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The Myth of Independence:
*British-Bahraini Relations in the Nineteenth
Century.*

Richard Bunney

Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies
University of Durham.

February 1997.

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Submitted in fulfilment of
Master of the Arts
(Middle East Studies).



- 4 MAR 1998

Abstract.

This thesis considers the period from the establishment of regular contact between Britain and Bahrain in 1806 until the deposition and criminalisation of Muhammed bin Khalifah, the incumbent Sheikh of Bahrain, in 1869. During this period Britain attempted to supervise regional affairs through a mediating layer of independent Arab Chieftains who it recognised by concluding a General Treaty with them in 1820. This system, however, identified here as a distinct paradigm, had several fundamental weaknesses. The practical organisation of this system was not only unable to effect the ambitions of peace, stability and the preservation of a dominant British influence, it acted negatively against the fulfilment of these ambitions and inhibited the very aims that it had been designed to secure.

In signing the General Treaty, the Al Khalifah were formally recognised as sovereign rulers, but they did not have the means and the resources to exercise this right, and were still subject to aggressions from their neighbours. Britain was thus obliged to guarantee the tenure of the Al Khalifah as rulers of Bahrain, or accept the overthrow and destruction of the system of independent rulers. If the Al Khalifah were to avoid attack from hostile parties, they were obliged to offer submission, and repeatedly did so, although such acts compromised their independence and Britain's position in the Persian Gulf. Under the terms of the General Treaty, however, the British had forfeited their opportunity actively defend their interests by restraining the Sheikh. In recognising the Al Khalifah as independent chiefs, Britain was committed to non-intervention in the affairs of the Persian Gulf. This withdrawal from the internal affairs of Bahrain transformed the independent sheikhs into agents for instability that compromised Britain's authority in the Gulf. It also allowed the Al Khalifah to indulge in oppressions that not only destabilised the tranquillity of the Persian Gulf, but destroyed the internal cohesion of the ruling tribe and precipitated Civil War.

As the nineteenth century progressed, Britain was obliged in response to these reoccurring and irresolvable tensions to increasingly ignore its own paradigm and disregard the independence of the Al Khalifah in order to preserve its essential interests. Incrementally, starting with discussions in 1839, Britain considered alternative options for the organisation of the Gulf and began to refashion its relationship outside of the nineteenth century paradigm. This process culminated in the assumption under an Order-in-Council of protectorate status, although the abandonment of this unworkable paradigm was indicated by the deposition and criminalisation of the Sheikh of Bahrain in 1869. Bahrain's independence was ultimately sacrificed to the exigencies of British policy. In point of fact, however, it had been conceived as a mask for British domination of the region. This thesis examines the ambiguity implicit in the General Treaty and the reasons behind the failure of British attempts at domination in the Persian Gulf in the nineteenth century. The diktats of the General Treaty precluded intervention in regional affairs while due attention to British strategic interests demanded the exercise of a degree of control.

The thesis is divided into five sections: Chapter I - The Early History of Bahrain & Rise of the Al Khalifah: Chapter Two- Pirates and Profiteers: The East India Company: Chapter Three- Laying the Foundations: The 1820's and the General Treaty: Chapter Four- An Untimely Intervention: Interlopers and Invaders Chapter Five- Settling the Question: Towards a New Regional Order: Conclusion: Appendices: Bibliography. 122 pp.

*This work has been jointly supervised by
Anoush Ehteshami, Ray Hinnebusch and
Tim Niblock.*

I have elected to use the standardised spelling of names, places, dynasties and tribes laid out below in this work. The original spelling of correspondence has been left unaltered.

Places:

| | | |
|---------------|----------|----------------|
| ‘Arad | Doha | Manama |
| Al Hasa | Dubai | Muharraq |
| Al Sirr | Fuwairat | Nejd |
| Baghdad | Grain | Qatar |
| Bahrain | Hajar | Qatif |
| Bandar ‘Abbas | Herat | Ras Al Khaymah |
| Bar ‘Aada | Hormuz | Saihat |
| Basrah | Ispahan | Sharjah |
| Bidda | Jask | Shiraz |
| Bombay | Kenn | Sitra |
| Bushire | Kishm | Tarut |
| Delhi | Kuwait | Wakrah |
| Demaum | Lahsah | Zubarah |

Tribes, Dynasties & Ethnic Groupings :

| | | |
|---------------|-------------|----------|
| ‘Amair | Al Sabah | Qawasim |
| ‘Anaiza | Baharnah | Safavid |
| Al Abdul Raof | Beni Hajar | Selucids |
| Al Dowasir | Beni Khalid | Shi’ah |
| Al Ghassomee | Beni Saudi | ‘Ujium |
| Al Hasa | Huwailah | ‘Utub |
| Al Hawra | Karmats | Wahhabi |
| Al Jalahimah | Moghul | Ya’aribi |
| Al Majed | Nebhani | Zand |
| Al Mussallam | Qajar | |

Names:

Al Khalifah Sheikhs:

Abdullah bin Ahmed
 Ahmed bin Khalifah
 Ali bin Khalifah
 Isa bin Ali
 Khalifah bin Sulman
 Muhammed bin Khalifah
 Nasir bin Mubarak

Others:

Basher bin Rahman
 Fath Ali Qajar Shah
 Faysal bin Turki
 Hajee Jasseem
 Hajee Qassim
 Jaffer Ali Khan
 Karim Khan Zand
 Khurshid Pasha
 Nadir Shah
 Rahman bin Jabir
 Sa’id Abdul Jalil bin Sa’id Yasal Tabatabee
 Muhammed bin Khalifah bin Faysal al Fazd

Said bin Tahnoon
 Saif bin Sultan
 Sayyid bin Said
 Sheikh Jibara of Tahiri
 Sheikh Nasir of the Abu Muhair
 Sheikh Tahnoon
 Sultan bin Ahmed Al Bu Saeed
 Turki bin Saud
 Zekee Khan

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Introduction

This work is a study of the development and exercise of British influence in Bahrain and the nineteenth century experiment with petty territorial powers. Other writers have examined the period from 1900 onward in which the modern state of Bahrain was born.¹ My concern is to examine the processes through which the institutions, individuals and ideas that underpin later developments emerged. It is an attempt to explore the rise to prominence of the Al Khalifah family, the unsuccessful British attempts in the first half of the nineteenth century to stabilise the Gulf with the creation of independent states; the reasons for the failure of this project.

The development of the British Empire was perceived as a voluntaristic extension of civilisation, in which colonials, inspired by their contact with the English, were assisted in their imitation of English progress, culture and mores. Imperialism was a source of pride and standing. An ill-defined, but consistent, aggregation of ethical precepts, underwritten with a popular idea of racial superiority, gave the British imperial establishment a sense of its own purpose. Believing themselves to be culturally superior and highly civilised, the English equated their particular interests with the general interest of humanity. Sir Charles Wentworth Dilkes explained that:

*'The ultimate future of any one section of our race, however is of little moment by the side of its triumph as a whole, but the power of English laws and English principles of government is not merely an English question - its continuance is essential to the freedom of mankind.'*²

Thus the one-time Resident in the Persian Gulf, A.T. Wilson, described the process by which Britain extended its influence as an altruistic act for the general good, writing that:

'We have maintained order and thereby promoted trade; we have raised the standard of living and thereby encouraged the spread of education: we have thus fostered the growth of individual freedom and of the aspiration to succeed in life. This is what we understand as civilisation, and what we call progress lies in the changes of structure in the social organism which entail such consequences.'

¹ / Farah (1985), Rumaihi (1976), and Al- Tajir (1987) all provide excellent general commentaries on this later period. A. Clarke, *Bahrain Oil and Development*, 1990 is a commercially sponsored history of Bahrain's oil industry; H.Mapp, *Leave Well Alone*, 1994 is a personal account of the changes in Bahrain post 1940.

² / Sir C.Wentworth Dilkes *Greater Britain: A Record of Travel in English Speaking Countries*, (1868) extract in Synder (1962) p112.

⁵ / Wilson (1928) p272.

