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STEAM POWER AND BRITISH INFLUENCE IN BAGHDAD, 1820–1860*

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ABSTRACT. *Very little has been published on British political activity in the province of Baghdad in the nineteenth century. Indeed, those formally responsible for it – officials in India – considered the region insignificant. This article argues, however, that it was not insignificant either to men on the spot or to influential British public figures in London and Constantinople. These men argued for its strategic and commercial potential, based on an inter-continental rather than a narrowly Indian view of policy, and optimism about the transformative material and moral power of steamships. Their pressure was responsible for the introduction of British armed steamers to the Mesopotamian rivers in 1835 and their retention throughout the century. This helped to ensure that the British had greater power in the region than any rival. The British also cultivated good relations with Arabs, expecting Ottoman rule to collapse in favour of something more progressive. The case of Baghdad shows the value for diplomatic historians of seeing Britain's European and Indian strategy as connected. It also raises doubts about the importance to British officials of promoting specific commercial interests abroad: the British in the region were much more concerned with the projection of power, reliability, and even-handedness. For the early Victorian mind, the key to progress was surely not the making of particular tariff arrangements, but the dynamic potential of steam itself.*

The pashalik of Baghdad – the easternmost major province of the Ottoman Empire – can hardly be said to feature in accounts of the nineteenth-century British Empire. There is no mention in the three most definitive recent academic surveys, though each deals with areas of 'informal' as well as 'formal' influence. Those analyses that discuss Britain's role in the Ottoman Empire concentrate on diplomacy at Constantinople, the strategic significance of Egypt and Syria, and economic penetration in general.[1] Important works by Kelly and

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* This article is based on four collections of MSS, abbreviated as follows: the Foreign Office records in the National Archives (FO) and three collections in the British Library: the Broughton papers, MSS Eur. F213 (Broughton); the Layard papers, BL Add. MSS (Layard), and the India Office records (IOR). I am grateful to Marie Keyworth for discussions on some of these issues when she was preparing an undergraduate dissertation, to Charles Melville for help with local names, and to the insightful comments of the anonymous referees.

[1] A. Porter, ed., *The Oxford history of the British empire*, III: *The nineteenth century* (Oxford, 1999); P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, *British imperialism, 1688–2000* (London, 2002 edn); J. Darwin, *The empire project: the rise and fall of the British world-system, 1830–1970* (Cambridge, 2009).

Onley discuss Britain's naval power in the Gulf, but venture inland only in passing.[2] There are to my knowledge only two works, both very obscure, devoted to British policy in the province of Baghdad – or Mesopotamia, or Iraq, or Turkish Arabia, all names applied to the region, with, for current purposes, not significantly different meanings.[3] Moreover, accounts of the early nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire itself pay it little attention. Malcolm Yapp, the foremost British scholar of the Near East, calls Iraq a 'sleepy backwater'.[4]

In some ways, it was indeed a backwater, but the British were nonetheless active there, and this article seeks to explain why. In the first half of the nineteenth century, there was considerable discussion of its potential significance, among local officials and in London government circles. These discussions help to illuminate two broader debates about the nature and ambition of British global power in the period before the overt imperialism of the 1870s and 1880s. One perennial debate concerns the relationship between economic pressures and political activity. How far did the promotion of trade and British economic interests drive new commitments abroad? The other considers the relative significance of the various theatres of world politics for British strategy. How far did Britain think as a genuinely global power and how far in narrower terms of the defence of India?

As far as economic pressures are concerned, the dispute between Robinson and Gallagher and their critics about an 'imperialism of free trade' in the years before 1870 has produced some scepticism about the influence of specific commercial pressures on policy outside the formal empire. Several area studies have shown that in neither Latin America nor West Africa did the British have the power or intention to create anything approaching an informal imperialism. British officials there did not want to exercise informal control, to shape local economies to suit British interests, or even to gain many exclusive rights for British firms.[5] Nonetheless, many imperial historians – most famously Cain and Hopkins – assume that economic motives must have affected

[2] J. B. Kelly, *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1795–1880* (Oxford, 1968); J. Onley, *The Arabian frontier of the British Raj: merchants, rulers and the British in the nineteenth-century Gulf* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 20–1. The same is true of M. Fisher, *Indirect rule in India: Residents and the Residency system, 1764–1858* (Delhi, 1991), pp. 461–3.

[3] Z. Saleh, *Britain and Mesopotamia (Iraq to 1914): a study in British foreign affairs* (Baghdad, 1966); M. G. I. Khan, 'British policy in Iraq, 1828–1843', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh*, 18 (1973), pp. 173–94. I shall use 'Baghdad' or 'Mesopotamia' except when following a specific reference by a contemporary or historian.

[4] M. E. Yapp, *The making of the modern Near East, 1792–1923* (London and New York, NY, 1987), p. 142; his magisterial *Strategies of British India: Britain, Iran and Afghanistan, 1798–1850* (Oxford, 1980) has only a handful of passing references to Iraq. There is one paragraph on Iraq before the 1860s in R. Owen, *The Middle East in the world economy, 1800–1914* (London, 1981).

[5] W. M. Mathew, 'The imperialism of free trade: Peru, 1820–1870', *Economic History Review*, 21 (1968), pp. 562–79; H. S. Ferns, *Britain and Argentina in the nineteenth century* (New York, NY, 1960); A. G. Hopkins, 'Informal empire in Argentina: an alternative view', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 26 (1994), p. 470; M. Lynn, 'The "imperialism of free trade" and the case of

policy-making. For example, the most brilliant general account of the early nineteenth-century empire mentions Baghdad, but only to argue that British had economic ambitions there which were successfully resisted by the local government. The dispute in question, in 1821, did indeed involve the Baghdad authorities penalizing merchants trading under British protection. However, it is more plausible to regard the real issue as a trial of *political* strength between the British Resident, Claudius Rich, and the pasha of Baghdad over Persian aggression and Kurdistan.[6] British economic interests in the region were insubstantial (and the main merchant protected by Britain in the dispute was Austrian). Until the 1860s – when trade prospects were transformed by the telegraph, regular steamships to India, and then the Suez Canal – hopes for economic development in Mesopotamia were always frustrated, and there were only a handful of British merchants in Baghdad. Moreover, as we shall see, the Resident did not always approve of their demands.

However, this does not mean that economics did not affect policy-makers' thinking. This article stresses the importance of longer-term and more general British aspirations for progress, based particularly on the revolutionary impact of steam. Steamships were already transforming communication on the major rivers of Europe and America; they could cope with strong currents and manoeuvre in difficult conditions. Surely they had the potential to regenerate economies elsewhere in the world, especially regions of proven historical fertility like Mesopotamia? The rhetoric of steam and progress was in its heyday in the second quarter of the century, particularly among the self-consciously intellectual whigs interested in science who were so influential on the governments of the 1830s.[7] Though there is a tendency to think that British policy towards the Ottoman Empire simply sought to maintain the status quo,

West Africa, c. 1830 – c. 1870', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 15 (1986–7), pp. 22–40.

[6] C. A. Bayly, *Imperial meridian: the British empire and the world, 1780–1830* (London and New York, NY, 1989), p. 231, claims that the British resident (Rich) was 'sent packing' in 1823. In fact, the crisis took place in 1820–1 when Daud Pasha confiscated the goods of Antone Svoboda, a Viennese crystal merchant with British protection, then doubled customs duties on a British merchant's goods. Daud almost certainly feared that Rich was encouraging Persian hostilities against Baghdad on the Kurdistan frontier; he also disliked British political influence in the Gulf after the anti-piracy treaty of 1820. This important incident needs further discussion. See A. Malet, *Précis containing information in regard to the first connection of the Hon'ble East India Company with Turkish Arabia* (Calcutta, 1874), pp. 111–20. The British needed to show their power, so got the excessive duties abandoned: C. U. Aitchison, *A collection of treaties, engagements, and sunnuds relating to India and neighbouring countries*, VII (Calcutta, 1876), pp. 11–14. Arguably, rather than being shut out, the small amount of British trade had considerable advantages at Baghdad at this point, by managing unofficially to avoid many of the duties: C. Issawi, *The fertile crescent, 1800–1914: a documentary economic history* (New York and Oxford, 1988), p. 109. Generally, see Cain and Hopkins, *British imperialism*.

[7] J. Morrell and A. W. Thackray, *Gentlemen of science: early years of the British Association for the Advancement of Science* (Oxford, 1981); J. Bord, *Science and whig manners: science and political style in Britain, c. 1790–1850* (Basingstoke, 2009).

in fact in this period there was a lot of aspirational thinking about its prospects, in which steam was crucial. Parts of the story of steam in Mesopotamia are already known, especially the episode of the Euphrates expedition, the quixotic attempt to navigate the Euphrates by steam power in 1835–6, though this is generally seen in terms of the search for faster routes to India.[8] This article shows that British preoccupation with the potential of steam on the Tigris and Euphrates lasted long after the expedition had failed.

One striking thing about this steam commitment was that at every stage it was treated with either indifference or outright hostility by the British authorities in India. This should persuade us of the need to see Britain's activity in the Middle East as part of a genuinely global strategy rather than just through the narrower prism of its importance for India. Indeed, historians' neglect of British activity in Baghdad is surely connected to the limited interest shown in it by the Indian officials who had formal responsibility for it.

The authorities in Bombay and Calcutta consistently regarded Baghdad as a place of marginal significance. British representation in Turkish Arabia was funded by the East India Company and answerable to the governor of Bombay (and to the governor-general of India from 1834). Because of the Gulf trade, the Company had had a factory at Basra since the 1630s and a consular Resident there since 1764. However, the justification for this presence had waned with the decline of this trade and the development of the Cape and Black Sea routes. The Company's Court of Directors would not pay to develop an overland route from the Mediterranean to the Gulf. It was instead for political reasons that a second Resident was placed at Baghdad after the French invasion of Egypt in 1798 – at the suggestion of the home government, not the Company. By 1805–6, pressure was already mounting for its abolition.[9] After Napoleon moved elsewhere, the Baghdad and Basra Residencies were united in 1810, forming the Political Agency of Turkish Arabia in 1812. Claudius Rich, Political Agent until 1821, resided at Baghdad with a British assistant at Basra. On his death, with French ambitions now dormant, the Bombay government would have abolished the Political Agency, but for the fact that abolition would mean losing face after Rich's recent ill-treatment by the Baghdad pasha.[10] The assistant at Basra, Robert Taylor, was made sole Political Agent, but in 1822 and again in 1827 there was discussion about abolishing the position and relying for influence just on the British official in the Gulf itself, at Bushire on the Persian

[8] H. L. Hoskins, *British routes to India* (London, 1966 edn); J. S. Guest, *The Euphrates expedition* (London and New York, NY, 1992); D. R. Headrick, *The tools of empire: technology and European imperialism in the nineteenth century* (New York, NY, and Oxford, 1981), chs. 1, 8.

