

British Intelligence and Turkish Arabia:  
Strategy, Diplomacy, and Empire, 1898-1918

by

Geoffrey Hamm

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Department of History  
University of Toronto

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## Abstract

### **British Intelligence and Turkish Arabia: Strategy, Diplomacy, and Empire, 1898-1918**

Geoffrey Hamm  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Department of History  
University of Toronto, 2012

This dissertation addresses early British intelligence activities and Anglo-Ottoman relations by viewing the activities of army officers and private individuals as a collective pursuit to safeguard British imperial interests. It offers a new understanding of the relationships between intelligence, grand strategy, and diplomacy before the Great War. It also examines the role that pre-1914 intelligence played in that conflict.

The Boer War had shown that the geographic expanse of the British Empire was a source of strategic danger as well as a foundation of global power. The revelation of weakness propelled Britain to begin collecting intelligence on possible sources of conflict in preparation for the next war.

A 1906 border incident between Egypt and Turkey marked turning points in Anglo-Ottoman relations and British intelligence efforts. Intelligence began to focus on railways that threatened Britain's commercial position, on the disposition of Arab tribes who might revolt against Turkish authority, on the state of the Turkish army, and on the extent of European activity in Turkey.

In 1914, British policy in the Middle East was unco-ordinated. Needing an effective means of combatting the Turco-German *Jihad* proclaimed in 1915, London created the Arab Bureau as an advisory organ based in Cairo. It became the central repository for much of the intelligence gathered before 1914. Officials in Cairo and London created

new maps, compiled route reports, and assembled intelligence handbooks for distribution. Once the Arab Revolt began in 1916, intelligence helped marshal Britain's resources effectively in pursuit of victory.

Placing pre-1914 intelligence in the context of British imperial concerns extends our understanding of Anglo-Ottoman relations by considering strategic and diplomatic issues within a single frame. It demonstrates the influence of the Boer War in initiating intelligence-gathering missions in the Ottoman Empire, showing that even those undertaken before the establishment of a professional intelligence service in 1909, although lacking organization, were surprisingly modern, and ultimately successful.

Analysis of under-utilized sources, such as the handbooks created by the Arab Bureau and the Royal Geographical Society, demonstrates the value of pre-war intelligence in detailed ways. It deepens understanding of the role British intelligence played in the defeat of the Ottoman Empire and shows how one nation's intelligence, military, and diplomatic bodies operated separately and collectively in an era that presented them with unprecedented challenges and opportunities.

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## Introduction

The Ottoman Empire occupied a unique place in British strategic and political thinking during the twenty years preceding the Great War. Covering great swaths of territory around the Mediterranean, through the Middle East, almost to the borders of India, the Ottoman Empire was itself at the crossroads of many different policy currents. The status of the empire and events within its boundaries were of interest to a variety of different British government departments. The War Office was concerned with the ability of the Turks to defend themselves against a Great Power aggressor; the Government of India worried about the security of the Persian Gulf and Mesopotamia, to which it imagined the borders of the sub-continent extended; and the Foreign Office busied itself with the larger international problems of the Eastern Question – the century-old problem of how to avoid a general European war in the event of the breakup of the Ottoman Empire – and the balance of power.

Intelligence represented one means by which these problems could be managed. Efforts at intelligence collection and compilation were deeply coloured by the British experience of the Boer War at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> While some of these efforts to compile knowledge of the Ottoman Empire took place before the war began, a

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<sup>1</sup> The “Boer War” refers specifically in this study to the Second Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902, and not the First Anglo-Boer War of 1880-1881. Militarily, the Boer War demonstrated that a numerically inferior guerrilla force could hold a modern trained and equipped European army at bay, though to a certain extent this had also been shown in the Franco-Prussian War. However, there seems to be no indication that the Arab Revolt of 1916-1918 represented a conscious effort on the part of the British to reproduce the results of the Boer War in Arabia against the Turks. Given that the two forces in Arabia were relatively close in size – perhaps several thousand Arab irregulars against an estimated 12,000 Turks, as compared to the more than 400,000 British and colonial troops that fought in South Africa against the Boers – the experience of the Boer War must have seemed incongruous with the situation in Arabia. For the size of the British force in South Africa see Thomas Pakenham, *The Boer War* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1979), 572 and Edward M. Spiers, “Between the South African War and the First World War, 1902-1914,” in *Big Wars and Small Wars: The British Army and the Lessons of War in the Twentieth Century*, Hew Strachan, ed., (London: Routledge, 2006), 21.

marked increase in British activity in Asiatic Turkey and around the Persian Gulf coincided with the course of that disastrous conflict. In Britain, the Boer War exacerbated existing worries about imperial fragility. As Sir Michael Howard has argued, the South African War revealed the British Empire to be isolated, “not particularly splendidly, in a world of highly armed states, with a Navy whose supremacy still depended on the divisions among her adversaries and an Army incapable of taking the field against any single one of them.”<sup>2</sup>

The difficulty of suppressing a colonial rebellion in South Africa made clear the problem of defending imperial commitments and interests that spanned a quarter of the globe with the limited resources available. Indeed, though signs of imperial decline appeared elsewhere – in the form of the rapid growth of German commerce and industry, the rise of the United States, and the poor physical condition of much of the urban population of the British Isles – it was the Boer War that made the point most emphatically and most forcefully.

Historians have vigorously debated the state British strength and the role of the empire in British foreign policy, strategic calculations, and in the ultimate decision for war in 1914. Keith Neilson and others have argued that the British Empire, far from being in a state of decline, was the strongest of the belligerent powers at the start of the Great War.<sup>3</sup> They have argued that British foreign policy, and the decision for war, was driven by imperial interests rather than European concerns. In such a scenario Russia,

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<sup>2</sup> Sir Michael Howard, *The Continental Commitment: The Dilemma of British Defence Policy in the Era of the Two World Wars* (London: Maurice Temple Smith, 1972), 13.

<sup>3</sup> Keith Neilson, “‘Greatly Exaggerated’: The Myth of the Decline of Great Britain Before 1914,” *International History Review* 13, 4 (1991), especially 696; Keith Neilson, *Britain and the Last Tsar: British Policy and Russia, 1894-1917* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Keith Wilson, *The Policy of the Entente: Essays on the Determinants of British Foreign Policy, 1904-1914* (Cambridge: University Press, 1985).

rather than Germany, was potentially Britain's greatest antagonist even after the conclusion of the 1907 Anglo-Russian Entente. Yet other historians, notably Paul Kennedy, Zara Steiner, and Sir Michael Howard, have argued that the British Empire was in decline, that Germany represented the most dangerous threat to its survival, and that Britain went to war not to preserve its empire, but to restore the balance of power in Europe.<sup>4</sup> By any number of measures, the British decline of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was real, but also relative. As Paul Kennedy notes, British industry and commerce were the pillars upon which British military and naval strength ultimately rested. By various industrial and commercial measures the British had been losing ground to both the United States and Germany since at least the mid-1890s.<sup>5</sup> This dissertation argues that the Boer War, seen in the context of a more general Edwardian pessimism about the future of the empire and colonial defence, provoked the British to attempt to secure imperial and European interests by various means prior to 1914.<sup>6</sup> Thus, British intelligence activities in the Ottoman Empire and the new concern for the Eastern Question can be seen in the context of the efforts to end Britain's international isolation that followed the Boer War.

The impact of the South African War extended to multiple facets of British life, and its legacy included bureaucratic and military reform, as well as changes to trade and

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<sup>4</sup> Naturally the restoration of the balance of power and the elimination of Germany as a serious threat would preserve the British Empire. See Zara Steiner, *The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy, 1898-1914* (Cambridge: University Press, 1969); Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism, 1860-1914* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1980); Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (London: Fontana Press, 1988); Sir Michael Howard, *The Continental Commitment: The Dilemma of British Defence Policy in the Era of the Two World Wars* (London: Maurice Temple Smith, 1972).

<sup>5</sup> Kennedy, *Great Powers*, 293; Kennedy, *Antagonism*, 465. In contrast, David Dilks has argued that British power in this period is often exaggerated, and therefore so is Britain's decline. David Dilks, ed., *Retreat from Power: Studies in Britain's Foreign Policy of the Twentieth Century* (London: Macmillan, 1981), 1.

<sup>6</sup> Zara Steiner and Keith Neilson, *Britain and the Origins of the First World War*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 5; Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery* (London: Allen Lane, 1976), 209-210.

commerce.<sup>7</sup> However the greatest legacy of the South African war was in the realm of foreign policy. Its influence on British foreign relations was noted by the French ambassador to the Court of St. James, Paul Cambon, who wrote to his brother in Paris on the conclusion of the Entente Cordiale in 1904, claiming that without “the war in the Transvaal, which bled Great Britain and made her wise...our agreements would not have been possible.”<sup>8</sup> A similar sentiment was echoed by the French foreign minister and architect of the Entente, Théophile Delcassé, who declared that the “principal cause of the change in English attitudes towards the continent during the early years of the twentieth century was the traumatic experience of the Boer War.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, the impact of the Boer War on British foreign policy, as on other aspects of British life, was profound.

“Splendid Isolation” had left Britain in a poor position to deal with a multiplicity of threats, and the revelation of imperial weakness meant that Britain could no longer rely on military strength to protect its various commercial and strategic interests. Older problems were exacerbated by the recognition of weakness: British interests and possessions, India foremost among them, now seemed to lie relatively unprotected, ripe

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<sup>7</sup> Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain’s 1902 denunciation of Free Trade is one immediate, non-military, legacy of South Africa. See Anthony Wood, *Nineteenth Century Britain, 1815-1914* (London: Longman, 1982), 387-388; Peter Clarke, *Hope and Glory: Britain, 1900-1990* (London: Allen Lane, 1996), 23ff. The Boer War also encouraged interest in social reform, and contributed to the Liberal election victory of 1906, the “People’s budget,” and the rise of the welfare state. Trevor O. Lloyd, *Empire, Welfare State, Europe: English History 1906-1992*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Oxford: University Press, 1993), 15. The poor physical condition of so much of the British male population of military age was of particular concern to Robert Baden-Powell, hero of Mafeking, who founded the Boy Scouts in 1908 in order to transform “thousands of boys and young men, pale, narrow-chested, hunched up, miserable specimens, smoking endless cigarettes.” The scout movement would draw them away from urban hovels and meaningless lives to the countryside where they would be turned into healthy scouts and into “energetic patriots.” Steiner and Neilson, *Britain and the Origins of the First World War*, 169. For representations of the difficulties of the Boer War in popular literature, see John Peck, *War, the Army and Victorian Literature* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1998), 164-187. On the military reforms occasioned by the Boer War, see David French and Brian Holden Reid eds., *The British General Staff: Reform and Innovation, 1890-1939* (London: Frank Cass, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe* (Oxford: University Press, 1954), 517.

<sup>9</sup> Christopher Andrew and A.S. Kanya-Forstner, *The Climax of French Imperial Expansion, 1914-1924* (Stanford: University Press, 1981), 203.

for picking by some other Great Power. Britain looked for ways to address this problem by a variety of means, first through diplomacy, exemplified by the signature of a treaty with Japan in 1902, and then by the Ententes with France and Russia in 1904 and 1907 respectively. Britain embarked on an aggressive naval building program to protect its supremacy at sea. But the country also employed less conventional means to solve its problems.

Intelligence offered a way to protect British interests in Asia Minor and the Persian Gulf, first against Russia, then against Germany, and ultimately against Turkey itself. By 1900, Britain had fought two disastrous wars far from home in recent decades: the Crimean War in the 1850s, where logistics had been partly to blame for the fiasco, and the Boer War.<sup>10</sup> The possibility of having to fight another war in Asia Minor, so far from Europe, awoke British officials in the Foreign and War Offices to the realization that they actually knew relatively little about Turkey. Intelligence presented a way around this problem by acquiring information about the extent and stability of Turkish authority, about the activities of other Great Powers in the region, about the physical topography of the land, and about its people and their relationship to the Turkish government. In the process of acquiring this information Great Britain assembled a body of knowledge and a network of contacts throughout Asia Minor and Arabia that allowed it to manage imperial interests, to prosecute the war against Turkey, and to support the Arab Revolt that broke out in 1916. This was the principal value of the intelligence collection and

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<sup>10</sup> This assessment, of course, does not include the numerous, smaller, conflicts undertaken throughout the British Empire during the latter part of the nineteenth century. The Crimean War, fought far from home and for a less tangible objective in the eyes of public opinion, was arguably a bigger disaster than the Boer War, its name having since become synonymous with military incompetence, it produced no real change in British foreign policy. Britain's (along with France's and Turkey's) ultimate victory over Russia seems to have covered multitude of errors.

compilation done throughout Anatolia and Turkish Arabia by Great Britain before 1914. When armed conflict finally came, the work done by Great Britain in the preceding decades helped make possible the successful conduct of the First World War.

Britain's attitude towards the Turkish Empire for much of the century between the Congress of Vienna and the First World War was determined principally by the Eastern Question. Late Victorian statesmen understood the Eastern Question as the problem presented by the need to avoid a Great Power war in the event of the Ottoman Empire's collapse. With various European powers either sharing borders with Ottoman territory, maintaining colonies that shared borders, or possessing other vital interests in the empire and surrounding regions, the sudden end of the Ottoman Empire could provoke a free-for-all, in which the Great Powers (and some smaller ones) might violently squabble for control of its pieces. British policy throughout the nineteenth century had been to buttress the ailing Ottoman Empire and support it against the encroachments of other Great Powers, chiefly Austria and Russia.<sup>11</sup> This policy was made the more necessary by the development of the Great Game with Russia, the nineteenth-century contest for the security of India that saw the two powers competing for influence among the Khanates of Central Asia.<sup>12</sup> Though the focal point of this diplomatic chess game was India, the Ottoman Empire was a crucial component of this challenge. Sitting astride the principal land and sea routes to the British Empire east of Suez, and stretching its own borders

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<sup>11</sup> Standard works of international history on the subject include M.S. Anderson, *The Eastern Question, 1774-1923: A Study in International Relations* (London: MacMillan, 1966); Paul W. Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics, 1763-1848* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); A.J.P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848-1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954).

<sup>12</sup> See two books by Edward Ingram: *The Beginning of the Great Game in Asia, 1828-1834* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), and *In Defence of British India: Great Britain in the Middle East, 1775-1842* (London: Cass, 1984). A good, recent, look at the later period of this contest is Jennifer Siegel, *Endgame: Britain, Russia and the final struggle for central Asia* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002).

almost as far as India itself, the health of the “Sick Man of Europe,” and the preservation of Turkish authority in the far-flung reaches of the Ottoman Empire, were crucial to the successful protection of India. The Crimean War (1854-56) and the Russo-Turkish War (1877-78) had bred Anglo-Russian antagonism and made Russian hostility a more acute problem by 1900. Russian hostility meant considering the prospect of war. This in turn led British officials to look to the Boer War as a recent indication of their country’s likely performance.

British intelligence in this period was deeply influenced by that conflict and largely devoted to rectifying the problems it made apparent. One of the chief shortcomings of intelligence during that war had been a lack of proper maps.<sup>13</sup> Thus, military officers were often given consular positions in order to conduct topographical surveys of parts of the Turkish Empire where little map work had been done. Though the work was mostly carried out under the authority of the Foreign Office via the embassy at Constantinople, the War Office was the driving force behind the project. It was the War Office, chiefly the Intelligence Division (raised to Departmental status after 1904), which determined the nature of the information to be acquired, areas to be mapped, and the personnel to carry out the work. Often this surveying was concerned with the ability of the Turks to defend against a Russian invasion, but its principal focus seems to have been preparing for the possibility that Great Britain might one day have to conduct military operations in Asia Minor. As its proximity to the theatre made the Indian Army the body most likely to carry out such operations, much map work was done by the Intelligence Department of

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<sup>13</sup> Thomas Pakenham, *The Boer War* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1979), 179; Thomas G. Fergusson, *British Military Intelligence, 1870-1914: The Development of a Modern Intelligence Organization* (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1984), 114; Bill Nassom, *The South African War, 1899-1902* (London: Arnold, 1999), 75.

the Indian Army for its own purposes. In fact, the British intelligence effort in Asia Minor, Arabia, and the Persian Gulf might best be described as three separate efforts, undertaken severally by the War Office, the Foreign Office, and the Government of India. Before 1906 these efforts were largely individual; that is, collaboration between departments was minimal, and tended to occur only when necessary, usually at the level of execution. However, after 1906, the separate strands of intelligence collection began to form a more cohesive whole, and interdepartmental co-operation increased correspondingly with the threat of war.

The importance of larger strategic and political issues like the Eastern Question and the balance of power meant that it was not Turkey per se that Britain was interested in preserving, but rather Britain's imperial position in that part of the world. Most British statesmen believed that the best way to do this was through the preservation and protection of the Ottoman Empire. This policy was complicated by the fact that relations between Turkey and Britain were often difficult. From the British perspective, Turkish truculence extended to even the most ordinary of matters. In 1890, for example, an Englishman seeking official support of his plan to construct a railway through the Euphrates Valley approached the Foreign Office for help. Sir Thomas Sanderson, Assistant Undersecretary at the Foreign Office, told him in plain language that the likelihood of such a project becoming reality was all but non-existent, and Lord Salisbury minuted on Sanderson's report of the exchange that they would merely be "misleading" the man if they encouraged him to believe that the Porte was likely to grant such a concession. The Turks, Salisbury complained, "will not even let us steam up the

Tigris.”<sup>14</sup> Lord Salisbury’s frustration at the obstinacy of the Turks in matters as seemingly mundane as trade and river traffic in Mesopotamia suggests a general feeling of exasperation with the state of Anglo-Turkish relations.

This study addresses the larger question of imperial defence, and more specifically the defence of British India, by examining the relationship between intelligence, strategy, and foreign policy in Anatolia and Turkish Arabia from the Boer War to the end of World War I. The decision to focus on this particular region was partly a function of scope, and partly a function of archival research. A study incorporating the whole of the Ottoman Empire would have very quickly become an unmanageable enterprise. The need to integrate Austria-Hungary and Russia more completely into the study, to say nothing of the need to address the Balkan morass, would have necessarily doubled the size of the project. While this study concentrates on Anatolia and Turkish Arabia, I am acutely aware of the fact that the events and conditions I discuss cannot be wholly divorced from the history of European Turkey. The second reason for the focus on Turkey-in-Asia was source-based. I was intrigued by the notion of the “gentleman spy,” particularly as it appeared in a recent article in *Intelligence and National Security*. The article attempted to document the pre-war intelligence activities of Harry Pirie-Gordon, who worked for the Eastern Mediterranean Special Intelligence Bureau during the war. In search of others like him, I followed a paper trail that led me in the footsteps of Gertrude Bell, Francis Maunsell, and several others. This trail led across Anatolia, Mesopotamia, and Arabia to the Persian Gulf and, ultimately, to British India. Thus, this study addresses British intelligence, strategy, and foreign policy in Asiatic Turkey and the Persian Gulf region,

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<sup>14</sup> Sir Thomas Sanderson to Lord Salisbury, 30 September 1890, FO 78/4297.

but says very little about European Turkey or Palestine, though other historians have made efforts to address both these subjects.<sup>15</sup>

This study is composed of six chapters divided into three chronological periods: 1898–1905, 1906–July 1914, and July 1914–November 1918. Each of the three segments contains two complementary chapters. Chapters one and two deal with the new international situation that emerged out of the Boer War and the increased attention paid to the Eastern Question in British foreign policy. The chapters cover British efforts to shore up the defence of India against possible encroachments from Russia and Germany. In the process, Britain undertook new forms of intelligence gathering in the Ottoman Empire and began to identify a series of targets to attack and defend in the event of a possible violent resolution of the Eastern Question at some future date. Chapters three and four cover the various challenges that confronted British policy in Turkey and the Middle East after 1905. By 1906 Turkey was seen as a potential enemy; German influence in the Ottoman Empire was increasing; and the 1908 Young Turk Revolution was potentially detrimental to British interests. In this turbulent political environment, the British collected information about a widening circle of targets and expanded their efforts to include liaison with prominent members of Turkey’s disaffected Arab population. As

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<sup>15</sup> On European Turkey see, e.g., Isa Blumi, *Reinstating the Ottomans: Alternative Balkan Modernities, 1800-1912* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Charles Jelavich and Barbara Jelavich, *The Establishment of the Balkan National States, 1804-1920* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1977); R.J. Crampton, *The Hollow Détente: Anglo-German Relations in the Balkans, 1911-1914* (London: G. Prior, 1980); Ryan Gingeras, *Sorrowful Shores: Violence, Ethnicity and the End of the Ottoman Empire, 1912-1923* (Oxford: University Press, 2009). For Palestine see, e.g., Yuval Ben-Bassat and Eyal Ginio eds. *Late Ottoman Palestine: The Period of Young Turk Rule* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011); Michelle U. Campos, *Ottoman Brothers: Muslims, Christians and Jews in Early Twentieth-Century Palestine* (Stanford: University Press, 2011); James Renton, *The Zionist Masquerade: The Birth of the Anglo-Zionist Alliance, 1914-1918* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). The article on Harry Pirie-Gordon in *Intelligence and National Security* is David W.J. Gill, “Harry Pirie-Gordon: Historical research, journalism and intelligence gathering in the Eastern Mediterranean (1908-1918),” *Intelligence and National Security* 21, 6 (2006), 1045-1059.

the crisis of 1914 approached, Britain already possessed a wealth of military and political information that could support military operations in the Middle East. The way this information was used against the Turks is the subject of chapters five and six. These last two chapters analyse British efforts, first, to blunt the Turco-German *Jihad*, which was aimed at causing turmoil among India's Muslim population, and second, to mobilize a guerrilla force in Arabia. The latter assisted the main body of British forces in Egypt and Palestine and contributed to Britain's victory in this theatre of war.

The difficulties present in the Anglo-Turkish relationship, and the importance of intelligence for the Middle Eastern campaigns during the First World War, has led historians to assume that Britons or Europeans travelling or working in Turkish Arabia, especially private individuals, were engaged in clandestine activity. With the commencement of hostilities against the Turks in 1914, Britain's various intelligence bodies sought people with knowledge of the region, its people, history, and languages. Because figures such as T.E. Lawrence, Mark Sykes, and Gertrude Bell were involved with intelligence work during the war, their pre-war activities are often assumed to be of a similar nature. The subject of the campaign in the desert during the First World War has long been the stuff of romantic legend. Some of this was perpetuated by its principal actors, and later codified by works such as David Lean's 1962 film *Lawrence of Arabia*. But the elevation of the desert revolt to the status of myth has produced similar trends in the historiography of the subject. Much of what has been written on the subject consists of laudatory biographies of T.E. Lawrence, such as Michael Korda's *Hero: The Life and Legend of Lawrence of Arabia* and Jeremy Wilson's *Lawrence of Arabia: The Authorized*

*Biography of T.E. Lawrence.*<sup>16</sup> Histories of the war itself often take the tone of H.V.F. Winstone's *The Illicit Adventure: the story of political and military intelligence in the Middle East from 1898 to 1926*: vague, general, and inclined to ascribe everything to "secret intelligence" without the substance to back the claim.<sup>17</sup> Military officers posted to Turkish Arabia, like Captain William Henry Irvine Shakespear, were often listed as being on "special duty" or "special service." Historians and popular authors have tended to work from the premise that these terms signified something secret and exotic. In fact, the term meant nothing more than special pay and allowances for officers, and had nothing to do with secrecy at all.<sup>18</sup> The result has often been works of sensational, cloak-and-dagger tales of derring-do and a literary trend dating back to the First World War itself.<sup>19</sup>

The subject of British intelligence in the Ottoman Empire before and during World War I has largely been ignored or avoided by more serious historians, who have abandoned the field to populist writers like Winstone. Older works on the subject have

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<sup>16</sup> On Lawrence, see e.g. Michael Korda, *Hero: The Life and Legend of Lawrence of Arabia* (New York: Harper, 2010); Michael Asher, *Lawrence: The Uncrowned King of Arabia* (London: Viking, 1998), and Jeremy Wilson, *Lawrence of Arabia: The Authorized Biography of T.E. Lawrence* (London: Heinemann, 1989).

<sup>17</sup> H.V.F. Winstone has written a number of biographies of important figures in this period, however, most of them are sensationalist and lack a scholarly consideration of their subjects. See, e.g., H.V.F. Winstone, *Gertrude Bell* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1978); *Leachman: 'OC Desert'* (London: Quartet, 1982) and *Captain Shakespear: A Portrait* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1976). Winstone's *The Illicit Adventure: the story of political and military intelligence in the Middle East from 1898 to 1926* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982) is, as the title suggests, a broad survey of the period in which the subjects of his biographies played important roles.

<sup>18</sup> Gerald Morgan, "Myth and Reality in the Great Game," *Asian Affairs* 4, 1 (February 1973), 59.

<sup>19</sup> See e.g., Peter Hopkirk, *The Great Game: On Secret Service in High Asia* (London: Murray, 1990) and *On Secret Service East of Constantinople: The Plot to Bring Down the British Empire* (London: Murray, 1994). More recent titles in this vein include Karl E. Meyer and Shareen Blair Brysac, *Tournament of Shadows: The Great Game and the Race for Empire in Central Asia* (Washington: Counterpoint, 1999) and *Kingmakers: The Invention of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Norton, 2008). The book from which many of these later works take their cue is John Buchan's classic novel *Greenmantle* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1916). Buchan's protagonist, Richard Hannay, operating as a secret agent in Constantinople, foils a German plan to "set the East ablaze" by promoting a *Jihad* against the British Empire. Although some of Buchan's writing was inspired by his work in the Intelligence Corps, later historical research has revealed that Buchan's novel was much closer to reality than he may have known at the time.

focused much of their attention on the desert war itself.<sup>20</sup> Recently, however, the subject has received new scholarly consideration, and in the last fifteen years a number of studies have given it new life. Bruce Westrate has published the only book in English to date on the Arab Bureau, the arm of military intelligence in Cairo set up during the war first to advise the British on Arab affairs, and later to run the guerrilla war in which Lawrence played such a prominent role.<sup>21</sup> Yigal Sheffy's thorough study of military intelligence in the Palestine campaign raises the profile of intelligence operations in the theatre as a whole, but largely ignores the Arab Revolt.<sup>22</sup> This problem has been largely rectified by Polly Mohs's operational intelligence history of the revolt, published in 2008.<sup>23</sup> As with earlier works, however, these studies focus almost entirely on the period of the war itself, and have little new to say about the period before 1914.

While there is a burgeoning literature on the subject of imperial intelligence, historians have by and large had very little to say about Britain's activities in the Ottoman Empire before the war. Martin Thomas and C.A. Bayly have written excellent studies on imperial intelligence, but these deal primarily with later and earlier periods in Palestine and India respectively.<sup>24</sup> James Onley's study of the British political establishment around the Persian Gulf is useful for understanding the political channels through which intelligence flowed, and the means by which some information was

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<sup>20</sup> See e.g., B.H. Liddell-Hart, *T.E. Lawrence: In Arabia and After* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1934).

<sup>21</sup> Bruce Westrate, *The Arab Bureau: British Policy in the Middle East, 1916-1920* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992).

<sup>22</sup> Yigal Sheffy, *British Military Intelligence in the Palestine Campaign, 1914-1918* (London: Frank Cass, 1998).

<sup>23</sup> Polly A. Mohs, *Military Intelligence and the Arab Revolt: The First Modern Intelligence War* (London: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>24</sup> Martin Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence: Security Services and Colonial Disorder after 1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); C.A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Richard Popplewell has dealt with intelligence and Indian revolutionaries in *Intelligence and Imperial Defence: British Intelligence and the Defence of the Indian Empire, 1904-1924* (London: Frank Cass, 1995).

collected, but intelligence is not his focus and the work is concentrated on an earlier period.<sup>25</sup> Most recently, Priya Satia's *Spies in Arabia* has explored British intelligence activity in the Middle East both before and after the war. Her study is chiefly concerned with the cultural assumptions that drove intelligence collection, rather than the driving strategic and political circumstances, and pays significant attention to the period following 1918.<sup>26</sup>

While very good work has been done on the intelligence history of the Middle East during the First World War, and on the subjects of imperial intelligence, only Satia's book deals in any meaningful way with the pre-war period.<sup>27</sup> My dissertation thus fills a gap in the literature by presenting a focused analysis of early British intelligence activity in the parts of the Ottoman Empire that lay in Asia Minor and around the Persian Gulf. By exploring the cultural underpinnings of the intelligence work being done in Turkish Arabia, my dissertation achieves a synthesis between issues of strategy, foreign policy, and culture, which are too often dealt with in isolation from one another. The chief contribution of my research is to situate British intelligence activity in the broader context of Britain's decline in the latter part of the "long nineteenth century." By expanding traditional conceptions of intelligence as secret knowledge to include such issues as mapmaking and ethnography – what might otherwise be termed as "open source intelligence" or "OSINT" – my research highlights the associations between the

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<sup>25</sup> James Onley, *The Arabian Frontier of the British Raj: Merchants, Rulers and the British in the Nineteenth-Century Gulf* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>26</sup> Priya Satia, *Spies in Arabia: The Great War and the Cultural Foundations of Britain's Covert Empire in the Middle East* (Oxford: University Press, 2008). The nineteenth century cultural and intellectual interest in the "orient" is discussed at great length in Suzanne L. Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race and Scholarship* (Cambridge: University Press, 2009).

<sup>27</sup> An exception is David W.J. Gill's interesting but ultimately inconclusive article "Harry Pirie-Gordon: Historical research, journalism and intelligence gathering in the Eastern Mediterranean (1908-1918)," *Intelligence and National Security* 21, 6 (2006), 1045-1059.

intelligence activities conducted before the establishment of a professional intelligence service and the uses of intelligence in wartime. It thereby establishes a crucial link between the nineteenth century and the modern age of diplomacy and intelligence that followed it.

Despite the attention paid to this period, and to related subjects, this study addresses many open questions about British intelligence and Anglo-Ottoman relations in the generation that preceded the Great War. What was the state of British intelligence before the creation of a permanent intelligence bureaucracy in 1909?<sup>28</sup> What was the nature of intelligence collection, collation, and analysis before the existence of offices dedicated to these tasks? What was the relationship of intelligence to larger British interests and dilemmas in this period? What was its relationship to British foreign policy, grand strategy and commercial interests, in the regional context of Turkish Arabia and the Middle East, and in the wider context of more European and imperial problems like the Boer War, the Eastern Question and the defence of India? In light of the work done by Priya Satia we know a good deal about the cultural interactions of British agents with the Arab world. But what were the cultural underpinnings of intelligence activity, and what role did cultural factors play in intelligence activity? Addressing these questions throws light on the bureaucratic relationship between the Foreign and War Offices and the Government of India. How did these bodies negotiate intelligence operations within their respective spheres of influence? In the absence of a clearly defined chain of command for intelligence work, how were decisions made regarding the use of agents, information to be acquired, collated and disseminated, and on the ways in which intelligence might be

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<sup>28</sup> The Secret Service Bureau was established in 1909, and included both “Home” and “Foreign” Sections. The “Home” section evolved into the Security Service, more popularly known as MI5, and “Foreign” section into the Special Intelligence Service (MI6).

used? In the context of Turkish Arabia, a better understanding of inter-departmental relationships and the place of intelligence in considerations of Britain's larger dilemmas will help historians understand how intelligence targets were identified and chosen. In other words, what knowledge did the British seek and why did they seek it? Which set of priorities and assumptions drove intelligence collection, and from which department did they originate?

Here, historians need to think carefully about the definition of intelligence. Modern notions of secret information are not necessarily sufficient to explain intelligence in a period before the establishment of a permanent intelligence bureaucracy, in spite of the assertion that spying remains the world's second oldest profession.<sup>29</sup> By what methods was that intelligence acquired? If T.E. Lawrence, Gertrude Bell and others were not acting as spies before the war, then what means were employed to gather information, and how were these methods determined? Neither the British government nor the Government of India had a coterie of professional spies that could be employed for such a purpose. This requires us to scrutinize the relationship between individuals commonly assumed to be spies and the real intelligence work being carried out by the British and Indian governments. This is not a study to uncover the "real story" of T.E. Lawrence, but rather a means of exploring the relationships between private individuals, government employees, and espionage activity in Turkish Arabia between 1898 and 1914.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Phillip Knightley, *The Second Oldest Profession: Spies and Spying in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Norton, 1987); Christopher Andrew, *Secret Service: The Making of the British Intelligence Community* (London: Heinemann, 1985). Andrew notes, wryly, that unlike the world's oldest profession, God's command to Moses to go and spy the Land of Canaan in 1250 BC (Numbers 13:1-16) means that the second oldest profession is divinely sanctioned.

<sup>30</sup> The extensive social and Oxbridge connections between travellers, scholars and political officials are discussed in detail by Priya Satia, who notes that the "bonds that drew [this cadre of adventurers] together were based as much on social, class, and family as on professional relationships." For example, Gertrude Bell's best friend was David Hogarth's sister Janet. Hogarth was a good friend of the director of naval

A study of the political, strategic and cultural underpinnings of intelligence operations in Asia Minor and the Middle East also speaks to a number of other historiographies. This study contributes to the history of British intelligence institutions as they evolved over time. Very few works give serious consideration to the nineteenth-century origins of the British intelligence establishment, but of those that do, Thomas G. Fergusson's and B.A.H. Parritt's are among the most important.<sup>31</sup> Bernard Porter offers a long look at political espionage in Britain, but the more immediate origins of Britain's professional intelligence community are dealt with in Christopher Andrew's pioneering study *Secret Service*.<sup>32</sup> Good histories of MI5 and MI6 have been in short supply, though recent authorized (but not official) histories by Christopher Andrew and Keith Jeffery have gone a long way toward rectifying this problem.<sup>33</sup> Although MI5 periodically releases files to the National Archives, the extent of Christopher Andrew's access means that this study is likely to remain the standard work on the subject for a generation or more. The refusal of MI6 to declassify any files at all, or to open their own archives to Keith Jeffery beyond 1949, means that it will be many more years before we have a history that can challenge his.

My dissertation will also be of interest to intelligence historians of the First World War. The number of works on intelligence in the Great War pales in comparison to the

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intelligence, Admiral Reginald "Blinker" Hall, through family connections. Hogarth recruited T.E. Lawrence and Leonard Woolley at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. See Satia, *Spies in Arabia*, 36-39.

<sup>31</sup> Both Fergusson and Parritt focus their studies on the growth of a military intelligence department from about the middle of the nineteenth century to the outbreak of war. As such, they have little to say about the other forms of intelligence with which this study is chiefly concerned. Fergusson, *British Military Intelligence*; B.A.H. Parritt, *The Intelligencers: the Story of British Military Intelligence up to 1914* (Ashford: Intelligence Corps Association, 1983).

<sup>32</sup> Bernard Porter, *Plots and Paranoia: A History of Political Espionage in Britain, 1790-1988* (London: Routledge, 1988); Andrew, *Secret Service*. The book appeared in the United States as *Her Majesty's Secret Service: The Making of the British Intelligence Community* (New York: Viking, 1986).

<sup>33</sup> Christopher Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm: The Authorized History of MI5* (London: Viking, 2009); Keith Jeffery, *The Secret History of MI6, 1909-1949* (New York: Penguin, 2010).

number written on intelligence in the Second World War. Although this is not without reason, good, scholarly studies of intelligence in the First World War remain in short supply. Perhaps the most comprehensive is Michael Occleshaw's 1989 study *Armour Against Fate*, but the most prolific scholar of the subject has been John Ferris, whose extensive work on the subject is in many ways the gold standard for historians.<sup>34</sup> Such attention as has been paid recently to the subject of intelligence in the First World War has centred on the Middle Eastern campaign. As noted previously, Yigal Sheffy, Polly Mohs and Priya Satia have offered three different, but valuable, perspectives on various aspects of the campaign.<sup>35</sup>

A significant portion of my dissertation deals with the creation and compilation of maps of the Ottoman Empire. Although the association between travel and espionage is an old one, a literature on mapping, travel, and intelligence has only recently begun to emerge, complementing existing studies of geography and imperialism like Matthew Edney's *Mapping an Empire*.<sup>36</sup> Many of these studies deal with significantly different contexts than my dissertation, but treat similar themes and ideas.<sup>37</sup> This study therefore

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<sup>34</sup> Michael Occleshaw, *Armour Against Fate* (London: Columbus, 1989). For Ferris see e.g. John R. Ferris, ed., *The British Army and Signals Intelligence During the First World War* (Gloucestershire: Alan Sutton for the Army Records Society, 1992); Ferris, "The Road to Bletchley Park: The British Experience with Signals Intelligence, 1890-1945," in Oliver Hoare, ed., *British Intelligence in the Twentieth Century, A New Dimension* (London: Frank Cass, 2003); Ferris, "'Far Too Dangerous a Gamble?': British Intelligence and Policy During the Chanak Crisis, September-October 1922," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 14, 3 (2003), 139-184.

<sup>35</sup> See discussion on pp.13-14 above.

<sup>36</sup> Matthew H. Edney, *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India, 1765-1843* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

<sup>37</sup> See e.g. James Canton, "Imperial Eyes: Imperial Spies. British Travel and Espionage in Southern Arabia, 1891-1946," *The Journal of Commonwealth and Imperial History* 37, 4 (2009), 537-554; John Fisher, "Official Responses to Foreign Travel at the British Foreign and India Offices before 1914," *English Historical Review* 122, 498 (2007), 937-964; Avril Maddrell, "The 'Map Girls'. British women geographers' war work, shifting gender boundaries and reflections on the history of geography," *Transactions of the British Institute of Geographers* 33, 1 (2008), 127-148; Michael Heffernan, "Geography, Cartography and Military Intelligence: The Royal Geographical Society and the First World War," *Transactions of the British Institute of Geographers*, New Series 21, 3 (1996), 504-533. A

cuts across disciplines, making connections with historical work done by geographers as well as connecting with work on geography and travel done by historians.

A dissertation engaging the subject of British intelligence and the First World War naturally has much to contribute to the military history of the war itself. Hew Strachan's projected multi-volume study is perhaps the most recent and certainly the most comprehensive, but there are a number of very good older studies.<sup>38</sup> Military histories of the Middle East campaign are fewer in number, but good work has also been done on this subject recently. Matthew Hughes has written a thoughtful study of the Palestine campaign, and Edward Erickson has written one of the few accounts in English of the war from the Turkish side.<sup>39</sup>

My dissertation also engages broad themes in international relations, as well as questions of international relations and foreign policy more specifically connected to Anglo-Turkish relations and British policy in the Middle East.<sup>40</sup> The bigger issues of British foreign policy have been well covered: M.S. Anderson's *The Eastern Question* remains one of the pillars of the field, as does Paul Kennedy's *The Rise of the Anglo-*

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contemporary look at the role of the Royal Geographical Society in the war can be found in B.B. Cubitt, "War Work of the Society," *The Geographical Journal* 53, 5 (1919), 336-339.

<sup>38</sup> Hew Strachan, *The First World War. Vol. 1: To Arms* (Oxford: University Press, 2002); B.H. Liddell-Hart, *History of the First World War* (London: Cassell, 1970). John Keegan, *The First World War* (London: Hutchinson, 1998) is useful and eminently readable, though Keegan devotes less space to the year 1918 than he might otherwise have done.

<sup>39</sup> Matthew Hughes, *Allenby and British Strategy in the Middle East, 1917-1919* (London: Frank Cass, 1999); Edward J. Erickson, *Ordered to Die: A History of the Ottoman Army in the First World War* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2001). On the war in Palestine see also David Bullock, *Allenby's War: the Palestine-Arabian Campaigns, 1916-1918* (London: Blandford, 1988) and John D. Grainger, *The Battle for Palestine, 1917* (Rochester, NY: Boydell, 2006).

<sup>40</sup> See e.g. Elie Kedourie, *England and the Middle East: The Destruction of the Ottoman Empire, 1914-1921* (London: Bowes and Bowes, 1956); Feroz Ahmad, "Britain's Relations with the Young Turks, 1908-14," *Middle Eastern Studies* 2, 4 (1966), 302-329; Joseph Heller, *British Policy towards the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1914* (London: Cass, 1983).

*German Antagonism*.<sup>41</sup> The Great Game of the later nineteenth century still awaits its historian, but Edward Ingram has done the best work on the Anglo-Russian tension in Central Asia, while Jennifer Siegel brings this contest into the twentieth century.<sup>42</sup> My dissertation also builds on international relations histories of the Middle East and histories of Britain's imperial role in the region, many of which focus on a later period.<sup>43</sup>

The foreign policy of British India is a key part of Britain's interest in the region, and also an important component of this study. Robert J. Blyth explores the sphere of influence India carved out for itself in the region, building on earlier works by Raj Kumar Trivedi, Briton Cooper Busch and Ravinder Kumar.<sup>44</sup> One of the most significant aspects of India's place in this equation is its large Muslim population. The rise of Pan-Islamism in the latter half of the nineteenth century worried Britain that disturbances among British Muslim's co-religionists anywhere else in the world could easily, at least in the British imagination, translate to uprisings and rebellions in valuable imperial possessions such as Egypt or India. The most recent study of the place of Pan-Islamism in British policy is John Ferris's "'The Internationalization of Islam': The British Perception of a Muslim Menace, 1840-1951," *Intelligence and National Security* (2009). The importance of India as a political force in its own right within the British Empire and the international system

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<sup>41</sup> Anderson, *The Eastern Question*; Paul Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism, 1860-1914* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1980).

<sup>42</sup> See fn 12 above. See also John Ferris, "Lord Salisbury, Secret Intelligence, and British Policy toward Russia and Central Asia, 1874-1878," in Keith Neilson and B.J.C. McKercher, eds., *Go Spy the Land: Military Intelligence in History* (Westport: Praeger, 1992).

<sup>43</sup> See, e.g. Sean McMeekin, *The Berlin-Baghdad Express: The Ottoman Empire and Germany's Bid for World Power* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2010); Marion Kent, ed., *The Great Powers and the End of the Ottoman Empire* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1984); Elizabeth Monroe, *Britain's Moment in the Middle East, 1914-1971*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981); Ulrich Trumpener, *Germany and the Ottoman Empire, 1914-1918* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968).

<sup>44</sup> Robert J. Blyth, *The Empire of the Raj: India, Eastern Africa and the Middle East, 1858-1947* (Houndmills: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003); Raj Kumar Trivedi, *The Critical Triangle: India, Britain and Turkey, 1908-1924* (Jaipur: Publication Scheme, 1993); Briton Cooper Busch, *Britain, India and the Arabs, 1914-1921* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971); Ravinder Kumar, *India and the Persian Gulf Region, 1858-1907: A Study in British Imperial Policy* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1965).

east of Suez is often undervalued by Eurocentric histories. My dissertation integrates India more fully into the circle of British policy. A study dealing with Britain's place in the Middle East at such a crucial juncture will also be of interest to historians of the Modern Middle East and historians of European imperialism.

The emphasis on the role of the Boer War in shaping Britain's intelligence efforts from the turn of the century to the outbreak of war and a wider definition of intelligence that includes ethnographic and topographical study as well as more traditional political and strategic intelligence sets this study apart from other works that cover related subjects and themes. Historians examining the nature and role of British intelligence in the Middle East during the First World War have paid little attention to Britain's collection of "open source" intelligence (OSINT). The emphasis on secret intelligence has obscured the fact that several features of modern intelligence practice were present in Britain's intelligence efforts in the Middle East during the early years of the twentieth century. Indeed, in gathering topographical and ethnographical information, British intelligence efforts reflected the change that had taken place over the course of the nineteenth century from haphazard to a more scientific administration throughout the country. An increasing reliance in all areas of government on the "scientific collection and analysis of information by experts" was part of the wider growth of what Michael Herman calls the "Knowledgeable State."<sup>45</sup> The collection of a significant body of information on a wide variety of subjects connected to the Ottoman Empire places British intelligence firmly in the context of this development. Furthermore, as Herman points out, the role of intelligence – the sum of assembled information on a given subject – is not principally to drive decisions in short-term, specific ways. Rather its role is to

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<sup>45</sup> Michael Herman, *Intelligence Power in Peace and War* (Cambridge: University Press, 1996), 28.

contribute to the general enlightenment of decision makers. The business of intelligence producers is to educate their political masters.<sup>46</sup> The effect of this is to optimize national strength and international influence, and to assist the efficient use of force in wartime.<sup>47</sup> Certainly this was the case with British intelligence in Turkish Arabia, where the body of knowledge assembled before 1914 proved useful to military operations and to the determination of Middle Eastern policy during the war.

The inclusion of a cultural dimension in this study gives it a multi-faceted approach that further sets it apart from other works on the topic.<sup>48</sup> The conclusions of this study rely heavily on intelligence handbooks compiled from pre-war intelligence and printed during the war. The use of this material links pre-war intelligence collection to wartime military operations in concrete ways not achieved in other studies.

The documentary evidence for historians of this period is at once frustratingly thin and abundantly rich.<sup>49</sup> Because the Secret Service Bureau was not formed until 1909, intelligence work for much of the period covered by this dissertation was amateurish; that is to say, it was not governed or otherwise directed by a professional peacetime

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>48</sup> “Culture” is an intrinsic component of many different facets of intelligence. In this study it refers principally to the place occupied in late-Victorian and Edwardian culture by the Ottoman Empire, and to the impetus that gave to individuals like T.E. Lawrence, David Hogarth, and Gertrude Bell to explore the territory of their own accord. However, it also refers to the considerable cultural knowledge possessed by many of these same individuals in their capacity as intelligence officers with the Arab Bureau during the First World War. Their pre-war expertise in the culture, language and customs of the Middle East was deployed in the service of the British war effort. A similar scenario played itself out in the Research and Analysis branch of the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS) in the Second World War. The employment of academicians there enabled the R&A branch, as it was known, to produce voluminous quantities of reports on a vast array of subjects from native nationalism in North Africa, to Latin American politics, to the “Organization of European Waterways,” and various aspects of European politics. Bradley E. Smith, *The Shadow Warriors: O.S.S. and the Origins of the C.I.A.* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 375. See also Barry Katz, *Foreign Intelligence: Research and Analysis in the Office of Strategic Services, 1942-1945* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1989), especially chapter 1, and Thomas F. Troy, *Donovan and the C.I.A.* (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1981), especially chapters 5 and 6.

<sup>49</sup> A discussion of this can be found in Yigal Sheffy, “British Intelligence and the Middle East, 1900-1918: How Much Do We Know?,” *Intelligence and National Security* 17, 1 (2002), 31-52.

intelligence organization, though it displayed characteristics of modern, professional, intelligence practice. The historian wishing to trace British intelligence practice in Turkish Arabia and its influence on foreign and strategic policy must therefore cast a wider net to assess the role played by the various interested parties. This study seeks to explore the ways in which knowledge of a foreign power was gathered and processed in order to make effective policy decisions. Although much of the knowledge was often acquired in such a way as to avoid attracting unnecessary attention, such secrecy as was maintained was often to avoid the obstacles to the gathering of information erected by a Turkish bureaucracy desperate to maintain its grip on power.

The overwhelming majority of documents for this study come from the files of the British Foreign Office, located at the National Archives in Kew. For much of the period 1890-1914, and even during the war, intelligence collection and analysis was directed by the War Office but actually carried out under the authority of the Foreign Office. The Foreign Office generally received copies of reports and facilitated the travel and communication of British agents in the Ottoman Empire. The Foreign Office files are full of the correspondence between the numerous consular posts in the Ottoman Empire, the embassy at Constantinople, and the Foreign Office in London. During the pre-war period, consular officials in the Ottoman Empire were often army officers whose appointment was sought by the War Office, usually to complete survey work or to report on military developments in their particular districts. Whereas the Foreign Office was generally a willing accomplice in this, the diplomatists were sometimes frustrated by what they

perceived to be the needs of the War Office superseding diplomatic work.<sup>50</sup> Besides the regular correspondence that took place between the consuls, ambassador and the foreign secretary, information was also passed between military attachés, the embassy, the Foreign Office, and the Director of Military Intelligence. Special reports, for example on railways, were also passed from consuls or attachés through the embassy to the appropriate office in London.

A large body of material is also contained in the War Office files. Much of this consists of correspondence passed on from the Foreign Office, but General Staff papers and memoranda offer insights into the evolution of British strategic policy toward the Ottoman Empire. The War Office also produced occasional reports on the state of the Turkish army and navy, as well as intelligence handbooks, and almanacs to be kept on file as a base-line body of knowledge about the Turkish Empire.<sup>51</sup> This was part of an effort that emerged in the wake of the South African War to produce foreign intelligence handbooks on virtually every important army in the world, and “military reports”, which were compiled for any country or territory in South-East Europe, Asia, or Africa in which it was considered likely that British troops would be employed.<sup>52</sup> Many of the handbooks and reports found in the War Office files contain extensive information on routes through Turkish domains. Maps compiled by the Geographical Section of the General Staff contain useful information of a bibliographical nature. War Office maps often cite their sources, whether from travellers’ reports, officers’ journeys, or pre-existing atlases of the region in question. This allows historians to trace the accumulation of topographical

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<sup>50</sup> Sir Nicholas O’Conor to Lord Lansdowne, 20 November 1902, FO 78/5474. O’Conor hoped to replace the vice-consul at Diarbekir, Major Anderson, with a member of the Levant Consular Service once the former’s topographical work was completed, rather than with another military officer.

<sup>51</sup> “Military Report on Turkey in Asia,” 1904, General Staff prepared report, WO 33/331.

<sup>52</sup> Fergusson, *British Military Intelligence*, 223.

knowledge, particularly the manner and dates by which military intelligence acquired it. The War Office material can be supplemented to some degree by the Cabinet files, chiefly from the meetings of the Committee of Imperial Defence. After 1914, both the Foreign Office and the War Office files become much more narrowly focused on the business of intelligence. The creation of the Arab Bureau under the authority of the Foreign Office in 1916 produced a wealth of material for this dissertation, including the regularly printed *Arab Bulletins*. War Office material also became more specific, producing daily and monthly intelligence summaries and General Staff papers on wartime problems.

This main body of material is supplemented by collections from smaller archives. The Royal Geographical Society (RGS) contains route information and journals from the travels of Gertrude Bell and Captain Shakespear, as well as maps produced by the Geographical Section of the General Staff during the war. The RGS was heavily involved in producing maps for the War Office between 1914-1918. It also housed the Admiralty's intelligence branch, which produced the intelligence handbooks on the Turkish Empire.<sup>53</sup> Maps of Asia Minor and Arabia were placed in the charge of Douglas Carruthers, the explorer, naturalist and cartographer. Carruthers worked closely with Gertrude Bell and other adventurers and military personnel who had travelled through the region in order to produce precise and accurate maps.<sup>54</sup>

Beginning in 1916, Admiralty and War Office Intelligence, in co-operation with Cairo Military Intelligence and the Arab Bureau, printed a series of handbooks on various

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<sup>53</sup> Hugh Robert Mill, *The Record of the Royal Geographical Society, 1830-1930* (London: The Royal Geographical Society, 1930), especially pp.189-205.

<sup>54</sup> Douglas Carruthers, "Reminiscences of Gertrude Bell," in *Royal Central Asian Journal* 45, 1 (1958), 52-57.

regions of the Turkish Empire. They contained route information, details on the culture and population of the various regions, as well as comments about historical and religious matters. Some of these, like the handbooks for Mesopotamia and Arabia, ran to several volumes. They were assembled from a combination of local sources and travellers' information, and publication of them appears to have run from 1916 to 1919.

Information collected before 1914 was pressed into service to aid the British cause when war began. Although information was constantly being updated, improved and added to, it is important not to underestimate the value of the intelligence established in the pre-war period. By January 1917 a second edition of the Hejaz Handbook was in an advanced stage, the first edition having been rushed into publication in June 1916 when the sherif declared his revolt against the Turks.<sup>55</sup> Reflecting the separate intelligence efforts, and differing priorities, the General Staff of the Indian Army also printed handbooks such as the 1915 *Routes in Arabia*, using information from a wide variety of sources.<sup>56</sup> These handbooks appear to have been widely distributed. The *Arab Bulletin* promised that the two-volume handbook on Arabia would be “welcome to every official who has to deal with Arabian matters,” suggesting that every official who had to deal with Arabian affairs would have access to a copy.<sup>57</sup> The Indian General Staff publications appear to have been more closely restricted: a note on the front cover of the handbook declares that its contents are only to be disclosed to “authorised persons.” The handbooks were a compilation of various forms of intelligence,<sup>58</sup> put together not just for

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<sup>55</sup> *Arab Bulletin* No. 37, 4 January 1917, FO 882/6.

<sup>56</sup> *Routes in Arabia*, 1915, IOR/R/15/5/379.

<sup>57</sup> *Arab Bulletin* No. 37, 4 January 1917, FO 882/26.

<sup>58</sup> *Arab Bulletin* No. 37 notes “It is inevitable that, at the moment of its eventual issue, such a work [the *Handbook of Arabia*] must have fallen a little behind the latest information, e.g. about an area of actual operations like Hejaz.”

the use of Staff officers in the field but also to aid in the formation and execution of policy both during the war and afterwards.<sup>59</sup>

The Middle East Centre Archive (MECA) at St. Antony's College, Oxford, holds papers from several important people, including a copy of the diary kept by Gertrude Bell during her trip to Hail in 1914. Other collections there include some of the papers of Sir Mark Sykes and Sir Percy Cox. Two small collections, at the Palestine Exploration Fund (PEF) and the Royal Society for Asian Affairs (RSAA), have holdings that help to fill out the picture sketched by officers and adventurers. In the winter of 1914, T.E. Lawrence and Leonard Woolley, then engaged on archaeological digs for the PEF, were employed by the War Office to complete a survey of southern Palestine, under the direction of Captain S.F. Newcombe, who was himself later involved with sabotage operations against the Hejaz Railway.<sup>60</sup> While both Lawrence and Woolley professed ignorance of the clandestine nature of their task, generations of writers and historians have pointed to this episode to suggest that Lawrence's archaeological work was merely a cover for his spying. As an archaeologist working for the British Museum, temporarily attached to PEF for the purposes of the survey, it seems unlikely that he would have been privy to sensitive information. What Lawrence guessed by himself, or pieced together from what

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<sup>59</sup> Most of the handbooks printed by the Indian Army can be found in the British Library's India Office collection as IOR/L/MIL files. Eight handbooks and a collection of maps from the India Office materials were printed as a ten volume series entitled *A Collection of First World War Military Handbooks of Arabia 1913-1917* (Farnham Common, Buckinghamshire, England: Archive Editions, 1988). The 1916 *Handbook of Arabia* appears to be at least partially duplicated in the Royal Geographical Society archive (no call numbers) and the Admiralty files at the National Archive (ADM 186/573). Both the RGS and the National Archive also contain the four-volume *Handbook of Mesopotamia* (1916) printed by the Admiralty (ADM 186/570-572) and which used the India Office materials as reference. Some of these contain much useful bibliographical information similar to that contained in the Geographical Section, General Staff maps. For most of the routes given in these handbooks the sources of information are listed, though sources listed as "Local Information" are frustratingly imprecise.

<sup>60</sup> The survey was eventually published as C.L. Woolley and T.E. Lawrence, *The Wilderness of Zin* (London: Published by order of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Exploration Fund, 1915; Jonathan Cape, 1936). Details of the PEF's involvement in the survey are found the Executive Committee Meeting Minutes and the ZIN files in the PEF archives.

he was told, is another matter entirely. The RSAA contains a typescript copy of Captain Shakespear's diary for his 1914 trip across Central Arabia to Egypt; the original is in the British Library.<sup>61</sup>

There is a great deal of useful material in the British Library, chiefly in the India Office records. The Indian government was in charge of the British agents in the Persian Gulf, and papers of the residencies of Kuwait and the various Trucial Chiefs offer a unique glimpse into the intelligence activities of that particular organization. The Indian government employed officials to create its own handbooks. Of these, the most notable was J.G. Lorimer's *Gazetteer of Arabia*, first produced in 1908 and probably the most-used source for both route and topographical information by the War Office and by political officials in the region.<sup>62</sup> The Government of India also engaged agents on topographical missions and kept a close eye on events in Arabia. Correspondence between Shakespear and Cox concerning the former's meetings with Ibn Saud is part of the India Office collection, as are the various intelligence handbooks produced by the General Staff of the Indian Army both before and during the war.

A study of British intelligence and the Ottoman Empire at this important historical juncture has much to contribute to our understanding of the period. It offers a clearer picture of Anglo-Ottoman relations than scholars have produced to date. While knowledge of Britain's ambivalent policy toward the Ottomans is not new, a study of

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<sup>61</sup> The copy at the Royal Society for Asian Affairs is in two files: RSAA/SC/S/WS/1 and 2; the British Library copy is listed as MssEur A230.

<sup>62</sup> J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, completed and edited by L. Birdwood, (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1908-1915). The *Gazetteer* was produced in two volumes, the first of which, the *Historical* volume, was actually published second and the second of which, the *Geographical and Statistical*, volume, first appeared in 1908. A series of maps are also included. The *Gazetteer* is in the India Office Records in the British Library, but it has also been widely printed.

British intelligence efforts throughout Asia Minor and the Persian Gulf shows that Britain's response to the Eastern Question attempted to preserve the status quo but prepared for the worst. The British went to great lengths in the pre-war years to avoid doing anything that might push the Turks squarely into the German camp. In this way, diplomats hoped that the Turks could be kept out of the coming war and that a solution of the Eastern Question could at least be postponed. Much of the history of British foreign policy during this period is focused on the naval race and the war in Europe. But Britain's European and Middle-Eastern policies cannot be studied in isolation from one another. On the contrary, the parallels are striking. It was not until the final, fateful days of the July 1914 crisis that the British decided that Germany's threat to the Balance of Power made their intervention unavoidable. Thus, although Britain had tried to avoid war until the very last minute, it had also prepared itself for the conflict with an aggressive naval building programme. A similar scenario played out in the Middle Eastern theatre over the Eastern Question, with the British attempting to placate the Turks until the end, while simultaneously conducting intelligence operations in preparation for hostilities. Considered separately, British action in each theatre appears to be influenced by particular circumstances. The bigger picture, however, reveals a British Empire scrambling to rectify the problems of the Boer War, before the next war – the one that ultimately came in 1914 - arrived.

## Chapter One: The Boer War and the Ottoman Empire, 1898-1905

The intersection British military intelligence, foreign policy, and strategic concerns in Anatolia and Turkish at the turn of the twentieth century was a phenomenon deeply rooted in Britain's experience in the Boer War. The unexpected difficulty of suppressing the colonial rebellion in South Africa heralded a new era in Britain's relationship both with its empire and with the other Great Powers. It revealed to Britain a state of imperial weakness, and motivated Britain to end its isolationist policy and mend fences with former adversaries. Paul Kennedy notes that historians can perceive that the Diamond Jubilee celebrations of 1897 not as the zenith of Britain's power, but rather as the defiant swan-song of a nation becoming less and less complacent about the increasing threats to its world-wide interests.<sup>63</sup> But the assessment of British decline is not merely the judgement of historians. Contemporary Britons were keenly aware that their position in the world was slipping. Sir Thomas Sanderson, Permanent Undersecretary at the Foreign Office, wrote in 1907 that the British Empire seemed like "some huge giant sprawling over the globe, with gouty fingers and toes outstretched in every direction, which cannot be approached without soliciting a scream." In the famous expression of colonial secretary Joseph Chamberlain, the empire was like "a weary Titan struggling under the too-vast orb of its own fate."<sup>64</sup> The war showed Britain that its industrial prowess was no longer unassailable, and that commercial markets hitherto dominated by British goods

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<sup>63</sup> Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery* (London: Allen Lane, 1976), 209.

<sup>64</sup> Zara Steiner and Keith Neilson, *Britain and the Origins of the First World War*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 19; Christopher Andrew, *Secret Service: The Making of the British Intelligence Community* (London: Heinemann, 1985), 25.

were now being challenged by other Great Powers. The conflict in South Africa did not necessarily increase the geostrategic and commercial importance of the Ottoman Empire per se. What it did do was reveal to Britain that its dealings with foreign powers were now coming from a position of weakness, rather than strength. Existing sources of conflict and potential flashpoints had to be dealt with more astutely, lest an international crisis produce a war for which the British Empire was manifestly unready.

The revelation of imperial weakness was not simply a question of the war in South Africa. Rather, the Boer War was merely the largest of a whole host of problems for Great Britain at the close of the Victorian Age. In industrial terms, Britain's decline could be measured by Germany and the United States having eclipsed Britain's annual steel production by the late 1890s.<sup>65</sup> In India, the North-West Frontier erupted into open revolt in 1897, suppression of which was made difficult by the illicit arms trade in the Persian Gulf. In November 1897 the German seizure of Kiaochow (Jiaozhou) provoked a crisis over China that climaxed with the Russian occupation of Port Arthur and Talien-wan the following February. Russia's actions were particularly distressing; they revealed Great Britain to be powerless to prevent Russian expansion in the Far East, and unable to contain it in Central Asia and Persia. Corruption in Persia had led to unrest and financial instability, rendering the shah vulnerable to Russian pressure. 1898 also brought France and Britain to the brink of war over the headwaters of the Nile at Fashoda in the Sudan. At the height of that crisis, in October 1898, Britain received news that the Sultan of Muscat intended to allow France to build a coaling station in the Gulf of Oman, in contravention of a treaty he had signed with the government of India in 1891. October 1898 also witnessed the visit of Kaiser Wilhelm II to Constantinople, where he famously

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<sup>65</sup> Steiner and Neilson, *Britain and the Origins of the First World War*, 13.

declared himself the friend and protector of Muslims everywhere.<sup>66</sup> With approximately one-third of the world's 300 million Muslims under British rule, a sizeable portion of which lived in India, the Kaiser's statement seemed like an attempt to undermine Britain's imperial position.

Thus, in the years between 1898 and 1904, Great Britain concluded an alliance with Japan for the protection of its Far Eastern empire and concluded an Entente with France to avoid further colonial entanglements. This allowed Britain to focus renewed energy on maintaining influence and authority over the parts of the globe where it already existed. It is this course of action with which this study is chiefly concerned.

### **I. Intelligence and South Africa**

Revelations of imperial weakness meant that ever-present concerns about the defence of India were reasserted, particularly after Lord Curzon's appointment to the vice-regal post in 1899. In the nineteenth century, worries about Indian security sprang mostly from Anglo-Russian tensions in Asia, more commonly referred to as the "Great Game," and from internal disturbances like the Indian Mutiny in 1857-1858. Old fears about the security of India and the British Empire persisted, but new fears revealed themselves too, and the prospective construction of the Baghdad Railway under German leadership was particularly worrisome. Germany, after all, was the power most likely to overtake Britain as the premier industrial and commercial nation in Europe. The Kaiser's "New Course" in German foreign policy after 1890, his avowed desire to have a fleet of battleships, his

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<sup>66</sup> J.B. Kelly, "Salisbury, Curzon and the Kuwait Agreement of 1899," in K. Bourne and D.C. Watt, eds., *Studies in International History: Essays Presented to W.N. Medlicott* (London: Longmans, 1967), 264-265.

congratulatory message to President Kruger in early 1896 after the suppression of the Jameson Raid, and his visit to Constantinople in 1898, had created an uneasy relationship between the Anglo-Saxon powers. The Baghdad Railway represented not only a threat to Britain's established position as the pre-eminent European power at the court of the sultan, but also a challenge to British political influence and commercial traffic in Turkish Arabia and the Persian Gulf. In British eyes, the commercial and political threats were inextricably linked. The railway also had the potential to offer a new challenge to the land route to India. The Boer War and all that it entailed thus gave new importance to a part of the world where Britain held influence.<sup>67</sup> This was the mood among political officials in Britain at the time. A 1902 letter to Capt. (later Maj.-Gen. Sir) Percy Cox, then political agent and consul at Muscat, expressed hope that with the Boer War over the Foreign Office would be able to devote more attention to the Persian Gulf.<sup>68</sup> The need to maintain its standing as a Great Power and the desire to preserve its dominant political and commercial position revived the Eastern Question and prodded Britain to devote fresh attention to the Turkish Empire in Asia and the Persian Gulf.

Although British interests in the east were closely tied to the defence of Suez and India, many in the British government retained a surprisingly poor level of comprehension about the Middle East, its geography, its people, its culture, and about British interests there.<sup>69</sup> Local intelligence often had very little effect on political

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<sup>67</sup> Priya Satia arrives at a similar conclusion in *Spies in Arabia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 16.

<sup>68</sup> Letter from H. Whigham to Cox, n.d., Sir Percy Cox Papers: Box 1: File 1: Item 3, MECA.

<sup>69</sup> Much of the geographical area under consideration in this dissertation is commonly referred to today as the "Middle East." Contemporaries often referred to the region between the Mediterranean Sea and India as the "Near East," but appeared to use the term interchangeably with "Middle East." Indeed, as Charles Townshend points out, most people in Britain thought of the Ottoman Empire as the "Near East" and would have had trouble saying exactly where the Near East became the "East." Charles Townshend, *Desert Hell: The British Invasion of Mesopotamia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2011), 261. Imperialists

decisions taken in Westminster.<sup>70</sup> Nevertheless, the Boer War brought a number of changes to British intelligence in the Middle East: the methods of intelligence collection remained essentially Victorian, but efforts to gather intelligence were marked by a fresh sense of the importance of the task.

One of the most glaring intelligence failures of the South African war had been a lack of adequate maps of the country, and of the Boer Republics in particular.<sup>71</sup> This had not been the fault of the War Office Intelligence Division, as many at the time claimed. The Boers printed no maps of their territory, and would allow no British subject into their territories to draw them; furthermore, precise, militarily useful, route descriptions had been in short supply.<sup>72</sup> Among the principal intelligence problems of the Boer War, then, had been a lack of knowledge about the territory. The country was unknown and, thanks to the Boers, unknowable. Except for “inaccurate compilations from rough farm surveys” no militarily useful maps of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State existed. The inadequacy of the maps provided to field commanders in the early stages of the war led in several instances to British defeats, notably the defeat of General Methuen’s force

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such as Valentine Chirol, foreign director of *The Times* appear to have used the term in a geo-strategic, rather than merely a geographical sense. For Chirol, the term “Middle East” meant all land and sea approaches to India. He described the term as referring to “those regions of Asia which extend to the borders of India or command the approaches to India, and which are consequently bound up with the problems of Indian political as well as military defence.” Roger Adelson, *London and the Invention of the Middle East: Money, Power, and War, 1902-1922* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 24; Satia, *Spies in Arabia*, 14. This dissertation will use “Middle East,” rather than “Near East.”

<sup>70</sup> Adelson, *Invention of the Middle East*, 4.

<sup>71</sup> Thomas G. Fergusson, *British Military Intelligence, 1870-1914: The Development of a Modern Intelligence Organization* (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1984), 116; “South Africa. Military Survey of the Transvaal.” 2 May 1907, CAB 38/13/21. Colonial cartography was a relatively new enterprise at the time of the Boer War. With the exception of Napoleon’s brief sojourn in Egypt a century earlier, and the Ordnance Survey of Ireland carried out in the 1820s, only India, under the efforts of the Great Trigonometric Survey, appears to have been subjected to any systematic, triangulation based survey before the 1870s. Prior to this, colonial cartography was undertaken using older methods on an ad hoc basis. Matthew H. Edney, *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India, 1765-1843* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 35.

<sup>72</sup> Jay Stone and Erwin A. Schmidt, *The Boer War and Military Reforms* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988), 10-11.

at the Modder River on 28 November 1899, where Methuen and his staff were completely mistaken about the river's course.<sup>73</sup> As Britain began to gird itself for the possibility that it might have to fight a war against a European power in the near future, it began to address some of the shortcomings revealed by the Boer War.

The intelligence failure of South Africa was only partly due to the inability to gather pertinent information; institutional objections to the use of intelligence hampered its effectiveness during the war. The 1903 Royal Commission on the War in South Africa concluded that the Intelligence Division had performed quite well, despite being grossly undermanned for the work of preparing for war.<sup>74</sup> In fact, the Intelligence Division accurately predicted the size of the Boer forces. A copy of the Intelligence Division's manual on South Africa was sent to General Sir Redvers Buller, newly appointed commander-in-chief of the expeditionary force bound for the Cape. Buller returned the book, claiming that he already "knew everything there was to know about South Africa."<sup>75</sup> A 1902 letter to Percy Cox also hinted at the institutional bias against intelligence: "What we really need however is a little knowledge. I know from experience that the FO has a distinct distaste for acquiring geographical knowledge."<sup>76</sup> The comment is telling. Maps of South Africa had been in short supply, in part because of reluctance on the part of the Foreign Office to compile and collect them. The problem of maps had been highlighted in the report of the Royal Commission. The Committee of Imperial Defence (CID), meeting in 1907 to consider a new military survey of the

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<sup>73</sup> Fergusson, *British Military Intelligence*, 114.

<sup>74</sup> Andrew, *Secret Service*, 28.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>76</sup> Letter from H. Whigham to Cox, n.d., Sir Percy Cox Papers: Box 1: File 1: Item 3, MECA. Internal evidence from the letter indicates that it was written the day before the coronation of Edward VII, which would mean that the letter was written on 8 August 1902. However, the letter is addressed to "Captain Cox," and Cox was promoted to Major in February 1902. The author may not have been aware of Cox's promotion.

Transvaal, reflected upon the lack of good military maps that “show the form of the ground by means of contours, contain notes as to camping grounds, water, and supplies.” The CID noted that the “want of a good military map of the theatre of operations [in South Africa] proved a serious disadvantage to our troops, and this deficiency incurred the adverse comments of the Royal Commission.”<sup>77</sup> The CID paper on the new military survey of the Transvaal also pointed out that a lack of good military maps had hampered both sides during the recent Russo-Japanese War.<sup>78</sup> The War Office took the lessons to heart. But while the army reforms by Lord Esher that followed the Royal Commission attempted to rectify various problems, intelligence practice changed little and a permanent intelligence service was still years away.<sup>79</sup> What the Boer War did accomplish was a change, at least at the War Office, of attitudes towards the collection of intelligence. In the years that followed it was the War Office, far more than the Foreign Office, which devoted its attention to the Ottoman Empire and demonstrated a new zeal for intelligence collection and the acquisition of geographical knowledge.

## II. New Focus, Old Problem

In 1898, Britain’s two most likely European antagonists remained France and Russia. The defence of India naturally implied the possibility of war with Russia, and war with Russia implied the possibility of fighting in Central Asia and the Ottoman Empire. Thus, British intelligence activity in Turkish Arabia at the turn of the twentieth century was overwhelmingly concerned with knowing the terrain of the site of a potential future

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<sup>77</sup> “South Africa. Military Survey of the Transvaal.” 2 May 1907, CAB 38/13/21.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Andrew, *Secret Service*, 30.

conflict.<sup>80</sup> These efforts were governed by the belief that if Ottoman Asia was largely unknown, its people, its customs, and its terrain were nevertheless knowable. Between 1898 and 1905 numerous journeys by British officers, as well as by travellers of independent means, sought to obtain precise knowledge of Asiatic Turkey, Arabia, Mesopotamia, Kuwait and the environs around the Persian Gulf. These officers made precise route surveys, drew sketch maps of the terrain, and compiled empirical data about the lands through which they passed. Their work was most often carried out under the direction of the War Office; it was the War Office that determined “intelligence targets” – areas of interest that were to be mapped, explored, and studied. Much of the work, however, was done under the authority of the Foreign Office as many officers, like Lt.-Col. Francis Maunsell, were at least temporarily given official diplomatic posts as cover for their activities. These efforts to collect empirical data on the physical geography of the Ottoman Empire were not entirely systematic, but neither were they entirely ad hoc. There was no specific plan to survey the whole of Asiatic Turkey and Arabia, but efforts were made to create a precise and comprehensive body of information. The results of several of these surveys were printed in the form of War Office handbooks, gazetteers, or else as handbooks produced by the Indian Army to serve its own particular needs. Other targets of these intelligence efforts also reflected the experience of the South African War. Careful reports about the progress of the Baghdad Railway were compiled by officers, as were summaries of the physical extent of Turkish authority, and the political climate of regions such as Arabia, Yemen, and Kuwait.

If the Boer War left its indelible stamp on British intelligence activity in the Ottoman Empire and the Persian Gulf, it is also true that Asia Minor and the Gulf had begun to

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<sup>80</sup> Satia, *Spies in Arabia*, 16.

assume a greater importance in British foreign policy in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. The maintenance of a strong British position in the Persian Gulf was particularly vital to the defence of India. Between 1880 and 1892, the government of India signed a number of agreements with the rulers of several Persian Gulf states and principalities in order to preserve British influence in the Gulf and protect it from the encroachments not just of other European powers, but of the Ottoman Empire as well. In that period, the government of India signed exclusive agreements with the rulers of Bahrain, Abu Dhabi and Dubai, along with several of the smaller Gulf sheikhdoms.<sup>81</sup> In 1891, India also signed a treaty with the Sultan of Muscat and Oman, which forbade him from selling, ceding, or leasing any of his dominions to any foreign power save Great Britain.<sup>82</sup> An agreement similar to those signed with Bahrain, Abu Dhabi and Dubai was signed with the Sheikh of Kuwait in 1899.<sup>83</sup> British protection was thus offered to much of the western coast of the Persian Gulf, though formal protectorates over these states were not established and were in fact eschewed by the Home government.