The presentation of the process of historical development in the Gulf as a struggle between authentic social tendencies and external imperial civilising influences, however, caricatures the development of the modern Persian Gulf. Britain expanded its role in the Persian Gulf in the nineteenth century covertly, exercising a position of dominance by virtue of its commitment to secure peace and protect shipping. Extrapolating from this basic tenets of policy, Britain constructed an elaborate system of independent states to shield itself from extra imperial responsibilities, but Britain was unable to impose its imperial ambitions on the islanders of Bahrain or fashion the Persian Gulf according to its preconceived plan. The distinction that Kiernan draws between growth - 'due primarily to internal evolution and ferment'- and change - 'which may come about most often through external intrusion' indicates the more complex pattern of interaction between imperial and local influences in Bahrain. As he notes:

'From the penetration of one society ripe for change, by another with some superior attainments, a third may be expected to emerge, distinct from both though inheriting much from each.'

The nineteenth century Persian Gulf developed through the interaction and fusion of traditional modes of social organisation and Britain's new imperial ideology. Thus, although British intervention in Persian Gulf affairs was aimed at the pacification of the region, the nineteenth century history of the region was characterised by irreconcilable conflict.

The contradiction between imperial ambition and the failure of the nineteenth century system of imperial organisation can be explained by fundamental weaknesses that emerged at the heart of the system of independent states when put into operation in the traditional environment. The key foci of British intervention in the Persian Gulf in the nineteenth century were the question of sovereignty, and the peaceful coexistence of the social aggregate. However the acceptance of these new values did not transplant traditional Arabian value structures or forms of diplomacy. As a result an identifiable

paradigm emerged based on the fusion and co-existence of contradictory ideas of sovereignty, tutelage, zakat -*religious tribute*- and overlordship. This new paradigm, comprised of both external and traditional elements, was inherently unstable, inhibited the establishment of any durable status quo, and ultimately proved to be unworkable. Until the system of independent states was abandoned in the 1860's, conflict amongst external powers over suzerainty; conflict within British Government over its mandate; and domestic confusion within Bahrain consistently reproduced and fuelled each other with often anarchic results.

Chapter One will outline the history of Bahrain and the Al Khalifah prior to the significant arrival of Britain in the Persian Gulf that was marked by three military expeditions between 1800 and 1820. It explores the socio-economic traditional structures of Bahraini society, political and social identities, forms of political expression, the traditional structure of power in Bahraini society and modes of diplomacy to establish the characteristics of the Persian Gulf and Bahrain at the point of contact with the British.

Chapter Two will consider the growth of British interest in the East - first through the East India Company and later through the Governments of Bombay and India- up to the point of the Expeditions against the Qawasim. British awareness and interest in the Persian Gulf owed its origin to the development of the Indian trade which was originally organised by forerunners of the East India Company and later the East India Company itself.⁴ Early mention of Bahrain is found in Company despatches in 1613 and 1750 when Bahrain was briefly considered as a possible factory site or base for the East

⁴/ The predecessor of the East India Company, the United Company was founded through the amalgamation of the Old London and the New English trading companies in 1709. This union was effected to circumvent contemporary parliamentary activity aimed at withdrawing exclusive East Indian trading privileges from the monolithic and unaccountable London Company. See later discussion.

India Company,⁵ but little interest was subsequently paid to the island by the Company until the Revolutionary Wars with France in the 1790's when Bahrain's importance in the wider geopolitical issues of the Persian Gulf could no longer be ignored.

Chapter Three examines the defining moment in 1820 when the British codified the system of independent states and declared Bahrain an independent country by compacting the General Treaty with the Arabian Chieftains. It considers the confusion that resulted from this shift in strategic policy within British diplomatic channels and the problems attendant upon the conjuring of independent states out of thin air. Having recognised the independence of the Al Khalifah, Britain adopted a position of non-intervention in the affairs of the Persian Gulf, placing the responsibility for the stability of the area on the independent chiefs it had summoned into existence. However, the independent chieftains did not have the resources to defend themselves against external aggression, nor the same commitment to the general interest and security. The Al Khalifah used their independence to compact agreements that encouraged other imperial powers to extend their influence over Bahrain, and themselves indulged in extreme oppressions without responsibility. There arose an inevitable contradiction within British policy between eschewing intervention in the affairs of the Gulf or conspicuous patronage of supposedly independent states which this chapter will examine.

Chapter Four examines the conflict between Britain and its imperial proxy in the middle of the nineteenth century. Other regional powers such as Persia, Turkey and the Egyptians refused to accept Britain's regional security arrangement. They persisted in pursuing their claim to suzerainty over Bahrain. Britain attempted to oppose this establishment of third-party control over

⁵ / See Tuson (1978) p43.

Bahrain, but did not support the independent Sheikhs by guaranteeing them. The Sheikhs became their antithesis. Their reaction to the Egyptians compromised Britain's authority in the Gulf and forced Britain to reconsider their system of regional management.

Chapter Five considers the implosion of political authority in Bahrain in the 1840's and 1859's. It identifies the flaws in the paradigm for the management of the Gulf through the system of independent states that led to the paralysis of civil authority, and Britain's reaction to this disintegration of Bahrain. It examines the revision of standing orders to allow Britain to mediate, intervene and settle the Civil War which broke out. Finally, it examines the growing trend towards alternative arrangements for managing Bahrain, and looks how Britain increasingly selectively undermined, and simply ignored Bahrain's sovereign rights as and when appropriate to protect its imperial interests.

Chapter One: The Early History of Bahrain and the Rise of the Al Khalifah

The histories of the Al Khalifah and Bahrain do not converge until 1760, when the Beni Khalid refused the Al Khalifah permission to settle on the island, and the latter retired to Kuwait.¹ Prior the arrival of the Al Khalifah, Bahrain had been integrated into the Persian Empire, though the islands were the subject of repeated usurpations, conquest and disputes. This chapter will consider those aspects of the history of Bahrain, the Al Khalifah and the Persian Gulf that influenced events in the nineteenth century. Since Persian, Turkish and Omani claims of suzerainty over Bahrain were predicated on relations of submission and tutelage that had been acknowledged by previous rulers over Bahrain, a brief account of Bahrain's early history is provided to illustrate the historical aspect of these claims. An account of the Al Khalifah's rise to pre-eminence and overview of the diverse pressures that acted upon them in the early nineteenth century highlights the unstable and contentious position of the ruling clan when subject to the unmediated and direct impact of strength as power. Where possible, evidence of Bahraini customs and social organisation has also been provided to establish the conditions of life prior to the arrival of the British.²

A Brief Sociology of Bahrain Pre-1783

The ancient concept of Bahrain denoted an area larger than that recognised today. It incorporated the mainland region of Al Hasa, as well as the islands themselves. In contrast to the general nomadism of the Gulf, the

¹ / See Farouhy (1951) who provides the best account of the early history of the Al Khalifah.

² / Without a working knowledge Arabic, it is difficult to assess the condition of society, its organisation, customs and development in Bahrain prior to the arrival of the British. Whilst some travellers explored the Persian Gulf, it is the minute records of the Government of Bombay that provide the first consistent and detailed description of Bahrain. Historical anecdotes litter these archives, but are particularly abstract and ahistorical. The earlier travellers Niebuhr and Seton describe the more general state of affairs on the mainland. The most useful travel chronicle is that of T.H.Bent (1890), though it refers to a visit made in the 1880's. The most useful sources for the early history of Bahrain are Francis Warden's minute, prepared in 1816 as a discussion document prior to Keir's invasion, Lorimer Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf (1970 part II, Tadjbakhche (1960), Farouhy(1951) and a report by Captain Hennell dated 2/3/1839. See Hennell/Wiloughby Secret Letter no.2 BLOIORL R/15/1/72. Unfortunately the reliable information gleaned from these sources is scant and sketchy.

indigenous population of Bahrain appear to have been settled and sedentary over a long period of time. The population was comprised of émigré Persians, who belonged to the Shi'ah sect and tended to be non-tribal, even though the tribe provided the primary bond of association throughout the Arab quarter of the Gulf. These people were known generally as the Huwailah and those settled on Bahrain islands as the Baharnah, taking their name from the islands.³ It is possible to identify social ties and settled customs in usage in Bahrain in the late eighteenth century that evidenced extended social interaction characteristic of a settled society. A canon of custom was developed to control the pearling industry. This 'law' was a pragmatic attempt to mediate relations amongst divers, captains and merchants. It embodied concepts, especially those concerned with debt and loans, that were distinctly un-Islamic and unique.⁴ In addition, the growth of towns and commerce promoted greater homogeneity, and common mores. It is perhaps more apt to consider Bahrain at this earlier stage of its history as a territorial rather than a tribal entity, since it appears that the tribal elements to Bahrain's identity were only introduced after the immigration of the Al Khalifah, however laws that governed the interaction between tribes were reflected and imitated by settled communities.