[9] M. E. Yapp, 'The establishment of the East India Company Residency at Baghdad, 1798–1806', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 30 (1967), pp. 326–7, 335.

[10] The best sources of information on the history of British representation in Turkish Arabia are: J. A. Saldanha, *The Persian Gulf Précis, VI: Précis of Turkish Arabia affairs, 1801–1905* (8 vols., Gerrards Cross, 1986; orig. pub. 1906), and Malet, *Précis*, originally produced in 1847 for the Indian government inquiry into the Baghdad Residency.

coast, who had been upgraded to Resident status in 1822 with the duty of enforcing the anti-piracy treaty of 1820. He had native agents to bolster his position at Muscat, Bahrain, and Qatif; why should there not similarly just be a native agent at Basra? In 1834 and 1843 there was renewed pressure from Bombay to abolish the Residency at Baghdad (to which Taylor had moved in 1829, leaving a native agent at Basra).

Powerful individuals in India, therefore, consistently thought Baghdad an inconsequential place. This impression has been reinforced by the biographers of Henry Rawlinson, who succeeded Taylor as Political Agent in 1843. They present his years there as a leisurely holiday posting allowing him to pursue his real love, the decipherment of cuneiform, though in reality his severe overwork caused significant delays in his scholarly publications.[11] Moreover, it was under Rawlinson in the 1840s that primary responsibility for Baghdad was belatedly transferred from the India Office to the Foreign Office, in recognition of where its significance lay.[12] This followed the dramatic fall of Taylor in 1843 after forty years' service for British India, a completely ignored but very revealing incident about British governance and priorities.

In the nineteenth century, Baghdad was a European problem at least as much as an Indian one. Once Russia became a threat to India, few strategists thought that it would choose Mesopotamia and southern Persia, rather than central Asia, as a route of attack. Obviously, Britain could not afford to ignore any threat to Indian defence, but any British démarche in Mesopotamia would raise international suspicions about Britain's ambitions in the Ottoman Empire. The fear of complicating the Eastern question and alienating the other powers was the biggest problem in setting Mesopotamian policy. Nonetheless, it was essential to put down markers to foreshadow the possibility of Ottoman partition and to counter not only Russian plans but also growing French influence in Egypt and Syria. As Edward Ingram suggested some years ago, the British approach to western Asia had to take both European and Indian strategy into account. His work on British policy to the region during the international crises of 1798–1807 and 1828–34 is a suggestive exception to its general neglect.[13]

The most visible sign of British commitment to Mesopotamia was the introduction of armed steamers to the Euphrates and Tigris. This commitment was made in three stages between 1834 and 1846, at which point it became

[11] G. Rawlinson, *A memoir of Sir Henry Creswicke Rawlinson* (London, 1898), pp. 140–1, 150, 158–9; L. Adkins, *Empires of the plain: Henry Rawlinson and the lost languages of Babylon* (London, 2003); Yapp, *Strategies*, p. 522.

[12] Rawlinson to Canning, 19 Aug. 1846, FO 195/237. It helped that Taylor had been made a consul in 1841; Rawlinson was later promoted to consul-general.

[13] E. Ingram, *The beginning of the great game in Asia, 1828–1834* (Oxford, 1979). See also his *In defence of British India: Great Britain in the Middle East, 1775–1842* (London, 1984), and 'From trade to empire in the Near East, III – the uses of the Residency at Baghdad, 1794–1804', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 14 (1978), pp. 278–306.

permanent. In the following pages, each stage is discussed in turn, and the relative importance of strategic, commercial, and aspirational thinking considered. The article ends by examining the fall of Taylor in 1843 and what this reveals about the principles which the British sought to uphold in Mesopotamia.

I

The first stage of the imposition of British steam power in the region came with the Euphrates expedition. In 1834, parliament granted £20,000 for a steam exploration of the Euphrates. The Ottoman sultan was persuaded to issue a firman permitting two British steamers to sail on the Euphrates for as long as was mutually convenient to both governments, in order to 'facilitate commerce'.[14] In 1835, the steamers were transported in pieces overland from the Mediterranean and assembled on the upper Euphrates preparatory to an attempt to sail down to the Gulf and then, it was hoped, back up again.

At first sight, this was part of a broader drive to develop effective steam-powered communication with India. The 1834 select committee on steam navigation to India recommended two simultaneous policies investigating the two prime routes. While the Euphrates expedition would explore the feasibility of a connection from Basra to Beirut, two steamers were bought for regular service between Bombay and Suez in order to develop the route to Suez, up the Red Sea, and then overland through Egypt to Alexandria.[15] Government officials and merchants in India and London had been interested in the idea of steam communication between the two since the early 1820s. A Steam Fund had been established in Calcutta in 1823 to offer prizes for enterprising ventures by the Cape route, the Red Sea route, or a river and overland route across the desert from the Gulf to the Mediterranean. The Bombay government authorized the surveying of the Red Sea and launched a steam vessel, the *Hugh Lindsay*, to Suez in 1830. Rival private individuals in search of fame and wealth, particularly Thomas Waghorn and James Taylor, also explored the likely routes. F. R. Chesney, who was to command the Euphrates expedition, investigated the river in 1831.

However, these efforts had little immediate effect, because they proved the costliness of every option. Steamships were fast but, at this time, very expensive because of the amount of coal they needed to carry.[16] Neither the Court of Directors nor private capitalists seemed willing to pay to develop the routes. Merchant and public opinion became increasingly vociferous at the lack of

[14] Aitchison, *Treaties*, VII, p. 15.
[15] Report, 14 July 1834, *Parliamentary Papers* (*PP*), 1834, XIV.
[16] D. R. Headrick, *The tentacles of progress: technology transfer in the age of imperialism, 1850–1940* (New York, NY, and Oxford, 1988), pp. 23–4.

activity, contributing to the general criticism of the East India Company, like other ancien régime institutions, during the Reform tensions of 1830–2.[17]

By itself, therefore, commercial pressure for better communications with India would not have secured rapid action in 1834. The urgency instead came from the state of the Ottoman Empire. Muhammad Ali, pasha of Egypt, was determined to assert his effective independence from the sultan. He had built up trade revenues from the west by cultivating long-staple cotton for European markets and developing key communications, including coach-roads and the Mahmudiyah canal between Alexandria and the Nile. He had created a strong army and navy and the schools, hospitals, and factories needed to supply them, relying on western expertise, especially French. After his navy – helping the Ottomans – was destroyed by the British at Navarino in 1827, he redoubled his attempts at a self-defence policy, built a new shipyard and barracks in Alexandria, and became more reliant on French assistance. Seeking new territory, resources, and a buffer against the sultan, he conquered Syria in 1832, a major blow to Ottoman power. In 1833, the sultan, already enfeebled by the Russo-Turkish war, had to acknowledge his reliance on Russia to check the challenge of Egypt. The Ottoman Empire seemed weaker than since the days of Napoleon. For the British, it was imperative to demonstrate interest in it wherever they realistically could. This meant reasserting the British presence in Egypt in competition with France and Russia, but also thinking about Mesopotamia. Thus, British interest in the two alternative mail routes to India in 1834 was part of a new general policy of maintaining the Ottoman Empire against Russia, Muhammad Ali, and all comers, that was worked out in 1833–4 by Foreign Secretary Palmerston and others including Henry Ellis at the Board of Control.[18] The sultan's weakness gave the British the opening to win the firman allowing them unprecedented steam access to the rivers.

Naturally, this strategy was developed in London. However, the crucial back story to it involved Robert Taylor in Baghdad, who had laid the foundations over several years, and whose role has been downplayed in favour of Chesney by the few historians who have considered the matter.[19]

The province of Baghdad, though not quite as strategically significant as Egypt, had several similarities to it. It was one of the richer Ottoman provinces, and with strong government could have created a thriving agricultural sector. It was governed by a Mamluk dynasty of pashas who enjoyed substantial independence from the sultan.[20] However, it had been enfeebled by factional conflict in the 1800s and 1810s as well as by the threat of aggression from Persia at various points along their disputed frontier. Daud had emerged as pasha in

[17] Hoskins, *British routes*, chs. 4–5.

[18] Ingram, *Great game*, ch. 9.

[19] For an emphasis on Chesney's role, see Hoskins, *British routes*, p. 154; Guest, *Euphrates expedition*, chs. 3–4. Guest, and Headrick, *Tools of empire*, ch. 1, also give T. L. Peacock much of the credit.

[20] J. S. Buckingham, *Travels in Mesopotamia* (2 vols., London, 1827), II, pp. 198–9.

1816 and in the 1820s began to implement a ruthless modernizing strategy like that of Muhammad Ali.