The extension of British protection throughout the Gulf to safeguard the borders of India created new problems for British intelligence. The British found themselves faced with the increasing importance of the Persian Gulf and Asia Minor, but without the intelligence tools to provide them with the information they needed to safeguard their

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<sup>81</sup> "British Interests on the Coast of Arabia, Koweit, Bahrein and El Katr," Memorandum by R. Ritchie, 30 January 1905, CAB 37/74/15. In addition, see James Onley, *The Arabian Frontier of the British Raj* (Oxford: University Press, 2007), 37. The Government of India also signed treaties with Sharjah, Ajman, Umm al-Qaiwain and Ras el-Khaimah. Onley's recent case study of Bahrain is the only focused treatment of the British political agent system in the Persian Gulf.

<sup>82</sup> Onley reports that after 1900 the Government of India managed the foreign policy of Muscat and Oman at the sultan's request, though this excluded relations with France and the United States, which were governed by previous treaties. Onley, *The Arabian Frontier*, 37.

<sup>83</sup> Details on this can be found in *British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print*, Vol. 17, Document 62: R.V. Harcourt, "Memorandum Respecting Koweit," 11 December 1905. Henceforth abbreviated as *Confidential Print*.

interests. It was one thing to recognize that knowledge was lacking and another thing entirely to acquire it. In the absence of a professional, peacetime intelligence service, measures taken for the gathering of information were spread out between the War Office, the Foreign Office, and the Government of India. Each body collected intelligence to suit its own needs, and by its own methods. Frequently there was conflict between the departments, but more often than not there was merely ignorance of the other's work. Occasionally the various departments would actively collaborate in the collection of intelligence, but these situations tended to be the exception rather than the rule.

The first new measure taken to enhance intelligence collection was the gradual phasing out of the system of native agents that the British had hitherto employed in the Persian Gulf in favour of more permanent, European, political agents established in the treaty states in the Gulf.<sup>84</sup> Under the vice regal tenure of Lord Curzon, the government of India recognized that the increased importance of the Persian Gulf necessitated up to date information regarding the geography, people, and resources of the region.<sup>85</sup> In 1900, the native agent at Bahrain was replaced with an Anglo-Indian political officer from the Indian Civil Service. In 1904 that political officer was replaced with an officer of the Indian Army, a further indication of the growing importance of the region. Bahrain was the first place in the Gulf to have its native agency replaced by a British political officer. Between 1900 and 1911 nearly all of Britain's native agencies in the Gulf were replaced by political agencies or by consulates run by British officers.<sup>86</sup> Almost all of the British agents put in place throughout the Persian Gulf were members of the Indian Political Service (IPS), which served as the diplomatic corps of the government of India. Most

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<sup>84</sup> Onley, *The Arabian Frontier*, 82.

<sup>85</sup> Philip Graves, *The Life of Sir Percy Cox* (London: Hutchinson, 1941), 149.

<sup>86</sup> Onley, *The Arabian Frontier*, 189.

members of the IPS, on the order of seventy per cent, were young officers of the British Indian Army.<sup>87</sup> The purpose of this replacement of native agents by British officers was twofold. First, it met the need for a stronger British political presence. As the Persian Gulf and its relationship to the defence of India increased in importance, so did the need for Britain's formal presence there to safeguard commercial and political interests. Second, the establishment of British political agents created intelligence opportunities that supported the efforts to protect Britain's established interests.

Despite these efforts to create a more efficient system that would preserve Britain's position around the Persian Gulf, problems attended the appointment of Europeans as political agents. These chiefly emerged in the form of language; too few suitable individuals spoke Arabic or even Farsi, as compared with their French and Russian counterparts. This issue was not unique to the establishment of European agents in the Persian Gulf. As early as 1873 calls for the creation of an Intelligence Branch of the Indian Army emphasized the importance of language. Lt.-Col. F.S. Roberts argued "It is of primary importance for officers to study the language and customs of the people, and to have a personal knowledge of the chiefs, priests, and leaders likely to have the most influence among them."<sup>88</sup> A generation later, in a different context, Sir Arthur Godley, the permanent under-secretary of state for India, wrote to Lord Curzon about the problem in 1899:

[t]here seems to be a general opinion [at the India Office] that we suffer from the fact that...our men do not, as a rule, know Arabic...I confess it seems to me that change is required, e.g. either that the Foreign Office should take over these posts,

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<sup>87</sup> Terence Creagh-Coen, *The Indian Political Service: A Study in Indirect Rule* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1971), 5.

<sup>88</sup> L.P. Morris, "British Secret Service Activity in Khorassan, 1887-1908," *The Historical Journal* 27, 3 (1984), 658.

or else that you should create a class of specially qualified men, speaking Arabic, who would be told that they must spend a good long time in the Persian Gulf, and would be paid accordingly.<sup>89</sup>

Curzon demurred, on the grounds that talented individuals were often unwilling to accept postings to “disagreeable” stations in the region, and Godley proposed a further solution to the problem: “Certainly, gentlemen are to be preferred; but if gentlemen cannot be induced to learn the language and to stay long enough in one place to acquire influence there, I should be disposed to descend a step lower on the social scale.”<sup>90</sup> The viceroy offered to correct the deficiencies he saw within the IPS by interviewing candidates personally before approving their positions.<sup>91</sup>

The replacement of native agents with Europeans came at a time when the Gulf was attracting attention from many of the other Great Powers, as well as renewed attention

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<sup>89</sup> Quoted in Onley, *The Arabian Frontier*, 211.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 211. Godley’s comment carries with it an implied racial criticism, in addition to the overt class bias. Clearly gentlemen could be more reliably counted upon to represent British interests than their social inferiors, but even Europeans of a lower social standing were preferable to Indians or Arabs. A similar concern over language seems to have been behind the creation of the Levant Consular Service (LCS) in the 1870s. The LCS was almost exclusively the body responsible for staffing diplomatic posts in the Ottoman Empire until military officers began to be used in specific instances for intelligence purposes. Language study was emphasized for members of the LCS. In 1908 a senior member of the LCS noted: “We all of us know enough of the language of the country that we work in to be able to conduct our business without an Interpreter, without having to call in somebody to talk for us; we can transact business in the languages of the country.” Rigorous examinations for the LCS effectively weeded out all but those who were willing and able to spend several years living abroad and preparing for language tests. Naturally this restricted the talent pool to those applicants who were possessed of some means. D.C.M. Platt, *The Cinderella Service: British Consuls Since 1825* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1971), 165-166. Language requirements of officers in the Indian Political Service, which was drawn in part from the Indian Civil Service and in part from officers in the Indian Army, emphasized an individual’s fluency in Hindustani, because of its status as a “ceremonious language.” Sir Edward Blunt, *The I.C.S.: The Indian Civil Service* (London: Faber and Faber, 1937), 174. As was the case with Captain Teesdale, however, officers with special language skills could be particularly useful (see p.197 below).

<sup>91</sup> Onley, *The Arabian Frontier*, 212. Curzon’s desire to populate the IPS with gentlemen came at a time when recruits were being drawn from a widening range of social backgrounds in England, although it still recruited from a fairly narrow social pool in India. In fact, as David Gilmour points out, the administration of India was overwhelmingly middle class. Curzon’s comment, and his reluctant willingness to accept his more talented social inferiors, may have been an expression of disappointment with the changing state of affairs. David Gilmour, *The Ruling Caste: Imperial Lives in the Victorian Raj* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 32-33.

from the Turks. In 1898 two expeditions – one Swedish, one Austro-Hungarian – made visits to southern Arabia and Aden. The noted “orientalist” and scholar Count Carlo de Landberg, a former Swedish consul-general in Egypt, headed the Swedish expedition.<sup>92</sup> The trip was to be scientific and exploratory, and included “a naval officer as topographer.” The Austro-Hungarian expedition was also a scientific mission, and the British Resident at Aden was instructed to lend his good offices to the explorers.<sup>93</sup> In 1899 a suspected French agent named Antonin Goguyer, who was rumoured to be issuing Bahrainis with French citizenship certificates or French registration papers for their ships, arrived in Bahrain.<sup>94</sup> The year 1898 also saw the arrival of two Germans to Baghdad, ostensibly for the purpose of visiting the archaeological ruins at Babylon.<sup>95</sup> The archaeological expedition may have been, or was suspected to have been, a cover for an ulterior purpose: the British ambassador, Sir Philip Currie, reported that he was making further enquiries about the activities of these two travellers. Perhaps equally as alarming was the report that official permission had been granted to a group of German officers to survey the Plain of Issus and the mountains around the Mediterranean port of Alexandretta.<sup>96</sup> More than a challenge to Britain’s commercial position in that part of the world, this news had the makings of an effort by Germany to supplant Britain’s position as the principal European influence at Constantinople. Seen in the context of the Kaiser’s grandiose foreign policy ambitions and his visit to Constantinople in 1898, where he proclaimed Germany the protector of the Muslim world, the announcement was

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<sup>92</sup> Sir T. Sanderson to M. de Bunsen, 25 July 1898, FO 195/2004. Landberg’s mission was a complete failure. Having apparently offended his host, the Count apparently left Arabia under angry circumstances. FO to Sir N. O’Conor, 21 February 1899, FO 195/2040.

<sup>93</sup> Francis Bertie to Sir N. O’Conor, 25 October 1898, FO 195/2005. The request originated with the India Office.

<sup>94</sup> Onley, *The Arabian Frontier*, 191.

<sup>95</sup> Sir P. Currie to Lord Salisbury, 2 April 1898, FO 195/2006.

<sup>96</sup> Sir N. O’Conor to Lord Lansdowne, 25 April 1902, FO 424/203.

disconcerting. The British feared that the news of the sultan having given permission for the survey to conduct its activities was an early indication of a larger German plan to acquire substantial influence in the Turkish Empire.

There were yet further disturbing indications that other European powers were attempting to undermine Britain's position in Turkish Arabia. In 1903 Lieutenant-colonel Maunsell, the military attaché at the British embassy, wrote to the ambassador Sir Nicholas O'Connor that Russian secret agents had been actively surveying small ports on the coast of Asia Minor between Sinope and Heraklia.<sup>97</sup> The agents, it was reported, had been making surveys of the country around Heraklia, and enquiring about the coal mines there which supplied the Turkish navy. Maunsell's report was enough to prompt O'Connor to warn the foreign secretary, Lord Lansdowne, of the dangerous possibility that the Russians might suddenly seize Heraklia and severely disrupt the ability of the Turks to transport reinforcements to the region in the event of open conflict.

In 1903 the Russian interest in Asiatic Turkey extended much further than the coast. In May O'Connor wrote to the Foreign Office that the Russian ambassador at Constantinople had been pressing the Porte for authorization for a "scientific expedition" to visit Van, Diarbekir, Mosul, and Baghdad for the purpose of making archaeological and geographical surveys and to "study the country."<sup>98</sup> The Russian ambassador had indicated that the purpose of the survey was in part to scout a possible route for a railway that might run through Ottoman territory and connect with the Russian Caucasus railways. O'Connor reported that the Turkish foreign minister, Tewfik Pasha, had informed the Russian ambassador that such a scenario was unlikely; the Germans already

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<sup>97</sup> Lt.-Col. Maunsell to Sir N. O'Connor, 6 November 1903, FO 195/2150; Sir N. O'Connor to Lord Lansdowne, 6 November 1903, FO 78/5270.

<sup>98</sup> Sir N. O'Connor to Lord Lansdowne, 20 May 1903, FO 78/5322.

had a concession to build the Baghdad Railway, and Britain would certainly raise objections to the Russian proposal. Tewfik told the Russian ambassador, I.A. Zinoviev, that the sultan would be extremely reluctant to raise such a delicate question with the other powers.

O’Conor’s comment on the matter reveals deep-rooted British suspicions of Russian policy towards the Ottoman Empire. He told Lansdowne that “this intelligence is interesting” but that it was difficult to gauge the political importance of Zinoviev’s suggestion; O’Conor was not sure whether it was a concrete offer to connect Russian and Turkish railways, or whether it was a tentative proposal indicating the kind of compensation Russia was likely to seek in order to offset the advantages Germany had gained with the Baghdad Railway concession.<sup>99</sup> These reports of other European powers’ activities in Ottoman territory, often perceived as subtle and not-so-subtle efforts to undermine Britain’s political and commercial position in the Gulf, necessitated a definitive and visible response. The establishment of political agents throughout the Gulf sent the message that Britain would not watch idly as other European powers sought to usurp its dominant trading position in the Gulf. Political agents made sure that local chiefs and sultans did not unilaterally abrogate the terms of the agreements they had signed with Britain and the government of India. The establishment of political agents kept a tighter rein on local rulers, and prevented them from stepping outside the boundaries of the treaties they had signed. The positioning of political agents in the Gulf also gave new support to Britain’s relationship with the Ottoman government, which often refused to recognize native agents as official political representatives of the British

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

or Indian governments.<sup>100</sup> Many of the local rulers, but especially the sheikhs of Bahrain and Kuwait, disputed the sovereignty of their territory with the Ottoman sultan, who was inclined to consider the Gulf sheikhs as vassals. Upgrading native agencies to more formal political agencies allowed Britain to treat with the various Persian Gulf states more as independent territories than as vassals of the sultan.

The principal benefit coming from the establishment of political agents throughout the Gulf, however was the steady stream of accurate information they could provide, in contrast to the inaccuracy of the reports native agents often produced. Native agent reports to the political resident in the Persian Gulf, normally headquartered at Bushire and responsible for Britain's relations with the rulers and governors throughout the region, tended to be coloured by personal interests.<sup>101</sup> Native agents often reported rumour as fact, and occasionally distorted or falsified information if it was to their benefit to do so.<sup>102</sup> While the informality of the native agent system could also be advantageous, and offered British authorities access to local power structures and connections, the increasing importance of the Gulf necessitated a more formal presence, and a guarantee of more accurate information.

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<sup>100</sup> Onley, *The Arabian Frontier*, 99.

<sup>101</sup> Bushire, on the Persian coast, was the busiest commercial hub in the Gulf, and therefore a logical place for European powers to place diplomatic representatives. The British Political Resident occupied a unique position, in that he also held the post of consul-general for the Gulf and Southern Persia. In the former role, he was an agent of the Viceroy and the Government of India, whose authority he represented. In the latter role, he was actually an agent of the Foreign Office in London. The role of political resident was more influential and prestigious, but the addition of consular duties added to the importance of the position.

<sup>102</sup> Onley, *The Arabian Frontier*, 98-99.

### III. Kuwait

The most important Gulf territory linked by treaty to Britain was Kuwait. The establishment of a political agent there is suggestive of the motives and processes for the establishment of political agents throughout the Gulf on a wider scale. The Anglo-Kuwaiti agreement of 1899 had created problems for British policy in the Persian Gulf. Sheikh Mubarak of Kuwait sought to use the treaty as a means of gaining British support for his own independent policies in Arabia and the Gulf and in his dispute with the sultan over the precise boundaries of his sheikdom. For their part, the British saw the agreement with Mubarak as giving them control over any potential terminus to the Baghdad Railway that might be established on the Gulf in Kuwaiti territory. It also offered a measure of security against rumoured Russian influence, and against Turkish threats to British trade interests in the region.<sup>103</sup> However, the British had little patience for Mubarak's ambitions: Lord Lansdowne considered the sheikh to be "an impossible client" and "an untrustworthy savage."<sup>104</sup>

In order to manage the Kuwait situation more effectively, the Home Government and the Government of India began to consider the idea of establishing a political agent in Kuwait as early as 1901. The Persian Gulf was considered by the Government of India to properly fall within the bounds of its own empire. British Political Agents around the Persian Gulf belonged to the Indian Political Service, and represented one means by which the Indian government gathered political intelligence throughout its sphere of influence. Under the vice-regal tenure of Lord Curzon, the government of India naturally

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<sup>103</sup> Kelly, "Salisbury, Curzon and the Kuwait Agreement," 261-262.

<sup>104</sup> *Confidential Print*, Vol. 17, Document 65 - Enclosure in Document 62: Lord Lansdowne, "Memorandum," 21 March 1902.

favoured a more active policy in the Gulf and urged the appointment of a political agent at Kuwait because, “as we were without a representative there our information was spasmodic and unreliable, and our hold on the Sheikh uncertain.”<sup>105</sup> In August 1904 Maj. Stuart George Knox was appointed temporary political agent at Kuwait. The original impetus for Major Knox’s mission to Kuwait had been a series of complaints made by the Porte that Sheikh Mubarak was supporting Ibn Saud, Emir of Nejd, against his rival Ibn Rashid, the Turkish vassal, head of the Shammar tribe, and Emir of Hail.<sup>106</sup> Knox was sent to exercise a moderating influence over Sheikh Mubarak, and to dissuade him from any involvement in the affairs of the interior of Arabia. He was instructed to avoid becoming involved in Arabian/Kuwaiti affairs, but to report on Mubarak’s activities. This he did with the fidelity desired by both the War Office and the government of India: Knox reported news of an apparent peaceful resolution to the crisis as Mubarak and his ally Ibn Saud, the Wahhabi emir of the Central Arabian region of Nejd, prepared to meet the Turks at Basra to negotiate a truce.<sup>107</sup>

The discussion over the establishment of a political agent in Kuwait reveals disagreement between the Home government and the government of India over the nature of British policy in the Gulf, and the manner in which it should be conducted. According to the 1901 Anglo-Turkish accord, both parties were committed to maintaining the status quo in the Persian Gulf. Yet as Priya Satia points out, even this produced a need for more reliable intelligence gathering: the treaty required knowledge of the precise nature of the

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<sup>105</sup> *Confidential Print*, Vol. 17, Document 62: R.V. Harcourt, “Memorandum Respecting Koweit,” 11 December 1905.

<sup>106</sup> R. Ritchie, “British Interests on the Coast of Arabia, Koweit, Bahrein and El Katr,” 30 January 1905, CAB 37/74/15.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

status quo.<sup>108</sup> While both the Home government and the government of India recognized the need for some more formal kind of representation in Kuwait, there were disagreements over what that should actually look like. The government of India pressed for a resident political agent at Kuwait like the one established in Bahrain. But the foreign secretary in London objected to this on the grounds that such a move was incompatible with British assurances to the Porte about the maintenance of the status quo.<sup>109</sup> Lord Lansdowne suggested to the India Office that perhaps an officer, nominated by the Persian Gulf resident, might visit Kuwait from time to time, repeating his visits until his stay became practically permanent. Knox was selected for a temporary mission to Kuwait, but the dispute continued and the government of India declared that by agreeing to send Knox to Kuwait, the Home Government had agreed, de facto, to its original proposal that a resident political agent be established there permanently.<sup>110</sup>

It was the Turks, with their complaint that Knox's presence was a violation of the agreement to respect the status quo, who drove the Home government and the government of India closer together on the issue. Britain's presence in the Persian Gulf was viewed with hostility from Constantinople. Though the Turkish government could exercise little real power over Kuwait and the Persian Gulf, particularly while the Royal Navy controlled the seas, it still maintained that Kuwait and the Arabian coast of the Persian Gulf were firmly within the borders of the sultan's empire. Rumours floated around Constantinople at the time of Mubarak's accession in 1896, achieved by the

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<sup>108</sup> *Confidential Print*, Vol. 17, Document 42: R.V. Harcourt, "Memorandum Respecting Koweit," 29 October 1901; Satia, *Spies in Arabia*, 16. Satia argues that Lord Curzon established the Political Agency at Kuwait specifically to fulfil intelligence needs. The implication is that Knox was a spy, but intelligence reporting was only part of his mandate. His instructions clearly indicate that he was to be an instrument of policy, sent to ensure that Sheikh Mubarak acted in accordance with the Government of India's wishes.

<sup>109</sup> *Confidential Print*, Vol. 17, Document 62: R.V. Harcourt, "Memorandum Respecting Koweit," 11 December 1905.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

murder of his half-brothers, that it was accomplished with the connivance of the British political resident in the Gulf, who sought to create an “Arabic confederation.” The confederation would serve as a British puppet, independent of Ottoman rule if not actively hostile to it. Mubarak’s half-brothers, so the rumour went, would not go along with the scheme and were killed as a result. There was no truth in the rumour of British co-operation in Mubarak’s accession (though there was plenty in the rumour about the murder of his brothers), but the fact that it could be received with even partial credence in Constantinople demonstrated the hostility with which the Turks viewed the British presence in the Persian Gulf.<sup>111</sup>

In order to satisfy Constantinople, Knox was temporarily recalled, but the British government clearly resented the interference of the Turkish government in the matter. In London, the Foreign Office testily informed the Turks that Knox’s presence was in no way a violation of the status quo, and that they reserved the right to send an officer to Kuwait as occasion required, with time and length of stay to be determined solely at the discretion of the British government.<sup>112</sup>

The desire of the Government of India to establish a political agent in Kuwait reveals clearly the motives for replacing the whole system of native agents in the region with political agents: both the Foreign Office and the Government of India needed accurate information with which to manage policy and they needed to maintain control over the local rulers with whom they had treaties. Knox was sent to Kuwait at a time when discussions over the route of the Baghdad Railway identified Kuwait as a favourable outlet for a railway terminus on the Persian Gulf. Knox’s mission to Kuwait was

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<sup>111</sup> Kelly, “Salisbury, Curzon and the Kuwait Agreement,” 251.

<sup>112</sup> *Confidential Print*, Vol. 17, Document 62: R.V. Harcourt, “Memorandum Respecting Koweit,” 11 December 1905.

prompted by a dispute between Sheikh Mubarak and the sultan over the former's ambitions in Arabia, and the nature of the suzerain-vassal relationship between the two. He was sent to exercise influence on Sheikh Mubarak, to execute British Persian Gulf policy, and to report back to the political resident at Bushire on the nature of circumstances in Kuwait and on the course of events that took place there. The dispute between London and Constantinople over Knox's appointment also signified Britain's desire to uphold the status quo in the Persian Gulf as it was understood in London, or at least as it suited the British to understand it. Lansdowne's temporary retreat over the precise status of Knox's position suggested that Britain's understanding of the status quo involved a nominally independent Kuwait, rather than one that was a mere appendage of the Ottoman Empire.

Knox's appointment as political agent in Kuwait was not particularly secret, but the extent of Britain's relationship with Sheikh Mubarak was. The agreement of 1899 was to be "absolutely secret," and Mubarak had been paid a handsome fee of 15,000 rupees (approximately £1,000 at the time) from the Bushire treasury for his co-operation.<sup>113</sup> His appointment, therefore, added another dimension to the establishment of a political agent system in the Persian Gulf, that of secret diplomacy if not secret intelligence. The strengthening of British authority in the Gulf was done with an eye to avoiding confrontations with other powers, particularly the Ottoman Empire, suggesting a new British willingness to safeguard its interests in the Persian Gulf by secret means.

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<sup>113</sup> *Confidential Print*, Vol. 17, Document 64 – Enclosure in Document 62: Lt-Col. Meade, British Resident in the Persian Gulf, to Sheikh Mubarak-bin-Subah, 23 January, 1899.

#### IV. Consuls, Officers, Spies

The establishment of a system of political agents throughout the Persian Gulf was an important measure designed to collect intelligence and fulfil British and Indian policy needs. The two objectives were naturally complementary. In the parts of the Ottoman Empire covered by the Asiatic landmass, consular officials fulfilled this policy. This was not a new phenomenon. At least as long ago as the Crimean War, consular officials were used as intelligence agents. Then, the only information the British could get regarding the Russian military situation came from consular officials, who provided widely varying reports and whose flow of information dried up once the war began.<sup>114</sup> The size of the British Empire and the proliferation of consular officials within it meant that for much of the nineteenth century consuls and attaches functioned as the major source of British intelligence collection. The Intelligence Branch of the War Office was established in 1873 out of the old War Office Topographical and Statistical Branch, with mapmaking listed as one of its principal functions. In spite of this, however, its library and map collections were “deficient.”<sup>115</sup> Military officers were also routinely employed in the collection of intelligence before 1914. It was not uncommon for officers on “secret service” to pose as civilians and avoid local authorities. Often these missions were undertaken without the knowledge or co-operation of local British diplomatic officials, a practice that bred resentment between the Foreign Office and the War Office.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> B.A.H. Parritt, *The Intelligencers: The Story of British Military Intelligence up to 1914* (Ashford: Kent Intelligence Corps Association, 1983), 72.

<sup>115</sup> Fergusson, *British Military Intelligence*, 41.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

The tendency to appoint military officers to consular posts to act as intelligence agents, rather than members of the Levantine Consular Service, was the principal new development in the Victorian intelligence gathering system. The system of military consuls seems to have emerged in the late 1890s concurrently with the increasing importance of Turkish Arabia in British foreign policy and the experience of the Boer War, but also in response to the inadequacies of the existing system of using consular officials as intelligence agents.<sup>117</sup> In need of current information on a host of subjects, the Directorate of Military Operations at the War Office, under whose authority the Intelligence Division operated, took advantage of the opportunity to appoint officers trained in topography to pre-existing positions. The posting of military officers to consular positions had a number of benefits: their roles as consular officials offered useful cover as there were so few British subjects to whom they needed to lend their assistance that they could spend the majority of their time on intelligence work.<sup>118</sup> The emergence of these military consuls in the mid-1890s suggests an inability of the Levantine Consular officials, who regularly manned these posts, to collect the kind of information the War Office desired.<sup>119</sup> It also illustrates the role played by the War Office in driving this particular intelligence collection effort. The emphasis on topography stands in contrast to the kind of political and economic information likely to be collected by consuls. In the earliest part of the twentieth century, at least, intelligence collection was governed by military needs.

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<sup>117</sup> John Fisher, "On the Baghdad Road: On the Trail of W.J. Childs; A Study in Near Eastern Intelligence and Historical Analysis, c. 1900-1930," *Archives* 24, 101 (1999), 55-56. Even military consuls faced difficulties gathering the information required by the War Office, and Fisher notes that from the mid-1890s a steady stream of intelligence "not always satisfactory" flowed from the Turkish Empire to London.

<sup>118</sup> Satia, *Spies in Arabia*, 25.

<sup>119</sup> The Levant Consular Service was a specialized branch of the British diplomatic establishment, chiefly responsible for consular posts in the Balkans, the Ottoman Empire and the Middle East.

Consular officials who collected intelligence for the British government before the 1890s often appear to have done so on their own initiative, and probably without any consideration that what they were doing could be construed as intelligence work. The case of George Pollard Devey, the vice-consul at Van, offers a window into the state of intelligence gathering before the advent of military consuls. In August 1889 Devey had undertaken a trip through the districts south of Lake Van, which constituted part of his consular jurisdiction. During the course of the trip, which was taken at his own expense, Devey compiled a body of topographical and road information which he had hoped to offer to the Royal Geographical Society, or perhaps to the German cartographer Richard Kiepert. The military attaché in Constantinople, Colonel Chermiside, upon becoming aware of the information in Devey's possession, suggested that it be sent on to the War Office, which might find it of interest. Devey was compensated the sum of £20 for what he considered a "trifling labour," and sworn to confidentiality.<sup>120</sup> By the early twentieth century this elementary effort at secret intelligence collection had given way to a more systematic practice. Devey had been replaced before the decade was out by Lieutenant-colonel Maunsell and several of the consular posts that dotted the map of Asiatic Turkey were manned by trained military officers. The consul-general at Baghdad, consul at Adrianople, and vice-consuls at Van, Sivas, Adana, and Konia (Konya) were regularly military officers either from the British Army or from British units of the Indian Army.<sup>121</sup> Officers occasionally manned other posts but not with the same regularity as these.

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<sup>120</sup> Vice-Consul Devey to Mr. Clifford Lloyd, 29 January 1890, FO 78/4274.

<sup>121</sup> The rotation of military officers through these diplomatic posts can be traced through the annual *British Imperial Calendar and Civil Service List*. *The British Imperial Calendar and Civil Service List* (London: Warrington, 1895-1914).

Still, consular officials retained their usefulness for intelligence purposes until, as in 1854, they were neutralized by the outbreak of war. A 1905 memorandum offers an example of the kind of intelligence work that continued to be performed by consular officials of the diplomatic service. The Director of Military Operations communicated his thanks to Mr. W.J. Heathcote, the vice-consul at Moush, who took photographs of the Bitlis Pass and sent them on to the Intelligence Department at the War Office.<sup>122</sup> Like Devey's trip around Lake Van, Heathcote seems to have undertaken this project on his own initiative. Clearly, however, his decision to forward the photos of the Pass on to the War Office via the military attaché at Constantinople suggests a greater understanding of the meaning of his actions than was possessed by Devey.

Although the military consuls were under the authority of the Foreign Office in their capacity as consular officials, they were still military men who took their marching orders from the War Office, and from the Intelligence Department in particular. In March 1902 the Director of Military Intelligence suggested that Captain Tyrell, the newly appointed military vice-consul at Van, travel to his post by way of Alexandretta and Diarbekir, as information on those areas was much needed.<sup>123</sup> The years at the turn of the century saw a marked interest in the northern border regions of the Ottoman Empire such as Van and Erzurum because of their proximity to Russia, and to Persia, where Britain and Russia were competing for influence. In the summer of 1899, Col. P.H.H. Massy, the acting consul at Erzurum, sent a preliminary report on his topographical survey of the country north of the city to Sir Nicholas O'Connor, the ambassador at Constantinople, with the request that the report be sent on to the Director of Military Intelligence. On its

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<sup>122</sup> Director of Military Operations to FO, 15 March 1905, FO 78/5420. The pass linked the southern plateau of Armenia with Northern Mesopotamia.

<sup>123</sup> Fisher, "On the Baghdad Road," 57.

way to its intended recipient, the report also made its way across Lord Salisbury's desk, suggesting a degree of shared interest between the Foreign and War Offices in the intelligence activities of the military consuls. Massy's topographical survey had an explicitly military purpose: to add to existing topographical knowledge of the area while ascertaining the size of any force Russia might be able to send across the frontier. A Russian force might play an important role at the outset of a campaign in turning the defences of Erzurum, causing the fortress to fall in the space of a few weeks, rather than after several months.<sup>124</sup> He wrote in his preliminary report that his intention was to complete a topographical survey over the summer of 1902, as time permitted, of a large area between Erzurum and the Russian frontier. The object of Massy's survey was to study the possibility of the defences of Erzurum being turned by military movement across the region. His chief interest, therefore, lay in the roads heading west from the frontier.<sup>125</sup> This was not the only object of Massy's – and the War Office's – curiosity. He noted that in June he had already written of the feasibility of turning Erzurum's defences from the south, and identified much work still to do in surveying that region. The interest of the War Office in the parts of the Ottoman Empire bordering the Russian frontier was also evident in Massy's report. He did not consider his own reconnaissance to be targeting hitherto unexplored parts of the country, his “military predecessors having already done valuable work in some parts of it,” but according to Massy its topography was so little known that even a few weeks travelling across would greatly add to existing geographical knowledge of that part of the Turco-Trans-Caucasian frontier.<sup>126</sup> Massy's

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<sup>124</sup> Col. P.H.H. Massy to Sir N. O'Connor, 25 July 1899, FO 424/199.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.* During the First World War, Russian forces advanced along many of the same roads surveyed by Massy and captured Erzurum in the space of five weeks between January and February 1916.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

reference to his military predecessors included a nod to the work done by Captain Callwell for the Intelligence Department in 1892. In keeping with the military purpose of his survey, Massy's report included intelligence on the suitability of roads in the region for wheeled traffic: artillery and wagons.

Two other features of Massy's report are worth noting. First, he was concerned with the accuracy of the information he provided. Military consuls were not seeking intuitive, "orientalist" knowledge of Turkish Arabia that could only be gained by spending time in the region and learning the ways of the "oriental mind." The intelligence knowledge they sought was precise and measurable.<sup>127</sup> Massy wrote that as a time saving measure, he proposed to follow only routes that were said to be passable by wheeled traffic. His decision to traverse these routes himself reveals a need for precise information. To simply rely on hearsay from native sources, which were notoriously inaccurate, was insufficient.<sup>128</sup> A topographical survey based on native sources would be almost useless, and could have grave consequences in the event of a Russo-Turkish war in which Great Britain might become involved. The need for accurate information carried with it a need for up-to-date intelligence. In any future campaign, it was probable for a variety of reasons that a Russian advance would move into Melasgird, Passen, and Khunus, towards the important Bitlis defile. An advance was likely to follow the lines Sarikamish-Zivin-Hasankale (as Russia did in 1916), or Bayazid-Melasgird, or both. Callwell's 1892 report arrived at the same conclusion and, more recently, so had the Turks, who had reinforced infantry detachments along the probable line of Russian advance. Massy's survey might

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<sup>127</sup> This is in contrast to Satia, who suggests that agents sought to know the Ottoman Empire through an intuitive intelligence epistemology modelled on their understanding of the "Arab mind." Long immersion in the desert world would allow them to replicate the apparently intuitive knowledge-gathering and navigational practices of nomadic Arabs. Satia, *Spies in Arabia*, 5.

<sup>128</sup> Col. P.H.H. Massy to Sir N. O'Connor, 25 July 1899, FO 424/199.

therefore have seemed redundant, but it demonstrated the importance the War Office attached to up-to-date information. Massy's survey also reflected the need for newer intelligence in the face of the changing political climate at the turn of the century. The second notable feature of Massy's work is that it was secretive, if not completely secret. Massy's diplomatic post served as a cover for his intelligence work. While he made no efforts to disguise his identity, his position or even his military connections, he took measures to attract as little attention as possible to his activities.<sup>129</sup>

Massy did not say from whom he tried to conceal his activities, but the internal evidence of Massy's report suggests that it was the Turks whose attention he was trying to avoid. Indeed, the Turks had earlier demonstrated sensitivity to the kind of activities Massy was undertaking. In 1890, a group of British officers visited a village near Aden for the purpose of making topographical surveys. The Turkish ambassador in London lodged a complaint with the Foreign Office over the matter, which Lord Salisbury ordered to be investigated. The substance of the complaint was communicated to the India Office – presumably the officers were from the Indian Army – which was instructed to get Turkish permission for such activities in the future.<sup>130</sup> What had changed in the interim to make secrecy a necessity of Massy's activities is unclear, but perhaps it was competition from a Great Power rival. Massy noted that the Russians had already sent survey parties through the area he was currently reconnoitring, under the supervision of a Colonel Prjevalsky, a personal contact of his.<sup>131</sup> The comment suggests a complicated and nuanced view of the Ottoman Empire on the part of British officers, if

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Sir Philip Currie to IO, 27 June 1890, FO 78/4296.

<sup>131</sup> Prjevalsky was sponsored by the Russian Imperial Geographical Society, suggesting that the Russians may have been exploring the border region with the Ottoman Empire in a manner similar to that of the British. Gerald Morgan, "Myth and Reality in the Great Game," *Asian Affairs* 4, 1 (1973), 60.

not on the part of the British government, for it seems unlikely that Massy would make a point of reporting that he had done his best to ensure secrecy if there had not been some official order, or at least concern, to do so. That Massy was in contact with his Russian counterpart Prjevalsky on the subject of military intelligence is indicative of the kind of international camaraderie that existed among military officers. But given that Massy's reconnaissance was conducted with an eye towards a possible Russo-Turkish war, or even an Anglo-Russian war, his conduct is a shocking display of poor judgement. In the absence of a professionalized intelligence service, however, the British could not hope for much better. Massy's behaviour also reveals a cultural bias. Presumably, Massy felt comfortable speaking candidly with Prjevalsky because the Russian was a brother officer in the service of a Great Power, white, and Christian.

Colonel Massy's appointment as consul at Erzurum overlapped with the appointment of Maunsell, at this point a captain, to the vice-consulate at Van. Here again, although Maunsell was technically serving as a consular official, the War Office determined the work required of him. In May 1899 the Intelligence Division suggested to the Foreign Office that Maunsell be authorized to make sketches of, and draw up reports on, the main roads between Erzurum, Diarbekir, and Bitlis.<sup>132</sup> The Intelligence Division wanted the information in order to advance its mapping of Asia Minor, and estimated that the work it desired Maunsell to perform would cover about 500 miles, and take between thirty and forty days, though it need not be done all at once.<sup>133</sup> Lord Salisbury wished to know whether or not O'Connor had any objections to the enterprise. O'Connor replied that he had none, so long as Maunsell's work did not attract the attention of the Turkish authorities,

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<sup>132</sup> Lord Salisbury to Sir N. O'Connor, 1 May 1899, FO 78/2040.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

and did not cause Maunsell to neglect his regular consular work.<sup>134</sup> The ambassador's reply to Lord Salisbury lends credence to the suggestion that Massy's work was to be hidden from the Turks, rather than the Russians, and offers some possible insight into why. The Turks were clearly xenophobic, fearing perhaps that the mapping activities of the military consuls would somehow undermine their own authority within the Empire. O'Connor's reply is also evidence of a certain friction between the Foreign Office and the War Office. This may have been the product of different ideas about the conduct of foreign policy, similar to the disagreement between the Foreign Office and the Government of India over the appointment of a political agent to Kuwait. It may have also simply been the product of a bureaucratic resentment over the appointment of military officers to diplomatic posts.<sup>135</sup>

The Intelligence Division appeared to recognize that its request might be a delicate subject at the Foreign Office, and the proviso that the work need not be done all at once may be seen as a concession to Foreign Office sensitivities. Whatever tensions existed between the Foreign Office and the War Office over the issue of military consuls do not seem to have impeded the collection of information desired by the Intelligence Division, and O'Connor reported in July that he had received word from Maunsell, now a Major, that he was starting for Diarbekir on the 18<sup>th</sup> of May.<sup>136</sup> Maunsell was given official authorization from O'Connor for his trip, signifying that while he was posted to a consular position, he was a de facto employee of the Foreign Office. Maunsell's topographical activities may have taken considerably longer than the thirty to forty days envisioned by

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<sup>134</sup> Lord Salisbury to Sir N. O'Connor, 1 May 1899, FO 78/2040; Sir N. O'Connor to Lord Salisbury, 9 May 1899, FO 195/2043.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Sir N. O'Connor to Lord Salisbury, 18 July 1899, FO 195/2043.

the War Office. Perhaps his consular duties were more burdensome than expected or perhaps he simply did a more thorough job than the War Office expected, because he did not resurface again until 1901. General Sir John Ardagh, the then Director of Military Intelligence, suggested that Maunsell should be employed at the Intelligence Division for a period of about nine months for the purpose of compiling the results of his journeys into the official *Military Report on Eastern Turkey in Asia* with accompanying maps.<sup>137</sup> O'Connor did not want the vice-consulate at Van sitting empty while Maunsell was engaged elsewhere, and expressed his wish that if the survey work desired by the War Office was completed, then perhaps Maunsell might be replaced by a regular member of the Levant Consular Service.<sup>138</sup> O'Connor was to be disappointed. Sir John Ardagh replied that there was still a good deal of topographical work to be done in that part of Asia Minor, too much for the military consul at Diarbekir, Captain Anderson, to do alone in a reasonable amount of time, for the vacant post to be filled by a regular member of the diplomatic corps.<sup>139</sup> A military officer had to be appointed in order to ensure satisfactory completion of the survey. In fact, Asiatic Turkey, remote from any particular British interest, was frequently a target of topographical intelligence collection. In 1902 and 1903, Captain Anderson, by this time promoted to major undertook a number of trips, the reports of which were forwarded on to the War Office Intelligence Division.<sup>140</sup>

O'Connor's frustration with the system of military consuls emerges clearly in the documents, and he proposed a limitation on the amount of time that the post at Van might

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<sup>137</sup> FO to M. de Bunsen, 9 January 1901, FO 78/5474.

<sup>138</sup> FO to WO, 31 December 1901, FO 78/5474.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Major Anderson to Sir N. O'Connor, 18 December 1902, FO 78/5264; Sir N. O'Connor to Lord Lansdowne, 24 March 1903, FO 78/5265; Sir N. O'Connor to Lord Lansdowne, 2 June 1903, FO 78/5266.

be occupied by a military consul.<sup>141</sup> Lord Lansdowne sympathetically denied his request. The foreign secretary recognized that the holding of consular posts by military officers was inconvenient but, given the importance of the work, and the impossibility of determining how long the survey would take, he sided with the Intelligence Division's request for an officer to be posted to the vacancy at Van. The dispute between the War Office and the Foreign Office over the posting at Van illustrates the problems with intelligence collection that existed before the advent of the military consuls, and which had made that system necessary in the first place. The Levant Consular Service simply did not have the skilled personnel necessary to complete topographical surveys, or to report on other items of interest to the War Office. The Foreign Office, though it was the bureaucratic institution through which intelligence collection was carried out, did not have the capacity to do the job. In 1904, after the completion of Maunsell's *Military Report on Eastern Turkey in Asia*, he wrote that nobody in the Levant Consular Service had been of any use whatsoever in the process of its compilation: "I regret to say that there is no one in the Levant Consular Service who has sent any sketches or reports regarding the compilation of the map or the route reports for the Handbooks, such as the descriptions of towns, races, customs of people or anything regarding the people with which they are constantly in touch." This grievous shortcoming, Maunsell declared, was not the fault of the individuals themselves, but rather of the system under which they worked, which apparently discouraged anything in the way of geographical research or study of the inhabitants of the country in which they spend their lives. Nevertheless, though Maunsell essentially faulted the system under which the consuls worked for their inattention to detail, he castigated officials who seemed disinclined to learn anything at

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<sup>141</sup> Satia, *Spies in Arabia*, 29.

all about the country in which they were posted. He suggested that they might study the various “races, resources of the country, etc more than they do. In the old days we had Consuls ... whose books are still most instructive, and who did a lot of sketching work besides. The interest in the country has not by any means been exhausted and there is lots to be done.”<sup>142</sup> Maunsell’s complaint, and the Foreign Office’s objection to the use of military officers in consular positions, echoes the earlier letter from H.J. Whigham to Percy Cox.<sup>143</sup> There remained within the Foreign Office an institutional aversion to the kind of intelligence work that the War Office was taking up enthusiastically after the Boer War.

Some measures were attempted to rectify the situation. In 1905 Maj.-Gen. Sir James Grierson, the Director of Military Operations (DMO), wrote to the Foreign Office to suggest that the new consular assistant at Baghdad should take a course in military sketching at the Military Engineering school at Chatham before proceeding to his post.<sup>144</sup> As it was important for the Intelligence Division to have accurate information concerning the regions near Baghdad, this would enable the new assistant to make full use of the opportunities afforded him for sketching and mapping the country. However the problems of which Maunsell complained do not appear to have been addressed on any wider scale.

Maunsell’s claim that interest in Asiatic Turkey was not yet exhausted is borne out by the activities of several other military consuls. In 1903 the War Office sought to fill the vice-consulate at Adana with a military officer rather than a member of the Levant Consular Service. The War Office recommended Capt. A.F. Townshend for the post, and

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<sup>142</sup> Lieutenant-colonel Hill to FO, 14 March 1904, FO 78/5354.

<sup>143</sup> See p.33 above.

<sup>144</sup> FO to IO, 7 October 1905, FO 78/5422.

cited among his other qualifications a diploma from the Royal Geographical Society (RGS) in surveying and astronomical observations. His expenses and salary were to be paid by the Foreign Office.<sup>145</sup> As with other military consuls, Townshend's appointment was made at least partly with the aim of acquiring topographical information about the region for the Intelligence Division.<sup>146</sup> His survey training was clearly useful when he travelled in late 1903 between Marash and Payas in the vilayet of Adana. Townshend reported that he made as good a road report as possible, and took astronomical observations at most of the places he stopped. Like Massy before him, Townshend attempted to carry out his work in secret. He wrote that at times his attempts to gather information attracted a crowd, and he was forced to abandon the effort. Townshend also had reason to believe that his movements were closely watched. Whatever reasons the British had for gathering information secretly, the Turks appear to have been aware of their activities.

Major Newmarch, the consul-general at Baghdad, also undertook an intelligence-gathering mission in 1903, between Baghdad and Mosul. He described his report as merely an "eye-sketch," rather than a more formal survey. The trip was undertaken on his own initiative, for reasons that are unclear. Newmarch may have been motivated by the same sense of duty that motivated Heathcote and Devey, or he may have simply been an enthusiastic supporter of the War Office's wider efforts to acquire topographical information.<sup>147</sup> His report was sent to the Foreign Office for transmission to the War Office, but also to the foreign secretary of the Indian government, Newmarch having

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<sup>145</sup> WO to FO, 2 May 1903, FO 78/5488.

<sup>146</sup> Sir N. O'Connor to Lord Lansdowne, 1 February 1904, FO 78/5329. O'Connor forwarded Townshend's route report on to the Foreign Office, which in turn sent it to the War Office, apparently without making a copy. A note in the file says that the report was kept by the Intelligence Division.

<sup>147</sup> Major Newmarch to Sir N. O'Connor, 20 May 1903, FO 78/5268.

expressed his hope that the report would be useful to the Intelligence Branch of the Indian Army. His report is revealing for a number of reasons.

First, it offers a glimpse of how topographical and route information was collected when it was not measured by a proper survey. Newmarch claimed that he was able to estimate shorter distances, such as the width of a bridge, accurately by sight, but that longer distances were measured by sight, by his watch, and by the “paces of the very steady Arab mare” he was riding. By his own admission, the information he provided was neither final nor definite, but his trip appears to have been motivated in part by a desire to update older information, and to fill gaps in existing route knowledge of the territory between Baghdad and Mosul. The only existing information on the area he covered, Newmarch wrote, was found in *Routes in Persia, Section II*, by Capt. J. Vans Agnew, and the reconnaissance done in Mesopotamia by Lt.-Col. Mark Bell, which formed Appendix I to the *Gazetteer of Central Asia, Part V* (published between 1868 and 1873), by the late Maj. Gen. Sir Charles Macgregor. In both of these volumes, route information was often inaccurate or incomplete, and Newmarch offered updates and improvements. Newmarch reported of the stage from Suenna to Kara Tapa that the “map shows a road passing through a plain which is ridiculous: it passes through difficult hill country for about 10 miles, which is the breadth of the range.”<sup>148</sup>

Newmarch’s report showed, second, that even in the absence of proper surveying equipment, the land could be known in other ways, equally as precise. His route reports frequently contained descriptions of the number of houses in towns he passed through, the numbers of livestock seen grazing on stretches of the journey and the military

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

usefulness of roads and places of encampment. At the end of the first leg of the trip, an eighteen-mile stage from Baghdad to Jedida, Newmarch reported that Jedida was a town of about 1,000 inhabitants, with 2,000 palm trees, 600 sheep and fifty horses. The leg of the return journey that took him along the thirty-eight mile stretch from Ain Shababit to Sharamiya traversed a road that wound for several miles through a stretch of low hills. The road was good, except for a section near the summit of the hills, which Newmarch noted would be difficult for guns; apparently no alternative route was available. The final leg of his return trip, the twenty-three mile leg from Khan Mushahida to Baghdad, was impassable by guns or carts, but could be used by infantry or cavalry travelling in file.

Newmarch, third, offered comment on the maps he used for his journey – a combination of Survey General of India maps, and a map by the German cartographer Richard Kiepert (possibly specific sheets of Kiepert's 1902 *Karte von Kleinasien*), which accompanied the German "orientalist" Baron Max von Oppenheim's *Vom Mittelmeere zum Persischen Gulf* – noting that he preferred the former to the latter.

Unlike many of his counterparts, Newmarch was not concerned with the secrecy of his journey. He reported that he was well received everywhere he went, and frequently interacted with Turkish authorities, who often offered him what assistance they could. The report's coverage of a wide variety of subjects reflected the voluntary nature of the trip; Newmarch wrote that it would be difficult to render his intelligence final or definite without knowing what kind of information the War Office or the Indian Army desired. The comment suggests that Newmarch undertook the trip with some knowledge of the War Office's wider intelligence collection efforts but it also indicates that these efforts lacked a focused sense of purpose and direction. There appeared to be a general sense at

the War Office that more information about Turkish Arabia was inherently a useful thing, but a more specific purpose had yet to emerge.

The report encompassed a variety of subjects, and Newmarch commented on British commercial interests along his route, an issue that was to become of increasing interest to the Foreign Office, particularly as plans for the Baghdad Railway began to mature and take shape. There were, he reported, no British firms represented in the towns of Kirfi, Kirkuk, and Erbil, something Newmarch brought to the attention of British merchants upon his return to Baghdad.

Newmarch's report encapsulates many of the features of intelligence gathering by military consuls around the turn of the century. While it was not carried out in secret like the work of several of his counterparts, it was concerned with many of the same issues and themes. Its principal purpose was the collection of topographical and route intelligence, which was passed on not just to the Intelligence Department at the War Office, but to the Indian Army as well.<sup>149</sup> The intelligence Newmarch gathered was meant, like that collected by many of his colleagues, to fill gaps in official knowledge of the region in which he travelled and worked. Newmarch's report, like the reports of his colleagues, was both accurate and precise. Even without the aid of proper instruments he provided accurate measurements of the distances between stops on the route between

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<sup>149</sup> British India itself had a large, informal, sub-empire in South Asia, in addition to its more traditional areas of interest in Tibet and Afghanistan. Throughout the course of the nineteenth century the Indian government expanded this to include much of the Persian Gulf littoral, Aden, the Somali Coast and a good portion of the Hadramaut. In general, before 1914, London did not actively seek to gain direct control over India's sphere of influence, though Indian involvement in external affairs often frustrated imperial officials. Thus, before the war, communication and policy co-ordination between the Home Government and the Government of India was often spotty, allowing for incidents like the one involving Captain Mahon, described on p.115-116 below. The need to create a cohesive imperial war policy after 1914 changed some of this, and Whitehall was compelled to secure greater centralised control over key operations. See Onley, *The Arabian Frontier*, 216-217 and Robert J. Blyth, *Empire of the Raj: India, Eastern Africa and the Middle East, 1858-1947* (Palgrave: Macmillan, 2003), 4-8.

Baghdad and Mosul, and he offered precise information about roads and routes, and about the population – both human and animal – that he encountered during his travels.

For Newmarch, as for the other military consuls and the War Office in London, the Turkish Empire was a territory about which much remained unknown. This problem could be resolved by traditional means, and in very specific and material ways.

Intelligence was quantifiable; distances could be measured, livestock and people could be counted, maps could be filled in and improved. The information collected by British agents could not only be quantified, it could be compiled and distributed so that there existed an official body of information about the Turkish Empire that would suit the needs of those who collected it: the War Office and the Government of India. While those needs were as yet undefined, the British government at least recognized the importance of collecting information on a wide scale for some future purpose.

### **V. The “Military Report on Arabia”**

Much of the various activities of the military consuls and other officers went into compiling the *Military Report on Arabia*, produced by the War Office General Staff in 1904.<sup>150</sup> Military reports like this one, which contained the bulk of information to be put into the hands of troops in the event of war, were created for every country in South-East Europe, Asia, and Africa, where there was a possibility that British troops might be employed. Reports were also created for a number of British colonial possessions, and a

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<sup>150</sup> “Military Report on Arabia,” 1904, WO 33/331. The preface to the report says that “Considerable assistance has been received from the publications of the Naval Intelligence Department, and from the reports of Military Attaches and H.M. Consuls in Turkey.”

number of the colonial possessions of other countries.<sup>151</sup> The creation of these military reports emphasizes that the efforts to gather intelligence in parts of the Ottoman Empire after 1900 represented a contingency plan; it was an attempt to rectify the problems of the Boer War, where ill-preparedness had led to military disaster.

The *Military Report* naturally shared many of the features of the reports of military consuls. It contained a substantial amount of route information, much of it recently acquired, and attempted to update older knowledge of the Ottoman Empire. It was an effort to know the Turkish Empire in a scientific and quantifiable way. Of the forty routes described in Appendix A of the report, thirty-three were travelled or surveyed after 1890, and twenty-one of those – more than half of the routes described in the *Report* – were travelled or surveyed between 1900 and 1903, indicating a serious and sustained effort by the War Office to acquire precise and detailed knowledge of Turkish Arabia.<sup>152</sup> Eleven of the route reports were definitely provided by military consuls: Massy, Anderson, Newmarch and Maunsell are all well represented in the *Report*. Thirty-three of the route reports were compiled by officers, either in consular positions or otherwise, and only four of the route reports were compiled by officers before 1890. A small number of routes in the *Report* (five) are listed as having come from an unknown authority, and one – the route from Basra to Kuwait – is listed as having come from a Naval Intelligence Report

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<sup>151</sup> Fergusson, *British Military Intelligence*, 223.

<sup>152</sup> The chief advantage of route reports, which measured distance, direction and notable features of each leg of a route travelled, was the speed with which they could be compiled. Trigonometric surveys were expensive and time consuming, and could only rarely be carried out by the British in parts of the world they did not rule (Lord Kitchener's nineteenth-century surveys of Palestine, and the 1913 survey by the Palestine Exploration Fund being notable exceptions, though these were done in haste). Route surveys did not concern themselves with the details of cartographic survey, and accuracy remained an issue, but they remained the basic technique for reconnoitering territory for military purposes well into the twentieth, as this study shows. And, in the absence of the time and money required for a "proper" cartographic survey, they remained one of the best tools available for the purpose of mapping. Matthew H. Edney, *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India, 1765-1843* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 92, 95.

dating from 1903. A few routes were taken from older published sources such as Charles Montagu Doughty's authoritative *Travels in Arabia Deserta* (1888). Thus the majority of route information contained in the *Military Report on Arabia* was gathered by military officers, several of them serving in consular posts, after 1900. A small number of routes were based on older information, much of that also from military officers. The numbers reveal a renewed interest in the Ottoman Empire beginning in the 1890s and intensifying significantly after the Boer War, as well as an effort to quantify and know the territory being surveyed.

The information contained in the "List of Authorities Consulted" for the *Report* as a whole (Appendix J) as well as in the other appendices suggests that efforts to gather intelligence on Turkish Arabia represented a mixture of empiricism and intuition. Maunsell's *Military Report on Eastern Turkey in Asia*, the result of his travels in his various military consul positions is listed as an authority, as is a Naval Intelligence report on the Persian Gulf printed in 1903. Among the other quantitative authorities consulted for the *Military Report on Arabia* are gazetteers of Baghdad and Arabia (printed between 1884 and 1889) and pilot guides to the Persian Gulf (1898), the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden (1900). But the *Military Report* did not limit itself to measurements and calculations of routes and distances. Knowing Turkish Arabia involved much more than that, as the *Report's* bibliography and appendices make clear. Appendix J also listed "travel literature" among the authorities consulted. Travellers obtained knowledge not by measuring distances and routes, but by spending time among local inhabitants and learning their thought processes intuitively, as Priya Satia suggests. Most of these books

dated from the late nineteenth century, indicating that renewed interest in the Ottoman Empire was a cultural, in addition to being a political and strategic phenomenon.

A form of “orientalism” provided the impetus for many travellers and archaeologists to visit the exotic east. The development of archaeology and a late Victorian interest in Biblical lands prompted scholars, academics and travellers to visit the Ottoman hinterland.<sup>153</sup> Whatever the reason, the publication of travel books on the Ottoman Empire demonstrated that interest was much broader than even this handful of travellers and academics: there was clearly a paying readership interested in learning about the region in a more intuitive way than could be learned from route reports. The paying readership included the War Office, who used such publications as the eminent archaeologist David Hogarth’s *The Nearer East* (1902) and *The Penetration of Arabia* (1904) to arrive at a more complete knowledge of the Ottoman Empire. Efforts to know Turkish Arabia meant knowledge of its people, and appendices in the *Military Report* included information on such topics as the “Muhammadan Religion” as well as on the ruling houses of Arabia.<sup>154</sup> The *Report* also included a glossary of Turkish and Arabic terms, suggesting that military or diplomatic personnel who used the *Report* were not only to understand the land in which they lived and worked, but they were also to engage with its customs and people. These appendices appeared in the *Report* alongside more empirical information such as a “General Description of the River Tigris, from a report by Lt.-Col. Maunsell” (Appendix C) or the “Report on the Navigation of the Euphrates

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<sup>153</sup> In fact this was part of a wider, European, intellectual interest in the Orient. Biblical scholars pursued the acquisition and study of Old Testament texts in part to clear up confusing Biblical passages, or to investigate their own doubts about the truth of Christianity. Suzanne L. Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race and Scholarship* (Cambridge: University Press, 2009), 160-161.

<sup>154</sup> “Military Report on Arabia,” 1904, WO 33/331. “Appendix H: The Wahabite Family, or the Old Ruling Family in Nejd; The Ibn Rashid Family; The Sheikhs of Kuwait.”

by Mr. Dobbs, ICS, January 1903” (Appendix A). The *Military Report on Arabia* was therefore more than simply a collection of route reports and distance measurements. It represented an intelligence product, compiled from military consul reports and the experiences of other officers and travellers in the empire that aimed to provide a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the topography and the people of Turkish Arabia.

But to label the document a “Military Report” is misleading. It was a military report in the sense that it was compiled by the War Office, and distributed to various military departments.<sup>155</sup> However, it was not a report on the military strength of the Turkish Army, nor was its route information strictly limited to matters of military concern. It was an early effort to create a systematically arranged and organized body of knowledge about the Arabian parts of the Ottoman Empire. It offered information on a wide range of subjects of interest to British authorities in Turkey, and mirrored the larger priorities that had come to dominate British activity in Turkish Arabia since the 1890s. The *Report* reflected British concern with the Eastern Question in its attention to the stability of the Ottoman Empire and the reach of Turkish authority throughout its domain. The report noted that tax collection was done on the Arabian Peninsula only with great difficulty, and that Turkish authority there was limited by the influence of local sheikhs and tribal chieftains. In fact, the report noted, Turkish authority was weak and in decline everywhere in Arabia.

The Turkish military presence in the Hejaz, on the Red Sea coast of the Arabian peninsula, was indeed small, and largely ineffective; in Nejd, in the interior of Arabia,

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<sup>155</sup> The copy in WO 33/331 appears to have belonged to the foreign countries section of the Department of Military Operations.

there was no Turkish presence of which to speak. Revolt had broken out in Yemen in 1902 and was proving difficult to suppress; the terrain there lent itself to guerrilla warfare, and the continual fighting between the native population and Turkish troops, as well as losses from disease, were constant drains on Turkish military strength.<sup>156</sup> The Military Report described Turkish rule in Arabia as precarious: a strong Emir of Nejd or a European power might easily terminate it.<sup>157</sup> It was perhaps for this reason - the sultan's awareness of his own weaknesses - that British officers often needed to collect their information out of sight of Turkish authorities. The sultan's possession of, and influence in, Central Arabia was important to his religious and strategic position in the Hejaz, Yemen, and the Persian Gulf. Without a solid presence in Central Arabia, the sultan could not claim guardianship of the holy places of Islam, nor could he press his claim to the Muslim Caliphate, which Ottoman rulers had done periodically since the sixteenth century. Since much of the sultan's authority rested on these claims, so did the integrity of the Ottoman Empire.

The implications of this for Great Britain were clear: having attempted to uphold the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire since the early nineteenth century, and faced with new challenges to its imperial position from other Great Powers, it was imperative for Britain to have some understanding of the strength and reach of the sultan's authority. Upholding the integrity of the Ottoman Empire meant more than just preserving the power of the sultan over his own dominions, it also meant working through other means to fill power vacuums when they emerged. The policy of sending a British agent to Kuwait was one such measure; if it was not designed to preserve the status quo vis à vis

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<sup>156</sup> "Military Report on Arabia," 1904, WO 33/331.

<sup>157</sup> Nejd was the home of the Saudi dynasty. The Saud family ruled that part of Central Arabia as the Emirs of Nejd from their capital at Riyadh.

Turkey, it was an effort to prevent a power vacuum being filled by another Great Power. This was the essence of Britain's policy toward the Eastern Question; the status quo was interpreted not just as the preservation of Turkish authority but as the absence of other European powers from regions where Turkish authority was, or had been, present.

In sum, the revelation of imperial weakness that attended the Boer War, combined with a renewed interest in certain parts of the Ottoman Empire by the Turks and the other Great Powers, produced a need for more complete, more accurate, intelligence about many of the areas nominally under Ottoman authority. Imperial antagonisms resurrected older concerns about the Eastern Question and the defence of India: they prompted both the British government and the Government of India to seek out new ways of collecting intelligence on a part of the world that was of increasing importance but about which relatively little was known. Efforts at intelligence collection increased notably after 1900, principally through the War Office's use of military consuls, whose prime objective was the mapping and surveying of the country in which they lived and worked, but also through the voluntary efforts of "regular" diplomatic officials. This information was compiled and distributed in various forms, the most noteworthy of which was the 1904 *Military Report on Arabia*. It represented a cross-section of the ways and means by which Britain sought to know the Middle East: it was a combination of measured distances, topography and ethnographical information about Turkish Arabia. The collection of intelligence was an effort to meet Britain's needs in the face of a changing geopolitical landscape: concerns about the defence of India could be managed by

knowledge of other Great Power's intentions and activities in the Turkish Empire; the Eastern Question could similarly be managed by knowledge of the state of Turkish authority through its dominions. In places where such authority was weak, or where European influence threatened the status quo, the British could take measures to shore up their influence. Crucial to all of this was intelligence: accurate, precise, up-to-date intelligence about an increasingly specific circle of targets.

## Chapter Two: The Eastern Question, 1898-1905

The challenges facing Great Britain in Anatolia and Turkish Arabia were intricately connected to the challenges of the Eastern Question. The preservation of Ottoman authority was crucial for Britain's imperial position in Asia and for the defence of India. However, Ottoman authority, and thus Britain's position, was threatened by a number of developments from the late nineteenth century. Frequent uprisings in Yemen, the nominal independence of Arabia owing to the almost total absence of a Turkish presence there, and the ongoing dispute with the Sheikh of Kuwait all weakened the sultan's position in outlying parts of his empire. This situation was not new: the sultan's hold on his own dominions was often tenuous, and the Turkish Empire had been considered the "Sick Man of Europe," on the verge of collapse, since the Congress of Vienna in 1815. The 1904 *Military Report on Arabia* had noted the weakness of the sultan's authority in Arabia and Yemen. What gave the issue new immediacy and salience was the precarious imperial position in which Great Britain found itself as a result of the Boer War.

Conventional wisdom on the Eastern Question predicted that the collapse of Turkish authority would create a power vacuum that might precipitate a Great Power war. Britain needed to minimize the danger of this by keeping itself fully informed about other powers' interests that might lead them to try to fill such a vacuum. This meant working with local notables either for the purpose of ensuring their obedience to the sultan's authority or else to ensure their goodwill toward Great Britain. This had been the rationale behind the British decision to conclude a secret treaty with Sheikh Mubarak in

1899.<sup>158</sup> It also meant guarding against efforts by other European powers to increase their own standing and influence at Constantinople and within the sultan's realms. In practice, this entailed maintaining vigilance against not only Russian efforts to undermine the British position, but also increasingly against apparent German ones too. As the antagonism grew between Great Britain and Germany in Europe, so it grew between the two powers in other parts of the globe. The German challenge was commercial and political, and therefore strategic. It was principally embodied in the construction of the Baghdad Railway, which Germany had been granted a concession to build in the late 1890s.

Railways were a salient feature of the Eastern Question, and both the Baghdad Railway and the Hejaz Railway were major sources of concern. The former represented the growth and spread of German influence, while the latter represented efforts by the sultan to extend or shore up his authority in remote parts of his dominions. The Baghdad Railway especially was a target of Foreign Office intelligence efforts, because of the German intention to terminate the line on the Persian Gulf. A railway across Anatolia to Baghdad was of little value unless it connected Baghdad to the Persian Gulf. The railway's completion would bring a firm German presence into the Gulf, establishing another European power in a traditionally British sphere of influence, and adding to the existing threat of Russian expansion in the direction of the Persian littoral.

Collection of intelligence on these targets was conducted partly by the system of military consuls and officers described in Chapter One, but intelligence was also collected by less formal means. Officers, usually from the Indian Army, were requested to observe particular features of the Ottoman landscape while on leave. Those returning

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<sup>158</sup> "Military Report on Arabia," 1904, WO 33/331.

to their regiments in India were occasionally instructed to follow a particular route and study particular items of interest. Military intelligence also made extensive use of amateur reports in its efforts to compile information about Turkish Arabia. Independent travellers and amateur archaeologists such as Mark Sykes and Gertrude Bell often reported on local political and geographic conditions. The use of published works by scholars was noted in the last chapter, but the use of contemporary travel accounts by academics and adventurers coincided with, or perhaps resulted from, the late Victorian popular interest in the Ottoman Empire.

Britain's sudden interest in Ottoman railways, its concerns about the reach of Ottoman authority, and its worries about the increasing presence of other European powers in the empire – all three developments show that Britain viewed the problem of the Eastern Question with a sense of immediacy. The various forms of human intelligence collection (HUMINT) employed by the Foreign and War Offices demonstrate a relatively prompt British reaction to the problems highlighted by the experience of the Boer War. The problems were intertwined. For the British, intelligence offered a way of managing the larger international problem of the Eastern Question and Ottoman collapse. Other European powers, such as Russia, Germany, and even Italy, were likely angling for their own advantage in the event that Turkish power crumbled, and might even be working to hasten its demise. Monitoring the reach of Turkish authority within its own borders might also offer some indication of how close the “Sick Man” was to its deathbed. In the event that the Ottoman Empire did collapse, intelligence could help the British identify key interests that needed to be strengthened and protected, and allies with whom they could co-operate. Thus, while intelligence often dealt with

specific issues like railways or the growth of German commerce, all intelligence activity was subsumed under the larger umbrella of the Eastern Question.

### I. The Question of Turkish Authority

During Lord Salisbury's third premiership (1895-1902) Britain abandoned the policy of attempting to safeguard its interests east of Suez by preserving the integrity of the Ottoman Empire, which it had pursued for much of the nineteenth century.<sup>159</sup> This created a need for new or better intelligence about two things: the parts of the empire in which Ottoman rule was most threatened, and who threatened it. The question of Turkish authority within the sultan's dominions, though largely a matter of Turkish politics, tended to revolve around two further issues: tax collection and the guardianship of the Islamic holy cities of Mecca and Medina. The latter issue was a matter of great significance for Britain, with its large Indian Muslim population, a disproportionate number of whom served in the Indian Army.<sup>160</sup> Contemporary estimates suggested that of the 300 million Muslims in the world at the turn of the century, approximately one-third of them lived under British rule.<sup>161</sup> The Turkish sultan's claim to the Caliphate of Sunni Islam was by no means universally accepted within the Muslim world, but his guardianship of the holy cities and his position as the most powerful Islamic ruler gave the sultan a measure of authority and influence that extended well beyond his borders. It was this influence, specifically its effect on Indian Muslims, which made the status of the

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<sup>159</sup> Ravinder Kumar, *India and the Persian Gulf Region, 1858-1907: A Study in British Imperial Policy* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1965), 149; Robert Taylor, *Lord Salisbury* (London: Allen Lane, 1975), 169; David Steele, *Lord Salisbury: A Political Biography* (London: UCL Press, 1999), 321.

<sup>160</sup> See pp.257-258 below.

<sup>161</sup> Sir N. O'Connor to Lord Lansdowne, 29 October 1903, FO 78/5270.

sultan's authority in Arabia a matter of considerable interest for the British government and the Government of India. The allegiance of Indian Muslims to the sultan represented a serious threat in the event that the Eastern Question erupted into a more general war.

There was plenty of activity for British agents to monitor, particularly in Arabia and the Persian Gulf, the two areas where Turkish rule was most precarious. Yemen especially was almost perpetually in a state of rebellion. A significant rebellion had broken out there in 1898-1899, which had been ruthlessly suppressed by the Turks.<sup>162</sup> This rebellion had been put down by 1900, though that had required substantial numbers of reinforcements.<sup>163</sup> A more serious rebellion broke out in late 1902. A report by the British vice-consul at Hodeida reported that the Turkish commander, General Yusuf Pasha, had been besieged for several months in the capital by rebel forces.<sup>164</sup> Despite this piece of news, sent to both the India Office and the Intelligence Division at the War Office, and despite the awareness of wide-ranging unrest in Yemen, reliable information about the state of affairs in the region was difficult to come by. Further reports came from Colonel Francis Maunsell, by this time the British military attaché in Constantinople. Maunsell's reporting complemented the information gained by the vice-consul in the region by concentrating on the Turkish response to the rebellion.

To some extent it was possible to gauge the seriousness of events in Yemen even without reliable local information by assessing the Turkish reaction. Maunsell noted that the man sent to quell the rising, Hadi Pasha, was the same man who had brutally

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<sup>162</sup> Colonel Ponsonby, Military Attaché, to Sir N. O'Connor, 23 January 1900, FO 195/2107; Colonel Maunsell, Military Attaché, to Sir N. O'Connor, 23 October 1903, FO 78/5270.

<sup>163</sup> The Turks had been forced to mobilize a number of their reserve (*Redif*) units for the expedition to Yemen

<sup>164</sup> Sir N. O'Connor to Lord Lansdowne, 17 March 1903, FO 78/5265; Caesar E. Farah, *The Sultan's Yemen: Nineteenth-Century Challenges to Ottoman Rule* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002), 190.

suppressed the 1898-1899 uprising. This, and the dispatch of reinforcements to the region, indicated the seriousness of events.<sup>165</sup> A report from Maunsell in 1905, sent to the Intelligence Division, described the increasing severity of the situation. Turkish reinforcements arrived slowly, which in turn boosted rebel morale. Their demands for a modicum of self-government and immunity from excessive taxation had gathered momentum and were beginning to spread northwards through Asir and into the Hejaz, where the rebel's influence threatened the Islamic holy places.<sup>166</sup> Maunsell, stationed in Constantinople, seems to have based his reports on a personal network of contacts. He had heard that morale among Turkish troops was very low: the weather in Yemen was extremely hot, and many of the men suffered from fever and dysentery. The local population was sympathetic to the rebels and was making life difficult for Turkish forces.<sup>167</sup> Despite his distance from the action, Maunsell's information was good. His sources, which his report did not name, provided him with the embarkation and mobilization dates for every Turkish division heading to Yemen.

The difficulties of obtaining accurate information on the course of events in Yemen meant that Maunsell's assessments of the Ottoman response became the principal source of intelligence on the revolt. In June 1905 Maunsell reported to the India Office and the War Office Intelligence Division that the Turks had drawn up a final plan for the reconquest of Yemen that called for a force of 80,000 men. Maunsell doubted that the number would actually be reached. The mortality rate of Turkish forces in Arabia was high, which in turn produced a high desertion rate among units mobilized for Yemen.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Sir N. O'Connor to Lord Lansdowne, 17 March 1903, FO 78/5265.

<sup>166</sup> Sir N. O'Connor to Lord Lansdowne, 6 June 1905, FO 78/5395.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Sir N. O'Connor to Lord Lansdowne, 18 April 1905, FO 78/5394; Farah, *The Sultan's Yemen*, 214.

Furthermore, the Turks were finding supplies difficult to come by and the requisite number of pack animals had not been assembled.<sup>169</sup> Of the 2,000 transport animals the Turks had ordered to be rounded up in Syria by April 1905, only 300 had been shipped.<sup>170</sup> It seemed unlikely that more would be gathered from within Yemen, owing to the hostility of the local Arab tribes.

The rebellion in Yemen offers an early example of tri-partite intelligence co-operation between the Foreign Office, the War Office, and the Government of India. One or more aspects of the rebellion attracted the interest of each party: the state of Turkish authority, the performance of the Turkish army, and political unrest on the border of the Aden protectorate, in a region considered by India to fall within its own sphere of influence. Though the intelligence collection effort in Asia Minor and Turkish Arabia in the early twentieth century was principally a War Office initiative, the Foreign Office and the Government of India were perfectly willing to co-operate in cases where they saw an overlap of interest.

Maunsell's ability to collect intelligence on Yemeni affairs stands in contrast to that of the man on the spot. The British vice-consul in the port town of Hodeida, George Pollard Devey, was unable to acquire intelligence that matched Maunsell's in scope and precision. Devey was able to estimate the number of casualties suffered by Turkish forces (6,000-7,000 from disease and starvation during the siege of Sana'a from November 1904 to March 1905), however reliable intelligence about developments in many other parts of the region was hard to obtain. The vice-consul reported that there "is no reliable information regarding the progress of events in the vicinity of TA'IZ, but the rumour

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<sup>169</sup> Farah, *The Sultan's Yemen*, 222.

<sup>170</sup> Sir N. O'Connor to Lord Lansdowne, 14 June 1905, FO 78/5395.

current here for some time past that RIZA PASHA and the mutesarif of the sandjak with one thousand men are besieged at IBB, daily gains ground.”<sup>171</sup> Much of what Devey reported was gleaned from rumour and such local sources as were available to him, but it appears to have been used principally to supplement the better intelligence obtained by Maunsell. British assessments of events in Yemen were mostly reliant upon Maunsell’s reports and an analysis of the Turkish response. As Sir Nicholas O’Conor described the situation, the reports from Yemen that things were going badly for Turkish troops were probably true, since the Porte would have denied that things were going badly if it possibly could have.<sup>172</sup>

The question of Turkish guardianship of the Islamic holy places emerged independently from revolts in Yemen. As far back as 1895 the British noted that the Sherif of Mecca could occasionally be supported in his disputes with the Ottoman Caliphs.<sup>173</sup> This meant that even in periods of poor Anglo-Turkish relations, it was important for Britain’s standing in the Muslim world to be on good terms with whoever controlled the holy places. The present sherif was known to be a Turkish vassal, and was not available for such negotiations, but he was old and the likely candidates to succeed him were reputed to have pro-British sympathies.<sup>174</sup> Should the British ultimately decide, as they would in 1915, to support the sherif against the sultan they would need to apply a considerable amount of pressure to separate the vassal from his lord. This was not as easy

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<sup>171</sup> Sir N. O’Conor to Lord Lansdowne, 15 June 1905, FO 78/5395.

