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## 'Note on Trade in the Persian Gulf (Communicated by the Board of Trade)'

<b>Holding Institution</b>	British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers
<b>Reference</b>	IOR/L/PS/18/B411
<b>Date(s)</b>	1928 (CE, Gregorian)
<b>Written in</b>	English in Latin
<b>Extent and Format</b>	1 file (2 folios)
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### About this record

Note on trade in the Persian Gulf by the Board of Trade, divided into the following sections:

- a) General (revised to 26 July 1928);
- b) Koweit [Kuwait] and Muscat (revised to 26 July 1928);
- c) The position of British Trade in the Gulf (to 30 June 1928).

Section 'a' discusses the counterbalance of the German and Russian threat to British trade ascendancy, the impact of economic autonomy in Persia, and the extinction of Turkish sovereignty in the Persian Gulf. It includes a table providing statistics on the proportion of Persian trade as divided between the chief participating countries, with analysis of the proportions of trade, and the amount of which is oil. Additional figures for shipping are provided. The advantages for the provision of railway communication in terms of trade are also given.

Section 'b' provides figures for trade and shipping in Kuwait and Muscat covering 1925-27.

Section 'c' covers the British trade position, and whether a political move such as a formal reassertion of interest in the Gulf by His Majesty's Government would present any advantage. Tables provide import and export figures for the United Kingdom 1926-27, and the value of imports into Persia and Iraq 1925-27.



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**Note on Trade in the Persian Gulf.**  
(Communicated by the Board of Trade.)

Sections (a) and (b) revised to 26th July 1928.  
Section (c) to 30th June 1928.

(a) General.

When the Foreign Office Memorandum of 1908 was written, British preoccupations in connection with the Persian Gulf mainly centred upon German competition and the help which this would receive from the construction of the Bagdad Railway. Russian designs, which had previously given rise to anxiety, had lost importance through the destruction of the Russian fleets in the Russo-Japanese War. In the last 20 years the situation has undergone fundamental changes, but the threats to our present well-established trade ascendancy in those regions still come from Germany and Russia, though at present they are scarcely more than perceptible. At the same time the establishment of economic autonomy in Persia and the abolition of the capitulations certainly tend to impair British influence in that country and will probably make it more difficult for Great Britain to resist favours which Persia seems apt to show to both Germany and Russia, to the former largely because of her fear or jealousy of Great Britain and to Russia because of the extent to which Persia is really at the mercy of that country. On the other hand, the extinction of Turkish sovereignty in all the regions of the Persian Gulf, and the ascendancy of British influence in Iraq, together with oil developments in that country and Persia, would seem to do more than counterbalance the changes in the other direction which have just been referred to. In view of the change in the general position of Persia referred to above, it would, it is thought, be misleading to treat the trade of the southern Persian ports such as Bushire and Bunder Abbas separately from the general trade of Persia, though it is true that that trade represents the main portion of British trade with Persia other than the oil trade from Abadan and Mohammerah. It may suffice to note here that owing largely, of course, to the oil trade in question, the share of the total trade of Persia which the British Empire participates in is now a good deal larger than it was before the war. The following are the chief features from this point of view :-

*Proportion of Persian Trade as divided between the Chief Participating Countries  
(Exports and Imports).*

	1913-4.	1923-4.
	Per cent.	Per cent.
British Empire (including India)	21	57
Russia	60	18
Germany	3	1
United States	1	4
Egypt	4	4
Turkey }		{ 2
Iraq }	5	{ 3

It may be added that for recent years the ports on the Persian Gulf have dealt with about half the total trade of Persia, but here again oil accounts for the greater portion of this trade, and the figures for Bushire and Lingah and Bunder Abbas alone give a total of some 250,000,000 kranas out of a total of 780,000,000. These figures may be regarded as supplementary to those given in the Board of Trade Memorandum of 30th June, which gives the latest figures of Persian imports and also those for imports into Iraq. In the latter case the British proportion of the trade, including that with India, is well over 50 per cent., and in neither case has German or American trade reached at all a large proportion, though it will be noted that in the case of trade with Persia there has been a steady increase in the last three years, 1925-7, in imports into Persia. Russia, it is well known, is making strong attempts to increase her trade with Persia, which is, of course, not illegitimate having regard to her much greater pre-war trade with that country, but it seems unlikely that she will be able to oust British trade to any very serious extent. These are matters, of course, upon

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which current reports from the men on the spot are most valuable. As regards those ports in the Persian Gulf which are under British protectorate, the Foreign Office Memorandum gives particulars in the section on Commerce only in respect of Bahrein. The most recent figures for the trade of that port which the Board of Trade has been able to obtain are those in respect of the year ending 31st March 1926, and according to these figures, whereas the total imports into Bahrein in 1906 were Rs. 2,45,55,392, in 1925-6 they were valued at £1,621,869 (£1,818,012 in previous 12 months). As regards the distribution of this trade, India accounted for £1,210,223 and the Arab coast for £209,784. Neither Russia nor Germany nor the United States of America sent anything in that year, but in the previous year the imports from the United States of America and Germany were £27,295 and £386 respectively; the figure for the United Kingdom was £27,723 (year before £11,079). The exports, which consisted largely of re-exports to other places in Arabia and also in the shipment of pearls and specie to India, amounted to £1,154,777 as against Rs. 2,27,62,810 in 1906.