Taylor's importance stemmed from the combination of his influence over Daud and his excellent contacts with the steam lobby in India. Though Daud had clashed badly with the British when they seemed pro-Persian in 1820–1, he had come to see their common interest in developing the prosperity of the pashalik. Taylor appreciated Daud's energy but was most concerned to check foreign power involvement in the province. Viscerally anti-Russian, he was worried by their ambitions in Persia and in Kurdistan, where troops appeared in 1827 during the Persian war. Russia's subsequent treaties with Persia and Turkey redoubled his anxieties, as did the military training that the French were giving the pasha's forces. Daud requested Taylor to supply British military assistance and ships. Taylor, in passing this request to government, also asked permission to move to Baghdad, arguing that there would be little British influence over Daud while he was confined to Basra. These suggestions divided officials. Bombay was originally opposed, but in December 1828, with Russian power in the Near East manifest, Lord Ellenborough, the responsible cabinet minister, supported Taylor, urging the importance of checking other powers, and discounting the fear that European military training might make Daud a strategic threat to the sultan. Taylor therefore arrived in Baghdad in May 1829, brought his son from India to be in charge of the Residency Guard, trained up 500 bodyguards and a brigade of cavalry, and had the satisfaction of seeing Daud dismiss his other foreign advisers.[21] He claimed that these reforms 'had made rapid advances towards the establishment of a military and political bulwark impregnable to Russia'.[22]

Taylor believed that steam navigation on the Mesopotamian rivers would be 'a political lever of inestimable power and consequence' to the same end.[23] He was confident that his connections with the Arab tribes would allow British ships safe passage. A steamer service would develop the commerce and wealth of the pashalik, as in Egypt, and would entrench British influence. In 1830, he began discussing plans with Daud. These were then enthusiastically adopted by his brother James, who for several years had sought to make his name by developing steam navigation from India to London. Having failed with his first scheme in 1825, and another via Suez in 1829–30, he went to stay with his brother in Baghdad and in June 1830 quickly saw the advantages of the Euphrates route as a means of connecting to the Mediterranean. It was not yet obvious that the Red Sea was the best mail route to India. Early generations of steamers could not cope with the Indian Ocean monsoons between July and September, and the Company was daunted by the cost of building and

[21] Khan, 'British policy', pp. 177–81; Ingram, *Great game*, pp. 149–60.

[22] J. H. Stocqueler, *Fifteen months' pilgrimage through untrodden tracts of Khuzistan and Persia in a journey from India to England ... in the years 1831 to 1832* (2 vols., London, 1832), I, pp. 53–4.

[23] Taylor to Auber, 14 July 1830, IOR L/P&S/P/91.

maintaining four ocean-going vessels. There were already fears that Muhammad Ali might fall under French or Russian sway, and Britain had little presence in the Red Sea ports. But the Euphrates route was several hundred miles shorter, and steamers were already running effectively on most major European and American rivers. Herodotus showed that the river had supported trade; Trajan and Julian had used it for invasion. Its decline seemed simply due to the decay of local commerce in face of western competition, and the rise of vagabondage.[24]

The Taylor brothers worked on Daud and by July 1830 he had granted James the right to run a tolled steam service on the rivers and thirty miles of land along the banks at a nominal rent, to produce indigo and rice, on which an especially low export duty would apply. In return, he wanted James to introduce 'machinery of the latest and most approved invention' for the 'cultivation and irrigation of the soil'. Daud drew up plans to cut a canal between the Tigris and Euphrates to help these developments, again following Muhammad Ali's policy.[25] However, these plans collapsed dramatically when James was murdered by Yezidi tribesmen near Mosul in August 1830.

The sudden termination of this strategy disguised how coherent Robert Taylor's plans were to strengthen British influence in the region, develop commerce along the rivers, and enrich his brother. Taylor's reputation has also suffered from his support for Daud. In 1830–1, this became very embarrassing because Daud sought, more blatantly than Muhammad Ali at this stage, to assert his independence of the sultan, and murdered the envoy he had sent to demand increased revenue payments. In 1831, the sultan sent Ali Rida from Aleppo with an army to force Daud to submit to Ottoman power. The upshot, after a long siege of Baghdad, was Daud's overthrow in October (replaced by Ali Rida) and the end of Mamluk rule in the province. Ellis at the Board of Control, and other London policy-makers, were desperate to prevent a break-up of the Ottoman Empire, which they felt would benefit Russia more than Britain. Constantinople must be sovereign at Baghdad, which Ellis considered of small strategic significance. As Kelly and Ingram stress, Ellis insisted on rebuking Taylor. He was told that he had overstepped the mark in treating the pasha as a semi-independent power; he was instructed to keep out of local politics in Baghdad and also in the contested frontier region of Kurdistan.[26] From then on, both accounts emphasize that London set policy in the region.

[24] Thomas Love Peacock at the India Office, another exponent of the route, made these historical points particularly forcefully: *PP*, 1834, XIV, pp. 5–6; 'On steam navigation to India', *Edinburgh Review*, 60 (1835), p. 462.

[25] Robert to James Taylor, 11 July 1830, IOR L/P&S/9/91; A. N. Groves, *Journal of a residence at Bagdad, during the years 1830 and 1831* (London, 1832), pp. 3–4, 9–11, 17, 54; F. W. Newman, *Personal narrative, in letters, principally from Turkey, in the years 1830–1833* (London, 1856), pp. 99–101.

[26] Kelly, *Persian Gulf*, p. 270; Ingram, *Great game*, pp. 165–76.

However, the London officials had exaggerated Taylor's partisanship as between the pasha and the sultan. His strategy was to reconcile them, and he hoped to gain more concessions from Daud by achieving this.[27] He knew the strength of Daud's position; he was displaced only because of the terrible plague of 1831. Even so. it took months for Baghdad to submit to the sultan's forces, and in recognition of Daud's past services he was not killed but moved to administer another part of the empire. Taylor was confident that his policies would strengthen any Baghdad authority, by securing order on the riverbanks and boosting revenues, which was especially necessary after the plague and floods had made most canals inoperable. A visitor sent by government later reported home that Daud's Taylor-inspired plan – of digging and reopening canals in order to increase settlement, prosperity, and 'a liberal system of improvement and British influence' – was the only chance of maintaining any rule over the Arabs.[28] Ali Rida lost no time in personally and repeatedly requesting that Taylor should return from Basra to Baghdad to help him. The sultan approved his plans to recommence the steam navigation policy and to increase British military assistance. Ali Rida also wanted to continue Daud's canal, which had been started even after James's death, but there was now no money to do so.[29] In short, Taylor's actions had not remotely endangered British influence at Baghdad or Constantinople. He wrote pointing out the errors of his London critics, who did not understand his significance at Baghdad or the value placed by the Ottoman authorities on his mediation in Kurdistan. These arguments were accepted by the Board of Control.[30]

Thus, when the steam expedition to the Euphrates was finally sanctioned in 1834, it should not be seen as simply the triumph of Henry Ellis's Ottoman status quo policy. Taylor had developed the idea and the official approval that he had secured for it was crucial in getting the permissions of 1834.[31] He was still an enthusiast for it; indeed, from his perspective, it was increasingly essential. Until Britain declared its interest in Egypt and Mesopotamia in 1834, his influence in Baghdad was waning. With Russia so powerful at Constantinople, the pasha seemed friendlier to Russia than to Britain, and failed to give redress when staff at the British Residency were attacked and humiliated by locals in 1833, in an incident that reached the London newspapers. Britain seemed weak in a region where weakness did not command

[27] Stocqueler, *Fifteen months*, pp. 53–4.

[28] J. B. Fraser, 'Memorandum on the present condition of the Pachalic of Bagdad and the means it possesses of renovation and improvement', 12 Nov. 1834, printed as Appendix E of Malet, *Précis*, pp. xxviii–xliv.

[29] Taylor to Norris, 15 Jan. 1832, IOR L/P&S/9/93, Taylor to Bombay, 15 Sept. 1832, IOR L/P&S/9/95; see Ingram, *Great game*, pp.173–4.

[30] See Taylor to London, 6 Oct. 1831, and Cabell memo, 14 Mar. 1832, IOR L/P&S/P/92; Malet, *Précis*, pp. 128–9.

[31] In instructing Taylor about the expedition, India House emphasized the approval for steam navigation that he had secured in 1831–2: Carter to Taylor, 1 Sept. 1834, FO 195/113.

respect. Moreover, after the plague, the pasha's influence itself hardly reached beyond Baghdad, and lawlessness was rife.[32] The gap between the reality and the potential of the province was disturbingly wide.

II

In 1838, the British government expanded to four the steamer flotilla on the Mesopotamian rivers. This decision was taken in secret by the government in London, and taken despite the fact that the case for using the Euphrates to communicate with India had now been comprehensively weakened. By 1837, most experts had concluded that the Red Sea route was the most reliable option for the Indian mail. Powerful sea-going steamers commissioned in 1835 silenced many doubters, and in 1837 the number of them on the Bombay–Suez run was increased. The acquisition of Aden in 1838–9 supplied a coaling station and protection against piracy. By contrast, the Euphrates expedition had met with delay and then disaster. Muhammad Ali and his son Ibrahim in Syria placed various obstacles in the way of assembling the two ships, and their descent, under Chesney's command, was delayed until spring 1836. One of the two ships, the *Tigris*, was then sunk in a heavy storm and twenty officers and sailors were drowned. Chesney failed in the crucial objective of going back up the river, instead damaging the remaining steamer, the *Euphrates*. The costs of the expedition overran, the Company resisted extra contributions, and Chesney gained a reputation for waywardness and insubordination. In 1837, as a consolation prize to the advocates of the Euphrates route, an official dromedary post was set up between Basra and Beirut to provide back-up during the monsoon and in case the Red Sea route failed. However, humiliatingly, this post was lost for two successive months during the 1838 monsoon after being attacked by desert raiders or saboteurs, thus paralysing London's ability to respond to the Herat crisis. It also became clear that it would not be assisted by a steamer on the Euphrates, since dromedaries were quicker in the upstream direction.[33]

Despite these embarrassments, the London government decided, first, to keep the *Euphrates* in the region in 1836–7 rather than to send her to India, and then to buy three new steamers to assist her in September 1838. These decisions were clearly not driven by pressure from India. The 1838 commitment was instead a significant part of the cabinet's pan-Asian strategy to tackle simultaneously the threat from Muhammad Ali, France, Persia, and Russia. The cabinet had to consider the possibility that Muhammad Ali would soon invade Baghdad, either from Syria, still occupied by Ibrahim's army, or from Arabia which was being slowly overrun by Egyptian forces under Khurshid Pasha.

[32] Taylor to Ponsonby, 25 June, 30 July, 23 Aug. 1833, 31 Mar. 1834, FO 195/113; Taylor to London, 14 Mar. 1834, IOR/L/P&S/9/96; *Times*, 14 Jan. 1834, p. 4.