<sup>172</sup> Sir N. O’Conor to Lord Lansdowne, 18 April 1905, FO 78/5394; Farah, *The Sultan’s Yemen*, 220.

<sup>173</sup> *British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print*, Vol. 17, Document 32: Memorandum by Colonel Chermiside, 19 August 1895.

<sup>174</sup> “Military Report on Arabia,” 1904, WO 33/331. The sherif, Aun Rafiq, was succeeded in 1905 by his son Abdullah, who was in turn replaced in 1908 by Sherif Hussein ibn Ali, the man who would lead the Arab Revolt in the First World War. It had long been the practice of Ottoman sultans to personally appoint the Emir of Mecca and Hussein’s accession to the position was no exception. David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: Creating the Modern Middle East, 1914-1922* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1989), 112-113.

in the Hejaz as it would be on the periphery of Ottoman territory, where Turkish authority had little control over Oman, Muscat, Bahrain or Kuwait. Ottoman authority had been bolstered in western Arabia by the construction of the Hejaz Railway. The Hejaz Railway was meant to connect the holy places of Mecca and Medina with Ottoman Syria and Anatolia. The line was begun around 1900, ostensibly to facilitate the Muslim pilgrimage, the *Hajj*, but most British observers saw it as an effort to buttress Turkish authority in Arabia and challenge Britain's presence there.<sup>175</sup> As a result of the railway, there was no existing powerful Arab influence or combination of influences that could challenge Ottoman supremacy.<sup>176</sup> Naturally, the chief political force in Central Arabia would have de facto claim to the guardianship of Mecca and Medina. Certainly it was important that when the new sherif assumed his throne no other European power should have his ear. But the sherif was not the only force in Central Arabia that had to be considered, and political stability in the region was also necessary to the well-being of British commerce in Arabia and the Gulf.<sup>177</sup>

Other powers, particularly Ibn Saud, the Emir of Nejd, and Ibn Rashid, the Emir of Hail, were forces to be reckoned with. The possession of Central Arabia was important to the sultan for the same reasons that it was important to Great Britain: it materially affected his religious and strategic position in the Hejaz, Yemen, and the Persian Gulf, and by extension his standing within the Muslim world. But Turkish authority in Central Arabia was weak. Tribal divisions and the nomadic character of Central Arabia's

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<sup>175</sup> Sir N. O'Connor to Lord Lansdowne, 18 August 1903, FO 78/5452; "Military Report on Arabia," 1904, WO 33/331; "General Report on Syrian Railways," 1905, WO 33/335; *Confidential Print*, Vol. 17, Document 53: "General Report on Syrian Railways." The Confidential Print document is an incomplete copy of the one contained in WO 33/335. See also Sean McMeekin, *The Berlin-Baghdad Express: The Ottoman Empire and Germany's Bid for World Power* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2010), 48.

<sup>176</sup> *Confidential Print*, Vol. 17, Document 32: Memorandum by Colonel Chermiside, 19 August 1895.

<sup>177</sup> Sir N. O'Connor to Lord Lansdowne, 23 October 1903, FO 78/5270; Stuart A. Cohen, *British Policy in Mesopotamia, 1903-1914* (London: Ithaca Press, 1976), 8.

Bedouin inhabitants made a permanent garrison hitherto unnecessary.<sup>178</sup> Although Ibn Rashid and Ibn Saud were the two most likely challengers to Turkish authority in Central Arabia, the former was essentially a Turkish vassal and the latter was not strong enough to mount a successful rebellion.

For a brief period in 1901, however, a victory by Ibn Rashid over the allied forces of Sheikh Mubarak and Ibn Saud enabled him to attempt to negotiate with the British for a more influential position on the Persian Gulf. Ibn Rashid, claiming to be fed up with Turkish duplicity, proposed to accept Britain's dominant position at Kuwait in return for replacing Sheikh Mubarak with one of his own protégés.<sup>179</sup> There was never a serious debate in British political circles about whether to accede to Ibn Rashid's proposals. Both Lord Curzon and Lord Lansdowne recognized that the short-term benefits of solidifying Britain's position in the Persian Gulf would be outweighed by the long-term prospect of alienating the Ottoman authorities.<sup>180</sup> There was no guarantee that Ibn Rashid would maintain his hold in eastern Arabia and the Gulf, and the Turkish Empire, though weak, was not yet on the verge of collapse. In fact Ibn Saud crushed Ibn Rashid's forces in late 1902, prompting Britain to take serious notice of the rise of the Wahhabi movement in Central Arabia.

Indeed, as early as 1904 the question of overt assistance to Ibn Saud in his ongoing feud with Ibn Rashid was mooted in British political circles. Sir Percy Cox, by this time the British political resident in the Persian Gulf, noted that the Turks were openly supporting Ibn Rashid with men and guns. Cox pointed out that Ibn Saud had sought British assistance and protection, and wondered whether it would serve British interests

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<sup>178</sup> "Military Report on Arabia," 1904, WO 33/331.

<sup>179</sup> Kumar, *India and the Persian Gulf Region*, 196.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 196

to answer the call for help. Curzon refused material assistance to Ibn Saud, in accordance with Britain's policy of avoiding involvement with the Wahhabi sect of Islam.<sup>181</sup> While the Foreign Office was occasionally open to working with local chiefs at the expense of Turkish authority, it had no interest at that stage of actively engineering the ascendance of an alternate power. Indeed, while a number of military and diplomatic personnel familiar with events in Arabia believed that Ibn Saud was a power on the rise, there seemed little doubt that he had intentionally sought armed conflict with Ibn Rashid. The British had no vested interest in working to alter what was essentially, as O'Connor pointed out, the status quo in Central Arabia. Both the Foreign Office and the Government of India were, however, interested in collecting information about the state of affairs in Nejd and the details of the relationship between Ibn Rashid, the Turks, Ibn Saud and Sheikh Mubarak. It was at this point, in the context of the Ottoman government's support for Ibn Rashid, that the proposal to post a British Resident at Kuwait was voiced by Lord Curzon. Accordingly, Major Knox was sent as Britain's political agent to Kuwait in August 1904.<sup>182</sup>

The British attitude towards Turkish authority in Arabia was thus one of "wait and see." They preferred to gather intelligence on the state of political affairs and to use that information to build informal relationships with rising powers like the new Sherif of Mecca or Ibn Saud. But they wanted to remain aloof from the actual proceedings. The rationale behind the policy was one of British self-interest. Turkish rule throughout

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<sup>181</sup> IO to FO, 21 May 1904, FO 78/5488; "Memorandum on British Policy of Non-Interference in the Affairs of Nejd," 3 July 1913, FO 371/1820. The policy, represented by Sir Nicholas O'Connor's famous dictum, "No entanglement with Wahhabis," dates from 1902. H.V.F. Winstone, *The Illicit Adventure: The Story of Political and Military Intelligence in the Middle East from 1898-1926* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982), 15.

<sup>182</sup> See p.47ff above.

Arabia was, as O'Connor reported, fragile at best, and it was in the process of disintegrating.<sup>183</sup> Yet O'Connor realized that to engage in activity that could be construed (rightly or wrongly) as interfering with the status quo and Ottoman integrity would set a dangerous precedent. Such a course of action would, he wrote, encourage other powers to "some act of rank aggression, which will precipitate developments and possibly place us before very long in a serious and grave predicament."<sup>184</sup> Britain's position did not allow for interference, only for observation.

Even in this capacity, Britain was anxious to avoid doing anything that might upset the Porte or be perceived as interfering with Turkish sovereignty. The appointment of an agent at Kuwait, which Britain maintained was not part of Turkish territory, was to be done quietly so as not to arouse Turkish opposition.<sup>185</sup> O'Connor's fears that British interference in Arabian affairs would provoke some other power to action were becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. In 1900 a party of Germans visited the Sheikh of Kuwait in order to discuss the lease or purchase of land that would eventually serve as the Gulf terminus of the Baghdad Railway.<sup>186</sup> The sheikh received them coolly, apparently afraid that a German presence in the Persian Gulf might be the prelude to a Turkish attempt to reassert control over Kuwait.<sup>187</sup> British authorities inevitably interpreted the incident as a German response to Britain's presence in the Gulf. A new power appeared to be making a bid for commercial and political influence in the region, and Britain was eager to avoid giving Germany any justification for further action. The extent of the enterprise and the

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<sup>183</sup> Briton Cooper Busch, *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1894-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 144.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

<sup>186</sup> Lt-Col. M.J. Meade, Political Resident Persian Gulf, to Secretary of the Foreign Department, Government of India, 5 February 1900, FO 78/5114.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

nature of the threat needed to be assessed. Turkish authority was weak and in decline, and other powers had already begun to try to fill the holes.

## II. The Russian Threat

The two Great Powers about whose presence in the Persian Gulf Britain was most concerned were Russia and Germany. Anglo-Russian competition in Asia had been a regular feature of the nineteenth-century political landscape. From the end of the Crimean War in 1856 until the signing of the Anglo-Russian Entente in 1907, Russia remained Britain's most likely antagonist and the chief threat to its position in Asia Minor and the Persian Gulf.<sup>188</sup> The Russian threat to the Ottoman Empire had its roots in longstanding Russo-Turkish antipathy, but more immediately, as far as Britain was concerned, it seemed to be an extension of Russia's effort to bring Persia into its orbit. The presence of Russian travellers, officers, and scientific expeditions around the Persian Gulf and in the region of Van and Diarbekir mirrored Britain's own attempts to collect intelligence, and it naturally bred hostility between the two powers. Railways – either their actual construction or the intent to construct them – were often representations of Russian influence. Railways were linked in turn to Russia's ability to undertake military action swiftly and decisively in the Middle East. In November 1899, the British consul-

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<sup>188</sup> Jennifer Siegel makes the argument that Anglo-Russian competition in Asia did not cease after the signing of the Entente. Jennifer Siegel, *Endgame: Britain, Russia and the Struggle for Central Asia* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002). Siegel echoes earlier work by Keith Wilson who claims, unconvincingly, that Russia was the pivot of British foreign policy up to 1914 and even beyond. Wilson argues that Sir Edward Grey's foreign policy was imperial, rather than European, in orientation, and focused on Russia, rather than Germany, because of the danger Russia posed to British India. Grey, claims Wilson, was determined to preserve Russian friendship at any cost, and that the British decision for war in August 1914 was taken out of apprehension that a victorious Russia, having been abandoned by Britain, would present a stronger, more dangerous, threat to India than it had in the past. See Keith Wilson, *The Policy of the Entente: Essays on the Determinants of British Foreign Power, 1904-1914* (Cambridge: University Press, 1985).

general at Tabriz and the British minister at Teheran reported the presence of Russian engineering parties surveying for strategic railways throughout Persia. The railways were to run from the Russian frontier to points as far as Tabriz and Bushire, home of the British Persian Gulf Resident.<sup>189</sup> This news was interpreted by Britain in light of the existing rivalry with Russia: it was perceived as a strategic threat to Britain's position in the Persian Gulf.

In addition to the projected railways in Persia, Russia was also backing a railway scheme by Count Vladimir Kapnist, nephew of the Russian ambassador to Vienna, to construct a line to the Persian Gulf.<sup>190</sup> The railway was initially to run from Tripoli in Syria, to Baghdad, and thence to the Gulf. Although the railway was never begun owing to a lack of financial backing, Count Kapnist's connection to the Russian government, and Russia's formal support for the enterprise in its early stages, meant that problems associated with the railway persisted. Lord Curzon identified the real problem with the Kapnist railway as its attempt to establish a terminus on the Persian Gulf at Kuwait, and not its traverse of Asia Minor to Baghdad. Kuwait, the viceroy noted, was the most appropriate place on the Persian Gulf to construct a railway terminus.<sup>191</sup> The presence of a railway controlled by a foreign power on the Gulf would be detrimental to British commercial and political influence. That Kapnist had appealed to the Porte for permission to build the terminus of the railway at Kuwait assumed that Kuwait was part

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<sup>189</sup> British Minister, Teheran, to Lord Salisbury, 24 November 1899, FO 195/2041; Busch, *Britain and the Persian Gulf*, 117.

<sup>190</sup> *Confidential Print*, Vol. 17, Document 40: "Memorandum respecting Persian Affairs," 19 November 1898. The scheme is explained more fully in Sir N. O'Connor to Lord Salisbury, 8 November 1898, FO 195/2008. The Kapnist plan emerged around the same time as the original Baghdad Railway concession was granted to Germany. It is unclear whether it was to be a competitor – two railways across Anatolia to the Persian Gulf would have certainly been impractical and excessive – whether this was the sultan playing the European powers against one another, or whether it was simply a matter of Turkish ineptitude.

<sup>191</sup> *Confidential Print*, Vol. 17, Document 40: "Memorandum respecting Persian Affairs," 19 November 1898.

of Turkish territory, something that was disputed by the Sheikh of Kuwait with British support. Recognition of Turkish sovereignty over Kuwait was dangerous: if Turkey did not build a railway to the Gulf itself it might grant some other power the right to do so. A Russian railway terminating at Kuwait would be, according to Curzon, “in the highest degree injurious” to British interests. A German railway would be no better, and even a Turkish railway would be detrimental to British commercial and political influence in the Gulf.<sup>192</sup>

The problem was exacerbated by reports of Russia’s desire to build a coaling station on the Persian Gulf, and even to extend influence over Kuwait.<sup>193</sup> Turkey’s own attempts to extend and consolidate its control over Kuwait were no less worrisome, and the British consul-general at Baghdad, Lt.-Col. William Loch, echoed Curzon’s view when he suggested that Turkish control over Kuwait would constitute a standing menace to British trade interests in Turkish Arabia.<sup>194</sup> To remedy the problem, Curzon sought the establishment of a British protectorate over Kuwait. The Government of India’s desire to extend its formal influence throughout the Gulf was opposed by London’s preference for informal control. The compromise was the 1899 political agreement with Kuwait and in 1903 the acceptance of Curzon’s suggestion that a political resident be established there.<sup>195</sup> This enabled Britain to deal with several problems at once: tempering Sheikh Mubarak’s own ambitions, collecting reliable information on Arabian affairs, and effectively blocking any other power’s attempt to build a railway to the Persian Gulf

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> J.B. Kelly, “Salisbury, Curzon and the Kuwait Agreement of 1899” in Kenneth Bourne and D.C. Watt, eds. *Studies in International History: Essays Presented to W. N. Medlicott* (London: Longmans, 1967), 261.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 261.

<sup>195</sup> Busch, *Britain and the Persian Gulf*, 108.

without British support. Although actual Russian efforts to extend their influence to the Gulf were weak, the prospect of another European presence there aggravated Britain's sensitivity to anything that appeared to menace the security of India.

The military nature of Russian railways, as opposed to the ostensibly commercial nature of the Baghdad Railway and the political-religious purpose of the Hejaz Railway, made Russian influence in the Persian Gulf and the Ottoman Empire a pressing concern.<sup>196</sup> Intelligence assessments of Britain's position in the Ottoman Empire and of Russian capabilities and intentions reflected this state of affairs. A Committee of Imperial Defence (CID) memorandum on the defence of India shows that the immediate concern over European powers establishing influence in the Ottoman Empire was tied to the ability of Russia's strategic railways to support military action against Turkey. Russian railways were favourite objects of British intelligence. The CID also took into consideration a short report by Capt. Herbert Smyth on Russian railways in the Middle East and Transcaucasia.<sup>197</sup> Both the Intelligence Branch of the Indian Army and the Intelligence Department at the War Office evaluated Russia's railway capacity in Central Asia. They concluded that within a month of an order for mobilization, 20,000 men could be transported along Russian railways there.<sup>198</sup> Britain feared that Russian military action might extend beyond the railways of Central Asia and the defence of India to threaten Constantinople itself. In 1903 Maunsell prepared a report estimating Russia's ability to

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<sup>196</sup> Russian railway construction in Persia itself was viewed with alarm, even after the conclusion of the Anglo-Russian Entente. British statesmen believed that Russia was taking advantage of a period of good relations with Britain to close the gap between the Russian and Indian frontiers. *A Strategic Study of Persia and the Persian Gulf* (Simla: General Staff, Army Headquarters, 1913), 53, IOR/L/MIL/17/15/27. The same publication also appears in the series *A Collection of First World War Military Handbooks of Arabia, 1913-1917*, Vol. 1 (Farnham Common, Buckinghamshire, England: Archive Editions, 1988).

<sup>197</sup> "Russian Intentions in the Middle East," report by Capt. Herbert Smyth, 6 June 1903, CAB 38/3/43.

<sup>198</sup> Explanatory notes on the "Memorandum on the Defence of India," 10 March 1903, CAB 38/2/18.

launch a *coup de main* on Constantinople and the ability of the Turks to defend their capital.

This issue was a matter of debate within the CID. The Intelligence Department, considering another paper on the same subject by the Deputy Adjutant Quarter Master General Forestier Walker, thought Maunsell's calculations of Turkey's ability to defend the city overly optimistic.<sup>199</sup> The discussion centred on the larger strategic question of the balance of power in the Mediterranean, and the effect on Britain's strategic position of Russia's possession of Constantinople.<sup>200</sup> The details of the debate are less important than its mere existence. It showed that although Britain no longer believed that a Russian presence in the Mediterranean would substantially alter the balance of power, it still feared Russian expansion.<sup>201</sup> In 1903 this was a more immediate and more dangerous problem than the creeping influence of German commerce in the form of the Baghdad Railway. The financing for the railway had taken several years to arrange, and construction of the line only began in 1903. It was not scheduled for completion until 1911.<sup>202</sup> However, the CID debate over the Russian threat to Constantinople marks an important step in the growth of British military intelligence. The Intelligence Division was simultaneously dealing with multiple threats to Britain's imperial position, and attempting to assess and analyse their severity. It was tasked with creating a corpus of empirical data about a little-known region of the world in which Britain had interests, but also with evaluating threats to Britain's position there. In 1903 the Intelligence Division

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<sup>199</sup> "Information regarding the defences of Constantinople submitted for the consideration of the Committee of Imperial Defence, in continuation of No. 4B," 8 July 1903, CAB 38/3/59.

<sup>200</sup> "Report of the Conclusion Arrived at on 11<sup>th</sup> February in reference to Russia and Constantinople," Memorandum by Arthur Balfour, 23 February 1903, CAB 4/1/1B; "Memorandum on Russia and the Naval position in the Mediterranean," 7 February 1903, CAB 4/1/2B.

<sup>201</sup> Lt.-Col. Maunsell to Walter Townley, Chargé d'Affaires at Constantinople, 24 October 1904, FO 195/2176.

<sup>202</sup> McMeekin, *Berlin-Baghdad Express*, 45.

had identified the Russian threat as the most serious: it was discussed at the Cabinet level and by the Committee of Imperial Defence. In the wake of the Boer War, Britain's diminished strategic position was of primary concern. The threat of German commercial and political expansion was not ignored, but it was not yet given the same sober consideration. In other words, Turkey was not itself considered to be a threat; rather, it was a contested space; a particularly unstable region of the world where competition between the Great Powers might play out with disastrous effects.

### **III. The German Threat**

The assessment of Russia as the principal outside threat to Britain's position in the Ottoman Empire did not mean that Britain disregarded the German danger, nor did the rise of the German danger mean that the Russian threat necessarily receded. As early as 1898, with the passing of the first German navy law, Britain recognized the potential implications of German expansion for its own position. At that time the threat was chiefly commercial. While the Boer War revealed deficiencies in Britain's strategic position, the preoccupation with commercial questions in the late 1890s underscores the fact that it was British commerce, far more than military power, which was the foundation of British strength.

In 1888, railways in Turkey had been owned entirely by British and French financiers, with British capital taking pride of place. It was in 1888 that German interest in Turkish railways first began; the sultan sought to develop railway communications in the Asiatic dominions of his empire, and he authorized the extension of a number of

existing Anatolian railways.<sup>203</sup> German financiers seized upon the opportunity presented to them, and a syndicate formed from the *Deutsche Bank* and the *Württembergische Vereinsbank* of Stuttgart took over the existing Haidar-Pasha-Ismid railway and began construction of an extension to Angora. Lord Curzon had been right to be suspicious of the growth of German business interests, legitimate though they might have been. In 1887 there had been no German capital to speak of in Asiatic Turkey's railways. Five years later, *Deutsche Bank* and its partners controlled Turkish railways from the Austrian border to Constantinople. They had constructed a line from Haidar-Pasha on the Asiatic side of the Straits to Angora, and they had begun surveying a line from Angora across Anatolia into Mesopotamia.<sup>204</sup> In 1898 the ambassador, Sir Philip Currie, expressed concern to the Foreign Office about growing German influence over Turkish railways.<sup>205</sup> The original concession to construct the Baghdad Railway was granted the following year. The railway was supposed to make the journey from Constantinople to Baghdad in fifty-five hours, shaving nearly four days off the time for the mail to reach India from Britain by steamer.<sup>206</sup>

By the 1890s, German influence had been steadily expanding for several years.

Between 1883 and 1895 the German field marshal Baron Colmar von der Goltz had

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<sup>203</sup> Edward Meade Earle, *Turkey, the Great Powers and the Bagdad Railway: A Study in Imperialism* (New York: Macmillan, 1923), 30.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, 33; Ulrich Trumpener, "Germany and the End of the Ottoman Empire," in Marion Kent, ed., *The Great Powers and the End of the Ottoman Empire* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1984), 117.

<sup>205</sup> Sir P. Currie to Lord Salisbury, 12 January 1898, FO 195/2006.

<sup>206</sup> "Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman: Resources and Coast Defences, 1903; Appendix: Official Statement of British Policy with regard to (1) the proposed Bagdad Railway; and (2) Persia and the Persian Gulf Generally," IOR/L/PS/20/64; *Confidential Print*, Vol. 17, Document 43: "Memorandum Respecting the Anatolian Railway," 18 June 1902. The actual time saved was to have been three days, sixteen and a half hours. One of the expressed aims of the Bagdad Railway Company was to acquire the mail carriage to India. If the railway was faster than the steamer route, it would enable the Home Government to cease subsidizing the mail steamers, essentially saving the government money. There was, however, some debate about whether, and by how much, the railway was faster than the steamer route. Earle, *Baghdad Railway*, 191-192.

reorganized the Turkish army. Von der Goltz set up a Turkish general staff, a military academy, and a new system of reserves. *The Times* of London, in an article on 28 October 1898, reviewed the status of Germany in the Ottoman Empire for the preceding decade. According to *The Times* Germany had become the most active power in finance and trade in Asia Minor and Constantinople. The Germania shipbuilding company, owned by Krupp, was selling torpedoes to the Turkish navy, and Krupp of Essen was selling artillery to the Turkish army, siphoning off sales from the British firm Armstrong. Another firm, Ludwig-Loewe and Co. of Berlin, was selling small arms to the sultan's army, and American-made bicycles in Turkey were being replaced by German manufactures. There had been a noticeable increase of German trade with Palestine and Syria, and Germany had also increased its share of Turkish railways, although this was chiefly a commercial, rather than political, enterprise.<sup>207</sup>

In early 1898 Germany had been granted railway extensions in Asia Minor which would be injurious to the British owned-Smyrna-Aidin Railway, and which were regarded as a deliberate attack on British interests.<sup>208</sup> The nexus of German commercial and political influence had been earlier demonstrated when a contract to rearm the Turkish fleet was given to the German firm of Krupp, even though the British firm Armstrong had come in with a lower bid. According to Sir Philip Currie, this was due to the personal intervention of the Kaiser.<sup>209</sup> Whether or not this was actually the case mattered far less than the British perception that German firms were being given an unfair advantage, against which Britain could not hope to compete for long.

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<sup>207</sup> Earle, *Bagdad Railway*, 37-39.

<sup>208</sup> Sir P. Currie to FO, 12 January 1898, FO 195/2006.

<sup>209</sup> Sir P. Currie to Lord Salisbury, 12 January 1898, FO 195/2006.

Germany's increasing interest in Turkish railways was merely the most striking example of the growth of German economic activity in the Ottoman Empire and the Persian Gulf that began in the late nineteenth century and continued to the outbreak of war in 1914. In 1889 the Deutsche Levant steamship line opened up a direct steam link between Germany and the Middle East, and the Hamburg-Amerika line began regular service to the Persian Gulf in 1906. In 1881, German holdings had been a mere five per cent of the Ottoman public debt. By 1914 that share had risen to twenty per cent, a four-fold increase in Turkey's reliance on German finance.<sup>210</sup> The threat posed by Germany was considered in the wider context of the international system, and it was not until that threat emerged more clearly that Britain began to fear German influence in the Ottoman Empire more acutely. But for all of the danger of another Russo-Turkish war, it was German influence that was probably more dangerous from the beginning. Germany was a power in ascension and the gradual increase of German commercial and political interests offered little opportunity for Britain to mount an effective opposition. Even Lord Curzon, who was among the most vociferous defendants of Britain's position, had to recognize that Germany had bona fide commercial interests in the Persian Gulf.<sup>211</sup> The viceroy suggested that German political interests might even represent an occasional ally or safeguard for Britain against Russia. But the viceroy warned, perspicaciously, that German interests had a tendency to grow quickly and by steps "which are not always acceptable to her neighbours."<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> M.S. Anderson, *The Eastern Question, 1774-1923* (London: MacMillan, 1966), 267.

<sup>211</sup> J.C. Hurewitz, ed., *Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East: a documentary record, 1535-1956* (Gerrard's Cross, England: Archive Editions, 1987), Vol. 1, Document 101: "Curzon's analysis of British Policy and Interests in the Persian Gulf, 21 September 1899"; Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism, 1860-1914* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1980), 411.

<sup>212</sup> Hurewitz, *Diplomacy*, Vol. 1, Doc. 101; Kennedy, *Antagonism*, 302.

A memorandum by Lord Curzon in 1898 shows a farsighted understanding of the dangers of German influence. Curzon wrote that while Britain's position in the Gulf was still supreme, it was being assailed by commercial challenges on all sides. Commercial claims, wrote Curzon, were always the precursor to political claims.<sup>213</sup> He observed that Germany was now "pushing her way" into the Gulf. The previous year a German consulate had been set up on the eastern littoral of the Persian Gulf at Bushire to safeguard the interests of the "six German subjects in the entire Gulf." The memorandum pointed out that Germany was making a bid to get hold of the Basra trade which, coupled with the Kaiser's recent interest in the Asiatic dominions of the sultan and his profession of friendship for the world's Muslims, indicated the likelihood of increased German activity in the Gulf, and even the possibility of German claims there at some future date.<sup>214</sup> As with Russia, German influence was represented by railway construction, though German railways were commercially rather than militarily oriented. Germany had the largest railway interest in Asia Minor, and Curzon had little doubt that Germany would attempt to construct a line towards the Tigris or Euphrates and down through Mesopotamia to the Persian Gulf. It was, Curzon believed, simply a question of time.

#### **IV. The Baghdad Railway**

The Baghdad Railway was to become a symbol of both German strategic and financial competition with Britain. As such, it was a key target of British intelligence efforts, particularly from the Foreign Office, about which more will be said below. The gradual

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<sup>213</sup> *Confidential Print*, Vol. 17, Document 40: "Memorandum Respecting Persian Affairs," 19 November 1898.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*

increase in size of the *Deutsche Bank*-owned Anatolian Railway Company after 1888 allowed it to extend its holdings from Konia (Konya) to the Persian Gulf. The formal Baghdad Railway Convention, granted in 1899, was not finally approved in 1902 due to the difficulty of securing capital investors for the project. The *Deutsche Bank* and the Turkish government created the Imperial Ottoman Baghdad Railway Company in 1903 to raise capital for construction of the line. Initially the Company sought the financial participation of other European powers, particularly France and Great Britain. Whereas investment groups in both countries were willing to support the line financially, their respective governments proved less willing. The French government refused to sanction the participation of French financiers in the project, even going so far as to prevent the shares of the French group from being quoted on the Paris Bourse. In Britain, investors were unwilling to offer their support for the railway without the assurances and confidence of the British government. The willingness of the British government to back the investment of British financial houses depended in turn on the “adequate provision being made for safeguarding what were regarded as the chief British interests concerned.”<sup>215</sup>

Concern for British interests was raised by a number of concessions requested by the Company. They were a mixture of both commercial and strategic demands: the agreement of Britain to a “reasonable increase” in Turkish customs duties, part of which would be used to construct the railway; the use of the Baghdad Railway as the mail route to India if it proved to be superior to the steamer route currently in use; and British good offices for the construction of a railway terminus on the Persian Gulf at or near Kuwait.

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<sup>215</sup> “The Baghdad Railway, Part II: Appendix giving the History of the Scheme to the end of 1904,” 26 January 1905, CAB 4/1/47B.

Far from representing an adequate safeguard for British interests, the concessions represented a threat, and negotiations for the participation of British investors in the railway fell through, throwing some doubt on the ability of the Company to raise the necessary capital for the construction of the line.<sup>216</sup> The collapse of negotiations for British participation in the Baghdad Railway in 1903 was partly due to an outburst of violent opposition from the British press. Popular indignation over Germany's attitude during the South African War had cast a shadow of mistrust over German behaviour.<sup>217</sup> Many in Britain believed that Germany could no longer be regarded as a friendly power and was attempting to use British capital to build a railway that would be detrimental to British interests and controlled single-handedly by Germany.<sup>218</sup>

Certainly, the Baghdad Railway was a symbol of the growth of German economic influence and the penetration of the Persian Gulf trade by other European countries threatened British interests there. Britain controlled the carrying trade in Mesopotamia: from 1900-1902 almost ninety-five per cent of the ships calling at Basra flew the British flag. Within Iraq itself, most of the carrying trade along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers was controlled by the British-owned Tigris and Euphrates Steam Navigation Company.<sup>219</sup> The British Empire was also the region's largest trading partner: India was the second largest importer of Mesopotamian dates, hides and wool, and the British

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid.; McMeekin, *Berlin-Baghdad Express*, 45.

<sup>217</sup> *Confidential Print*, Vol. 17, Document 73: "Memorandum Respecting the Baghdad Railway," 10 March 1906; Earle, *Baghdad Railway*, 192.

<sup>218</sup> This did not mean, of course, that 1914 was inevitable, or that Germany and Great Britain were on a collision course. Certainly there were elements within the British political establishment that regarded Germany as a threat. Sir Eyre Crowe's famous 1907 memorandum is often taken as an early warning of the extent of the German problem, but it did not make the Anglo-German confrontation a foregone conclusion. In fact, the German problem was just one of several issues that the Foreign Office had to juggle in the years before the war. See David French, *British Strategy and War Aims, 1914-1916* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1986).

<sup>219</sup> Cohen, *British Policy in Mesopotamia*, 8.

Empire supplied nearly two-thirds of the Mesopotamian market's goods, to the tune of £2.5 million per year.<sup>220</sup> Thus Britain still held a commanding position in the Gulf economy. Yet it was the perception of British decline and German growth, more than the reality of the matter, which gave cause for alarm. In 1896, Germany's share of the Gulf trade had been two per cent of the total. That figure had doubled by 1906 to four per cent, while Britain's own share had declined over the same time-span. The purely British share of the Gulf trade shrunk from thirty four to twenty eight per cent between 1896 and 1906.<sup>221</sup>

It was the prospect of being supplanted by German commerce that made the Baghdad Railway so unappealing to Britain. A railroad that owed its existence to an elaborate system of German and Turkish government subsidies and which was projected as a direct line of communication between the German Empire and the Persian Gulf could not be regarded as an ordinary commercial venture. The Baghdad Railway's promoters had declared their ambition to supersede British trade in a region that had hitherto been almost devoid of commercial competition.<sup>222</sup> But inasmuch as the British feared the ability of the Baghdad Railway to supplant their own share of the Gulf trade, they also feared the strategic implications of a foreign power controlling a railway across

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 8. Persia was the single largest importer of Mesopotamian trade.

<sup>221</sup> The British and Indian combined share of the Gulf trade was still enormous in 1906. Marion Kent's note that this 28 per cent represented just over £2.25 million shows clearly that this was not a trade of vital national economic importance. Yet the upward trend of Germany's commercial share in the Gulf continued to 1914. By then the British share of Turkey's imports had fallen by a further one-third, while the German share had risen a further threefold. Marion Kent, "Great Britain and the End of the Ottoman Empire, 1900-1923" in Kent, ed., *End of the Ottoman Empire*, 179. By 1913, Germany was still only the fourth largest customer of Ottoman exports, behind Britain, France and Austria-Hungary, and the third largest importer of goods to the Ottoman Empire, behind Britain and Austria, but ahead of France. Turkey's largest creditor was France, which held almost sixty per cent of the Ottoman Public Debt in 1914, with Britain and Germany holding roughly equal shares of most of the remainder. Ulrich Trampener, *Germany and the Ottoman Empire, 1914-1918* (Princeton: University Press, 1968), 9-11.

<sup>222</sup> *Confidential Print*, Vol. 17, Document 73: "Memorandum Respecting the Baghdad Railway," 10 March 1906.

Anatolia and down to the Persian Gulf. No less a figure than Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan expressed the view that concession in the Gulf would imperil the British naval position in the Far East, Britain's political position in India, its commercial interests in both, and the imperial tie with Australasia.<sup>223</sup> Concession could come either by some formal arrangement with other Great Powers, or by neglecting the defence of the commercial interests that underpinned Britain's naval and military control. For a country that had traditionally fostered links between commercial and strategic interests, and which was insecure about its own imperial position after the Boer War, the spectre of the Baghdad Railway was a menacing one.

The CID believed that the railway, built under German auspices, would not only injure British commerce but also destroy English political influence in Southern Persia and the Gulf. Britain had, the committee wrote, "the strongest grounds for preventing control of a railway from Baghdad to the Gulf from falling wholly under the control of a Power which regards its own interests exclusively and which well understands the manipulation of railway routes."<sup>224</sup> However, if British statesmen allowed their imaginations to feed their fears of German expansion, their suspicions about the aims and ambitions of German policy were not wholly unjustified. The line would serve the interests of both Turkey and Germany. For Turkey, it would help prevent the disintegration of Turkish authority in the Hejaz by connecting the Hejaz and Baghdad Railways, and render the Porte more capable of resisting foreign attack.<sup>225</sup> The extension of the Hejaz Railway and its connection to the Baghdad Railway would enable Turkish

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> "The Baghdad Railway," 26 January 1905; Part II: Appendix giving the History of the Scheme to the end of 1904, CAB 4/1/47B.

<sup>225</sup> Valentine Chirol to FO, 20 October 1903, FO 78/5322.

troops to be concentrated on the western or eastern frontiers of the sultan's dominions, threatening the British position in Egypt, Aden, and the Red Sea route to India, while simultaneously consolidating Turkey's hold over Arabia.<sup>226</sup> For Germany, the success of the Baghdad Railway would enhance its prestige in the Muslim world. It would open a market for German industries above all others, and offer access to raw materials that Germany was lacking. The Baghdad Railway represented a more comprehensive infiltration of German influence than an ordinary commercial enterprise. Germans connected with the railway were instructed to express their loyalty to the sultan and learn the local language: Turkish as far as Aintab, Arabic beyond. Native characters were to be prominently used to advertise and label German goods; German schools were to be established to promote the spread of the German language; and natives who learned German were to be given jobs with the railway. A German telegraphic agency was to be set up for the press, and relationships with newspapers in the east, particularly Arabic newspapers, were to be cultivated in order to create pro-German feeling among the populace. Germany, noted Sir Valentine Chirol, foreign editor of *The Times*, was popular among the Muslim population of the Turkish Empire, but not among the Christians.<sup>227</sup>

British apprehensions about the railway were compounded by the concerns of the Indian government, which pointed out that while Kuwait might be the most suitable Gulf terminus of the railway, it was not the only possible option. In an effort to make the Baghdad Railway independent of British influence and assistance, the company had commenced a search for an alternative terminus. Britain also investigated the possibility of an alternate location to the railway's Gulf terminus. Captain E.W.S. Mahon of the

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<sup>226</sup> *Confidential Print*, Vol. 17, Document 59: Government of India to Secretary of State for India, 12 July 1906.

<sup>227</sup> Valentine Chirol to FO, 20 October 1903, FO 78/5322.

Royal Engineers, reported in 1905 of his examination of possible Gulf termini for the railway. He claimed that there were no engineering difficulties that would prevent Basra from being made the terminus of the railway line.<sup>228</sup> It had a port equal to the demands of trade, and the bar of the Shatt-el-Arab could easily be dredged to accommodate steamers. This view was supported by the Naval Commander-in-Chief of the Persian Gulf and by officers of the British India Steam Navigation Company who plied those waters. Germany's recent attempt to purchase a concession for a port and coaling station at the mouth of the Shatt-el-Arab from Persia was taken as further evidence that the Baghdad Railway was the harbinger of Germany's intrusion into the Persian Gulf.<sup>229</sup>

The Government of India sounded a particularly alarmist tone about German intentions. It reported that Germany had already obtained the right to construct branch lines of the railway and to run steamers on the Tigris during construction. Schemes had been started by German commercial associations for the exploitation of the mineral wealth of the country traversed by the railway. A German consul had been appointed to Bushire in 1897 when German interests were minimal. A vice-consul had recently been appointed to Mosul, ostensibly for the purpose of looking after the affairs of the German scientific mission to Kela Shergat and Babylon. But the current political climate caused the move to be viewed with suspicion. The British consul at Baghdad reported to the Government of India that he suspected that the real purpose of the scientific mission was the collection of information and dissemination of German influence in connection with

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<sup>228</sup> Colonel Davies, Intelligence Division, WO, to FO, 11 May 1905, HD 3/130; *Confidential Print*, Vol. 17, Document 59: Government of India to Secretary of State for India, 12 July 1906.

<sup>229</sup> *Confidential Print*, Vol. 17, Document 59: Government of India to Secretary of State for India, 12 July 1906.

the Baghdad Railway.<sup>230</sup> The arrival of a German railway at Basra, Umm Qasr, Kuwait, or any other point in the area would undoubtedly result in the Germanization of the Baghdad and Basra vilayets, the diminution of British prestige and commerce there, and the disturbance of British influence with Arab chiefs on the southern and western shores of the Gulf. It might also necessitate a considerable increase of the British naval presence in the Persian Gulf.<sup>231</sup>

The Government of India thus shared the Foreign Office's concerns about the Baghdad Railway: "We anticipate that... a more or less gradual process of interference by Germany will ensue in the administration of those portions of the Turkish Empire through which the railway will pass. In time this process can have but one result... the eventual passing into German hands of all real power in this particular zone."<sup>232</sup>

The menace of the Baghdad Railway and German commerce in the Persian Gulf was never as serious as some British statesmen feared, in part because the difficulties associated with its construction meant that at the outbreak of war over 800 km of track through difficult, mountainous, territory had still to be laid, and in part because the railway was always intended to serve commercial, not military, purposes.<sup>233</sup> Liman von Sanders, the head of the German military mission to Constantinople in 1913, himself disagreed with the German political authorities on this latter point.<sup>234</sup> Nevertheless, the British had legitimate reasons to be concerned about both the decline of their influence in the Gulf and the potential political problems that the Baghdad Railway would create. A German-controlled railway in Asia Minor created strategic difficulties for the British, in

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

<sup>233</sup> Hew Strachan, *The First World War, Vol. 1: To Arms* (Oxford: University Press, 2001), 691.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 667.

addition to the various commercial concerns it represented. The CID considered that such a railway would threaten imperial communications between Suez and India. In the event of a war with Russia, which many in Britain still believed possible and even likely, Germany could use the port on the Persian Gulf to prevent Britain reinforcing the Indian garrison.<sup>235</sup>

### V. Captain Smyth's Report

The Baghdad Railway remained the question on which the Foreign Office and the War Office were most likely to co-operate. Whether or not the railway would offer a cheaper and faster alternative to steam travel remained an open question, but for both commercial and strategic reasons the Foreign and War Offices co-operated in systematic efforts to survey the Baghdad Railway, track its progress, understand the geography of the terrain it would cross, and analyse its potential commercial and strategic implications.

In July 1903, with the co-operation of the Foreign Office, Capt. Herbert Smyth was dispatched by the War Office to survey the route of the Baghdad Railway.<sup>236</sup> Smyth was returning to his regiment in India from leave in England, suggesting a shared degree of interest and co-operation by the Government of India, and Sir Nicholas O'Connor had instructed British consular officials through whose districts Smyth would pass to offer him assistance.<sup>237</sup> It is clear both from Smyth's report and from the Foreign Office correspondence that the War Office considered the mission to be primarily a military one.

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<sup>235</sup> "Effect of the Baghdad Railway on our Relations with Persia and on the Defence of India," Memorandum by General Staff, War Office, 16 November 1904, CAB 38/6/109.

<sup>236</sup> Cohen, *British Policy in Mesopotamia*, 69.

<sup>237</sup> Sir N. O'Connor to Lord Lansdowne, 22 July 1903, FO 424/205.

O'Connor wrote to inform Lord Lansdowne of Smyth's arrival in Constantinople, and of the nature of the information he hoped Smyth would report on: "*Putting aside the military aspects of the question*, it is evident that with the means at his disposal, it will be impossible for Captain Smyth to undertake a detailed investigation into such questions as those connected with mining-irrigation and such like."<sup>238</sup>

Regardless of the limited resources available to Smyth, O'Connor prepared a lengthy list of subjects he wanted the officer to investigate on his trip back to India. The list reflects the differing priorities of the Foreign and War Offices. Almost all of O'Connor's desiderata were commercial. He identified the prospect of the railway becoming a great east-west trade route, the effect of the railway on the population, both actual and prospective, as well as details about the composition of the population, as important questions for Smyth's report to address. The ambassador further inquired about the nature and productivity of the soil as affected by the water supply, the amount of annual rainfall in parts of Turkish Arabia crossed by the railway, and the effect on the railway if maritime access could be gained from a terminus Smyrna or Alexandretta, as opposed to the sole western terminus being at Haidar Pasha on the Asiatic side of the Straits.<sup>239</sup>

Regarding the section of the line between Baghdad and the Gulf, O'Connor wanted Smyth to find out whether the railway would increase British trade inland from the Persian Gulf, what the effect of competition between railway and river transport from Basra to Baghdad would be, the relative merits or disadvantages of the various possible termini on the Gulf or the Shatt-el-Arab, the actual percentage of British trade between Basra and Baghdad and how it would be affected by the railway, whether any special advantages

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<sup>238</sup> Ibid. Italics mine.

<sup>239</sup> Sir N. O'Connor to Lord Lansdowne, 22 July 1903, FO 424/205.

would accrue to British trade as a result of sole British possession of that section of the line, and finally, the effect the railway would have on transit trade through Turkish territory with Persia.<sup>240</sup> Though he thrust a heavy workload upon Smyth, O'Connor did his best to bring his agent up to speed. He furnished him with numerous papers on the Baghdad Railway upon his arrival in Constantinople, and he tried to obtain a technical report on the railway for Smyth. Smyth was, therefore, given at least a rudimentary briefing about the various subjects he was expected to report on, in addition to his regular military training.

The report Smyth submitted at the end of his five-month journey reflects many of Britain's most important concerns in Turkish Arabia. It commented on the strength of Turkish rule in the hinterlands of the empire, the creeping growth of German influence, and the nature and extent of the problem posed by the Baghdad Railway. It also offers a glimpse into the nature of British intelligence operations in this period.<sup>241</sup> His report was the most comprehensive assessment of the Baghdad Railway produced by British intelligence in the pre-war period. Smyth concluded that the Baghdad Railway was unlikely to become an important east-west trade route under existing political conditions. Until a stronger government that could tame the lawlessness of the Kurds and Arabs superseded the weakness of Turkish rule, the railway would not be a major artery of trade or travel. If law and order could be instituted, Smyth wrote, foreign capitalists could be

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<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> Intelligence Division, WO, to FO, 6 May 1904, FO 78/5449; *Confidential Print*, Vol. 17, Document 52: Enclosure in Doc. 41 "Capt. Smyth's Journey from England to India." Smyth was returning to India, and his mission was not particularly secret. An officer on legitimate business was far less likely to raise objections than one who simply wanted to travel the route of an old Roman road, or archaeologists who were often refused permits to excavate. Smyth was to gather information in a way that did not attract unwelcome attention from the Turks, but he was in contact with Turkish authorities at various points during his trip. He was, for example, barred by the Turks from travelling direct from Hauran (Tall Al Abyad) to Mosul because of the instability of the region, owing to a war between the Shammar and the Anaze Arabs.

induced to invest in the Ottoman Empire, and a more stable, peaceful, population established. Only then could the railway be of real commercial value.

Even so, the profitability of the railway remained doubtful. Smyth's observations suggested that the local population along the proposed route of the railway was not dense enough to make the line pay for passenger traffic, and it was unlikely to compete successfully with the sea route for heavy freight moving from east to west. However, the railway could offer competition to the sea route for passenger traffic, mail to India, and for perishable light goods requiring rapid transit. The railway would be of little commercial value if it did not have a terminus on the Gulf of Alexandretta. Merely linking the Smyrna Railway with the Anatolian Railway would not suffice, and the present port of Mersina was not deep enough for larger ships.<sup>242</sup>

Smyth's report suggested that the railway would provide short-term benefits for the trade between Baghdad and Basra. The immediate effect of the completion of the line would be a drop in the "very high rate of freight" between Baghdad and the Persian Gulf. It would also eliminate the delays at Basra and Baghdad that occurred when the river steamers were unable to cope with the large amount of goods awaiting transport. While the railway was unlikely to greatly increase the Baghdad trade, it would eventually cut into Britain's virtual monopoly if another power controlled the line. Smyth's assessment projected a dramatic increase in the number of French, German, and Russian ships calling at Basra if a railway terminus were to be established on the Gulf, which he considered feasible at Um Qasr or Kuwait, but less so at Basra. In addition, the line would require a significant military presence to guard against Arab raiders. This would have the undesirable effect of turning the line into a military railway. This would be

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<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

undoubtedly bad for business, though the railway's military value may have been the issue about which the War Office was most concerned.<sup>243</sup>

Smyth divided the population along the railway route not along ethnic or tribal divisions, but for commercial purposes into two groups: nomadic and agricultural. Despite the existence of an agricultural population, Smyth described the country he surveyed as “thinly populated and wretchedly cultivated. The agricultural population only exists on sufferance at all. They dare not settle far from towns, and are fleeced by the Government officials equally with Kurd or Arab robbers.” Such a population, Smyth argued, would welcome the railway, which would bring them foreign protection from Turks and bandits alike, the opportunity to till the land in safety and the prospect of a good market for their produce. The railway would foster the growth of the agricultural class as well as the emergence of a mercantile class, which was practically non-existent at present. The nomadic tribes of the sultan's eastern territories would also welcome the railway at first, thinking it would mean a free supply of modern firearms, with a market for their surplus flocks and well paid billets for themselves as guardians of the line. This support would quickly evaporate once they realised that it meant “their repression and disarmament by the forces of law and order, that their grazing grounds would be used by the despised peasant for corn growing, and that they must not interfere with him as of old,” and it would take a powerful and determined government to prevent the destruction of the railway line and the massacres of settlers. On the “magnificent plains” of northern Mesopotamia, Smyth reported, irrigation was unnecessary owing to sufficient rainfall, but proper irrigation was absolutely essential to maximize the enormous agricultural

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

potential of Babylonia, “between the Euphrates and Tigris south of Bagdad.” The report concluded that irrigating Southern Mesopotamia would be a pointless exercise unless the security of the area had been established, that is, until the railway had been built through the region and the nomadic population subdued.<sup>244</sup>

Smyth’s report offered comprehensive and precise answers to the principal questions posed by his military and political masters. He included numerous photographs of pack camels in his report, as well as of the saddles and frames used to load them. In several places he reported on the availability of water for an advancing force, and on the numbers of Turkish troops stationed in the regions through which he travelled. At Osmaniye, for example, he noted numerous streams which provided an abundance of water, and though he considered that place suitable enough for several army corps to make camp, Smyth believed that heat, malaria and insects made it uninhabitable for European soldiers and horses. At Hauran (Tall Al Abyad) there was water enough to sustain a sizeable force, but grazing land and food were relatively scarce. Elsewhere there was no water, no firewood and no grazing, which made it a poor place for an army to halt at. In the Turkish VI Ordu (military district), headquartered at Baghdad, Smyth estimated slightly more than 32,000 Turkish troops. Information was obtained with the help of the British Resident at Baghdad, who bribed a Turkish official for a statement of the troop distribution. Estimating the size of the Turkish force in this far-flung part of the empire was difficult, Smyth wrote, because the Turks “never have any parades, and are never seen except in the cafes, so it is very difficult to estimate their numbers.”<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> Intelligence Division, WO, to FO, 6 May 1904, FO 78/5449; *Confidential Print*, Vol. 17, Document 52: Enclosure in Doc. 41 “Capt. Smyth’s Journey from England to India.”

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*

At numerous places along his route, Smyth offered detailed and precise notes on the geography and population of the region. At Adana, for example, Smyth reported that the population of 60,000 was more than half Armenian. A stone bridge across the unnamed river there, which he photographed, was in good repair and could support a military railway without much trouble. The river itself ranged from 200 to 400 yards wide, and averaged a depth of four feet. In the shallowest places it was only two feet deep, but in the deepest parts reached as depth as high as twelve feet. Much of Smyth's geographical work was of this variety: it was meant to increase practical knowledge about places that had already been mapped.

Smyth's final report included a full description of the proposed route of the Baghdad Railway. It thus represented a major work of intelligence conducted by an agent acting out of a concerted effort between the War Office, the Foreign Office, and the Government of India. Though his mission was not explicitly secret, it involved elements of secrecy. It also represented an inter-departmental compromise on intelligence gathering. The Foreign Office offered no obstacle to the desire of the War Office to collect intelligence, using an Indian-supplied agent. In exchange Smyth devoted some of his time to collecting information sought by the embassy at Constantinople. Though the Foreign Office complained about the use of military officers in consular posts, and the War Office's intelligence gathering efforts more generally, it was willing to co-operate when it made sense to do so. In this instance, although both offices wanted different intelligence about the same target, there was a shared recognition of the importance of the Baghdad Railway and the danger it posed.

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## VI. Formal and Informal Intelligence

Proper assessment of any threat requires good intelligence. Early British intelligence efforts had concerned themselves with knowing the physical and political landscape of Turkish Arabia. The appearance of more specific intelligence targets enabled Britain to make use of the information it had already collected and was continuing to collect. The efforts to gather information about the Ottoman Empire and to assess the nature of the German threat were simultaneous, and knowledge of the Ottoman landscape enabled the British to better analyse the extent of the menace posed by German intrusion. Whereas topographical intelligence collection aimed at the Ottoman Empire was largely static, in the sense that most of the agents held consular posts and were responsible only for the immediate area under their jurisdiction, collection methods on the Baghdad Railway and the German threat were much more dynamic. These involved more formal intelligence missions, usually consisting of officers being sent to reconnoitre a specific location or section of the railway line. Officers heading to England on leave, or returning to their regiments in India were ideal candidates for these kinds of missions. Other information was acquired informally, from private individuals travelling through Turkish Arabia on personal business. They were not usually in contact with the British government beyond the usual need to check in at embassies or consular posts. Officers on leave, officers deputed for specific missions, and independent travellers were all sources of information about German activities throughout the Turkish Empire, as well as about the empire itself.

The foundation of British intelligence work in Turkish Arabia was geography and mapmaking. In 1903 Major Newmarch, the consul-general at Baghdad, complained of the “poor state of surveys” of Mesopotamia. Lord Selborne, the First Sea Lord, warned of the lack of information concerning the Persian Gulf, and the British engineer Sir William Willcocks had difficulty finding recent maps of the area for his irrigation scheme.<sup>246</sup> The need for information about railways, foreign and Turkish, especially the Baghdad Railway, created a need for better, more precise maps. Historians have long accused British geographers, archaeologists, and travellers of merely using their scholarly activities as a flimsy pretext for intelligence work.<sup>247</sup> Conventional wisdom reads the activities of these scholars backwards from their work for British intelligence during the First World War: people like T.E. Lawrence, David Hogarth, and Gertrude Bell were intelligence agents during the war, ergo they must have been working for intelligence before the war. Broadly speaking, this was not the case. Certainly scholars and travellers possessed a certain expertise, of which the Foreign and War Offices made use, but formal intelligence agents in this early period were almost exclusively military men. Officers, often engineers, were occasionally asked to collect intelligence while going on or returning from leave, or else they were specifically ordered to gather information on a specific target. Owing to the difficulty of securing travel or excavation permits in Turkish Arabia for scholars, military officers travelling to or from India were the best option for filling in the intelligence gaps. Archaeologists and scholars routinely corresponded with British the embassy in Constantinople, expressing their frustration at being unable to

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<sup>246</sup> Cohen, *British Policy in Mesopotamia*, 68.

<sup>247</sup> See, for example, Winstone, *The Illicit Adventure*, and David W.J. Gill, “Harry Pirie-Gordon: Historical Research, Journalism and Intelligence Gathering in the Eastern Mediterranean, 1908-1918,” *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol. 21, No. 6 (2006), 1045-1054.

obtain the proper permission to travel and excavate in the Middle East.<sup>248</sup> Sir Philip Currie wrote to the Foreign Office in 1898 that, given the obstacles placed in the way of embassy staff getting the necessary internal passports from the Porte for travel through the empire, permission for British archaeologists to excavate was unlikely to be forthcoming.<sup>249</sup> British travellers seemed generally able to visit coastal areas, but a policy of excluding foreigners from the interior of the empire as much as possible appeared to be the principal roadblock to the issue of passports. British subjects, more so than any other nationality, appeared to have difficulty getting the appropriate permission, probably owing to the relative inactivity of other countries in the empire at that stage.<sup>250</sup>

Although the Foreign Office and the embassy at Constantinople were the principal channels through which travel requests were made, the Foreign Office was sometimes reluctant to act on behalf of travellers not on formal business. In 1899, Sir Nicholas O'Connor refused to request travel permission for an army officer who wished to travel through Arabia from Aqaba to Daur along an old Roman road. O'Connor noted that the request would have to be specially approved by the sultan. Given the suspicion with which British travellers were viewed by the Porte, such permission was unlikely to be forthcoming.<sup>251</sup> O'Connor's reluctance to press the matter with the sultan reflects the frustration felt by the Foreign Office at the military consul system described in Chapter

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<sup>248</sup> See for example the correspondence regarding Messrs. Anderson and Crowfoot of the British School at Athens in FO 195/2003. The issue of travellers in Turkish Arabia has been given useful attention in John Fisher, "Official responses to foreign travel at the British Foreign and India Offices before 1914," *English Historical Review* 122, 498 (September 2007), 937-964. The subject is dealt with less satisfactorily in James Canton, "Imperial Eyes: Imperial Spies. British Travel and Espionage in Southern Arabia, 1891-1946," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 37, 4 (November 2009), 537-554.

<sup>249</sup> Sir Philip Currie to Lord Salisbury, 16 April 1898, FO 195/2007.

<sup>250</sup> Maurice de Bunsen to Lord Salisbury, 2 June 1898, FO 195/2007; Maurice de Bunsen to Lord Salisbury, 28 June 1898, FO 195/2007.

<sup>251</sup> Sir N. O'Connor to Lord Salisbury, 8 March 1899, FO 195/2042. The officer in question was a Colonel Fraser, R.E. The documents do not state the purpose of his trip, or the reason for his route choice, but the activities of other officers from the Royal Engineers in Anatolia and Arabia suggest that his purpose was at least partly to make a geographical survey of the route in question.

One. The Foreign Office likely saw the efforts of the War Office to collect intelligence as an obstacle to good Anglo-Turkish relations.<sup>252</sup> The issue reflects the difference of opinion between the War Office and the Foreign Office over the manner in which intelligence activities should be conducted.

The Foreign Office was much more amenable to co-operating in intelligence matters when there was an official reason for doing so, or when the target of intelligence gathering was of interest to them. Well before construction began on the Baghdad Railway, the Foreign Office was concerned about railway development in Asiatic Turkey. In 1895, an army officer travelled several railway routes in Anatolia at the behest of Sir Philip Currie. He reported to the ambassador that, as a result of his most recent trip, combined with previous rail journeys, “I have now been over all the existing railways in Asiatic Turkey, with the exception of the short line between Jaffa and Jerusalem.”<sup>253</sup> Maj. Edward Law wrote that there had been a notable decline in British influence over Ottoman railways in recent years. There had been no British participation in the “great enterprises” of the Anatolian Railway, or in the reconstruction and extension of the Smyrna-Cassaba line. From the point of view of British trade, he wrote, this was an unfortunate circumstance.<sup>254</sup> Whereas Law’s primary purpose in travelling the railways of Asia Minor seems to have been to investigate the relationship of British commerce to Turkish railways, as an army officer he was also well placed to comment on the strategic principles of Turkish rail construction. All railways of any economic value in Turkey were to connect the interior of the country with the seacoast. In practice this meant the

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<sup>252</sup> Fisher, “Official Responses,” 950.

<sup>253</sup> *Confidential Print*, Vol. 17, Document 34: Major Law to Sir Philip Currie, “Railways in Ottoman Asia,” 20 October 1895.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*

Sea of Marmora, since Turkish possessions on the Black Sea and the Mediterranean were vulnerable to foreign attack. However, because it would be impossible for all Turkish railways to terminate on the Sea of Marmora, it was determined that all railways connecting the interior of Asia Minor with the sea had to be headed by a railway which started from the Sea of Marmora.<sup>255</sup> This principle had guided recent railway construction and extension, and was likely to continue doing so for the foreseeable future. In 1905 Maunsell, then military attaché at Constantinople, undertook a more comprehensive examination of Turkish railways. The mission appears to have been undertaken at his own initiative, and covered the Hejaz and Baghdad Railways, as well as the lines under French control in Syria.<sup>256</sup>

Both the Foreign Office and the War Office employed a range of means to gather intelligence. Despite the limitations of military consuls, they continued to be used to gather geographical information and intelligence on the Baghdad Railway where possible. In April 1904, Captain Townshend, who had arrived at his post as vice-consul at Adana the previous year, travelled the section of the Baghdad Railway in his district for the purpose of compiling a military report.<sup>257</sup> His mission was an open one: as a consular official he could hardly escape notice, and he travelled with permission from the Turks. Townshend reported that the director of the railway showed him around, and that he called on local officials in every town he visited, telegraphing his movements ahead so that he would be expected.<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> *Confidential Print*, Vol. 17, Document 35: Inclosure in Doc. 34, "Confidential Memorandum Respecting Railways in Asiatic Turkey."

<sup>256</sup> "General Report on Syrian Railways," 1905, WO 33/335; *Confidential Print*, Vol. 17, Document 53: "General Report on Syrian Railways."

<sup>257</sup> WO to FO, 2 May 1903, FO 78/5474.

<sup>258</sup> Sir N. O'Connor to Lord Lansdowne, 4 April 1904, FO 78/5449.

This tendency to co-operate with local officials did not prevent the British from trying to obtain information by clandestine means. Smyth resorted to bribery on at least one occasion, and Townshend was able to copy a confidential map of the Baghdad Railway on the sly, “having provided [himself] with materials for the purpose.”<sup>259</sup> In 1903 Maunsell managed to get a copy of a German map showing petroleum deposits in Mesopotamia. The map was made by an employee of the Anatolian Railway Company, which was responsible for the Baghdad Railway. The employee had travelled in Mesopotamia in the winter of 1903 looking for petroleum fields. The map, which was a copy of Kiepert’s *Karte von Kleinasien* with petroleum fields marked and coloured, was obtained by bribing a draughtsman, sometimes employed by Maunsell, who was elsewhere employed making maps for the *Deutsche Bank*-owned Anatolian Railway Company.<sup>260</sup>

Despite these attempts at secrecy, secret missions or secret agents remained the exception to intelligence collection, rather than the rule. However, in 1905 Capt. E.W.S. Mahon was sent out by the Committee of Imperial Defence on a secret mission from the Intelligence Department to report on places that could serve as possible locations for the Persian Gulf terminus of the Baghdad Railway.<sup>261</sup> The War Office intended to share its findings both with the Foreign Office and the Intelligence Department of the Indian Army. From an operational perspective the mission was a disaster. Although Mahon avoided creating an international incident, neither the Foreign Office, nor the India

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<sup>259</sup> Ibid. Presumably this refers to pencils, paper, etc.

<sup>260</sup> Walter Townley, Constantinople, to Lord Lansdowne, 15 November 1904, FO 78/5337; Lt.-Col. F. Maunsell to Sir N. O’Conor, 15 November 1904, FO 195/2176. The petroleum prospector in question is known in the documents only as Herr Grosskopf. Cohen, *British Policy in Mesopotamia*, 68.

<sup>261</sup> Director of Military Operations to FO, 29 July 1905, FO 78/5449; Colonel Francis Davies, Intelligence Division, WO, to FO, 11 May 1905, HD 3/130. See pp.101-102 above.

Office, nor local British officials, were properly informed of the mission. News of the mission provoked a storm of protest from Indian officials and from the Foreign Office, where it was likely seen as evidence of the War Office's ineptitude.

Sir Percy Cox who, as Persian Gulf Resident was Britain's most senior political official in the Gulf and a respected authority on the region, was particularly angry that Captain Mahon, travelling in disguise as a shipping agent, had visited Kuwait in June 1905, only a few days after Cox himself had visited Sheikh Mubarak. Being unaware of Mahon's mission, Cox was unable to notify the sheikh of his impending visit. The incident undermined Cox's own credibility, making it appear as though the British government did not have enough confidence in his abilities to inform him of the mission. Furthermore, the presence of a secret agent in Kuwait gave the appearance that Cox was being duplicitous with Mubarak. It was not, Cox wrote, in the best interests of His Majesty's Government that the sheikh should entertain either impression. Cox's complaints naturally found a sympathetic hearing at the Foreign Office, where Lord Lansdowne remarked, "If this is the manner in which we organize a 'secret mission', we had better avoid spending public money on them. Major Cox's letter is instructive."<sup>262</sup> Cox himself was livid, and his criticism of the mission was damning: "Is it to be supposed for a moment that an officer of the British Army can travel out by P. and O. in his own name (entered in the published list of passengers), and can come up the Persian Gulf by British Indian Mail, and then pose as a merchant when he has his name and corps painted on his baggage?"<sup>263</sup> A Dutch merchant who was travelling from Europe to the Gulf on the same ship had easily recognized Mahon and brought the matter to Cox's

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<sup>262</sup> IO to FO, 28 August 1905, FO 78/5449.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

attention while the resident was in the company of the Russian consul-general. News of British spies running around the Persian Gulf was likely to attract more than just unwanted attention from Turkish authorities. Such missions had the potential to snowball into much more significant international incidents.

This incident highlights some of the problems inherent in British intelligence operations in this early period. There was often, as we have seen, a lack of cohesion between the Foreign Office and the War Office. The Foreign Office usually co-operated with the War Office over intelligence gathering, but it did not always do so. It tended to co-operate most effectively when, as was the case with Captain Smyth, there was little risk of incident and much potential benefit. If the Foreign Office reluctantly acquiesced in the appointment of military consuls, it at least recognized that it was in need of the information these officers provided. However, the Mahon mission shows that the War Office was not always eager to co-operate with the Foreign Office, and that neither communicated regularly with the India Office and the Government of India. Cox hoped that his assistance and advice would be sought if such a mission were contemplated in the future. His being kept uninformed, Cox said, was likely to make things difficult for the agent. Unwanted attention could be drawn to the agent's presence by inquiries made after him with Cox. In any case, the resident concluded, the mission was poorly conceived. Had he been consulted, Cox would have suggested that Captain Mahon's mission could have been carried out less obtrusively from Basra than from Bushire, where the presence of other Europeans made secrecy more difficult.<sup>264</sup> The European community at Basra was smaller, but mostly British, and the presence of another Englishman there was unlikely to draw attention. While the War Office may have wanted to keep the Mahon

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<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

mission secret in order to avoid what they saw as unnecessary bureaucratic entanglements with the Foreign Office, the fiasco stands as an example of the relatively disorganized state of British intelligence efforts in the first half-decade of the twentieth century. The missions lacked a cohesive, over-arching purpose. They often appeared to be ad hoc, and inter-departmental co-operation was inconsistent. The Foreign Office continued to eschew elaborate operations like the Mahon mission in favour of less obtrusive methods of intelligence gathering. While the War Office concerned itself with strategic matters, such as the possible Gulf terminus of the Baghdad Railway, and with the details of possible operations in Asia Minor, the Foreign Office focused on matters of commerce and on broader international issues like the Eastern Question. Both departments shared a commitment to protecting and maintaining Britain's position in the world, but they disagreed on the nature of potential threats to that position as well as on the means to safeguard it. Undoubtedly the disagreement sprang in part from the nature of the information desired by each office. Political information, or information about the growth of German commerce in various parts of the Turkish Empire, could be obtained through the various British consuls that dotted the landscape without much trouble. This was part of their regular duties, after all. But the information sought by the War Office – chiefly geographical and statistical information – could not be obtained in this manner, or even by the same personnel. As a result, War Office intelligence gathering missions tended to be more politically sensitive, and a source of difficulty for the Foreign Office and the embassy at Constantinople.

Nevertheless, whereas the Foreign Office disliked anything that might aggravate Anglo-Turkish relations, and whereas it saw the use of military consuls as an

inconvenience, it was not without its own methods of intelligence collection. At the turn of the century Mark (later Sir Mark) Sykes found himself an honorary attaché at the embassy in Constantinople. He was a close associate of both O'Connor and Maunsell, and shared their feeling that the Anglo-Turkish relationship should be strengthened in the interests of the Eastern Question: to protect the Turkish Empire from foreign encroachment and to preserve British interests there.<sup>265</sup> Sykes' work had already attracted the attention of his superiors. In 1904, Maunsell had specifically named Sykes to O'Connor as somebody who had been of great assistance to him while compiling his map of Eastern Turkey in Asia.<sup>266</sup> Not everyone was as enamoured of Sykes' abilities, however. One of the problems with the Foreign Office's method of gathering intelligence was that independent travellers did not all operate with the same, shared sense of purpose that military officers under orders from the War Office did.

In 1905 Sykes encountered Gertrude Bell, the adventurer-cum-archaeologist, in Jerusalem as she was preparing one of her many trips through Ottoman territory. Bell was a seasoned traveller by 1905, and complained in a letter home that if she did not get into the desert ahead of Sykes, his tendency to overpay for goods and services would make her trip unaffordable.<sup>267</sup> For his part, Sykes described Bell as a "terror of the desert" and a "silly chattering windbag of conceited, gushing, flat-chested, man-woman, globe-trotting, rump-wagging, blethering ass!"<sup>268</sup> Bell's increasing familiarity with the Middle East made her an authority on the region and somebody the Foreign Office would repeatedly turn to for expertise in the coming years. She was the consummate Foreign

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<sup>265</sup> Roger Adelson, *Mark Sykes: Portrait of an Amateur* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1975), 110-111.

<sup>266</sup> Lt.-Col. Maunsell to Sir N. O'Connor, 21 April 1904, FO 195/2176.

<sup>267</sup> H.V.F. Winstone, *Gertrude Bell*, rev. ed. (London: Barzan, 2004), 153.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

Office intelligence agent. The larger point is that, as a private individual, travelling at her own expense through various parts of Turkish Arabia, Bell provided intelligence that was almost accidental. To the Foreign Office she merely represented an opportunity. Since she was not a representative of the government, the damage she could do to British foreign policy was limited. She did not take up a diplomatic post or otherwise interfere with the work of the British embassy at Constantinople. If she happened to publish a map or a work of travel writing that might be of use to the Foreign Office, or if she could offer some news of distant corners of the Ottoman Empire upon her return home – and best of all at no cost to the British government – then this was serendipity, not strategy.

Taking stock, we see that by the end of 1905 Great Britain had taken several measures to preserve its privileged status in the Ottoman Empire, reacting to ways in which the Boer War had revealed its imperial weakness. Between 1900 and 1905 Britain made serious efforts to gather a substantial corpus of information about a country which had been a major cornerstone of Victorian foreign policy – a country, moreover, in which British interests might be threatened in the future by political upheaval and European encroachment. Early intelligence efforts were focused on simply knowing the land and the landscape. Efforts to map the geography of Turkish Arabia were made by the appointment of military officers to British consular posts throughout Ottoman territory. Information was compiled in comprehensive reports, like the 1904 *Military Report on Arabia*, or the report on Kuwait, and the *Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman: Resources and*

*Coast Defences*, both printed in 1903.<sup>269</sup> However, neither the military consuls nor those who compiled geographical and ethnographical information sufficed to meet British needs. The threat of Russia, and the rising influence of Germany in the Ottoman Empire, coupled with political instability in Arabia and Yemen that threatened to undermine Turkish rule, required more specific, more precise information. To that end, officers were dispatched throughout the empire from the late nineteenth-century until 1914 to report on the growth of foreign-owned railways and their capacity strategically and commercially to threaten Britain's standing in the region. Meanwhile consular officials and travellers provided information on the political state of affairs in disturbed parts of the Ottoman Empire.

In this early period, intelligence efforts were often unco-ordinated, and efforts by various departments of the British government to collect information were sometimes met with acrimony by other departments. Britain was, in these early years of the twentieth century, struggling with a changing political landscape and a growing intelligence establishment. It was unsure of itself. The rise of Germany was shifting the global balance of power, old enemies were becoming new allies, intelligence objectives were moving targets, and the professional intelligence craft itself was young and inexperienced. In the years between 1905 and the outbreak of war in 1914, all this would change. The strategic aims of British intelligence gathering became less protean and more focused. Intelligence agents honed their craft. And Britain began to conduct intelligence operations in Turkey with a greater sense of purpose.

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<sup>269</sup> "Kuwait," report compiled by Capt. H.H. Dowding, 1903, Intelligence Branch, Simla, IOR/L/PS/20/153; "Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman: Resources and coast defences," 1903, Naval Intelligence Department, IOR/L/PS/20/64.

### **Chapter Three: A Changing Sense of Purpose, 1906-1909**

Political and strategic changes in Europe and Asia after 1905 helped to give British intelligence targets in Turkish Arabia a firmer shape. Changes in the Ottoman Empire also increased the unity of purpose and degree of co-operation between the Foreign Office, the War Office, and India. What had been uneasy concerns over imperial weakness and Great Power penetrations of Britain's sphere of influence were now perceived as clear and present dangers to Britain's position in Asia Minor and the Middle East. During the period 1906-1909, the essential methods of intelligence collection described in the previous two chapters remained the same. Information was gathered by political officers (attachés and other diplomatic personnel), by army officers, and by travellers on official or private business. Many of the targets of intelligence gathering also remained the same. What changed was the sense of purpose with which this information was collected. In 1906 Britain for the first time began to consider the Ottoman Empire as a potential enemy, and the growth of the German navy made concerns about Germany's position in the Ottoman Empire more acute. In light of these new concerns, information on older intelligence subjects – above all the state of Arab unrest and threats to the sultan's authority – became more important. Consideration of Turkey as a potential enemy revived the spectre of the Eastern Question, but now it took on troubling new dimensions: the collapse of the Ottoman Empire hastened by war, internal unrest – or perhaps both in whatever sequence. Intelligence efforts in Asia Minor and the Middle East after 1906 not only reflected changing geopolitical circumstances; they also laid important groundwork for British activities during the First World War.

### I. The Taba Affair

In 1906 a dispute between London and Constantinople broke out over the delineation of the border between Palestine and Egypt in the Sinai Peninsula at the head of the Gulf of Aqaba. The “Taba Affair,” named for the location at the centre of the dispute, led British authorities in both London and Cairo to begin planning measures for the defence of British Egypt against the Turks. The dispute had roots in a similar controversy that occurred during the 1890s, during the sultan’s investiture of Abbas Hilmi II as Khedive of Egypt. At that time, the Sinai Peninsula had not been explicitly mentioned in the description of territories over which the khedive had titular authority. At the insistence of Lord Cromer, Britain’s consul-general in Egypt, the Turks consented to khedival authority over the Sinai Peninsula (though not over the Hejaz ports) in 1892. The Turkish acknowledgement of the khedive’s authority over the Sinai did not, however, define the precise area over which Egypt was to rule, nor did it delimit the frontier. As a result the boundary between Sinai and Aqaba remained poorly defined.<sup>270</sup> While Sinai was considered outside of Egypt proper, it was traditionally administered by Egypt with the consent of the Ottoman government. Lord Cromer was intent on keeping the Sinai Peninsula within the boundaries of the Egyptian territory Britain controlled, in part to protect the Suez Canal, and attempted to unilaterally rectify the problem of an ill-defined frontier that had existed since 1892 on the basis of Egypt’s traditional control of the Sinai.