No doubt momentum was given to the development of common non-tribal values by the sedentary and settled nature of the islands. Historically Bahrain had been a vital link in the ancient trade routes and was known for its export of pearls, tent cloth, dates and sail.⁵ Its insularity, relative fertility and freshwater supply sustained a more sedentary existence than that known across the rest of the Gulf where the harsh environment promoted a nomadic lifestyle.⁶ The population of Bahrain had a unique commitment to the fertile

³ / Farougy (1951) describes the Huwailah Arabs as a body who migrated from the Arabian mainland and southern Persia to settle on the Gulf coast. See pp67/8.

⁴ / See Rumaihi (1976) Chapter I for a discussion of the organisation of the pearling industry.

⁵ / See Farougy (1951) p33 for references from antiquity, including Pliny and Ptolemy. See C.E.Lawson, *Land Use on the Bahrain Islands*, Chicago, 1983.

⁶ / There are very divergent estimates of the population of Bahrain. It supported approximately 60,000 persons through the nineteenth century. By 1897, there were 12 main

island and the agriculture it supported that impeded its freedom of movement or its ability to migrate. The cultivation of date palms and the extraction of pearls are consistently mentioned in records and chronicles as major economic activities. Farouhy noted that:

*'Idrisi, who wrote in the first half of the twelfth century, tells us that although Bahrein was governed by an independent chief, the Governor of Kish was "entitled" to collect taxes on the pearl fishing in the island. He speaks of the capital city as well populated, with fertile outlying regions producing abundant grain and dates. There was also a flourishing trade in guano, which was both exported to Mesopotamia and used as a fertiliser for the palm groves.'*⁷

Over six hundred years later, a report examining Muhammed bin Khalifah's excesses again made mention of the production of dates. It recorded that prior to the arrival of the Al Khalifah, the elders of al Hawra, Al Majed, Al Abdul Raoof & Al Ghassomee had been local overlords and noted that:

*'the above had each appropriated a piece of ground cultivated and planted Date trees and lived on the fruit thereof All of these were of the Sheah Sect, acknowledging to be under the protection of the Kings of Persia and were in the habit of sending a yearly present to Shiraz with their own will as they were of one faith.'*⁸

Given this constant and unchanging nature of the local economy, it seems likely that over time customs would have ossified and thus been preserved in the collective consciousness as a distinct body of social mores. Major innovations in production methods or economic diversification appear to have been suppressed by the combined effect of feudal obligations, religious zealotry, the limitations of the natural economy and the destabilising influence of marauders. Travellers and Company representatives in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries give the impression that the 'Bahraini' way of life was both well-ingrained and followed established patterns. Yet Bahrain flourished in a regional system based upon tribal associations. Two important aspects of tribal custom that influenced Bahrain in antiquity can be discerned: firstly in the direct interaction and interdependence between the community and the Bedouin, and secondly in the modes of diplomacy that governed relations between communities and their rulers.

towns situated to promote the natural economy. Manama was the traditional merchant centre, and Muharraq the residence of the ruling clique.

⁷ / Farouhy (1951) p59.

⁸ / BLOIORL R/15/1/192 Translated purport of report re: the excesses of Muhammed bin Khalifah[exact title unclear enclosure to Ross 11/7/1875.

Established centres of commercial settlement, such as Bahrain, Oman and Yemen were subject to the unpredictable and ravishing depredations of nomadic tribes. Throughout the early part of the eighteenth century, the Beni Khalid tribe exercised control over Al Hasa and north from Kuwait to Qatar, although the Al Mussallam tribe were also influential in the Qatar peninsula.⁹ There was also a large preponderance of Bedouins, the Beni Hajar, who roamed Al Hasa and professed independence. It appears that the Bedouin would periodically threaten to attack and harass settlements unless financially ameliorated for their moderation. Under the workings of this simple protection racket, settlements bought temporary relief from the Bedouins, but could not prevent sporadic attacks. The interdependence of Bedouin and settled communities was also reinforced by the obligation for any given ruler to enlist Bedouin support as a necessary component in a makeshift system of security. However the relative concept of allegiance and authority within the tribe, and the mutation of these concepts within settled communities prevented the emergence of any long-term stability.

The development or extension of a ruler's individual authority over a settlement was the antithesis of the tribal system of communal power-sharing where the interdependence of tribes, and the autonomy of familial units mitigated the potential for discord. The cohesion and unity of any given tribe was reinforced by extended familial relationships that encouraged common interests and provided a common heritage. Tribal legitimacy and authority resided in the familial unit, and whilst this promoted individual chiefs no authority was transferred to individual as rulers. The ruling Sheikh of a ruling family, had no particular title of distinction from other family elders, and was only and arbitrarily *primus inter pares*. His authority was an merely an

⁹ / See Miles (1966) and Farah (1985) pp4/5. More specifically the report on Muhammed bin Khalifah's excesses lists tribes present in the immediate vicinity of Ruwais, including the Al Chubaisah at Khose Yassas, the Al Mahaudeh at Khose Shaheek, the Al Bookoooueh at Biddah, the Al Bu 'Aynain at Wakra, and the Al Ghobaisand at Odeyd.

extension of familial authority, and as such was entirely contingent and frequently revoked. Lienhardt noted that:

*'The frequency with which ruling shaykhs in the states of the Gulf were overthrown suggests the absence of any strong belief there in the legitimacy of authority in the hands of particular rulers. The families as wholes, however were a different matter.'*¹⁰

A tribal chief was expected to pacify and reconcile disputes within the tribe in consultation with family elders as a leader not a ruler. Order was secured not by the chief's personal rule, but by the observance of accepted tribal customs. Disputes were settled by migration, secession or the renunciation of political allegiance: wrongdoers could seek sanctuary from other tribes when fleeing from the scene of a crime; and in extreme cases the assassination or overthrow of the tribal elders by the ruling family was considered acceptable. Accordingly, not only did the Bedouin evidence little or no loyalty when pressed into the service for or against a particular ruler, the very concept of authority as it emerged within settlements was underdeveloped and provisional. Whilst several families had authoritarily assumed power, there was no organic link between the ruler and his population. Indeed Lienhardt likens the allegiance of a population to its ruler to the revocable agreement of treaty.¹¹ At all times, even after the advent of Britain into the Gulf in the nineteenth century, the ruler was confronted with the real possibility of assassination or the desertion of the populace, and also subject to interference from external powers.

The historical basis of nineteenth century claims to suzerainty over Bahrain

The ancient importance of the Bahrain islands as a commercial centre made Bahrain a prize possession and object of struggle. In addition to Bedouin ravages, other regional powers, most notably Persia, Oman, and the Kings of Hormuz allied with the Ottoman rulers fought over the possession of the islands with unremitting tenacity. Relationships between such settlements

¹⁰ / Lienhardt (1975) p63.

¹¹ / *ibid.*

initially appear to have been organised directly, according to their relative strength, and given expression through the obligation to offer fealty or to pay zakat. This system threw up a pyramidal hierarchy of inter-dependent communities: the weaker ones offering vassalage to relatively stronger powers as a semi-feudal form of protection. When Britain attempted to refashion power relations in the nineteenth century, evidence of Bahrain's historical submission to a third-party was promoted as the basis for a contemporary right of that third party to assume suzerainty over the islands. A brief survey of historical submission and subjection is thus a necessary prelude to a study of nineteenth century regional history.¹²

The most ancient and durable bond appears to have been that between Bahrain and Persia. Bahrain was incorporated into the Persian Empire in the sixth century B.C., fell under local control when the power of the Persians declined, but was subsequently re-established as a dependency of Fars in the fourth century A.D. At one time, Bahrain was an integral part of the Persian Empire, and recognised as the Satrapy of Marzan, with a capital at Hajar. Under this arrangement the satrap tended to be a local chieftain who was allowed to control the most part of Bahraini affairs, the exception being those of a military nature. This arrangement persevered until the rise of Islam when Bahrain accepted submission.