[33] Hobhouse to Taylor, 14 May 1839, 4 June 1840, Broughton 7.

By 1838, Khurshid was menacing the Arabian coast of the Gulf, particularly Bahrain. Taylor warned repeatedly that Baghdad was defenceless against moves from either quarter, and moreover that Muhammad Ali was popular among the townspeople. He seemed to be aiming at a powerful Moslem state, supplanting Turkish control everywhere in Asia outside Anatolia.

Both decisions about the steamers were taken by whig cabinet minister John Cam Hobhouse at the Board of Control, with the help of Foreign Secretary Palmerston and officials at the Board and India House. But all the pressure and detailed evidence for the policy was supplied by Taylor, Chesney, and his second-in-command Henry Blosse Lynch, whom Hobhouse then promoted to command the new flotilla. The three locals' optimistic presentation of the benefits of steam power converted Hobhouse (and Ambassador Ponsonby in Constantinople) to enthusiastic agreement.[34] So it is worth considering their argument.

It was a developed version of Taylor's in 1829–30. It was ultimately a political strategy to secure Britain's position against Russia and France, but it rested on liberal assumptions about the benefits of protection of the Arabs, agricultural settlement, and Britain's unique ability to gain the respect of contending parties by firm and fair rule. It was focused on the Arabs much more than the Ottomans. It had little faith in the beneficence of Ottoman rule and little expectation of its long continuation.

The first, clearest, benefit of the steamers, the argument went, would be to impose order and discipline on the Arab tribes along the riverbanks, thus securing authority and protecting these key commercial waterways. In 1834, Taylor lamented that the Tigris between Baghdad and Basra was completely under Arab control and that fleets of boats were regularly attacked.[35] A great discovery of the Euphrates expedition was the effect of a steamer – which the Arabs called 'dukhani', or 'smoky' – on the tribes. The Anizah formally sought Chesney's protection against marauding nomads; other tribes were so willing to do so that similar treaties were not necessary. The steamers' weaponry, especially 'our gun, mortar and rocket practice', had a remarkable effect.[36] So did other aspects of the technology. When the three new steamers arrived at Basra in early 1840, they were in parts for local assembly: when the machines eventually floated, one after the other, it seemed to the astonished Arabs that they had reproduced themselves.[37] For both the Arabs and the Ottomans, the benefits of working with this new power were self-evident. The British invariably took care to cultivate the riverbank tribes, offering presents, usually of British-

[34] Headrick, *Tools of empire*, is useful on broader debates about steam power but does not consider these arguments. For Ponsonby, see Lynch to Hobhouse, 12 Nov. 1838, Broughton 9.

[35] To Ponsonby, 31 Mar. 1834, FO 195/113.

[36] Chesney to Hobhouse, 30 Apr., 16 May 1836, Broughton 4; Lynch to London, 5 Feb. 1839, IOR L/P&S/9/110; Felix Jones, *Memoirs of Baghdad, Kurdistan and Turkish Arabia, 1857* (Slough, 1998), p. 76.

[37] Lynch to Hobhouse, 25 Jan. 1840, Broughton 10.

made clothes.[38] Moreover, the pasha quickly grasped the importance of improving order on the rivers. He became much friendlier to Taylor, sensing that the regional balance of power had changed. When the *Euphrates* arrived in Baghdad, he visited it several times, hoping to use it to gain influence over the tribes near the coast, particularly the Kaab who were befriending Persia, and to strengthen himself against Khurshid Pasha and the Wahhabi.[39]

It was reasonable to hope that settlement and cultivation would follow the establishment of order. All British travellers to Mesopotamia could see what it needed: if the Arabs were settled on fertile land, given security of property, and taxed fairly and lightly, they would improve it. Their avidity for woollens, cottons, cutlery, and guns meant that they would exert themselves as farmers to earn the money to buy them. Government should help by introducing effective irrigation. Settlement and irrigation together would improve the agricultural yield 250 times. The fascination of Mesopotamia for the British was that primitive civilizations had made it the richest, most fertile country known to man, 'the granary of the world', simply by irrigation and good government. Chesney quoted Herodotus that Mesopotamia grew one third of Asian produce.[40] A policy implemented several centuries before Christ was manifestly not beyond the wit of nineteenth-century capitalists. Indeed, to the early Victorian mind it seemed obvious that someone else would develop the region, if not the British.[41] Perhaps a providential conflict was brewing: explorations to trace the course of ancient canals and their impressively engineered dams made one steamship commander wonder if 'some wise design' was in operation to amend for the destruction of ancient civilization by a 'locust breed'.[42]

This mindset produced a decided ambivalence about Ottoman rule. Though the steamer might help the Ottomans to discipline and civilize unruly Arabs, they would fail unless they understood the principles of good government. They acted as a short-term occupying power, fleecing the land with arbitrary and excessive taxes for the pasha's personal gain, rather than developing it. Their rapacity was stupid and indefensible. The centralization policy of the Ottomans after 1831, determinedly crushing independent fiefdoms all over the region, made matters worse because the financial burden was insupportable.[43] Taylor and Lynch were clear, and impressed on all British visitors, that it was the Ottomans, not the Arabs, who prevented agricultural improvement. Stereotypes

[38] Chesney to Hobhouse, 19 June 1836, Broughton 4; Jones, *Memoirs*, p. 271. This practice had inestimable benefits but had to be concealed from the bureaucrats in charge of the Indian navy accounts.

[39] Taylor to London, 11 June 1836, IOR L/P&S/9/99, 15 Aug. 1837, IOR L/P&S/9/103.

[40] Jones, *Memoirs*, pp. 42, 133, 240–1; F. R. Chesney, *The expedition for the survey of the rivers Euphrates and Tigris ... 1835, 1836, and 1837* (2 vols., London, 1850), II, pp. 602–3, 686–8, 691, 697; Fraser, 'Memorandum', pp. xli–xliv.

[41] Lynch memo, 7 Sept. 1837, IOR L/P&S/9/103. See also Countess Nostitz, *Travels of Doctor and Madame Helfer in Syria, Mesopotamia, Burmah and other lands* (2 vols., London, 1878), I, pp. 274–6.

[42] Jones, *Memoirs*, pp. 107–8, 128, 204, 235.

[43] Rawlinson to London, 2 Feb. 1852, IOR L/P&S/9/14.

of Arab lawlessness were wrong: they would prove energetic, intelligent farmers, 'the most tractable people in the world' according to Lynch's brother who later in the century employed many of them to grow grain, cotton, and tobacco. They responded straightforwardly to British straightforwardness; it was Ottoman greed and deceitfulness which forced them to reciprocate in kind and to revert to primitive 'robber-barbarism'.[44] Like so many later British travellers in the region, Taylor and Lynch admired the simplicity, manliness, and freedom of the Arabs; for Lynch, England was 'the natural resort of the Arab in his hour of need'.[45] Both, indeed, were immensely knowledgeable about Arab culture. Lynch had learned Persian and Arabic while engaged on the naval survey of the Gulf in the 1820s, became the interpreter to the Gulf squadron, and was in charge of dealings with the tribes during the Euphrates expedition. Taylor (who had married an Armenian Persian) built up an unrivalled library of Arabic and Persian historical, religious, scientific, and literary texts which his widow sold to the British Museum for £2,000, forming the basis of its collection. Layard regarded him as 'the best living authority' on Oriental culture.[46]

The strategy that they urged on Hobhouse and the government was thus a double-edged one designed to cope with any political eventuality. In May 1838, Lynch wrote of the steamer: 'The Turks look upon it as a means of consolidating their power here. The Arabs as their only chance of protection from the ravages of the Turks. We must look to it to civilize both.' Thereby, the British would obtain a 'moral power here nothing could shake'.[47] The pashalik was inevitably decaying and British influence inevitably increasing: when the old regime collapsed, the British would be able to arrange things 'as our interests dictate, without any violent measures likely to attract attention'.[48] If the region was attacked by foreign powers, the British could count on Arab loyalty – 'the finest band of soldiers, by land or sea, on our Indian frontier'.[49] The steamer policy was in fact an extension of that already being pursued in the Gulf by Samuel Hennell, the British Resident there, whose small flotilla allowed him to 'treat with every petty Chief and force them to respect our views and interests'.[50]

[44] Newman, *Personal narrative*, p. 104; Jones, *Memoirs*, pp. 42,110, 133, 223–4; T. K. Lynch, *Across Mesopotamia to India by the Euphrates valley* (London, 1879), p. 18. Jones was more critical of 'predatory' Arabs than the others.

[45] Lynch memo, Aug. 1837, IOR L/P&S/9/103.

[46] Layard to Sara Austen, 28 May 1840, Layard 58154. The British Museum acquired 355 works, BL Add. MSS 23252–606.

[47] Lynch to Hobhouse, 31 May 1838, 11 Aug. 1837, Broughton 6.

[48] Lynch to Hobhouse, 12 Nov. 1838, Broughton 9. Fraser also argued that Britain must seek 'permanent influence' irrespective of who actually ruled the pashalik: 'Memorandum', p. xliv.

[49] Lynch to Hobhouse, 28 May 1839, Broughton 9; see also Chesney to Hobhouse, 30 Apr. 1836, Broughton 4.

[50] Lynch to Hobhouse, 31 Mar. 1839, Broughton 9. See J. Onley, 'The politics of protection in the Gulf: the Arab rulers and the British Resident in the nineteenth century', *New Arabian Studies*, 6 (2004), pp. 30–92.