Shipping at Bahrein in 1925-6 was much on the same lines as in 1906. It was all under the British flag (106) except for 7 German ships and 1 Greek ship. In 1906 there were 71 British ships, 4 German and 1 American. Similar overwhelming predominance of British shipping is maintained at other ports—for example, at Bunder Abbas in 1925 all shipping was British (123) except for 6 German and 1 French vessel, whereas in 1906 there were 7 German and 10 Russian vessels calling at the port. At Lingah in 1925 all shipping was British (85) except 5 German vessels; at Bushire in 1923-4 out of 169 vessels visiting the port 164 were British, 3 Japanese and 2 Chinese as compared with a total of 168 in 1906, out of which 153 were British, 8 German and 5 Russian.

The complete development of the Persian Gulf economically must still, it seems, most probably depend upon the provision of railway communication from the West to the head of the Gulf either through the completion of the Bagdad Railway or, which from some points of view would appear to present considerable advantages, by the construction of a desert railway joining Bagdad to a Mediterranean port such as Haifa. Such a railway communication would develop a natural route for the trade between the Middle East and India on the one hand and Central Europe or Mediterranean countries on the other for relatively expensive goods which can afford to pay railway charges as compared with shipping freights. Finally, now that the political dangers associated with the Central Europe *Drang nach Osten* may presumably be regarded as largely eliminated, and that British influence in Bagdad is well established, the policy of the open door for the legitimate trade of all other countries in the Persian Gulf can presumably be allowed full application in regard to such railway developments, and also generally, it being left to British traders and to the services which already exist, for aiding them to maintain and even improve their own position and connections in those parts of the world.

(b) Koweit and Muscat.

The total trade of Koweit for the year ended 31st March 1925 was over £1,000,000, divided between £496,000 imports and £547,000 exports, of which the trade with India accounted for £373,000 imports and £298,000 exports, the rest being with the Arab coast, Iraq and Persia. This level of trade was not maintained in 1926 and 1927, and for the latter year (ended 31st March 1927) had fallen off to £348,000 imports and £92,000 exports, the latter figure being so low owing to the failure of the pearl fisheries, which had accounted for £189,000 in 1924-5. The imports from India were made up chiefly of piece-goods, rice, tea and sugar. The chief exports were of rice, sugar and piece-goods to other Persian Gulf ports by sailing craft.

Of the shipping calling at Koweit during the year 1926-7 all the steamers except one were British (84), the one exception being a German steamer. There was a great deal of sailing vessel traffic at the port, including over 1,000 entrances and clearances of both Iraqi (1,300) and Persian (1,200) craft.

The trade of Muscat during the years 1924-5, 1925-6 and 1926-7 reached the following totals:—£613,000, £674,000 and £474,000 respectively, in which the imports predominated, being generally twice the amount of exports. The trade is almost wholly with India, the figures for 1926-7 being £290,000 imports from India and £111,000 exports to India. The trade with the United Kingdom is small, consisting in 1926-7 of £9,405 imports. The chief imports from India are rice, cotton goods and coffee. The chief exports to that country are dates and dry sardines.



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There is very little trade with foreign countries beyond the Persian Gulf. The United States of America took considerable quantities of dates (Fard) in 1924-5, value £38,748, but this trade had fallen to £12,896 in 1926-7.

The trade of Muscat was entirely carried in British (including Indian) vessels in 1926-7, except for 2 Arab sailing vessels. There were 117 British steamers aggregating 400,000 net tonnage entering and clearing during that year, as well as 62 Indian sailing vessels aggregating 8,000 tons net, and the 2 Arab vessels referred to (of 270 tons net).

(c) The position of British Trade in the Gulf.

The first section of this Note deals in general terms with the question of trade in the Gulf: the second in some detail with the position of Koweit and Muscat. The present section deals principally with the British trade position and with the possible advantage or disadvantage to be derived from a purely political movement such as a formal reassertion of the special interest in the Gulf of His Majesty's Government.