Revolt broke out after the death of Muhammed and Bahrain was subsequently used as a base by the heretical Karmats. After their defeat by the Selucids, a local tribe, the 'Ujjum, were installed as overlords of the island and obliged to pay tribute to the Governor of Kish. One can only surmise that once established, Islam acted as a lingua franca throughout the region to

¹²/ The claims to suzerainty over Bahrain, by the Wahhabis (a religiously puritannical movement that existed on the mainland) and the Turks do not figure in this historical survey of Bahrain before the nineteenth century since both were based on the balance of power throughout the nineteenth century and will be dealt with later.

justify tutelage, submission and ravage, in much the way that early Christianity supported the original robber barons in Europe. However, whether cloaked in Islamic garb or conducted in the form of naked oppression, a process was initiated whereby exactions were bled from Bahrain by a series of overlords, who seemed content to draw off revenue from the island without interfering in the local order. Undoubtedly fords were drawn from among the Bahrainis, but since little attempt was made to alter anything apart from the intensity of these exactions whose level was controlled by natural resources, these periodic invasions did not disrupt the ingrained traditions, and everyday life of the local population. Apart from occasional interruption in the pearl trade, different overlords allowed the local economy to follow its own trajectory, often nominating local chieftains as proxy rulers. However, the stability of this arrangement was disrupted by the greed of the controlling party and the decline of their relative military strength. Different proxy rulers gained control of Bahrain, by fighting off the attacks of other interested parties, but invariably they had to be forcibly removed from power when they refused to release tribute to the central authority.

Relations between Kish and the Persians deteriorated until an expedition was sent against the ruler of Kish in 1229/30 A.D. with the intention of re-securing Kishite submission and tribute. This expedition received assistance from the Governor of Hormuz, in return for which Bahrain was placed in his hands on the understanding that $\frac{2}{3}$ rds of the revenue accruing from the island be paid to the Emperor, but the King of Hormuz refused to pay tribute. A further imperial expedition was sent to reclaim the island. Bahrain was subsequently annexed to the Province of Fars and the Bahraini chiefs received substantial presents from the Emperor for their allegiance.¹³ Such gifts may indicate the tentative grip that the Persian centre was able to exercise on

¹³ / See Farougy (1951) p60. An expedition sent against the King of Hormuz in 1236. Thereafter the local Sheikhs were reportedly paid 12,000 gold Dinars to secure their loyalty.

Bahrain, especially given the absence of a significant imperial navy, but the Baharnah nevertheless offered fealty to the Shah.

Sometime after the Mongol conquest of Persia, the privileged position of the province of Fars and the attempt to directly control Bahrain from the centre were abandoned. Bahrain was thereafter once more farmed out to third parties although an association was maintained between the islands and the Il Khan, until the implosion of the Il Khanid dynasty following the death of Abu Said in 1335A.D. The King of Hormuz took advantage of the weakness of central Persian authority to establish his position as overlord of Bahrain. This relationship proved comparatively stable and appears to have lasted until and indeed even after the Portuguese invasion. Farouhy noted that:

*'For the next 260 years Bahrein was ruled almost without interruption by the Kings of Hormuz (themselves tributary of the Persian Empire), and followed the fate of Hormuz even after its invasion by the Portuguese in 1515.'*¹⁴

Since the Governors of Hormuz nominally swore allegiance to the Persian Emperor, Bahrain was still formally subject to the Persians under this new arrangement. However, the appearance of the Portuguese in the Gulf and the outbreak of hostilities between Safavids and the Ottomans altered the balance of power. The governors of Hormuz disassociated themselves from the Persians, renouncing their submission to the Persians, and thereafter pursued their claim to Bahrain in the face of Persian opposition. In 1519A.D. the Governor of Hormuz temporarily established himself in Bahrain, but his authority was commandeered by the Portuguese.¹⁵

In contrast, to the later British dominance of the area, Portuguese mastery of the Persian Gulf, whilst representing a long period of stability, had no lasting effect and failed to break the cycle of conquest, exactions and further invasion that dominated the Gulf. The Portuguese invasion of Bahrain in 1522

¹⁴/ Farouhy (1951) p61.

¹⁵/ Lorimer (1970) part II p841.

A.D. provided Bahrain with a brief respite from Arab subjugation. For the next 130 years the Portuguese exercised an unassailable grip over the islands, although the Persians did not relinquish their supposed rights to suzerainty over Portuguese possessions. However, save for the garrisoning of soldiers and the construction of the fort of 'Arad on the island of Muharraq, the Portuguese left no indelible mark of their presence. Little innovation or change derived from this occupation. Miles noted that:

*'The system adopted by the Portuguese in their stations on the Arab coast was to maintain their political and commercial supremacy by retaining the citadel or fort which overawed and commanded the town and by controlling the customs house and port. This gave them all the protection and trade advantage they required, but they did not interfere with the internal administration or with native habits, religion, and prejudices in so far as they did not affect themselves, and the people were thus left to their own laws and customs in all respects.'*¹⁶

When the Portuguese finally lost their commanding position in the Gulf at the end of the seventeenth century confronted with a Dutch/English/Persian alliance, the same forces that had previously destabilised the Gulf re-emerged and the struggle for control over Bahrain once more began in earnest. In the aftermath of the Portuguese, the power of the kings of Hormuz had been broken, but as long as their domestic cohesion permitted, the Ya'aribi dynasty of Oman and Safavid Persians confounded each other in their attempts to gain control of the islands.

The Ya'aribi dynasty rose to prominence in Oman at the start of the seventeenth century out of the secessionist struggle that followed the collapse of the Nebhani rulers of Oman. Enjoying the Portuguese favouritism shown to their predecessors, which had made the Muscatis governors of Hormuz and given them effective control over Arab shipping through the straits of Musallam, the Ya'aribi were able to force the Portuguese out of Muscat and re-establish their territorial integrity. Then, once secure, they rapidly constructed an unparalleled Arab navy, under the Imamate of Saif bin Sultan,

¹⁶ / Miles (1966) p166.

that transformed them into a major regional force with its own ambitions against Bahrain. As Miles noted:

*'At the opening of the eighteenth century the maritime power of Oman was paramount to that of all the native rulers along the entire shores of the Indian Ocean, even to that of the pirate Angria.'*¹⁷

Unsurprisingly, Saif attacked and captured Bahrain in 1699 A.D., but was forced to leave after a mass emigration of Bahrain's populace in protest against excessive exactions.¹⁸ Control over the island thus reverted to the Persian Safavid dynasty. However, the Ya'aribi re-occupied Bahrain in 1718 and massacred the Persian garrison. Recognising their inability to hold the island, the Omanis negotiated a ransom and thereafter surrendered possession. No further Omani intrusions on Bahrain were recorded during the eighteenth century since the Ya'aribi dynasty imploded over the question of secession after the death of Saif in 1719. Dynastic strife eroded the stability of Oman to the point that Muscat itself was subject to Persian invasion in the early 1740's.¹⁹ It was not until the emergence of Imam Sultan bin Ahmed Al Bu Saeed in 1793 that Omani regained its former regional pre-eminence and was once more able to scheme against Bahrain.

The self-destruction of its major regional opponent might have heralded the beginning of a protracted period of Persian control over Bahrain, were the Safavid rulers of Persia themselves not suffering from fatal weakness at the heart of their administration. Following the withdrawal of the Ya'aribi in 1718, Bahrain was placed under the local charge of Sheikh Jibara of Tahiri, Admiral of the Persian Gulf and Chief of the Huwailah Arabs, but the power of the Safavids was broken by an Afghani invasion in 1722. When Nadir Khan Afshar, who had expelled the Afghans seven years previously, proclaimed himself *shahanshah* in 1736 at the expense of Abbas III, Sheikh Jibara refused to recognise Nadir Shah Afshar's coup d'état and subsequently

¹⁷ / Miles (1966) p221.

¹⁸ / Lorimer (1970) part II p837, Farouhy (1951) p64 and Miles (1967) p233.