It was thus crucial to show the steamers' invincibility to the Arabs: Lynch would not set sail until he had large crews capable of meeting any difficulty, and tried always to avoid shallows or other parts of the rivers where the boats might get stuck and require local assistance. The British navy must appear paramount at all times.[51]

In the meantime, steam power would have more immediate benefits. The greatest revelation of the Euphrates expedition concerned the Tigris. The steamer's ascent to Baghdad in September 1836 proved that the river was easily navigable by steam even in low season. The time needed for a round trip between Baghdad and the British-controlled Gulf would fall to ten to twelve days, against well over a month for a sailing boat. Though a lot of effort continued to be deployed on the Euphrates – with little success above Hit, while even on the lower Euphrates the Lemlum marshes were frequently treacherous – it was the Tigris that offered the better prospects, of unrivalled political influence at Baghdad itself, and a secure commercial route to the sea on payment of modest tribute to the Arab tribes. The steamer appeared at Baghdad as a marvel: the people treated it as 'a new prophet ... sent into the world'. Chesney realized then that such a 'supernatural machine' could 'govern the entire line of the Tigris' by its 'moral power' over the Arabs.[52] The steamship commanders put a lot of effort into surveying the Tigris and preparing navigation charts; they also helped the pasha to plan his canal, and tried to reach Mosul, the gateway to Kurdistan. By 1845, Baghdad was so easy to access from the sea that Rawlinson argued that it was a port.[53]

The other major river that the steamer commanders surveyed was the Karun, which ran down into the Shatt al-Arab from Khuzistan (south-west Persia). Chesney assumed that it was navigable because Alexander's henchman Nearchus had reached Susa in 324 BC. British steamers explored it briefly in 1836, and three times in 1841 and 1842, when Selby reached Ahvaz but was grounded for several weeks at Shushtar. Nonetheless, his journey was regarded in Baghdad as a great success, opening the prospects of increased British influence in a sensitive Turkish–Persian border area. The traveller Henry Layard, who had spent months living with the Bakhtiari in Khuzistan in 1840, urged the trips on Selby and accompanied him. This fact was omitted from Selby's account published by the Royal Geographical Society in 1844, because Layard had antagonized the Persian government by apparently encouraging the Bakhtiari to think that the British would welcome their independence from Tehran, something that all officials were anxious to avoid in their attempt to stabilize the area. A British commercial presence in

[51] Lynch to Maddock, 23 Aug. 1839, IOR L/P&S/9/113; hence his ill-advised trip to London in search of extra resources in 1840.

[52] Chesney to Grant, 16 Oct. 1836, Broughton 5.

[53] To Canning, 25 Nov. 1845, FO 195/237. Preliminary reports about the Tigris were published in the *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, 7 (1837), p. 432, and ibid., 9 (1839), pp. 441–2, 471–6.

Khuzistan, however, was another matter, which might increase strategic options in the longer term, and the British minister in Tehran condoned initiatives to that end.[54]

These arguments about the benefit of a permanent steamer presence chimed neatly with Hobhouse's faith in progress and the 'steam intellect' mentality of 1830s liberalism. Hobhouse wrote in 1838 that by steam power 'we may silently obtain that influence with the Arab tribes which will more than half ensure our permanent predominance'.[55] In early 1837, he saw off pressure from India, which had bought the *Euphrates*, to send it there for future service, which he did by mixing the question up with the settlement of the broader mail communication issue and the simultaneous introduction of a proper steam navy in India.[56] Claiming that the *Euphrates* would be important for the new back-up dromedary post in Mesopotamia, he insisted that specially built steamers should be sent out for service in India instead. In April 1837, Lynch was given instructions to command the *Euphrates* and 'any other steam vessel' which might be employed with it, endeavour to establish 'with the tribes of the rivers such relations as may be serviceable' to British interests, help with a regular mail service, and survey the rivers.[57] Chesney and Lynch repeatedly suggested to Hobhouse and Ponsonby that the *Euphrates* should form the basis of a small Indian navy flotilla in Mesopotamia.[58] However, the Indian government opposed the idea; indeed, it took so long to send a crew for the *Euphrates* that Lynch was only able to make its inaugural river voyage in the spring of 1838 by borrowing a crew from HMS *Clive* in the Gulf. Afterwards, Lynch and Taylor wrote home enthusiastically about this journey down the Tigris, up the Euphrates to Hit and then back to Baghdad along the Saqlawiyah canal – a region 'so long lost to our commercial interests'.[59]

Fortuitously, these excited letters arrived in England in August 1838, when the government was grappling with a double crisis: the Persian advance on Herat and Afghanistan, and Muhammad Ali's moves to seek Egyptian independence from the sultan. Most commentators assumed that Russia was behind Persia and France behind Egypt. If Persia was not ejected from Herat, Russia might gain the upper hand in Afghanistan as it already had in Persia. If Persia was ejected from Herat, however, it might seek compensation by an attack on Baghdad, as in 1821, taking advantage of Ottoman weakness, and in revenge for the Baghdad pasha's attack on the border town of Mohammareh on

[54] Sheil to Palmerston, 15 Apr. 1841, IOR L/P&S/9/118; W. B. Selby, 'Account of the ascent of the Karun and Dizful rivers', *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, 14 (1844), pp. 231, 242; Layard to B. Austen, 19 Jan. 1842, Layard 58154; Chesney, *Euphrates expedition*, pp. 698, 701.

[55] To Lynch, 26 Dec. 1838, Broughton 7.

[56] Hobhouse to Grant, 19 Dec. 1836, Broughton 5.

[57] Malet, *Précis*, pp. 133–4.

[58] Chesney to Ponsonby, 24 Sept. 1836, Broughton 5; Lynch to London, 7 Sept. 1837, IOR L/P&S/9/103.

[59] Lynch and Taylor to London, 20 and 25 June 1838, IOR L/P&S/9/106.

the Shatt al-Arab in 1837–8. Meanwhile, Muhammad Ali's move appreciably increased the risk that he would occupy the Arabian Gulf coast and Baghdad as well as Syria, and establish a new empire. Perhaps, then, the Ottoman Empire could no longer be maintained. But if it could, it might well only be at the cost of increasing further the sultan's dependence on Russian influence at Constantinople. This combination of scenarios posed a serious threat to British global power. The greatest danger was obviously the Russian threat to Afghanistan and then India, and the cabinet and governor-general agreed that to move against Persia was a priority. However, there was uncertainty about how far to attack Persia in the Gulf as well as at Herat. The British occupation of the Gulf island of Kharg was already underway, in order to intimidate Persia from the south, and also to warn Muhammad Ali of British interest in the Gulf. In addition, a land invasion of Persia was mooted, either from the Residency at Bushire, or, more temptingly, up the Karun river from Mohammareh into Khuzistan. There was also talk of a British march on Baghdad.[60]

The problem that the British faced in responding to these linked crises was partly imperial overstretch but also the need not to antagonize the western powers. The great advantage of focusing on Afghanistan was that neither Russia nor France could effectively object to British military activity there, whereas both criticized the occupation of Kharg, let alone a British invasion of either Persian or Ottoman territory from the Gulf.[61] Moreover, an attack on the Persian mainland would weaken the shah and increase his dependence on Russia. The need to avoid escalating tension with Russia and France was one reason why British military activity in Mesopotamia or southern Persia was in the event limited. However, the other reason was that the occupation of Kharg appeared very successful: the Persians quickly withdrew from Herat, and Palmerston made clear that the British would continue to occupy Kharg until they left Ghurian as well. Moreover, Britain found a way of underlining her predominance in Mesopotamia that Russia or France could not criticize.

This was the steamer flotilla. When the letters from Lynch and Taylor about the spring expedition arrived in London in late August, Hobhouse, his secretary Cabell, and Thomas Love Peacock at India House (an advocate of steam power in Mesopotamia since 1829) used them to force the idea of a flotilla on the Court of Directors through the Secret Committee, on the basis of political imperatives which were not divulged to them. This demand was agreed by mid-September; the flotilla became largely Hobhouse's own responsibility, protected as far as possible from Indian navy interference. The decision then

[60] See Palmerston to Hobhouse, 27 Aug. 1838, Melbourne to Hobhouse, 26 Sept. 1838, Hobhouse to Palmerston, 29 Sept. 1838, Broughton 6; Hobhouse to Taylor, 15 July 1839, Broughton 7.

[61] Hobhouse to Auckland, 27 Oct. 1838, Broughton 6, Hobhouse to Taylor, 26 Dec. 1838, Broughton 7.

allowed the cabinet to reject John McNeill's request to send 5,000 more men to the Gulf.[62]

British officials from Palmerston downwards told Muhammad Ali throughout 1838 and 1839 that there would be consequences if his troops threatened Bahrain or other Gulf settlements, and also warned him against invading Baghdad. At the same time, the British government told the anxious Taylor and Lynch that it could not commit any troops to Baghdad itself, and that the solution to Muhammad Ali's aggression lay in European diplomacy. Hobhouse advised them that if Baghdad was attacked, they should declare it a hostile act but avoid a conflict and withdraw from the Residency.[63] The aim was to show international opinion that Muhammad Ali (or Persia), rather than the British, was the aggressor on Baghdad. In fact, however, a further symbol of British interest was conveniently found, in the shape of the detachment of British troops that was forced to leave Persia after diplomatic relations were suspended in 1838. The detachment (which included Henry Rawlinson and seven other officers), was sent to Baghdad where it stayed between February and late October 1839 – with instructions to be on public display – before resuming its journey to India.[64]

In 1840–1, the powers solved the Eastern crisis by diplomacy, afforced by British warship reinforcements in the Gulf, and then the bombardment of Acre. The integrity of the Ottoman Empire was maintained.[65] On the surface no commitment had been made to Baghdad. However, British interest in the region was understood, albeit understated for fear of antagonizing the other powers to no benefit. Indeed, almost the first military action taken by Britain after the Crimean War altered assumptions about the European balance of power was an invasion of southern Persia in 1857, by the Karun river, and occupation of Mohammareh and Ahvaz – helped by plans of the area drawn up by one of the British steamship commanders, Felix Jones.[66]

III

There were still many officials, in India and London, who did not believe that Baghdad should matter to Britain. Indeed, the powers made great diplomatic efforts to keep the whole Near Eastern region quiet after the settlement of the Eastern question in 1841. Muhammad Ali was forced to withdraw from Syria and Arabia. Russia and Britain agreed to settle various remaining tensions,

[62] See Cabell and Peacock notes, 30 Aug. and 14 Sept. 1838, IOR L/P&S/3/4; Hobhouse to Auckland, 27 Oct. 1838, Broughton 6; Hobhouse to Carnac, 4 May 1840, Broughton 7. Hobhouse personally regretted that several thousand troops were not available to be sent to Baghdad: to Auckland, 15 June 1839, Broughton 7.