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<sup>270</sup> The Khedive was the nominal ruler of Egypt, though he was a vassal of the Ottoman sultan. However, by 1906 Egypt had been governed for almost a generation by an administration that was controlled at almost every level by the British, under the consul-general Lord Cromer. Rashid Khalidi, *British Policy Towards Syria and Palestine, 1906-1914: A Study of the Antecedents of the Hussein-McMahon correspondence, the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Balfour Declaration* (London: Ithaca Press, 1980), 5, 18.

In early 1906 an officer of the Egyptian Camel Corps was dispatched to the Sinai Peninsula, supposedly to report on lawlessness among the Bedouin of the region, though it is more likely that the officer was sent to investigate the details of a proposed spur of the Hejaz Railway.<sup>271</sup> The officer, Lt.-Col. Jennings Bramly, began erecting small military outposts along the length of the frontier and entering into discussions with local Turkish authorities about the exact position of certain points along a boundary that had never been precisely demarcated. In doing so, Bramly claimed that the frontier between the Sinai and Aqaba lay considerably to the east of the north-south road linking Aqaba with el-Arish near Gaza, the traditional administrative boundary. Possibly owing to a misunderstanding between Bramly and the aide de camp of the sultan sent to the region, tempers flared and two battalions of Turkish troops were dispatched to fortify the area. The British did likewise. At Taba, a few miles down the Sinai coast from Aqaba, Egyptian troops aboard a British naval vessel were prevented from landing by a Turkish garrison occupying the coast. From this small affair arose a diplomatic incident that lasted several months. To the Turks, British attempts to define the frontier were seen as intolerable encroachments on Ottoman territory. The British in turn saw Turkish moves as provocative.<sup>272</sup> The dispute was settled, peacefully and diplomatically, but it left an indelible stamp on Anglo-Turkish relations. Confronted for the first time with the prospect of Turkish belligerence, the British began to consider coercive actions that might be taken against the Ottoman Empire in time of war.<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> Ibid., 19-20.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>273</sup> Yigal Sheffy, *British Military Intelligence in the Palestine Campaign, 1914-1918* (London: Frank Cass, 1998), 3.

Despite the peaceful resolution of the incident, a number of features of the affair are worth noting for the insight they provide into British fears, indeed, the British political mind.<sup>274</sup> British suspicions that the Germans might have provoked the Turks into starting the border dispute reflected central aspects of the Anglo-German rivalry in Europe. These suspicions invigorated British fears over German activity in Asia.<sup>275</sup> More immediately, the recognition of a potential Ottoman threat to Egypt added a new layer of concern to the Anglo-Turkish antagonism.<sup>276</sup> Thus far, Turkey's ability to inflict any harm against Britain had been limited to attacks on British commercial interests within the Ottoman Empire. A Turkish attack on India was beyond reasonable consideration, and despite earlier disputes over Kuwait, no real Turkish military threat to Sheikh Mubarak ever materialized. The "Taba Affair," therefore, represented the first time that British-controlled territory was legitimately threatened.

Taba did not put Turkey and Britain on a collision course for war, nor did it throw Turkey firmly into an alliance with the Central Powers. Anglo-Turkish relations were marked by periodic efforts to build a more secure friendship even as late as the July Crisis of 1914. But damage had been done, with ripple effects extending beyond the immediate context of Anglo-Egyptian-Turkish relations. Turkish policies influenced Indian Muslim opinion, which influenced the policies of the Egyptian and Indian governments as well as the Home Government.<sup>277</sup> Pan-Islamists in India had begun to establish direct contacts with Constantinople as early as 1905, and while no serious

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<sup>274</sup> "Turkish Army Annual Change Report for 1906," Col. H. Conyer Surtees to Sir N. O'Connor, January 1907, FO 195/2226.

<sup>275</sup> Lord Cromer to FO, 7 February 1906, FO 195/2227; Lord Cromer to FO, 28 February 1906, FO 195/2227. Turkish demands during the crisis, Cromer wrote, were "almost certainly inspired by Germany."

<sup>276</sup> Rashid Khalidi, *British Policy Towards Syria and Palestine, 1906-1914* (London: Ithaca Press, 1980), iii.

<sup>277</sup> Raj Kumar Trivedi, *The Critical Triangle: India, Britain and Turkey, 1908-1924* (Jaipur: Publication Scheme, 1993), 1.

formal relationship existed, popular Indian Muslim opinion tended to be pro-Turkey.<sup>278</sup> Britain therefore had to act with great circumspection in its dealings with the Ottomans, lest tension with the Turks should appear in an anti-Islamic light that would create problems in Egypt, India or other British possessions with large Muslim populations.

The dangers of the Pan-Islamic-Turkish relationship were compounded by the new set of problems that emerged in Anglo-Turkish relations with the conclusion of the 1907 Anglo-Russian Entente. Britain's attachment to Turkey's traditional rival forced British policy-makers to consider ways in which they could support Russian interests without giving the appearance of having disregarded Turkish friendship.<sup>279</sup> The Entente would ultimately prove damaging to Anglo-Turkish relations. Britain's refusal to back Turkey unreservedly against Russia in moments of crisis, as was the case during the Balkan Wars, meant that Turkey ultimately looked to Germany for the support it was not getting from London.<sup>280</sup> In light of existing Anglo-German antagonisms in Asia Minor in the Middle East and Europe, the Turco-German rapprochement seemed a confirmation of Britain's worst fears.

The 1908 Young Turk Revolution gave new life to British concerns about the collapse of Turkish authority. In June 1908, a cadre of young, patriotic army officers believing an Anglo-Russian partition of Macedonia to be imminent mutinied and forced Sultan Abdul-Hamid II to restore the dormant constitution and parliamentary government. The Young Turks, as they were dubbed, believed that the cause of the Ottoman Empire's weakness was twofold: divisions among its disparate ethnic and religious populations sapped the empire of strength, while backward legal and

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<sup>278</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid., 53.

administrative structures left the empire unable to defend itself from predators. These self-styled Unionists, so named for the title they gave themselves: the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), claimed that restoration of the constitution could reverse Ottoman decline. A legal order resting on the constitution would allow for the modernization of state structures, enabling the empire to hold its own against outside threats, while the guarantee of political liberties would resolve internal strife.<sup>281</sup> The army suppressed a counter-revolution in April 1909, and the CUP was restored to power. Sultan Abdul-Hamid was deposed and replaced by his brother, who ruled as Mehmet V.<sup>282</sup>

Privately the Unionists, led by Enver Pasha, were opposed to parliamentary government. They distrusted democracy, and had little faith in the ability of the people to pursue their own best interests.<sup>283</sup> But the fiction that a parliamentary government would rejuvenate Turkish strength and halt the territorial haemorrhaging was exposed by Turkish defeats in the Italo-Turkish War of 1911-1912 and by the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913. Between September 1911 and September 1913 the Ottoman Empire lost over one-third of its territory and more than one-fifth of its population. The losses to the Balkan states were felt even more keenly because they had come at the hands of former subject peoples, rather than other Great Powers.<sup>284</sup> As a result, in January 1913, the Young Turks

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<sup>281</sup> Michael A. Reynolds, *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires, 1908-1918* (Cambridge: University Press, 2011), 22; Donald Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire, 1700-1922* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: University Press, 2005), 64; Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey* (London: Routledge, 1993), 36; Feroz Ahmad, *The Young Turks: The Committee of Union and Progress in Turkish Politics, 1908-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), 2; Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (Oxford: University Press, 1967), 203-208. The III Army, headquartered in Macedonia, was a hotbed of Young Turk activity. Both Enver and Mustafa Kemal numbered among its ranks, though from 1909-1911 Enver was out of the country, serving as military attaché in Berlin.

<sup>282</sup> Ahmad, *Young Turks*, 45.

<sup>283</sup> Reynolds, *Shattering Empires*, 22.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

fomented popular unrest and launched a coup against the government, killing the Minister of War and forcing Sultan Mehmet V to permit them to form a government. From 1913 until the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1918 the government of Turkey was dominated by a virtual military dictatorship.<sup>285</sup>

Questions about the stability of the Young Turk regime, combined with further reports of rebellion in Yemen and tribal unrest in Arabia, fed into larger British concerns about the Eastern Question. Furthermore, the rise of Pan-Islamism meant that concern for the security of India remained a feature of Anglo-Turkish relations, to which fears over the security of Egypt were added.<sup>286</sup> In this changing political context British intelligence also evolved. It often assumed a more secret character, and the kind of information collected was oriented more towards specifically military purposes than had hitherto been the case. Mapmaking and the gathering of ethnographic information continued to serve military needs, including the obvious desideratum of military intelligence about the Turkish army and politics.<sup>287</sup> There was no timeline by which an intelligence assessment of the Turkish Empire needed to be complete. The Boer War had been a shock to

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<sup>285</sup> Lewis, *Emergence*, 220-221.

<sup>286</sup> For a very good, recent discussion of Britain and pan-Islamism see John Ferris, "The Internationalisation of Islam?: The British Perception of a Muslim Menace, 1840-1951," *Intelligence and National Security* 24, no. 1 (February 2009): 57-77. See also Richard Popplewell, *Intelligence and Imperial Defence: British Intelligence and the Defence of the Indian Empire, 1904-1924* (London: Frank Cass, 1995). David Steele notes that after the Indian Mutiny of the mid-nineteenth century, pan-Islamism was seen as the most dangerous potential instigator of revolt against European influence in India. David Steele, "Britain and Egypt, 1882-1914: The Containment of Islamic Nationalism," in Keith Wilson, ed., *Imperialism and Nationalism in the Middle East: The Anglo-Egyptian Experience, 1882-1982* (London: Mansell, 1983), 2.

<sup>287</sup> That specifically military intelligence collection, as opposed to political intelligence, increased after the rise of the Young Turks, is likely due to two reasons. First, the War Office had, by 1908, been collecting topographical intelligence for several years already. This effort pre-dated the 1906 Taba Affair, which only heightened the desire for this particular kind of information. Thus, changes in the political situation at Constantinople fed into a pre-existing effort on the part of the War Office to collect intelligence. The second reason for the relative lack of political intelligence is ability: the British lacked highly placed agents within the Turkish government. See Yigal Sheffy, "British Intelligence and the Middle East, 1900-1918: How Much Do We Know?," *Intelligence and National Security* 17, 1 (2002), 41.

political establishment in Britain, but the machinery of state moves slowly. It took two years from the end of the Boer War to conclude an Entente with France, and three more to conclude one with Russia. Early efforts to collect intelligence in Turkish Arabia began about the same time as the Boer War, but increased in its aftermath. Even then, it was not until 1906 that British policy makers began to consider the Ottoman Empire a potential enemy. The pace of change in British intelligence activity more or less kept pace with the changes in the strategic and imperial concerns that had become paramount to Great Britain since the South African war.

During the Taba Affair, most of the information the British received came from their diplomatic and consular network throughout the Ottoman Empire, though the chief source of information on the Turkish army's operational movements came from the military attaché in Constantinople, Col. Herbert Conyer Surtees.<sup>288</sup> What was different was an element of secrecy that was only occasionally present in an earlier period. As early as 1906 an annual secret service fund (usually £1,000) available to the embassy at Constantinople was used to fund clandestine activity in Turkish Arabia and the Middle East.<sup>289</sup> Certainly payment for information was not new. Several instances of the War Office rendering payment for information, usually of a topographical character, have been discussed in previous chapters.<sup>290</sup> In January 1906, for example, the Intelligence Division offered to pay an officer £20 for topographical and military information he had

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<sup>288</sup> Sheffy, *Palestine Campaign*, 8.

<sup>289</sup> Yigal Sheffy suggests this began in 1908, but documentary evidence shows that the Secret Service money was available to the embassy several years earlier. Sheffy, *Palestine Campaign*, 13; Sir N. O'Connor to FO, 12 March 1906, HD 3/132. O'Connor requested a Secret Service budget of £1,200 instead of the £1,000 he ultimately received.

<sup>290</sup> See pp.53-54 above.

furnished on Persia.<sup>291</sup> However, the frequency of this kind of activity increased in Turkish Arabia beginning in 1906.

As with the military consul system, the question of who was to bear the costs of clandestine activity was a source of contention between the Foreign Office and the War Office. In 1907 Surtees, the military attaché, and Captain Samson, the consul at Adrianople (Edirne), applied to the War Office for £50 in secret funds to pay for “important intelligence.” They were told that owing to bureaucratic difficulties getting money for such purposes from the Treasury, they would be better off applying to Sir Nicholas O’Conor for the money from his secret service fund. O’Conor acquiesced to the request, but expressed his qualms about allowing the War Office to apply to the Foreign Office for funds for something that was more properly within their province. O’Conor complained that he had already given Surtees £60 the previous year “for one of the English Pashas” at the Arsenal who had been supplying the embassy with good information for many years now.<sup>292</sup>

Not all intelligence activity was done in secret after 1906, nor was it all funded by secret service money. But the growing Anglo-Turkish antagonism and the preparations for a possible war against the Ottoman Empire meant that intelligence work was done secretly much more regularly after 1906 than had hitherto been the case. The growth of secrecy can partly be attributed to the growing discussion within Britain about the need for a regular secret intelligence bureaucracy, ultimately established in 1909.<sup>293</sup> As the

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<sup>291</sup> Col. Francis Davies to FO, 17 January 1906, HD 3/132.

<sup>292</sup> Sir N. O’Conor to FO, 27 May 1907, HD 3/134. The Foreign Office, for its part, had no real objection to paying the money from the embassy’s secret service fund, in view of the “important military information” it would bring from Adrianople. Sir C. Hardinge to Sir N. O’Conor, 4 June 1907, HD 3/134.

<sup>293</sup> On the emergence of a modern intelligence bureaucracy in Britain see Thomas G. Fergusson, *British Military Intelligence, 1870-1914: The Development of a Modern Intelligence Organization* (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1984); B.A.H. Parritt, *The Intelligencers: the Story of British*

need for, and acceptability of, a secret intelligence service grew in political circles within Britain, the element of secrecy increased correspondingly in British intelligence operations elsewhere.

The possibility of the Ottoman Empire as an enemy led the British to rely heavily on intelligence for the drawing up of contingency plans for war. In considering the various courses of action that might be taken in a war with Turkey, the War Office and the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID) examined a number of alternatives. While the Admiralty considered that seizing a Mediterranean island might be the best way of coercing the sultan in wartime, the Directorate of Military Operations at the War Office thought that action in the Persian Gulf might be more effective.<sup>294</sup> The guiding considerations of such an action should be the possible conflict with the interests of other powers, the Turkish force in the region where action was considered, and the effect action would have on Britain's Muslim subjects. The CID memorandum concluded in order to be effective actions would need to hurt the sultan's purse, endanger his personal safety, and undermine his position as Muslim Caliph.<sup>295</sup>

Further considerations of the problem of Turkey as a belligerent emphasized the danger to Egypt and the ultimate ineffectiveness of naval operations in the Mediterranean.<sup>296</sup> While the British considered a large-scale Turkish invasion of Egypt unlikely, owing to the relative scarcity of water supplies in the Sinai Desert, they worried about the possibility of a small force crossing the desert and stirring up Muslim

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*Military Intelligence up to 1914* (Ashford: Intelligence Corps Association, 1983); Christopher Andrew, *Her Majesty's Secret Service: The making of the British intelligence community* (London: Viking, 1986); Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm: The Authorized History of MI5* (London: Penguin, 2009) and Keith Jeffery, *The Secret History of MI6* (London: Penguin, 2010).

<sup>294</sup> Memorandum by Director of Naval Intelligence, 12 December 1902 and Memorandum by MO2, 27 April 1906 in "Memorandums on the coercion of Turkey in Wartime," 1906, WO 106/41.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

<sup>296</sup> "Memorandum on military policy in the event of war with Turkey," 11 July 1906, WO 106/42.

fanaticism. This would create difficulties for India, many of whose sixty million Muslims served in the Indian Army. It was extremely important to avoid any action that would offend Muslim sentiment.<sup>297</sup> Capturing islands in the Mediterranean or in the Aegean Sea was considered unlikely to exert any serious pressure on the sultan, and the absence of an efficient Turkish navy meant that seapower could not be used effectively unless the Royal Navy was prepared to run the Dardanelles. Seizing customs houses on the Persian Gulf and elsewhere was unlikely to do much to damage anyone's trade but Britain's, and fomenting Arab rebellion was considered impractical at this juncture, as Britain was unprepared to commit to protecting the disturbers from Turkish vengeance. The 1906 report concluded that unless the Turks committed large forces to an assault on Egypt, Britain would be unable to inflict decisive defeats. Smaller actions would only result in a deadlock, with the Turks unable to decisively defeat Britain's military and naval forces, and the British unable to cripple the ability of the Turks to make war. Such a scenario was likely to produce a situation in which only a negotiated settlement could end the conflict, but in which neither side possessed any significant military or strategic advantage to bring to the table. The best way to break the deadlock, a 1906 memorandum concluded, would be to force the Dardanelles.<sup>298</sup> Anglo-Ottoman relations in the period 1906-1909 marked only a period of tension, not a definitive break. But the intelligence activities in which the British were engaged in this new, more militarized, environment had important implications for British actions during the First World War.

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<sup>297</sup> Ibid.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid. and "Minute on attacking Dardanelles in the event of a war with Turkey," 26 July 1906, WO 106/42.

## II. Military Reconnaissance

Perhaps the best example of the ways in which the changing political situation after 1906 affected intelligence practice can be found in the work done by Maj. Francis Maunsell, who had produced the 1904 *Military Report on Arabia*. In March of 1907, Maunsell had been instructed by the War Office to travel through Syria to obtain information regarding Haifa and the country included in the area “Tripoli-Damascus-Deraa-Haifa.” Maunsell was also to examine and report on the construction of the Hejaz Railway as far as it had been completed. His intelligence was described by the War Office as being “of great value not only from a military but also from a political point of view” in the event of future complications between Great Britain and Turkey. During the course of his travels, Maunsell had been obliged to spend £22 10s 0d as *backshish* (bribery), for which the War Office asked the Foreign Office to reimburse him, as the War Office had “no Secret Service fund or army vote against which this expenditure could be admitted.”<sup>299</sup> In return the War Office promised to supply the Foreign Office with copies of the fruits of Maunsell’s labour. This promise, along with the claim that Maunsell’s intelligence would be of great political value, appeared to anticipate the objections of the mandarins at the Foreign Office, who might balk at being asked to pay for something they did not consider of any real worth.

The Taba Affair had led the British to take a substantial interest in Syria and Palestine, as part of their considerations for the defence of Egypt and possible coercion of

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<sup>299</sup> WO to FO, 10 June 1907, HD 3/134.

Turkey in wartime.<sup>300</sup> Maunsell's travels produced a report entitled *Reconnaissance of Syria from the Coast Eastwards*, printed and circulated by the War Office in June 1908.<sup>301</sup> It contained a cross section of all of the targets of interest to British intelligence efforts, including railways, mapmaking, and other military information.

The fruits borne by intelligence work, particularly the work done by Maunsell, reflected the changing dynamic of the Anglo-Turkish relationship after 1906. Indicative of new British strategic priorities, Maunsell had reported on military intelligence useful for possible British operations in Syria. His reconnaissance revealed numerous possible landing places for troops along the Syrian coast.<sup>302</sup> Maunsell described the Damascus-Homs road as good for wheeled traffic. It would be useful for troop movements if Homs were occupied by a British force landing on the coast, planning to move on to Damascus. Mapping was also a feature of this reporting: the Damascus-Homs road was not shown very well on maps; Maunsell sketched it in himself, connecting it where possible to the existing Lebanon Survey.<sup>303</sup> Water was generally scarce, but good springs could be found in a few places. The road from Homs-Tripoli was described as the only possible route through the hills in northern Lebanon.<sup>304</sup> The country on either side of the road was too stony for wheeled traffic to pass. At Tripoli, Maunsell scouted positions from which a landing could be protected, and found a good camping ground near a large spring about a

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<sup>300</sup> Khalidi, *British Policy*, 1. An interest in Syria would naturally bring Britain into contact with France's sphere of influence. However, there is no indication in the documents that the British considered France to be anything more than a competing colonial power, whose interests might be inconvenient to Britain but which would nevertheless have to be recognised and engaged.

<sup>301</sup> "Reconnaissance of Syria from the Coast Eastwards," June 1908, WO 33/456. Though Maunsell is not named as its author, the report notes that a British officer carried out the reconnaissance in the spring of 1907. The proximity of dates make Maunsell the most likely candidate for authorship of the document.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid. The report noted that a good, sandy beach was located just outside of Acre that would serve well for the purpose of landing men ashore.

<sup>303</sup> Director of Military Operations (DMO) to FO, 13 May 1907, FO 424/212.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid.

mile and a half north of the town, from which the Homs road could be covered.<sup>305</sup> The Tripoli-Homs road, running sixty miles between the two towns, was described as a useful route by which Homs could be occupied from the coast, and Turkish railway communications between Damascus and northern Syria could be severed. The road had plenty of water, and good campsites for landing forces could be found not far from Tripoli.

Similar information on campsites, water and communication was provided for other places, such as Beirut. The distribution of Turkish forces in Syria was discussed in the report at length. Syria was the home of the Ottoman *V Ordu* headquartered at Damascus.<sup>306</sup> The force there was severely depleted. Troops had been taken from Syria for operations in Macedonia, where the situation prohibited their removal, and for operations in Yemen, where casualties, illness, and desertion had severely diminished the fighting strength of the army. Doubtless when the prospect of landing an expeditionary force on the Syrian coast was considered in 1915, Maunsell's work provided the basis for the discussion.

The fractured nature of Ottoman society, and the discontent of many of the empire's subject peoples, led the British to consider whether or not nascent nationalist, or anti-Turkish attitudes, could be mobilized for their own interests. British officials in the region had been aware of a growing Arab nationalism in Lebanon and Syria since the early 1880s, as well as a separate Egyptian nationalism.<sup>307</sup> Arab nationalism entered the

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<sup>305</sup> Ibid.

<sup>306</sup> The word alternately means "army" and "military district." Ottoman military organization placed numbered armies in corresponding military districts. Here the sense is that of the Ottoman V army, responsible for a particular segment of the empire, mostly based in Syria and headquartered at Damascus.

<sup>307</sup> George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening: The Story of the Arab National Movement* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1946), 82-83, 100.

public sphere more definitively with the 1913 Arab congress, held in Paris.<sup>308</sup>

Burgeoning Arab nationalism, combined with the native unrest in Yemen and the anti-Turkish attitude of Sheikh Mubarak of Kuwait, seemed to the British evidence that in the event of war with Turkey, local allies might easily be found. As a result, *Reconnaissance of Syria from the Coast Eastwards* spent a considerable amount of time discussing the attitudes of local populations to Turkish rule, and on their likely attitude toward any British force landing along the Syrian coast. Maunsell considered the Muslim Druze population as potential allies, noting that they displayed pro-British tendencies. They were described as a warlike race, constantly feuding with the Bedouin tribes around them, and hostile to Turkish efforts at subjugation. British observers thought that the Druze and the Bedouin could help prevent the concentration of Turkish forces in Syria by attacking the Hejaz Railway and breaking the line. The Maronite Christian population of northern Lebanon might also be urged to attack the railway, Maunsell suggested, but as he considered them to be less warlike and less organized than the Druze, he thought their military value limited.

The Bedouin tribes represented a different situation altogether: their political allegiance in the event of a British invasion was difficult to gauge. Certainly they had no regard for the Turks, and any British operations that could be presented to them as opposing Turkish authority, rather than as opposing Islam, might secure Arab friendship. Urging the Arabs to attack towns was ill advised; their movements would be difficult to control, and they might alienate the Druze in so doing. The British believed the Arabs could be easily bribed; the Bedouin might be persuaded to take action further south, or perhaps paid not to sell camels or otherwise render assistance to the Turks. The Arab

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<sup>308</sup> Ibid., 114.

tribes of Central Arabia, who had always resented the Hejaz Railway as an instrument of Turkish authority, might take the opportunity to destroy the line, raiding as far north as Ma'an, almost 400 km south of Damascus. They might also try to seize Mecca and Medina, which would undoubtedly complicate Britain's position vis à vis India's Muslim population. The tribes to the east of Damascus professed friendship to Britain, and might best be reached through Sheikh Mubarak of Kuwait. The importance of Kuwait, therefore, extended beyond the question of a terminus for the Baghdad Railway. Thus as the British became more interested in the affairs of Central Arabia, Kuwait's value as an ally increased correspondingly.

Considering the Arabs as a homogenous group, Maunsell suggested that it would be best to leave them to their own devices rather than try to "instigate a revolt on an extensive scale."<sup>309</sup> There were too many difficulties attached to the instigation of such a revolt. He believed that the Bedouin were unpredictable and might not confine themselves to attacking the Turks, but also attack villages and towns or other tribes friendly to Britain. Instigating a widespread Arab revolt at least at this stage, Maunsell wrote, could easily do more harm than good. Such comments suggest that British intelligence activity in the Ottoman Empire had already identified a number of courses of action that might be taken in the event of war, and had begun laying important groundwork for those. Nobody in 1908 could say with certainty whether war was coming, whether Turkey might be involved, or on which side. Nevertheless, contingency plans for such a range of possibilities meant that when war arrived the British were far better prepared to fight it than they would have otherwise been without this more intensive intelligence effort after 1906.

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<sup>309</sup> "Reconnaissance of Syria from the Coast Eastwards," June 1908, WO 33/456.

Maunsell's report covered a number of other subjects of interest for the Foreign and War Offices. He described the influence of the various European powers in Syria and Lebanon. The improved government and general prosperity of Egypt under British rule had had a positive effect on Syria in recent years, particularly on the "more enlightened" Christian and Muslim inhabitants. By contrast, German influence in Syria was growing slowly, owing to the fact that the second generation of German colonists tended to lose many of their German characteristics. The report also contained precise topographical information of the kind that would be useful to the War Office in the event of operations in Syria. It noted, for example, that the "hilly country inland from Haifa and Acre towards Nazareth and the Jordan is traversed by some good roads passable for guns, and is generally suitable for military operations." Elsewhere, the terrain to the west of Mount Carmel towards the sea, consisted of "easier slopes, but cut up by many deep, rocky ravines, covered with scattered oak forest and shrub; the whole very difficult for military operations."<sup>310</sup> Attached to the report were numerous appendices offering similar information to that contained in the 1904 *Military Report on Arabia*: every *vilayet* and *sanjak* (province and district) was listed, along with the number of towns in each; Syrian weights and measures, maps of Asia Minor with all of the Turkish military *Ordus* marked, and a list of all the Arab tribes near Damascus, including their names, locations, and numbers.<sup>311</sup> This comprehensive report was supplemented by another, secret, paper entitled *Scheme for an Attack on Haifa*, which gave significantly more detailed

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<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid.

consideration to the military strength available to Turkey in the event of hostilities with Britain or an attack on Egypt.<sup>312</sup>

The general downturn in Anglo-Ottoman relations following the Taba Affair led the General Staff, the Admiralty and the Foreign Office to continue studying the new strategic problem of Egypt through 1906-1907.<sup>313</sup> Fears persisted about the ability, and intention, of the Turks to launch a large-scale invasion of Egypt.<sup>314</sup> As a result, British military planners began contemplating operations in Syria and Anatolia as early as the end of 1906. A CID paper considering the possibility of an assault on the Dardanelles noted that an assault on Smyrna (Izmir) “would carry the British army into the heart” of Anatolia.<sup>315</sup> Such an endeavour, were it to take place, would naturally require good military maps of the theatre of operations.

In this new political climate intelligence efforts targeted the Turkish army more methodically. In January 1907 the first annual report on changes within the Turkish army, required by the intelligence division, was published for 1906. Since the Taba Affair in early 1906 marked the first time the British began to consider the Turks as potential enemies, the coincidence of dates can hardly be an accident. The report on 1907 pegged the peacetime strength of the Turkish army at 257,000 men, increasing to 1.1 million in wartime.<sup>316</sup> Emphasizing that the figures reported were only best-guess estimates, the report on 1908 approximated the peacetime strength of the Turkish army at 331,000. Col. Herbert Conyer Surtees, the military attaché, noted that the numbers were

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<sup>312</sup> “Scheme for an Attack on Haifa,” 1906, WO 106/42.

<sup>313</sup> Khalidi, *British Policy*, 62.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>315</sup> “The Possibility of a Joint Naval and Military Attack Upon the Dardanelles.” 20 December, 1906. CAB 38/12/60.

<sup>316</sup> “Turkish Army Annual Change Report for 1907,” in Col. H. Conyer Surtees to Sir N. O’Conor, 6 January 1908, FO 195/2226.

constantly in flux but the general trend seemed to be upwards, and the size of the army was unlikely to be diminished for several years.<sup>317</sup> His 1908 report promised information about the Turkish army budget as soon as it was discussed in the Turkish parliament in February, and added that discipline had been restored in the army after the initial disruption of the Young Turk Revolution.<sup>318</sup> Although the War Office was paying closer attention to the composition and development of the Turkish army, most of the information contained in the annual change reports has to be considered as open source, rather than secret, intelligence. Surtees appears to have compiled and collated most of his information from sources, which, if not publicly accessible, were certainly easily available to him as a military attaché. The military attaché was not a spy but a diplomatic officer, and in reporting on the state of the Turkish army Surtees was merely doing his job. However, in providing this information to the various departments in London that desired it, Surtees was essentially acting as an intelligence agent, though he neither broke Turkish codes nor stole Turkish state secrets.

### **III. The Young Turks and Changing Anglo-Turkish Relations**

The Young Turk Revolution of 1908 produced another significant shift in Anglo-Ottoman relations. Specifically, British officials in London, Cairo, and Constantinople wondered whether the revolution was the harbinger of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, or whether it would produce liberal reforms that would improve the empire's

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<sup>317</sup> "Turkish Army Annual Change Report in 1908," in Col. H. Conyer Surtees to Sir G. Lowther, 24 December 1908, FO 195/2290.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid; "Annual Report on Turkey for 1908," in Sir G. Lowther to FO, 17 February 1909, FO 195/2363.

health. There was initial hope in London that the Young Turk regime would present an opportunity for improved relations with Turkey; many of the Young Turks publicly admired British forms of government and declared that Britain was the model that Turkey should emulate. At the Foreign Office, there was early confidence that the revolution would be a blow to German ambitions at Constantinople; Germany had supported the sultan, and was closely identified with his despotism as a result. The Young Turks, by comparison, gave indications of being progressive. The warm welcome received by the new British ambassador Sir Gerald Lowther, who succeeded to the post after the untimely death of Sir Nicholas O'Connor in 1908, was seen in London as a sign of better relations.<sup>319</sup> Lowther thought the moment propitious for re-establishing British influence at Constantinople by granting a loan to the Young Turk government.<sup>320</sup> He hoped such a move would forestall any efforts by German creditors to exert influence at Constantinople, which the embassy feared might happen if Britain did not act quickly.

British optimism was short lived. By the end of the year relations with the Young Turks had soured, and German influence in Constantinople was once more on the rise. The reality of the Young Turk regime, which in the event was not as progressive as some westerners had hoped, and Britain's larger strategic obligations to France and especially to Russia after the conclusion of the 1907 Entente, militated against close Anglo-Turkish relations. Turkish efforts to raise customs duties, and the Porte's refusal to make the Baghdad Railway Convention more favourable to Britain in exchange for a British loan, revealed to Whitehall that Turkish friendship was a poor substitute for good relations

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<sup>319</sup> Joseph Heller, *British Policy Towards the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1914* (London: Cass, 1982), 11-12; "Annual Report on Turkey for 1908," in Sir G. Lowther to FO, 17 February 1909, FO 195/2363.

<sup>320</sup> Heller, *British Policy*, 14.

with France and Russia.<sup>321</sup> In a state of increasing European tension, with Britain's dependence on the friendship of Russia and France increasing, it became more and more difficult to walk the fine line of being pro-Ottoman without appearing to be anti-Russian, particularly given the tentative new Anglo-Russian friendship that emerged out of the 1907 Entente. The Bulgarian declaration of independence in October 1908, timed to coincide with the Austrian annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, dealt a blow to Britain's efforts to walk the Russo-Turkish tightrope.<sup>322</sup> Britain, along with France, declined to support Russia in the face of Austro-German threats. Furthermore, having abandoned its nineteenth-century policy of propping up the Ottoman Empire by intervention, Britain was forced by circumstance to fall into line with the rest of the powers and could do little but offer sympathetic, non-committal, declarations of support to the Turks.<sup>323</sup>

Even as relations between Britain and Turkey were deteriorating, London held out hope that the situation would only be temporary, and that Britain could still walk the tightrope between Turkey and Russia. But, having alienated both Russia and the Ottoman Empire, Britain only had the ability to mend fences with one of the two. The British expected that for a year after the Young Turk Revolution, two years at the most, there would be a general jockeying for position at Constantinople by the Great Powers. The

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<sup>321</sup> Ibid., 28. The Young Turk regime was certainly not as progressive as the British had hoped it would be, though before 1914 it was certainly more progressive than the Hamidian regime that preceded it. The Armenian Massacres of the First World War, however, demonstrated that the Young Turks could be just as brutal as their predecessors. Still, the lack of a "progressive" outlook had never in and of itself been an obstacle to Britain's relationships with foreign powers.

<sup>322</sup> Bosnia-Herzegovina, though still nominally Ottoman territory, had been under Austrian administration from the Congress of Berlin in 1878 until the Austrian annexation in 1908. A.J.P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848-1918* (Oxford: University Press, 1954), 251. Eastern Rumelia was lost to Bulgaria in 1908 when Bulgaria declared full autonomy as part of the brief war between Bulgaria and Serbia. Since 1878, Bulgaria had been a principedom and Eastern Rumelia a semi-autonomous region of the Ottoman Empire. The loss of these two territories naturally made the Ottomans suspicious of any foreign activity within their borders. Charles Jelavich and Barbara Jelavich, *The Establishment of the Balkan National States, 1804-1920* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1977), 216.

<sup>323</sup> Heller, *British Policy*, 16; Charles Jelavich and Barbara Jelavich, *The Establishment of the Balkan National States, 1804-1920* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1977), 214-216.

belief that British influence was so deeply ingrained at the Porte led many at the Foreign Office to consider that the ascendance of Britain's position over Germany's at the Turkish capital was inevitable. What ultimately hurt British influence at Constantinople, and helped Germany, was Britain's vigorous stand over Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf.<sup>324</sup> The Committee of Union and Progress was extraordinarily sensitive to developments in these areas. Since Iraq elected deputies to the Turkish parliament, Britain's support of an independent Kuwait and its claim to commercial predominance in the Persian Gulf was a barrier to good Anglo-Ottoman relations.<sup>325</sup> Iraqi deputies, upset by commercial concessions granted to British firms such as the monopoly on river trade in Iraq given to the Lynch Brothers Steam Navigation Company, lobbied against Britain in parliament. The Young Turks were only too well aware of the state of Arab unrest in the provinces and could not afford to flout Arab opinion by allowing British commercial predominance to continue unopposed.<sup>326</sup>

Fears of increased German influence in Turkey under the new regime appeared to be confirmed by the appointment of Field Marshal Baron Colmar von der Goltz to reorganize the Turkish army in 1909.<sup>327</sup> Von der Goltz had been in charge of reorganizing the army once before, from 1883-1895, and his return to the Turkish capital sparked rumblings of a Turco-German alliance. The military attaché, Surtees, endeavoured to allay the fears of his superiors in London that no such alliance had been concluded, but he suggested that Turkey had by this time recognized that both groupings of powers in Europe were courting the friendship of the Porte, and Turkey had decided to

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<sup>324</sup> Heller, *British Policy*, 33.

<sup>325</sup> Feroz Ahmad, "Britain's Relations with the Young Turks, 1908-1914," *Middle Eastern Studies* 2, 4 (1966), 317.

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid.*, 317.

<sup>327</sup> Col. H. Conyer Surtees to Sir G. Lowther, 1 August 1909, FO 195/2323.

play one off against the other. The gifts of friendship that were within Turkey's power to bestow were commercial contracts and concessions, of which Germany received an ample share.<sup>328</sup> Despite these fears, Britain seems to have considered that Anglo-Ottoman relations were not irreparably damaged and held out hope for future co-operation.

In November 1909, Surtees reported on Turkish army manoeuvres recently conducted near Adrianople. The war games, which had been led by von der Goltz, were predicated on a conflict with Bulgaria.<sup>329</sup> Surtees's general impression was that the Turks at last had a modern army and considered that, with a period of several years free from internal strife and disorder, it would be an "offensive" army capable of fighting "alongside the British."<sup>330</sup> The statement is peculiar, and it is unclear from the text of Surtees's letter precisely whom he thought the British and Turks would be fighting together against. With a German field marshal in charge of the Turkish army, Germany was an unlikely candidate. Russia presented a more likely choice, but such a scenario would be completely at odds with the course of British foreign policy over the previous several years. While it is possible that Surtees was completely out of touch with Britain's strategic and political priorities, leading to his replacement as attaché in 1909 by Maj. G.E. Tyrrell, a more persuasive explanation is that Britain was pursuing an ambivalent policy toward the Ottoman Empire: holding out hope that a firmer friendship would emerge between the two countries, but simultaneously preparing for the day when hostilities might emerge between them.

The annual reports on changes in the Turkish army, the first of which had appeared in 1906, continued to provide the War Office with as comprehensive a picture of the

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<sup>328</sup> Ibid.

<sup>329</sup> Col. H. Conyer Surtees to Charles Marling, 12 November 1909, FO 195/2323.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid.

composition and performance of the Turkish army as possible. Tyrrell's 1909 report offered the details on the Turkish army budget for that year that had been alluded to in the previous year's offering. 1909, Tyrrell declared, was the first year in which a national budget had been submitted to the Turkish parliament and sanctioned by it. The total allotment to military purposes was approximately forty per cent of national expenditure.<sup>331</sup> A number of other noteworthy changes had taken place under the Young Turk regime. Several German officers had been brought in to assist von der Goltz in his reorganization of the army, and a number of Turkish officers had been selected to study in Germany as well as in France, suggesting that fears of a Turco-German alliance were premature.<sup>332</sup> On the performance of the Turkish army, however, little reliable information was available. Except for the army's suppression of the rebellion in the capital in April, all of the military operations of 1909 were punitive expeditions against internal disorders in Yemen and elsewhere.<sup>333</sup> Of these, Tyrrell reported, details were wanting and information was generally scarce.

#### **IV. Germans, Railways, Arabs**

Two intelligence subjects which acquired more prominence in British strategic considerations after the Taba Affair were railway construction through Turkish Arabia, and ethnographic information about Arab tribes and other Turkish subjects. These two subjects were closely related. As railways brought the sultan's authority to parts of the

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<sup>331</sup> Turkish Army Annual Change Report for 1909 in Maj. G.E. Tyrrell to Sir G. Lowther, 17 January 1910, FO 195/2346.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid.

empire where it was weak, the British were eager to learn all they could about the populations of those areas. Railways also brought European influence to parts of Turkish Arabia where the British would have preferred not to see it. This was more the case with the Baghdad Railway than with the Hejaz line. But the Baghdad Railway also produced concerns about declining British influence among the local populations. Moreover, fears that German business might supplant British commercial influence were nearly matched by fears about the growth of German influence among the populace.

The Baghdad Railway was the principal means of German influence in Anatolia and around the Persian Gulf, but not the only one. German companies were granted concessions to supply materiel to the Turkish army and given privileged positions in the competition for a number of industrial and commercial concessions.<sup>334</sup> In this they had the personal support of Kaiser Wilhelm II, whose 1898 visit to Constantinople, British businessmen complained, had procured numerous material advantages for Germany. Honorary attaché to the embassy in Constantinople, George Lloyd, wrote to Sir Nicholas O'Connor in 1907 that British companies were at a disadvantage because German firms received government subsidies, something Lloyd claimed was an undoubted fact but impossible to prove.<sup>335</sup> The energy and insistence with which Germany was trying to rival Britain's political and commercial position in the Gulf, Lloyd wrote, could be seen in its attempts to control trade, historically the prerequisite of political control in the Gulf.<sup>336</sup> In their pursuit of the mother of pearl industry, the Germans had established relationships with sheikhs and coastal villages. They owned boats and employed local

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<sup>334</sup> "General Report on Turkey for 1907," in Sir N. O'Connor to FO, 18 January 1908, FO 195/2363.

<sup>335</sup> "Memorandum on Mother of Pearl and Oyster Shell trade in the Persian Gulf," by George Lloyd in Sir N. O'Connor to FO, 19 September 1907, FO 424/213.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*

labour, and if some accident should occur, or some attack be made by Arabs on German boats, the Germans might find a pretext to send gunships to the Gulf or to interfere politically in a region where they had as yet no political interests. This was not fantasy, Lloyd warned, but a prediction based on past German behaviour. It had happened at Kiaochow and it might happen in the Persian Gulf.<sup>337</sup> The Germans were also interested in petroleum, newly discovered in the Middle East, and German geologists were employed by the Turks to prospect for it.<sup>338</sup> In this climate of suspicion and antagonism, disagreements over British involvement in the Baghdad Railway scheme and questions surrounding a potential terminus on the Persian Gulf only exacerbated tensions.

A 1909 report on the railway declared that the Baghdad Railway would have little commercial value as a through-route. The Indian mails were unlikely to be entrusted overland from London to the Persian Gulf, passenger traffic would be nominal, and the commercial effect of the railway was likely to be minimal.<sup>339</sup> Progress was slow, and by 1909 the date by which the railway would reach Baghdad was still very uncertain. With the railway unlikely to be completed in the near future, the commercial threat posed by the railway and any prospective branch line to the Persian Gulf abated somewhat. This did not mean, however, that British fears over the growth of German influence followed suit. Until 1914 Britain remained alert to the threats posed by railway developments by other great powers in Mesopotamia.<sup>340</sup>

The Baghdad Railway, besides serving as a source of concern about German ambitions, led to an interest in the ethnography of Turkish Mesopotamia. In August 1907

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<sup>337</sup> Ibid.

<sup>338</sup> Sir F. Lascelles to FO, 11 February 1908, FO 424/214.

<sup>339</sup> Lt.-Col. Stewart F. Newcombe to T.B. Hohler, Khartoum, 16 October 1909, FO 195/2327.

<sup>340</sup> "Memorandum on railway developments by other great powers in Mesopotamia, and the potential challenge to British interests and influence in the region," by H. Conyer Surtees, 1908, FO 195/2288.

Capt. Mark Sykes, upon hearing of disturbances on the Turco-Persian frontier, sent the Foreign Office a list of Kurdish tribes in Mesopotamia that he had compiled on his last journey, undertaken in 1905 when he was honorary attaché at the embassy in Constantinople.<sup>341</sup> The list corresponded to a map of the region produced by the Royal Geographical Society and would, Sykes wrote, “afford considerable assistance in making out the true nature of information emanating from native sources.”<sup>342</sup> The early collaboration with the Royal Geographical Society became an important aspect of British intelligence work in Turkish Arabia, and increased in scope and significance during the war. Sykes was the classic amateur intelligence agent. In his youth he had travelled through the Middle East with his father on numerous occasions, but he had no formal training or expertise in Turkish affairs.<sup>343</sup> He represented a particular strain of thought that believed knowledge of foreign lands was best acquired by spending time there. The report that his journey produced, however, was a mixture of this intuitive approach to understanding the Middle East, and the more empirical approach to understanding being taken by the War Office. It was the product of over 6,000 miles of riding through the country, and innumerable conversations with policemen, muleteers, Mullahs, chieftains, and anyone else who might be able to provide him with useful information. Sykes had no formal scholarly training that would have rendered him an expert on the ethnography of Turkish Arabia and Mesopotamia. His knowledge was gained by first-hand experience. If

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<sup>341</sup> Capt. Mark Sykes to Sir E. Grey, 14 August 1907, FO 424/213.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid.

<sup>343</sup> In particular, Sykes lacked the language ability to understand the politics, history, and culture of the Middle East in any meaningful way. His attempt at a monumental history of the Ottoman Empire, *The Caliph's Last Heritage* (1915) was limited by his inability to read languages other than English, French, and Latin. Sykes's time spent as honorary attaché at Constantinople would have allowed him to acquire a rudimentary knowledge of Turkish, and his travels through Turkish Arabia in his youth with his father would have enabled him to learn some basic Arabic. His efforts to study Middle Eastern languages as an undergraduate at Cambridge, however, suffered from a lack of studious application. Roger Adelson, *Mark Sykes: Portrait of an Amateur* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1975), 62, 115, and 122-123.

late-Victorian curiosity brought Sykes to the land of the Old Testament, he laboured there under the belief common to many in early twentieth-century Britain that the only way one could properly *know* the Arab world and the exotic Orient was to live in it. This was part of a broader European trend of intellectualism versus dilettantism. In Germany, in the imperial era, “an increasing number of individuals began to claim expertise based not their ability to read ancient texts and exotic languages, but on time spent ‘on the ground’ or together with real-existing ‘orientals.’”<sup>344</sup> While Sykes hoped that his information might be of future use to travellers, as honorary attaché there was no doubt that he also intended it to serve a political purpose.

#### V. New Co-operation

Despite occasional bureaucratic antagonism, the Foreign and War Offices collaborated more closely after 1906 than they did in earlier times. Information Maunsell collected while making his surveys of Syria, eventually printed in the 1908 *Reconnaissance of Syria from the Coast Eastwards*, was passed by the Intelligence Department to the Foreign Office. A good deal of Maunsell’s information about Arab affairs came from missionaries and local sources. Information from these channels led him to report that Ibn Saud, having apparently inflicted a serious defeat on his rival Ibn Rashid, was marching on the latter’s capital city of Hail. There were early signs among the Arabs of a

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<sup>344</sup> Suzanne L. Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race and Scholarship* (Cambridge: University Press, 2009), 339. chapter 8 of Marchand’s book covers this in some detail, as does chapter 2 of Priya Satia, *Spies in Arabia* (Oxford: University Press, 2008).

movement to attack the Hejaz Railway, which they rightly interpreted as a means of bringing Turkish troops into Arabia.<sup>345</sup>

One of the purposes of Maunsell's travels was to investigate the progress of the Hejaz Railway. Since railways, and the Hejaz Railway in particular, were de facto instruments of Turkish authority, they were naturally resented by many of the Arab tribes whose territory they crossed. The Hejaz Railway was therefore of interest for the strategic and operational possibilities that would allow action by the Turkish army in Arabia, and for its effect on Turco-Arab relations. It was a narrow gauge line with specially made rolling stock that would be difficult to procure in an emergency. Should British operations, or perhaps Bedouin tribes, damage the railway, rolling stock would be hard to come by.<sup>346</sup>

The Hejaz Railway, Maunsell noted, was only really vulnerable along the Haifa branch in the Yarmuk gorge; indeed, in 1917 T.E. Lawrence planned to destroy several of the bridges there in conjunction with General Allenby's offensive at Gaza.<sup>347</sup> Elsewhere, there were no important bridges that could be destroyed, but in the gorge were several long spans with lattice girders that, if destroyed, could block the line for some time. Materials to repair the damage would be scarce, and the narrowness of the gorge made deviations of the line almost impossible. The report contained information about travel times along the railway, along with a list of important stations on the line, complete with descriptions of their sidings, loading facilities and capacities.<sup>348</sup> Maunsell

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<sup>345</sup> DMO to FO, 13 May 1907, FO 424/212.

<sup>346</sup> This was actually the case during the First World War, as attacks on the railway by T.E. Lawrence and Bedouin guerrillas led to a shortage of rolling stock. See Edward Erickson, *Ordered to Die: A History of the Ottoman Army in the First World War* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2001), 175; Basil Liddell-Hart, "T.E. Lawrence" *In Arabia and After* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1934), 235.

<sup>347</sup> T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph* orig. 1935 (London: Jonathan Cape, 1946), 397.

<sup>348</sup> "Reconnaissance of Syria from the Coast Eastwards," June 1908, WO 33/456.

reported in April 1907 that he had followed the line down to Tebuk, nearly 450 miles from Damascus, an oasis with a good water supply, and a large depot of material provisions. Shortly beyond Tebuk, though, was a long dry stretch for 165 miles as far as Medain-i-Salih.<sup>349</sup> At Tebuk, Maunsell wrote, he had been fortunate to obtain a copy of the contoured survey of the 1/100,000 map from Ma'an down to Medina, which he described as being potentially very useful.<sup>350</sup> He also saw a survey of the planned Jeddah-Mecca branch line, but was unable to copy it.

Maunsell's efforts to obtain information for the Intelligence Division were a matter of public knowledge. He spoke with Meisner Pasha, the German Chief Engineer of the Hejaz Railway, who promised to send Maunsell a copy of the contoured map of the line from Damascus to Ma'an through the British consul in Damascus. This would have given Maunsell a complete map of the Hejaz line, though his information to that point was fairly comprehensive: included in Maunsell's correspondence was a list of all the stations on the Hejaz Railway south of Ma'an, with their distance from Damascus.<sup>351</sup> In retrospect, it seems likely that Maunsell's map was used by T.E. Lawrence during the war. Lawrence's account of the desert war suggests that kilometre 475 of the Hejaz Railway was a good spot at which to sabotage the line.<sup>352</sup>

South of Ma'an, the country comprising *Arabia Petraea* had seldom been traversed by Europeans.<sup>353</sup> For thirty-eight miles south of Ma'an the country was stony and dry, the only available water coming from shallow wadis that filled with rain at uncertain

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<sup>349</sup> DMO to FO, 13 May 1907, FO 424/212.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid.

<sup>352</sup> Lawrence, *Seven Pillars*, 386.

<sup>353</sup> DMO to FO, 26 July 1907, FO 424/213.

intervals every few years.<sup>354</sup> As the importance of water and the ability to supply a force in a desert campaign was paramount, Maunsell's work revealed some of the factors limiting Turkish authority in Arabia proper.

It would be wrong to suggest that definite plans to attack the railway were drawn up almost a decade before T.E. Lawrence and the Arab Revolt. The public nature of Maunsell's work suggests that he was merely on a "fact-finding" mission, and that neither he nor his superiors at the War Office considered secrecy necessary. However, when war ultimately came, the British had a pool of knowledge that they could draw upon when deciding how best to prosecute the war in the Middle East. This was the chief value of the work done between 1906 and 1909.

While none of the Turkish officers (construction of the Baghdad Railway was mostly being done by Turkish military labour) claimed to be concerned with Arab raids against the railway, Maunsell reported that many were privately worried by the prospect of a raid on the line by Ibn Saud's forces, which a "reliable source" claimed was imminent. The railway was projected to reach Medina by September 1908, though this was considered an optimistic estimate, as the hostility of Arab tribes was likely to delay construction.<sup>355</sup> Travelling the railway brought Maunsell opportunities to gather information regarding events in Central Arabia, the geography and politics of which had attracted Britain's notice in the post-1906 climate. The potential of an Arab rebellion to facilitate the collapse of Turkish authority, perhaps independently of any European assistance, gave new importance to Arabian affairs. Many of Maunsell's contacts spoke of the complete

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<sup>354</sup> Ibid.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid.

ascendancy of Ibn Saud over his rivals and of efforts by Ibn Rashid to raise allies in his quarrel with Ibn Saud.<sup>356</sup>

Britain's interest in Arabian politics led Maunsell to turn his attention to the Grand Sherif of Mecca, who he noted was all powerful between Mecca and Medina, strongly anti-Turk, and likely to side with Ibn Saud if the latter made any move against the railway.<sup>357</sup> The Bedouin between Mecca and Medina were in a perpetual state of unrest, and telegraphs and railway surveys were unable to pass through their country. The normal practice was for the Turks to bribe major sheikhs for their co-operation in maintaining order, but this really only worked in northern Arabia. In the south, Maunsell opined, the tribes were harder to control and had a greater capacity for mischief.<sup>358</sup> Where the system worked, though, it seemed to work well, with only occasional raids by the Arabs lifting rails or placing heavy stones on the track. Turkish authority decreased dramatically with distance from major urban centres. At the centre of all of this unrest, Maunsell reported, was Ibn Saud. If he made trouble for the Turks in Arabia, the Bedouin, the grand sherif and numerous other Arab tribes would probably join him; Ibn Saud was emerging as the paramount political authority in Central Arabia and a person of great interest to British authorities for years to come.

The interest in Turkish authority that attended railway construction in Central Arabia also led to a desire for information about the possibility of Turkish military operations being undertaken there. Regular uprisings in Yemen made clear the need for the Turks to reassert their authority in Central Arabia, while simultaneously questioning their ability to do so. The constant movement of troops up and down the Hejaz Railway demonstrated

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<sup>356</sup> DMO to FO, 13 May 1907, FO 424/212.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid.

<sup>358</sup> DMO to FO, 26 July 1907, FO 424/213.

that the line was considered by the Turks as a base from which to stage an invasion of Central Arabia should the need present itself. If the Turks were to do this, Maunsell wrote, they would have to do it from Tebuk or Akhdar where water was in good supply. Muadhem, the closest point on the line to Hail, eight days from the city, did not have enough water to serve as a staging point.<sup>359</sup> Logistics, Maunsell declared, would be the major issue for any operations undertaken in Arabia. The Turkish army would have to find a way to set up supply and communication lines that were protected against such a mobile enemy.

Maunsell's assessment of the Arabs' fighting abilities accurately forecast the course of the Arab Revolt. An invasion of Central Arabia was not as simple as working out distances on a map. Ibn Saud might be able to muster 20,000 men, who could cover sixty to seventy miles per day on camel. Such a mobile force would be almost impossible for the Turks to pin down and compel to give battle. In pitched engagements the Arabs tended to be poor fighters, but when they concerned themselves with raiding and cutting supply lines they had often forced the Turks to withdraw, as Maunsell observed had been the case recently in Yemen.<sup>360</sup>

## **VI. Commerce, Mapping and the Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf**

Although British intelligence efforts were guided by strategic and political concerns, the commercial interests at stake in Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf were equally important. The three strains of British interest were inextricably linked. Britain's

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<sup>359</sup> DMO to FO, 26 July 1907, FO 424/213.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid.

commercial preponderance in the Persian Gulf depended on the maintenance of political influence to the exclusion of other Great Powers. The exclusion of other Great Powers from the Persian Gulf safeguarded Britain's position in India. Britain was the largest European trading partner and investor in the Ottoman Empire, and it was this financial relationship that Britain considered to be most threatened by the growth of German influence in Turkey.

Britain's own import and export trade with Turkey was small: in 1908 approximately one per cent of Britain's total imports came from the Ottoman Empire. Exports were marginally higher.<sup>361</sup> The real focus of Britain's financial interest in the Ottoman Empire came from British businessmen, who controlled a much larger share to the Turkish import and export trade: twenty-two per cent and thirty per cent respectively.<sup>362</sup> In Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf the proportion of trade controlled by the British was estimated at seventy per cent.<sup>363</sup> In the early twentieth century pearls were the chief commodity in the Persian Gulf trade. Without the pearl trade Kuwaiti commerce would be severely crippled, Bahrain's reduced by nearly eighty per cent, and the trade in Omani ports would all but cease. In 1905-1906 alone the value of pearls exported from the Gulf had been almost £1.5 million. To this was added the mother of pearl trade, over £30,000 in 1903-1904 and growing all the time.<sup>364</sup> If Britain's attitude towards the Turks underwent a general change after the Taba Affair, British policy towards Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf remained largely unchanged. Britain sought to eliminate the

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<sup>361</sup> Eber Harold Rice, "British Policy in Turkey, 1908-1914" (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1974), 65. British imports from Turkey were £5,052,885 out of a total of £592,953,487; exports were £6,948,982 from a total of £377,103, 824.

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid.*, 65. Rice says that in 1908 British traders imported £7,010,188 worth of goods from a total import trade of £31,521,470, while they controlled £5,153,149 of a Turkish export total of £17,469,390.

<sup>363</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>364</sup> J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia: Volume I: Historical, Part 1b* (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, India, 1915), 2220.

influence of any other Great Power over the lines of communication to India, and to maintain a political and commercial monopoly on the Persian Gulf and its shores. These objectives determined British policy towards all questions at all times.<sup>365</sup> In the past, they had guided Britain's attitude towards Russian attempts to gain access to the Gulf, presently they dictated Britain's policy towards the expansion of German influence in Turkey; in the future these considerations would come to shape British attitudes towards Arab nationalism.

Mapping and topographical work remained important features of British intelligence activity in Turkish Arabia. Map work done after 1906, particularly by Maunsell, embodied the new military and political character of intelligence collection. As before, military officers in diplomatic positions did much of the work. One such officer, Capt. William Henry Irvine Shakespear, appointed Political Officer at Kuwait in 1909, did a good deal of work for the War Office and the Intelligence Branch of the Indian Army, going over much of the ground first covered by his predecessor, Major Knox. He also made use of work done previously by Maunsell in an effort to create as precise a map as possible.<sup>366</sup>

Much of the mapping was done in conjunction with the compilation of the monumental intelligence product, the *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, assembled principally by John Gordon Lorimer, political resident at Baghdad from 1909-1914. The *Gazetteer* was printed in two multi-part volumes between 1908 and

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<sup>365</sup> Trivedi, *The Critical Triangle*, 250.

<sup>366</sup> Capt. W.H.I. Shakespear to Capt. C.M. Gibbon, Intelligence Branch, Simla, 4 October 1909, IOR/R/15/5/55.

1915, and remained classified by the British government until 1930.<sup>367</sup> It was begun in 1904 by order of the viceroy, Lord Curzon, and based on personal tours of the Gulf made by Lorimer and his assistants.<sup>368</sup> Although the impetus for its creation came from the Government of India, the *Gazetteer* represented a collaborative effort that included the Foreign and War Offices. It did this by making use of exploration work done around the Persian Gulf in earlier years, often by military consuls or other diplomatic officials in the region. Other journeys made independently of the gazetteer work were incorporated into the volumes. The map work done by Major Knox at Kuwait between 1905 and 1907 that Shakespear built on was done in conjunction with the *Gazetteer*.<sup>369</sup> Sir Percy Cox, who simultaneously served the Government of India as political resident in the Persian Gulf and the Foreign Office as consul-general for the Persian provinces of Fars, Lurestan, and Khuzestan, also did work in 1905 and 1906, “chiefly for the purpose of solving topographical problems connected with the *Gazetteer*.”<sup>370</sup>

However the *Gazetteer* was more than a collection of maps. It was a substantially bigger version of the kind of information produced in the 1904 *Military Report on Arabia*, and while its production was in some ways a collaborative effort that included the Foreign and War Offices, it also represented the separate intelligence effort of the Government of India. There was some overlap with earlier War Office publications, and the *Gazetteer* tended to duplicate the intelligence collection methods employed in Asia Minor: consuls and officers were sent throughout the Persian Gulf region to carry out mapping and ethnographic surveys, among other things. The “Geographical and

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<sup>367</sup> H.V.F. Winstone, *The Illicit Adventure: the story of political and military intelligence in the Middle East from 1898 to 1926* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982), 58.

<sup>368</sup> J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer Part 1a*, 383.

<sup>369</sup> *Ibid.*, 384, 1045.

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid.*, 384.

Statistical” volume of the *Gazetteer*, printed in 1908, contained a geographical dictionary and alphabetical list of place names. It described the physical and political conditions of the Persian Gulf and its environs. Its articles covered topography, political boundaries, climate and seasons, natural flora and fauna, agriculture, and livestock.<sup>371</sup> It described the country’s inhabitants in racial, tribal and religious terms, and included information on languages, customs and estimates of population. The *Gazetteer* also contained valuable information on trade, both internal and external, including currency, weights and measures, shipping, manufactures and industries. It was as comprehensive a compendium of knowledge about the region as has ever been produced; a pool of information that would help Britain defend its political, commercial and strategic interests in the years leading up to World War I.

Britain’s defence of its interests in Mesopotamia and the Gulf naturally exacerbated antagonisms with Turkey. As Anglo-Turkish antagonism increased, so did British fears that Germany would seek to exploit the situation in order to increase its own influence.

This became a self-fulfilling prophecy. The more the British feared the growth of

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<sup>371</sup> J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia: Volume II: Geographical and Statistical*, (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, India, 1908). The *Gazetteer* was also a throwback to older methods of geographical study. In India during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, before the advent of triangulated surveys, similar epistemological forms of exploration and study were standard practice. Although the context is different here – Britain did not yet rule parts of the Persian Gulf as an imperial power – the informal empire of British India in the region can in some ways be seen as an extension of the kind of imposition of rationality on a “backward” and “uncivilized” part of the world that the British had earlier imposed on India itself. For the British, measurement and quantification meant the imposition of European science and rationality on a foreign landscape. It was one of the things that served to set the British apart from their Indian subjects. Here it can be seen as setting the British apart as a potential imperial power from other potential imperialists (the Germans, French and Russians), and, particularly, from the existing, “inefficient” imperial rule of the Ottoman Empire. Matthew H. Edney, *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India, 1765-1843* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 32.

German influence, the more they saw every new German move as evidence of a larger imperial ambition. The Turks, for their part, believed that British commercial interests were merely a screen for political ambitions and the partitioning of Ottoman territory.<sup>372</sup> Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey denied that the British had any political designs on Turkish territory, but he maintained that London could not remain indifferent to Britain's economic position in Mesopotamia, to the political situation in the Persian Gulf, nor to the influence that this might have on India. The Committee of Union and Progress was determined to reassert Turkish prestige and authority in the Gulf.<sup>373</sup> Since Iraq sent deputies to the Turkish parliament, the Young Turks could hardly afford to abandon the region.<sup>374</sup> Revitalized Turkish authority in the region would threaten the autonomy of Kuwait, whose sheikh was a British client, as well as the British position at Baghdad.

The concerns over German penetration of the Turkish Empire were not only a function of Anglo-Turkish relations. The worries were also part of the growing Anglo-German antagonism. As in Europe, tension resulted from the confluence of political, commercial and strategic interests. The preservation of British influence in these spheres was the overriding concern of the Foreign Office after the Boer War. Strategic considerations over the defence of Egypt and India, especially after 1906, tended to dominate the outlook of the War Office and the Government of India. All these government departments turned to intelligence to solve some of their problems and fill the gaps in their information; undoubtedly the growing Anglo-Turkish alienation and the fears of a Turco-German alliance created a unity of purpose. Whereas the Foreign Office tended to view War Office intelligence missions as a nuisance prior to 1906, the Tabá

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<sup>372</sup> Heller, *British Policy*, 45.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>374</sup> Ahmad, "Britain's Relations," 317.

Affair produced a new co-operation between the two ministries. The possibility of war with Turkey led them to make common cause against a potential enemy, and work more closely to acquire intelligence than they had in an earlier period. While the period after 1906 saw a number of new developments in British intelligence work in Turkish Arabia, the period from 1910 to 1914 gave rise to strategic considerations that, while not entirely new, now governed intelligence efforts more decisively than ever before.

## **Chapter Four: Transition and Strategic Planning, 1909-1914**

By 1909 British intelligence had been working for several years to correct the deficiencies made evident during the Boer War, while simultaneously attempting to manage larger strategic problems. The British had begun making contingency plans for the next war, in Asia and in Europe. Britain was preparing the ground diplomatically by building relationships with Japan, France, and Russia. It was preparing the ground strategically through the compilation of maps and information about Turkish Arabia. There was, of course, no specific timeline or plan that would mark the completion of Britain's intelligence efforts in the Ottoman Empire. Nobody could say with certainty when the next war might occur. But if British intelligence began to operate with a new sense of direction, Anglo-Turkish policy remained marked by ambivalence as the Foreign Office continued to wrestle with the Eastern Question, the growing antagonism in Europe, and the burden of new Great Power relationships. While the Foreign Office, War Office, and the Government of India all agreed on the need for more intelligence, there seemed little agreement, or even desire, at the highest levels of policy-making to use it to shape Anglo-Turkish relations.

### **I. The Course of Anglo-Turkish Relations**

Officially, Britain's attitude towards Turkey, and therefore towards the Eastern Question, appeared to be one of "survival of the fittest." During the 1912 Balkan Crisis, Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey attempted to contain the conflict by telling the Porte that by

mutual consent no Great Power would intervene to maintain Turkey's territorial integrity.<sup>375</sup> Turkey could not look to other Great Powers for help, nor could it attempt to use the spectre of the Eastern Question to manipulate European Powers into acting in Turkey's interest. Britain thus reaffirmed its abandonment of its nineteenth-century policy of propping up the Turkish Empire.<sup>376</sup> The hope was that without Western assistance, Turkey would be forced to enact liberal reforms to ensure its own survival. A more liberal Ottoman Empire, bereft of corruption and tyranny, could then be a more useful member of the international community.

Not all British diplomats believed that such a policy was in the best interest of Great Britain or in the interest of the Balance of Power. Sir Louis Mallet, the last British ambassador to Turkey before the war, thought the maintenance of Turkey as a strong power was the best thing for Britain's Asiatic interests.<sup>377</sup> The longer the breakup of the Ottoman Empire could be postponed, Mallet wrote to the Foreign Office, the better. The Ottoman Empire acted as a buffer between other Great Power interests in Asia Minor, and its end would bring renewed imperial rivalries in the Middle East for the Triple Entente and the Triple Alliance alike. Mallet declared that it would be "a great misfortune for India to see Russia in the six Vilayets [of Asiatic Turkey], Germany in Asia Minor and France in Syria."<sup>378</sup> He recommended a consistent policy of maintaining

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<sup>375</sup> Feroz Ahmad, "Britain's Relations with the Young Turks, 1908-14," *Middle Eastern Studies* 2, 4 (1966), 320. None of the Great Powers wished to see a dramatic weakening of the Ottoman Empire during the Balkan Wars. M.S. Anderson, *The Eastern Question, 1774-1923* (London: Macmillan, 1966), 294-295.

<sup>376</sup> Robert Taylor, *Lord Salisbury* (London: Allen Lane, 1975), 169; David Steele, *Lord Salisbury: A Political Biography* (London: University College of London Press, 1999), 321; Anderson, *The Eastern Question*, 261.

<sup>377</sup> Mallet took charge of the embassy in the summer of 1913 after his predecessor Sir Gerald Lowther's anti-Turkish feelings led to his permanent recall. It was Mallet's sympathies for the Young Turks that led to his appointment as ambassador to Constantinople. Joseph Heller, "Sir Louis Mallet and the Ottoman Empire: the Road to War," *Middle Eastern Studies* 12, 1 (January 1976), 3.

<sup>378</sup> Joseph Heller, *British Policy Towards the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1914* (London: Cass, 1982), 102.

and strengthening the Ottoman Empire, while simultaneously urging reforms, as an important measure for the defence of India. This created a sort of paradox in Anglo-Turkish relations: the British were torn between needing to keep the Ottoman Empire in place but wanting it to suffer setbacks that would force it to enact reforms. Deteriorating relations with the Turks themselves exacerbated the problems of Britain's Turkish policy. Sir Gerald Lowther found the warmth of his initial reception in Constantinople quickly cool when Britain and France would not acquiesce in a loan to the new Young Turk regime. His own anti-Turk prejudices further soured relations and eventually led to his recall.

Lowther's annual report for 1911 noted that the policy of Turkey towards Great Britain had not been friendly over the past year. The loss of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Eastern Rumelia had created suspicion in the minds of the Turks wherever the integrity of their empire might be questioned. For Britain, Turkish suspicion meant hostility towards British influence around the Persian Gulf.<sup>379</sup> When, in 1911, the Turkish press was openly hostile to Britain's influence in Mesopotamia, demanding that Britain renounce all interests and admit Turkish supremacy there, Lowther was highly critical of the Young Turks. He complained to the Foreign Office that this was a typical Young Turk tactic: to invent an accusation, in this case British efforts to acquire parts of Turkish Arabia, and then challenge the accused to deny it.<sup>380</sup> The imposition of martial law in Constantinople seemed to provide evidence that the Young Turks were not as progressive as the world had once believed. Throwing his hands up in despair, Lowther declared it practically impossible to reason with such people.

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<sup>379</sup> "Annual Report on Turkey for 1911," Lowther to FO, 31 January 1912, FO 424/250.

<sup>380</sup> Lowther to FO, 25 January 1911, FO 424/226.

The growing closeness of Turkey and Germany cast a shadow over Anglo-Ottoman relations. The refusal of Britain and France to grant Turkey a loan had led the Turks to look to Germany for help. There were other reasons for Germany and Turkey to move towards each other: the lack of a long German imperial tradition was reassuring to the morbidly suspicious sultan, as was Germany's geographic remoteness from his domain. The Ottoman Empire shared volatile borders with Austria-Hungary, Russia, and British Egypt, and a sizeable French population of settlers was stirring up Christian minorities in Syria.<sup>381</sup> Germany took advantage of this situation to seize all available opportunities to increase its power and influence at Constantinople.

The growth of German influence in Turkey seemed to forecast that when war came Turkey would cast its lot with the Central Powers. A *Punch* cartoon from October 1910 entitled "The Teutonising of Turkey" depicted a large turkey wearing a German *Pickelhaube* and mimicking Kaiser Wilhelm II. The caption read "German Kaiser: 'Good Bird!' The Kaiser takes Turkey in hand."<sup>382</sup> Britain's intelligence work in the Turkish Empire, particularly after the 1906 Taba Affair, had begun to explore possible courses of action in the event of a war with Turkey. This was the line of official British policy, though it was not necessarily in Britain's best interest. But how did Britain deal with these two inter-related assumptions: that war was coming and that Turkey was likely to be an enemy? How did the British, believing that the Eastern Question must be solved, prepare for these eventualities?

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<sup>381</sup> Sean McMeekin, *The Berlin-Baghdad Express: The Ottoman Empire and Germany's bid for world power* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2010), 37.

<sup>382</sup> *Punch Cartoons of the Great War* (New York: George H. Doran, 1915), 33. The cartoon appeared in *Punch* on 5 October 1910.

Intelligence offered solutions to these problems. Intelligence gathering efforts now took place in the context of a defined state policy. One of the goals of these efforts was to help determine the precise nature and extent of German influence in Turkey—not just in the government and the army, but among the population as well. Ever since Britain had recognized the German threat in the early part of the century, British intelligence had been carefully monitoring German activity in the Ottoman Empire. But the notion that Britain might have to fight a Turco-German alliance in the near future meant that comparisons of German and British influence amongst the populace would give planners an indication of how far military operations in Turkish territory might be aided or hindered by the local population. Thus, after 1909 British attention shifted from Asia Minor and began to focus more on the Arabian Peninsula, the Persian Gulf, and Mesopotamia. With the explosion of the Eastern Question on the horizon, the British needed to know not just whether local populations would be friendly or hostile, but whether, and how far, Bedouin tribes could be relied upon to act as a fifth column against Turkish armies. In the aftermath of the Taba Affair, considerations of plans for military and naval operations against Turkey mostly centred on the defence of Suez and Egypt, and operations at Gallipoli. However, a note by the Director of Military Operations (DMO) on a 1910 War Office paper entitled “Proposed Attack on Syria” perceptively suggested that a Gallipoli operation was problematic. The DMO suggested that with the diplomatic “crisis” of the Taba Affair at an end, and with military and naval operations against the Ottoman Empire not likely to be required in the near future, Britain might take advantage of the breathing space to re-evaluate the feasibility of an attack on Syria.<sup>383</sup> A landing of British troops on the Syrian coast in wartime might serve to spark

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<sup>383</sup> “Proposed Attack on Syria,” 1906, WO 106/42/C3/14.

an uprising among the discontented elements of the population. The rising might be deployed as a fifth column against Turkish forces. As British planners took note of such proposals, the co-ordination of a British assault with an Arab rebellion began to be considered as a viable wartime option.

## II. The Turco-German Problem

A military coup deposed Sultan Abdul Hamid II in 1909, replacing him with his brother, who ruled as Mehmet V until his death in July 1918. The fall of Abdul Hamid saw the Germans temporarily out of favour at Constantinople. But the refusal of France and Britain to grant loans to Turkey pushed the Ottoman Empire into the arms of the Kaiser.<sup>384</sup> Germany earned further goodwill during the 1911-1912 war between Italy and Turkey. Turkish public opinion was troubled that British neutrality prevented the passage through the Suez Canal of men, arms, and ammunition. By contrast, Austria-Hungary and Germany, Italy's Triple Alliance partners, had no qualms about supplying Turkey with military hardware.<sup>385</sup>

The growing friendliness between Turkey and Germany increased Britain's alarm about the relationship between the Turkish and German armies. British concern over the appointment of Field Marshal Baron von der Goltz has been discussed previously; but the continued exchange of Turkish and German officers bred further suspicion and rumour about the exact nature of the Turco-German relationship. In 1911 Britain's military attaché reported that about twenty Turkish officers went to Germany for study in 1910,

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<sup>384</sup> W.O. Henderson, "German Economic Penetration of the Near East, 1870-1914," *Economic History Review* 18, 1-2 (1948), 63.