¹⁹ / Miles (1966) pp237- 286 gives a detailed account of the dynastic struggle in Oman during this period.

withheld tribute from the centre.²⁰ Order was restored after Bahrain was visited by Nadir Shah's hastily constructed Persian navy in 1737 and Sheikh Jibara was replaced by Sheikh Nasir of the Abu Muhair tribe.²¹ Whilst this censure did not encourage greater deference to central authority, the provision of a Persian Gulf Squadron provided Persia with the means to suppress discontent and revolt. When disagreement inevitably arose thereafter over the non-payment of tribute, Sheikh Nasir was rapidly imprisoned and an agreement reached for the surrender of a tribute of 4,000 tumans per annum.²² But no sooner had the Persians gained this ascendancy, than civil war broke out following the assassination of Nadir Shah in 1749. For the next fifty years the Zand and Qajar dynasties engaged each other in a lingering conflict that was not properly resolved until 1797. In the course of this turmoil, Persia lost the naval means to assert its authority over the Arabian settlements of the Gulf and was divested of its suzerainty over Bahrain.

This brief survey of Bahrain's relationship to other regional powers indicates the historical fact of submission. For periods of time Bahrain was in a position of fealty to Persia, Oman and the Kings of Hormuz. Such submission was not sacrosanct, but remained in a constant state of flux. The domination achieved over Bahrain reflected a contemporary balance of power in the region between settlements without establishing immemorial rights of suzerainty. Indeed, the tendency throughout this survey was not towards the entrenchment of relations of domination, but for the consistent attempts to circumnavigate and renounce such claims. Overlordship lasted only as long as the means for exacting tribute or threatening the settlement were at the dominating power's disposal. By the mid-eighteenth century, foreign domination of Bahrain had thus fallen into abeyance owing to the collapse of internal cohesion within the

²⁰ / At this juncture, Nadir Shah did not possess the naval means to re-assert the centre's control over its satellites, and this may in part account for Sheikh Jibara's contumacy.

²¹ / Zahlan (1979) and Lorimer (1970) part II suggest that Nadir Shah recapture Bahrain around 1753 but Miles records the date as 1737, a year after Nadir Shah's accession. Nadir Shah appears to have died in 1749.

²² / Lorimer (1970) part II p837.

Persian and Oman states. In the absence of any suzerain power, control of the islands devolved initially to the local populace, and thereafter the Al Khalifah, who, following their own trajectory, emerged in the 1780's as the foremost family on the islands.

The Rise to Power of the Al Khalifah

The history of the Al Khalifah is obscure during the eighteenth century. The Al Khalifah belonged to the larger 'Utub tribe which was in turn a sub-branch of the 'Anaiza tribe. The Al Khalifah separated from the wider 'Utub tribe when they undertook a migration towards the littoral coast in compact with two other familial 'Utub branches, the Al Jalahimah and the Al Sabah. One report into the later excesses of the Al Khalifah family mentions that Muhammed bin Khalifah bin Faysal al Fazd, a Bedouin of Nejd came and located at the Bar 'Aada with his family and flock in the early eighteenth century.²³ It appears that the Al Khalifah negotiated local permission from their neighbours and subsequently settled along with other two familial branches at Grain. There was nothing untoward about the relocation of the Al Khalifah since migration and resettlement was an accepted aspect of contemporary nomadic life.

By common consent, each of the three 'Utub families that resettled in the Arabian littoral specialised in an aspect of the tribe's affairs. The Al Khalifah family was responsible for mercantile activity and concentrated on building up substantial pearling and trading operations. Their success in this commercial activity made them a target of intra-tribal jealousy and the family elders were forced to flee to avoid arrest. Thus around 1760 the Al Khalifah split from the larger body of 'Utub and resettled again at Zubarah on the Qatari

²³ / BLOIORL R/15/1/192 op. cit. Farougy concurs with this account. See p48 & pp70-71.

peninsula.²⁴ In undertaking this migration and divorcing themselves from their immediate tribal kin, the Al Khalifah in effect constituted themselves as a distinct and independent familial branch. The development of their authority, even within a new settlement, was hampered by the physical immediacy of the rump 'Utub and the arbitrary commitment of their subject population, however their commercial prosperity travelled with them, and despite these pressures, Zubarah rapidly grew to become an important pearling and trading centre. This growth was encouraged by the absence of import duties and the decline of Basrah as a commercial centre owing to the war between Persia and Turkey.²⁵ When Basrah was captured by the Persians in 1776 many members of its commercial population resettled in Zubarah immediately raising the importance and trading volume of the town.

This successful re-invention of the Al Khalifah as regional commercial moguls inevitably antagonised their traditional enemies, the rump 'Utub. It additionally drew ire from their neighbouring competitors, the Persians and the Baharnah. The Al Khalifah were obliged to defend their new advantages from hostile attacks, since the risk of losing all prosperity under attack outweighed a partial decline in fortune caused by the commercial instability brought on militarisation. The latent hostility of the rump 'Utub expressed itself in the continual harassment of cargo entering and leaving Zubarah.²⁶ Karim Khan Zand went so far as to commission an assault against Zubarah in 1777 although no action appears to resulted from this decree.²⁷ However real hostilities between the Al Khalifah and the Baharnah broke out in 1782. The quarrel itself appears to have started as a minor incident with the refusal of some Baharnah to supply the Al Khalifah with raw materials, but was

^{24/} Farah (1985), citing the Bombay Selections, notes that this migration went first to Bahrain.

^{25/} Lorimer (1970) part II p841.

^{26/} This harassment receded after the major perpetrators Al Jalahimah joined the Al Khalifah at Zubarah in the late 1770's following further intra-tribal quarrelling.

^{27/} Lorimer (1970) part II p839.

transformed into a blood-feud after the death of a servant. Abu Hakima notes that:

*'According to a tradition held by the Al Khalifa probably from about 1780, the people of Bahrain, being Shi'as, forbade some of Khalifas' servants to by palm tree trunks from Sitra, an island of Bahrain. As a result of the quarrel a servant was killed. The Zubara inhabitants retaliated by attacking Sitra & killing five inhabitants. The Sitra people reported the matter to Sheikh Nasir, who prepared for a retaliatory expedition against Zubara.'*²⁸

A Baharnah counter-attack failed to destroy Zubarah and the Al Khalifah, assisted by other local tribes, captured Bahrain in a second counter-attack in the Summer of 1783.²⁹ Although the combined strength of the Baharnah and the Persians, to whom the Baharnah appealed for assistance, probably exceeded that of the Al Khalifah, no attempt was made to evict the Al Khalifah owing to the death of the Sheikh of Shiraz who had agreed to sponsor an attack, in February 1785, mid-way through preparations for an expedition. Under the circumstances, further retaliatory measures were abandoned. Thus a combination of fortuitous luck, the absence of a dominant regional power, and the physical shield of the sea that complicated retaliatory action, elevated the Al Khalifah to the position of Chiefs of Bahrain. The Al Khalifahs' control over the islands, its populace and their kinsmen however remained tentative for the next thirty years.

Although they were able to exercise a reasonably strong familial authority, instability was promoted by the co-existence of distinct factions within the family. The family elder and first Al Khalifah Sheikh of Bahrain, Ahmed bin Khalifah, had two sons, Salman bin Khalifah and Abdullah bin Ahmed, whose descendants grew increasingly separate³⁰. By 1820, the cohesion of the Al Khalifah family was unhinged by the latent hostility and intolerance between these two branches. For the first three generations of rule the Al Khalifah operated a power-sharing agreement which represented both

²⁸ / Abu Hakima (1956) p111. Lorimer (1970) part II suggests that the Al Khalifah attack was altogether more encompassing and that it involved the plunder of Manama.

²⁹ / Lorimer (1970) part II p840 mentions that Manama fort surrendered on 28th July 1783 after a short siege.

³⁰ / The geneology of the Al Khalifah is documented in the appendices.

sides of the family in power. This meant that at any one time, one Sheikh from the Abdullah branch, and one from the Khalifah branch would share the responsibility for governing Bahrain. Power was thus diffused throughout the clan. In practise, there was invariably one minor partner in this arrangement although the authority of the nominal chief to control the sheikhs was marginal and the family elders pursued their own oppressions when opportunity presented itself, leaving behind a catalogue of complaints.