[63] Hobhouse to Taylor, 25 Sept. 1839, and to Lynch, 4 Mar. 1840, Broughton 7.

[64] Hobhouse to Taylor, 13 June 1839, Broughton 7; Rawlinson, *Rawlinson*, pp. 69–70.

[65] Kelly, *Persian Gulf*, ch. 8.

[66] C. R. Markham, *A memoir on the Indian surveys* (London, 1871), p. 30.

including superintending a joint arbitration of the Turkish–Persian boundary. The replacement of Palmerston by Aberdeen as foreign secretary in 1841 lowered temperatures further, as did the extension of a peaceful British naval supremacy in the Gulf with the signing of the Trucial treaty of 1843 by which the Arab parties agreed a non-aggression pact during the pearl fishing season.[67] All regional difficulties now seemed under control. Unsurprisingly, Indian officials now urged the withdrawal of the Mesopotamian flotilla and the abolition of the Baghdad Residency. However, neither happened. Why not?

Lynch's command of the flotilla certainly gave its critics plenty of ammunition. He had undertaken a leisurely journey to Britain in 1840–1 to ask for more resources, and on returning had nearly lost one steamer trying to descend the Euphrates in early 1842. He was finally forced to admit that it was not navigable: the lack of commerce on the riverbank created a vicious circle, requiring the flotilla to carry so much fuel, food, and weaponry that the boats were too heavy for the ascent.[68] His accounts, moreover, were in complete disarray. Three of the four steamers were recalled to India at various times in 1842, as was Lynch himself, and the dromedary post was axed (though Rawlinson reinstated it in 1844). Only the *Nitocris* was left on the Tigris, under the command of Felix Jones. In 1843, the Bombay government requested the withdrawal of the *Nitocris* and the entire steamer operation, and the abolition of the Baghdad Residency, proposing merely an assistant at Basra for the Resident in the Gulf. The Indian government launched an investigation into the steamer flotilla and a review of the cost of the Residency.[69]

There is considerable confusion about what happened next – but it is generally assumed that soon after the Euphrates expedition the government steamers were withdrawn.[70] It is well known that two Lynch brothers established a private Euphrates and Tigris Steam Navigation Company in 1861, which, albeit in competition with Ottoman steamers running from 1855, came to dominate commercial traffic between Baghdad and Basra well into the twentieth century. In fact, however, this was in addition to the continuous presence of a government steamer on the rivers through the century from 1842. The *Nitocris*, commanded by Jones, survived, to be succeeded by the *Comet* in 1852. The *Nitocris* was saved by the forceful arguments made by the new

[67] Kelly, *Persian Gulf*, ch. 9.

[68] Lynch to Fitzgerald, 25 June 1842, IOR L/P&S/9/13.

[69] See Malet, *Précis*, pp. 1, 136–7.

[70] Saleh claims that the Lynch brothers took over the steamers for commerce in 1842–3: *Britain and Mesopotamia*, pp. 182–3. So does Ebubekir Ceylan, *The Ottoman origins of modern Iraq: political reform, modernization and development in the nineteenth-century Middle East* (London and New York, NY, 2011), p. 190. Guest thinks that they took over the Company vessels in 1861: *Euphrates expedition*, p. 155. Hala Fattah suggests that the British steam project made no inroads before 1861 though there was a 'surreptitious' plan for steamships at Maqil in 1849 (where in fact the flotilla had been assembled openly in 1839–40): *The politics of regional trade in Iraq, Arabia, and the Gulf, 1745–1900* (Albany, NY, 1997), pp. 104–5, 117–18. For the truth, see Saldanha, *Précis*, pp. 173–85.

Political Agent Rawlinson between 1844 and 1846, together with the return to their old cabinet posts in 1846 of Hobhouse and Palmerston, who insisted on keeping it.[71]

Rawlinson was keen to celebrate the fact that 'our flag is at present supreme' in Mesopotamia. His main argument was the familiar one that the steamer 'strengthens the hands of the British Agent in the most effectual, and ... least ostentatious, manner possible', in relation to the pasha, with whom he had never had a serious dispute, to other powers and to the locals. It particularly helped him against the French, who after Muhammad Ali's failure were making major efforts to increase their presence in Mesopotamia from 1841, principally by claiming to protect the Catholic Chaldeans.[72] As for the Arabs on the Tigris and lower Euphrates, Jones cultivated excellent relations with them. In 1854, he produced a detailed analysis for government of the 155 tribes 'which I am best acquainted with in Irak'.[73] This mixture of friendship and force seems to have produced what the British merchants in Baghdad called a 'wholesome dread of the power of the British Government'.[74] When a British seaman on the *Nitocris* killed an Arab in a brawl at Maqil in 1845, the Montafik chief agreed to waive the blood expiation only because the man was English, 'for the sake of our long friendship'.[75]

A secondary argument for the retention of the steamer was the benefit for British commerce. The secure navigation of the Tigris to the sea, free from Arab molestation, provided the conditions for merchant houses to invest in the development of their business in the 1840s. Lynch's younger brothers Tom and Stephen established one house at Baghdad in 1841, with Alexander Hector, a veteran of the Euphrates expedition, as their main rival. In the mid-1840s, Taylor's son John set up as a merchant, while the Resident also protected branches of Indian houses and Armenian and Jewish merchants. Several merchants soon pressed for permission to bring boats from India direct to Baghdad, and ideally in due course to introduce steamers. If boats flew the British flag, they paid the lower duties agreed throughout Ottoman territory between Britain and Turkey in the 1838 Convention of Balta Liman, but Najib, who succeeded Ali Rida as pasha in 1842, announced that he would refuse to allow boats from India or commercial steamers this right. Another long-running uncertainty was whether boats flying the British flag were exempt from the pasha's special river tax that native boats (including those used by British merchants) had to pay. In 1846, following merchant pressure on these issues, Stratford Canning, now ambassador at Constantinople, brokered a new

[71] Hobhouse note on Rawlinson to London, 28 May 1846, IOR L/P&S/9/14; Palmerston memo 16 Dec. 1846, FO 78/656.

[72] Saldanha, *Précis*, pp. 173–5; Rawlinson to Bombay, 22 Feb. 1845, IOR L/P&S/9/14.

[73] Jones, *Memoirs*, pp. 369–86.

[74] Petition to Rawlinson, 27 Oct. 1846, IOR L/P&S/9/14.

[75] Rawlinson had to pay £60: to Aberdeen, 26 June 1846, FO 78/656; see Jones to Rawlinson, 18 Dec. 1845, FO 195/237.

settlement which the sultan imposed on Najib. British merchants would be allowed to fly the British flag on their own boats importing goods up the Tigris; they would pay only the Convention duties, a small anchorage fee, and the customary tribute to the Arab river tribes. At the same time, the special arrangements were ended by which merchants had been allowed to fly the British flag on native boats for internal trade, in violation of accepted regulations. Rawlinson thought this compromise settlement invaluable in removing merchants' uncertainty about investing in shipping.[76] Palmerston's support for the *Nitocris* in 1846 attached particular weight to its commercial benefits, no doubt with his mind on broader hopes for Ottoman westernization under the Tanzimat.[77]

The continuing British insistence on their permanent rights under the firman to run steamers on the Mesopotamian rivers was in fact the reason why it was possible to introduce (government-subsidized) Lynch steamships in 1861: the Constantinople authorities did not see a distinction between them. A regular steamship service from Basra to Bombay began in 1862. Together with the laying of telegraph cables through the Gulf, and then the opening of the Suez Canal, this led to a doubling of exports from Basra in the late 1860s and a quadrupling in the 1870s.[78] Thus, a steamer presence which had originally served mainly strategic purposes evolved gradually into one that maintained British commercial primacy in the region. Both were threatened only by the German sponsorship of the Berlin to Baghdad railway in the early twentieth century.

IV

The calls for the abolition of the Baghdad Residency, and the resulting official review of it, were prompted not just by the traditional criticisms from the Bombay government, but also by the behaviour of Taylor in 1842–3, leading to his dismissal. The upshot, however, was not abolition but the strengthening of the Residency by Henry Rawlinson's appointment as Political Agent with wider powers, and the decision that he should in future report mainly not to India but to the Foreign Office and to the Constantinople embassy. This decision recognized the importance of the Eastern question for the western powers. It also showed the continuing importance of the traditional policy that the Residency had pursued in the region. The steamers added greatly to the aura of the British in Mesopotamia, but mainly by allowing them to do more effectively what they were doing anyway. Before steam arrived, the Baghdad Residency was already pursuing a clear policy: to mediate between any conflicting local parties

[76] Canning to Rawlinson, 25 Mar. 1846, IOR L/P&S/9/14; Rawlinson to Canning, 28 Apr. 1846, FO 195/237; Saldanha, *Précis*, pp. 176–80. In fact, successive pashas used the 1834 firman to restrict the number of British *steamers* on the Tigris to two.

[77] Palmerston memo, 16 Dec. 1846, FO 78/656.

[78] Saldanha, *Précis*, pp. 181–5; Owen, *Middle East*, pp. 181–3.

and commercial interests in a way that underlined Britain's own importance, authority, and even-handedness. Taylor fell because he seemed to violate those principles.

As well as the steamers, British power in Baghdad had two props. One was British influence at Constantinople, usually fairly strong after 1834, so that Ottoman officials at Baghdad could expect that any complaints from the Residency about their behaviour would reach the sultan.[79] The other was the power and connections of the Residency itself. The Indian origins of the Residency system were a key element in this respect. As in India, the occupants of the Baghdad Residency relied on display, force, and dignity to assert their superior position, and they also made use of extensive intelligence systems to acquire information about and influence with the tribes and to show their own fair-mindedness.[80] Thus, in 1830–1, Taylor was confident of his 'high reputation' among the Arabs even without leaving Baghdad.[81]

The Baghdad Residency exuded grandeur and authority: 'everything was calculated to impress ideas of great respect on the minds of the inhabitants'. The Political Agent never left the building without 'appropriate state', exemplified by his uniformed staff, his elegant yacht, and especially the armed bodyguard of sepoys which accompanied him everywhere to drumbeats. The guard was large enough to protect the Residency against the wrath of Daud when Rich alienated him in 1821. Rich was responsible for this grandeur, moving into a Mamluk palace, the second most opulent building in Baghdad, in 1818, and establishing it as the centre of local society. He was 'universally considered' the 'second man' in Iraq.[82] In Rawlinson's time, the establishment was four times as large as the French consulate's. Many tribes and nationalities visited his court: thirteen languages were once heard there at the same time. Madame Helfer, staying in 1835, thought Taylor had the rank of an Asiatic prince and influence equal to the pasha. To the French consul, it was the pasha himself, constantly consulting with the British Resident, who was like an Indian prince.[83]

A larger study of the networks of the Baghdad Residency, beyond the scope of this article, would be needed to show how this influence worked. Intelligence and mediation were particularly important in Kurdistan (where steam power was not available). Rich, Taylor, and Rawlinson all spent a great deal of time

[79] S. H. Longrigg, *Four centuries of modern Iraq* (Oxford, 1925), p. 279.