British trade with the Persian Gulf consists of trade with (1) Persia (nearly all our trade with Persia is via the south, trade over the northern frontier being predominantly trade with Russia); (2) Iraq; and (3) Arab States. The last branch of our trade is relatively insignificant, but trade with Persia and Iraq is of substantial magnitude, as the following figures for 1927 show:—

	Imports into the United Kingdom.	Exports from the United Kingdom.	
		United Kingdom Produce and Manufactures.	Re-exports.
	£	£	£
Persia .. .. .	9,449,000	2,247,000	170,000
Iraq .. .. .	1,708,000	3,680,000	142,000
Muscat and Trucial Oman ..	9,000	15,000	1,000
Other native Arab States ..	6,000	147,000	1,000

Details for 1927 are wanting, but in 1926 out of imports from Persia, amounting in value to £7,856,000, no less than £7,213,000 represented oil, crude and refined, other imports being gum, skins, dates, barley and carpets. Imports from Iraq in the same year amounted to £852,000, the principal headings being dates (£262,000), undressed leather (£145,000) and carpets (£103,000).

The predominant exports to Iraq are cotton manufactures, which also figure largely in our exports to Persia. They are, however, less than the similar exports to Iraq, and in 1926 were exceeded in value by the exports of iron and steel manufactures whilst exports of machinery were also considerable. The following figures show the exports under each of these headings and the total exports to Persia and Iraq respectively in 1926:—

	Exports of the Produce and Manufactures of the United Kingdom in 1926.	
	Persia.	Iraq.
	£	£
Cotton manufactures .. ..	469,000	1,584,000
Iron and Steel manufactures .. ..	540,000	144,000
Machinery .. .. .	294,000	199,000
Other goods .. .. .	698,000	903,000
	2,001,000	2,830,000

In spite of our undoubted Treaty rights Russian goods admitted into Persia over the Northern frontier have for some years enjoyed the advantage of a lower tariff than that extended to British goods admitted over the Southern frontier, but Persia about a month ago introduced a Uniform tariff applicable to all frontiers and concluded a treaty with us by virtue of which British goods are secured against any form of customs discrimination. This Treaty is concluded for a period of eight years and we have every reason to hope that its provisions will be respected.

Iraq was placed under our Mandate by the Treaty of Versailles and by the terms of that Treaty and the mandate we were also secured against discrimination. The



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mandate has itself been replaced by a specific Treaty between Great Britain and Iraq based however on the provisions of the mandate and equality of treatment for our goods is, therefore, assured in that country also.

So long as this Treaty position can be maintained, it is difficult to see how any further advantage to our general trade would arise from any such purely political movement as a declaration of our predominant interest in the Persian Gulf, such as that respecting the interests of the U.S.A. in the American Continent which is embodied in the Monroe declaration.

The only thing that can be said is that it would of course be to our great disadvantage if at any time either State should be induced to depart from this attitude and to give special preferences to some other country than ourselves. This, however, implies rather the desirability of maintaining the policy of the "open door" than either the necessity or desirability of an announcement of our special interest in the countries neighbouring on the Gulf.

The following tables show the imports into Persia and Iraq from the principal countries in the last three years:—

STATEMENT showing Total Imports into PERSIA during the years ended March 20, 1925, 1926 and 1927, distinguishing the Principal Countries whence derived.  
(In 1,000 Krans.)

	Years ended March 20.		
	1925.	1926.	1927.
Total Imports .. .. .	771,445	881,025	787,397
Of which from—			
British Empire (except British India)	230,877	249,360	185,707
British India .. .. .	214,365	217,770	199,902
Russia .. .. .	125,670	211,764	184,484
Germany .. .. .	23,069	32,696	39,350
France .. .. .	32,364	24,447	37,621
Italy .. .. .	12,164	20,369	29,726
Belgium .. .. .	43,736	35,033	27,641
United States .. .. .	6,234	10,255	20,670
Japan .. .. .	7,822	9,850	11,910
Netherlands .. .. .	26,717	18,506	10,642
Iraq .. .. .	7,426	10,839	8,876
Turkey .. .. .	18,456	15,266	7,499
Rate of Exchange, krans to £1 .. .. .	42·0	42·50	47·34

IRAQ.

VALUE of Imports from the undermentioned Countries (years ended March, except for 1927, which is for calendar year).

(In lakhs of rupees.)

	1925-26.	1926-27.	1927.
United Kingdom .. .. .	282	326	359
India .. .. .	364	257	229
Persia .. .. .	102	112	94
Holland .. .. .	48	72	}
Syria and Turkey .. .. .	43	56	
Germany .. .. .	36	37	} 402
Italy .. .. .	31	35	
Belgium .. .. .	31	35	
France .. .. .	20	31	
Egypt .. .. .	23	9	}
Austria .. .. .	4	7	
All other countries .. .. .	87	83	}
Total .. .. .	1,071	1,060	1,084
Rate of Exchange, rupee =.. .. .	Pence. 18·115	Pence. 17·932	Pence. 17·954