

1902**Alfred T. Mahan, 'The Persian Gulf and International Relations,' (Excerpts)****Citation:**

"Alfred T. Mahan, 'The Persian Gulf and International Relations,' (Excerpts)", 1902, Wilson Center Digital Archive, National Review, 40 (September 1902): pp. 27-45. Contributed and annotated by Guillemette Crouzet.
<https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/300998>

Summary:

The bulk of this long article, published in a London magazine and aimed at the British public, discusses international relations in the Far East, and in particular the Russian advance into the Chinese seas. The Middle East only receives cursory attention, with the exception of the Persian Gulf which Mahan describes as a geopolitical flashpoint. The American admiral defines the Middle East as a zone with fluid borders situated between South and West Asia and centered around the Gulf. More specifically, for Mahan it was a region where Britain's dominance of the strategic land and sea communication routes between London and India was increasingly being threatened by the encroachments of imperial rivals.

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Transcript - English

Of such questions the prospective status of Persia and the Persian Gulf now forms one in the consideration of two or three of the great world Powers. (...). In the general economy of the world, irrespective of political tenures, present or possible, the Persian Gulf is one terminus of a prospective interoceanic railroad. (...).

Commercially, therefore, the railroad system, or systems, and their branches, which shall find their terminus at the Persian Gulf, begin at a great disadvantage towards the Suez route, considered as a line of commercial communication between two seas, or between the two continents, Asia and Europe. (...). Furthermore, railways serve to expedite not only the movement of commerce but the movement of troops. They have therefore military significance as well as commercial and political. (...) This concentration makes them singularly the object of forcible interference, and consequently attributes to them an importance which is military or naval, according to the locality. This at present is the particular bearing of the Persian Gulf upon politics. (...). I have said that an analysis of the circumstances shows that Great Britain, in the clear failure of Turkey and Persia, is the nation first -that is, most-concerned. (...). First, her security in India, which would be materially affected by an adverse change in political control of the Gulf; secondly, the safety of the great sea route, commercial and military, to India and the Farther East (...); and thirdly, the economic and commercial welfare of India (...). Water communication with the external world, through an un-impeded seaboard of her own, is Russia's greatest present want. For this object, to what extent would she benefit commercially by access to the Persian Gulf, as compared with the China seas?(...) Concession in the Persian Gulf, whether by formal arrangement or by neglect of the local commercial interests which now underlie political and military control, will imperil Great Britain's naval situation in the Farther East, her political position in India, her commercial interests in both and the imperial tie between herself and Australasia.

So far from yielding here, it appears to me that the signs of the times, as outlined above, point seriously to the advisability of concentrating attention, preparation of the understanding, at least, upon that portion of the Suez route to the farther East which lies between Aden and Singapore, and of which the Persian Gulf is a very prominent figure. (...). Besides its bearing upon the Suez route, the Gulf has a very special relation to the Euphrates valley and any road passing through it from the Levant; and this relation is shared by South Persia, because of the political effect of its tenure upon the control of the Gulf. There is here concentrated, therefore, commercial and political influence upon both of the two routes, that by land and that by water, from Europe to India and to the East beyond. There is no occasion in the nature of things that Great Britain, either by concession or compulsion, should share with another state the control she now has here; but, in order to retain it, she needs not only to keep the particular protective relations already established with minor local rulers, but further to develop and fortify her commercial interests and political prestige in South Persia and adjacent Mesopotamia. (...). As towards the Farther East, South Persia is in fact the logical next step beyond Egypt; though it does not follow that the connection there of local provision with is to be the same. Correlative to this commercial and political progress goes the necessity of local provision for naval activity when required. The Middle East, if I may adopt a term which I have not seen, will some day need its Malta, as well as its Gibraltar; it does not follow that either will be in the Gulf. Naval force has t quality of mobility which carries with it the privilege of temporary absences; but it needs to find on every scene of operation established bases of refit, or supply, and, in case of disaster, of security. The British Navy should have the facility to concentrate in force, if occasion arise, about Aden, India and the Gulf.