[80] See C. A. Bayly, *Empire and information: intelligence gathering and social communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge, 1996); Fisher, *Indirect rule*, pp. 128–33, 170–7.

[81] Newman, *Personal narrative*, pp. 99–101. His predecessor said the same: Colquhoun to the select committee: *PP* 1834, XIV, p. 141.

[82] Buckingham, *Travels*, II, p. 211; Nostitz, *Travels*, I, pp. 263–4; Longrigg, *Four centuries*, pp. 255–6.

[83] Rawlinson to Wellesley, 26 May 1847, FO 195/272; Jones, *Memoirs*, p. 340; Nostitz, *Travels*, I, pp. 263–4; Tom Nieuwenhuis, *Politics and society in early modern Iraq: mamluk pashas, tribal shayks and local rule between 1802 and 1831* (The Hague, 1982), p. 82.

dealing with the complex tribal tensions throughout Kurdistan and the mutual suspicions that they regularly engendered between the Baghdad pasha and the Persian government. The French, the Russians, and American missionaries were also involved in the region, and this western activity could create considerable additional tension – and a real backlash among Moslems.[84]

However, local Britons in Mesopotamia were confident about their reputation for justice, in comparison with western or Ottoman rivals. In 1838–40, Taylor wrote home that Muhammad Ali was more popular among the local people, and that though they 'admire the power of Great Britain' there was dislike of all European influence, but as London policy-makers did not consider that a Moslem empire could sustain itself without domination by a European power, this prompted no great concern.[85] British visitors to the region frequently noted their country's reputation among locals for good government, either because of British rule in Hindustan, or because of the behaviour of key Britons.[86] In 1832, F. W. Newman was struck by the 'wonderful moral influence' that Taylor had attained, since the Arabs would trust no one else to settle their disputes.[87] No doubt a lot of this was flattery, not to be taken at face value. But the 1848 revolutions in Europe made such waves in Mesopotamia that both Rawlinson and Jones were told by Arab chiefs that Turkish rule was finished and that only the British could supply the necessary 'just administration' and 'religious tolerance': an Englishman's word, unlike an Osmanli's, could be trusted.[88]

Though Taylor understood the need to uphold the dignity, trustworthiness, and even-handedness of the British government – among Ottomans, Arabs, and Persians, and also among local merchants – he appeared to betray them in 1842–3. As his encouragement of his brother James's commercial interests in 1829–30 indicated, Taylor's Achilles heel was his favouritism towards family. Lynch became family in 1838 when he married Taylor's daughter Caroline.[89] Naturally, he was displeased to be summoned back to India when most of the steamers were removed in 1842. He fought hard to remain in Baghdad, most strikingly by encouraging – and perhaps instigating – a proposal from Najib, the new pasha, that the local government should take over the operation of the *Nitocris*, or buy a replacement, and that he should command it with a British

[84] Britain's role in Kurdistan between 1820 and 1850 is a complex subject, never written up, which needs separate treatment.

[85] Taylor to Hobhouse, 19 Nov. 1840, 8 Apr. 1841, Broughton 11; Hobhouse to Werry, 4 Aug. 1840, Broughton 7.

[86] Groves, *Journal*, p. 195; Taylor to Hobhouse, 9 July 1838, Broughton 9; Robert Taylor jnr to the select committee: *PP* 1834, XIV, p. 108. An old man in Sumeïchah told Lynch in 1837 that the British, unlike the Turks, would provide the area with a proper water supply: *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, 9 (1839), p. 475.

[87] Newman, *Personal narrative*, pp. 99–100, 103.

[88] Rawlinson to Bidwell, 28 May 1848, FO 78/753; Jones, *Memoirs*, p. 76. Lynch had reported similar sentiments to Canning, 12 Nov. 1842, FO 195/113.

[89] Taylor's other daughter Harriet married Lynch's brother Tom in 1857.

crew and 20,000 shells imported from India. Taylor urged this idea on India. It got very short shrift, not surprisingly, since the British would have surrendered their official control and the special rights given them by the firman, while Lynch, commanding the steamer in Najib's name, would have lost the British their reputation for even-handedness as between Ottomans and Arabs. The astonished Indian government made clear that such an inappropriate request should never have been forwarded.[90]

Calcutta would have been content with issuing this rebuke, but for the persistence of Alexander Hector, the leading rival merchant to the Lynches in Baghdad. To Hector, this was the most egregious of a series of attempts by Taylor to use his official powers to benefit his connections at Hector's expense. Hector had fallen out with Taylor over the administration of the dromedary post, which he had had to surrender to Lynch, and claimed that the Lynches (but not he) were allowed to evade river duties by transporting goods in Residency boats under the British flag. For years, he had also suspected the dealings of the Residency dragoman Catchick, an Armenian merchant and long-standing connection of Taylor's from Basra days, who had made large sums out of other merchants through his control of the Baghdad exchange, and allegedly exploited his Residency position to take bribes from locals; Hector wondered how in nine years he had amassed £30,000. It was precisely because the British exercised such great power that Catchick had been able to do this; an earlier traveller, similarly, had noted the way in which Taylor's native agent at Basra, Aga Pharseigh Johannes, amassed private payments by exploiting his reputation as a more reliable person to settle local disputes than either the Ottomans or the mullahs.[91] If Taylor allowed Lynch and his brothers to run the steamship in a private arrangement with the pasha, this would consolidate the monopoly of the Residency vested interest. Hector complained to India and London and threatened to leave Baghdad. This complaint was taken seriously, not least because Layard, a friend of Hector at Baghdad, had now moved to Constantinople as an unofficial adviser to Ambassador Canning. A particularly zealous advocate of modernization, Layard argued that Hector planned to invest capital in irrigation schemes near Baghdad and a cotton press at Mohammareh, but that Residency hostility to him had denied him the pasha's approval.[92]

These allegations alone would probably have sealed Taylor's fate, but simultaneously he offended on another front. Najib, a confidant of the sultan, was made pasha at Baghdad in 1842 in order to impose control over Arab, Kurdish, and other dissidents. An early target was the Shia holy city of Karbala,

[90] Malet, *Précis*, p. 136; Taylor to Bombay, 7 Mar. 1843, IOR L/P&S/9/13; Stark to Addington, 30 Oct. 1843, IOR L/P&S/3/15.

[91] Stocqueler, *Fifteen months*, I, pp. 25–6, 58–9.

[92] Stirling to Aberdeen, 5 June 1843, IOR L/P&S/3/14; Hector to Layard, 8 Oct. 1842, 11, 24 Mar., 5, 19 Apr., 15 May 1843, Layard 38975; also Layard to Mitford, 12 Aug. 1842, Layard 58159, and to Canning, 9 Dec. 1842, Layard 38975.

which for years had resisted the authority of Ottoman pashas and was in the hands of various groups of refugees and outlaws who refused to pay regular tribute. Najib besieged the town and eventually, after due warning, attacked it in January 1843. Estimates of the dead settled at 4,000–5,000, though were originally much higher. Hundreds were killed having sought sanctuary at the shrine of Abbas; the British surgeon who inspected the site reported that 'the cloth of gold covering the defunct Gent's bones is now red with blood'.[93]

Thousands of Persian Shia made the pilgrimage to Karbala each year, and the outraged Persian government demanded Najib's dismissal. The timing was particularly bad because it threatened to upset the Anglo-Russian initiative for a commission to settle the Turkish–Persian border, the most inflamed remaining issue in Near Eastern politics; Canning and his Russian counterpart at Constantinople had spent months persuading the Ottomans and the Persians to agree the form of talks to begin at Erzerum in May. Canning was not surprised that Najib wished to assert himself against Persia, but he was furious that Taylor, who had been informed of Najib's plans two months before the attack, had not told Canning so that he could persuade the Porte to restrain him. Layard supplied Canning with titbits about Taylor's admiration for Najib's strongman tactics, passed to him by Hector, who also claimed that the lead, powder, and shot used at Karbala had been brought upstream by the *Nitocris*, adding to his fears that it was becoming a personal military vessel for Najib. Taylor's failure to keep Canning informed left the latter reliant on news from the French embassy, which told him that Taylor had swiftly congratulated Najib on his successful action. Layard suspected that the French would use the affair to undermine British influence at Tehran.[94]

Canning's complaint against Taylor was forwarded to Calcutta from London between the first and second instalment of the two complaints about the commercial bias of the Residency. Taylor was sacked almost immediately after the receipt of the second instalment. Though Hector was told that the commercial complaints had been instrumental in his fall, the Indian government also saw the need to appoint someone who could be relied on to police the Turkish–Persian boundary disputes fairly.[95] Governor-General Ellenborough seems to have taken these decisions personally. He overruled Bombay's request that the Baghdad Residency should be abolished, and gave Rawlinson, Taylor's replacement, extra powers over British officers in the Gulf if necessary to resolve any border tensions. He laid down that the Political Agent should henceforth report mainly to Constantinople and the

[93] Ross to Taylor, 22 Jan. 1843, FO 195/204.

[94] Canning to Taylor, 10 Mar. 1843, and Aberdeen to Fitzgerald, 10 Apr. 1843, IOR L/P&S/3/14; Layard to Canning, 4 Feb, 30 Apr., 25 June 1843, and Hector to Layard 5, 19 Apr. 1843, Layard 38975. See Taylor's justification, to Canning, 14 May 1843, FO 195/204, and Farrant's various reports, on the whole discounting the Persian complaints, ibid.