The stability of the Al Khalifahs' rule over Bahrain was further upset by developments on the mainland, with which Bahrain was intimately connected owing to the shared pearl fishing and common identities. Farah noted that:

*'The continual interaction between the tribesmen of the islands and those on the mainland, the shifting of allegiances, and the regrouping of settlements tied Bahrain's affairs closely with those of the mainland.'*³¹

For the first twelve years following the invasion, this connection was strengthened by the continued residence of the Chiefs of Bahrain at Zubarah. Ahmed bin Khalifah who became Chief of Bahrain did not settle on the islands, but retired to Zubarah and it was not until after Zubarah was laid waste by the Wahhabis- a religiously puritanical and proselytising mainland power united under Saud the Amir of the Nejd- that the Al Khalifah settled permanently on Bahrain.³² In addition, the Al Jalahimah branch of Utub refused to accept the Al- Khalifah's authority in Bahrain and returned to Khawr Hassan on the mainland, whence they struck alliance with the Wahhabis and the Qawasim and waged war on the Al Khalifah. Thereafter an unerring state of aggression was maintained by Rahman bin Jabir, the chief of the Al Jalahimah, against the Al Khalifah until his death in 1826. The Al Jalahimah's 'sworn enmity' to the Al Khalifah became a counter-point and rallying call for anti-Khalifah interests and was skilfully pursued through this period resulting in a series of anti-Khalifah alliances and attempted invasions: the most serious of which was the combined

³¹ / Farah (1985) p4.

³² / Rumaihi (1971) p26.

attack in 1816 undertaken in conjunction with the Omanis, although this was repulsed.

Furthermore, contemporary changes in the political configuration of Gulf encouraged by the growth of the Qawasim pirates of Al Sirr, the rise of the Wahhabis and the re-emergence of Muscat posed an immediate threat to the Al Khalifah: the Imam of Muscat and the Wahhabis both harboured designs on Bahrain and attempted to pursue these ambitions in the early nineteenth century; the Persians under Fath Ali Qajar Shah remained an interested party in Bahraini affairs and were eager to re-establish their regional control, although their injunctions lacked the resonance of times past; and the Qawasim undermined the general stability and prosperity of the Gulf. The Al Khalifah appear to have intuitively appreciated that their survival required a relative parity between the Wahhabis and the Omani so that the power of one would nullify the other. With Machiavellian diplomatic contortions, the Al Khalifah exploited this balance of power in order to survive.

A series of shifting and often contradictory alliances and tutelage were thus acknowledged between 1800 and 1810, with the Al Khalifah concluding alliances to stave off imminent invasion, but renouncing ties in order to inhibit the emergence of a dominant power or prevent a curb on their authority. When the Imam of Muscat declared war on Bahrain in 1799 because of a dispute over transit tax past Muscat, the Al Khalifah became a vassal of Persia, hoping to dissuade further hostilities. Nevertheless, the island was invaded in 1800 and 25 of the leading families were shipped to Muscat. The Omanis established a fort at 'Arad and the son of the Imam was left in charge of the garrison. The 'Utub forced the surrender of the garrison and re-established themselves with Persian assistance, but Bahrain was re-occupied a year later when the Omanis had neutralised the Al Khalifah's alliance by gaining

permission from the ruler of Shiraz for their adventures. In response the Al Khalifah made an alliance with the Wahhabis that forced the Imam Sayyid to return home.³³

This alliance with the Wahhabi was maintained until 1805, but sensing the growing dominance of the Wahhabis, the Al Khalifah joined an Omani expedition to destroy the influence of the Qawasim and the Wahhabis. This miscalculation led the Wahhabis to conclude an alliance with Rahman bin Jabir and resulted in a successful joint invasion of Bahrain. The 'Utub remained local proxies under the authority of a Wahhabi Wakil for the area of Bahrain, Al Hasa and Qatar until the threat of Egyptian encroachment forced the Wahhabis to retire in 1811 and the Al Khalifah were momentarily free from any bond of vassalage. However, this independence was inherently unstable and encouraged other local powers to take advantage of the Al Khalifah's weaknesses. Imam Sayyid Said immediately attacked Bahrain and the Al Khalifah were obliged to acknowledge their subordination to Muscat. The Al Khalifah subsequently renounced their loyalty in 1813, provoking a new configuration of alliances that resulted in the unsuccessful Omani expedition in 1816.

By aligning themselves propitiously, often through acts of submission, in relation to broader and stronger regional interests and ambitions, the Al Khalifah enjoyed a near-uninterrupted period of rule over Bahrain between the years 1783 and 1820. It is arguable that it was only their ability to accept vassalage or the protection of stronger regional powers, without drawing Bahrain into destructive alliances or highlighting the arbitrariness of their rule, that preserved the Al Khalifahs' power. Whilst they remained in power, the Al Khalifah sought to extend and develop their authority. They were not,

³³ / Lorimer (1970) part II pp841/2.

however, able to lay the foundations for independent rule. The traditional organisation of the Gulf based upon the mutation of tribal mores did not admit to the concept of independence. No ruler's authority, nor indeed that of a clan was absolute and above question. When instances of dissatisfaction with the ruling clan arose, recourse was often sought from an uninvolved neighbouring ruler or tribe who could provide mediation.³⁴ Nevertheless, even within this state of inter-dependence, the Al Khalifah made substantial headway in developing their authority, entrenching themselves in Bahrain and using their authority to engage in a campaign of oppression.

Initially the brunt of oppression was borne by the Baharnah date cultivators since the farmers were least likely or able to confront the power of the sheikhs. Almost immediately therefore, the Al Khalifah intensified the feudal aspect of land ownership, reorganising land holdings as personal property. Previous land distribution was simply ignored. In order to persevere with their agriculture, the Baharnah were obliged to rent the same land for exaggerated tithes and taxes. Additionally, the Al Dowasir, a sub-tribe of Beni Khalid, were recruited as bodyguards for the ruling clan, and the Bedouin entertained at the ruling family's and the islands' expense.³⁵ The merchant community however, acted as a counterweight to the Al Khalifah's despotic ambitions.

The power of the pearl merchants mimicked that of the sectional tribal Sheikhs. Lienhardt described their patronage and their social function in political terms, noting that:

The leading families had the same power to resist the extension of shaykly authority as did the families of the sectional shaykhs of the tribes,... Leading families could lend support to one section of the ruling family as against another. Their followers were capable of bearing arms. The support of leading families was particularly important when

³⁴ / Third party interference of this sort which undermined the exclusive authority of the Shuyukh was generally condoned on the basis of shared heritage and kinship.

³⁵ / Farah (1985) p4.

*some of the merchants were wealthier than the rulers, as often happened before the decline of pearl fishing and the development of oil. If internal pressures did not prevail, the merchants could sometimes take their followers, their jama'ah, away with them, like the sectional shaykhs.*³⁶

The oppression evidenced in the Al Khalifah's relationship with the Baharnah was thus tempered by the need to guarantee a stable and propitious environment for commerce and appease the merchants. Abu Hakima noted that in these early years:

*'The tribal authority of the shaikhs was strong, but because of the commercial nature of the 'Utubi States, the shaikhs were less despotic than might be expected.'*³⁷

In response to the pressure of the merchants the Al Khalifah initiated several progressive measures that underpinned and stimulated, rather than penalised, commerce.³⁸ They were principally responsible for the development of sea trade, in particular the carrying trade between the Gulf and India which they promoted by restricting customs duties and sponsoring a fleet of carrying vessels. Lorimer noted that:

*'The conquest of Bahrain by the 'Utub gave a great impulse to the trade of the island, for the Arab immigrants soon acquired a mercantile fleet and became the principal carriers of goods between Masqat, at this time the chief local emporium, and Basrah and the places on the Western coast of the Gulf.'*³⁹

As a result of this initiative, Bahraini traders rapidly cornered a major share of a re-export trade: Indian cotton goods, rice, sugar, spices, metals and timber were shipped to the Gulf and there exchanged for Basrah dates, Yemeni coffee, and dried fruit and grain from Persia and Oman. There was also contemporary accounts of Bahrain being used by 'pirates' as a staging post although such allegations will be dealt with in the next chapter.

