



حبر أبيض
WHITE INK



PH.D. Hayat Al-Rashidi

Persian Political Influence in Persian Gulf And a Miserable Napoleonic Alliance

At the peak of the Napoleonic colonial wars, British fears of a possible French invasion of India through Persia exacerbated its intervention in the Gulf.

During Napoleonic Wars (1815-1803), Britain's colonial possessions in India were a tempting target for France, as India was an important source of Britain's wealth. That masked threat was enough to divert Britain's attention and resources away from the conflict in Europe. Hence, Napoleon sought to invade India through Persia. India Office's records reveal Britain's response, which dragged it further into Persia and the Gulf.

Napoleon considered attacking India as early as 1798 AD, at the same time he had invaded Egypt and Syria. He tried to form an alliance with Sultan of Mysore, Tipu Sultan, against the British. In 1805 AD, another opportunity arose when the Shah of Persia, Fath Ali Shah Qajar, sought military assistance and an alliance to confront the Russian Empire.

In the flux of these events, the Shah sought British and French assistance, in order to utilize the forces of two countries competing for presence in the Persian Gulf region. In the aftermath of Russia's invasion of the Caucasian provinces of Persia in 1804 AD, and out of keenness to seize the opportunity, Napoleon sent two envoys in 1805 AD, who were watched by the British with caution. The memoirs of Bushehr residency for the years 1807-1806 CE include a number of reports on the arrival of an envoy, Pierre Amédée Joubert, to Tehran in October 1806 CE.

As a result of the ambition of the Persian-French alliance, the Shah was impressed by Napoleon's victories in Europe and agreed to send him an envoy. Accordingly, Mirza Muhammad Reza Khan Qazwini met with Napoleon at the Finkenstein Palace in Austria, where they signed a treaty of alliance in May 1807. Napoleon agreed to provide military assistance and diplomacy against Russia, while the Persians agreed to sever relations with the British and allow the French army to march through Persia to India.

Immediately upon that, Napoleon sent a military expedition under General Claude-Mathieu de Jardin and the expedition reached Teheran in December 1807. Jardin was to provide military assistance and assess the feasibility of invading India by land.

The British stationed in the Gulf.

Reports on deepening the Franco-Persian relations aroused alarm in both London and Bombay as the British had begun to realize the strategic importance of the Gulf to defend India during Napoleon's previous campaign in Egypt and Syria. In order to undermine French influence in the region, Britain established Baghdad Residency in 1798 AD and sent envoys to Persia: Mahdi Ali Khan in 1798 AD and John Malcolm in 1800 AD. Malcolm's campaign, the legendary campaign in Persia for its greatness, resulted in signing a political and commercial treaty in 1801 AD.

By 1807, British intelligence reports were sounding the alarm that an army of 12000, led by the veteran General Jacques-François Menault, was marching towards India through Persia. In November, Acting Resident at Baghdad, John Hynd, wrote to the Resident at Bushire, Nicholas Hankey-Smith, of the forthcoming arrival of General Jardin's envoy to Tehran, warning that "the French are swarming in Persia".

Events accelerated, by sending military campaigns against the Persians, including Malcolm's campaign to Bushehr in May 1808 AD, accompanied by an accompanying force of 500 soldiers. Here the Persians arrested him because of Jardin's presence in Tehran. Because he was frustrated with the delay, Malcolm threatened to occupy Kharij. Nicholas Hankey Smith, who was resident at Basra, informed Samuel Manesty that Malcolm had intended to advance towards Kharij, but was waiting for orders to act more severely towards the Persian government if circumstances so required. Then was a final blow would come against Persian and French deception, as Jardin's departure witnessed the decline of Napoleon's hopes to invade India by land. Be March, Jones had made a preliminary treaty with Persia, alienating the French. The treaty ratified in 1814 laid the foundation for continued and strong Anglo-Persian relations.

As a result of those events, and despite Napoleon's alliance with Persia, albeit transient, it had lasting consequences as the strategic importance of the region prompted the British government to expel France from Persia once and for all and reinforced the hidden interest of the Government of India to establish a base in the Gulf.

Events and their heroes may be surprising, but it is history!