<sup>385</sup> "Annual Report on Turkey for 1911," Lowther to FO, 31 January 1912, FO 424/250.

along with another ten or so who were sent to France.<sup>386</sup> In 1913, the attaché reported on a number of German officers serving with the Turkish army, many of whom came to Turkey when the Italian war broke out in the hope of gaining war experience. It was noteworthy, reported the attaché, that the German government had done nothing to discourage this.<sup>387</sup> The action fed British fears of Germany's aggressive and militaristic designs. The Turkish army was actually sending officers abroad as part of a larger program of reform, but this general development seemed to matter less to the British than that most Turkish officers went to Germany. It was far less important to Britain that any Turkish officers went to France at all than the fact that several others went to Germany to study.

In one sense, British concerns were disingenuous and inconsistent. Turkey was merely seeking the best available assistance for its military development. Britain's apparent lack of concern over the 1913 Liman von Sanders affair, in which a German general was sent to head a reinforced German military mission, suggests that the British were selective about the things that concerned them. The British were far less upset by the appointment than were the Russians, whose protests ultimately resulted in von Sanders being relieved of his command role.<sup>388</sup> And the Germans might well have pointed out in the face of British and Russian complaints that the Turks were in the

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<sup>386</sup> Report on the Turkish Army for 1910, 16 January 1911, FO 195/2386.

<sup>387</sup> Lowther to FO, 20 February 1913, FO 424/242.

<sup>388</sup> David Stevenson, *Cataclysm: The First World War as Political Tragedy* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 20. Russia's principal objection laid in von Sanders' appointment to a command post, specifically the command of the Ottoman I corps in Constantinople, rather than to an advisory role. The spectre of a German officer of such senior rank commanding the Straits produced in Russia the belief that the mission served to merely turn the Turkish army into an instrument of German policy. Exacerbating the situation, von Sanders' appointment to Constantinople had been accompanied by the usual bombast from Kaiser Wilhelm II, who urged the general to "Germanize" the Turkish army in order to make it a useful counterweight to Russian power. Hew Strachan, *The First World War, Vol. 1: To Arms* (Oxford: University Press, 2001), 60; Hew Strachan, *The First World War: A New Illustrated History* (London: Pocket Books, 2003), 100.

practice of employing British naval officers to assist in the reforming of the Turkish navy.

The Turkish fleet itself was of little interest to the British. A 1904 report from the naval attaché, Capt. Mark Kerr, to Sir Nicholas O'Connor declared the Turkish fleet practically non-existent; such was its state of disrepair.<sup>389</sup> However, the inherent difficulties in Britain's Turkish policy manifested themselves even in what appeared to be a simple, technical, mission. The Turks had declared that Russia was their most likely enemy, and that the Russian fleet was therefore the standard for the Turkish navy. The British found themselves in the position of having sent an admiral and officers to assist in the formation and training of a fleet which viewed Russia, with whom Britain was officially on friendly terms, as its primary opponent.<sup>390</sup> Furthermore, a modern, efficient Turkish fleet was of no particular benefit to Britain's Mediterranean policy. In fact, visits by Turkish warships to British ports at Alexandria, in the Persian Gulf, or even at Bombay, might prove politically embarrassing. The British were thus faced with a complicated situation. Their current assistance to the Turkish navy was a potential source of friction with the Russians, who might view the British naval mission as actively assisting the Turkish navy to prepare for a successful war against Russia's Black Sea fleet. The British, however, feared the ramifications of abandoning the mission altogether.

Rear Admiral Arthur H. Limpus, the officer in charge of the British naval mission to Turkey, was due to have his contract expire at the end of April 1914. Limpus reported his general impression that the Turks expected him to stay beyond that time, and that if he

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<sup>389</sup> Kerr to O'Connor, 21 July 1904, FO 195/2178.

<sup>390</sup> Sir L. Mallet to FO, 21 January 1914, FO 424/251.

left, they were likely to request other British naval officers. If Great Britain refused to continue its assistance to the Turkish navy on the ground that such a relationship was detrimental to Anglo-Russian friendship, Limpus thought it highly probable that the Germans would attempt to secure the position for their own naval officers, and that the Turks would likely acquiesce. A decision not to renew the British mission would send a message to the Porte that Britain was no longer interested in maintaining the integrity and independence of Turkey. Such a message, British diplomatists though, was likely to throw the Turks completely into the arms of the Triple Alliance. The influence of Germany was already strong because of the number of Turkish officers who had spent time in that country.<sup>391</sup> The German problem in Turkey was therefore one of damage control, and the Limpus mission was renewed.<sup>392</sup> The decision suggested that Britain had resigned itself to a Turco-German alliance well before the war. The British were forced to pursue policies that were potentially harmful to its relationships with other Great Powers but which were necessary to limit German influence, as the naval mission showed.

With war on the horizon it was important not just to be able to assess German influence in the Turkish army, but also to gauge Germany's influence with Turkish public opinion. At least as important to Britain as the political and military influence of Germany at Constantinople was the growth of German commercial influence. For many years, Great Britain was the only power with trade interests in Lower Mesopotamia, though it was not a significant percentage of Britain's overall trade balance. However, the advent of the Baghdad Railway meant that German trade interests would rapidly

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<sup>391</sup> Ibid.

<sup>392</sup> Heller, "Sir Louis Mallet," 16. The British naval mission was withdrawn over the incident surrounding the *Goeben* and the *Breslau* in September 1914.

increase and offer a pretext on which to advance political claims.<sup>393</sup> Ninety-five per cent of the shipping in the Shatt al-Arab was in British hands, and half of Mesopotamia's import-export trade went to or from British possessions.<sup>394</sup> Although the Baghdad Railway made slow progress, the British were alarmed at the spread of German influence throughout the regions it traversed. The line ran through places where English commercial houses were conspicuously absent, and the Christian population of Turkish Arabia looked to young German reserve officers (*Unteroffiziere*) connected with the railway for protection against Bedouin raiders.<sup>395</sup>

Elsewhere, construction along the railway appeared a harbinger of German influence. At Jerablus (Carchemish) a railway station was being built out of all proportion to the size and commercial importance of the town. The British consul at Aleppo reported that a German engineer had claimed that the railway was just a preparation for Germany's incursion into the region.<sup>396</sup> That a mere railway engineer would make such a statement seemed indicative to British officials that some larger policy or plan was at work. In the vilayet of Adana, the British vice-consul there noted the growing influence of the Baghdad Railway Company. They put on a good show, reported Vice-Consul E.C. Rawlins, "a fact which goes a long way towards producing an impression on the Oriental mind." The company's offices were imposing structures and on the occasion of the sultan's birthday they were the best-decorated buildings in town.

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<sup>393</sup> *A Strategical Study of the Persian Gulf*, General Staff, India, 1913, IOR/L/MIL/17/15/27. This is also available in *A Collection of First World War Military Handbooks of Arabia, 1913-1917*, vol. 1, *A Strategical Study of Persia and the Persian Gulf, 1913* and *Military Report on Aden Protectorate, 1915* (Farnham Common, Buckinghamshire, England: Archive Editions, 1988).

<sup>394</sup> Henry Wilson, DMO, to Field Marshal Sir William Nicholson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS), 26 April 1911, WO 106/43.

<sup>395</sup> "Annual Report on Turkey for 1910," Lowther to Grey, 14 February 1911, FO 195/2363. Also in FO 242/250.

<sup>396</sup> Lowther to FO, 10 November 1911, FO 424/233.

Other details—for example, the very expensive house occupied by the company’s director and carriages used by company employees—added to the impression of power and influence.<sup>397</sup> In his Annual Report for 1913, Sir Gerald Lowther wrote to the Foreign Office:

German commercial influence in Turkey is undoubtedly growing. It is impossible for a new-comer in Constantinople not to be struck by the importance of German commercial enterprise. The imposing railway terminus at Haidar Pasha, German shops, German electric lighting companies, tramways and power stations, all of recent growth, show the readiness with which German capital seeks an outlet in this country ... The direct gain to Germany is perhaps small, but, in addition to being a source of political influence, indirectly, through the placing of orders for railway materials, the commercial profits are considerable.<sup>398</sup>

This unmistakable accretion of German influence in the Ottoman Empire deepened British fears of an explosion of the Eastern Question. General talk in Britain of a war with Germany was commonplace, and had been for some years.<sup>399</sup> The Turco-German relationship produced fears of a formal military alliance: an eventual war with Germany now seemed certain, and it appeared increasingly likely that Turkey would enter the fray on the side of the Central Powers.

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<sup>397</sup> Lowther to FO, 19 July 1910, FO 424/224.

<sup>398</sup> “Annual Report on Turkey for 1913,” Lowther to Grey, 4 December 1914, FO 424/250.

<sup>399</sup> See Christopher Andrew, *Secret Service: The Making of the British Intelligence Community* (London: Heinemann, 1985), chapter 1, and Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism, 1860-1914* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1980), chapter 14.

### III. Britain, Turkey and the Arabs

Whereas mapping and information about the state of the Turkish army had long been features of British intelligence work in the Ottoman Empire, the British now turned their attention more seriously to the idea of using Arab allies as a fifth column. Part of the impetus for this idea came from the longstanding hostility that existed between Arabs and Turks. The Turkish sultan commanded the obedience of Arabs by virtue of being their temporal ruler and also their spiritual ruler, through the sultan's claim to the Caliphate of Sunni Islam. Neither claim had ever been fully accepted by the Bedouin tribes. Relations between the Turks and their Arab subjects had been steadily deteriorating for several decades. By 1911, Capt. William Henry Irvine Shakespear, the political agent at Kuwait, was able to write that virtually all Bedouin tribes in Arabia despised the Turks. The recent war against Italy had led to the collapse of Turkish prestige. Arab contempt for the Turks was only increased by the exposure of alleged Turkish victories as falsehoods, propagated by the government to disguise its own failures.<sup>400</sup> Unrest and talk of Arab emancipation from the Turkish yoke, Shakespear claimed, was widespread and not merely confined to Nejd in Central Arabia. Such talk was becoming increasingly common in Syria, Beirut, Basra, and Baghdad. The Arabs' dissatisfaction with Turkish rule led them to imagine that every foreigner they encountered was part of the advance guard of an invasion. This naturally bred rumour and suspicion and did nothing to improve Anglo-Turkish relations.

Illustrating how such rumours spread, John Gordon Lorimer – political resident in Arabia, consul-general at Baghdad and chief author of the Persian Gulf *Gazetteer* –

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<sup>400</sup> Captain Shakespear to Sir Percy Cox, Bushire, 8 April 1911, IOR/R/15/5/27.

reported being approached by a local sheikh who asked, confidentially, when the English were coming to take over the country.<sup>401</sup> Lorimer replied that Britain had no interest in acquiring parts of the Turkish Empire. In his report of the incident to the Foreign Office in London, Lorimer expressed his concern about the problems such encounters could potentially create. Questions like the one posed to him were common, he noted. Whereas government officials knew well how to deal with these situations, travellers and private individuals might create incidents by sympathizing with Arab grievances. Furthermore, such conversations were bound eventually to reach Turkish ears, perhaps in garbled form. Lorimer spelled out the problem clearly for the British ambassador:

The Turks still show considerable suspicion ... of British travellers in their country; but their anxiety will appear only natural if we reflect for a moment how our own officers in the districts of the north-west frontier of India would regard a Turk, who having no ostensible business there, should tour among the Pathan tribes and appear to be ingratiating himself with them.<sup>402</sup>

Lorimer urged the ambassador to warn British travellers through Turkey against being drawn into conversations that appeared to censure Turkish authority.

Anti-Turkish sentiments were not limited to the Bedouin. Sir Gerald Lowther reported in 1911 that the Turkish deputy in the Ottoman Chamber for Sana'a, Yemen, spoke to him about Arab preference for English over Turkish rule. The deputy complained that things had not improved since the 1908 Young Turk Revolution, and that Turkey was now in the pay of Germany. The Baghdad Railway and the Hejaz Railway essentially hemmed in the Arabian Peninsula, and the deputy expressed

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<sup>401</sup> Lowther to FO, 23 March 1910, FO 424/222.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid.

concerns about possible German interference in Arab life. Arabs, he said, had done well elsewhere under English rule, which he described as egalitarian and just, and he expressed hope that if Turkish power collapsed, Britain would champion the cause of the Arabs.<sup>403</sup> Lowther responded that Britain and Turkey were friends and that His Majesty's Government was not prepared to enter into any disputes between Turkish subjects and Constantinople. Arab complaints about German intrusion did little to assuage British fears of a Turco-German alliance. The complaints did, however, raise hope that the Bedouin could be mobilized in Britain's interests.

Turco-Arab relations continued to erode in the years following Turkey's disastrous performance in the Balkan Wars. As they did so, Turkey's hold on the Arabian parts of its empire became even more tenuous. The adventurer and amateur archaeologist Gertrude Bell, travelling through Central Arabia to the Shammar capital of Hail in 1914, wrote in her diary for 28 March 1914, "The country is entirely out of hand, the reins of government were all dropped during the war (nor held very firmly before) the roads are not safe, trade decadent, the whole thing has gone to ruin. It is dreadful."<sup>404</sup> So tenuous had Turkey's hold on Arabia become that the old policy of playing Arab sheikhs off against each other was unlikely to work any longer. Shakespear informed the India Office in 1914 that the Turks would no longer be able to maintain even a shadow of sovereignty in Arabia and that their methods of rule were bound to invite disaster: "should matters ... come to a head the probable result will be a combination of all the Arab tribes, the expulsion of Turkish troops from the Hedjaz, Yemen and Asir, and the establishment of

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<sup>403</sup> Lowther to FO, 25 January 1911, FO 424/226.

<sup>404</sup> "Diary of a Trip to Hayyil, 1914," Gertrude Bell Collection, GB165-0023, MECA; Gertrude Bell Archive, Newcastle University Library, <http://www.gerty.ncl.ac.uk/diaries.php?year=1914&month=1#> Presumably Bell refers here to the Italo-Turkish War, or perhaps the Balkan conflicts.

an independent Arabia with a loose form of confederations.”<sup>405</sup> Admittedly, wrote Shakespear, such prophecies were rash, but he had heard the subject discussed so often in Arabia, by so many widely separated chiefs, that it could no longer merely be dismissed as fantasy.

Turco-Arab hostility offered the British excellent opportunities for gauging the strength and fighting ability of the Turkish army and, at the same time, for gathering information on the politics of Central Arabia. But the shift in British intelligence activity after 1906 to a more military footing created administrative and policy problems. While war planning against Turkey required good intelligence, intelligence collection can only proceed effectively if it is given clear directives. The somewhat scattered nature of British intelligence in Turkish Arabia was due in part to Great Britain’s ambivalent Turkish policy. General Sir Henry Wilson, Director of Military Operations at the War Office, under whose authority the Intelligence Division fell, complained that he could not draw up satisfactory plans for a war against Turkey because the Foreign Office had not given him a useful political scenario to consider.<sup>406</sup>

Wilson’s complaint was somewhat disingenuous in view of the CID’s earlier consideration of a possible attack on Syria. In fact the Foreign Office had expressed a verbal desire for a paper that would consider local actions and coercive measures the British could take against Turkey in the Persian Gulf. The prescribed scenario was not to include German intervention, but was to bear in mind that British action might lead to a formal war with Turkish Arabia. In reality it was highly unlikely that such a conflict would confine itself to the two principal belligerents, or that it could be contained within

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<sup>405</sup> Captain Shakespear to IO, 26 June 1914, IOR/R/15/5/27.

<sup>406</sup> Henry Wilson, DMO, to CIGS, 26 April 1911, WO 106/43.

the geographical boundaries of Asiatic Turkey. But Wilson complained that the poor parameters he had been given meant that he could only plan defensive actions.

Opinion in the War Office favoured exerting pressure on Turkey for British gain. Wilson wrote to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff in April 1911 that no better opportunity to pressure Turkey was likely to exist than at the present time. The Turkish army was in the process of being reorganized and large-scale operations were practically out of the question because of the disruption they would bring to the whole scheme. Moreover, a revolt in Albania and a rebellion in Yemen were keeping tens of thousands of Turkish troops tied up there. The Druzes of Hauran and other Arab tribes in Syria or in Lower Mesopotamia were in a state of unrest and could be prodded into open revolt relatively easily.<sup>407</sup> The passage of time, Wilson wrote, would only bring about the completion of the army's reorganization and Turkey's ability to reassert its sovereignty in places of interest to Britain. Wilson's prediction was belied by events: the war with Italy and then the Balkan Wars sapped Turkey of its ability to reassert sovereignty in a forceful manner. But the more important point is that by 1911 British operatives on the scene were substantially more knowledgeable about intra-Turkish conflicts than they had been only a few years earlier.

Despite the problems attending conversations like the one reported by Lorimer, British relations with Arab notables provided an important source of information about the Turkish army and Turco-Arab relations. These were not formal or official relationships. Indeed, in the case of Ibn Saud, the British eschewed formal relations with him as long as possible in order to avoid offending the Turks. However, informal relationships were politically valuable and provided useful intelligence on the state of

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<sup>407</sup> Ibid.

Turkish authority. The relationship with Ibn Saud was principally a personal, private, relationship between the Arab chieftain and Captain Shakespear, the political agent in Kuwait.<sup>408</sup> During a meeting with Ibn Saud in the spring of 1913, the former allegedly told Shakespear that the time was ripe to evict the Turks from parts of Arabia and the Persian Gulf, namely Hasa and Katif on the coast between Kuwait and Qatar. Hasa and Katif had been under the rule of the Emirs of Nejd until the Turks conquered the territories in the 1870s. Ibn Saud believed the coastal territories to be his ancestral lands, and resented their occupation by Ottoman forces. The Wahhabi emir declared that Turkey's recent wars had revealed a disastrous military performance, the army was broken, the empire's finances crippled, and Arabs in Iraq and Syria were all demanding reforms and self-government.<sup>409</sup> These sentiments were not expressed specifically for his benefit, Shakespear reported; rather, they were generally held throughout Central Arabia. The meeting had the potential to be very uncomfortable for the British. Efforts to improve Anglo-Turkish relations and forestall German influence at Constantinople could be irreparably damaged by the appearance of collusion in Ibn Saud's plans. However a firm rebuff to Ibn Saud at the moment of his ascension in Arabian politics could prejudice British interests in the Persian Gulf further down the road. According to Major A.P. Trevor, the political agent at Bahrain who accompanied Shakespear to the meeting,

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<sup>408</sup> H.V.F. Winstone in *Captain Shakespear: A Portrait* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1976), 18, claims that Shakespear and Ibn Saud were "the closest of friends." Given Ibn Saud's status as an important Arab chief, of an Islamic sect that tended to eschew foreigners and unbelievers, and Shakespear's position as a low ranking political officer of the Government of India, it seems unlikely that deep fraternal bonds existed between the two men. Although Shakespear's colleague Major A.P. Trevor observed a genuine friendship, Shakespear only met Ibn Saud on a handful of occasions, and while some of the meetings lasted several days, Winstone's claim seems to exaggerate the issue somewhat.

<sup>409</sup> Captain Shakespear to Cox, 15 May 1913, IOR/R/15/5/27.

it was largely due to Shakespear's personal relationship with Ibn Saud that the discussions were "friendly and cordial," rather than awkward and acrimonious.<sup>410</sup>

The constant state of unrest or outright rebellion in Yemen offered the British an opportunity to gauge the relative fighting qualities of the Turkish army and its Arab opponents. Good, timely, information from the interior of Yemen, however, was difficult to obtain, in part due to the lawlessness of the country. Information on Turkish forces in Yemen was easier to come by than information on Arab tribesmen, partly because Turkish forces were often concentrated on the coast or in towns and partly because information on forces dispatched to Yemen could be gained from other parts of the empire. Most of the information Britain did acquire from the interior of Yemen came from desert rumour or from the few officers who were able to travel to the region personally. In late 1909 and early 1910 one such officer, Capt. A.B. Eckford of the Central India Horse, offered useful observations about the Turkish garrison in Yemen. At that time, Eckford estimated that the Turkish force present in the country numbered approximately 35,000, mostly concentrated in urban centres like Sana'a or along the coast. The Turkish troops in Yemen were armed, Eckford noted, with Krupp artillery and German manufactured small arms.<sup>411</sup> Although the contracts between the Turkish army and German industry were a matter of public knowledge, the use of German materiel in Yemen seemed only to confirm British fears of German influence.

Rebellions in Yemen in 1910 and 1911 demonstrated the continuing volatility of the region. Reinforcements were dispatched to Yemen in February 1911, but the advance

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<sup>410</sup> Maj. A.P. Trevor to Cox, 20 December 1913, IOR/R/15/5/27.

<sup>411</sup> "Report by Captain Eckford respecting Journey in the Yemen," 2 January 1910, FO 424/222.

was slow and the rebellion far from suppressed as late as May 1911.<sup>412</sup> Reports from Yemen observed that the Arabs performed well when they were on the defensive, fighting irregular warfare, but were incapable of undertaking offensive operations by themselves. During the course of the rebellion, British intelligence was obtained chiefly from Arab sources, the accuracy of which was impossible to verify, but it was the only information available.<sup>413</sup>

The rebellions in Yemen taught the British several things. First, as DMO Sir Henry Wilson pointed out, in any war in which Turkey was involved, the constant drain on Turkish manpower and resources from operations in Yemen had to be taken into account. Second, the apparently co-ordinated uprisings by rival groups in Yemen, taken in combination with Ibn Saud's comments to Shakespear, showed a marked and steady deterioration in Turco-Arab relations. The suggestion that Arabs could be propelled into rebellion at least for their own cause, if not for Britain's interests, and the development of informal relationships with Ibn Saud, meant that the possibility to turn a rebellion into a wider uprising was emerging. Even if the British had not yet elevated the idea to the level of policy or planning, the idea that a Pan-Arab uprising could prove useful in the event of war with Turkey was gaining currency. Captain Eckford's report suggested that Arab irregulars could be recruited to fight the Turks by an invading power for small sums of money. Such a force would be useful, as the Arabs in Yemen were "fine mountaineers and often good fighters" who thoroughly detested the Turks.<sup>414</sup> The situation between Turkey and its Arab subjects was so tenuous, a 1910 CID paper noted, that the mere act

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<sup>412</sup> Note by Intelligence Department, War Office, Cairo, 15 May 1911, FO 424/227; "Annual Report on Turkey for 1911," Lowther to Grey, February 1912, FO 424/250.

<sup>413</sup> Sir Milne Cheetham to Lowther, 15 August 1911, FO 195/2378.

<sup>414</sup> "Report by Captain Eckford respecting Journey in the Yemen," 2 January 1910, FO 424/222.

of landing a British force in Syria might serve as a signal to the Druze, Maronite, and Arab populations to rise up against the Turks. The paper expressed hope that the Druze, a particularly “warlike” race, would attack the Hejaz Railway, hindering Ottoman efforts to concentrate their forces.<sup>415</sup> Considering the possibility that pan-Islamic feeling might outweigh the Syrian Arab’s hatred of the Turks, the paper suggested that Britain take extra measures to cast any action as being directed against Turkish authority, rather than against the Islamic faith. Under such circumstances, the Syrian Arabs might be won over to active resistance against the Turks. Third and lastly, the performance of Arab rebels in Yemen confirmed what British observers had already noted, that the Arabs were incapable of fighting set-piece battles or of mounting offensive operations.

#### **IV. The Problem of Ibn Saud**

Deteriorating Turco-Arab relations and the potential of using Arabs as a fifth column in a conflict with Turkey made intelligence about Arabian affairs increasingly important. Yet accurate intelligence about Arabia, as with news about Yemen, was difficult to obtain. As elsewhere, the British relied on a combination of official and unofficial sources to obtain information, and intelligence efforts from 1910 to the outbreak of war displayed more systematic interdepartmental co-operation. All three of the Foreign Office, the War Office, and the Government of India wanted intelligence of Arabian politics for their own purposes: the Foreign Office with an eye to the Eastern Question and its international implications; the War Office to plan better for possible military operations in the theatre; and the Government of India for the protection of its own borders. Britons occupying

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<sup>415</sup> “Proposed Attack on Syria,” 1910, WO 106/42/C3/14.

official positions as residents or agents held a unique place between London and India. While technically under the authority of the Government of India, they also liaised and took instruction from the Foreign Office, usually via the embassy at Constantinople. These agents were the chief conduits of intelligence from travellers or from private trips by officers, to the Foreign Office and to India. In other cases, as in the cases of Shakespear and Lorimer, they performed map work and intelligence gathering missions themselves.

Of particular note were journeys by Lt. Gerard Leachman, in 1910 and 1912. In 1910, Leachman circumvented all official attempts to prevent him leaving his regiment in India and entered Arabia as a private citizen. He travelled with Ibn Rashid's men for a time, and sent irregular reports to Lorimer, the political resident in Arabia, at Baghdad. In a letter to Shakespear in March 1910, Lorimer advised the political agent at Kuwait to be on the lookout for Leachman, who he said might be moving through Shakespear's area. Leachman was travelling for pleasure, Lorimer wrote, and he was not part of any official mission.<sup>416</sup> Leachman seemed unconcerned about Turkish knowledge of his journey and appeared to make no significant efforts to maintain secrecy. However, the presence of a British officer in a politically turbulent part of the Ottoman Empire certainly raised Turkish suspicions. The vali (governor) of the Turkish province of Basra broached the subject with the British consul there, F.E. Crowe, who replied that Leachman was merely "an English dervish studying botany," who should be treated civilly and sent on his

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<sup>416</sup> Lorimer to Shakespear, 21 March 1910, IOR/R/15/5/25. Winstone suggests that Leachman had sanction from the Intelligence Division in London for his activities. Winstone, *The Illicit Adventure: the story of political and military intelligence in the Middle East from 1898 to 1926* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982), 50.

way.<sup>417</sup> British authorities were apparently eager to profit from Leachman's efforts but they clearly wanted to avoid any political entanglements that might arise from an official acknowledgement of his presence in Arabia.

The news Leachman sent to Baghdad chiefly concerned the ebb and flow of the quarrel between Ibn Saud and Ibn Rashid for control of Central Arabia.<sup>418</sup> The British were interested in monitoring the political situation in Central Arabia for two reasons. First, a chief who consolidated his power in Central Arabia could potentially threaten British interests along the Persian Gulf littoral at Kuwait, Bahrain or Oman. Second, in the context of Turco-Arab tension, a powerful Central Arabian chief might be able to rally enough support to spark a rebellion against Turkish rule. Leachman, riding with Ibn Rashid's men, was able to provide independent information from the Rashid camp that was useful to corroborate or cross-check information obtained by Shakespear from the Saudi camp. Shakespear's position as political agent at Kuwait, where Sheikh Mubarak was Ibn Saud's ally and patron, and his personal relationship with Ibn Saud, gave him unprecedented access to information about desert affairs.

By Shakespear's own admission, however, it was difficult to verify the accuracy of the intelligence he received if he had not witnessed events first-hand.<sup>419</sup> He noted that retreats were often reported as victories, major expeditions reported as minor raiding parties, and weakness generally reported as strength. On at least one occasion, Sheikh Mubarak's claim of a stunning victory was greeted with scepticism by Shakespear, who wrote to Lorimer that the "few casualties on the Koweit side show that the affair, in spite

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<sup>417</sup> Winstone, *Shakespear*, 92.

<sup>418</sup> "Extract from Diary No. 11 of the Kuwait Political Agency for the week ending 16<sup>th</sup> March 1910," IOR/R/15/5/25.

<sup>419</sup> Winstone, *Shakespear*, 99.

of Sheikh Mubarak's somewhat ingenious explanation, was undoubtedly a disgraceful flight."<sup>420</sup> On another occasion differences between Shakespear's description of what turned out to be a major military engagement, in which Ibn Saud was worsted, and Mubarak's description, reflected the difficulty even someone in his position had gathering accurate intelligence. Sheikh Mubarak described the operation as a minor "punitive" expedition, but a raid of that type, Shakespear observed, would require only a fraction of the men Mubarak and Ibn Saud had assembled for the purpose.<sup>421</sup> Despite Shakespear's personal friendships with both Mubarak and Ibn Saud, good political intelligence often remained elusive.

If Shakespear and others had difficulty obtaining credible information about Arab affairs, despite their informal relationships with important sources, information on the relationship between the Turkish authorities and important Arab chieftains, particularly Ibn Saud, was easier to come by. Writing to Sir Percy Cox, political resident in the Persian Gulf, in 1913, Shakespear reported the substance of a meeting with Ibn Saud. The latter had informed Shakespear that the Turks were suspicious that an agreement of some kind actually existed between himself and the British government: as a result they were constantly pressuring him to declare his loyalty to the Sultan.<sup>422</sup> Ibn Saud made one of many pleas for British assistance, claiming that a public understanding with the British government, no matter how nebulous, would relieve him of the Turkish menace. Similar desires for a relationship with Great Britain had been expressed to Shakespear as early as 1911.<sup>423</sup> Without a relationship with Britain to act as a deterrent, the emir complained, he

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<sup>420</sup> Shakespear to Cox, 30 March 1910, IOR/R/15/5/25.

<sup>421</sup> Shakespear to Major A.P. Trevor, 9 March 1910, in IO to FO, 9 May 1910, FO 424/223.

<sup>422</sup> Shakespear to Cox, 8 April 1911, IOR/R/15/5/27.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid.

would always be subject to intrigue. Alliances with other Arab sheikhs would not last forever, and though he felt confident he could defend his territory against Ibn Rashid, he feared the dispatch of a sizeable Turkish expedition to Central Arabia.<sup>424</sup>

Ibn Saud also revealed to Shakespear his intention to expel the small Turkish garrisons from the territories of Hasa and Qatif on the Persian Gulf coast. The Turks had annexed the territories in the 1870s, and Ibn Saud regarded them as his own.<sup>425</sup> A direct attack on Turkish troops, Ibn Saud declared, was certain to invite reprisals and possibly the degeneration of the situation into a small war, similar to the one in Yemen. The emir wished to know what Britain's attitude to the situation would be. He expressed the hope that he might be able to count on His Majesty's Government for assistance if the time came. Shakespear's response reiterated Britain's official policy of good relations with the Ottoman Empire and its Arabian policy established in 1902 by Sir Nicholas O'Connor: "No entanglement with Wahhabis."<sup>426</sup> He told Ibn Saud that no help could be expected, and that since Great Britain regarded the Turks as the legitimate rulers of Hasa and Qatif, such an undertaking could hardly be viewed with sympathy. Privately, however, Shakespear had reservations. He recognized Ibn Saud as the rising star of Arabia, and believed that the British government should take advantage of the opportunity that now presented itself. Ibn Saud was currently well disposed towards Great Britain; there might come a time when this was not the case.

Almost immediately after Shakespear's meeting with Ibn Saud in early April 1913, the latter made good on his threat to move against Turkish troops on the Gulf coast. The

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<sup>424</sup> Shakespear to Cox, 15 May 1913, IOR/R/15/5/27.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid. and James Onley, *The Arabian Frontier of the British Raj: Merchants, Rulers and the British in the Nineteenth-Century Gulf* (Oxford: University Press, 2007), 37.

<sup>426</sup> Winstone, *The Illicit Adventure*, 15.

attack was executed with suddenness and ease: it was virtually bloodless, and the Turkish garrison at Hofhuf surrendered within a few hours. This development caught even Ibn Saud's allies by surprise and presented Britain with an awkward *fait accompli* in Arabia. While both the Home Government and the Government of India wished to preserve good relations with Turkey by not entering into relations with Ibn Saud, their hands had now been forced. Sir Percy Cox stated the obvious when he wrote that it was awkward, from the point of view of Anglo-Turkish relations, that Ibn Saud had made his move so soon after his meeting with Shakespear.<sup>427</sup> It might appear to Turkish eyes as though Ibn Saud had received some encouragement from Great Britain in his decision to act. Clearly, the moment had been propitious for Ibn Saud, and both the British and the Turks now had to face new practicalities.<sup>428</sup>

Lorimer echoed Cox's sentiments in his own correspondence with the Government of India in January 1914. Lorimer noted that, on the one hand, Great Britain recognized the province of Hasa, which Ibn Saud presently ruled independently, as belonging to Turkey. Despite the practical difficulties of a Turkish relief expedition to the Persian Gulf, it would be imprudent, he wrote, to behave as though Ibn Saud's occupation were more than temporary. Recognition of Turkish suzerainty on the Gulf coast had been the substance of an Anglo-Turkish agreement signed in July 1913.<sup>429</sup> On the other hand, Lorimer wrote, Great Britain could hardly treat Hasa as politically derelict, bereft of an administrative head with whom they could deal in matters pertaining to British subjects and interests, especially when a *de facto* ruler existed. Indeed, Ibn Saud's position as the most powerful of all local rulers on the Persian Gulf coast made British relations with

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<sup>427</sup> Cox to Foreign Secretary, Government of India, 26 May 1913, IOR/R/15/5/27.

<sup>428</sup> "Memorandum on British Commitments to Bin Saud," n.d., FO 882/9.

<sup>429</sup> Lorimer to Foreign Department, Government of India, 4 January 1914, IOR/R/15/5/27.

him inevitable. The time was perhaps ripe to take advantage of Ibn Saud's goodwill toward the British and post a native agent there to liaise between the political agent at Bahrain (the closest British political official) and Ibn Saud. This would avoid over-committing to Ibn Saud and angering the Turks should they be successful in recapturing the area. At the same time, should a British agent be well entrenched in Hasa, it would be very difficult for the Turks to evict him if they did reclaim the province.

Ultimately, the advice of the experts was ignored. No agent was placed in Hasa, and no formal relationships were established with Ibn Saud. Men like Shakespear – intelligence agents possessed of knowledge of local affairs and personal relationships with important personages – had their advice disregarded by their political masters, who saw the big picture but failed to see how the details of tribal politics in Central Arabia related to larger issues like the Eastern Question. The British ambassador, Sir Louis Mallet, preferred to maintain a policy of “wait and see.”<sup>430</sup> Eventually, Mallet believed, the Ottoman Empire would crumble and British relations with Ibn Saud would develop naturally. There was no point in endangering British relations with the Ottoman Empire, he said, for something that was inevitable. Mallet's position was a logical one, but it risked the possibility of Ibn Saud's resenting the British for many years to come.

This system of informal and formal agents – officers like Leachman acting on their own initiative, and officers like Shakespear in official posts – allowed the British to monitor events with a reasonable degree of accuracy despite some of the earlier noted problems. Even Shakespear did not rely exclusively on his official position to gather intelligence but made active use of personal and unofficial relationships in order to pass as complete a picture of events as possible to his political superiors. Although the British

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<sup>430</sup> Heller, *British Policy*, 130.

were uneasy about embracing adventurers such as Leachman or Gertrude Bell, they clearly benefited from the practice. Lorimer wrote to Shakespear in March 1910 asking for news of Central Arabia. He offered to send Shakespear information in exchange, that is, he offered to trade intelligence.<sup>431</sup> Lorimer's letter reveals that it was the active aim of the Government of India, more than the aim of the Foreign Office or the War Office, to set up intelligence networks around the Persian Gulf. This was only natural given that officials in Simla regarded Arabia and the Persian Gulf as part of India's imperial sphere, an attitude that was supported by the division of administrative responsibility between the Home Government and the Government of India.<sup>432</sup> Certainly, neither the Foreign Office nor the War Office were averse to benefiting from such an arrangement, and interdepartmental co-operation over the issue of intelligence had increased after the Taba Affair in 1906.

In 1913 Shakespear requested permission for leave to explore part of Central Arabia south of Riyadh: Ibn Saud had personally invited Shakespear in his capacity as a private individual, rather than as political agent.<sup>433</sup> The trip offered the chance to do some good intelligence work at his own expense and risk: Shakespear had been in touch with Francis Maunsell, who had asked him to check the accuracy of some newly printed maps of Northern and Central Arabia. He had also been in touch with the Intelligence Branch of the Indian Army, which had requested that he edit several articles on Kuwait and Central Arabia for the *Gazetteer of Arabia and the Persian Gulf*. The Indian Army Intelligence Branch was particularly anxious for Shakespear to check details of its own maps, which

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<sup>431</sup> Lorimer to Shakespear, 21 March 1910, IOR/R/15/5/25.

<sup>432</sup> This relationship is discussed in detail in Robert J. Blyth, *The Empire of the Raj: India, Eastern Africa and the Middle East, 1858-1947* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2003).

<sup>433</sup> Shakespear to Lorimer, 24 December 1913, IOR/R/15/5/55.

were compiled from a number of different sources and not from a single systematic survey.<sup>434</sup> Shakespear's informal friendship with Ibn Saud allowed him to monitor political developments in Central Arabia, maintain contact with a powerful Arab chieftain, and perform semi-official intelligence duties all at the same time. The personal relationships British agents on the ground formed with local contacts were a departure from more official intelligence activity and from the circles of policy making, which continued to view mapping and *Gazetteer* work as the principal means of gathering and compiling information. Some of this activity was officially sanctioned, but some intelligence activity was simply the result of opportunity.

### **V. Explorers, Maps and Secret Agents**

Increasingly, the cartographical work done in Turkish Arabia in the years before the outbreak of war focused on Arabia and the environs around the Persian Gulf. Certainly, fine-tuning of older maps of Anatolia and Asiatic Turkey continued, but older, detailed maps like the German cartographer Richard Kiepert's *Karte von Kleinasien* already existed for those parts of the Ottoman Empire. These were available fairly readily; in 1904 Francis Maunsell, then a Lieutenant-colonel and the British military attaché in Constantinople, obtained a German map of petroleum deposits in Mesopotamia, made for the German-owned Anatolian Railway Company. The map was one of Kiepert's, with the petroleum deposits drawn in overtop. Maunsell had acquired it from the draughtsman, who sometimes worked for the attaché. The map was forwarded on to the War Office,

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<sup>434</sup> Shakespear to Capt. C.M. Gibbon, 4 October 1909, IOR/R/15/5/55.

where it was to be copied.<sup>435</sup> The cartographic focus on Arabia made sense for a variety of reasons; it was relatively unexplored by Europeans, it was to a certain degree the land of the Old Testament, and it was the subject of a nineteenth-century fascination with the “exotic orient,” racialised impressions of which existed in the popular imagination.

In 1914 Gertrude Bell described the Central Arabian town of Hail, capital of Ibn Rashid and the Shammar tribes, as “fantastically oriental and medieval ... there are few places left wherein you can see the unadulterated East in its habit as it has lived for centuries and centuries – of these few Hayyil is one.”<sup>436</sup> A sense of exoticism, inspired by stories like the *One Thousand and One Nights*, two popular English versions of which appeared in the 1880s, helped fuel this fascination, as did a populist sense that Arabia remained one of the last few places that could be explored in the Victorian tradition of men like Dr. David Livingstone.<sup>437</sup> The reports, publications and public talks at places like the Royal Geographical Society in London of those who travelled through Turkish Arabia provided a gold mine from which military intelligence could glean valuable

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<sup>435</sup> Walter Townley to FO, 15 November 1904, FO 78/5337.

<sup>436</sup> Entry for 6 March, Diary of a Trip to Hayyil, 1914, Gertrude Bell Collection, GB165-0023, MECA; Gertrude Bell Archive, Newcastle University Library, <http://www.gerty.ncl.ac.uk/diaries.php?year=1914&month=1#>

Gertrude Bell, like T.E. Lawrence and Harry Pirie-Gordon, who worked for British intelligence in the Eastern Mediterranean during the war as a member of the Eastern Mediterranean Special Intelligence Bureau (EMSIB), first visited the Middle East to fulfil an interest in archaeology. In doing so they were the products of the late-Victorian/Edwardian fascination with the orient. Archaeologists suggest that the discipline was essentially “born” or rather “came of age” in the two decades between 1850 and 1870. The 1859 publication of Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species*, of course, provoked a wide-ranging discussion of the history of man. The history of archaeology after 1870, writes Glyn Daniel, is the history of the growth of an established discipline. Glyn Daniel, *The Origins and Growth of Archaeology* (London: Penguin, 1967), 126, 144. Debates over the origins and history of mankind naturally drew scholars and civilians alike to familiar works documenting the past, such as the Bible, or the works of Homer. This served as a springboard for excavations in the Eastern Mediterranean and throughout the Middle East.

<sup>437</sup> The 1877-1878 Russo-Turkish War and Britain’s annexation of Egypt in 1882 sparked vigorous European interest in the Middle East. Geoffrey P. Nash, *From Empire to Orient: Travellers to the Middle East, 1830-1926* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2005), 14. The development of archaeology as a discipline during this time, and the appearance of two new English translations of the *Arabian Nights* by John Payne (1882-1884) and Sir Richard Burton (1885-1888), suggest a European involvement with the Middle East that had a broader cultural appeal beyond its purely political aspects. Satia, *Spies in Arabia*, 72.

nuggets of information. The years 1912-1914 in particular witnessed determined efforts to explore unknown parts of Arabia by amateur adventurers and academics. Many of these individuals, like Gertrude Bell, D.G. Hogarth, and T.E. Lawrence, were well suited to the work. They were proficient in languages, had studied the history of the region, had spent time in the Middle East on academic study and archaeological expeditions, and were familiar with the customs and culture of the Arab world.

The army officer Gerard Leachman added 1,300 square miles of new survey to existing maps of Arabia in 1912 alone. In 1914 Shakespear and Gertrude Bell added nearly 1,500 square miles each, and the Danish explorer Barclay Raunkiær a further 700-800 square miles.<sup>438</sup> In addition to being Britain's chief link to Ibn Saud, Shakespear was responsible for most of Britain's knowledge of the Kuwaiti hinterland. He made a number of journeys around Kuwait between 1909 and 1914, and a trip across Central Arabia to Egypt in 1914.<sup>439</sup> As a result, routes that had hitherto been mainly the subject of conjecture could be drawn more or less correctly and many errors could be fixed.<sup>440</sup>

The cartographer and explorer Douglas Carruthers noted that Shakespear's 1913 journey

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<sup>438</sup> Douglas Carruthers, "Captain Shakespear's Last Journey," *The Geographical Journal* 59, 5 (May 1922): 324.

<sup>439</sup> Diaries for the Kuwaiti Journeys can be found in the Royal Geographical Society's Captain William H.I. Shakespear Collection, RGS ar WHI; Shakespear's journal for his 1914 trip across Arabia is held in typescript, in two parts, at the Royal Society for Asian Affairs, RSAA/SC/S/WS/1 and RSAA/SC/S/WS/2. The original handwritten diary appears to be in the British Library, MSS Eur A230.

<sup>440</sup> Shakespear's 1914 "Journal of a Trip via Central Arabia to Egypt" reads: "8 Feb, Sunday. Very pleased to find that my previous mapping four years ago panned out correct for this tour also."; "12 Feb, Thurs. Found my old map to be quite wrong as to the position of Kasr Belal.." RSAA/SC/S/WS/2 A handwritten note in the margin of the typed page containing the entry for 16 April reads as follows: "Esh Shigasa not known, but there is a well known waterway on the Nafud edge, due west of Jubbah, which I called Ubai ([Nineteenth-century explorer C.M.] Doughty Ubbeyt) and G Bell called Asafiyyeh. My Ubai was situated under Thleithowat Assafiyyeh, and is obviously the same/or one of group of wells as that noted by G Bell. [Austrian adventurer Alois] Musil distinctly ascribes Kulban el Asafiyyeh and Ubei to the East of it." The place names are less important than the meaning of the journal entries: Shakespear was clearly engaged in correcting and refining existing maps of the Kuwaiti hinterland and Arabia. RSAA/SC/S/WS/1.

to Majma'a, 120 miles northwest of Riyadh, was the first quality survey of the area.<sup>441</sup>

Carruthers had journeyed through "unknown" parts of Arabia himself in 1908 and again in the winter of 1909-1910 in search of the Arabian Oryx, an antelope species native to Asia and Africa.<sup>442</sup> During the war Carruthers was chiefly responsible for turning travel diaries and surveys into militarily useful maps at the Royal Geographical Society.

Gertrude Bell did similar work, voluntarily and unofficially. In December 1913 she set out to explore Roman ruins in the desert south-east of Damascus, the ruins of medieval Islamic palaces, and to do map work not for military intelligence but for the Royal Geographical Society, to which she had recently been elected as one of its first female members. Here she worked in collaboration with Carruthers, using and improving on his own notes. Neither Shakespear nor Bell worked in secret. In fact Bell was initially prevented from travelling into the desert by Ottoman authorities concerned for her safety: they feared that any misfortune that might befall her could create an international incident. She was ultimately allowed to go where she wished, on the condition that neither the Ottoman nor the British governments assume responsibility for her safety – a condition she considered perfectly reasonable.<sup>443</sup> Like Shakespear, Gertrude Bell was engaged in correcting existing maps. "The map is wildly wrong here. I think I can correct it a little," she wrote once.<sup>444</sup>

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<sup>441</sup> Carruthers, "Last Journey," 323.

<sup>442</sup> Priya Satia suggests that Carruthers was working for military intelligence at the War Office in this period. Certainly his activities could be classified under the rubric of intelligence as discussed in this dissertation, but I have found no evidence that Carruthers was engaged in work for the War Office before 1913 at the earliest. Priya Satia, *Spies in Arabia* (Oxford: University Press, 2008), 78. Cf. M. Philips Price, "Obituary: Douglas Carruthers," *The Geographical Journal* 128, 3 (September 1962), 368-369.

<sup>443</sup> Mallet to FO, 20 May 1914, FO 424/252.

<sup>444</sup> Entry for 28 April, Diary of a Trip to Hayyil, 1914, Gertrude Bell Collection, GB165-0023, MECA; Gertrude Bell Archive, Newcastle University Library, <http://www.gerty.ncl.ac.uk/diaries.php?year=1914&month=1#>

Bell's trip followed a medieval road, four days to the east of the Hejaz Railway, and was able to report that the Turkish government did not hold a single point off the railway, though Turkish authority was somewhat greater than it had been before the line's construction.<sup>445</sup> The extent of Turkish authority was nevertheless limited. The last six days of the trip, spent among tribes ostensibly under the control of the Ottoman government, were some of the most difficult of the entire journey. The tribes, Bell reported, were unruly and government authority virtually non-existent. Upon arriving at Hail, Bell found the teenaged Emir Ibn Rashid absent from the camp. His followers refused to allow her to leave, and so for eleven days she was held there as a prisoner – something she appears to have kept secret from the British ambassador, Sir Louis Mallet, on her return to Constantinople.

In Hail, there was talk of an expedition against Ibn Saud, and the Turks had given arms to Ibn Rashid as a gift, but Bell was certain that such an expedition would go badly for the Rashid camp. Domestic intrigue had handicapped the strength of the Rashid family: on two occasions within the past six years the Emir of Hail and as many male members of the family as could be seized were put to the sword.<sup>446</sup> Bell also confirmed the rising strength of Ibn Saud, which Shakespear had been reporting for some time. "The Turks," Bell noted in her diary, "will never recover the Hasa, in my belief, and had best waste no effort on it. Ibn Sa'ud turned them out without a shot fired ... I think it not improbable that he will hand over half the Hasa to the Sheikh of Kowait."<sup>447</sup> Given the importance of Sheikh Mubarak as a British ally in the region, his possible collaboration

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<sup>445</sup> Mallet to FO, 20 May 1914, FO 424/252.

<sup>446</sup> Ibid.

<sup>447</sup> Entry for 28 March, *Diary of a Trip to Hayyil, 1914*, Gertrude Bell Collection, GB165-0023, MECA; Gertrude Bell Archive, Newcastle University Library, <http://www.gerty.ncl.ac.uk/diaries.php?year=1914&month=1#>

with Ibn Saud and involvement in the affairs of Central Arabia was a matter of great interest to the Foreign Office. On Bell's return to Constantinople in May 1914 she agreed to furnish Sir Edward Grey with an account of her journey. Sir Louis Mallet hosted a dinner for Bell, to which he invited the Turkish Minister of the Interior, Talaat Bey, so that he might hear first-hand information of the Saud/Rashid quarrel in Central Arabia.<sup>448</sup> The virtual absence of the Ottoman government in Arabia made it necessary for them to get information from British "spies."

Upon her arrival in Baghdad, Gertrude Bell learned of the death of J.G. Lorimer, who had recently been killed when the loaded shotgun he was cleaning discharged. She lamented the loss for British interests in Arabia and the Persian Gulf, noting that Lorimer's successor was a disaster: he knew nothing and did nothing, often not getting out of bed before noon; "he knows no languages, not even French, and his mind is a complete blank as regards Turkey in general and Turkish Arabia in particular."<sup>449</sup> Bell, like Shakespear, occupied a place somewhere between the official and the unofficial with regard to British interests in Arabia and the Gulf. She travelled as a private individual, not associated with any governmental department or organization, yet she was concerned for the welfare of British interests in a strategically and politically important part of the world that held intrinsic fascination for her personally. She moved in circles with politicians and administrators, partly because there were so few Europeans in that part of the world that these were the only people with whom she could share her interests.

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<sup>448</sup> Mallet to FO, 20 May 1914, FO 424/252.

<sup>449</sup> Entry for 19 March, Diary of a Trip to Hayyil, 1914, Gertrude Bell Collection, GB165-0023, MECA; Gertrude Bell Archive, Newcastle University Library, <http://www.gerty.ncl.ac.uk/diaries.php?year=1914&month=1#>

Gertrude Bell's own interest in mapping and exploring intersected with the War Office's own efforts to map Turkish Arabia, and her experience of political affairs in Central Arabia made her a valuable source of information to the Foreign Office, and also to the Turkish government. But she was, first and foremost, a private individual engaged in private enterprise. What assistance she offered the British government before the war seems to have been motivated partly out of patriotism and partly out of intellectual interest.

As an authority on Arabian and Mesopotamian affairs with first-hand knowledge of the outer provinces of the Turkish Empire, Bell must have found the ambivalence of Britain's Turkish policy frustrating. Her travels gave her a keen perspective on the ways in which British involvement in Arabian affairs could further the cause of the British Empire. Policy mandarins in London, however, refused to become embroiled in the political affairs of the subjects of a foreign power, and continued to view Arabian matters as subordinate to the larger strategic problems of the Eastern Question and the growing European antagonism. They were correct to do so. Gertrude Bell had the luxury of concerning herself with a single issue. Larger international questions were not her province. Nevertheless, when the time came to unravel the puzzles of the Middle East her expertise would prove invaluable.

Whereas the fine-tuning of maps by Gertrude Bell and others was to pay dividends in the long run during the Arab Revolt, in the short run it was observations about the political state of Arabia that were chiefly of interest to British policy makers in London and Simla. Shakespear's relationship with Ibn Saud was of short-term value certainly; information coming directly from the camp of the ascendant power in Arabia was a

valuable line of communication indeed. Bell sought to achieve something similar by becoming the first European in nearly a generation to travel to Hail, the home of Ibn Saud's rival Ibn Rashid. She did this for the purpose of adventure and exploration, rather than for any political purpose, but her trip was of political value all the same.

If Captain Shakespear and Gertrude Bell occupied a middle ground between official and unofficial intelligence gatherers in Turkish Arabia and the Persian Gulf, other individuals were more explicitly engaged in secret intelligence work. In the spring of 1910, Captain Teesdale, 25<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, Indian Army, returning to India from leave in England, travelled in disguise as an Arab through Lower Mesopotamia to explore the territory between Nasiriyah and Basra, in order to determine whether or not a route existed that would bypass the bend in the Euphrates. His route reports and travel itinerary were forwarded to the War Office by the military attaché at Constantinople. Leachman left Baghdad on 25 January for Hail, and news of his apparent arrival there reached Lorimer at Baghdad a month later. Like Teesdale, Leachman travelled in native disguise, and though the British authorities in the Persian Gulf knew of his adventure, he managed to evade other Europeans during the course of his travel.<sup>450</sup> The secrecy of these officers' work made it no more official. Both Leachman and Teesdale appear to have acted on their own initiative, though in Teesdale's case the initiative was more favourably received. Major Tyrrell, the military attaché, applauded Teesdale's work and recommended him for future espionage work if the opportunity arose, particularly as he had recently passed a language exam in Turkish.<sup>451</sup>

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<sup>450</sup> "Summary of Events in Turkish Iraq for February 1910," Lowther to FO, 5 April 1910, FO 424/223.

<sup>451</sup> Tyrrell to Lowther, 29 March 1910, FO 195/2346.

The Foreign Office was less impressed. Lowther complained to the Foreign Office that these “tours by British military officers, occurring more or less together and at a time when there was much talk of British designs on Mesopotamia, naturally rendered the Turks suspicious, the more so that Mr. Leachman and Captain Teesdale avoided observation as much as they could and wore Arab clothes.”<sup>452</sup> A handwritten note in the margin of Tyrrell’s report of Teesdale’s activities to Lowther asks whether the War Office’s desire for topographical information of the kind acquired by Teesdale ought to supersede the objections of Lorimer, who thought it unwise to stir up Turkish suspicions at a time when an attack on Basra from the west, i.e. by the Turks, appeared unlikely.<sup>453</sup> The Foreign Office’s criticisms essentially amounted to an accusation of short-sightedness on the part of the War Office: if good relations between Britain and Turkey were the goal, there was little sense in provoking bad relations.

If the Foreign Office acquiesced in the War Office “meddling” in Anglo-Turkish relations, it was more vigorous in attempting to exclude others from acquiring information about the region. Efforts by the Royal Danish Geographical Society to obtain permission from the British to mount a geological and botanical expedition to the Persian Gulf were frustrated after nearly two years of negotiations. When the Danish explorer Barclay Raunkiær attempted to travel through Arabia alone, Shakespear was instructed to drop the hint to Sheikh Mubarak that the Government of India did not wish the Dane to be afforded facilities for his trip.<sup>454</sup> Objections to War Office enterprises in Ottoman territory did not prevent the Foreign Office from actively seeking information of its own: it was very anxious to plot the exact trace of the Baghdad Railway across Anatolia to the

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<sup>452</sup> “Summary of Events in Turkish Iraq for February 1910,” Lowther to FO, 5 April 1910, FO 424/223.

<sup>453</sup> Tyrrell to Lowther, 29 March 1910, FO 195/2346.

<sup>454</sup> Winstone, *Shakespear*, 109.

Euphrates, something that had eluded its officials as late as 1913.<sup>455</sup> The Foreign Office was interested in the information more for commercial and political reasons: strategic information fell within the purview of the War Office. But it was interested in information all the same. What the Foreign Office appeared to object to was the acquisition of information in ways that it had not sanctioned.<sup>456</sup> The War Office, operating under its own authority and rules, was in a position to damage Anglo-Turkish relations without the Foreign Office's consent for its activity.

Although the British were clearly interested in keeping other Europeans out of the Persian Gulf and Arabia, they were not entirely sure themselves what course they should pursue. The political intelligence provided by Shakespear and Bell was valuable but the Foreign Office objected to anything that would overturn the apple cart of Anglo-Turkish relations. Its policy appeared to be one of "wait and see." Intelligence would allow the Foreign Office to act in Britain's best interests in a crisis; but better still, Britain should not precipitate a crisis at all. Contingency plans were useful if there should be an Anglo-Turkish War; but better still, if war should come, the Turks should start it, not the British. It was of the utmost importance that Britain not be seen, particularly by Indian Muslims, as the despoiler of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>457</sup> This point of view was partly a legacy of the Boer War, when the British had been crucified by international opinion, and partly a genuine British desire for peace. By the eve of the First World War, the British were content to let international events take their course, choosing to sit back and acquire the

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<sup>455</sup> Lowther to FO, 15 January 1913, FO 424/237. Lowther acknowledged Grey's request that "every effort" be made to secure the exact trace of the railway between Ereğli and the Euphrates.

<sup>456</sup> Satia, *Spies in Arabia*, 33; James Canton, "Imperial Eyes: Imperial Spies. British Travel and Espionage in Southern Arabia, 1891-1946," *The Journal of Commonwealth and Imperial History* 37, 4 (November 2009), 538; John Fisher, "Official Responses to Foreign Travel at the British Foreign and India Offices before 1914," *English Historical Review* 122, 498 (September 2007), 938.

<sup>457</sup> David French, "The Dardanelles, Mecca and Kut: Prestige as a Factor in British Eastern Strategy, 1914-1916," *War and Society* 5, 1 (May 1987), 48.

information that would allow them to make the best possible decision in a moment of crisis.

## VI. The PEF Survey

In late 1913, the DMO, General Henry Wilson, contacted the Foreign Office to see whether Turkish objections to a survey of Palestine might have been removed by the conclusion of the Balkan War. The survey had first been suggested earlier in the year: as the DMO noted, it was “essential for the proper study of the problem represented by the defence of the north-eastern frontier of Egypt.”<sup>458</sup> The survey was to be carried out under the auspices of the Palestine Exploration Fund (PEF), an organization founded in 1865 to promote the study of the Levant. The War Office reasoned that it would be easier to get Turkish permission for the survey if it were seen as an extension of the work already being done by the Fund.<sup>459</sup> To that end Col. Coote Hedley, director of the Topographical Section of the War Office, was invited by the PEF to join its executive committee.<sup>460</sup>

The survey was mostly completed between December 1913 and March 1914. It started at a line running from west to east through Gaza and Beersheba to Masadan on the western shore of the Dead Sea. From there, the survey would run to the Egyptian frontier, and from a point on the Mediterranean coast south of Gaza, south by southeast, to the head of the Gulf of Aqaba. Its eastern limit would be a line north from the Gulf of Aqaba to the Dead Sea. The survey produced a new 1/2” scale map of Palestine and intertwined a number of different interests.

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<sup>458</sup> DMO to FO, 19 September 1913, PEF/ZIN/1/1.

<sup>459</sup> Colonel Hedley to Sir Charles Watson, 1 November 1913, PEF/ZIN/1/5.

<sup>460</sup> Executive Committee Minutes of Meeting (ECMM), 7 October 1913, PEF/EC/7/89-90.

The PEF, for its part, was eager to conduct the survey for academic reasons. PEF Director Sir Charles Watson wrote to Leonard Woolley, one of the archaeologists, along with T.E. Lawrence, who accompanied the expedition, that his priority was to produce an accurate map ( $\frac{1}{2}'' = 1$  mile) of a little known country. Travellers had crossed parts of it, and a survey of Western Palestine had been completed between 1872 and 1878 in part by Lord Kitchener, then a lieutenant in the Royal Engineers, but much of the country remained unexplored.<sup>461</sup> Woolley and Lawrence were to make special plans of ruins and important archaeological sites, photograph buildings and points of interest, record inscriptions, and carefully record all place names currently in use.<sup>462</sup> The interest of the PEF in the survey was purely academic, though they were happy to take advantage of somebody else's initiative in the matter to add to their own collection of knowledge.

The War Office was acting in continuity with its longer-term goal of planning for the defence of Egypt. The survey was to pick up where Kitchener's had left off. Perhaps chastened by the Foreign Office's rebuke, the War Office sought the assistance of the PEF in order to lend expertise and legitimacy to the survey. That the survey was suggested in the first place by the office of the DMO is indicative of the manner in which the War Office viewed intelligence. It was not secret, since the Turks had given permission for it to be completed, but mapping clearly fell under the rubric of intelligence work. Indeed long after the war, the PEF essentially admitted as much in a 1935 quarterly report article reflecting on the survey, shortly after the death of T.E. Lawrence. Lawrence and Woolley had been explicitly instructed by the PEF to plan archaeological sites, take photographs of buildings and other points of interest, and to

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<sup>461</sup> A 1917 reprint of Kitchener's map can be found in FO 925/41178. Other copies are in MPH 1/674/10 and MPH 1/674/13.

<sup>462</sup> Sir C. Watson to C. L. Woolley, 16 December 1913, PEF/ZIN/1/23.

record inscriptions. But they were also operating under a separate, tacit, set of instructions. As the PEF report noted, “the Committee was aware that it could not make definite instructions and it was trusted that the archaeologists would ‘understand the spirit of what is required.’”<sup>463</sup>

For its part, the Foreign Office appears to have acquiesced to the desire of the War Office for a survey, perhaps out of recognition of the importance of the defence of Egypt, but perhaps also because the terms of the survey could be dictated by the Foreign Office. The Turkish government approved the survey, and the names of the party were to be provided to the Turkish authorities. There could be no question of secret trips and officers in disguise endangering Anglo-Turkish relations.

With the undertaking of the survey decided in principle, a number of questions about personnel, cost, and publication were left to be decided. The War Office recommended that Capt. Stewart Newcombe, RE, lead the operation. Newcombe was an expert topographer already engaged on work in the Sinai.<sup>464</sup> For the project the PEF nominated T.E. Lawrence and Leonard Woolley, currently involved in a dig for the British Museum at Carchemish (Jerablus), a stone’s throw from the Baghdad Railway.<sup>465</sup> The War Office was to cover its own costs for the survey, while the PEF was responsible for supporting Lawrence and Woolley financially. Here, they found an ally in the Royal Geographical Society, which donated £100 to the effort.<sup>466</sup> This left only the question of what to do with the results of the survey. The question of publishing the survey’s results and the map

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<sup>463</sup> PEF Quarterly Statement, July 1935.

<sup>464</sup> DMO to FO, 4 November 1913, PEF/ZIN/1/8.

<sup>465</sup> ECMM, 2 December 1913, PEF/EC/7/99-101.

<sup>466</sup> ECMM, 16 December 1913, PEF/EC/7/102-103.

it produced was the subject of much discussion in the spring of 1914 when the work was complete.

The PEF was, of course, eager to publish a work of academic interest, and initially the Topographical Section of the War Office had no objection. However, the Foreign Office and the General Officer Commanding, Egypt (GOC) balked at the suggestion that the survey should be made public.<sup>467</sup> While the War Office believed that the Foreign Office had entirely misunderstood the nature of the enterprise, it admitted that its hands were tied by objections to the publication of the report.<sup>468</sup> Ultimately an expurgated (and thus publishable) copy of Newcombe's report was provided to the PEF and they received permission to publish hand drawn maps by T.E. Lawrence, provided no reference was made to the survey from which they came.<sup>469</sup> The report was finally published in 1915 by the PEF as *The Wilderness of Zin*.<sup>470</sup> Its publication represents a series of compromises between the various interests, civilian, academic, and military, that came together in the physical space of Turkish Arabia.

The disagreement over whether the report could be published reflects one important dimension of the state of British intelligence in Turkish Arabia on the eve of the First World War. Having expended a good deal of effort since 1900 collecting information on the Ottoman Empire, on its topography and people, on its politics and on the activities of other Great Powers, and on the protection of British interests, Britain had not set for itself clear priorities about what information should be kept secret. The Foreign Office's desire

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<sup>467</sup> Colonel Hedley to Sir C. Watson, 10 March 1914, PEF/ZIN/1/56.

<sup>468</sup> Geographical Section, General Staff, War Office to Sir C. Watson, 18 March 1914, PEF/ZIN/1/59.

<sup>469</sup> Colonel Hedley to Sir C. Watson, 18 March 1914, PEF/ZIN/1/65; Colonel Hedley to Mr. J.D. Crace, 30 October 1914, PEF/ZIN/1/65.

<sup>470</sup> C. Leonard Woolley and T.E. Lawrence, *The Wilderness of Zin (an archaeological report)* (London: Palestine Exploration Fund, published by order of the committee, 1915).

for Newcombe's survey to remain secret seems odd, since the Turkish government had given permission for the survey and knew the names of the various people involved. The most likely explanation for the secrecy seems to be that, given the deterioration of the international situation in Europe by 1914, the Foreign Office was overcautious in its effort to keep vital information out of German hands.

In parallel fashion there were no clear lines delineating who was in charge of gathering information or determining which information should be gathered and how. The most that could be said of Britain's intelligence practices up to 1914 is that the British had spent a great deal of time collecting information that might someday be useful, and the British were sure that no other power should have it. Thus, the British frustrated Danish attempts to conduct scientific expeditions in Arabia and even refused to publish earlier maps of Palestine lest they should fall into foreign hands. In 1913 Walter Morrison, a founder and wealthy patron of the PEF, wrote to remind the secretary of the Fund that publication of certain maps had been suspended "for some years at the request of the War Office because Russian officers in disguise had been caught in Northern Syria."<sup>471</sup> Gazetteers, handbooks, surveys, maps—these had been steadily compiled for the better part of two decades, all in case they were needed one day. The effort was not in vain. Surveys of Palestine dating at least as far back as Kitchener's work for the PEF in the 1870s were "utilised for operational purposes well into the war."<sup>472</sup> As late as October 1918 preparations for General Allenby's final push against the Turks on the Palestine front included PEF maps of the area north of the line Hadera-Samaria.<sup>473</sup>

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<sup>471</sup> Walter Morrison to Mr. J.D. Crace, 7 November 1913, PEF/ZIN/1/10.

<sup>472</sup> Sheffy, *Palestine Campaign*, 21-22.

<sup>473</sup> *Ibid.*, 315.

It seems likely that without the outbreak of war in 1914 British intelligence activity in Turkish Arabia would have continued without clear goals and directions. Indeed, Yigal Sheffy notes that while British intelligence entered the war entirely aware of the threat from the east and at least partially familiar with the likely battlefields in the Ottoman Empire, it was still hampered by a lack of co-ordination.<sup>474</sup>

Of course 1914 gave new purpose to British intelligence efforts. Now there was a real enemy, not a hypothetical one – an enemy against whom intelligence like that found in the PEF survey or Lorimer's *Gazetteer* could be put into service. There was no more speculation on the possible scenarios under which war with Turkey might come about. The war had come, and Turkey threw in its lot with the Central Powers. Maps, route reports, and political information would now be put to work. Expectations were high that the preceding years of effort would pay dividends.

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<sup>474</sup> Ibid., 27.

## Chapter Five: The July Crisis of 1914 to January 1916

By the time of the July Crisis in the summer of 1914, Anglo-Turkish relations had experienced something of a *détente*. To be sure, the Ottoman Empire was still the “Sick Man of Europe.” The Eastern Question remained, looming and unresolved, and the sultan was little more than an aged puppet of the Young Turks, who had shown themselves hardly less despotic than the regime they overthrew.<sup>475</sup> British worries about their declining share of Turkish trade persisted, too. But concerns over creeping German military and political influence at Constantinople had begun to abate, as had fears about the dangers posed by the Baghdad Railway.<sup>476</sup> By 1914 the Baghdad Railway, source of so much antagonism between Great Britain, Germany, and Turkey for the previous decade, was not an instrument capable of dominating the Ottoman economy, nor was it important enough that it could be used by another power to exert political pressure on Constantinople. By the summer of 1914 large sections of the railway across Anatolia remained incomplete, and efforts to finish constructing the line faced severe financial problems. With the coming of war, the Baghdad Railway fell increasingly under the

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<sup>475</sup> This was Mehmet V, who replaced his brother Abdul Hamid II in 1909 and ruled until his death in July 1918. David Fromkin, *A Peace to End all Peace: Creating the Modern Middle East, 1914-1922* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1989), 48; Malcolm E. Yapp, *The Making of the Modern Near East, 1792-1923* (London: Longmans, 1987), 267.

<sup>476</sup> In 1912 the British agreed to a 3% increase in Turkish customs duties, and recognized Turkish suzerainty over an autonomous Kuwait, in exchange for a promise that the railway would not terminate on the Persian Gulf, and that the line from Baghdad to Basra would not be constructed without Britain’s having been consulted. Parallel Anglo-German negotiations in 1913 saw Britain agree to German construction of the Baghdad-Basra section of the railway, on the condition that the construction would be postponed, and built only after the conclusion of a future agreement on the matter between Great Britain and Turkey. Zara Steiner and Keith Neilson, *Britain and the Origins of the First World War*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 114.

control of various Ottoman military authorities and government agencies, ensuring a lack of any concerted effort to develop the line.<sup>477</sup> Negotiations between Britain and Germany, and Britain and Turkey, had produced a series of compromise settlements that eased tensions. Indeed, an Anglo-German agreement dated March 1914, but never ratified, appeared to reconcile the conflicting interests of Germany and the Entente Powers in Asiatic Turkey.<sup>478</sup> Anglo-Turkish discussions settled boundary disputes in southern Arabia, with the Turks recognizing a British sphere of influence there that included the British protectorate at Aden.<sup>479</sup> The British naval mission headed by Admiral Limpus was, by 1914, equal at least in size if not in influence to the German military mission led by Liman von Sanders.<sup>480</sup> In the summer of 1914, then, Anglo-Turkish relations appeared to be more stable and even friendlier than they had been for several years.

For Germany, too, the Ottoman Empire had receded in importance by the time of the July Crisis. As late as May 1914, General Helmuth von Moltke, Chief of the General Staff and nephew of the elder Moltke – the hero of the German wars of unification – had thought it unwise to consider Turkey as an asset to Germany or the Triple Alliance in the near future.<sup>481</sup> Germany's war planning was focused on Europe and the Schlieffen Plan, not on Turkish Arabia and Asia. Furthermore, despite Germany's own efforts to reform the Ottoman army, opinion of its fighting strength and military effectiveness was

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<sup>477</sup> Ulrich Trumpener, *Germany and the Ottoman Empire, 1914-1918* (Princeton: University Press, 1968), 8; "Turkey: Coast Report. The Coast of Syria," April 1917, MssEur/ F112/158.

<sup>478</sup> Trumpener, *Germany and the Ottoman Empire*, 5. The text of the Anglo-German agreement can be found in Edward Meade Earle, "The Secret Anglo-German Convention of 1914 Regarding Asiatic Turkey," *Political Science Quarterly* 38, 1 (March 1923), 24-44. The outbreak of war in August prevented Britain from ratifying either of the agreements with Germany or Turkey. M.S. Anderson notes that the issue of the Baghdad Railway was much less important than many historians of the 1920s and 1930s believed, but that the line was nonetheless a symbol of Britain's growing fear and distrust of Germany. M.S. Anderson, *The Eastern Question, 1774-1923* (London: Macmillan, 1966), 265-266.

<sup>479</sup> Yapp, *Modern Near East*, 264.

<sup>480</sup> Trumpener, *Germany and the Ottoman Empire*, 13.

<sup>481</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

universally low.<sup>482</sup> The fears of the Entente Powers, especially of Russia, that the Liman von Sanders mission was a thinly veiled effort to Prussianize the Ottoman army were misplaced. Germany had reserved the right to recall Liman and his colleagues in the event of a European war.<sup>483</sup> Liman von Sanders was himself often at odds with the German ambassador, Baron Hans von Wangenheim, and with German political aims in Constantinople.<sup>484</sup> He complained, both at the time and subsequently, that he was constantly struggling against both German and Turkish attempts to minimize his influence.

Neither the growth of German commercial and political influence in Turkey over the preceding decade, nor the Liman von Sanders mission, made the Turco-German alliance of 2 August 1914 a foregone conclusion. That agreement was a defensive alliance. Germany agreed to defend the Ottoman Empire against aggression, while the Turks were only obligated to enter the conflict if Germany were required to fight by the terms of its treaty with Austria.<sup>485</sup> On the German side only the Kaiser was enthusiastic and the

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<sup>482</sup> Sir Arthur Nicolson, Permanent Undersecretary at the Foreign Office, considered that Turkey's losses in the Balkan Wars spelled the end of its claims to Great Power status, and Brigadier Henry Wilson, Director of Military Operations, opined in 1913 that the "Turkish army is not a serious modern army." David French, "The Origins of the Dardanelles Campaign Reconsidered," *History* (Great Britain) 68, 223 (1983), 213. These assessments were wrong. Edward J. Erickson, a retired US Army officer and one of the few English-speaking historians writing about the war from Ottoman sources, notes that although Turkey had barely one year of peace between the end of the Second Balkan War in July 1913 and the mobilization of August 1914, the time had been put to good use. The fighting strength of the Turkish army was consistently underestimated by the Entente powers throughout the war. Edward J. Erickson, *Ottoman Army Effectiveness in World War I: A Comparative Study* (London: Routledge, 2007), 7-8.

<sup>483</sup> Trumpener, *Germany and the Ottoman Empire*, 14.

<sup>484</sup> Ulrich Trumpener, "Liman von Sanders and the German-Ottoman Alliance," *Journal of Contemporary History* 1, 4 (October 1966), 179-180. See also Otto Liman von Sanders, *Five Years In Turkey*, trans. Carl Reichmann (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1927).

<sup>485</sup> Trumpener, *Germany and the Ottoman Empire*, 28-30; Fromkin, *A Peace*, 59; Frank G. Weber, *Eagles on the Crescent: Germany, Austria and the Diplomacy of the Turkish Alliance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), 60-83; Sean McMeekin, *The Berlin-Baghdad Express: The Ottoman Empire and Germany's Bid for World Power* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press, 2010), 109. The treaty did not actually obligate the Turks to join the fighting. It had been signed on 2 August, the day *after* Germany had declared war on Russia. Germany had actually declared war on Russia several days before Austria-Hungary did, meaning that it did not do so under the terms of the Triple Alliance. Thus, as Germany had not been forced

alliance was principally the result of Austrian pressure. By tying Constantinople to the Triple Alliance, Austria-Hungary hoped to contain Ottoman ambitions in the Balkans, where both empires were eager to make good the losses of recent years.<sup>486</sup> On the Turkish side, the alliance was seen as a chance to profit from a European war by making gains in the Balkans, North Africa, or Transcaucasia. The agreement was made in secret, and most of the Turkish Cabinet was ignorant of the bargain.<sup>487</sup> The alliance was the result of the personal policy of the energetic and charismatic War Minister, Enver Pasha. His secrecy may not have been necessary. In both the Balkans and Transcaucasia Ottoman gains would have to come at the expense of Russia, and so perhaps it mattered less what carrots of friendship Germany or Britain could hold out to the Turks than which side Russia was on. Ancient enmities died hard and Turkey, having suffered at the hands of Russian aggression more than once within living memory, was unlikely to be part of any alliance that counted Russia as a member.<sup>488</sup> Furthermore, if Britain would not

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to enter the war against Russia by its agreement with Austria, a literal reading of the Turco-German treaty meant that Turkey did not have to enter the conflict. As Hew Strachan points out, the Ottoman Empire entered the war through its own devices and in pursuit of its own interests. Hew Strachan, *The First World War, Vol. 1: To Arms* (Oxford: University Press, 2001), 679. The interests that led the Ottoman Empire to declare war are discussed in some length in the chapter by F.A.K. Yasamee in Keith Wilson, ed., *Decisions for War, 1914* (London: UCL Press, 1995).