³⁶ / Lienhardt (19715 p72

³⁷ / Abu Hakima (1965) p181.

³⁸ / There is no reliable estimate of the size of Bahrain's early economy. Niebuhr estimates the trade at 1 lakh [£10,000]; Parsons estimates 60,000 Basra tumans [£112,500] in 1775; Manesty & Jones recorded the average annual export in the 1790's as 5 lakhs [£50,000]; in 1818 Taylor assessed the total value of pearl trade at 100,000 tumans [£187,500]; Al Qasimi (1990) estimates the value of the pearl trade in 1818 as 100,000 tumans [£187,000] out of which the Sheikh levied tax of £10,000 per annum. (p11); the 1824 Gulf survey estimated its value as 1,600,000 Marie Terese dollars [£320,000]; and in 1833 Wilson guessed its value as \$MT1- 1.2 million [£200-240,000]. The earliest accurate figures appear to be the Brucks survey in 1841 which recorded the annual value of trade as £490,000, of which imports were £160,000 and exports £320,000. By comparison annual revenue of Baghdad in 1796/7 was £200,000 and in 1798 £1million.

³⁹ / Lorimer (1970) part II p841. Abu Hakima (1965) also mentioned the existence of direct freight lines between Bahrain and India: 'With the acquisition of large vessels from India, the Utub of Bahrain in the 1780s and after sailed to Indian ports to import necessities for daily use of their people and to export to Baghdad and Aleppo' [p176].

It is thus possible to identify two different aspects of the Al Khalifah's rule that developed before the appearance of the British in the Persian Gulf: an oppressive despotism drew heavy feudal exactions from the local populace, whilst their liberal approach to the merchant community encouraged trade. These aspects were reflected by an informal division of the main islands to suit different purposes. Muharraq was used as a residence by the ruling family, whilst Manama was used by the commercial community and left relatively alone by the Al Khalifah. As the length of their occupation increased, the Al Khalifah became more deeply entrenched in Bahrain. On the other hand, there were clearly defined parameters to Al Khalifah's authority that if transgressed implied the divorce of the Al Khalifah from Bahrain. At the point of contact with the British, marked by a visit in 1806 by Captain Bruce, Political Resident for the Persian Gulf, the Al Khalifah were still very much subject to the arbitrary realignment of power. Clever diplomacy had preserved the Al Khalifah family as overlords for twenty-five years, but hostilities between themselves and Rahman bin Jabir and the Omanis had not been resolved and the possibility of further invasion of the island was very real.

Chapter Two: Pirates and Profiteers The East India Company

Burke's statement that the constitution of the East India Company began in commerce, and ended in Empire,¹ captures the changing interests, ambitions and the growth of the Company through the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. From its earliest attempts to engage in a fruitful East Indian trade, the Company was obliged to adapt its modus operandi to local conditions. Equally it was obliged to manipulate local conditions to its own advantage. By the nineteenth century the Company's Eastern representatives were acting as both colonial field-officers and independent officials of state. The Company's intervention in Gulf affairs and specifically the conclusion of the General Treaty in 1820, initiated a system that it hoped would promote security and tranquility throughout the Gulf and guarantee British hegemony. However, the external and internal pressures to which the Company was forced to respond, frustrated the fulfilment of these political ambitions. The growth of the East Indian Company away from its mercantile origins to the point that the Company came to resemble a sovereign government in all but name was a reflection of the emergence of English power and influence in the Persian Gulf during the eighteenth century. The growing tension between British parliament and the East India Company provides the context within which the system of independent states and the attempt to refashion the Gulf in the early nineteenth century can be explained.²

The origins of the East Indian Company lie in seventeenth century mercantilism. Mercantilists argued that because preferential trade represented a flow of specie into a country, it increased the national concentration of precious metal, and therefore produced national wealth. The benefits of such simple, advantageous trade were summarised by Thomas Mun, himself a director of the East India Company, who wrote that:

The ordinary means therefore to increase our wealth and treasure is by Foreign Trade, wherein we must ever observe this rule; to sell more to strangers yearly than we

¹ / Burke (1881) p23.

² / Upon the abolition of the East India Company in 1874, its power and authority were subsumed by the Government of India, a fully-fledged imperial extension to the Crown.

*consume of theirs in value. For suppose that when this Kingdom is plentifully served with the Cloth, Lead, Tinn, Iron, Fish, and other native commodities, we doe yearly export the overplus to forraign Countreys to the value of twenty two hundred thousand pounds; by which means we are enabled beyond the Seas to buy and bring in forraign wares for our use and Consumption, to the value of twenty two hundred thousand pounds: By this order duly kept in our trading, we may rest assured that the kingdom shall be enriched yearly two hundred thousand pounds, which must be brought to us in so much Treasure.*³

Thus it was that the forerunner of the East India Company, the United Company came into existence. An exclusive, albeit temporary, Royal charter for East Indian trade was granted in 1600 to a body of merchants who formed themselves as a regulated company 'for the better advancement and continuance of the said [East Indian] trade and traffick.' Special licenses for the export of specie that facilitated this trade were subsequently added to exclusive trading concessions, notwithstanding explicit legislation prohibiting such measures.⁴ In many respects the formation of the United Company was a desperate attempt to establish English trading operations in the face of Portuguese and Spanish dominance of the intercontinental markets. Several previous Tudor endeavours had proved abortive and the benefits of foreign trade, including plunder, accrued overwhelmingly to the advantage of England's Catholic rivals. Compared to its European rivals, in particular the Dutch, who more successfully broke down the Portuguese Eastern monopoly in the seventeenth century, the East Indian Company was a half-hearted and dispirited affair. Wide-ranging powers were granted to the Company under its first charter as a precaution against likely eventualities, but the wording of the charter itself embodied a vagueness that suggested a lack of clear planning and foresight. The Company was granted the power to:

*'make, ordain and constitute such and so many reasonable laws, constitutions, orders and ordinances as to them or the greater part of them being there and then present, shall seem necessary for the good government of the same company.'*⁵

³/ Thomas Mun, *'England's Treasure by Forraign Trade.'* written 1630, published 1664, quoted in Rubin (1989) p49.

⁴/ A license permitting the export of limited specie was included in the first Elizabethan East Indian charter. Active laws against export of specie remained on the statute book until 1663, although they had fallen out of use sometime earlier. See Commons Journals for details.

⁵/ Ilbert (1915) part b, chap 1 no page number.

Yet the general delegation of authority to the Charter company was not in and of itself a solid foundation for the British to break into hostile Eastern markets. In the seventeenth century the pursuit of Eastern trade was an exaggerated enterprise carried out in a hostile and unstable setting. Direct trade *i.e.* the exchange of goods between two nations with the surplus paid for in specie, was comparatively rare. Trade revolved around the purchase, transfer and resale of commodities at a higher price. Several mediating exchanges were needed to realise the greatest possible return so that a large proportion of trade was concerned with the transportation of goods, but there was no general security or framework within which trade could be undertaken. When the Company first sought to establish trade routes through the East at the start of the seventeenth century, the Moghul Dynasty ruled and controlled an area corresponding to the later British Empire from its traditional seat at Delhi; the Safavid Persians were the dominant local power in the Persia Gulf, although they were engaged until 1639 in a conflict with the Ottoman Turks who controlled an area to the west of the Arabian shore of the Persian Gulf around the Red Sea; but the dominant regional power in the Persian Gulf at the start of the seventeenth century was Portuguese. The Portuguese and the Dutch between them operated an effective monopoly of the European and coastal spice trade for the first fifty years of the seventeenth century, and forcibly resisted English competition to open up the spice trade, underselling pepper on European markets and in the case of the Dutch engaging in war.⁶ Ilbert noted that:

*'In the seventeenth century the conditions under which private trade is now carried on with the East did not exist. Beyond certain narrow territorial limits international law did not run, diplomatic relations had no existence. Outside those limits force alone ruled, and trade competition meant war.'*⁷

⁶ / See Lawson (1994) p39-45 for details of the Anglo-Dutch Wars.

⁷ / Ilbert (1915) p9. Lawson (1994) has suggested that together with a similar Dutch agreement, the Elizabethan trading charters formed a Protestant counter-claim to the Papal Bull that divided the world into Spanish and Portuguese spheres of influence.