[95] The flow of the various letters is summarized in IOR Z/P/3537. Hector to Layard, 6 Mar. 1844, Layard 38975.

Foreign Office.[96] Rawlinson was trusted by Persian officials because of the military help that he had given on service there with the British detachment in the 1830s, while he had recently impressed Ellenborough with his grasp of Indian and European politics on a long Ganges steamer voyage.[97]

Though Rawlinson mostly followed Taylor's policies, he recognized his shortcomings in two respects. First, he mediated more actively and disinterestedly between local parties, refusing, for example, to allow Najib to use the steamer to discipline the rebellious marsh Arabs in 1844, fearing that this would compromise Britain's name with them.[98] He was much more active in calming border disputes in Kurdistan than Taylor, he pacified the Persians after the Karbala massacres, and he successfully urged Najib to show restraint in responding to Persian provocations around Mohammareh. Rawlinson's activity helped enormously in the settlement of the Turkish–Persian boundary disputes in 1847.

Secondly, he rooted out the financial cronyism of the Taylor years. He forbade Catchick from continuing in commerce while Residency dragoman; he refused Stephen Lynch's extortionate demand for rent of the steamer depot at Maqil in 1844 (on land previously passed between Residents, which Taylor had given him); and he humiliated the Lynch brothers in 1847 when he felt they had lied to him about a diamond transaction with Jewish merchants, declining to support them in the local commercial court and criticizing in front of the Residency servants their 'impertinent and familiar' manner to him.[99] He told the merchants that, since he no longer considered himself a Company representative but was subordinate to Constantinople and to the complex dictates of international politics, it would be inappropriate to insist on historical special privileges for Baghdad trade that other countries' merchants, or British merchants in other Ottoman territories, did not have.[100] Rawlinson and the steamer commander Jones both complained that the British merchants were too grasping for their own good and only ever encountered Arab obstruction when they tried to evade long-established river payments.[101]

V

The story of British steam power in Baghdad before the 1860s is emphatically not one of great commercial influence. Most of the hopes of men on the spot

[96] Rawlinson was told by the Indian government to subordinate himself to Canning but Aberdeen's Foreign Office was slow to legitimize this: Rawlinson to FO, 24 Feb. 1846, FO 78/656. Palmerston took a different view and he began writing to him regularly in 1846: ibid. 78/656,704.

[97] Rawlinson, *Rawlinson*, p. 139.

[98] Rawlinson to Canning, 7 Feb. 1844, FO 195/237.

[99] Rawlinson to Palmerston, 31 Mar. 1847, and to Cowley, 28 June 1847, FO 195/272; Rawlinson to London, 27 Feb. 1845, IOR L/P&S/9/14.

[100] Rawlinson to Canning, 19 Aug. 1846, FO 195/237.

[101] Saldanha, *Précis*, pp. 52–9; Jones, *Memoirs*, pp. 363–5.

for economic modernization were disappointed. Taylor, Rawlinson, Lynch, and Felix Jones would all have liked to see irrigation and capital investment in the region and local chiefs given the freedom to develop settled areas. They occasionally got the authorities interested in these plans, but they were always dashed by the realities of Ottoman rule.[102] Najib's increasingly heavy taxation pushed many tribes away from cultivation to brigandage.[103] Various attempts to develop the potential of the province failed; indeed, the Euphrates was less navigable by 1850 than in 1840 owing to the failure to repair embankments that controlled the spring floods.[104] There was not enough local wealth to provide reliable profits for many British merchants. Just as the critics of Robinson and Gallagher argued for Latin America and West Africa, the British in Baghdad lacked the power to shape the local economy. Here, as there, the term 'informal empire' hardly seems to fit.

Moreover, the steamer's impact was necessarily limited: the *Nitocris* was small and periodically had to be sent to Bombay for repair, leading to complaints from merchants about increased disorder on the Tigris.[105] As Crosbie Smith has argued in general, and Martin Lynn for West Africa, steam technology was neither cheap nor unproblematic, and endured frequent setbacks. Steam should not be seen simplistically as a straightforward driver of imperialism.[106]

However, this lack of economic impact was not, in itself, of major concern to policy-makers. British power in Baghdad rested on traditional mechanisms of influence as much as on novel technology. There is no evidence of aggressive commercial diplomacy to promote British interests, and the same was most likely true for most of the Ottoman Empire, since the same constraints applied. Taylor and Rawlinson were only made consuls (in 1841 and 1844) for political reasons, as part of the consolidation of British power in the Ottoman Empire. The key decisions about tariffs and firmans were taken in Constantinople, and, like all decisions there, were diplomatic more than economic: that is to say, they were affected by the need to balance the interests of all the European powers. Rawlinson and Canning thought that British trade would gain more from secure agreed laws than from special advantages; as a result, concessions which earlier East India Company pressure had secured for British trade in Mesopotamia were surrendered. Taylor's economic network had to be disbanded when it threatened to bring the Residency into disrepute. Rawlinson took great care to avoid similar allegations of financial bias, and tried to prevent grasping merchants from weakening Arab respect for the British.

[102] Rawlinson was optimistic that Najib would take them up in 1845, and he did begin a canal, but it was frustrated by various local crises: to Canning, 16 Apr. 1845, FO 195/237, Kemball to Cowley, 15 Sept. 1847, FO 195/272.

[103] Rawlinson to Canning, 13 May 1846, FO 195/237.

[104] Jones, *Memoirs*, pp. 363–5.

[105] Saldanha, *Précis*, p. 54; Jones, *Memoirs*, pp. 363–5.

[106] B. Marsden and C. Smith, *Engineering empires: a cultural history of technology in nineteenth-century Britain* (Basingstoke, 2005), ch. 3; Lynn, 'West Africa', p. 28.

Steam was more important in facilitating a vision of how the future might differ from the disappointing present, thus justifying spending British effort on the region. Hopes for agricultural development, good government, and fair taxation made it easier to uphold Ottoman rule in the meantime. To the early Victorian mind, it seemed almost certain that change would arrive soon. Arguably, British support for the Ottoman Empire in the mid-nineteenth century was politically possible only because of the publicity given at home to the progress anticipated from the Tanzimat after 1839. However fitful and hesitant the steps towards modernization in practice, it was natural for a global-minded Victorian to assume that development would come to Mesopotamia, an area celebrated throughout history for its fertility. Moreover, there was optimism that in the right conditions the Arabs could improve their character and prosperity, rather than be forever a primitive race condemned to 'robber-barbarism'.

But the main importance of steam was strategic and diplomatic. Armed steamships were symbols of virility and generated a 'wholesome dread' of British authority. They undoubtedly helped to keep order on the rivers and to impress Arabs. They also underlined to the Ottoman authorities that the British were a force to be reckoned with. Though the pashas would have preferred to control the steamers themselves – indeed from 1855 they began to set up an indigenous rival service and periodically sought to obstruct the Lynches' expansion after 1861– the ships' presence encouraged the authorities to work with Britain and to give greater weight to British influence locally than to the French.[107] Moreover, contemporaries clearly expected steam to have this impact, in Mesopotamia and elsewhere. The apparently invincible armed steamer *Nemesis* played a memorable role in the war against China in 1841, especially in the bombardment of Chuanbi and the move against Canton: astonished Chinese called it 'the devil-ship'.[108] In 1846, the appearance of the small steam warship *Alecto* in the Parana river in central South America during an attempt to weaken Argentine oppression made a similarly powerful impression on the locals, who hoped that it would lead to closer links with Britain and political and commercial benefits.[109] Enthusiastic press reports of British steam penetration of exotic waterways significantly affected the way in which domestic audiences thought about British global power, a topic that needs further discussion. Hobhouse's support for steamships in Mesopotamia was paralleled by his concern to develop a proper steam navy that would secure British power in India and on its frontiers. In 1839, he wrote with pride that the British flag

[107] Ceylan, *Ottoman origins*, pp. 191–3; Saldanha, *Précis*, pp. 181–6. Najib did not get on well with the French consul, Loève-Weimars, as Rawlinson enjoyed reporting: e.g. to Canning, 21 Feb. 1844, FO 195/237, to Wellesley, 17 Feb. 1847, FO 195/272.

[108] W. D. Bernard, *Narrative of the voyages and services of the Nemesis, from 1840 to 1843* (London, 1844).

[109] D. McLean, 'Trade, politics and the navy in Latin America: the British in the Paraná, 1845–1846', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 35 (2007), p. 360.

would soon 'wave upon three of the noblest rivers of the old world, the Euphrates, the Indus and the Ganges'.[110]

Ultimately, the main concern in Mesopotamia was always the hard-headed strategic one of staking out a position that other powers could not challenge. Good relations with local chiefs and with the Ottoman authorities were part of that strategy, as was the projection of power and even-handedness. We should not reduce British policy in Baghdad to a specific concern for Indian defence. The British always had a wider concern to secure their position against Russia and France, and succeeded, through the nineteenth century.[111] In its concern with asserting itself and blocking off opportunities for western rivals, British strategy in Baghdad was similar to that recently traced by Robert Holland for the Mediterranean.[112] A visible and reliable reputation locally would help the British in the event of future challenges to Ottoman power, which seemed almost inevitable. British steamers surveyed the rivers and their environs for various reasons, but at root for military ones. In 1853, Jones and his assistant Collingwood drew up a detailed map of Baghdad, to be used in the event of war. It had to be done in conditions of high secrecy; most of the notes for it were scribbled on Collingwood's shirt-cuffs in various explorations of the town.[113] Almost no one who was active in the region would have guessed that the British army would not occupy Baghdad for another sixty-four years.

[110] Hobhouse to Lynch, 4 Dec. 1839, Broughton 7.

[111] As claimed by consul Crow in 1907: Issawi, *Fertile crescent*, p. 258.

[112] Robert Holland, *The blue-water empire: the British in the Mediterranean since 1800* (London, 2012).

[113] Markham, *Memoir*, p. 29; Jones, *Memoirs*, p. xxix.