<sup>486</sup> Yapp, *Modern Near East*, 266. In Germany the Foreign Office (the *Auswärtiges Amt*) was especially unhappy about the prospect of being tied to the Ottoman Empire. However, the High Command insisted on it. There was no substitute for the displacement of Entente resources that Turkey's entry into the war provided.

<sup>487</sup> *Ibid.*, 266; Strachan, *To Arms*, 669.

<sup>488</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848-1918* (Oxford: University Press, 1954), 533-534; Strachan, *To Arms*, 670; Fromkin, *A Peace*, 49. Keith Wilson claims that Russia was the pivot of British foreign policy before 1914, and thus Britain was always bound to prefer Russian friendship to Turkish. Keith Wilson, *The Policy of the Entente: Essays on the Determinants of British Foreign Policy, 1904-1914* (Cambridge: University Press, 1985). According to Michael Reynolds the pretence of Turkish neutrality was effectively abandoned with the closing of the Straits to all shipping traffic in late September. The arrival of German gold in Constantinople in the middle of October appeared to confirm Turco-German intentions to commence hostilities against Russia. Russian secret intelligence was monitoring the situation in Constantinople through a combination of signals intelligence and secret agents. The secret of Turkey's partnership with Germany was revealed with the bombardment of Russian ships and defences in the Black Sea by the Turkish fleet, under the command of the German Admiral Wilhelm Souchon, on 29 October. The news divided the Turkish Cabinet. Only two or three ministers apart from Enver had foreknowledge of

abandon Russian friendship for German, as they had not during the Agadir Crisis of 1911, they would certainly not sacrifice it for Turkish friendship, which was less valuable than good relations with Russia, in part because Turkey was less threatening to British India.

### I. War for India

Despite the relaxation of tensions in the Middle East by 1914, the commencement of war in Europe brought Turkey and the Eastern Question back to the forefront of Britain's strategic considerations. The British needed, at the very least, to keep the Ottoman Empire neutral. The military threat Turkey posed to the Suez Canal, at a time when the quick passage of Indian troops to France was most needed, was both real and serious.<sup>489</sup> Equally distressing was the prospect of Pan-Islamic revolts being fomented by the Turks amongst the discontented segments of the Indian and Egyptian populations, particularly in the Indian Army, which contained a disproportionate number of Muslims within its ranks.<sup>490</sup> The Germans recognized this, and saw in the cultivation of the Ottoman Empire

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the attack, and while some ministers were pleased that Turkey had seized the initiative, several others resigned in protest. Reynolds, *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires, 1908-1918* (Cambridge: University Press, 2011), 112-113; Trumpener, *Germany and the Ottoman Empire*, 55-56. The overwhelming majority of the Turkish war effort came in Transcaucasia against Russia. While accurate statistics are difficult to come by, it is telling that approximately seventy-five per cent of all Turkish casualties between November 1915 and March 1917 came against Russia. Certainly the Turks envisioned Russia as their principal enemy, and saw potential gains coming chiefly at Russia's expense, and deployed their forces accordingly. Yapp, *Modern Near East*, 274.

<sup>489</sup> The Indian Army sent two divisions to France in the early weeks of the war. That figure represented 1/3 of the total British force in Flanders. The number of troops from the Indian Army that ultimately served on the Western Front during the course of the war was approximately 138,000. Strachan, *To Arms*, 580; Philip Mason, *A Matter of Honour* (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1974), 409.

<sup>490</sup> Elizabeth Monroe, *Britain's Moment in the Middle East, 1914-1971*, rev. ed. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1981), 23. John Ferris and David Steele both point out that after the Indian Mutiny of 1857-1858, the British saw pan-Islamism as most dangerous potential instigator of revolt against European influence in the sub-continent. John Ferris, "'The Internationalisation of Islam'": The British Perception of a Muslim

as an ally a means of increasing the burden on the limited resources available to the British war effort. As a result, both European blocs courted Turkey throughout the July Crisis. Yet the British did not offer Turkey a single incentive or concession of any real significance.<sup>491</sup>

Nevertheless, a Turco-German alliance, once signed, did not commit Turkey to war. Most Ottoman ministers favoured waiting to see which way the war was going to go before deciding whether or not to enter on the side of the Triple Alliance. A smaller cadre of ministers, again led by Enver, thought waiting to be a dangerous course of action. A short war would see the Ottoman Empire shut out of the peace negotiations, or worse, the victim of a European peace settlement. It was Enver who drew Turkey into the war by taking the lead in the decision to admit the German warships *Goeben* and *Breslau* into the Sea of Marmora and integrating the ships and their crews into the Ottoman navy. The fiction that Germany had sold the two vessels to Turks, to replace the ships under construction in England (and seized by the British government at the start of the war), fooled nobody. On 29 October the *Goeben* and the *Breslau* along with other ships of the Ottoman fleet, commanded by the German Admiral Wilhelm Souchon, launched a surprise attack and bombarded Russian ports in the Black Sea. Four days later Russia declared war on Turkey, with the other Entente powers following suit shortly

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Menace, 1840-1951," *Intelligence and National Security* 24, 1 (February 2009), 57-77; David Steele, "Britain and Egypt, 1882-1914: The Containment of Islamic Nationalism," in Keith Wilson, ed., *Imperialism and Nationalism in the Middle East: The Anglo-Egyptian Experience, 1882-1982* (London: Mansell, 1983).

<sup>491</sup> Strachan, *To Arms*, 675. On the uncertainty surrounding Turkey's intentions see Sean McMeekin, *The Berlin-Baghdad Express: The Ottoman Empire and Germany's Bid for World Power* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press, 2010), 101.

thereafter.<sup>492</sup> Turkey had crossed the Rubicon to enter the war on the side of the Central Powers.

With the British declaration of war against Turkey on 5 November,<sup>493</sup> Britain's immediate military objectives were to safeguard the Red Sea-Suez Canal corridor and to occupy the head of the Persian Gulf. The Indian Expeditionary Force "D" (renamed the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force after early 1916) carried out the latter task.<sup>494</sup> The threefold mission of Force "D" was to prevent any of the Central Powers from establishing a naval base in the Persian Gulf that could threaten British communications with India, to bolster Britain's Arab allies at Kuwait and along the Persian Gulf littoral, and to protect the valuable oilfields in southern Persia. The Admiralty saw the dispatch of an expeditionary force to Basra in November 1914 as particularly important. The Royal Navy had begun building ships that ran on petroleum fuel, rather than coal, starting in 1912. By 1914 some 25,000 tons of oil per month, a significant portion of the world's supply, were being exported to Britain from the oilfields in southern Persia.<sup>495</sup>

Britain's conduct of the war against Turkey in the Middle East and Asia was determined by the importance of India. The chief value of Egypt and the Suez Canal lay in the ability they conferred on the British to send troops and supplies from India and the Persian Gulf unmolested to Europe. The Persian Gulf commanded maritime approaches

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<sup>492</sup> Ibid., 267. See also Ulrich Trumpener, "Turkey's Entry into World War One: An assessment of responsibilities," *Journal of Modern History* 34, 4 (1962), 369-371.

<sup>493</sup> Strachan, *To Arms*, 680.

<sup>494</sup> Indian Expeditionary Force "A" was sent to France, while Force "B" and "C" were deployed to East Africa. Force "E" was sent to Egypt.

<sup>495</sup> Monroe, *Britain's Moment*, 25; Strachan, *To Arms*, 674. The HMS *Queen Elizabeth*, laid down in 1912, was the first battleship to burn oil rather than coal. Strachan, *To Arms*, 774. Lord Curzon pithily expressed the importance of oil when, after the war, he famously remarked that "the Allies floated to victory on a sea of oil." That the point was somewhat exaggerated does not diminish the importance of oil to the British war effort. Keith Jeffery, *The British Army and the Crisis of Empire, 1918-1922* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 36.

to India, with its vast supplies of manpower that could be pressed into service on the Western Front. However, the Ottoman Empire shared no frontiers with British India. Hence, as long as it did not possess a powerful navy and the Baghdad Railway remained incomplete, even a vastly improved Turkish army would find it impossible to mount any kind of attack on the sub-continent. But the value of India could still be checkmated by control of the Suez Canal and Egypt. It was thus imperative that Britain maintain that channel of communication. With the dispatch of Force “D” to Basra in the fall of 1914 and the failure of Turkish attacks against the Suez Canal in early 1915, conventional military threats to India were forestalled, if not neutralized.<sup>496</sup> Where conventional engagement was not possible, subversion offered an alternative. Indeed, Fritz Fischer pointed out that the fomenting of revolution in the Russian and British Empires had been a German war aim from the very outset of the conflict.<sup>497</sup> British occupation of Egypt, over which a protectorate was declared in December 1914, was not universally popular with the native population.

In India, too, anti-British feeling was rife. Nationalist unrest in both places had increased in the years before 1914. But Ottoman efforts to build a nationalist consensus throughout the empire by emphasizing a Pan-Turkish identity had amounted to little before the war. And the Turks were unlikely to gain footholds in places as different as Egypt and India. Nevertheless, religious ideology had the potential to bridge the divide.<sup>498</sup> The Ottoman sultans had, since the sixteenth century, assumed the mantle of

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<sup>496</sup> The Turkish attacks on the Suez Canal and operations in Mesopotamia are surveyed in McMeekin, *The Berlin-Baghdad Express*, and in Strachan, *To Arms*. They will not be recounted here in any detail.

<sup>497</sup> Fritz Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 1<sup>st</sup> American ed. (New York: Norton, 1967), chapter 5.

<sup>498</sup> Indian officials in particular were exercised by nationalist uprisings in 1907, 1909 and 1912. Lord Kitchener, British Resident in Egypt from 1911 until Sir Henry McMahon as High Commissioner replaced him in December 1914, consistently worked to root out nationalist subversion there. Polly A. Mohs,

Caliph of Sunni Islam, thus declaring themselves the titular heads of the Islamic faith.<sup>499</sup>

Although the position of Caliph was theologically disputed, with some branches and sects of Islam refusing to recognize the sultan's spiritual supremacy, his proclamations on matters of faith still carried significant weight in the Muslim world.

In 1914 the global Muslim population numbered close to 300 million. Of these 300 million, nearly one-third lived under British rule. Approximately sixty million of those lived in India, with sixteen million Muslims living in British Egypt and the Sudan, the rest living in Singapore and elsewhere. The French and Russian Empires contained about twenty million Muslims each, while the German Empire ruled slightly less than two million adherents to the Islamic religion. Only thirty million Muslims were ruled over by other Muslims in 1914, and most of those lived within the Ottoman Empire.<sup>500</sup> As the most powerful temporal Muslim ruler and nominal suzerain over the Muslim holy places of Medina and Mecca, the Ottoman sultan elicited loyalty even among Muslim populations who refused to recognize his spiritual position as Caliph.<sup>501</sup> Even a partially successful attempt by the Ottoman sultan to marshal the forces of global Islam in the service of Turkey and its allies could, therefore, bring disaster to the Entente Powers. If Turkey could not appeal to nationalist movements in India and Egypt, where Turkish rule would merely be considered another form of oppression, for help, Pan-Islamism still

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*Military Intelligence and the Arab Revolt: The First Modern Intelligence War* (London: Routledge, 2007), 14-19.

<sup>499</sup> "Intelligence News: Egypt and the Arabian Khalifate," 13 August 1914, Egyptian War Office Intelligence Department, FO 882/15. A good discussion of the sultan's position as Caliph can be found in McMeekin, *The Berlin-Baghdad Express*. As Shiite Muslims, the majority of the populations of Mesopotamia and Persia did not recognize the sultan's spiritual authority. In Central Arabia the Wahhabi sect of Sunni Islam also declined to recognize the Ottoman Caliphate.

<sup>500</sup> Strachan, *To Arms*, 703; Gary Troeller, "Ibn Sa'ud and Sharif Husain: A Comparison in Importance in the Early Years of the First World War," *The Historical Journal* 14, 3 (September 1971), 629. Much of this article reappears in Gary Troeller, *The Birth of Saudi Arabia: Britain and the Rise of the House of Sa'ud* (London: Frank Cass, 1976).

<sup>501</sup> An example of this can be seen in the sultan's successful appeal for subscriptions throughout the Muslim world to help finance the construction of the Hejaz Railway.

offered the possibility of revolution in other parts of the empires of the Entente Powers. Long before the war began, the German agent of intrigue and favourite of the Kaiser, Baron Max von Oppenheim, suggested that Germany might find in a Pan-Islamic movement a means of subverting the Muslim subjects of its enemies. This proposal inspired the Kaiser's speech at Damascus in 1898, where he declared himself friend and protector of the world's Muslims.<sup>502</sup> Thus on 14 November 1914, at the urging of Kaiser Wilhelm, a *Jihad* was proclaimed from Constantinople.<sup>503</sup>

Germany's effort to promote *Jihad* was a "new and more sinister" version of the nineteenth-century Great Game. On Moltke's instructions in August 1914, the German Foreign Office began recruiting spies and agents who would promote *Jihad* and tie down large numbers of Russian and British forces.<sup>504</sup> The proclamation of 1914 took the form of a general mobilization and a literal call to arms. Muslims throughout the world were called upon to fight Britain, France, Russia, Serbia, and Montenegro. The fact that the empires of the Entente powers contained large Muslim populations made it easy for the Islamic authorities in Constantinople to accuse them of enslaving Muslims. Implicit in the position of Caliph was temporal authority over all the Muslims of the world, thus the sultan could invoke both religious and temporal authority to call believers to arms.

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<sup>502</sup> R.L. Melka, "Max Freiherr von Oppenheim: Sixty Years of Scholarship and Political Intrigue in the Middle East," *Middle Eastern Studies* 9, 1 (January 1973), 81; Trumpener, *Germany and the Ottoman Empire*, 22; McMeekin, *Berlin-Baghdad Express*, 14, 25. McMeekin seems to suggest that both Ibn Saud and Sherif Hussein of Mecca were in the pay of British agents well before the war broke out. Oppenheim appeared to be sceptical of their value to Germany in the event of a pan-Islamic uprising, believing the British to have gotten to them first. Neither Arab chief was formally tied to Britain until 1915.

<sup>503</sup> The call to holy war was proclaimed on 14 November by the Sheikh-ul-Islam, a title given to a leading religious authority in Ottoman Turkey, in the presence of the sultan. Strachan, *To Arms*, 702.

<sup>504</sup> McMeekin, *Berlin-Baghdad Express*, 88.

However, the selective nature of the holy war robbed it of doctrinal purity; Muslims in Germany and Austria-Hungary were not enjoined to overthrow their Christian masters.<sup>505</sup>

The fear of Pan-Islamic uprisings was not new in 1914. As John Ferris has shown, the British were alive to the possibility as early as the mid-1800s.<sup>506</sup> The novelist, wartime propaganda writer, and later Minister for Information, John Buchan described the problem through Richard Hannay, the protagonist of his famous novel *Greenmantle*: “There is a dry wind blowing through the East, and the parched grasses wait the spark. And that wind is blowing towards the Indian border...If the East blazes up, our effort will be distracted from Europe.”<sup>507</sup> The initial British response to the Turco-German call for holy war sought to undermine the proclamation by bolstering British prestige throughout the Muslim world. Sir Milne Cheetham, acting British Resident in Cairo while Lord Kitchener fulfilled his responsibilities in London as War Minister, suggested to the Foreign Office that “an excellent effect” would be made by a British declaration reassuring the Muslim world that, out of respect for the sanctity of the holy places of Islam, Great Britain had no intention to undertake any military or naval operations in the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>508</sup> There was as yet no plan in place to actively counter the sultan’s call for *Jihad*; in the early days of the war the best Britain could hope for was to weather the storm and limit the damage.

The *Jihad*, though proclaimed from Turkey, was an integral part of Germany’s strategy for a world war. By fomenting unrest and perhaps even sparking revolution in

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<sup>505</sup> Strachan, *To Arms*, 702-703.

<sup>506</sup> John Ferris, “‘The Internationalisation of Islam’”: The British Perception of a Muslim Menace, 1840-1951,” *Intelligence and National Security* 24, 1 (February 2009), 57-77.

<sup>507</sup> John Buchan, *Greenmantle* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1916), 5, 8; McMeekin, *Berlin-Baghdad Express*, 141.

<sup>508</sup> Mohs, *Arab Revolt*, 19.

the empires of the Entente, Germany's enemies would be weakened in Europe: "Our consuls in Turkey and India, our agents, etc., must rouse the whole Muslim world into wild rebellion against this hateful, mendacious, unprincipled nation of shopkeepers; if we are going to shed our blood, England must at least lose India" the Kaiser raged.<sup>509</sup> For all of the principal combatants, then, the war in the east was essentially a war for India.

## II. Military Appraisals

Despite the universally low opinion of Turkish military strength, the Ottoman army that went to war in 1914 was a vastly improved instrument from the one that fought the Second Balkan War a year previously.<sup>510</sup> By the beginning of 1916 it had launched major operations, and it continued to tie down large numbers of British and Russian troops for the duration of the war. The Dardanelles remained closed to Entente traffic, and the Ottoman Empire would survive until the last days of the conflict.<sup>511</sup> Germany's

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<sup>509</sup> Hew Strachan, *The First World War: A New Illustrated History* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 98.

<sup>510</sup> See Erickson, *Ottoman Military Effectiveness*, 7-8. Turkey's chief military value lay in the sheer amount of manpower that could be mobilized against Entente forces. The Turkish military effort of the First World War was largely a failure. In the Caucasus, where the Turks met with initial success at Sarikamish in December 1914-January 1915, they could not complete their victories. This was in part because of Enver's overly high opinion of his abilities as a strategist and field commander. By early 1916 the Russians had wrested the initiative from the Turks and gone over to the offensive, capturing the fortress of Erzerum in February and the port of Trebizond (Trabzon) in April. Trabzon allowed the Russians to supply their forces in the Caucasus via the shorter and more direct route across the Black Sea. The Turks would not retake the offensive in the Caucasus before revolution took Russia out of the war in 1917. At Suez in February 1915 the Turks achieved tactical surprise but were forced to withdraw. Even victories gained at Gallipoli in April 1915, and at Kut-el-Amara in April 1916 (the fall of the city came after a lengthy siege), did not change the overall strategic situation. By the end of 1915 the Turks had been deprived of any offensive capability at the strategic level. Even their victories at Kut and at Gallipoli were undone by the British successes in Mesopotamia and in Palestine. Reynolds, *Shattering Empires*, 124-136; Strachan, *The First World War*, 108-109. See also, Edward J. Erickson, *Ordered to Die: A History of the Ottoman Army in the First World War* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2001).

<sup>511</sup> Strachan, *To Arms*, 680ff. Strachan's assessment of the Turkish army's and the economy's suitability for modern war is incisive. It is true that most European observers misjudged the ability of the Turkish army to stay in the fight, but it is noteworthy that almost all of the significant Turkish victories – at Gallipoli and at

expansion of the war to Africa, Asia, and the Middle East left Britain stretched thin and overcommitted everywhere. Valuable reinforcements from India and the Dominions were needed in France, leaving only small numbers available to bolster the British forces in Egypt and Mesopotamia. In September 1914, even before Turkey had formally entered the war, British military intelligence in Cairo forecast that 100,000 Turkish troops might soon be available in Syria and Palestine to threaten the Suez Canal.<sup>512</sup> Regardless of the number of Ottoman troops stationed in Syria, it was unlikely that a force of more than 70,000 could cross the Sinai Peninsula. The Ottoman force that attacked the canal in January 1915 was about one-third that size.<sup>513</sup> Regardless, a projected Ottoman mobilization of nearly one million men, operating along internal lines of communication and fighting close to home, was a serious threat to the British position in Egypt and Mesopotamia, despite the diversion of Ottoman forces to the Balkans and the Caucasus.

Intelligence offered a means of negating some of the Turkish numerical advantage. The Middle East theatre offered plenty of opportunities for intelligence to demonstrate its worth. Human intelligence (HUMINT) opportunities arose from local populations, British agents, refugees, prisoners of war, and deserting Ottoman officers. British military intelligence in Cairo intercepted Turkish communications between the military command in Syria and garrisons elsewhere, as well as wider Turco-German political traffic. Atmospheric conditions in the Middle East offered better opportunities for aerial

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Kut, for example – were defensive ones. Throughout the war, the Turkish army appeared incapable of seizing the initiative and mounting effective offensive operations. Assessment of Turkey's capabilities was likely based, like so many other assumptions about the war that ultimately proved false, on conventionally held attitudes towards a "backward" and corrupt culture and government, rather than on carefully evaluated information.

<sup>512</sup> Cyril Falls and George MacMunn Fletcher, *Military Operations in Egypt and Palestine*, Vol. 1 (London: HMSO, 1928), 14. According to Yigal Sheffy this number may have been an exaggeration. Yigal Sheffy, *British Military Intelligence in the Palestine Campaign, 1914-1918* (London: Frank Cass, 1998), 40.

<sup>513</sup> McMeekin, *Berlin-Baghdad Express*, 167, 174. The British force stationed on the Canal in January 1915 was only about 35,000 strong, just over half the size of the total force stationed in Egypt at the time.

reconnaissance than on the Western Front, where fog and poor weather often hampered missions.<sup>514</sup> But intelligence operations against Turkey also suffered serious shortcomings. No highly placed agents were stationed in the Middle East throughout the war, and no evidence exists of even a single Turkish officer recruited as a consciously active agent during the war.<sup>515</sup> The British had no real success running spy rings in Turkey, and most intelligence that came from secret agents during the war came through Switzerland, which was a hotbed of espionage activity.<sup>516</sup> However, the British possessed two significant intelligence resources that were to play important roles in the conflict to come: an array of eastern “experts,” or “Arabists,” familiar with the languages, geography, politics, and culture of Asia Minor and the Middle East; and the large body of information that had been systematically acquired and collated before 1914.

Among the foremost of these eastern experts was the archaeologist and Keeper of Antiquities at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, David Hogarth, who worked for the geographical division of naval intelligence in London. From late 1914 he made frequent trips to Cairo as part of a group operating under the auspices of Col. (later Brigadier-General) Gilbert Clayton, the director of civil and military intelligence in Cairo. Hogarth and Clayton worked to assemble a group of “Arab experts” whose names comprised an impressive list of talent: Ronald Storrs, Lord Kitchener’s oriental secretary, Philip

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<sup>514</sup> Mohs, *Arab Revolt*, 5.

<sup>515</sup> Yigal Sheffy, “British Intelligence and the Middle East, 1900-1918: How Much Do We Know?,” *Intelligence and National Security* 17, 1 (2002), 41; David French, “The Origins of the Dardanelles Campaign Reconsidered,” 215.

<sup>516</sup> Several short files from agents in Switzerland appear in WO 106/1420. Both Sheffy, “How Much Do We Know?” and *British Military Intelligence*, and Mohs, *Arab Revolt*, discuss British Signals Intelligence advantages at some length. (The term, abbreviated as SIGINT, refers mostly, but not exclusively, to intercepted wireless communications.) According to Erickson, Russia was the only one of the Entente Powers that had any real success running spy rings in the Ottoman Empire. That story awaits its historian. Erickson, *Ottoman Military Effectiveness*, 8.

Graves, foreign correspondent for *The Times*, Stewart Francis Newcombe, the officer in charge of the 1913 PEF survey, Mark Sykes, Gertrude Bell, and T.E. Lawrence.<sup>517</sup>

Topographical and geographical information collected before the war was likewise pressed into service early in the conflict. At the War Office, MO4 in the Department of Military Operations, more commonly known as the Geographical Section of the General Staff (GSGS), was the body responsible for collecting and producing maps for all parts of the world except India, which was covered by the India Office. In January 1915, as a result of the decision to begin a campaign against the Dardanelles, Col. Coote Hedley, head of the GSGS, ordered the Royal Geographical Society (RGS) to prepare 1:1,000,000 scale map sheets for the whole of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>518</sup> In order to compile maps the Royal Geographical Society relied on the notes and observations of explorers, scholars, and officers who had spent time in the region before the war. Hogarth worked closely with the RGS on this project. In some cases the immediacy of wartime needs took a backseat to the accurate production of maps. In response to an Admiralty request for the Persian Gulf sheet in May 1915, the RGS declared that progress had been delayed in order to incorporate the most recent information from the notebooks of Gertrude Bell and Captain William Shakespear.<sup>519</sup> The Society said that it hoped to have the sheet finished by Christmas. The lack of good maps, which had been a major problem

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<sup>517</sup> H.V.F. Winstone, *The Illicit Adventure: The Story of Political and Military Intelligence in the Middle East from 1898-1926* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982), 179-180; Bruce Westrate, *The Arab Bureau: British Policy in the Middle East, 1916-1920* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 34.

<sup>518</sup> Michael Heffernan, "Geography, Cartography and Military Intelligence: The Royal Geographical Society and the First World War," *Transactions of the British Institute of Geographers*, New Series 21, 3 (1996), 507, 512; Hugh Robert Mill, *The Record of the Royal Geographical Society, 1830-1930* (London: The Royal Geographical Society, 1930), 189-205. "MO" designations were changed to "MI" in 1916. Hedley was also the man responsible for organizing the 1913 PEF survey of Palestine, and for securing the participation of T.E. Lawrence and C. Leonard Woolley.

<sup>519</sup> Heffernan, "Geography," 515.

during the Boer War, was not going to hamper British action this time. The immense amount of topographical and geographical work done by the British before 1914 became the foundation for conventional wartime operations in the Ottoman Empire, as well as for intelligence operations in Arabia.

### III. The Arabian Peninsula

From the outset of the war, powerful voices in Britain advocated an aggressive approach against Turkey. Sir Reginald Wingate, Sirdar of the Egyptian Army and Governor General of the Sudan, and General Sir John Maxwell, GOC Egypt, believed that an expeditionary force that might disembark at Alexandretta on the Syrian coast would precipitate an uprising among a populace disaffected with Turkish rule.<sup>520</sup> In this they were supported by no less a figure than Lord Kitchener. Such a move would not only divert attention from the Suez Canal, but also threaten a vital junction of the Baghdad Railway. It could interrupt Turkish troop movements through Syria, Mesopotamia, Cilicia, and Asia Minor. In a best-case scenario it could even cut off communications between Turkish forces in Baghdad and Asia Minor. The plan was never carried through. The Alexandretta plan, popular though it was with Egyptian officials, fell victim to the preferences of ministers in London and was superseded by the Gallipoli scheme that began in February 1915. The Alexandretta plan was considered again in early November

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<sup>520</sup> In advocating this course of action both Wingate and Maxwell were supported by intelligence reports that noted the port facilities available at Alexandretta (Iskenderun in modern Turkey), and the sheltered harbours. "Military Report on Syria," 1911, WO 33/563. Alexandretta was only one of a handful of places on the Syrian coast where such a landing could be made. South of Beirut there were only one or two places on the whole coast where large numbers of men and artillery could be landed at all. Suitable landing spots on the Syrian coast were limited to Alexandretta, Tripoli-in-Syria, Beirut, and possibly Haifa and Acre. "Reconnaissance of Syria from the Coast Eastwards," 1908, WO 33/456.

1915, during the evacuation of the Gallipoli peninsula. Planners thought that such a landing would help restrain the newly released Turkish troops from making another assault on the Suez Canal. However the French objected vehemently to a British landing in a region where they had special interests. The French military attaché in London told Lord Kitchener that France could only acquiesce to a landing on the Syrian coast if the planning and execution of the operation included significant French participation. As the French could not spare the resources from the Western Front, the scheme came to nought.<sup>521</sup>

By early 1915 the Turco-German *Jihad* had failed to gain wide appeal in the Muslim world. Undoubtedly this was due in part to divisions within Islam that diminished the Sultan-Caliph's spiritual authority. There was also the obvious difficulty of declaring a holy war against non-Muslim populations while simultaneously being allied with European Christians. The sultan's call to *Jihad* urged Muslims to kill non-believers everywhere, unless they were German, Austrian, Hungarian or, in certain cases, American. Even Muslim scholars and theologians who accepted the sultan's authority as Caliph found this difficult to swallow.<sup>522</sup> However, even a partially successful *Jihad* could spell disaster for the British, and German efforts to promote the holy war continued. In February 1915 a party of Germans, including the former German consul-general at Baghdad and Bushire Wilhelm Wassmuss, arrived in Persia with the aim of

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<sup>521</sup> Mohs, *Arab Revolt*, 20-21; Bruce Westrate, *The Arab Bureau: British Policy in the Middle East, 1916-1920* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 12; Strachan, *To Arms*, 674; Matthew Hughes, *Allenby and British Strategy in the Middle East, 1917-1919* (London: Frank Cass, 1999), 32; Jan Karl Tanenbaum, "France and the Arab Middle East, 1914-1920," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 68, 7 (1978), 6; Sir R. Wingate to Khan Bahadur, 29 October 1914, FO 882/18. Had the scheme to land a force at Alexandretta reached a planning stage, the reconnaissance done by F.R. Maunsell in 1907/1908 and compiled as "Reconnaissance of Syria from the Coast Eastwards" would likely have served as the plan's starting point. Maunsell had identified Alexandretta as the best natural harbour on the Syrian coast.

<sup>522</sup> McMeekin, *Berlin-Baghdad Express*, 125.

inciting local populations to join in the holy war against the British. Harried by a British force, Wassmuss escaped, but members of his party along with his papers and personal effects fell into British hands. Examination of Wassmuss's papers revealed a plan to raise Afghanistan and Persia against Great Britain as part of a German Asiatic campaign. Included in the captured papers were pamphlets in various Indian dialects intended to corrupt the political loyalties of Indian soldiers. The information strengthened suspicions that a Turco-German move through Mesopotamia had India as its ultimate objective.<sup>523</sup> Despite the *Jihad's* lack of initial success, reports of parties of Germans moving throughout the Muslim world increased British anxieties.<sup>524</sup>

Military and political circumstances directed these anxieties towards Arabia. Faced with the stalemate on the Western Front and the setback at the Dardanelles, officials in London, Cairo, and India all began to favour a more proactive policy towards the Arabs.<sup>525</sup> This was partly because, with the Egyptian front stabilized and the disastrous advance to Baghdad not yet underway, Arabia remained one of the few geographical places where the British could actually engage the Turks. French objections had earlier ruled out the possibility of a landing on the Syrian coast, and it could not be revived after the Gallipoli debacle. At the same time, the special place of Arabia and the Arabs within Islam as the people of the Prophet meant that the lack of a powerful Arab chief's endorsement of the Turco-German *Jihad* was one of the principal constraints on its appeal. Indeed, the sultan had appealed to all the powerful chiefs of Arabia for their

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<sup>523</sup> Chief of Staff, India, to Chief of the Imperial General Staff, 16 March 1915, WO 33/731. Turco-German plots were also uncovered in Egypt. David French, *British Strategy and War Aims, 1914-1916* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1986), 47.

<sup>524</sup> German missions to the Near East will be discussed in chapter 6. See also McMeekin, *Berlin-Baghdad Express*, and Tilman Lüdke, *Jihad Made in Germany: Ottoman and German Propaganda and Intelligence Operations in the First World War* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2005).

<sup>525</sup> Westrate, *Arab Bureau*, 12; Troeller, "Ibn Sa'ud and Sharif Husain," 631.

support: letters had been sent to Ibn Rashid at Hail in Jebel Shammar, Ibn Saud at Riyadh in Nejd, the Idrisi in Asir, and the Imam Yahia of Sanaa, Yemen, and to Sherif Hussein, Emir of Mecca. An endorsement of the *Jihad* from some or all of these leaders could strengthen the authority of the sultan's proclamation and give it a foothold among the seventy million Muslims in India.

In particular, the endorsement of the Grand Sherif of Mecca, de facto guardian of the holy places of Islam, would bolster the theological credibility of the *Jihad*. The sherif was among the most prominent members of the Arab nobility: as part of the Hashemite dynasty, he could claim direct lineal descent from the Prophet as a member of the Koreish tribe. Though he owed his position and status as the guardian of the holy places to an appointment from the sultan, he ruled the Hejaz district of Arabia along the north-central coast of the Red Sea with a significant degree of autonomy. His endorsement of the call to arms would have dangerous consequences. Captain Shakespear, who was sent by the Government of India on special duty to Nejd to court Ibn Saud in the wake of the call to *Jihad*, offered his assessment of the situation:

A 'Jihad,' especially if proclaimed at Mecca by one of the Sherif's standing in Islam, is a contingency of which the consequences are unforeseeable and incalculable. Such a proclamation would, at least, raise the whole Arab world, and Bin Saud himself would be compelled by the circumstances of his faith, his prestige, and position as an Arab chief to follow with all his tribes.<sup>526</sup>

If Britain could manage to separate the Arab chiefs from Constantinople, it would be a blow struck in the war for the hearts and minds of the Muslim world.

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<sup>526</sup> "Copy of part of a letter from Captain W.H.I. Shakespear, I.A., Political Officer on Special Duty to the Persian Gulf Political Resident, January 19, 1915," printed in *Arab Bulletin* No. 25, 7 October 1916, FO 882/25.

The Turco-German *Jihad* had carried the European war to Asia, the Middle East and the Indian sub-continent, carrying with it the threat of revolution and insurrection against British imperial power. Military developments had limited the options available to Great Britain: the failure of the Gallipoli campaign prevented a strike against Constantinople to knock Turkey out of the war, and military and political circumstances ruled out a landing along the Syrian coast. The advance to Baghdad, even before its failure, could not achieve a decisive political result. The city was too isolated, and the British had neither the men nor the material to march an army across Anatolia and Asia Minor to strike at the Turkish capital.<sup>527</sup> Pre-war route intelligence had highlighted the enormous difficulties that would attend any sizeable force trying to cross Anatolia without railway transportation. The Suez Canal remained open, but the primacy of the Western Front meant that the necessary supplies and reinforcements to press the campaign against the Turks on the Palestine/Syria front were not available.

Thus Arabia became the political focus of the British war effort against Turkey.<sup>528</sup> The rejection of the Turco-German holy war by the important chiefs of Arabia would turn the sultan's proclamation into a paper tiger, but it would actually contribute little to the aim of defeating Turkey. The British needed to find a way to turn disaffected Arab opinion into military action. Such a move had long been considered by Kitchener and others, and the pre-war intelligence gathered by the British, in the hands of the "Arabists" and eastern experts being assembled by military intelligence at Cairo, were formidable resources for the task at hand. The work was hampered, however, by the lack of a

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<sup>527</sup> Hughes, *Allenby and British Strategy*, 33.

<sup>528</sup> Col. G. Clayton to Sir H. McMahon, "Memorandum on Young Arab Party," 11 October 1915, FO 882/15. The principle British military effort against the Ottoman Empire, of course, took place on the Sinai-Palestine and Mesopotamian fronts.

coherent and unified Middle Eastern policy. While officials in London, Cairo and Simla all agreed on the importance of Arabia for the war against the Turks and the preservation of internal order in the British Empire, there was no consensus on the best way to pursue the matter.

#### IV. The Making of a Revolt

There were good reasons for the British to believe that efforts to detach the Arabs from their Turkish overlords would meet with success. Turkish authority in Arabia was weak, Yemen was in an almost perpetual state of unrest or revolt, and Ibn Saud had bragged to Shakespear that all of Arabia only awaited the proper moment to evict the Turks from the peninsula. His victory over the Turkish garrisons at Hasa and Qatif seemed to confirm the boast. At the start of the war, the Turkish force in Arabia numbered four divisions, spread out between the Hejaz, Asir and Yemen. Two of those divisions, each approximately containing 12,000 men in 1914, were stationed in the Hejaz and Asir. But the unruliness of the Bedouin tribes meant that the Turks seldom ventured beyond their outposts.<sup>529</sup> Turkish losses in the Balkan Wars had fanned the “long smouldering ‘Arabia for the Arabs’” movement and created a window of opportunity for insurrection.<sup>530</sup> But the British could not mobilize the Arabs against the Turks without first entering into treaties with the principal desert chiefs, and supplying the Bedouin with arms, ammunition, money, and *materiel*. Of the five desert chieftains, Ibn Rashid, Emir of Hail

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<sup>529</sup> Erickson, *Military Effectiveness*, 181; George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening: The Story of the Arab National Movement* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1939), 138.

<sup>530</sup> “Intelligence News: Egypt and the Arabian Khalifate,” 13 August 1914, Egyptian War Office Intelligence Department, FO 882/15.

and Ibn Saud's primary antagonist, declared himself for the Turks almost as soon as the war broke out. The Wahhabi emir was well disposed towards the British, having sought formal relations for several years already. There remained three important chiefs in southern Arabia whose allegiances were uncertain: Seyyid Mohammed ibn Ali ibn Idris (the so-called Idrisi of Asir), the Imam Yehia of Sanaa, and the Grand Sherif of Mecca, Hussein ibn Ali.

Upon the outbreak of war the Government of India made overtures to the three desert chiefs it regarded as falling within its sphere of influence: the Idrisi, the Imam, and Ibn Saud.<sup>531</sup> Arabia and Arab policy had been traditionally regarded as the purview of the Government of India and the political agents who served under the Resident were often Indian Army officers, as in the case of Shakespear, or members of the Indian Political Service. Officials in Simla, more so than in Cairo or London, had an interest in trying to separate the Arabs from the Turks. Apart from the catastrophe of a successful *Jihad*, Arab tribes loyal to the sultan presented numerous potential difficulties for the expeditionary force sent to Basra. Hostile tribes could harass the flanks and supply lines of Force "D" as it advanced up the Tigris towards Baghdad. Indeed, the mood of public opinion in Mesopotamia, and the political dispositions, and capabilities, of the various Arab tribes throughout eastern Arabia and southern Mesopotamia, were of critical importance to Force "D." The success or failure of its advance depended in large measure on a favourable reception among the local populace. It was the job of the force's Chief Political Officer, Sir Percy Cox, who had been Persian Gulf resident from 1904-1914, to

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<sup>531</sup> Westrate, *Arab Bureau*, 16. The Idrisi and the Imam fell into the Government of India's orbit because of their proximity to the Protectorate of Aden, which was part of the Indian Empire and whose Resident answered to the Government of India. James Onley, *The Arabian Frontier of the British Raj* (Oxford: University Press, 2007), 16.

liaise between the commander of the expeditionary force and the Indian government on all these matters.<sup>532</sup>

Of the southern Arab chiefs, the Idrisi had the strongest anti-Turkish proclivities. He had led uprisings in Yemen, most recently in 1910-1911, in concert with the Imam, demanding religious reform and an end to years of Turkish misrule. His authority among the tribes of Yemen derived from a mixture of personal charisma and spiritual influence, rather than from an aristocratic heritage.<sup>533</sup> The Imam remained on the fence; the two Turkish divisions facing him in Yemen made a formal break with the Turks a foolhardy proposition, and he continued to feed and clothe the garrison for the duration of the war.<sup>534</sup>

Ibn Saud presented India with a different situation. As the most patently anti-Turk of the desert chiefs, and the strongest militarily, his friendship was the most valuable. Having rejected his offers of friendship before 1914, the British government and the Government of India suddenly found themselves in need of it. Accordingly, in October 1914, the India Office sent Captain Shakespear, then on leave in England, on special assignment to Ibn Saud. Shakespear, "having seen more of Ibn Saud than any other Englishman and being on terms of cordial friendship with him," was an obvious choice as messenger.<sup>535</sup> The purpose of the mission was to exercise "such influence over him [Ibn Saud] as would keep him on the right side, and prepare him for co-operation should

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<sup>532</sup> Philip Graves, *The Life of Sir Percy Cox* (London: Hutchinson, 1941), 183-184.

<sup>533</sup> "1909. Yemen." Undated Arab Bureau memorandum, FO 882/10; Paul Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen* (Cambridge: University Press, 2000), 7.

<sup>534</sup> Antonius, *Arab Awakening*, 162.

<sup>535</sup> "An Account of the late Capt. W.H.I. Shakespear's Mission to Ibn Saud, December 1914-January 1915," undated, FO 882/8. The paper is initialled "PZC" suggesting that Sir Percy Cox either authored it, or that at the very least he had read the document.

necessity arise.”<sup>536</sup> Shakespear reached Ibn Saud on 31 December. He found the emir receptive to British overtures but unwilling to commit himself irrevocably to Great Britain without a definite treaty.

Even so, Shakespear’s presence in the emir’s camp offered a valuable opportunity to serve British interests while communications over the terms of an alliance were on-going. In January 1915 a messenger from the Sherif of Mecca arrived at Ibn Saud’s camp to ask for the emir’s views on the Turco-German *Jihad*, which Constantinople was pressuring him to endorse. Ibn Saud broached the subject with Shakespear, who recognized the importance of the matter at once. The war, Shakespear told the emir, had been thrust upon Great Britain by Germany, who also propelled Turkey into the conflict. Britain neither sought nor desired war, Shakespear explained, and the British attitude towards Islam was, he thought, best exemplified by the viceroy’s proclamation that Great Britain would make every effort to safeguard the Islamic holy places. It behoved the sherif, Shakespear thought, to use his influence for peace, and it was in his best interest (by which Shakespear meant it would earn the sherif the goodwill of Britain) to continue temporizing with the Turks.<sup>537</sup> Ibn Saud would stand in good stead with Great Britain if he advised the sherif accordingly. The emir duly complied, and a treaty was signed between Ibn Saud and the Government of India. However, owing to bureaucratic processes and the difficulty of communicating with Central Arabia, it was not finalized until the following December.

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<sup>536</sup> Ibid.

<sup>537</sup> “Copy of part of a letter from Captain W.H.I. Shakespear, I.A., Political Officer on Special Duty to the Persian Gulf Political Resident, January 19, 1915,” printed in *Arab Bulletin* No. 25, 7 October 1916, FO 882/25.

The positive value of Shakespear's mission was indisputable. Reflecting on the mission in October 1916, when the Arab Revolt against the Turks was well under way, British military intelligence officers in Cairo described the mission as having come at a crucial moment for the future of the Turco-German holy war. In January 1915, "Arab eyes were all turned towards the Holy Places, waiting for the word of the Ashraf and Ulema [lineal descendants of the Prophet and Islamic legal scholars] of Mecca. Mecca, however, kept silent, and the Jihad fell flat. Instead of being Arabic or Islamic, it became merely Turk, and Turkish theology is not esteemed."<sup>538</sup> Many believed it was Shakespear's advice to Ibn Saud, and the latter's communication to the sherif, that ensured that the Turco-German *Jihad* largely failed.<sup>539</sup> Undoubtedly, Shakespear's death in a skirmish between Ibn Saud and Ibn Rashid at Jarrab on 24 January 1915, only days after he had advised Ibn Saud's reply to the Sherif, was a tremendous loss both to Ibn Saud and to the British cause.<sup>540</sup> The former lost a valuable advocate for his cause in powerful circles, and the British lost a talented officer with intimate knowledge of Arabian geography and close ties to an important desert chief.

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<sup>538</sup> Ibid. Of course the failure of the Turco-German call to *Jihad* is not the sole explanation for the maintenance of order in India during the First World War, but the disproportionate number of Muslims in the Indian Army certainly represented a legitimate concern about the potential effectiveness of the call to holy war. Only a handful of soldiers in the Indian Army mutinied against British rule during the war, most of them Pathans from the Northwest Frontier. This was the case with the 15<sup>th</sup> Lancers, who mutinied at Basra in February 1915, and the sepoy of the 130<sup>th</sup> Baluchis who mutinied at Rangoon in January. In both cases the root cause of the mutiny was an unwillingness to serve outside India. A more serious episode occurred at Singapore in February 1915, where the 5<sup>th</sup> Light Infantry – comprised of Punjabi Muslims, a significant portion of the Indian Army (see p.257-258 below) – took up the call to holy war, murdered several of their officers, and released some of their German prisoners, whom they considered fellow holy warriors. The mutiny was swiftly put down, and the regiment sent to fight in Cameroon. The various Muslim regiments of the French army seemed to pay no heed whatsoever to the Sultan-Caliph's call for *Jihad*. John Keegan, *The First World War* (London: Hutchinson, 1998), 217-218.

<sup>539</sup> J. Keyes to M. Sykes, 10 January 1916, FO 882/8.

<sup>540</sup> Reports on Shakespear's death are conflicting. Some reports have him shot by accident as an observer at the battle whereas others have him shot several times as he tried to man a field gun in order to halt the Rashid cavalry's advance. In recounting the story of Shakespear's demise to British authorities after the fact, Ibn Saud claimed that Shakespear alone was to blame for his death. The Englishman had forgotten, Ibn Saud offered, the first rule of desert warfare: to run away rather than stand and fight. Winstone, *Illicit Adventure*, 152-153; 158-159.

Shakespear's reports were not without their problems, and had he survived the war his influence and contribution to British Arab policy would likely have diminished. His advocacy for the Wahhabi chieftain coloured his analysis of the Arabian situation. Shakespear "grossly exaggerated" Ibn Saud's influence vis-à-vis the other desert chiefs and misinterpreted his capacity for a broader leadership in Arabia.<sup>541</sup> Shakespear seemed completely unaware of intra-peninsula strife. Ibn Saud and the sherif were not exactly enemies, but neither were they particularly friendly. Furthermore Shakespear's concerns that Ibn Saud was ambivalent about British friendship were misplaced.<sup>542</sup> Ibn Saud was never going to pursue a pro-Turkish policy.<sup>543</sup> The treaty he had signed with the Turks in May 1914 had been a temporizing measure designed to forestall a Turkish reprisal after his seizure of Hasa and Qatif the previous year; his attack on Ibn Rashid in January 1915, if not motivated by anti-Turkish feeling, at least constituted a de facto act of aggression against Turkey's ally and vassal. But British and Indian anxieties over the conclusion of a treaty with Ibn Saud reflected the continuing fear of a Pan-Islamic uprising, and the use of pre-war intelligence to deal with wartime problems.

As important as an agreement with Ibn Saud was – for the maintenance of British control of the Persian Gulf and Mesopotamia and for the blunting of the Turco-German call to *Jihad* – the geographical and political isolation of Ibn Saud remained a significant problem. The potential power of Ibn Saud was considerably less than that of the Sherif of Mecca. Ibn Saud's Wahhabi movement was localized, lacked wide appeal, and was often

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<sup>541</sup> Jacob Goldberg, "Captain Shakespear and Ibn Saud: A Balanced Reappraisal," *Middle Eastern Studies* 22, 1 (January 1986), 82.

<sup>542</sup> See p.185 above.

<sup>543</sup> Goldberg, "Reappraisal," 85-86.

viewed with a mixture of fear and disdain by other Muslims.<sup>544</sup> Furthermore, Ibn Saud was not in contact with Turkish forces, and operations along the Tigris in Mesopotamia were a long way from Central Arabia. The Hejaz, however, flanked Britain's most important communication route with India, and as guardian of Mecca and Medina, Sherif Hussein possessed a broad appeal that Ibn Saud did not.

To fully understand the decision to support the sherif and to appreciate the role played by British intelligence in directing Britain's resources in the Middle Eastern theatre, it is necessary to backtrack to the period preceding the outbreak of war. The importance of the sherif as a potential British ally was recognized well before the Turco-German *Jihad* was proclaimed. Lord Kitchener made overtures to the sherif through his second son Abdullah, on the pretext of improving pilgrim traffic, in 1912 or 1913 when the latter was in Cairo as a guest of the khedive and Kitchener was the British consul-general. In 1914 Abdullah renewed the acquaintance. The sherif had found himself at odds with the Young Turk Committee of Union and Progress at Constantinople, who were plotting his assassination. Abdullah asked Kitchener for assurances of British support, as well as money and guns, in the event the Turks tried to depose the sherif.<sup>545</sup> Kitchener offered a sympathetic reply, but refused to accede to the emir's demands. Great Britain and Turkey were not yet at war, and there was nothing he could do. Despite official constraints on his freedom of action, Kitchener recognized the importance of Arabia for the British position in Egypt and India, believing that Turkey's entry into the war would ultimately bring about the end of the Ottoman Empire and the solution to the Eastern Question. It was therefore important to keep lines of communication open with

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<sup>544</sup> Troeller, "Ibn Sa'ud and Sharif Husain," 632.

<sup>545</sup> Westrate, *Arab Bureau*, 14. The sherif had four sons, Ali, Abdullah, Feisal and Zeid, all of whom were actively involved in the political and military affairs of their father.

notable Arab figures. Because his duties as War Minister prevented him from taking a direct role in communications with the sherif and his sons, Kitchener left the matter in the hands of his Oriental Secretary at Cairo, Ronald Storrs.

Kitchener instructed Storrs in September 1914 to inquire of Abdullah whether, in the event of Turkey's entry into the war on the side of Germany, the Arabs would be "with us or against us."<sup>546</sup> The tenor of Abdullah's response proposing conditions for an alliance was cabled immediately to the Foreign Office in London. Kitchener's reply, sent via Ronald Storrs, laid the basis for further negotiations:

If the Arab nation assist England in this war that has been forced upon us by Turkey, England will give every guarantee that no internal intervention takes place in Arabia, and will give Arabs every assistance against external foreign aggression...It may be that an Arab of true race will assume the Khalifate at Mecca or Medina, and so good may come by the help of God out of all the evil that is now occurring.<sup>547</sup>

Kitchener's reply, dangling the prospect of the Caliphate in front of the sherif, was firm enough to keep the sherif interested but vague enough to avoid definite commitments. Kitchener's pledge of British support in the event of an Arab uprising promised an independent Arabia after the war, but declined to discuss precise borders or expand on the nature and extent of the support desired.

Undoubtedly Kitchener's prevarication was due in part to the absence of a defined Arab policy in London. It may be that Kitchener was trying to keep the sherif in play

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<sup>546</sup> "Summary of Historical Documents from the outbreak of War between Great Britain and Turkey 1914 to the outbreak of the Revolt of the Sherif of Mecca in June 1916," 29 November 1916, FO 882/5.

<sup>547</sup> Ibid.

while more precise commitments were debated by the Foreign Office.<sup>548</sup> But some in London doubted the usefulness of Arab allies in general and the sherif in particular. The India Office, which viewed Arab affairs and Arab policy as its particular purview, was also opposed to an alliance with the sherif. Yet the vague replies given to the sherif, first by Kitchener and then by the British High Commissioner Sir Henry McMahon, were almost certainly the consequence of a lack of knowledge of wider underground forces already at work within the Ottoman Empire.<sup>549</sup> Ultimately, the Hussein-McMahon correspondence, which took place between July 1915 and March 1916, determined that in return for promises of Ottoman territory at the end of the war, the British would support the sherif in a rebellion against Turkish rule in the Hejaz.<sup>550</sup>

Early doubts about the sherif's ability to speak for Arab populations beyond the Hejaz appeared to be dispelled by the arrival of information revealing the existence of secret Arab nationalist societies in Syria who were committed to the overthrow of Turkish rule.<sup>551</sup> From the early days of the war, a number of Arab representatives and Arab defectors from the (largely Arab) Ottoman IV Army in Syria had made contact with the British authorities in Cairo. One of the most noteworthy was Aziz Ali al-Masri, a

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<sup>548</sup> Westrate, *Arab Bureau*, 15.

<sup>549</sup> Antonius, *Arab Awakening*, 166.

<sup>550</sup> This was the infamous "Hussein-McMahon Correspondence," the full text of which can be found in George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening: The Story of the Arab National Movement* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1939) and in the official publication, *Correspondence between Sir Henry McMahon, His Majesty's High Commissioner at Cairo, and the Sherif Hussein of Mecca, July 1915-March 1916* (London: HMSO, 1939). What Kitchener and then McMahon understood by their territorial promises to the sherif, and what the sherif understood – or claimed to have understood – have been the subject of much debate in the intervening years. See Elie Kedourie, *England and the Middle East: The Destruction of the Ottoman Empire, 1914-1921* (London: Harvester Press, 1956); *The Chatham House Version and other Middle Eastern Studies* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970) and *In the Anglo-Arab Labyrinth: The McMahon-Husayn Correspondence and its Interpretations, 1914-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976). Opposing interpretations are found in Antonius, *The Arab Awakening* and Fromkin, *A Peace to End all Peace*. Antonius interviewed a number of the members of the sherif's family in the 1920s and 1930s, and his interpretation of the correspondence is heavily pro-Arab. A more balanced interpretation can be found in Monroe, *Britain's Moment* and in Yapp, *Modern Near East*.

<sup>551</sup> Mohs, *Arab Revolt*, 26.

decorated former Ottoman commander, who informed military intelligence of the existence of a secret society of Arab officers named *al-‘Ahd* (“The Covenant”) in Syria dedicated to the cause of Arab independence. Membership of the society, al-Masri claimed, numbered as high as 15,000 and in exchange for money and guns, they were willing to co-operate with Great Britain.<sup>552</sup> Another secret society, *al-Fatat* (the “Young Arab Party”), was brought to the attention of military intelligence in Egypt. In 1915 an Ottoman deserter at the Dardanelles, Sherif al-Faruqi, brought to Cairo a story about the existence of *al-Fatat*, to which he said ninety per cent of the Arab officers in the Ottoman army belonged. *Al-Fatat* aimed at creating an Arab Caliphate in Arabia, Syria and Iraq. If Britain would help, the Arab nationalists would side with Entente.<sup>553</sup> In reality the claims of both societies were greatly exaggerated and their combined membership never exceeded 200.<sup>554</sup> However, military intelligence at Cairo had no way to verify the claims, and the societies exerted a disproportionate influence on Middle Eastern affairs. This represented one of the great failures of British secret intelligence in Turkey. No highly placed secret agents were to be found in the entire Middle East, and there is no evidence of even a single Turkish officer who was recruited as a consciously active agent during the war.<sup>555</sup> The British thus had no means by which they could verify information garnered from Turkish deserters. Without reliable human agents in place to verify

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<sup>552</sup> Ibid., 16-17.

<sup>553</sup> Mohs, *Arab Revolt*, 16-17; Yapp, *Modern Near East*, 279. Al-Faruqi was later run as a liaison officer between High Commissioner (McMahon) and Sherif of Mecca, and given the codename “G.” He provided Cairo with information about the sherif’s relations with other desert chiefs, and the potential number of men the sherif could put under arms. Winstone, *The Illicit Adventure*, 190; [Illegible] to Clayton, 3 November 1915, FO 882/12.

<sup>554</sup> Mohs, *Arab Revolt*, 17; Eliezer Tauber, *The Arab Movements in World War I* (London: Frank Cass, 1993), 113.

<sup>555</sup> Sheffy, “How Much Do We Know,” 41.

information such as this, the British risked being manipulated by local forces for their own ends.

In January 1915 *al-Fatat* contacted the sherif, offering him leadership of their nationalist movement. In May the sherif's third son, Feisal, met with leaders of both societies in Damascus, who promised him a significant following if the sherif would step up to lead.<sup>556</sup> It appears that contact with the secret societies spurred the sherif's aspirations beyond the Hejaz. The prospect of an independent Arab state, and the possession of the Muslim Caliphate, backed by British power, clearly appealed to his ambition. At the same time, officials in Cairo recognized the similarity between the sherif's demands and those of the Arab nationalist societies: here was evidence that the sherif could be counted on to speak for the majority of the Arab peoples.<sup>557</sup> For Britain, the sherif became the link between the nationalist movements with definite political goals emerging in places like Beirut and Damascus, and the general anti-Turkish feelings of the desert Bedouin.<sup>558</sup> In the final analysis, however, the British placed altogether too much reliance on an Arab nationalism that was less unified than they believed it to be. The populations of Syria and Lebanon never recognized the sherif's authority when the Arab Revolt moved north in 1918, and anti-Turkish feeling in Yemen had not yet evolved into a cohesive national identity.

In short, for reasons of local politics, military necessity, and his wider religious appeal, the sherif emerged by the middle of 1915 as Britain's best hope to turn Arab discontent into something more tangible. Wider political concerns simultaneously aided

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<sup>556</sup> Isaiah Friedman, *British Pan-Arab Policy, 1915-1922: A Critical Appraisal* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2010) 43.

<sup>557</sup> Mohs, *Arab Revolt*, 26; Yapp, *Modern Near East*, 279.

<sup>558</sup> Troeller, "Ibn Sa'ud and Sharif Husain," 629-630.

Cairo's efforts to press the shérif's cause in London. A nascent Arab state, under British patronage, could also offer a useful counter to French claims in the Middle East, and protect British interests from a resurgent Russia once the war was over.<sup>559</sup> Soon negotiations were opened between the shérif and Sir Henry McMahon to formulate the terms of an agreement.

While the British had urgent reasons to reach an accommodation with the shérif, Hussein was also driven by exigencies to seek an understanding with the British. The war had thrown the economy of Arabia into upheaval. Turkish grain requisitions were felt especially keenly in the Arabian desert, which relied entirely on imported foodstuffs. Turco-German propaganda could and did blame the grain shortages on the coastal blockade of Arabia maintained by the Royal Navy, but this claim merely reinforced the image of British power for Hussein. Furthermore, by 1914 most pilgrims to Mecca travelled by sea on British ships to Jeddah, the "port" of Mecca – in reality almost seventy-five miles away – where Bedouin guides conducted them to Mecca. The Bedouin lived off the legitimate carrying costs paid by pilgrims, as well as by the plunder gained from robbing the same pilgrims of their money and goods. The annual pilgrimage to Mecca and the economy it sustained were thus heavily reliant on the British navy.<sup>560</sup> In August 1915 a messenger from the shérif to Ronald Storrs complained that almost no pilgrims from British territories – principally Egypt, India, and Java – had come to the Hejaz that year.<sup>561</sup> The incident demonstrated the degree to which Hussein was

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<sup>559</sup> Yapp, *Modern Near East*, 279.

<sup>560</sup> McMeekin, *Berlin-Baghdad Express*, 147-148.

<sup>561</sup> "Statement by a messenger from the Sherif to Ronald Storrs," 18 August 1915, FO 882/19. Turkish propaganda claimed that the British refused to allow their colonial subjects to fulfil their religious duties, but a handful of pilgrims from Java who were able to make the journey reported that this was a falsehood. The British put no obstacles in the way of their Muslim subjects' efforts to complete the pilgrimage, but there were simply too few steamers available, most having been requisitioned as troop ships.

dependant upon the goodwill of Britain for the maintenance of his economy. The British, for their part, began to perceive a tangible means of countering the Turco-German *Jihad*. British gold dispensed liberally to tribal leaders like Sherif Hussein could erode Turkish power and prestige; British grain sent to Jeddah could engender Arab goodwill.<sup>562</sup> Arab nationalism became for Hussein a practical alternative to supporting the Ottoman Empire, and a way to free himself from the influence of the Committee of Union and Progress, who sought to limit his nominal autonomy in the Hejaz.<sup>563</sup> Above all, the sherif understood that the leadership of an independent Arab state and the assumption of the Caliphate were pipe dreams without the backing of a European power.

Together the efforts by officials in India and Cairo to secure the allegiance of powerful desert chiefs seemed to represent a coup for Britain's Middle East policy. By the end of 1915 three of the five principal chiefs in Arabia were allied to, or in negotiations with, the British Empire. Of the two that remained, the Imam was of little consequence, and Ibn Rashid was a minor irritant. The wider appeal of the Sherif of Mecca would blunt the Turco-German *Jihad*, and the friendship of Ibn Saud meant that the two most powerful desert princes were actively engaged in preparing for a revolt against Ottoman rule. To be sure, numerous bureaucratic problems remained, symptomatic of a disjointed Arab policy where officials in Cairo dealt with the sherif while the Government of India sought a treaty with Ibn Saud. Promises of Arab independence to Hussein raised objections from Simla, where the fostering of Arab nationalism and the creation of an independent Arab state was seen as dangerous to the

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<sup>562</sup> McMeekin, *Berlin-Baghdad Express*, 148.

<sup>563</sup> C.E. Dawn, *From Ottomanism to Arabism: Essays on the Origins of Arab Nationalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 52.

safety and security of India. Cairo officials recognized the problems associated with supporting Hussein: a unified Arab nationalist movement that could be moulded into a post-war Arab state did not exist and was unlikely to. The sherif's authority was not universally acknowledged within the Muslim world; apart from theological schisms within Islam, questions of geography limited his appeal. He could not hope to command the political loyalty of tribes in northern Mesopotamia or other distant regions. Nevertheless, he was the only Arab potentate with influence outside his own tribal area, and Britain was bound to prefer him to any other.<sup>564</sup>

The treaties with the sherif and Ibn Saud also needed to be reconciled both with each other and with Britain's European allies. Russia had been promised Constantinople and the Straits in advance of the Gallipoli operation, and France was adamant about retaining colonial interests in Lebanon and Syria. No inter-allied treaty on the post-war make up of the Turkish state had been agreed upon; Britain had not made any claims to Ottoman territory and was not even sure that it desired any. All of these disparate policy threads had to be harmonized into a single Arab policy if an Arab revolt against Turkish rule was to have any chance of success.

### **V. Fractured Policy and War Aims**

Military developments gave additional impetus to the creation of a single, unified Arab policy. Sir Henry McMahon was to complain later that the Arab movement was "a purely military business," having come at the request of General Sir Ian Hamilton, commander of the assault force at Gallipoli. Hamilton and the Foreign Office urgently begged

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<sup>564</sup> "The Arab Question," note by David Hogarth, April 1916, FO 882/2.

McMahon to do something that would “take the Arabs out of the war.”<sup>565</sup> Much of the Turkish force at Gallipoli was composed of Arab conscripts, reinforcements having been brought from the predominantly Arab divisions of the Turkish IV Army stationed in Syria. The Turkish force in Mesopotamia also contained a sizeable Arab contingent, as high as sixty per cent.<sup>566</sup> Taking the Arabs “out of the war” would therefore denude the Turkish army of a significant source of manpower. In addition, news from India in the summer of 1915 reported that the campaign was going well and that Baghdad would soon be captured. The British therefore expected soon to find themselves in possession of large swaths of Arab territory. The Mesopotamian campaign would suffer a dramatic reverse before the year was out, but in mid-1915 there were compelling military reasons to move as quickly as possible to fashion a coherent Arab policy.

There were also pressing political reasons to co-ordinate Middle East policy. According to Mark Sykes, the proliferation of individuals, departments, colonial administrations and wartime bodies with an official interest in the Near and Middle East meant that at least eighteen different voices could lobby the British government on the subject. Sir Ronald Storrs, Lord Kitchener’s Oriental Secretary, wrote after the war of the difficulty of harmonizing the various “views and policies of the Foreign Office, the India Office, the Admiralty, the War Office, the Government of India and the Residency in Egypt.” The Arab Revolt, once begun, wrote Storrs, required the co-operation of at least three military commanders: the GOC’s of Egypt, Iraq, and Aden. The situation became further complicated when, after the withdrawal from Gallipoli in 1915, the Mediterranean

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<sup>565</sup> “Record of a Conference called by Sir Henry McMahon to Discuss the Military Situation,” Cairo, 12 September 1916, FO 882/4.

<sup>566</sup> Richard Popplewell, “British Intelligence in Mesopotamia, 1914-1916,” *Intelligence and National Security* 5, 2 (1990), 150.

Expeditionary Force merged with the Egyptian, became the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, and brought the Naval GOC and the Sudan Government into the fold of those claiming a vested interest in Arab and Middle Eastern policy.<sup>567</sup>

Coordinating policy and contemplating an Arab uprising thus required navigating a minefield of bureaucratic, as well as personal, conflicts. In Mesopotamia, Sir Percy Cox, the Chief Political Officer of the Indian Expeditionary Force, did not get along well with his military commander, General Sir Percy Lake. General Clayton, head of military and political intelligence in Cairo, and Sir Reginald Wingate, Governor General of the Sudan, did not get along with General Archibald Murray, GOC Egypt. McMahon disliked both Wingate and Murray, and everyone in Egypt was suspicious of Lake and the viceroy, Lord Hardinge.<sup>568</sup> All had their own ideas about how the Arabs should best be incorporated into the war effort, and in London the Admiralty, India Office, War Office, and the Foreign Office all jockeyed for influence over the Middle East.

There were yet more incentives to devise a unified Middle East policy. Arab questions could not necessarily be dealt with according to specific geographical boundaries. Syria could not be considered independently of Mesopotamia, nor the Hejaz independently of Nejd. The nomadic character of Bedouin life meant that tribes migrated across the desert between Syria, Iraq, and the Arabian Peninsula. Speaking after the war, Sir Percy Cox acknowledged the difficulties attendant on this, and paid tribute to the enormous advantage gained from the pre-war work and travels of Gertrude Bell.<sup>569</sup> Here

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<sup>567</sup> Sir Ronald Storrs, *The Memoirs of Sir Ronald Storrs* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1937), 168-169.

<sup>568</sup> Westrate, *Arab Bureau*, 25.

<sup>569</sup> Percy Cox, Gilbert Clayton, Hugh Bell, William Goodenough, "Gertrude Bell's Journey to Hayil: Discussion," *The Geographical Journal* 70, 1 (July 1927), 17-21. The discussion took place at a meeting of the Royal Geographical Society, 4 April 1927.

was explicit acknowledgement that pre-war experience made Bell an invaluable intelligence resource during the war.

The most forceful proponents of a unified Middle East policy were the British officials in Cairo who advocated working with existing Pan-Arab movements and the sherif to foster a military rebellion against Turkish rule in Arabia, Syria and Mesopotamia. By force of circumstance as much as anything else, military intelligence at Cairo had become the hub of communications with other military and political offices, as well as with Hussein.<sup>570</sup> Sir Reginald Wingate believed that such a nationalist tack would not only conform to the broader political principles for which Great Britain was fighting, but would also “wean Sunni Islam from the aggressive Pan-Islam of the Ottomans.” The preferred outcome for Wingate would be to create a temporal and spiritual balance of power in the central states of the Islamic world.<sup>571</sup>

Given that nobody considered the complete dissolution of the Ottoman Empire a probable result of the war, setting up the sherif as a counter-balance to Ottoman power seemed sound. A successful conclusion to the war, Wingate suggested, might see the emergence of a semi-independent federation of Arab states that could exist under European (British) guidance.<sup>572</sup> As the power most directly involved with the Arab movement, Great Britain would be in a strong position to dominate Middle Eastern affairs after the war. Wingate’s note demonstrates a firm grasp of the political and military situation in the East, and a deft understanding of the bureaucratic politics of Whitehall. He was more alive than McMahon to the various forces at work in the Arab

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<sup>570</sup> “Record of the Hejaz Rising, Part II: January to June 1916,” FO 882/4.

<sup>571</sup> “British Policy in the Near East,” Sir Reginald Wingate, 26 August 1915, FO 882/13.

<sup>572</sup> Ibid.

world.<sup>573</sup> The Arab movement of the First World War was never either purely nationalist or purely religious, just as the shérif's ambitions were never purely temporal or purely spiritual. The two forces were symbiotic. Neither was strong without the other, and an Arab movement based purely on one was of little use. Wingate, well aware that anything beyond the Western Front was considered by many in London to be of secondary or even tertiary importance, was making the case for the importance of the Middle Eastern theatre. His far-seeing reference to the post-war political shape of the Middle East was meant to sell Cairo's views on Arab policy over the objections of the India Office and the Government of India to those who doubted the wisdom of supporting the shérif. By showing the Arab question to be intricately bound up with the older issue of the Eastern Question, Wingate was staking out the political importance of the Middle Eastern campaigns.

In recognition of the political importance of the Middle Eastern theatre, and to resolve the tangle of opinions surrounding policy towards the Middle East and the Arabs, an inter-departmental committee was created in April 1915 to study the question. The Cabinet was itself divided over British war aims in the region. Sir Edward Grey and Prime Minister Asquith opposed acquiring more territory. At the Admiralty, Winston Churchill wanted to annex Mesopotamia, as did Lord Kitchener, who thought it the best way of preventing Russia from doing so. David Lloyd George, then Chancellor of the

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<sup>573</sup> McMahon's view of the issue was somewhat narrow. His claim that the Arab movement was begun in response to a request to offer military assistance to the campaigns at Gallipoli and in Mesopotamia, and that the shérif was "the only man we could get into touch with," neglected the broader issues of the Turco-German *Jihad* and ignored the Arab movements already in existence. "Record of a Conference called by Sir Henry McMahon to Discuss the Military Situation," Cairo, 12 September 1916, FO 882/4.

Exchequer, favoured the annexation of Palestine.<sup>574</sup> The committee forced representatives of the Foreign, India, and War Offices, along with representatives of the Admiralty and the Board of Trade, to sit down and negotiate Britain's post war desiderata and priorities vis-à-vis the Ottoman Empire. The De Bunsen Committee, so named for its chairman Sir Maurice De Bunsen, also needed to make sure that Britain's promises to the shah did not conflict with promises made to France and Russia, and with the war aims of the Government of India.

The list of British war aims in the final report submitted by the committee was very similar to pre-war British interests, with a few additional items occasioned by the war. The committee wanted the recognition and consolidation of Britain's pre-eminent position in the Persian Gulf, assurances that British trade in Turkish territory would not be discriminated against, security for the development of commercial undertakings of interest, namely oil, river navigation and irrigation and the security of sea communications between the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean. To these were added the fulfilment of pledges given to various Arab notables, the assurance that the Islamic holy places would remain under Muslim rule, and a satisfactory solution to the Caliphate that would, at the very least, not antagonize Indian Muslim opinion.<sup>575</sup> The list of British war aims, unlike those of France or Russia, did not contain any significant territorial ambitions.

It was one thing to enumerate British aims, another thing entirely to realize them. A number of possible solutions that subjected Turkey to various forms of partition and

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<sup>574</sup> "British Desiderata in Turkey in Asia: Report, Proceedings and Appendices of a Committee Appointed by the Prime Minister, 1915, Appendix X," 30 June 1915, CAB 27/1; Monroe, *Britain's Moment*, 29.

<sup>575</sup> "British Desiderata in Turkey in Asia: Report, Proceedings and Appendices of a Committee Appointed by the Prime Minister, 1915," 30 June 1915, CAB 27/1. A pared down version of the report, without minutes or appendices, can be found in CAB 4/6/220B.

vassalage were considered and rejected by the committee. The overriding concern was to remedy the problems of the Eastern Question by creating a stable political situation in the Middle East. Proposals that saw Turkey reduced to a vassal of Russia or France, or that prejudiced British interests to too great a degree, were considered unsuitable. The committee's recommendation was for a federated Turkish state under the nominal suzerainty of the sultan. Subdividing the Ottoman Empire into several autonomous states would theoretically solve the problem of minorities – the plan included forms of autonomy for Kurds, Armenians and Arabs – while creating a Turkish entity that could be subject to Great Power influence but not dominated by any one power.<sup>576</sup>

The De Bunsen Report's conclusions had been arrived at by careful study and deliberation, and made use of nearly all-available resources. Perhaps more importantly, in accepting papers submitted by experts and concerned parties, the committee was actually making use of pre-war intelligence information. In particular, one document paid special homage to the intelligence work done before 1914. This was a paper entitled "The Future Settlement of Eastern Turkey in Asia and Arabia," which outlined India's goals in Mesopotamia and offered objections to the foundation of an independent Arab state. Its author, Sir Arthur Hirtzel, Secretary of the Political and Secret Department at the India Office, acknowledged his debt in writing the paper to "those who – like Miss Gertrude Bell, Lieutenant-colonel F.R. Maunsell, C.M.G., and Mr. Arthur Tod (Messrs. Lynch's Manager at Baghdad) – have intimate personal knowledge of all the conditions."<sup>577</sup>

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<sup>576</sup> "British Desiderata in Turkey in Asia: Report, Proceedings and Appendices of a Committee Appointed by the Prime Minister, 1915," 30 June 1915, CAB 27/1. The issue of parcelling Ottoman territories amongst the Great Powers had attended the Eastern Question throughout its whole existence. Whether this was ultimately to be done by international agreement, as with the Sykes-Picot Agreement, or by some other means, as with Italy's attempt to seize parts of North Africa in 1911, remained in question.

<sup>577</sup> "British Desiderata in Turkey in Asia: Report, Proceedings and Appendices of a Committee Appointed by the Prime Minister, 1915, Appendix VI," 30 June 1915, CAB 27/1.

Another paper submitted by the CID on the potential value of Alexandretta referenced two pre-war military and naval intelligence reports: the 1911 *Military Report on Syria* and the 1908 *Turkey Coast Defences NID Report*.<sup>578</sup> Intelligence without policy direction is of little value, and the use of it here, indirectly, by the De Bunsen Committee represents an effort to employ pre-war information in the creation of a coherent policy. The submission of such papers to the committee shows that intelligence information formed an important part of the political decision-making process relatively early in the war.

The De Bunsen Report identified precise British interests in Turkey, but there remained two vexing problems: how to co-ordinate British desiderata with France, and how to reconcile Arab policy in connection with the De Bunsen Report and the outcome of negotiations with France? The details of the Anglo-French discussions concerning war aims in Turkey, the famous Sykes-Picot negotiations, have been dealt with elsewhere and need not be repeated here.<sup>579</sup> Mark Sykes, Lord Kitchener's protégé on the De Bunsen Committee, found his much-vaunted expertise on Middle Eastern questions ambushed by his French counterpart, François Georges-Picot, who demanded for France almost the whole of Syria, Lebanon and large tracts of Mesopotamia. The French were further unwilling to offer any guarantees of Arab independence or uphold British assurances to Hussein. Picot's intransigence and insistence that France retain a colonial presence in

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<sup>578</sup> "British Desiderata in Turkey in Asia: Report, Proceedings and Appendices of a Committee Appointed by the Prime Minister, 1915, Appendix XI," 30 June 1915, CAB 27/1. The *Military Report on Syria* can be found in WO 33/563.

<sup>579</sup> Tanenbaum, "France and the Middle East," 14. The Arab Bureau – in particular David Hogarth and Gilbert Clayton – disliked the Sykes-Picot Treaty. However they viewed it as a temporary guide to Anglo-French relations in the Middle East, and bound to change with the circumstances of war. See also Antonius, *Arab Awakening*, and Fromkin, *A Peace*. For an alternative interpretation of the treaty, see Monroe, *Britain's Moment* and Elie Kedourie, *In the Anglo-Arab Labyrinth: The McMahon-Husayn Correspondence and its interpretations, 1914-1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976). The text of the treaty can be found in Antonius, *Arab Awakening*.

Lebanon and Syria after the war meant that the Sykes-Picot Agreement superseded the De Bunsen Report as the blueprint for British policy in the Middle East.

The complications of the Sykes-Picot Agreement for British policy combined with the overlapping bureaucratic authorities in the Middle East to create a veritable Gordian Knot of administrative chaos. By the end of 1915 it was clear that the present state of affairs could not continue. If the Sykes-Picot Agreement had given British policy in the Middle East direction, there was still no effective way to pursue and implement it. The sheriff had appeared as the titular figurehead of a potential Arab Revolt. But the necessity of reconciling obligations to him with obligations to France, and the importance of having a single body directing Britain's Arab policy, made the simplification of British policy in the Middle East imperative.

In December 1915 Mark Sykes proposed the creation of an "Islamic Bureau" to guide and direct Britain's Arab policy and co-ordinate it with larger political aims and obligations. Bureaucratic squabbles, particularly between India and Egypt, had led to poor co-ordination among the various regional offices in the Middle East, and a general lack of information sharing and poor communication between the military intelligence offices. The idea of reorganizing Middle East intelligence in order to pursue a cohesive, coherent Arab policy seemed obvious to the Arab experts assembled at Cairo and Basra. Gertrude Bell, who had gone to Cairo in November 1915, T.E. Lawrence, Cox, and Ronald Storrs had all, separately, expressed their frustration with the dysfunctional situation in the Middle East.<sup>580</sup> The idea of an Arab Bureau received strong support from the High Commissioner, who telegraphed London with his views on the matter:

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<sup>580</sup> Mohs, *Arab Revolt*, 33.

Proposed Bureau appears very desirable, both during the war and during subsequent settlement of questions arising out of the war. I consider it essential that it should be located in Egypt, which is best centre for collection of intelligence and for useful activity; but it should have agency in London and *liaison* members in India and Mesopotamia...Field of work is large, and need of such a Bureau is urgent. Much necessary personnel is already on the spot, but it is important to secure services of Sir M. Sykes and Hogarth, whose assistance and experience in starting Bureau in Egypt would be invaluable.<sup>581</sup>

Nonetheless, even the proposal to create an agency to harmonize the disparate threads of British policy in the produced disagreement. It is little wonder that McMahon later referred to it as “the most unfortunate date in my life when I was left in charge of this Arab movement.”<sup>582</sup> The India Office tried to block creation of the agency altogether, while the Admiralty and the Foreign Office argued over whose aegis it should fall under. Sykes was content with Admiralty control over the “Islamic Bureau,” renamed the “Arab Bureau” to reflect its more specific purpose, because the Admiralty “alone achieves anything, has large funds and does things.”<sup>583</sup> Kitchener disagreed, pushing for the Arab Bureau to be under nominal Foreign Office control while simultaneously having access to the resources of naval intelligence.<sup>584</sup> The result was a sort of compromise, with the Arab Bureau being organised as a section of military intelligence in Cairo, reporting to the Foreign Office through the High Commissioner, but with resources coming from the four major departments with an interest in its work. The compromise was an effective

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<sup>581</sup> “Establishment of an Arab Bureau in Cairo. Report of an Interdepartmental Conference,” 10 January 1916, CAB 42/7/4.

<sup>582</sup> “Record of a Conference called by Sir Henry McMahon to Discuss the Military Situation,” Cairo, 12 September 1916, FO 882/4.

<sup>583</sup> Sykes to Clayton, 28 December 1915, FO 882/2.

<sup>584</sup> Mohs, *Arab Revolt*, 33.

one as the nominal Foreign Office control allowed the Arab Bureau wide latitude for action.

The Arab Bureau was formally created in January 1916. It had a broad mandate and a wide scope of authority. Its expressed functions were to harmonise British political activity in the Middle East, keeping the Foreign, War, and India Offices, as well as the CID, Admiralty and Government of India apprised of the “general tendency of Germano-Turkish policy.”<sup>585</sup> It was also charged with co-ordinating pro-British and pro-Entente propaganda among non-Indian Muslims, while simultaneously observing the sensibilities of India’s Muslim population. The report of the committee tasked with overseeing the Arab Bureau’s creation represents a victory for British intelligence officers in Cairo, many of whom formed the nucleus of the Bureau. The objections of the Government of India were ignored, and the committee ordered India’s co-operation. The committee “appreciated the fact that in order to carry out this scheme in its entirety the concurrence of the Government of India is necessary. They [the committee] confidently hope that this will be forthcoming.”<sup>586</sup> Communication with the sherif and co-ordination of the Arab movement were also to go through the Arab Bureau.

The work of the Arab Bureau ultimately exceeded its formal mandate to carry out propaganda operations and co-ordinate communication among the various political, military and intelligence bodies in London, India and Mesopotamia. It quickly began to undertake operations on its own, effectually dictating British policy in Arabia rather than merely implementing policy created elsewhere. Its most famous accomplishment was the direction facilitation of the Arab forces in the desert by T.E. Lawrence. But Lawrence’s

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<sup>585</sup> “Establishment of an Arab Bureau in Cairo,” Report of an Interdepartmental Conference, 10 January 1916, CAB 42/7/4.

<sup>586</sup> Ibid.

exploits would not have been possible without the groundwork done by the Bureau and its members elsewhere. Gertrude Bell had been sent to Cairo in 1915 by Admiral Reginald “Blinker” Hall, the Director of Naval Intelligence, to fill its intelligence files with information about the desert sheikhs and tribes, about which she had so much first-hand knowledge. David Hogarth, whose services were so badly wanted by the High Commissioner, was not to return to Cairo until the spring of 1916. He had been brought from Cairo to London in the fall of 1915 to work with other academics, recruited by naval intelligence, to research both actual and potential theatres of war around the world where naval power could be deployed. The Naval Intelligence Division, as well as the Geographical Section of the General Staff (MO4), had moved into the headquarters of the Royal Geographical Society in Kensington Gore, whose resources had been placed in the service of the GSGS at the outbreak of the war.<sup>587</sup> Among the tasks of naval intelligence was the preparation of handbooks that would serve as encyclopaedic compilations of existing knowledge of various theatres of war similar to Lorimer’s *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf*. The return of Hogarth to London focused these efforts on the Middle East.<sup>588</sup>

The detailed research on the distribution of tribes, on the territorial jurisdictions and loyalties of sheikhs and warlords, and the updating of cartographical information to include pre-war travels of people like Bell, Shakespear, and the naturalist/cartographer Douglas Carruthers, meant that the naval intelligence team at the Royal Geographical Society was essentially a branch of the Arab Bureau. The information contained in the maps and handbooks produced at the Royal Geographical Society during the war laid the

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<sup>587</sup> Heffernan, “Geography,” 517; Mill, *Record of the Royal Geographical Society*, 199.

<sup>588</sup> Heffernan, “Geography,” 517.

foundation for the Lawrence's achievements, but also for military and political activity in the Middle East on a much larger scale.

The creation of the Arab Bureau marked an end to Britain's often confused and ambivalent Middle Eastern policy. The entry of Turkey into the war as a German ally and the Kaiser's subsequent push for the declaration of a *Jihad* forced the British to adopt a more pro-active policy in the Middle East. This proved more difficult in practice than was imagined at the outset. Because the stakes were infinitely higher in wartime than in peacetime, pre-1914 inter-departmental rivalries became more bitter and divisive. The Government of India in particular resented the intrusion into Arab policy, traditionally seen as India's preserve. It jealously guarded its influence over Arab policy from what it perceived as the meddling of Cairo intelligence officials and Home Government ministers. The war with Turkey produced an urgent, immediate, need for reliable intelligence. No co-ordinated Arab policy could be put in place, and no British troops could conceivably operate in Turkish territory, without proper maps and without the support of local Arab chiefs. In the effort to employ cartography strategically and to woo local Arab chiefs effectively, Britain possessed an advantage over both its European allies and its rivals. That advantage was the result of the pre-war travels of scholars, adventurers and military officers alike. Although the Germans sent agents throughout the Muslim world to foment revolt, they did not have the experience, expertise or hard empirical data that the British had spent years acquiring. Moreover, Turco-Arab relations were poor, offering the British an opportunity to mobilize Arab nationalism and anti-

Turkish feeling for their own purposes. Thus, having decided that their policy in the Middle East must be harmonized in aid of the war effort and the post-war settlement, and having created an organization to oversee its implementation, in the second half of the war the British set about putting their advantages to use.

## Chapter Six: “A Museum of up to date knowledge”<sup>589</sup>

Despite the problems faced with India and with the sherif, from June 1916 to the end of the war the Arab Bureau ran what one recent historian has called the “first modern ‘intelligence war.’”<sup>590</sup> The expansion of the Arab Bureau’s activities represented the influence of intelligence on the tactical and strategic aspects of the war and the incorporation of intelligence into policy making. The regional expertise of the Bureau’s members was fundamental to this development. It was the mass of pre-war information collected from travellers, academics, and officers, many of whom later joined the Arab Bureau, that helped prosecute the first modern intelligence war. The value of this information, collected before 1914, was well understood by contemporaries. Speaking at a meeting of the Royal Geographical Society in 1927, Gilbert Clayton, wartime head of military intelligence in Cairo, reminded those present, including Sir Percy Cox and David Hogarth, of the importance of that knowledge: “Preparation [for T.E. Lawrence’s accomplishments] entailed ... the collection of a very large amount of information. Indeed, I attribute much of the success of Colonel Lawrence’s enterprises to information and study in which Miss Bell had a very large hand.”<sup>591</sup> Clayton’s observation underlines the importance of the years of preparation before 1914 for Britain’s war in the Middle East.

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<sup>589</sup> Bruce Westrate, *The Arab Bureau: British Policy in the Middle East, 1916-1920* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 86. The quote is taken from George Lloyd, describing the role the Arab Bureau should adopt beyond that of a mere propaganda organ, May 1916.

<sup>590</sup> Polly Mohs, *Military Intelligence and the Arab Revolt: The First Modern Intelligence War* (London: Routledge, 2008), 157.

<sup>591</sup> Percy Cox, Gilbert Clayton, Hugh Bell, William Goodenough, “Gertrude Bell’s Journey to Hayil: Discussion,” *The Geographical Journal* 70, 1 (July 1927), 17-21. The discussion took place at a meeting of the Royal Geographical Society, 4 April 1927.

Much of the pre-war preparation for the Arab Bureau's work was facilitated by the interpersonal connections that came from Oxbridge and public school educations, and from membership in well-heeled society. What Priya Satia has called the "community of Middle East intelligence experts" was drawn together as much by social, class, and family, relationships as by professional ones.<sup>592</sup> Ronald Storrs, who was Lord Kitchener's Oriental Secretary in Cairo, T.E. Lawrence, George Lloyd, Philip Graves, Kinahan Cornwallis, chief of the wartime Arab Bureau in Cairo, and Mark Sykes, were all of a similar age. Many of them met one another while attending Oxford or Cambridge. Gertrude Bell, who was older by some years, had befriended Janet Hogarth, sister of the archaeologist and wartime intelligence agent David Hogarth, while the former were themselves at Oxford. David Hogarth met T.E. Lawrence (who himself met Bell in 1911 at Carchemish in Syria) and C.L. Woolley, who would be involved with the Palestine Exploration Fund's 1913 survey of Palestine, at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. George Lloyd was a family friend of Gertrude Bell's, and in Constantinople she entertained Valentine Chirol, foreign editor for *The Times*, and Philip Graves, who was a correspondent for the same newspaper in Constantinople from 1908 until 1914.

The Royal Geographical Society, itself a sometime collaborator with the Palestine Exploration Fund, provided a hub where the "exploration fraternity", both military and civilian, could interact.<sup>593</sup> Hogarth, Bell, Shakespear, and Leachman were all members, as were wartime intelligence chief in Cairo Gilbert Clayton, the cartographer Douglas Carruthers, and the Blunts – Wilfrid Scawen and Lady Anne – who had themselves explored parts of the Middle East in the late nineteenth century. Lady Anne Blunt was a

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<sup>592</sup> Satia, *Spies in Arabia*, 36.

<sup>593</sup> See p.202 above.

friend of Gertrude Bell's in Cairo. Many of the "exploration fraternity" nominated one another for membership of the society, which offered an important extraofficial institution for the interaction of the civilian and official members of the "fraternity."<sup>594</sup> The personal relationships of this community extended abroad. Before he worked for *The Times*, Graves had been a correspondent for the *Egyptian Gazette* in Cairo, where he shared a flat with Ronald Storrs.<sup>595</sup> Leachman and Shakespear had met at Constantinople in 1914. Bell had met Valentine Chirol, John Gordon Lorimer, and Sir Percy Cox at the 1902 Durbar in Delhi. It was Chirol who facilitated her first journey to the Middle East in 1905 by pulling strings with his network of friends among British consuls in Turkey. 1905 was the same year Bell met Mark Sykes in Jerusalem. Bell's connections allowed her to fuse "polite travel and amateur archaeology with...information gathering." Her childhood friend, Louis Mallet, was ambassador at Constantinople. It was he who "first passed on useless advisories against travel and, afterwards, excitedly submitted her journey report, praising her 'remarkable exploit.'"<sup>596</sup>

But Clayton's post-war appraisal of the Arab Bureau's work was altogether too modest. Though his assessment of the importance of pre-war intelligence remained correct, the mere existence of such tools did not in itself ensure success. Much of the success that can be ascribed to the Arab Bureau is due not to its vast repository of information about the Middle East, nor to its employment of so-called Arab experts, but rather to the leadership of Clayton, who recognized the abilities of his assembled experts and left them alone to do their work. Clayton's subordinates appreciated his leadership. T.E. Lawrence labelled him the perfect leader for such an enterprise. On more than one

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<sup>594</sup> Satia, *Spies in Arabia*, 37.

<sup>595</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>596</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

occasion, Clayton advocated for the Arab Bureau with General Archibald Murray, GOC Egypt (January 1916-June 1917), whose headquarters at Ismailia were physically distinct from intelligence headquarters at Cairo.<sup>597</sup> Ronald Storrs described Clayton as being possessed of an “unruffled equanimity,” for which no problem seemed insoluble. He was, Storrs continued, “never in the way and never out of the way.”<sup>598</sup> Elsewhere, Clayton has been applauded for the remarkable foresight with which he viewed the Arab Bureau’s work. He was “perhaps the only figure before the outbreak of the revolt who fully grasped the new office’s unique position within the Egyptian administration and its potential for influence as an intelligence headquarters.”<sup>599</sup> Clayton’s sagacity led him to poach a number of Middle Eastern “experts” from military intelligence in Cairo to work directly under him at the Arab Bureau and, having staffed the new body with talented personnel, left them alone to get on with business.

### I. Pilgrimage and Propaganda

The Arab Revolt, originally scheduled to begin in August 1916, began early in June, having been overtaken by events. The antagonism between the sherif and the Committee of Union and Progress in Constantinople that had led him to open communications with the British at Cairo gathered new momentum in the spring of 1916. In May Fakhri Pasha, commander of the 3,000-strong Turkish garrison at Medina, was ordered to prepare for operations against the sherif. His force was bolstered by the arrival of 3,500 more troops

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<sup>597</sup> T.E. Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph* orig. 1935 (London: Jonathan Cape, 1946), 56, 114.

<sup>598</sup> Sir Ronald Storrs, *The Memoirs of Sir Ronald Storrs* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1937), 306.

<sup>599</sup> Mohs, *Arab Revolt*, 36.

en route to Yemen, part of a Turco-German effort to establish a wireless station in southern Arabia.<sup>600</sup> The reinforcements brought the Turkish force in Arabia to three battalions (between 6,500 and 7,000 troops) dispersed in the zone between Medina and Taif, forty-five miles southeast of Mecca, the port towns of Jeddah and Yenbo, and along the Hejaz Railway.<sup>601</sup> Sherif Hussein, mindful of an earlier Turkish attempt to assassinate him, decided that his moment had come. On 5 June 1916 two of his sons, Feisal and Ali, besieged Medina and tore up part of the Hejaz Railway north of the city to prevent the arrival of reinforcements. The Ottoman commander at Mecca surrendered to the sherif a week after the revolt began; Jeddah fell days later, with assistance from several British ships in the Red Sea that bombarded Turkish positions.<sup>602</sup> Within days money and guns were sent from Egypt to the Hejaz, and the Arab Bureau, surprised by the speed at which events developed, found the management of a guerrilla campaign in Arabia added to its list of responsibilities. Confronted with the spectre of a Pan-Islamic revolt throughout its eastern empire, the British mobilized Pan-Arabism to counter it.

The actual outbreak of the sherif's revolt lent increased importance to the Bureau's other duties. Propaganda, ostensibly the Bureau's chief *raison d'être*, took on a new urgency once the rising began. For the sherif to refuse to endorse the sultan's call to *Jihad* was one thing: there were obvious theological difficulties with the Turco-German holy war, not least of which was the fact that it was selective about which infidels should be marked for extermination. Flagrant acts of rebellion were another matter altogether, and were bound to have a significant effect on the opinion of Indian Muslims. If the religious authority of the Sultan-Caliph carried little weight in India, his position as the

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<sup>600</sup> See p.278ff below.

<sup>601</sup> Mohs, *Arab Revolt*, 40; *Arab Bulletin* 2, 12 June 1916; *Arab Bulletin* 13, 1 August 1916, FO 882/25.

<sup>602</sup> Mohs, *Arab Revolt*, 40.

world's leading Muslim ruler at least engendered sympathy among Indian Muslims, many of whom had sent subscriptions to finance the Hejaz Railway at the behest of his predecessor, Abdul-Hamid. The sheriff's revolt had the potential to create more problems for India than anything since the initial call for *Jihad*. It was critical that Great Britain and the Indian government win the propaganda war in the Islamic world.

The Arab Bureau kept its finger on the pulse of Muslim popular opinion following the public proclamation of the sheriff's revolt. Predictably, the least turbulent responses to Hussein's proclamation came from populations who were furthest away from the epicentre of rebellion. Reports from Singapore in the period immediately following the proclamation suggested success. The "intelligent classes" of Muslims there had received the news of the sheriff's rebellion with equanimity. In some very conservative classes the revolt was viewed in an unfavourable light, but discontent had not been very marked, as the majority of Singapore Muslims were sympathetic to the Arabs.<sup>603</sup>

Closer to Arabia responses were more complex. Reports from Egypt in the summer of 1916 revealed a wider range of reaction. Uneducated opinion in some of the towns in Egypt showed residents susceptible to Turkish propaganda and prone to believe rumour. In August 1916, two months after the revolt began, a story circulating in the towns had a well-equipped Turkish army of 750,000 troops advancing towards the Suez Canal in revenge for British intrigues in the Hejaz. Hearsay indicated that the Turks had gotten the better of British forces everywhere, and that British rule in Egypt teetered precariously on the edge of revolution.<sup>604</sup> Educated nationalist opinion trumpeted something similar:

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<sup>603</sup> Singapore to WO, 30 June 1916, FO 882/4.

<sup>604</sup> Colonel G. Clayton to Governor General of the Sudan, 25 August 1916, FO 882/4.

Enver Pasha would soon be the conqueror of Egypt and the Kaiser would then come as the protector of Islam.

Among Egyptian nationalists the reaction to the news of the revolt was coloured by the same mixture of political and religious feeling that was to be found in the sherif's camp. In larger villages in Egypt many people seemed caught between their political and religious allegiances. A large number of those who did not recognize the sultan's spiritual authority felt sympathy with the sherif's cause out of a shared sense of Arab identity; others opposed his rebellion against the Sultan-Caliph. In fact, Clayton reported to Wingate at Khartoum, Egyptian Muslims had been taught to think of themselves as Arabs for so long that they felt insulted whenever it was pointed out that they had descended from mixed and non-Arab races.<sup>605</sup> This Arab identity, Clayton continued, was largely a religious feeling. The Arabs were the people of the Prophet and the children of Islam he noted, adding that the Arab identity of Egyptians had sprung from their religious identity. Now "that there has declared itself a split within Turkey between Moslem and Moslem," Clayton wrote, "they are taken by surprise and do not know what to do."<sup>606</sup> Undoubtedly many Egyptians were remaining on the fence until it became clear whether or not the sherif would succeed. The line between the propaganda war and the "real" war thus became blurred for the Arab Bureau, producing a grey area of operations. To win the propaganda war it was necessary for the sherif to have tangible successes; by aiding the Sherif with money, *materiel* and guns, the Arab Bureau was contributing to the propaganda campaign.

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<sup>605</sup> Ibid.

<sup>606</sup> Ibid.

Though geography made the question of Muslim opinion in Egypt more immediate than the question of Indian Muslim opinion, the sheer number of Muslims in India, particularly in the Indian Army, made the matter there one of paramount importance.<sup>607</sup> Searching for ways to bolster the credibility of the sherif and his British allies in India, the Arab Bureau suggested bringing a dozen or so Indian officers from the Western Front to Arabia, where they would meet with Sherif Hussein and carry his message back to India. Such a move might have a salutary effect on Britain's position on the sub-continent.<sup>608</sup> The Indian government demurred, complaining that the suggestion was impractical. The Government of India's complaint was a good one. A handful of native officers were unlikely to sway the majority of Indian Muslim opinion. In a country of 300 million people, the voices of a few individuals would be hard pressed to carry much

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<sup>607</sup> The actual size of the Indian Army during the First World War is a matter of some debate. The size of the army in 1914 was approximately 155,000 men, though this figure may not include Britons, officers, and non-combatants. Steven P. Cohen says that nearly 740,000 Indians passed through the army from August 1914 to November 1918, but again, this figure may not reflect non-combatants. Steven P. Cohen, *The Indian Army: Its Contribution to the Development of a Nation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 69. Other historians suggest the number of men who passed through the Indian Army during the course of the war was much higher. Philip Mason suggests the number was slightly larger than 1.3 million men, while C.E. Carrington and H.H. Dodwell both put the figure at over 1.4 million. Philip Mason, *A Matter of Honour* (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1974), 411; C.E. Carrington, "The Empire at War," in *The Cambridge History of the British Empire, Vol. III: The Empire and Commonwealth, 1870-1919* (Cambridge: University Press, 1929-1963), 642; H.H. Dodwell, "India and the War," in *Cambridge History, Vol. IV: The Indian Empire, 1858-1918*, 481. At the time of the armistice in 1918, the Indian Army had slightly less than one million men under arms, over nearly three-quarters of whom were serving in the Egyptian and Mesopotamian theatres. Robert Holland, "The British Empire and the Great War, 1914-1918," in Judith M. Brown and William Roger Louis, eds., *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. 4 (Oxford: University Press, 1999), 115 fn. At its lowest ebb during the war, the number of Britons serving in the Indian Army dropped to 15,000. Bernard Porter, *The Lion's Share: A Short History of British Imperialism 1850-1995*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: Longman, 1996), 244. The number of Muslims serving in the Indian Army during the First World War is a difficult figure to pinpoint. Cohen notes that when war began, recruiting for the army initially sought to draw from the traditional so-called 'martial races'. Of these, Punjabi Muslims sent the largest single contribution to the army: 136,000 fighting men, as opposed to 88,000 Sikhs and 55,000 Gurkhas. Hindustani Muslims contributed a further 36,000 men. However, it remains unclear whether these numbers represent (a) the contribution levied from various groups over the entire course of the war, or in an initial recruiting drive, (b) what percentage of the Indian Army was Muslim before 1914, and (c) whether the proportion of Muslim troops in the Indian Army changed significantly over the course of the war. Nevertheless, the figures presented by Cohen show that the number of Muslim troops in the Indian Army was significant, and certainly large enough to give cause for concern about their loyalty in the wake of the sultan's call to holy war. Cohen, *The Indian Army*, 69.

<sup>608</sup> Secretary of State for India to Viceroy, 24 July 1916, FO 882/12.

weight. Moreover, news of the outbreak of war had aroused little interest in India, and fears that news of the evacuation from Gallipoli would damage British prestige on the sub-continent were largely unfounded because, as the Royal Commission that investigated the Dardanelles campaign concluded in 1917, “not one man in a million in India, perhaps, knew anything about Gallipoli.”<sup>609</sup>

In any event, the position of these native officers as paid agents of the government was bound to be discovered and their message discredited.<sup>610</sup> India’s suppression of Pan-Islamic meetings and censorship of the news seemed to have calmed the initial outburst of resentment against Britain and the sherif, but a longer-term solution was necessary.<sup>611</sup> The approach of the annual pilgrimage to Mecca offered “the most natural and most effective agency for bringing public opinion over to the side of the Sherif.” A successful pilgrimage would strike a blow for the hearts and minds of Indian Muslims, and the Indian government recommended that Sherif Hussein be heavily subsidized in order to make the pilgrim’s financial burden as light as possible.<sup>612</sup>

The Arab Bureau was enthusiastic about the idea; a successful pilgrimage might have a salutary effect on public opinion beyond India. In Egypt and Arabia, officials thought, those who had not yet made up their minds about the Arab Revolt might be persuaded to cast their lots for the sherif if the annual *hajj* was successful. The Bureau proposed that a statement by Hussein announcing the pilgrimage should be published in India. The sherif’s arrangements for the annual event were to take into account the past grievances of pilgrims. The cost and availability of food and lodging, and the fees

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<sup>609</sup> David French, “The Dardanelles, Mecca and Kut: Prestige as a Factor in British Eastern Strategy, 1914-1916,” *War and Society* 5, 1 (May 1987), 52, 56.

<sup>610</sup> Government of India to Secretary of State for India, 27 July 1916, FO 882/12.

<sup>611</sup> *Arab Bulletin* 15, 10 August 1916, FO 882/19.

<sup>612</sup> *Ibid.*

charged to pilgrims by Bedouin guides, had been problems in previous years. As the Emir of Mecca and guardian of the holy cities, it was the responsibility of the sherif to host the pilgrimage. Arab Bureau officials argued that a successful *hajj* could greatly raise his prestige, and that of the Hejaz Revolt, throughout the wider Muslim world. Food was to be plentiful and cheap, camel transportation from Jeddah was to be ample, and the official levies on pilgrims, as well as those exacted by Bedouin guides, were to be significantly reduced.<sup>613</sup>

Contemporary reports indicated that a successful pilgrimage took place in 1916. A British agent at Jeddah claimed that it was “the unanimous verdict of returning pilgrims that the ceremonial part of this year’s pilgrimage and the arrangements for the comfort and safety of the pilgrims have been a conspicuous success.”<sup>614</sup> But while the triumph of the *hajj* was proclaimed widely throughout Egypt and North Africa, the government-censored press in India appeared to deliberately ignore the matter.<sup>615</sup> As a result, little political capital was made out of the pilgrimage in India, to the Arab Bureau’s frustration. The Government of India’s objection to the creation of the Arab Bureau, and to the pursuit of a Middle Eastern policy that was neither controlled by the Government of India nor conducted according to its desires, led it to place various bureaucratic obstacles in the way of the Bureau’s work. The committee that created the Arab Bureau had anticipated that India might try to impede the Bureau’s efforts, and had insisted on India’s co-operation in Arab affairs. However, India’s interests extended beyond the immediate needs of the war. Officials at Simla worried that the promotion of Arab nationalism

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<sup>613</sup> Arab Bureau, Cairo, to Colonel C.E. Wilson, Jeddah, 19 August 1916, FO 882/15.

<sup>614</sup> “Draft Communiqué. The Pilgrimage 1916,” Capt. N.N.E. Bray, Cairo, to Director of Military Intelligence, War Office, 19 October 1916, FO 882/15.

<sup>615</sup> Westrate, *Arab Bureau*, 70.

might have important ramifications for India, and that territorial promises to the Arabs would preclude India's colonial acquisition of Mesopotamia during the peace process. To the Government of India these were matters of profound importance for the health and survival of the British Empire, and for the safety and security of India's own sphere of influence. They were not matters to be entrusted to a group of amateurs thousands of miles away, whose chief function seemed to be the championing of the Arab nationalist cause. Moreover, with Gertrude Bell liaising between Sir Percy Cox, who was serving as the chief political officer with the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force, and the Arab Bureau in Cairo, publications and other information were undoubtedly shared between the two organizations. The duplication of so much information in the various published handbooks by the Government of India further demonstrates its insistence on ignoring, if not actively trying to obstruct, the work of the Arab Bureau. Given the personal connections between the Arab Bureau and the political staff in Mesopotamia (Bell at least was on good terms with David Hogarth, Kinahan Cornwallis, T.E. Lawrence, and Ronald Storrs), the reluctance of the Indian government to co-operate actively with the Arab Bureau must be viewed as part of the continued opposition of high ranking officials to what they perceived as the latter's efforts to curb India's own imperial ambitions after the war.

The Indian government's obstructionist tendencies were only part of the Arab Bureau's propaganda problem. Popular opinion regarding Hussein and the revolt could be gauged, and engaged, easily enough in places like Egypt and India where British rule worked to negate the geographical distance from the Hejaz. However, building enough enthusiasm for the revolt to spur the populations of farther flung regions into action was a

difficult proposition. In India it was in the best interest of the Indian government to work against the kind of Pan-Islamic sedition that the Turco-German *Jihad* was designed to provoke, even if the government viewed the work of the Arab Bureau as a nuisance. However in Mesopotamia, where only part of the country was under British military occupation, the reaction to the sheri's revolt was muted. The *Arab Bulletin*, Cairo's regular, secret, printed digest of relevant news from the Arab world, reported in August 1916 that the "news of the Sherif's rebellion created no particular excitement in the slow moving minds of the local people." Speaking very generally, Shia Muslims seemed pleased by the news, and Sunnis more so.<sup>616</sup> But whatever early enthusiasm existed had produced no tangible result – no stirring of the populace to rebel against Turkish rule – by 1917, however, and informed opinion suggested that the Arab Revolt could have no real effect on the situation in Mesopotamia. Iraq, wrote Gertrude Bell – by this time she was working at Basra under Sir Percy Cox as a liaison to the Arab Bureau at Cairo – was mostly Shiite, and northern Mesopotamia was simply too far removed from the Hejaz for the population to be conscious of any political influence that may reside there.<sup>617</sup> In Mesopotamia, Hussein's name carried no weight. Even if he were to be elected as Caliph by Arab Muslims, his rising had produced no real enthusiasm in Mesopotamia. It would be bewildering to people there if he or his family were suggested as ruler in Baghdad.<sup>618</sup>

In October 1916, either as a result of a genuine belief that he was fulfilling Britain's promise to himself, or else for more cynical reasons, the sheri proclaimed himself "King

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<sup>616</sup> *Arab Bulletin* 15, 10 August 1916, FO 882/19.

<sup>617</sup> "Comment on Sir M. Sykes' views respecting Arabian Policy," Memorandum by Miss G. Bell, June 1917, FO 882/3.

<sup>618</sup> *Ibid.*

of the Arab Nation.”<sup>619</sup> Conscious of how this would appear to their other Arab allies, the British refused to recognize the title, instead only acknowledging the sherif as “King of the Hejaz.” The proclamation did little to endear Hussein to Ibn Saud who, having fiercely protected his own autonomy from the Turks, was unwilling to bend the knee to the Sherif of Mecca instead. The sherif’s proclamation created misgivings in the mind of the Wahhabi chief, who suspected that it was based on some secret understanding with the British.<sup>620</sup> For his part, Hussein claimed that the absence of even a token force from Ibn Saud to join the revolt was proof of the latter’s insincerity.<sup>621</sup> In reality, the two men had a longstanding antagonism that predated the war. But the fact remained that although the sherif was the best candidate to lead the revolt, and the only Arab chief with wider religious and political appeal within Islam, he was not universally popular. Thus the creation of a single body – the Arab Bureau – to implement Britain’s Middle Eastern policy and guide the conduct of the war against Turkey was only one step in a much more complex process. The Arab Bureau was presented with nearly as many obstacles by its allies as it was by the Turks.

## II. Maps and Mapping

From its inception, Col. Gilbert Clayton, head of military intelligence in Egypt and the Arab Bureau’s immediate military overseer, had conceived of the Bureau as much more than a propaganda organ. He wanted the Bureau to be “a centre to which all information

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<sup>619</sup> *Arab Bulletin* 29, 8 November 1916, FO 882/25.

<sup>620</sup> “Summary of the Hejaz Revolt,” 30 September 1918, FO 882/7.

<sup>621</sup> “Meetings with King Hussein to discuss his relations with Ibn Saud,” Colonel Bassett to Arab Bureau, 18 January 1918.

on the various questions connected with the Middle East will gravitate.”<sup>622</sup> The Arab Bureau’s mandate had placed all Arab questions under its authority. Indeed the Arab Bureau was at the forefront of the collaboration and planning for the revolt, directing Britain’s Middle East policy. It handled communications between the high commissioner and the sherif, and liaised with the military authorities that were to supply the Arabs with guns and ammunition.<sup>623</sup> McMahon, having only minimal knowledge of Arab affairs himself, and receiving little direction from London in his negotiations with Sherif Hussein, came to rely heavily on personnel in Cairo such as Clayton, Storrs, and Hogarth, whose knowledge and experience of Arabia were vastly more extensive than his own.<sup>624</sup> It was they who attempted to co-ordinate the timing of the revolt with the sherif, promising him the money and guns necessary to secure the allegiance of the Bedouin tribes of the Hejaz and regions further north.

Clayton believed that the Bureau should work to co-ordinate the disparate intelligence bodies working in the region, and act as the nerve centre for British Arab policy and the conduct of the war in the Middle East.<sup>625</sup> In Clayton’s view the Arab Bureau and military intelligence in Cairo, officially separate entities but sharing many personnel, needed to use the expertise at their disposal to educate policy makers in London and Cairo about the relevance of Arab territories to British policy. People like

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<sup>622</sup> Mohs, *Arab Revolt*, 34.

<sup>623</sup> The Arab Revolt had been placed under the authority of Sir Reginald Wingate, Governor General of the Sudan, rather than the military authorities in Egypt. As a result, the Arab Bureau tended to operate independently of operations in Sinai and Palestine. It was not until the arrival of General Sir Edmund Allenby to take command in Egypt in June 1917 that more cohesion emerged between the two bodies.

<sup>624</sup> Westrate, *Arab Bureau*, 34.

<sup>625</sup> Among the various intelligence bodies operating in the Middle East were the intelligence services of both the Egyptian and Mesopotamian Expeditionary Forces, the political intelligence organs in Cairo and Simla, the Eastern Mediterranean Special Intelligence Bureau (itself created in 1916 from a number of other bodies operating in Greece and the Aegean), Military Intelligence (London), the Naval Intelligence Division and the Secret Service Bureau, forerunner of MI6.

the High Commissioner were lifelong bureaucrats with no detailed understanding of the importance that the Ottoman Empire and Arabia had come to assume for Britain. The task of the Arab Bureau was to sift and catalogue material into a form easily accessible to non-experts like McMahon.<sup>626</sup>

In the weeks before the outbreak of the sheri's revolt, the Arab Bureau was busy scouring academic and non-academic publications alike for anthropological and geographical information about Turkish territories.<sup>627</sup> The library assembled by Hogarth at the Arab Bureau's headquarters at the Savoy Hotel in Cairo was impressive, containing over 300 volumes on Middle Eastern topography, history, ethnography, and theology.<sup>628</sup> From these sources and from wartime reports submitted by agents, the Arab Bureau compiled and updated maps and assembled detailed handbooks on various regions. The Bureau also produced military and political reports, such as the *Arab Bulletins*, for internal consumption. Mapping remained a crucial part of the Arab Bureau's work throughout the war. The need for maps was particularly important in the early stages of the Hejaz uprising. Whereas large tracts of Arabia had been explored and sketched by travellers before the war, information on the Hejaz was scant. The prohibition on non-Muslims visiting the holy places of Islam meant that few Europeans had visited the Hejaz, much less Mecca and Medina. Sir Richard Burton had famously visited Mecca in disguise in the 1850s, and Charles Montague Doughty, the Arabian explorer, had visited the Hejaz in the 1870s, but later nineteenth-century travellers had been more interested in

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<sup>626</sup> Mohs, *Arab Revolt*, 34.

<sup>627</sup> Westrate, *Arab Bureau*, 55.

<sup>628</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

Central Arabia.<sup>629</sup> Thus, at the outset of the campaign, good maps were urgently needed but were in short supply.

Despite the use of Bedouin tribesmen and native guides, the lack of proper maps hindered sabotage operations against the Hejaz Railway. The Arab Bureau noted in August 1916 that without more information about enemy dispositions and the topography of the region than it currently possessed, nothing could be planned or done against the Hejaz Railway.<sup>630</sup> Information from native guides was often less precise than European officers would have liked. Sherif Hussein and Feisal were criticized for offering only vague information about events at Medina and further north, and Colonel Newcombe complained that his own efforts to conduct sabotage operations against the railway were mitigated by the “vague and misleading” information his native guides offered about the location of water wells. Sometimes wells were described as being east of the railway line, other times the same well was described as being west of it.<sup>631</sup> A similar complaint was offered by Lawrence, who wrote to the Arab Bureau that “Feisal is out of his area here. He knows little more about Wadi Yenbo than we do. The names of places, sorts of roads and water supply are strange to him.”<sup>632</sup>

Intelligence appraisals of the Baghdad Railway naturally had little to do with the Hejaz, and the travels of private citizens before the war largely circumvented the region, owing partly to the Islamic prohibition on unbelievers near the holy cities. Officers who travelled on the Hejaz Railway prior to 1914 did not go as far as Medina, and their interest was mostly devoted to the progress of the railway’s construction. Thus, while the

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<sup>629</sup> A.A. Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia* (London: Saqi Books, 1998), 17.

<sup>630</sup> Arab Bureau to Colonel Wilson, Jeddah, 23 August 1916, FO 882/4.

<sup>631</sup> “Report by Colonel Newcombe,” 8 August 1917, FO 882/4.

<sup>632</sup> Lawrence to Arab Bureau, 5 December 1916, FO 882/6; T.E. Lawrence, *Secret Despatches from Arabia and Other Writings*. Edited by Malcolm Brown (London: Bellow, 1991), 93.

British had collected much information about Arabia before the war broke out, relatively little of it concerned the Hejaz. At a meeting between Clayton and Feisal in September 1916, the latter asked for British troops to reinforce his lightly armed Arabs trying to block the Turkish advance. But Feisal found the British unwilling to commit resources without adequate information. Clayton's report was unambiguous on this score: "In the absence of a great deal of necessary information, topographical and otherwise, which is not available, it is difficult to appreciate clearly the situation."<sup>633</sup> Hogarth questioned the wisdom of sending troops to Rabegh, a port town north of Jeddah, to support Feisal; given British ignorance of the topography beyond the hills outside of the town, British troops were unlikely to be effective. Moreover, Hogarth continued, according to Burton's information, any Turkish force travelling south could simply bypass Rabegh by moving through the hills, where water was available, towards Jeddah and Mecca.<sup>634</sup> But even when maps were available, problems often attended their use. The Ma'an sheet of the 1/500,000 map of the Ottoman Empire compiled by the Arab Bureau, the Geographical Section of the General Staff, and the Survey of Egypt, and used by Lawrence in his assault on Aqaba in July 1917, was hastily compiled and necessarily imperfect.<sup>635</sup> No surveys had been possible east of longitude 35° west, and in some places on the map the Hejaz Railway was as much as twenty miles out of position.

In the absence of more "scientific" geographical surveys, travel notes like Burton's, often decades old, were one of the chief sources of topographical information represented as maps and in the regional handbooks compiled at the Royal Geographical Society in

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<sup>633</sup> "Views of Sherif Feisal on the Military Situation," Report by Colonel Park, 10 September 1916, FO 882/4.

<sup>634</sup> "The Rabegh Question," by David Hogarth, 10 January 1917, FO 882/6.

<sup>635</sup> Note on Ma'an edition no. 1, issued 2 January 1917, WO 303/443.

London. Wartime maps produced at the RGS were often updated and improved versions of well-known places like France. Where the society did “original” cartographical work during the war, it was mostly turning traveller’s surveys and notes into maps. In fact, almost all of the original cartographic work done by the RGS during the war was on Arabia.<sup>636</sup> Douglas Carruthers, the naturalist and explorer placed in charge of the project, had himself travelled through Arabia in 1909 in search of the Arabian Oryx (a species of antelope native to arid regions of Africa and Asia). Though a member of the RGS and not the Arab Bureau, his work with the society required him to be in close touch with British intelligence officers in Cairo for the purpose of compiling maps. His research for the Ottoman Empire sheets of the RGS 1/1,000,000 map of the world incorporated the notes of pre-war journeys by Gertrude Bell, Capt. William Shakespear and Col. Gerard Leachman, as well as more recent observations from T.E. Lawrence. To complete the map, Carruthers also incorporated older information from Captains Aylmer and Butler, who travelled through Arabia in 1907-1908, as well as the Austrian nobleman Alois Musil (1908-1909) and Sir Wilfred Scawen Blunt and Lady Anne Blunt, all of whom had travelled through the Middle East in the 1870s and 1880s.<sup>637</sup>

The use of both current and older information to continually revise and update maps was a permanent feature of the cartographical work carried out by the Arab Bureau. Tactical and strategic requirements necessitated the constant refinement of existing maps, and the creation of new ones. A handwritten letter from T.E. Lawrence to Cairo, dated 27

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<sup>636</sup> B.B. Cubitt, “War Work of the Society,” *The Geographical Journal* 53, 5 (May 1919), 336-337; Hugh Robert Mill, *The Record of the Royal Geographical Society, 1830-1930* (London: The Royal Geographical Society, 1930), 201. The 1/1,000,000 scale map of the world was a wartime project that continued well after 1918. By war’s end over one hundred sheets had been completed, covering nearly all of Europe and extending through Asia Minor and the Middle East.

<sup>637</sup> *Arab Bulletin* 79, 18 February 1918, FO 882/27.

December 1916, shows him asking for specific map sheets (one showing the coastal town of Wejh and the Hejaz Railway was “an absolute necessity”) and making a number of corrections to the maps of Mecca, Medina and their environs.<sup>638</sup> Another letter from Lawrence, who was then with Feisal at Yenbo on the Red Sea coast, to Cairo complained that reconnaissance being done by the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) in Arabia, based at Rabegh, was of little use: “I want to talk over the question of satisfactory air reconnaissance with Ross. He has four times tried to send a plane up here and it has only once got through. That time its observation was a farce.” Pilots were not covering enough of the area of importance, and were handicapped by the use of older maps and a lack of notes on what places looked like, or what to look for. At Rabegh the RFC did not even have copies of Lawrence’s route notes, which would have been useful in offering guidance to RFC pilots flying reconnaissance missions. “So,” Lawrence complained, “they saw nothing.”<sup>639</sup> The lack of good aerial reconnaissance may have been what led Lawrence to request that a number of RGS and War Office maps be sent to him. “Please send me,” he wrote to Col. C.E. Wilson at Jeddah, “4 sets of 1/250000 Syria, and 1/500000 of Ma’an etc. (MAPS) Also one R.G.S. 1/2000000 Syria Mesopotamia etc.”<sup>640</sup>

Unsurprisingly, much of the new topographical information used for mapping during the war came from Lawrence, whose desert exploits led him to cover far more ground than his colleagues. As a result of his travels in north-western Arabia connected with the capture of Aqaba in July 1917, Lawrence could accurately report that existing maps of the Hejaz were incomplete or misleading. The 1/500,000 Ma’an sheet, he wrote, was

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<sup>638</sup> “Captain Lawrence to Major Cornwallis,” 27 December 1916, FO 882/6. Much of the information for this came from Sir Richard Burton’s travel notes, nearly sixty years old at that point.

<sup>639</sup> “Captain Lawrence to Brigadier Clayton,” December 1916, FO 882/6; Lawrence, *Secret Despatches*, 98.

<sup>640</sup> Lawrence to Col. C.E. Wilson, 5 January 1917, FO 882/6; Lawrence, *Secret Despatches*, 101.

adequate to provide a general view of the country, but the railway was placed too far to the east. The 1/2,000,000 map of the region produced by the RGS came in for criticism, as did all maps of the country between Ma'an and Aqaba, British, Turkish and German alike. Gertrude Bell's notes were good, he thought, but otherwise important landmarks and natural features were often improperly marked.<sup>641</sup>

The corroboration of existing maps by various means was an on-going process. Lawrence wrote of his location to an unnamed recipient in March 1917 for the purpose of enabling RFC flights to more accurately reconnoitre the area: "Colonel Wilson asks that Ross be informed where we are. El Ain is about 10 miles West and South of Murubba in W. Wais on the 1/500,000 Wejh as far as I can see. I did a compass traverse from Wejh but it was a shaky one."<sup>642</sup> Reports submitted by Lawrence to Cairo in the spring of 1917 were used to provide an updated version of the 1/500,000 Wejh provisional sheet, which also incorporated information from Newcombe and notes made by RFC missions and officers who had examined the area by car. The correction and revision of maps extended beyond the Arabian desert. Older maps, like Maunsell's *Map of Eastern Turkey in Asia*, assembled principally between 1901 and 1902, were also updated and improved. Sheets of that map covering parts of Syria and northern Mesopotamia appeared to be the War Office's standard map of the region before 1914, and were revised and expanded during the course of the war.<sup>643</sup> The fresh material improved the accuracy of the map not just by

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<sup>641</sup> *Arab Bulletin* 66, 21 October 1917, FO 882/26. Lawrence, having done survey work for the PEF in 1913, and having served as a map officer in Cairo in the early portion of the war, was undoubtedly capable of pronouncing on such matters with some authority.

<sup>642</sup> Lawrence, *Secret Despatches*, 106.

<sup>643</sup> RGS mr Asia Div.150. *Eastern Turkey in Asia* (1901)

filling in blanks but also by altering positions assigned to the railway and several important road stations.<sup>644</sup>

The constant correction and production of maps assisted the few British officers working with Bedouin tribesmen in Arabia. Small parties of saboteurs operating against the railway, like the ones led by Lawrence, often travelled a hundred miles or more from their camp to their targeted stretch of the line. Much of the travel was done on camelback, but much was also done on foot. In desert conditions, where water was scarce and the need to carry gun cotton and explosives for sabotage operations limited the amount of water that could be carried, knowledge of precise distances was especially important. Without accurate maps, officers could misjudge the distances they needed to travel and miss the railway altogether. They could run short of food and water, and become lost in the desert. Encounters with Turkish patrols could cause the Arabs to scatter and result in European officers becoming separated from their raiding parties. In such instances accurate maps could mean the difference between life and death.

### **III. Handbooks, Gazetteers and Route Books**

Starting in 1915 a series of handbooks covering specific geographical regions of Turkish Arabia were compiled at the Royal Geographical Society and printed by the Naval Intelligence Division. The handbooks relied heavily on the intelligence work done before

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<sup>644</sup> *Arab Bulletin* 52, 31 May 1917, FO 882/26.

the war, and as such represented the finished product of those various efforts.<sup>645</sup> The handbooks, often compiled in co-operation with the War Office and the Arab Bureau, differed from earlier intelligence materials such as the *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf* or the 1904 *Military Report on Arabia*. They were specifically wartime creations, put together with the sole purpose of equipping military officers, intelligence analysts, and diplomatic personnel with as much useful information as possible. Handbooks covering the Ottoman Empire were divided by region, covering Arabia, the Hejaz, Mesopotamia, Aden and Yemen. They were veritable encyclopaedias of history, ethnography, geography, and theology, and normally they contained route information on a number of frequently travelled paths. In keeping with its practice of acting independently from, but often duplicating the work of, London and Cairo, the Government of India issued its own publications, specifically, *Routes in Arabia* printed in 1915, and the enormous *Gazetteer of Arabia* that appeared in 1917.<sup>646</sup>

From the historian's point of view, the chief value of these handbooks is, first, that most of them included bibliographies, and second, that for most of the routes listed, the authors named the sources from which they derived their information. The ability to track the sources of raw intelligence data makes the link between pre-war intelligence activities and their wartime use much clearer and historically revealing. It allows historians to

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<sup>645</sup> Michael Heffernan, "Geography, Cartography and Military Intelligence: The Royal Geographical Society and the First World War," *Transactions of the British Institute of Geographers*, New Series 21, 3 (1996), 517.

<sup>646</sup> *Routes in Arabia* (Simla: General Staff, 1915), IOR/R/15/5/379. The volume can also be found in IOR/L/MIL/17/16/3 and in volume 3 of the Archive Editions series on First World War Handbooks, *A Collection of First World War Military Handbooks of Arabia 1913-1917: Volume 3, Routes in Arabia* (Farnham Common, Buckinghamshire, England: Archive Editions, 1988). The Archive Editions series will henceforth be abbreviated as *First World War Military Handbooks*.

speak very specifically about the contributions to wartime intelligence made by Britons visiting the Middle East before the war.<sup>647</sup>

Several of the handbooks were enormous in size and took significant time to prepare. The most important did not appear until 1916 and ran to several volumes. The *Handbook of Arabia*, printed as a collaborative effort between the Admiralty, military intelligence in London and Cairo, and the Arab Bureau, appeared in two volumes between May 1916 and May 1917. It took more than a year to compile, and was therefore somewhat out of date when it first appeared. A number of the handbooks appeared in more than one edition.<sup>648</sup> Little has been written about the handbooks; no historian of the First World War has examined them in any detail; and histories of the war in the Middle East all but ignore them. Most of the attention devoted to them has come from geographers, who rightly regard the wartime work of the RGS as a Herculean effort.<sup>649</sup> Their political purpose, as distinct from the operational purpose of maps, is alluded to in the *Arab Bulletin*, which describes the *Handbook of Arabia* as being “welcome to every official who has to deal with Arabian matters.”<sup>650</sup> No record of the distribution of the handbooks exists, but references to them in the *Arab Bulletin* indicate that several of the *Bulletin*’s recipients must also have had access to the handbooks.

The *Arab Bulletin*, the Arab Bureau’s “secret” regular digest of news, had an initial print-run of twenty-five copies per issue, a number that substantially increased almost

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<sup>647</sup> The ability to discuss the contributions of people like Gertrude Bell in some specific detail stands in marked contrast to the narratives presented by authors like H.V.F. Winstone, who deal only in vagaries and innuendo.

<sup>648</sup> *A Handbook of Arabia*, 2 vols. (London: Admiralty War Staff Intelligence Division, 1916-1917), IOR/L/MIL/17/16/1; *First World War Military Handbooks*, Vols. 4 and 5. The publication of the *Handbook of Arabia* is discussed in *Arab Bulletin* 37, 4 January 1917, FO 882/26.

<sup>649</sup> See Heffernan, “Geography, Cartography and Military Intelligence,” and Hugh Clout and Cyril Gosme, “The Naval Intelligence Handbooks: A Monument in Geographical Writing,” *Progress in Human Geography* 27, 2 (2003), 153-173.

<sup>650</sup> *Arab Bulletin* 37, 4 January 1917, FO 882/6.

immediately. The *Bulletin* was sent to relevant military and political personnel in London and the Middle East, as well as to other diplomatic posts in the Eastern Mediterranean and Red Sea region. Recipients normally included the Foreign, War, and India Offices, the Admiralty, the Director of Military Intelligence (London), the Sirdar in Khartoum, the Indian Foreign Secretary, the Chief Political Officer at Basra, the Commissioner of Somaliland, and the High Commissioners in Cyprus and Egypt. Certain individuals also received copies: Mark Sykes, Ronald Storrs, Col. C.E. Wilson at Jeddah, and a handful of others.<sup>651</sup> Some people were not permitted to have copies. The writer of an unsigned, unfinished, letter to David Hogarth in July 1918 complained about not being allowed to have the *Arab Bulletin*, which he thought very disadvantageous. He also expressed disbelief that anything could be written (presumably in the *Bulletin*) about Wahhabism without his being consulted on the matter.<sup>652</sup>

In spite of efforts to restrict circulation, proliferation of the *Bulletin* beyond its print-run of twenty-five copies began almost immediately. In August 1916, two months after the first issue was printed, Mark Sykes asked Hogarth, then head of the Arab Bureau, for an extra thirty copies. Ironically, a year later Sykes complained about the enormous

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<sup>651</sup> Mohs, *Arab Revolt*, 9; Westrate, *Arab Bureau*, 103; *Arab Bulletin* 1, 6 June 1916, FO 882/25. The *Arab Bulletin* seldom, if ever, contained information of a highly sensitive nature or top secret nature, so on the one hand the limitation of its print-run to high ranking military and political officials seems unnecessary. On the other hand, its limited circulation may have been a way of reining in people like Harry St. John Philby, who was notoriously difficult to deal with and whose judgment was not always sound. Philby was a late replacement for Shakespear. He had language abilities but no pre-war experience of any significance in Arabia, he was not part of the inner circle of policy-making elite in London, Cairo or Simla. There was thus no particular reason to expand the circulation of the *Arab Bulletin* and send it to people for whom its contents were not especially relevant. Its distribution to political officials in the region who were not directly involved in the creation and conduct of a Near Eastern policy, such as the GOC in Nairobi, or the British Minister at Addis Ababa, seems to have been more of a courtesy in light of their proximity to the events discussed in the *Bulletin*.

<sup>652</sup> "(Unfinished and unsigned) Letter to Commander Hogarth," 11 July 1918, FO 882/8. The author of the letter addressed it from Riyadh, so it was likely Harry St. John Philby who was sent as Shakespear's replacement to Ibn Saud in the fall of 1917. Philby's credentials as an authority on Wahhabism seem to have been clear only to himself.

number of people in London (over ninety, he said) who were reading the *Arab Bulletin*, and asked that the circulation again be restricted. The *Arab Bulletin*'s classified status was further compromised by French and Italian discovery of its existence.<sup>653</sup>

The print-run of handbooks was almost certainly less than the number of people reading the *Arab Bulletin*, but references to the handbooks in the pages of the *Bulletin* suggest that the intended readership for both publications was similar.<sup>654</sup> An article by David Hogarth in *Arab Bulletin* 47 entitled "Euphrates Route to Syria" suggests that readers consult volume three of the massive four-volume *Handbook of Mesopotamia* for particular details of both river and land routes along the Euphrates from Mesopotamia into Syria.<sup>655</sup> In a later issue, an article discussing the movements of Harry St. John Philby, the explorer and Arabist who had joined Cox's staff at Basra in 1915 and was sent as political agent to Ibn Saud in November 1917, refers to volume one of the *Handbook of Arabia* to place his last known whereabouts.<sup>656</sup> T.E. Lawrence specifically requested that he be sent a copy of the *Handbook of Hejaz*.<sup>657</sup> Lawrence's reports on his activities in June and July 1917, before his assault on and occupation of Aqaba reveal a route that appears to have come from the route listings in the Hejaz handbook.<sup>658</sup>

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<sup>653</sup> Westrate, *Arab Bureau*, 104-105. There is no indication that the Germans were alive to the *Arab Bulletin*'s existence.

<sup>654</sup> The archive copies of handbooks offer little additional clues as to their distribution. The National Archives at Kew contains a number of the handbooks in the Admiralty (ADM 186/570-587) and War Office (WO 106/5977). A more complete set of the handbooks is in the archives of the Royal Geographical Society, where much of the compilation work was done. Some of the handbooks are also located in the India Office Political and Secret files (IOR/L/PS) held at the British Library, which house the records of the Government of India's Foreign Office, in the Gulf Residency records (IOR/R) and in the India Office Military Department files (IOR/L/MIL). The most complete set of handbooks appears to be held at the RGS.

<sup>655</sup> *Arab Bulletin* 47, 11 April 1917, FO 882/26.

<sup>656</sup> *Arab Bulletin* 95, 2 July 1918, FO 882/27.

<sup>657</sup> Captain Lawrence to Major Cornwallis, 27 December 1916, FO 882/6.

<sup>658</sup> "The occupation of Aqaba," 7 August 1917, FO 882/7; *Handbook of Hejaz* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Prepared by the Arab Bureau (Cairo: Government Press, 1917), IOR/L/MIL/17/16/12; *First World War Military Handbooks*, Vol. 2. The first edition of the *Handbook of Hejaz* was rushed into press and released in June 1916 to meet

Other evidence suggests a wider official circulation for the handbooks than for the *Arab Bulletin*. A report by Lt.-Col. F. Cunliffe-Owen on a mission to Ibn Saud undertaken with Harry St. John Philby between October 1917 and March 1918 lists several important intelligence reference works as guides to his report. Chief among them were the two-volume *Handbook of Arabia*, the Indian government's *Routes in Arabia*, and the 1904 *Military Report on Arabia* compiled before the war by F.R. Maunsell, which Cunliffe-Owen said was extremely good and accurate.<sup>659</sup> Indeed, the *Military Report on Arabia* represented the most accurate information the General Staff of Force "D" in Mesopotamia had on the crucial strategic route between Mosul and Damascus until the end of 1915. Knowledge of routes was often the only means of knowing whether a body of enemy troops of a given size, known to have started from a specific place, could be close to the front line by a given date.<sup>660</sup>

Cunliffe-Owen's report is an explicit acknowledgement of the wartime value of the pre-war intelligence work done by Maunsell and others. The endorsement of Maunsell's work demonstrates the success of the effort to collect information and to know the region in systematic and quantifiable ways. It also demonstrates the foresight of military intelligence. Maunsell's work was conducted at a time when relations with the Ottoman Empire were reasonably good, and fears of the growth of German power had not yet reached fever pitch. The use of such material during the First World War is a legacy of the problems encountered during the Boer War.

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the immediate demand created by the sheriff's rising. As a result, it contained a number of errors and a more thorough edition was released in February 1917. See *Arab Bulletin* 37, 4 January 1917, FO 882/26.

<sup>659</sup> Report by Colonel Cunliffe-Owen on the mission to Ibn Saud, April 1918, FO 882/9.

<sup>660</sup> Popplewell, "British Intelligence in Mesopotamia," 152.

The source material used for the compilation of the military handbooks provides some of the clearest evidence of the way the Boer War influenced the practice of intelligence collection and analysis in World War I. It also offers a clear picture of the value of the information provided by scholars, travellers, and officers in the pre-1914 period. The various efforts to compile knowledge of Turkish Arabia prior to 1914, such as Maunsell's work, or J.G. Lorimer's efforts assembling the *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf*, are not just a legacy of the specific intelligence problems in South Africa, but also a legacy of the sense of imperial frailty that coloured British foreign policy at the end of the Victorian era. The materials produced by the Government of India drew upon much of the same source material as the intelligence handbooks produced at the RGS and in Cairo. Many of the officers conducting pre-war intelligence missions came from the Indian Army, and India's traditional regard for the Persian Gulf and Arabia as its sphere of influence meant that information and personnel often overlapped between India, London, and Cairo. The *Military Report on Aden Protectorate*, printed by the Government of India, listed David Hogarth's 1904 book *The Penetration of Arabia* in its bibliography along with the 1904 *Military Report on Arabia*.<sup>661</sup> Here was the Intelligence Branch of the Indian Army using the work of an independent scholar, now employed as an intelligence officer in Cairo, and a formal War Office publication prepared a decade before the war.

The presence of relatively accurate pre-war information was not a guarantee that such intelligence would be employed in the war effort. Arnold Wilson, deputy chief political officer in Mesopotamia under Percy Cox, complained that the Indian General

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<sup>661</sup> *Military Report on Aden Protectorate* (Simla: General Staff, 1915), IOR/L/MIL/17/16/6, and also in IOR/L/PS/20/E55; *First World War Military Handbooks*, Vol. 1. The 1904 *Military Report on Arabia* is in WO 33/331 and IOR/L/PS/20/E56.

Staff ignored a good deal of readily available information at the outbreak of the war including Lorimer's *Gazetteer*. Despite the Government of India's maintenance of consuls-general at Baghdad and Basra, men who were often military officers "well accustomed to furnishing reliable reports on every conceivable subject," Wilson complained that "General Head-quarters as a whole showed at all times a marked reluctance to consult local British residents as to practical possibilities and probable climactic and seasonal exigencies."<sup>662</sup> Wilson's memoir is harshly critical of Indian officials who complained that military operations were hampered by the insufficiency of pre-war information, particularly with regard to rivers, and who suggested a broader inadequacy of pre-war intelligence.<sup>663</sup> Wilson accused General Headquarters and General Sir George Gorringe (commanding the 3<sup>rd</sup> Indian Army Corps during the advance up the Tigris in the spring of 1916) of wilfully ignoring good intelligence during the initial advance on Kut in 1915. A failed attempt to navigate upriver from Nasiriya to Kut could have been avoided if only Lorimer's *Gazetteer* had been consulted, Wilson insisted. Such a consultation would have revealed that Lorimer did not attribute "any practical value to this stream for military purposes."<sup>664</sup> Furthermore, Wilson argued, a "vast amount of labour had been expended" on the compilation of a map of Arabia and the Persian Gulf from "every possible source" during the period immediately preceding the war. Good

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<sup>662</sup> Arnold T. Wilson, *Loyalties: Mesopotamia, 1914-1917* (Oxford: University Press, 1930), 22.

<sup>663</sup> Indian officials complained that "'the characteristics of the Tigris and Euphrates were so little known prior to our advance up them' and there were no plans for 'establishment for the building and upkeep of a river fleet suitable or sufficient for the requirements of operations.'" Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, *The Logistics and Politics of the British Campaigns in the Middle East, 1914-1922* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 35. Given that the official inquiry into the Mesopotamian campaign criticized the lack of river transport, the accusation here could simply be a case of shifting blame.

<sup>664</sup> Wilson, *Loyalties*, 79-80.

maps, Wilson claimed, were available in India, Bushire, and Mohammerah, but were classified as “confidential” and not made available to troops.<sup>665</sup>

The map Wilson refers to is presumably the one compiled by F. Fraser Hunter entitled *The Map of Arabia and the Persian Gulf*, but known more commonly as “Hunter’s Map of Arabia.” Hunter, an Indian Army officer, was tasked with compiling maps to illustrate the *Gazetteer* being compiled by J.G. Lorimer. Hunter, Lorimer, and a draftsman spent the winter of 1905-1906 at the Indian Foreign Office in Simla, working in a building designed for summer use, often for up to fourteen hours a day in mittens and overcoats, battling frigid temperatures and freezing ink.<sup>666</sup> In addition to the work done by Lorimer, the map relied on a variety of other available sources: Kitchener’s survey of Palestine done for the PEF in the 1870s, Doughty’s *Arabia Deserta*, Hogarth’s *Penetration of Arabia* and, of course, the Bible. Readily available foreign sources were also used where appropriate, including information from the Frenchman Charles Huber, who explored parts of Arabia in the 1880s, and from the Austrian academic Alois Musil.<sup>667</sup> The map appears to have been in widespread use during the war. An issue of the *Arab Bulletin* from 1916 refers to a number of places located on “Hunter’s Map,” implying that the map was readily available to anyone with access to the *Arab Bulletin*.<sup>668</sup> Furthermore, Harry St. John Philby claimed that it was the only map he carried with him

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<sup>665</sup> Ibid., 40-41.

<sup>666</sup> F. Fraser Hunter, “Reminiscences of the Map of Arabia and the Persian Gulf,” *The Geographical Journal* 54, 6 (1919), 356.

<sup>667</sup> Ibid., 361-363.

<sup>668</sup> *Arab Bulletin* 26, 16 October 1916, FO 882/25.

for much of his 1918 journey across Arabia and the map featured prominently in the Indian General Staff's 1915 intelligence publication *Routes in Arabia*.<sup>669</sup>

The intelligence community – the War Office, India, and Cairo – valued the vast body of pre-war geographical knowledge for more than just the correction of maps. It relied heavily upon geographical information, and the expertise of the Royal Geographical Society, in the publication of the numerous intelligence handbooks. The 1919 *Handbook of Syria (Including Palestine)*, printed by naval intelligence as part of the series produced at the RGS, cited the 1913 PEF survey of Palestine among the maps it consulted. Though the *Handbook of Syria* was printed after the war, its preparation and compilation was a wartime effort. In addition to the PEF survey, the handbook also made use of the RGS map series *Eastern Turkey in Asia*, which accompanied the Military Report on Eastern Turkey in Asia, compiled in four volumes by Maunsell between 1893 and 1904. The four-volume *Handbook of Asia Minor* also made use of the same map series.<sup>670</sup> The forty-seven sheets of the RGS *Eastern Turkey in Asia* series date from 1901. Maunsell did much of the original work before the war, and many of the maps were revised and reissued during the war.<sup>671</sup>

The more important volumes made even heavier use of pre-war information. Both volumes of the *Handbook of Arabia* (a combined 1,200 pages) included a number of

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<sup>669</sup> Hunter, "Reminiscences," 360; *Arab Bulletin* 84, 7 April 1918, FO 882/27; *Routes in Arabia* (Simla: General Staff, 1915), IOR/R/15/5/379 and IOR/L/MIL/17/16/3; *First World War Military Handbooks*, Vol. 3.

<sup>670</sup> RGS *A Handbook of Syria (Including Palestine)* (London: Naval Intelligence Department, 1919); RGS *A Handbook of Asia Minor*, 4 vols. (London: Naval Intelligence Department, 1919). The handbooks are not catalogued in the RGS archives. An index to the map series can be found in the Royal Geographical Society's archives, RGS mr Asia Div.150. Most of the individual sheets of the series can be found in the GSGS files, WO 303 series. The first two volumes of Maunsell's *Military Report on Eastern Turkey in Asia* are in FO 881/6565X and in WO 33/54. The National Archives catalogue lists subsequent volumes in WO 106/64, but the reports are not in the box.

<sup>671</sup> RGS mr Asia Div.150. Maunsell appears to have spent much of the war in London, writing notes about the Baghdad Railway to a colleague at the War Office, but accomplishing little else.

photographic plates attributed to Shakespear, Carruthers, and Leachman. More significantly, a large proportion of the route information contained in the second volume of the handbook comes from post-1900 sources. The *Handbook of Arabia* lists seventy-six routes from twenty-six different sources. Counting references to “native information” as one source, though the notation represents a diverse number of sources, there remain twenty-five sources. Of that tally, eight are taken from pre-war travellers and officers: Percy Cox, William Shakespear, Gertrude Bell, Gerard Leachman, Stuart G. Knox, Francis Maunsell, Barclay Raunkiær, and Douglas Carruthers. Eight more sources are listed as official publications, including the *Military Report on Arabia* and the *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf*. There is a significant amount of overlap here, since much of the work done for the *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf* was done by many of the same people whose individual efforts were listed as sources in the handbooks. Cox, for example, appears as a source in the *Handbook of Arabia* but also did a significant amount of work for the *Gazetteer*. Thus not only does a sizeable proportion of the route information in the *Handbook of Arabia* date from after the Boer War, but much of it actually comes from individuals who worked with military intelligence during the First World War and who had been involved in some way with intelligence collection before 1914.

These individuals were not technically spies or secret agents. They were involved in the collection of intelligence more broadly defined as information, or open source intelligence (OSINT): geographical and ethnographical knowledge, information about the state of Turkish authority in the various provinces of the Ottoman Empire, or news of desert affairs. This was not secret knowledge obtained by cloak and dagger methods. The desire of various British government offices to have the information simply reflected an

admission on their part that there were things they wished to know that they currently did not. The information was readily available upon the expenditure of a modicum of effort. No code-breaking operation or interception of radio transmissions was going to fill in blank spaces on maps, or report on the state of Bedouin unrest. The use of the word “intelligence” to describe the activities of Shakespear, Bell, or Leachman is only applied in hindsight. Their information only became elevated to the level of intelligence, in the sense of secret or sensitive information, once a realistic prospect of war between Britain and Turkey existed and official intelligence organs began to collate existing information with that contingency in mind.

The presence of individuals like Gertrude Bell and Col. Francis Maunsell in the various parts of the intelligence process – from target determination, to intelligence collection, compilation, and ultimately analysis – represents two important continuities in the development of early twentieth-century British intelligence institutions. First, many of the same people were involved in the collection of information from the late nineteenth century through the outbreak of war and beyond. The presence of figures like Maunsell first as consul, then as attaché, and then as an agent undertaking specific missions for the War Office, creates a continuous link between the Boer War and World War I. Secondly, the involvement of many of the same individuals first in the collection of information, and later in its collation, analysis, and wartime use, creates a continuity of process between the early intelligence efforts in Turkish Arabia and the conduct of the war in the Middle Eastern theatre between 1914 and 1918. Gertrude Bell herself, along with many others, represents the link between the innocuous pre-war explorations that

the British government sought to profit from and the transformation of information into key components of the British war effort against the Ottomans.

A closer examination of the route sources in the handbooks reveals an even heavier reliance on the pre-war explorations of Gertrude Bell and others. The seventy-six routes listed in the *Handbook of Arabia* contain 117 source citations. Many of the routes list several citations while some list only one. Of those 117 citations, forty-three – almost forty per cent – come from individuals or intelligence publications dated prior to 1914. That number is deceptively low because the routes in the handbook are broken up by region, and include the least explored parts of the Arabian Peninsula before the war – the Hejaz, Yemen, and western Arabia. The overall contribution of pre-war explorers appears to be lessened by the inclusion in the handbooks of regions they never visited. Of the sixty-six routes listed in these regions, nearly one-third are from “native information,” an unspecific notation that reveals little about the origin of the route information. Ten sources are from nineteenth-century travel writings, and ten more are from Carruthers, Bell, and the *Gazetteer* combined. The rest are from more obscure pre-war publications, or other wartime sources. Upon closer inspection of the routes described in parts of Arabia that were visited by travellers and officers before the war, the proportion of source information increases significantly: almost sixty-five per cent of the information used to describe routes in the parts of Arabia that were explored before the war is taken from adventurers, scholars, and officers.<sup>672</sup> Captain Shakespear and Gertrude Bell alone accounted for almost a quarter of the source information.

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<sup>672</sup> *A Handbook of Arabia*, 2 vols. (London: Admiralty War Staff Intelligence Division, 1916-1917), IOR/L/MIL/17/16/1; *First World War Military Handbooks*, Vols. 4 and 5.

A similar pattern can be found in the Indian government's 1915 *Routes in Arabia*. Of the more than 200 routes listed there, thirty-five different sources are used, with 287 references given. Twenty-five of the total number of sources used are people rather than publications, a share of over seventy per cent. Of that number, sixteen are from information collected after 1900, meaning that almost half of the total number of sources used to produce the book is from officers and travellers from the period 1900-1914. Their names are already familiar: "Hunter's Map," Capt. H. Smyth, Capt. A.B. Eckford, Maj. L.S. Newmarch, Maj. F. R. Maunsell, Capt. L. Aylmer, Capt. S.S. Butler, J.G. Lorimer, Capt. Shakespear, Douglas Carruthers, Col. G. Leachman, Maj. S.G. Knox, Barclay Raunkiær, and Maj. Percy Cox.<sup>673</sup> Their contribution to *Routes in Arabia* is slightly more than one quarter of the total citations listed.

Of the sources that may be termed as official or unofficial publications, the greatest proportion of total citations is taken from the *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf* – nearly twenty-five per cent of the total number of citations listed in *Routes in Arabia*. A significant number of citations also came from earlier Indian government publications dealing with Aden. As with the *Handbook of Arabia*, the debt owed by *Routes in Arabia* to pre-war intelligence collection is enormous. Fully half of the information contained in *Routes in Arabia* can be described as having come from the *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf* or from individuals engaged in intelligence work between 1900 and 1914.<sup>674</sup> This large proportion and the sharing of source material among both India's intelligence publications and the RGS handbooks indicates the extent to which British intelligence

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<sup>673</sup> A small portion of the information listed as having come from Maunsell pre-dates 1900, but I have included it in order to show the larger scope of his individual contribution. For information on Eckford and Newmarch, see p.176-177 and p.64-67 respectively.

<sup>674</sup> *Routes in Arabia* (Simla: General Staff, 1915), IOR/R/15/5/379 and IOR/L/MIL/17/16/3; *First World War Military Handbooks*, Vol. 3.

gathering missions in Turkish Arabia before the First World War were integral to the campaigns in the Middle East.

The four-volume *Handbook of Mesopotamia* does not contain extensive route information, but it does include a bibliographical list of maps and other publications used in its assembly.<sup>675</sup> The RGS *Eastern Turkey in Asia* series is the principal map resource noted; the rest are not especially noteworthy. The bibliography contained in the handbook is revealing for its mixture of official and unofficial publications. Many of the familiar official volumes are present, including Lorimer's *Gazetteer, Routes in Arabia, Military Report on Arabia, Military Report on Eastern Turkey in Asia, Military Report on Syria* (1911) and another publication by Lorimer, then consul-general at Baghdad, entitled *Report of a Tour in Turkish Arabia and Kurdistan* (1913). The unofficial list of publications also includes publications by familiar names like Bell, Maunsell, Leachman, Hogarth, and Mark Sykes, along with several German travel publications.<sup>676</sup> Much of the same material appears again in the *Hejaz Handbook* and the two-volume *Gazetteer of Arabia*. The *Hejaz Handbook* used by Lawrence was prepared using much of the same material that was used for the *Handbook of Arabia* and contains only a small amount of route information.<sup>677</sup> Information on the route used by Lawrence in his operation appears to have come from Carruthers and the Austrian academic Baron Alois Musil. The

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<sup>675</sup> RGS *A Handbook of Mesopotamia*, 4 vols. (London: Admiralty War Staff Intelligence Division, 1916-1917); ADM 186/570-572 (Vols. 2-4 only. Vol. 1 appears to be missing).

<sup>676</sup> Notable titles include Bell's 1911 *Amurath to Amurath*, Sykes's *Dar ul-Islam* (1904) and *The Caliph's Last Heritage* (1915), and Leachman, "Journey through Central Arabia," *Geographical Journal* 43, 5 (May 1914), 500-520. The German titles listed include Oppenheim, *Vom Mittelmeer zum Persischen Golf*, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1900); Friedrich Sarre and E. Herzfeld, *Archaeologische Reise im Euphrat und Tigris-Gebiet* (Berlin, 1911); Ernst Sachau, *Am Euphrat und Tigris* (1900). These three German writings are regularly cited in the publications under discussion here.

<sup>677</sup> *Handbook of Hejaz*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Prepared by the Arab Bureau (Cairo: Government Press, 1917), IOR/L/MIL/17/16/12; *First World War Military Handbooks*, Vol. 2; *Gazetteer of Arabia*, 2 vols. (Simla: General Staff, 1917), IOR/L/MIL/17/16/2. The *Gazetteer of Arabia* and *Routes in Arabia* combine to form a much more detailed and thorough version of the Arab Bureau's *Handbook of Arabia*.

*Gazetteer of Arabia* bibliography contains many of the same names as the *Handbook of Arabia*, among them Bell, Leachman, Shakespear, and Maunsell. Though it contains no route information, the *Gazetteer of Arabia* is easily the most detailed and comprehensive reference to people and places in Arabia.

#### IV. Travellers and Travelogues

Whereas post-1900 intelligence sources dealt with knowledge gaps and specific information in the context of the Eastern Question and Britain's imperial fragility, pre-1900 travel literature was of particular interest to the Edwardian generation of scholars, travellers, and officers. It inspired and informed many of their tours through the Middle East and Arabia.<sup>678</sup> William Gifford Palgrave, who travelled through central and eastern Arabia in the 1860s, published an account of his travels as *A Narrative of a Year's Journey in Central and Eastern Arabia* (1865): it was frequently used as a source for various handbooks and gazetteers. Wilfrid Scawen Blunt and Lady Anne Blunt published two travelogues, the first, *Bedouin Tribes of the Euphrates*, appearing in 1879, and the second, *A Pilgrimage to Nejd*, in 1881. Both volumes appear frequently as references in the intelligence publications, as does C.M. Doughty's enormous *Travels in Arabia Deserta*, published in two volumes in 1888 and considered a masterpiece of travel writing. T.E. Lawrence was shaped by the Blunts' ideas about Bedouins, but it was Doughty's work in particular that wartime intelligence agents looked to as being

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<sup>678</sup> Some of this is described in detail in chapter 2 of Priya Satia, *Spies in Arabia* (Oxford: University Press, 2008) and in chapters 8 and 10 of Suzanne L. Marchand, *German Orientalism In the Age of Empire: Religion, Race and Scholarship* (Cambridge: University Press, 2009).

authoritative.<sup>679</sup> Lawrence was especially inspired by Doughty's writings and republished the book after the war with his own introduction.<sup>680</sup> Harry St. John Philby was also influenced by Doughty's writings, using them as a guide for some of his wartime journeys through Central Arabia. Even the *Handbook of Arabia* noted "study of Doughty's *Arabia Deserta* cannot be too strongly recommended. Pretty well everything that needs to be known about Bedouin life can be found there by a patient reader."<sup>681</sup>

Works by Doughty and others formed a canon of travel literature on the Middle East that the Arab Bureau consistently consulted. David Hogarth was often asked whether there was a single book that offered a useful study of social and political conditions in Syria. There was not, he wrote in the *Arab Bulletin*, since no government commission, scientific society, or individual explorer had ever examined the land as a whole and produced a comprehensive report. Travellers either covered cross sections of the land, as the German Baron Max von Oppenheim had done, or studied one longitudinal section, with occasional digressions, as had been Gertrude Bell's practice.<sup>682</sup> Hogarth's article offered a short list of titles, which included works by Oppenheim, Bell and the Blunts, as well as *The Wilderness of Zin*, the published account of the PEF survey conducted in 1913 by Lawrence and C.L. Woolley, and Alois Musil's 1907 *Arabia Petraea*. The Arab Bureau got its hands on another report of Musil's, from his 1910 expedition to northern Hejaz, which he had undertaken at the behest of the Austro-Hungarian embassy in Constantinople.<sup>683</sup>

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<sup>679</sup> Geoffrey P. Nash, *From Empire to Orient: Travellers to the Middle East, 1830-1926* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 195.

<sup>680</sup> T.E. Lawrence, introduction to *Travels in Arabia Deserta* by C.M Doughty (London: Jonathon Cape, 1923).

<sup>681</sup> *Arab Bulletin* 95, 2 July 1918, FO 882/27; *A Handbook of Arabia*, vol.1, 19.

<sup>682</sup> *Arab Bulletin* 47, 11 April 1917, FO 882/26.

<sup>683</sup> "The North of the Hedjaz," Report by Alois Musil, May 1911, FO 882/3.

The employment of “Arabists” in the theatre by British intelligence during the war was not a universally successful policy. Harry St. John Philby, sent as Shakespear’s replacement to Riyadh in the fall of 1917, had little to no pre-war experience in Arabia. His chief asset had been knowledge of languages, rather than any knowledge of the landscape or relationships with notable persons. His mission to Ibn Saud as political liaison had been problematic. Philby’s judgments were dubious; he was highly critical of the decision to support the shērif, and he emerged as an unabashed cheerleader for the cause of Ibn Saud, without a firm understanding of the nuances of Arabian politics. Philby’s views and sympathies had a “contrary course” to the policy adopted towards Ibn Saud by London, and his superiors ultimately decided that his whereas his experiences in Arabia “will be useful for students and travellers ... so far as his mission to Ibn Saud is concerned he has reached the end of his tether.” He was replaced in the fall of 1918; among the stipulations for his replacement were that the new officer should “have first hand knowledge of conditions in Hejaz. Leachman would be a good choice if no other can be found.”<sup>684</sup> Accordingly Leachman, who had travelled through much of Central Arabia between 1910 and 1914, was sent as political agent to Ibn Saud with the temporary rank of brigadier general. From the British perspective the choice was a good one, though it was less favourable for Ibn Saud. Leachman was devoted to the cause of the British Empire. He shared none of Lawrence’s Arab sympathies, wore his khaki uniform rather than Arab dress, and lacked Shakespear’s partisan support for the Wahhabi emir.

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<sup>684</sup> Sir A. Wilson, Baghdad, to India Office, 15 September 1918, FO 882/9.

### V. Germany in the East

Even the Germans recognized the value of the Arabists' contributions to the British war effort. A translated précis of an article on Mesopotamia from the *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Erdkunde zu Berlin* claimed that

[t]here is much ground for believing that the English have very full descriptions of the country which they keep secret. They were certainly better informed in many respects regarding the country than the Turks or ourselves. In the enemy's books, for instance, of F.R. Maunsell, G.L. Bell, and Mark Sykes we can detect, reading between the lines, a man of hidden, keen and purposeful work for British Imperialism [sic].<sup>685</sup>

Sykes's 1915 book *The Caliph's Last Heritage* came in for particular praise from the writer of the article. The Germans themselves were alive to the possibility of using academics as intelligence agents in the Muslim world. It was, after all, the Germans who had provoked the war in the east. Curt Prüfer, sent to Syria in order to target British Egypt, and Oskar Niedermayer, dispatched to Afghanistan to incite the emir to move

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<sup>685</sup> "Sir Mark Sykes as seen by the author of an article on Mesopotamia in the 'Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Erdkunde zu Berlin,'" n.d., WO 106/1419. Such foreign assessments of the British intelligence-gathering effort within Turkish Arabia appear to have been few and far between. Only German sources are in any real position to offer comment on the value and contribution of British intelligence. The very small number of Frenchmen in the theatre, and the acrimonious state of Anglo-French relations over the future of the Middle East, meant that information on British operations in Arabia and Mesopotamia was seldom shared with French personnel, though the situation regarding Syria was somewhat different. Col. Edouard Brémond, the head of the French military mission to Arabia, was largely kept in the dark about British activities, and his post-war writings offer no comment on the state of British intelligence during the war. The complete, or near complete, absence of Russians from the southern portion of the Middle Eastern theatre (Russian troops were naturally engaged heavily in the Caucasus and, later, in Northern Mesopotamia and Persia) leaves only Germans available to comment on British intelligence. Other instances of German comments like this one may exist in the archives of German newspapers, government papers, or in the private paper collections of German "Orientalists," but I have found no further examples in the British archives. On the treatment given Brémond by the British see Mohs, *Arab Revolt*, 131. Anglo-French intelligence co-operation in the eastern Mediterranean is discussed in Sheffy, *Palestine Campaign*, 156-157. Anglo-Russian co-operation was facilitated on the Caucasus front by the presence of a British liaison officer. Richard Popplewell, "British Intelligence in Mesopotamia, 1914-1916," *Intelligence and National Security* 5, 2 (1990), 141; F.J. Moberly, *The Campaign in Mesopotamia, 1914-1918*, vol. 2 (London: HMSO, 1924), 51.

against India's North-West Frontier, were the German agents with the most important missions, but German agents were sent throughout the Muslim world to promote *Jihad* and foster anti-Entente feeling. Agents were sent to North Africa, to Ethiopia, Southern Mesopotamia, Persia, Medina, Central Arabia, and to Mecca itself.<sup>686</sup>

It was a German mission to Arabia that occasioned the premature start of the sheri's revolt. This was the "Stotzingen Mission" led by Baron Othmar von Stotzingen, which left Berlin for Constantinople and the Arabian Peninsula in March 1916. Its purpose was the establishment of a wireless radio station in southern Arabia, to communicate with Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck's guerrilla campaign in East Africa and to link it with Medina, Damascus, and ultimately Berlin.<sup>687</sup> Had it succeeded it would have represented a potent Turco-German force in southern Arabia (two Turkish battalions were sent to escort the small party of Germans but never made it south of Medina), and a powerful propaganda force in the Red Sea, Egypt, and East Africa zone. As it was, however, the mission was overtaken by Bedouin. Most of its members were killed and their papers fell into British hands. The failure of the Stotzingen Mission emboldened the Arab Bureau and British efforts the Middle East with a tangible success. It offered concrete proof of Germany's

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<sup>686</sup> Sean McMeekin, *The Berlin-Baghdad Express: The Ottoman Empire and Germany's Bid for World Power* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2010), 96-97. Otto Mannesmann was sent to Tripoli in order to stir up French North Africa and to provoke the Sanussi tribes of Libya to attack Egypt from the west. Leo Frobenius was sent via the Hejaz to Ethiopia and the Sudan. The German army captain Fritz Klein was dispatched to southern Mesopotamia to gain the support of the leading clerics of the Shiite holy places at Najaf and Kerbala, as well as to secure the oil wells around Basra. Bernhard Moritz was to establish a German propaganda bureau in Medina, and Max Roloff-Breslau, a scholar of Islam who had lived before the war in Dutch Indonesia, was to sail for the East Indies in September 1914 on a Dutch passport. Once in Sumatra, he was to adopt Muslim disguise, just in time to join Indonesian pilgrims on the annual pilgrimage on a ship bound for the Hejaz. Whether he ever arrived at his destination remains uncertain. David French notes that Niedermayer's mission to Afghanistan was one of four German missions to Persia and Afghanistan. French, "Prestige," 53.

<sup>687</sup> Sir Telford Waugh, "The German Counter to the Revolt in the Desert," *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society* 24, 2 (1937), 314; *Arab Bulletin* 13, 1 August 1916, FO 882/25; "Record of the Rising. Part II: January to June 1916," July 1916, FO 882/4. David Hogarth remarked after the war that if the sheri's rising accomplished nothing else but the thwarting of the von Stotzingen mission, it would have been well worth-while. Antonius, *Arab Awakening*, 210.

efforts to sow the seeds of revolution throughout the Muslim world, and evidence that the money liberally dispensed to the sherif for distribution to the Hejaz Bedouin was well spent.<sup>688</sup>

Most of the German missions to set the east ablaze met similar failure. A June 1918 issue of the *Arab Bulletin* included an article entitled “Archaeologist Enemy Agents,” which noted that the Germans had also been employing archaeologists.<sup>689</sup> The reason was plain: the archaeologists’ familiarity with out-of-the-way localities, native ways and means of transport, and their close relations with native populations, made them well-suited to the task of promoting the Turco-German *Jihad*. Chief among the German agitators was Oppenheim, favourite of the Kaiser but known for licentiousness and immorality by the locals in Syria and Egypt. Other notable figures included Dr. Conrad Preusser, who had known Gertrude Bell before the war and was working to rouse the tribes on the Euphrates front against Britain before he was captured. Another was Major Dr. Friedrich Sarre, who had been working for some time on the Persian front as the German liaison to the Ottoman Sixth Army. Sarre had worked at the Kaiser Friedrich Museum in Berlin, where he was a noted buyer and collector of antiquities. He had also travelled through Asia Minor before the war, and his co-authored book, *Archaeologische Reise im Euphrat und Tigris-Gebiet* (Berlin, 1911), appeared frequently as a reference in official British intelligence publications.<sup>690</sup>

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<sup>688</sup> Waugh, “German Counter,” 314.

<sup>689</sup> *Arab Bulletin* 92, 11 June 1918, FO 882/27. The best books in English that covers these missions to the east in any detail from the German side are McMeekin, *Berlin-Baghdad Express* and Tilman Lüdke, *Jihad Made in Germany: Ottoman and German Propaganda and Intelligence Operations in the First World War* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2005).

<sup>690</sup> Friedrich Sarre and E. Herzfeld, *Archaeologische Reise im Euphrat und Tigris-Gebiet* (Berlin: D. Reimer, 1911).

The lack of any broad efforts at intelligence collection before the war on the German side meant that German intelligence missions were characterized by adventurism with little relationship to policymaking organs or the conduct of the war on a wider scale. By contrast, Lawrence, Shakespear, Gertrude Bell, and others were all connected in various ways to the Britain's larger political and military wartime efforts: Lawrence was in regular contact with Cairo headquarters; Shakespear was in regular communication with the Government of India before his death; Bell worked on Sir Percy Cox's staff in Mesopotamia. But whereas Lawrence of Arabia is often lauded as the quintessential adventurer and guerrilla warrior, the truth of the matter is that careful preparation and systematic study made Lawrence's exploits possible in the first place – precisely as Gilbert Clayton explained after the war. Lack of such preparation and study contributed directly to the German's failures.

The lack of preparation and study reflected the importance the German Foreign Office attached to the prospect of widespread *Jihad*. Shortly after the war began, *The Times* of London named Baron Max von Oppenheim as the key figure in what the paper exaggeratedly alleged was a purposeful German campaign over the course of “the last nine years...to weaken British power and prestige in Egypt by politico-financial and political propaganda actively supported by the German Agency at Cairo.”<sup>691</sup> The paper was only half right. While preparations were made almost at the outset of the war to send German subversive agents to the Middle East, it was the personal influence of Oppenheim with the Kaiser, rather than any serious enthusiasm on the part of the German Foreign Office, that formed the driving force behind Germany's efforts to promote *Jihad*.

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<sup>691</sup> Donald McKale, “‘The Kaiser's Spy’: Max von Oppenheim and the Anglo-German Rivalry Before and During the First World War,” *European History Quarterly* 27, 2 (1997), 201.

As a result, the German efforts bore all the hallmarks of “hasty improvisation.”<sup>692</sup> The Germans neglected to make use of the number of German settlers in Palestine (approximately 2,200 in 1914) – a ready population of potential spies and propaganda agents – for the furthering of German interests. In fact the German Foreign Office adopted an ambivalent, if not hostile attitude, to settlement there before the war, in contrast to the British who saw the Ottoman Empire as the site of a future geo-political struggle.<sup>693</sup> German volunteers for service in the Middle East were often judged on the basis of social standing, rather than ability. Thus, Dr. Hugo Grothe, who spent time in Mesopotamia before the war prospecting for petroleum, offered his services as a political agent for the Middle East and was rebuffed, spending the war in Berlin.<sup>694</sup> The German effort in the Middle East, claims one historian, was run by “unqualified experts and outright charlatans.”<sup>695</sup>

In their efforts to stir revolt against British power throughout the Muslim world, the Germans conducted a broad campaign that sent agents and missions to almost every place where it abutted British interests. But this campaign failed because the British efforts to combat the call to holy war were more concentrated and focused than the German’s efforts to promote it. The British directed resources towards forging alliances with people such as the sherrif and Ibn Saud, who could most easily blunt any unwelcome call to rebellion. The preparation and study carried out before the war provided the

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<sup>692</sup> Trumpener, *Germany and the Ottoman Empire*, 22; McMeekin, *Berlin-Baghdad Express*, 86-87; Donald McKale, *Curt Prüfer: German Diplomat from the Kaiser to Hitler* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1987), 26.

<sup>693</sup> Alex Carmel, “The Political Significance of German Settlement in Palestine, 1868-1918,” in Jehuda Wallach, ed., *Germany and the Middle East, 1835-1939* (Tel-Aviv: Israel Press, 1975), 48, 70.

<sup>694</sup> Lüdke, *Jihad Made in Germany*, 100; Mr. Cartwright, Munich, to Sir Edward Grey, 1 June 1907, FO 424/212.

<sup>695</sup> Reynolds, *Shattering Empires*, 122.

British with the tools to make the policy decisions to focus British efforts in this direction when war finally came.

The German plan to “set the east ablaze” by rousing the Muslim world to revolution against the British was a failure. The call to *Jihad* was beset by problems from its inception. The divisions within Islam, the strain between the Sultan-Caliph and his Arab subjects, and the obvious theological difficulties of waging holy war against some unbelievers – these and other factors dampened enthusiasm for the proclamation. Yet even a partially successful *Jihad* would have had grave consequences for the Entente powers. That it did not materialize was largely due to the success of British intelligence operations in the Middle East. The employment of personnel with intimate knowledge of the region and its populations early in the war helped ensure that prominent Arab notables such as Ibn Saud and the Sherif of Mecca, whose voices could have lent weight to the call to *Jihad*, remained silent. It was partly due to the personal influence of Shakespear that Ibn Saud counselled Sherif Hussein to reject the call to holy war. The sherif saw an opportunity, with British assistance, to free himself from Turkish suzerainty and realize his own spiritual and territorial ambitions. The British, for their part, saw an opportunity to separate the Arabs from the Turks, damage the Turkish war effort, and pacify Muslim sentiment in Egypt and India. The result of their collaboration, the Hejaz Revolt of 1916, was the first military campaign in history driven by intelligence. The employment of scholars, “Arabists,” and officers familiar with the region from the pre-war period created a potent weapon with which to combat the Turks.

The combination of knowledge and experience allowed the British to navigate the geographical landscape, as handbooks, gazetteers, and route books demonstrate. Such

information enabled the successes of T.E. Lawrence and others. It also enabled the British to steer their way through the political landscape of the Middle East and even contributed to the piecemeal fashioning of a post-war vision for the region. Ibn Saud, Sherif Hussein, and the Idrisi were neither friends nor allies, but each had been promised some reward for taking the part of the Entente in the struggle, and each attempted to put aside their grievances for the sake of the larger goal. That such a fragile coalition was achieved at all owes much to the expertise of the likes of Cox, Shakespear, Bell, and others. To be sure, the coalition fell apart soon after the war. The sheriff's efforts to secure the Caliphate for himself failed. And many of the Arab chiefs felt that promises were not kept. But new imperial considerations and the change produced in the international situation by the Russian Revolution led Great Britain and France to reconsider their earlier bargains and obligations.<sup>696</sup>

The Great War was always going to be won, or lost, on the Western Front. But to relegate the Middle Eastern theatre to a mere sideshow underestimates its importance for Britain as an imperial power. The expansion of the war by Germany into Africa, the Middle East, and Asia threatened the survival of the British Empire east of Suez. The loss of Egypt, and with it control of the Suez Canal, would have been catastrophic for the British war effort. In a sense the survival of the British Empire was remarkable, given the weaknesses revealed by the Boer War less than a generation earlier. In a relatively short space of time the British had carried out extensive preparations for the resolution of the Eastern Question. The Eastern Question was rendered more complicated by the fact that it was wrapped up in the most destructive war in human history to that point.

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<sup>696</sup> Anglo-French treatment of the Middle East and the Arabs at the Paris Peace Conference is incisively covered in Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months That Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2001), chapter 27.

Recognizing the importance of the Eastern Question for the health of Britain's status as a Great Power, and lacking the resources to employ more traditional diplomatic tools to protect their interests, the British used intelligence to safeguard their position. The vast amounts of preparation done by officers and private adventurers before 1914 ensured that when war came the British were prepared to fight it. The intelligence effort expended between the Boer War and the First World War paid dividends when the Ottoman Empire joined the Triple Alliance. Britain was able to use the information at its disposal to marshal resources, counter Turco-German efforts at subversion, and direct the revolt of the Arabs against their Ottoman masters. In doing so, British intelligence made a substantial contribution to victory and ensured the survival of the empire.

## **VI. Armistice and After**

The Armistice of 1918 found Great Britain ostensibly in control all of the eastern Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire, but the vanquishing of the Turks appeared to create more problems than it solved. Great Britain soon found its attempts to determine the future of the old Ottoman Empire – in essence to single-handedly resolve the Eastern Question in a manner favourable to British interests – beset by problems on every side. The French had to be appeased in Lebanon and Syria, while the Syrians, Hashemites, Zionists, Palestinians, and the Government of India, pulled in all different directions. The American President Woodrow Wilson's insistence on national self-determination, and its influence on local public opinion throughout the former Turkish Empire, had also to be

reckoned with.<sup>697</sup> It was little wonder the peacemakers at Paris in 1919 prevaricated for so long on the fate of the Middle East, especially when the more pressing questions of Europe's future – the questions that the Great Powers had gone to war over in 1914 – remained unsolved.<sup>698</sup>

By 1918 the British had spent two decades mapping and cataloguing the Ottoman Empire. In the process they had acquired a substantial body of information, which made a decisively positive contribution to victory on the battlefield, and to Britain's ability to navigate Middle Eastern politics. The British had also produced a number of talented "Arabists", whose intimate knowledge of the Ottoman Empire had played a pivotal role in Britain's wartime success. Despite their talents, however, the "Arabists" had been largely shut out of the halls of power in London. The Middle Eastern theatre had been a sideshow, and decision makers in Whitehall had little inclination to listen to the inconvenient advice of experts. Ironically, the one "expert" who did have access to the inner circles of political decision making in London, Mark Sykes, was probably the least qualified member of the community of what some called "Near Easterners." Nevertheless, early indications were that Britain's knowledge and expertise would help shape post-war policy even more than it had shaped policy in wartime; at the peace conference experts were routinely being called in to advise on major decisions, and the negotiation of a treaty with the Turks was one of the conference's most pressing concerns.

It is useful at this juncture to ask what role Britain's acquired knowledge and expertise played in the post-war settlement of the Turkish Empire, and to see whether

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<sup>697</sup> Glen Balfour-Paul, "Britain's Informal Empire in the Middle East," in Judith M. Brown and William Roger Louis, eds., *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. 4 (Oxford: University Press, 1999), 497.

<sup>698</sup> MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, 400.

what the British took valuable lessons from their wartime experience. In one sense, the British deployed their resources very well, putting talented people in key positions. In Jerusalem, Ronald Storrs was made governor. Percy Cox was dispatched to Persia in mid-1918, being replaced by his deputy, Arnold T. Wilson, who governed Mesopotamia until 1920. Gertrude Bell served as Wilson's right hand, her pre-war knowledge of the Arab tribes there making her an obvious candidate for the position. T.E. Lawrence accompanied Feisal to Paris, where he caused a stir in his desert garb. But the most important questions of the day did not concern the apportioning of territories, or the posting of talented individuals to important posts, but rather ideologies: Pan-Islamism, and Arab nationalism. Having had first hand experience of both during the war, the British nevertheless took the wrong lessons from their experience. Decision makers in London and Paris believed that Great Britain could continue to dominate Turks, Arabs, and Persians after the war, just as they had done previously.

The Foreign Office believed that the failure of the Turco-German *Jihad* and the success of the Arab Revolt had revealed Pan-Islamism to be a dead letter; Lord Curzon, now foreign secretary, claimed that it revealed the fallacy of Muslim solidarity. Yet here, as in so much else before, the Foreign Office found itself at odds with the views of the Government of India. Perhaps the organisation most alive to the Pan-Islamic threat before the war, the Government of India was not inclined to discount its power on the basis of the failed Turco-German holy war.<sup>699</sup> That the *Jihad* did not take hold was not

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<sup>699</sup> John Ferris, "The British Empire vs. The Hidden Hand: British Intelligence and Strategy and 'The CUP-Jew-German-Bolshevik combination', 1918-1924," in Keith Neilson and Greg Kennedy, eds., *The British Way in Warfare: Power and the International System, 1856-1956. Essays in Honour of David French* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), 328.

proof of the weakness of Pan-Islamism; it was proof that the call to arms lacked theological credibility.

Pan-Islamism was deeply wound up with the negotiation of the Treaty of San Remo than officially ended the war with Turkey in 1920. During the war, Constantinople had been promised to the Russians, but the Bolshevik Revolution and Russia's early exit from the war had resurrected the issue afresh. Early speculation was that Constantinople would become part of an American mandate. Some officials wanted to see a joint occupation of the city, the sultan deposed, and the Caliphate with him. Eyre Crowe, the permanent undersecretary at the Foreign Office, believed taking Constantinople from Turkey would arouse the hostility of Islamic opinion, but it would also wreck the legend of Turkish military prowess, which he claimed had long been the mainspring of Pan-Islamic propaganda. Such an act would encourage Muslims to seek a new figurehead for their religion. Muslim mentality, Crowe claimed, would be more impressed by a categorical anti-Turkish decision than it would be placated by a policy of temporization and compromise. The Indian foreign secretary, Hamilton Grant, opposed this, arguing that rumours that the allies intended to depose the sultan and abolish the Caliphate had outraged popular Muslim opinion in India. The Indian Secretary, Edwin Montagu, urged Lloyd George and Curzon to take popular Islamic opinion into account during their negotiations with Turkey.<sup>700</sup> He was ignored, and resigned on the issue in 1922. Indeed, the refusal to acknowledge the strength of Pan-Islamic opposition to British rule did more than just alienate Muslim opinion. In India, focus of so much concern over Pan-Islamic agitation, it provided an opportunity for nationalists, Ghandi foremost among them, to

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<sup>700</sup> Ibid, 328, and Francis Robinson, "The British Empire and the Muslim World," in Judith M. Brown and William Roger Louis, eds., *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. 4 (Oxford: University Press, 1999), 406.

attempt to build bridges between India's Muslim and Hindu populations, and unite them in common cause against British rule.<sup>701</sup>

Britain's post-war record on the subject of Arab nationalism was equally mixed. Every British agency that shaped policy in the Middle East, except for the Government of India, patronized Arab nationalism because they saw it as a sword, to destroy the Ottoman Empire, and a shield, to protect the British Empire from Pan-Islam.<sup>702</sup> The success of the Arab Revolt had led decision makers to overvalue the cohesion of nationalist feeling, and underestimate the role of religion in the creation of Muslim-Arab identity. This had not always been the case. Wartime discussions surrounding Britain's Middle Eastern policy, particularly regarding the Arab Revolt, had recognized that Arab nationalism was largely a myth. The Arab Revolt had not even gained traction in Syria, the cradle of pre-war Arab nationalist thinking. But by 1918, the peacemakers in Paris preferred to see the revolt's success as less anti-Turk and more pro-Arab. Certainly this was more convenient for the purposes of solving difficult territorial questions.

Nowhere was this more evident than in the case of the Iraq mandate. Arnold Wilson believed that Britain should rule a single, unified, Iraqi state. He believed the British should acquire Mosul in order to protect Baghdad and Basra, but beyond that, Wilson hoped that Iraq might become a profitable enterprise. There was a good chance that Mosul contained oil deposits, and with proper irrigation, wheat could flourish. Administratively a single Iraq was appealing, but it made little sense otherwise. There was no Iraqi nationalism, only a broader Arab nationalism, and the heterogeneity of the

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<sup>701</sup> MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, 404.

<sup>702</sup> John Ferris, "'The Internationalisation of Islam': The British Perception of a Muslim Menace, 1840-1951," *Intelligence and National Security* 24, 1 (2009), 64.

Arab peoples and Arab lands made a single, unified, Arab state impossible, irrespective of Sherif Hussein's wish to rule over one.

Historically, Iraq had always been divided ethnically, between Kurds and Arabs, and religiously, between Sunnis and Shias. It was also divided geographically. Mosul had always looked more to Aleppo and south-western Turkey than to Baghdad. Baghdad itself was a centre of Persian transit trade, while Basra had always been oriented towards the Persian Gulf and India.<sup>703</sup> Gertrude Bell went personally to Paris to lobby against the idea of a unified Iraq, as did Wilson, though he lobbied in favour of the idea. Bell's expertise made her a formidable authority, but her arguments fell on deaf ears. She wrote to her father in March 1919, "I'm lunching tomorrow with Mr. Balfour (Foreign Secretary) who, I fancy, really doesn't care. Ultimately I hope to catch Mr. Lloyd George by the coat tails, and if I can manage to do so I believe I can enlist his sympathies."<sup>704</sup> While the peacemakers in Paris repeatedly postponed decisions on the future of Mesopotamia while unrest spread through the country. Kurds and Persians had become restless under Arab dominion; Shias resented Sunni influence; tribal leaders resented British power; discontent simmered among officers and bureaucrats who had lost status with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and among an increasing number of Arab nationalists. Unable to maintain order, and convinced that the disturbances that broke out up and down the country in the summer of 1920 were the work of outside agitators, rather than any British short-sightedness, Wilson was relieved and Percy Cox installed as governor. Given their inability to persuade the peacemakers of the foolishness of a unified Iraq, Cox and Bell advocated installing a pliable Arab ruler as a cheap and

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<sup>703</sup> MacMillan, *Paris 1919* 397, and Peter Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq: Contriving King and Country, 1914-1932* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 5.

<sup>704</sup> H.V.F. Winstone, *Gertrude Bell* rev. ed. (London: Barzan, 2004), 321-322.

practical solution to the country's problems.<sup>705</sup> As a result, Feisal was installed as King of Iraq.<sup>706</sup> Though Iraq became stable, British misunderstanding of the nature of Arab nationalism meant that Iraq was never a unified country.

The British believed that Arab nationalism and pan-Islam were mutually exclusive: as one strengthened the other weakened. But they were not mutually exclusive, and British post-war attitudes towards pan-Islam and Arab nationalism continued to be coloured by the same problems that plagued wartime Middle Eastern policy: a lack of general agreement at the departmental level on a course of action to be adopted, and the exclusion of talented and knowledgeable people from the decision making process at the highest levels. It is true that talented people like Percy Cox, Gertrude Bell, Kinahan Cornwallis, and Ronald Storrs were employed in administrative posts throughout the Middle East. It is also true that in several of these cases, most notably in the cases of Bell and Cox, their own knowledge and expertise put them at odds with official British policy. Yet they remained servants of empire, limited in their ability to effect real change at the highest levels of policy making.

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<sup>705</sup> MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, 400.

<sup>706</sup> The French had recently thrown Feisal out of Syria. Frustrated with what he perceived as broken Anglo-French promises about the establishment of a post-war kingdom, he had declared himself King of Syria in 1920. His own forces were quickly swept aside by French troops, and Feisal exiled.

## Conclusion

As the nineteenth century came to a close, Britain's standing as the leading Great Power was more tenuous than it had been at any time since the defeat of Napoleon Bonaparte. A host of crises in Europe and throughout the empire – the Boer War foremost among them – revealed serious cracks in Britain's armour. Both Germany and the United States were outstripping British industrial production, Germany's new navy law challenged Britain's supremacy at sea, and British commerce was contested in markets where it had previously operated with unquestioned dominance. The relative decline of the British Empire produced a new foreign policy paradigm. "Splendid isolation" was abandoned in favour of a series of agreements with other powers in Europe and Asia, in order to protect the empire and avoid a Great Power war. The Eastern Question, and by extension the defence of India, assumed a new urgency in this changing international climate. As a result, British attention was directed towards the theatre where a Great Power confrontation over the Eastern Question was most likely to occur: the Ottoman Empire.

While treaties and ententes offered one method of managing Britain's international problems, intelligence offered another. Information rather than secret knowledge – what modern analysts would call "open source intelligence" (OSINT) – offered a means to an end. The Ottoman Empire was the "Sick Man of Europe." It was corrupt and in decline, and popular opinion in Europe held that the next great international crisis could bring about the empire's collapse. This belief was an erroneous one, and the Ottoman Empire survived numerous crises before finally crumbling at the end of the First World War. But the perception mattered more than the reality, and to prepare for the various scenarios that such a collapse might produce, the British needed information. Information –

intelligence – about the political health of the Ottoman Empire could provide early warning of its demise. Close monitoring of other powers' activities within the empire, such as the construction of the Baghdad Railway, could better allow Britain to defend its existing interests in places like Egypt and the Persian Gulf. Map-making and topographical surveys could make advance planning for military operations possible. The cultivation of relationships with Ottoman vassal chiefs was another (relatively inexpensive) means of protecting British commercial, political, and strategic interests.

The years after 1900 therefore saw a significant effort by the British to acquire information about parts of Turkish Arabia that were little known to them. But in the absence of a proper secret service organization to perform the desired tasks, the British needed to find alternative methods of gathering intelligence. Diplomatic officials already in place represented one such method. This was in fact an old practice. It was, after all, the job of ambassadors and embassy attachés to report information back to their home governments. That practice continued in Turkish Arabia after 1900, though with a new sense of purpose. But embassy personnel were confined to the capital, whereas much of the early information sought by the Intelligence Division at the War Office concerned the parts of Anatolia close to the Russian frontier. Furthermore, embassy personnel could not provide scientific geographical information. Consuls and vice-consuls, scattered throughout the Ottoman Empire, offered a solution. By replacing diplomatic personnel with military officers trained in surveying and topography, the War Office in London was able to acquire a raft of geographical information that was used to create serviceable maps of potential zones of Russian invasion.

Intelligence acquired from military consuls was supplemented by information gained from officers sent on specific fact-finding missions. Officers, often from the Indian Army returning to or from leave, like Capt. Herbert Smyth in 1903, were directed to follow specific routes in order to engage precise intelligence targets like the Baghdad Railway. The results of their inquiries were compiled into printed reports, such as the 1904 *Military Report on Arabia*, meant for the consumption of those policy makers and civil servants at the Foreign Office, War Office, and India Office who were most closely connected to the defence of British interests in Asia. Occasionally, as in the cases of Capt. William Henry Irvine Shakespear and Col. Gerard Leachman, these officers undertook intelligence-gathering trips on their own initiative. Intelligence was also acquired by the posting of military officers to newly created positions in the Ottoman Empire, as was the case when a political agent was established at Kuwait in 1904. Between 1904 and 1914 successive political agents at Kuwait exercised influence over the sheikh, performed topographical work throughout the Kuwaiti hinterland, and cultivated relations with the principal desert chief of Central Arabia, Ibn Saud.

Information acquired by military officers was augmented by the information collected by private individuals. Adventurers, explorers, and archaeologists, driven by a cultural fascination with the land of the Old Testament, travelled throughout Turkish Arabia in the early twentieth century. Often they were sponsored by organizations such as the Royal Geographical Society, which published their papers and hosted their lectures. Military intelligence authorities frequently mined the body of travel literature and scholarly material produced by such travellers as Gertrude Bell and David Hogarth in order to compile handbooks and reports before and during the war.

The means of acquiring information were varied, but they ultimately represent two separate, complementary, methods of collecting intelligence, carried out by three separate bodies: the War Office, the Foreign Office, and the Government of India. On the one hand, military officers were sent throughout Turkish Arabia to gather empirical data of interest to military intelligence. These officers measured routes, counted villages and populations, and conducted scientific topographical surveys of particular regions. Their efforts were printed in the form of wartime handbooks and pre-war reports. On the other hand, adventurers and academics attempted to gain an intuitive knowledge of the “oriental mind” through prolonged contact with local inhabitants of the regions they visited. The two methods of collecting intelligence were not mutually exclusive; rather, they were complementary. Private individuals also did plenty of empirical work. Faced with a need for information to manage potential international crises, and lacking a professional intelligence service to do the job, the British employed eclectic methods of intelligence collection throughout Turkish Arabia in the decades before the First World War. Gradually a more co-ordinated “system” emerged.

As British interests in the Ottoman Empire were intricately tied up with larger diplomatic and strategic issues – the Eastern Question and the defence of India – British intelligence activity conducted by the War Office and the Foreign Office naturally concentrated on targets that were connected to the bigger picture. Intelligence concerning the state and extent of Ottoman authority throughout the sultan’s dominions was of great interest to Britain. The reach of Ottoman authority could measure the health of the “Sick Man.” Rebellions and uprisings, particularly in Yemen, and the general ineffectiveness of Turkish authority beyond Anatolia offered a way to gauge the likelihood and even the

timing of the empire's ultimate collapse – or survival. Attachés and travellers were the War Office's chief sources of intelligence on rebellions and uprisings, on the state of Ottoman authority, and the health of the Ottoman army.

As objects of commercial, political, and strategic value, railways embodied the increasing influence of other European powers in the Ottoman Empire. The Anglo-German rivalry in Europe was reflected in Anglo-German relations in Asia, chiefly in the form of tension over the Baghdad Railway. The railway was an important commercial concession granted to Germany, and it threatened to carry German goods and German influence throughout Anatolia and Mesopotamia, usurping British dominance. Plans to terminate the line on the Persian Gulf at Kuwait represented a strategic German threat to British seapower in the Gulf and to the route to India. Thus Foreign Office fears about the growth of German influence centred on the Baghdad Railway, even more so than on German military aid to Turkey.

The same concerns that led the British to closely watch the development of German influence in Turkey led them to build relationships with the various Arab notables. Through these relations the British found another way to gauge the strength or fragility of Ottoman authority; they could also hope to receive an early warning in the case of the Ottoman Empire's collapse. A treaty with Kuwait in 1899 followed treaties with the Sultans of Muscat and Oman in the early 1890s. Informal relations with Ibn Saud further followed this trend, as did wartime alliances with Ibn Saud, Sherif Hussein of Mecca, and the Idrisi of Asir. In the context of these alliances, too, railways attracted British attention. The Hejaz Railway represented the sultan's authority in the Arabian Peninsula.

As the railway progressed south towards Mecca, the troops and bureaucratic officials that came with it buttressed what remained of the sultan's authority.

British intelligence efforts, over time, increasingly concentrated on map-making, topography and ethnography in Turkish Arabia. Up-to-date maps and knowledge of the terrain would be indispensable should it become necessary to conduct military operations in Turkish territory. Such operations might be in support of Turkish sovereignty against Russia, or they might be directed against Turkey and its possible German ally. After 1906, the Ottoman Empire was considered a potential enemy for the first time. Good maps of enemy territory, which had been lacking in the Boer War, became a priority for British intelligence.

Initial British intelligence efforts in Turkey were tentative and uncertain. But as the fault lines in the international system grew deeper, British intelligence began to operate with a firmer sense of purpose. Though no permanent professional secret service bureaucracy existed until 1909 (and had little to do with the Ottoman Empire anyway), the means of intelligence collection and analysis did not substantially change from earlier practices, even once such a bureaucracy had been created. With war came the understanding that the Eastern Question would be resolved. True, pre-war intelligence had offered no clear evidence about Turkey's intentions to join the Allies or the Central Powers. In that respect, British intelligence in the Ottoman Empire must be gauged a strategic failure. But in summer 1914, the British had an enormous amount of information about a variety of targets – information that had been collected and collated over more than a decade. Here, pre-war intelligence information contributed materially to

operational and tactical successes, as it did in the Mesopotamian campaign and in the Arab Revolt.

The entry of Turkey into the war on the side of the Central Powers produced a scenario for which British intelligence had been preparing contingency plans. Because the British had good maps and topographical information, they could contemplate operations on Turkish territory. The cultivation of Arab notables presented another opportunity: a potential fifth column that might destabilize the Turkish regime from within and divert Turco-German resources away from Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Gallipoli.

The expansion of the war to Asia by means of the Turco-German *Jihad* created a serious problem for Britain's ability to wage war on the Western Front – always the crucial theatre of the war. A Muslim holy war could throw Egypt into revolution and deprive the British of the use of the Suez Canal, through which troops from India sailed to Europe. A *Jihad* could also destroy any British commercial and political interests in Arabia and the Persian Gulf or, no less worrying, inspire an uprising by Muslims in India. To combat the pan-Islamic threat, the British attempted to mobilize pan-Arab nationalism in the form of alliances with numerous desert chiefs, foremost among them Ibn Saud and the Sherif of Mecca. The sherif was chosen as the standard-bearer of revolt because he seemed to hold wide appeal throughout the Muslim world broadly and India specifically. Thus it was Britain's awareness of Arab discontent, its cultivation of relations with Arab chiefs, and its gathering of political intelligence on the status of Ottoman authority that – together – enabled the British to identify useful allies and prod them into open revolt.

The sheriff's revolt, begun in June 1916, was effectively managed by the Arab Bureau, an instrument of policy and propaganda called into being in early 1916 to harmonize the disparate threads of British policy in the Middle East. The Home Government, the Government of India, and the British administration in Egypt all had different ideas about how the war against Turkey should be conducted, and on the nature of British war aims. The Arab Bureau was composed of a number of "oriental experts," chiefly officers and private individuals such as David Hogarth, Gertrude Bell, and T.E. Lawrence. These individuals had all spent time in Turkish Arabia before the war and possessed detailed knowledge of the politics, culture, and customs of Arabia and the Middle East. The enormous amount of empirical data collected by officers, consuls, and travellers before 1914 was also pressed into service in the form of handbooks. These were printed both by the War Office General Staff, in collaboration with the Naval Intelligence Division and the Royal Geographical Society, and by the Government of India. The handbooks were distributed to high-ranking political officials throughout the British Empire, to regional officials, and to officers operating in that theatre. In combination, the body of formal and informal knowledge collected by the British before 1914 served as the foundation for British policy and successful military operations in Arabia during the war.

The prosecution of the war against Turkey to a successful conclusion in 1918 was not wholly the result of the intelligence work done before the war. Intelligence did not offer the British a magic bullet with which to defeat the Turks and their German allies. The value of intelligence, however, was three-fold. It ensured that when war came the British were prepared for a number of possible political and military scenarios; that they

were able to direct resources effectively; and that the best people were available to conduct day-to-day operations. Cumulatively, Britain's intelligence efforts over a span of fifteen years, from the Boer War to the First World War, made a significant contribution to Britain's victory over Turkey.

This dissertation has attempted to wrestle with the varying definitions and methods of intelligence in turbulent era. "By 'intelligence,'" wrote the military philosopher Carl von Clausewitz, "we mean every sort of information about the enemy and his country – the basis, in short, of our own plans and operations."<sup>707</sup> British intelligence activity in Turkish Arabia before the First World War was the practical working-out of the principle enumerated by Clausewitz nearly a century earlier: careful and meticulous preparation is the foundation of good practice. Though this is a timeless axiom, in the field of intelligence in the early twentieth century it was a fairly recent development. Professional intelligence services only emerged about a half-decade before the First World War. While spying is glibly referred to as the world's second oldest profession, intelligence had been an ad hoc affair for most of its history. British intelligence in the Middle East was one of the earliest peacetime intelligence efforts. The attempts to collect, compile, and analyse large quantities of information years before the outbreak of a war was a new development in statecraft and strategy, though it was one that bore many of the hallmarks of the professionalized intelligence practice of a later era. As this study has shown, that development was incremental and often piecemeal, though it was punctuated by significant leaps forward.

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<sup>707</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: University Press, 1976), 117.

The question of the piecemeal “modernization” of intelligence provides necessary context to more familiar events after 1914. The story of the Arab Revolt in 1916 is well known. T.E. Lawrence’s adventures are even more famous – to his contemporaries and to viewers of the 1962 epic film, *Lawrence of Arabia*. Succeeding generations of authors and historians have been intrigued by the man himself, and by the campaign in the Middle East. The reasons for this are many. Lawrence was a captivating and enigmatic character. His exploits, particularly as portrayed in film, bore the hallmarks of romantic adventure. The subsequent rise in geopolitical importance of the Middle East has led commentators and historians alike to point to the war and the peace conference that followed as the point where that rise began. And yet in the many romantic biographies of Lawrence and in more scholarly studies too, no serious attention has been paid to the preparatory intelligence work that made Lawrence’s, and others’, successful operations against the Turks possible.

That success required the effort of a large number of individuals who gathered open source intelligence about Turkish Arabia. In a sense they were researchers, sent out on behalf of the British government to learn things that the government freely recognized it did not know. But the knowledge they gathered was to serve as the foundation for Britain’s involvement in the Arab Revolt. Intelligence monitored the degradation of Ottoman authority throughout the Arabian Peninsula, surveyed the dissatisfaction of a subject minority with its political masters, and identified a number of key figures who could be mobilized in support of British interests. At the same time, this preparation allowed the British to blunt the Turco-German call for *Jihad* on a much wider scale. It helped to secure British rule in India and Egypt for another generation, and protected the

supply line between Europe and the Middle East by keeping the Suez Canal open. Intelligence and pre-war contingency planning also provided the British with strategic and military options that were not pursued. After the Gallipoli disaster of 1915, the idea of landing an expeditionary force on the Syrian coast was discarded. Had the operation been carried out it would have rested on the intelligence work done by Francis Maunsell, who reconnoitred suitable landing places along the coast. That no such operation was undertaken highlights the importance of the intelligence work done years before. Great Britain had prepared for a number of possible scenarios, giving itself wide latitude for action – wider, certainly, than the Germans enjoyed in the same corner of the globe.

Any study of intelligence must necessarily confront the question of the accuracy and value of the specific information under discussion. Michael Herman notes that intelligence is judged in two ways. The first judges the accuracy of intelligence in an absolute way by comparing it to reality. The second judges the quality of intelligence as compared to an opponent's.<sup>708</sup> On both of these counts, British intelligence efforts in Turkish Arabia between the Boer War and the First World War score well. While T.E. Lawrence noted that many of the maps in circulation contained errors, the sheer quantity of geographical information represented by "Hunter's Map," Lorimer's *Gazetteer*, Maunsell's reports, and numerous other intelligence products constitute a remarkable achievement. In a number of cases older intelligence products like PEF surveys or the *Military Report on Arabia* were used by forces in the field in the absence of newer, better, information. Furthermore, post-war testimonies of men like Arnold Wilson, Gilbert Clayton, and David Hogarth spoke to the value of the pre-war collection effort. Though several of the maps contained imperfections, their collective existence gave the

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<sup>708</sup> Michael Herman, *Intelligence Power in Peace and War* (Cambridge: University Press, 1996), 145.

British at least a partial familiarity with the likely battlefields on which the war would be fought.<sup>709</sup> This gave the British a considerable advantage over the Germans, whose lack of systematic and serious focus on the Middle East before the war made military operations problematic. German intelligence missions to the Middle East were hasty and amateurish. The German Foreign Office was not enthusiastic about the prospects of the Turkish alliance or of the *Jihad*, and the plan to “set the east ablaze” was more a child of the Kaiser’s fancy than of serious political and military considerations. There were thus no German handbooks equivalent to the ones produced at the Royal Geographical Society, and no constant efforts to corroborate and improve upon existing maps. The Middle East bureau at the German Foreign Office was understaffed, and the willingness to seek the counsel of German settlers, “Orientalists,” and Middle East experts was far less than it was on the British side. The German mission to promote *Jihad* was a failure in part because, as Donald McKale notes, Arab opposition to the Ottoman Empire increased as the war went on.<sup>710</sup> The growth of Arab opposition to Ottoman rule, from rumblings of discontent to open nationalist revolt, must be attributed, again in part, to the success of British intelligence; and if it is true, as Michael Herman suggests, that the extent and type of intelligence collection have some bearing on success or failure, some measure of Britain’s success in the war against the Ottoman Empire must be attributed to the efforts at intelligence collection undertaken in the early part of the twentieth century.<sup>711</sup>

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<sup>709</sup> Yigal Sheffy, *British Military Intelligence in the Palestine Campaign, 1914-1918* (London: Frank Cass, 1998), 27.

<sup>710</sup> Donald McKale, “‘The Kaiser’s Spy’: Max von Oppenheim and the Anglo-German Rivalry Before and During the First World War,” *European History Quarterly* 27, 2 (1997), 200.

<sup>711</sup> Herman, *Intelligence Power*, 231.

This study, then, has focused on the twists and turns of British military intelligence that ultimately contributed to victory in 1918. Britain's intelligence preparation for war has been presented here in a way that breaks new ground, in two senses. First, it was possible to discover or reassess previously unknown or under-utilized sources. Second, the subject has been examined through a wider chronological lens than has previously been used. By beginning the study in the late nineteenth century, Britain's wider imperial and foreign policy priorities could be analysed in their proper medium- and long-term contexts. Both points merit brief elaboration

A good example of the novel primary sources used here are the military handbooks printed during the war and the military reports printed prior to 1914. Through both types of sources, Britain's military intelligence preparation for war could be assessed without recourse to hide-bound theories still found in the secondary literature. A significant proportion of the information contained in the handbooks – both the ones compiled in London and the ones compiled by the Government of India – was obtained through the means set in motion after the Boer War.

Second, the handbooks offer a window into the wider chronological context of this study. Incidents like the Boer War and the various international crises that attended Britain at the beginning of the twentieth century cannot be considered in isolation. As a global, imperial power, events that affected one part of the British Empire influenced events and policies throughout the empire as a whole. This was a problem understood by contemporaries. Thus a direct line can be drawn from the colonial war in South Africa to the Ottoman Empire and the defence of India. Framing the analysis this way directs the attention of historians toward the inter-connectedness of these globally dispersed regions.

A wider chronological context also enables the reader to see Britain as an imperial power in relative decline – a world power – whose global interests were seen as being increasingly threatened by the rapid growth of other Great Powers. It was no mere coincidence that military officers were placed in consular positions around the same time as the Government of India paid new interest to the Persian Gulf and Asia Minor. On the contrary: Britain itself and constituent members of its empire had been spurred to action by the war in South Africa. The many individuals who remained active from the earliest stages of the intelligence effort in Turkish Arabia through the First World War, and their presence in the pages of the various military handbooks, demonstrates the necessity of looking at the war against Turkey from a wider chronological perspective. In the end, the wider evidentiary and chronological perspectives offered in this dissertation offer new insight into the study of the British war in the Middle East.

The long and complex pre-war history of British military intelligence has been the focus of this dissertation. Even before the dawn of the twentieth century, the British, ill at ease with their position in the world, began a comprehensive and increasingly cohesive intelligence effort throughout Turkish Arabia and the Middle East. Britain's objective was to prepare for the resolution of the Eastern Question, whether by violent means or not. As the Anglo-German rivalry in Europe and on the high seas increased, and as the international situation deteriorated after 1905, the British recognized that it was imperative for them to be able to engage the next international crisis or enter the next war from a position of knowledge and strength, rather than from one of ignorance and

weakness. When war broke out in the Middle East in 1914, the British found that extensive intelligence preparation – the basis of their own plans and operations – enabled them to direct resources more efficiently, to counter enemy initiatives more effectively, and to prosecute the war to a successful conclusion.

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## Appendix I: Maps

1. The Middle East<sup>712</sup>
2. The Ottoman Empire<sup>713</sup>
3. Anatolia and the Caucasus
4. Arabia and the Persian Gulf<sup>714</sup>
5. The Baghdad Railway
6. The Hejaz<sup>715</sup>

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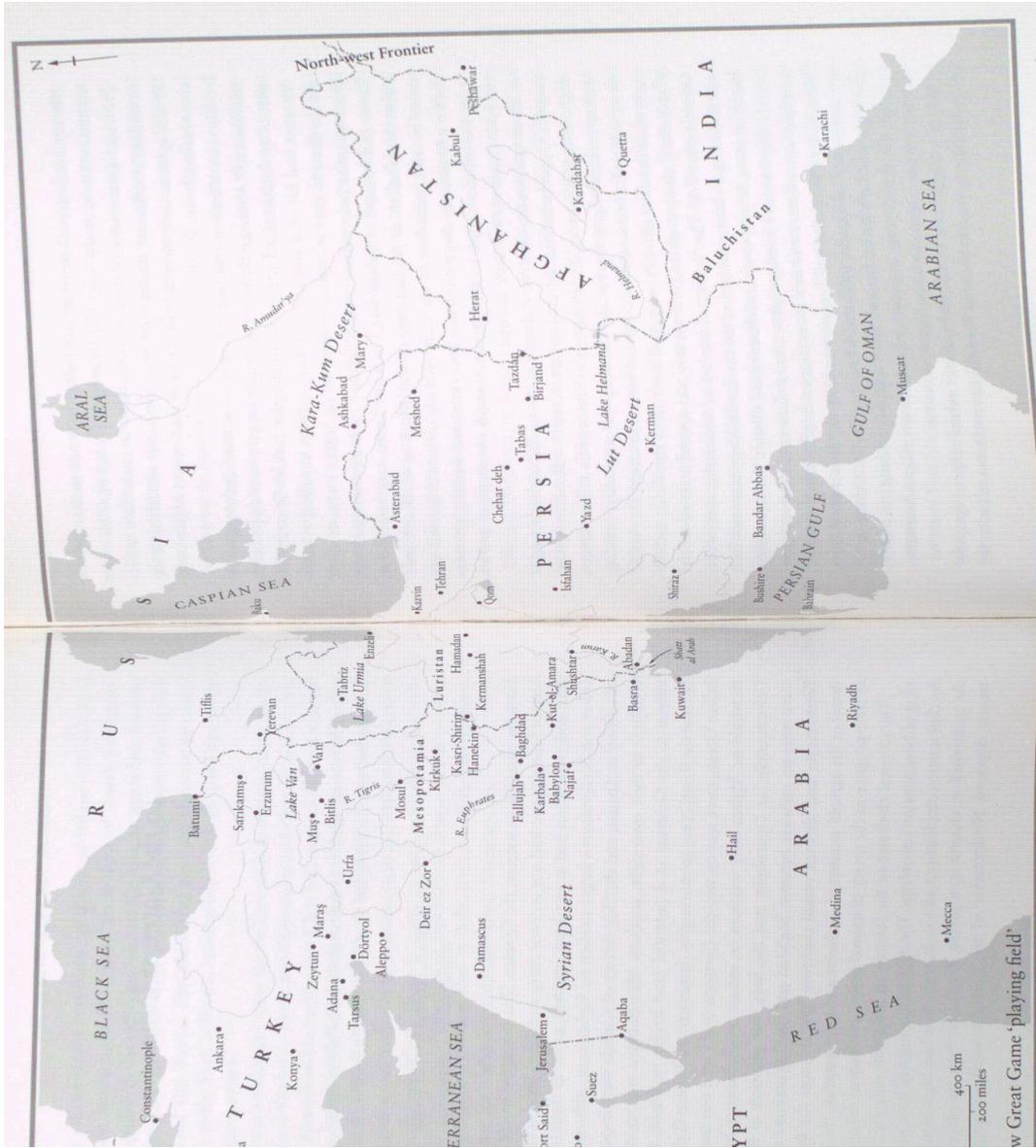
<sup>712</sup> “The Middle East” and “The Baghdad Railway” taken from Sean McMeekin, *The Berlin-Baghdad Express: The Ottoman Empire and Germany’s Bid for World Power* (Harvard: The Belknap Press, 2010).

<sup>713</sup> “The Ottoman Empire” and “Anatolia and the Caucasus” taken from Michael A. Reynolds, *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires, 1908-1918* (Cambridge: University Press, 2011)

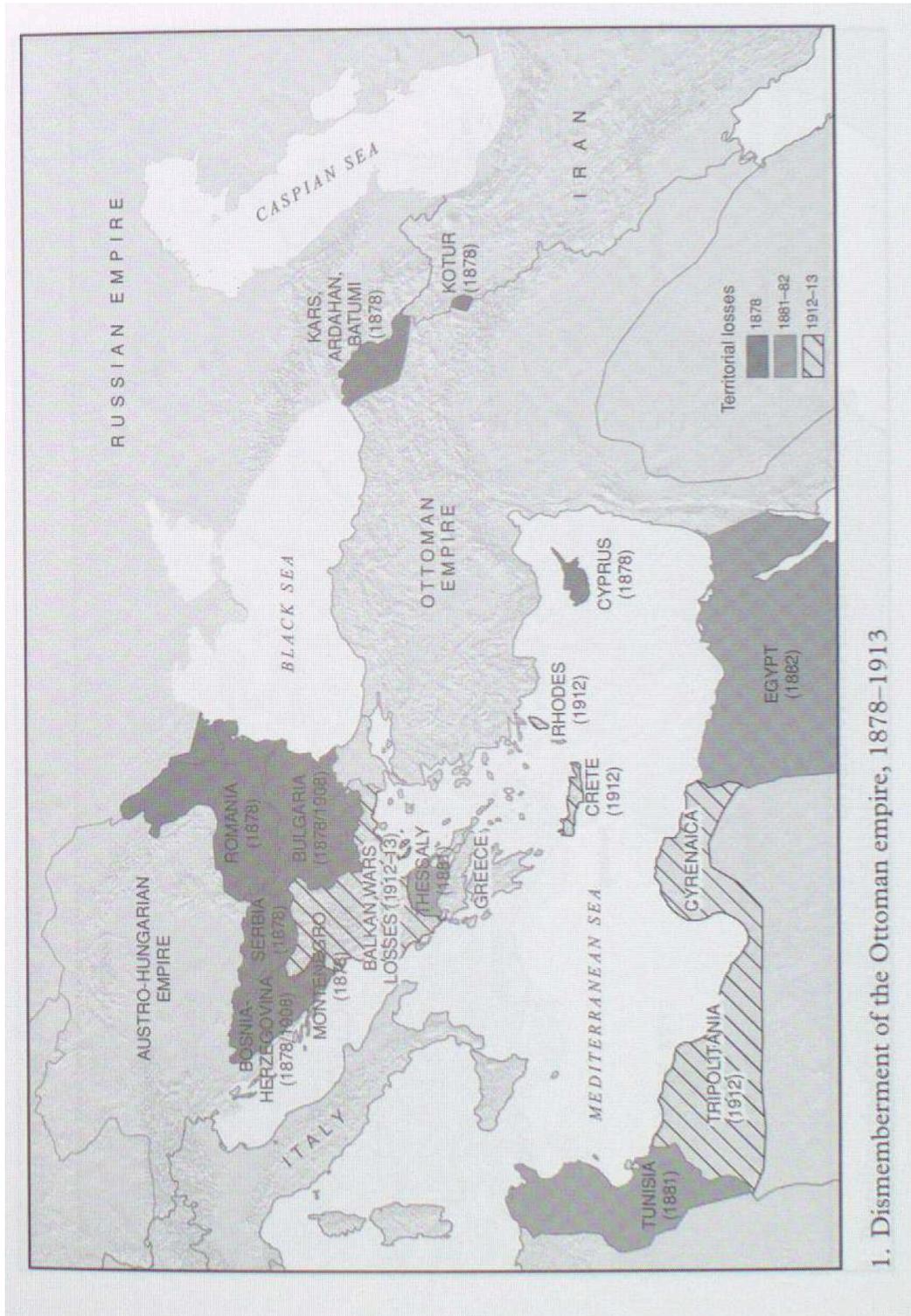
<sup>714</sup> “Arabia and the Persian Gulf” taken from H.V.F. Winstone, *The Illicit Adventure: The Story of Political and Military Intelligence in the Middle East from 1898 to 1926* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982);

<sup>715</sup> “The Hejaz” taken from Polly A. Mohs, *Military Intelligence and the Arab Revolt: The First Modern Intelligence War* (London: Routledge, 2007).

### The Middle East

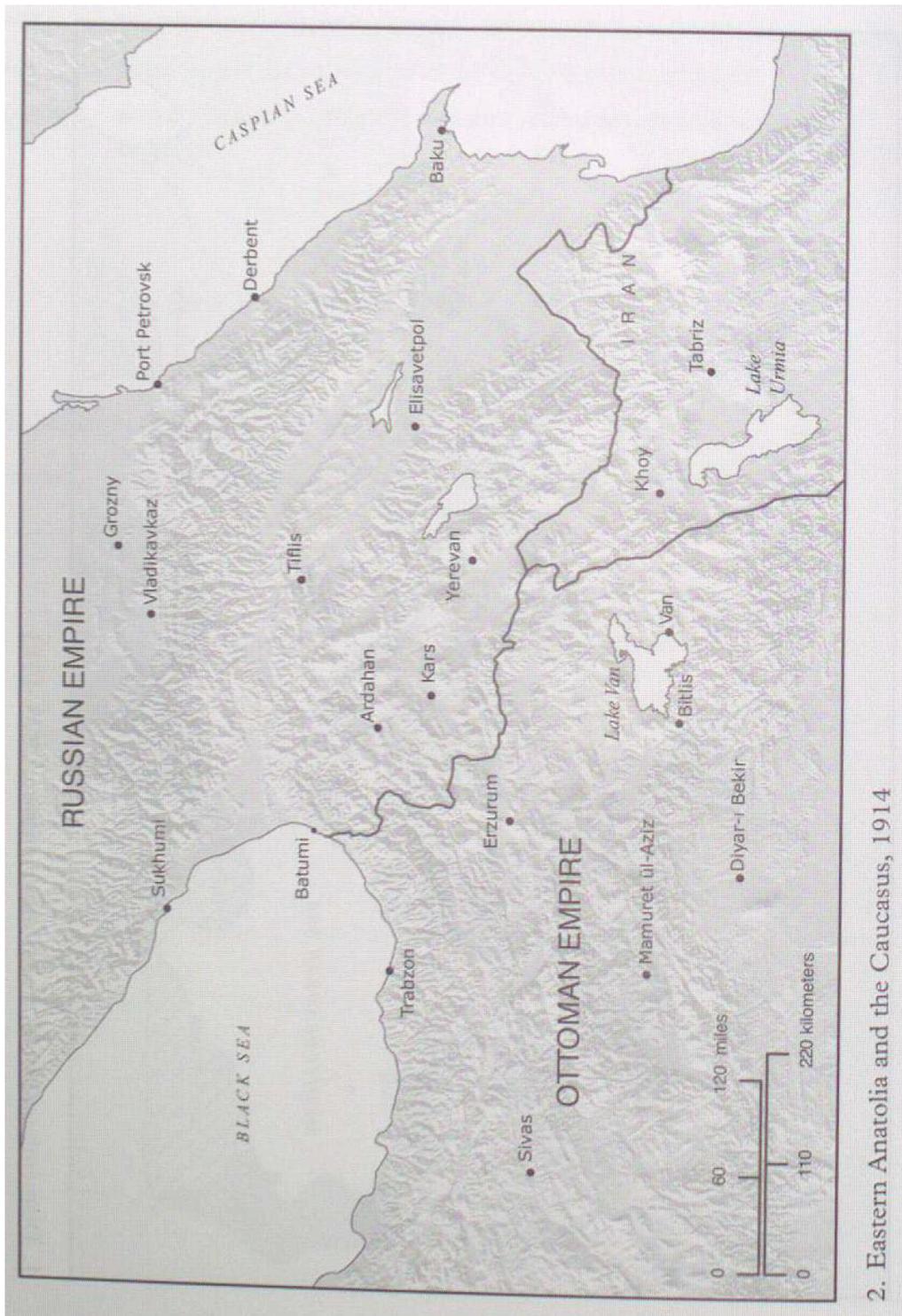


### The Ottoman Empire



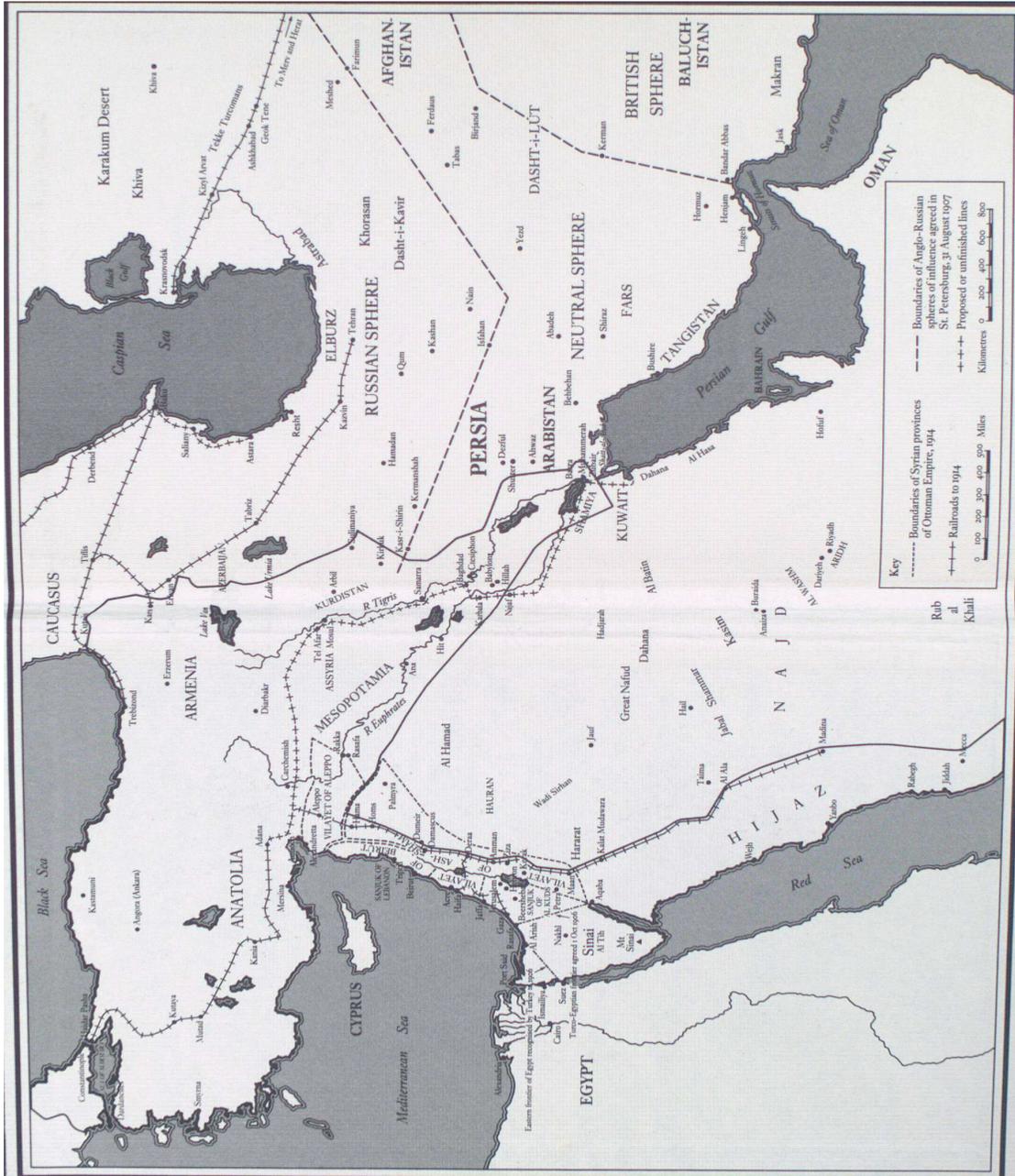
1. Dismemberment of the Ottoman empire, 1878-1913

### Anatolia and the Caucasus

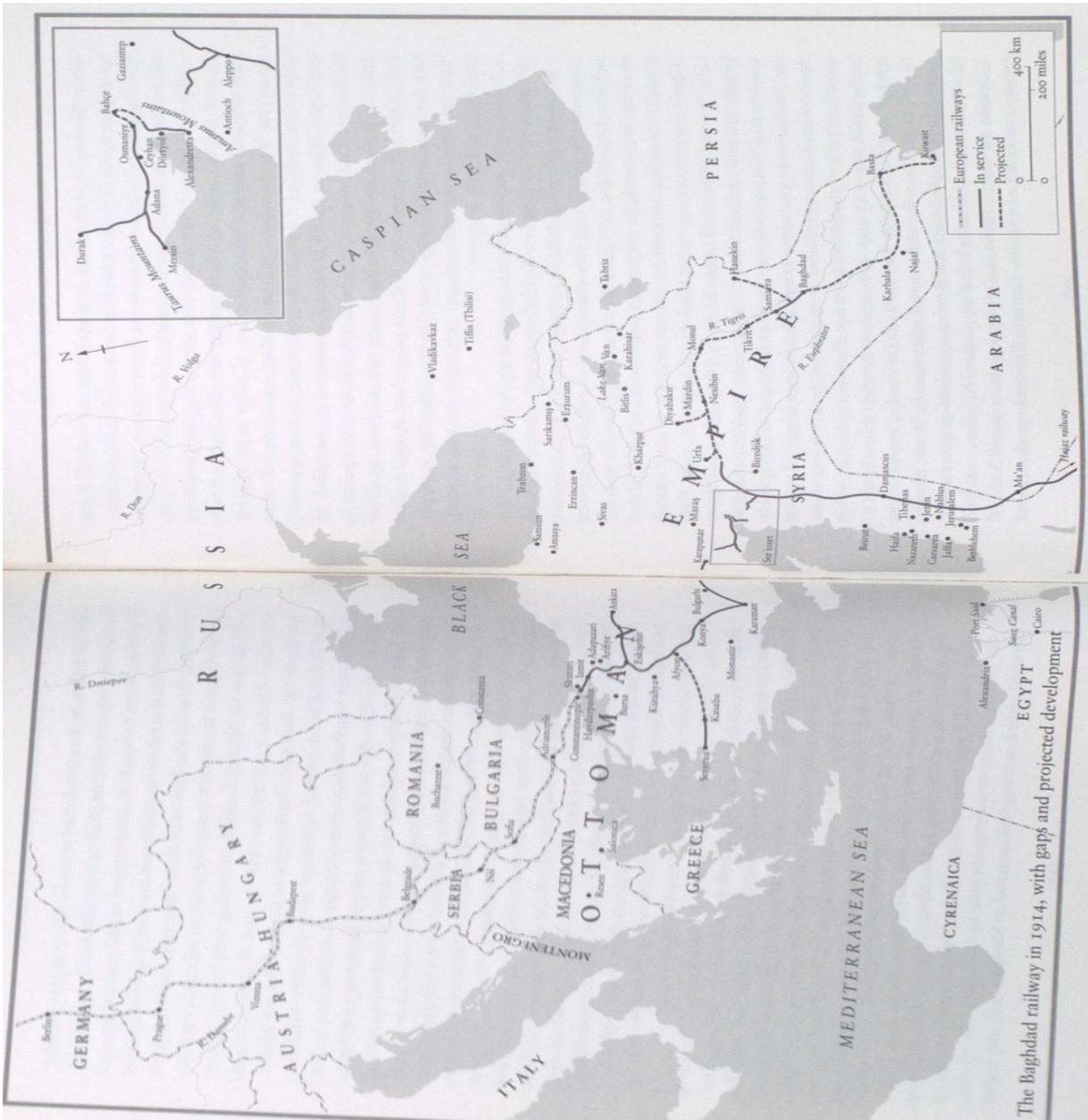


2. Eastern Anatolia and the Caucasus, 1914

### Arabia and the Persian Gulf



### The Baghdad Railway



The Baghdad railway in 1914, with gaps and projected development