The intimate association of trade and war produced demands within the Company for the devolution of more extensive royal prerogative. The Company argued that a greater concentration of power was imperative for its continued success. Sir Joshua Childs, a director of the Company in the seventeenth century, justified his philosophy of, and his ambitions for East Indian trade to the king, writing in 1684 that:

*'The first consideration in my poor opinion, ought to be abstractively what powers a National East India Company ought to have for the public good to hold up against the Dutch and other foreign nations in India; and I say and will maintain it against all mankind by reason and experience. that it ought to be not less than absolute sovereign power in India.'*⁸

The Company then used its established position and moderate success to realise its sovereign ambitions. Legal and illegal payouts to parliamentary shareholders provided the Company with the necessary leverage to increase their delegated authority. In the first instance, the temporary charter under which the Company was regulated, was renewed and extended through widespread bribery of Government ministries and the later deposit of substantial revenue with the Treasury. The East India Company accordingly became the major underwriter of publicly-funded treasury debt, at a time when central funds were difficult to raise.⁹ Under such circumstances, the positive disposition of government towards the Company was no surprise and extensive power could be extracted as a *quid pro quo*. In addition, spectacular dividends were paid to investors that encouraged goodwill toward the Company. Parliamentary subscribers who benefited from the Company's prosperity provided the Company with a significant and vocal ready-made political lobby. As long as the prosperity of the Company was assured, this process appeared a closed circle: more power led to greater trade returns that in turn demanded more power.

Accordingly the Company was granted additional powers through the course of the seventeenth century as a defence against European competition:

⁸ / quoted in Sutherland (1951) p4.

⁹ / Lawson (1994) pp54-7 and pp74-77 for more detail about the financial contributions the East India Company made to the British Crown in return for its privileges.

in 1617 it was granted the right to form its own naval squadron, the Bombay Marine; in 1661 the Company was given the power and command over fortresses and authorised to appoint governors and officials for government under English law and granted the right to make peace or war with non-Christian people in the places of its trade for the most advantage and benefit to the Company; in 1669 it was granted Bombay at a nominal annual rent of £10 by the Crown; in 1677 the Company was empowered to coin money and in 1687 it was given full power to declare and make peace and war with heathen nations. Again, in the early eighteenth century, notwithstanding Child's Bill and the Redbridge affair,¹⁰ the Company benefited by the establishment of several municipalities in 1726; the licensed formation of a Company army in 1748; the application of the English Mutiny Acts in 1754; and power by treaty to dispose of territories acquired by conquest excluding those acquired from European powers without special license from the Crown which was acknowledged, as well as the Company's right to claim booty and plunder from enemies by way of recompense for the cost of hostilities, in 1758.¹¹ By the late 1750's the Company was no longer formed of 'speculators and pirates,' but had appropriated the sovereign rights of the British Crown and existed as a 'state in the disguise of a merchants.' Burke noted:

*'Those high and almost incommunicable prerogatives of sovereignty, which were hardly ever known before to be parted with to any subjects, and which, in several states, were not wholly intrusted to the prince or head of the commonwealth himself, were given to the East India Company.'*¹²

As a result,

*'The East Indian Company was no longer merely a mercantile company, formed for the extension of the Great British commerce; it more nearly resembled a delegation of the whole power and sovereignty of this kingdom, sent into the East.'*¹³

This delegation of sovereignty necessarily called into question the relationship between East India Company and Parliament. It raised the

¹⁰ / A petition of merchants was presented to parliament on 30/12/1693 after the Admiralty impeded the ship before departure and led to a condemnation of the East India Company's trade monopoly that was referred to a Committee of the whole house. See Commons Journals vol. 11 (1693) p43.

¹¹ / See Ilbert (1915) for a general history of the growth of the East India Company.

¹² / Burke (1881) p22/3.

¹³ / *ibid.*

immediate question of accountability: 'to whom did the Company owe responsibility?' Formally, as Burke was to argue during the impeachment of Warren Hastings, the Company remained 'subordinately sovereign.' It exercised the powers of sovereignty in a foreign or extra-territorial environment, but its existence and therefore its power derived from the British Crown. As such, the Company was bound by a formal obligation to act in accordance with parliamentary procedures and to uphold the democratic values embodied therein. Burke asserted that the magnitude of the Company's powers did not free the Company from its obligations, but rather increased the degree of its subordinate responsibility because of the intimate trust that parliament had bestowed upon the Company:

*'In delegating great power to the East India Company this kingdom has not abused its sovereignty; on the contrary the responsibility of the Company is increased by the greatness and sacredness of the powers that have been entrusted to it.'*¹⁴

In practice, the mutual interdependence of government and the Company cancelled out the Company's formal accountability.

At an early stage the relationship between the East India Company and the state had already become entrenched. The East India Company owed its existence to parliament, and was dependent on the renewal of the charter for its continued survival, but endeavoured to minimise parliamentary interference in its affairs; parliament on the other hand sought to liberate the benefits of Eastern commerce for itself and intervened in the affairs of the Company primarily to secure much-needed finances. Since the East India Company had, as a result of constant pecuniary demands, become the major creditor to the state, there was in practice, a mutual dependence upon each other.¹⁵ Parliament relied on the East Indian Company for its solvency as much as the Company relied on Parliament for its charter. The stability of this arrangement lasted until the Company involved itself in territorial expansion in the second half of the

¹⁴ / Burke (1881) p20.

¹⁵ / For a brief summary of the relationship between the trading company and English state see Sutherland (1952) pp5-7.

eighteenth century, when the consolidation of vast Indian territories induced the bankruptcy of East India Company and allowed parliament the opportunity to reassert its high government, despite the fact that the Company had over the course of its tradings, and particularly since the turn of the eighteenth century, cultivated an alternative source of authority which in the case of India was the Moghul Empire, but in the Persian Gulf was indistinct and ill-defined.

The development of this alternative source of power was directly related to the unstable and unprofitable nature of British trade resulting from the political turmoil of the South East Asian subcontinent that accompanied the decline of the Moghul Empire.¹⁶ For the first eighty years of trading in the East, the Company sought to extract trade concessions from the main local powers as opportunity presented itself. Concessions were granted at the ruler's discretion in the form of royal decrees *-firmans*. Occasional financial payment secured extended privileges but it was more by accident than conscious plan that the English were accepted into the Moghul Capitulations. Thereafter, a series of factories *-holding warehouses-* were established with Moghul acquiescence, to regulate English trade through India. Similar concessions that allowed the Company to trade in the Gulf were extracted from the Safavid Court of Persia as a *quid pro quo* in return for assistance against the Portuguese. The Company was granted permission to trade with Persia in 1616, and secured the silk trade, which was conducted by royal monopoly after Spain declined the offer. Persia was thereafter used as a halfway trading stage at which Indian goods were exchanged for Persian silks. The Company exported pepper, Persian silk and Indian calico to Europe. Factories were subsequently established by concessionary agreement at Shiraz, Ispahan (both opened 1617), Jask (opened 1619) and Bandar 'Abbas (opened 1624).¹⁷ In addition a factory was opened at Basrah in Turkish Arabia in 1636. Such

¹⁶ / See Davies, C.C. *Rivalries in India* in Lindsey (1970).

¹⁷ / See Kelly (1968) pp50-56. An additional factory was established at Basrah in Turkish Arabia in 1639.

privileges transformed, albeit formally, the early, episodic commercial activity of the East India Company into fully fledged concessionary trade with a potentially lucrative return.

The impact of such concessions was nonetheless moderated by the repercussions of political instability. The formal authority of royal firmans was often ignored by the country powers of India who invariably harassed and frustrated English trade throughout the seventh and eighteenth centuries. The compound effect of this harassment and unfavourable contemporary vicissitudes of trade produced a general crisis of Company trade that catalysed the Company to build up its authority and revenues by guaranteeing the general conditions for trade. This shift can be seen in a resolution of the Company from 1688 that argued that:

*'The increase of our revenue is the subject of our care as much as our trade; 'tis that must maintain our force when twenty accidents may interrupt our trade; 'tis that must make us a nation in India; without that we are but a number of interlopers, united by His Majesty's royal charter, fit only to trade where nobody of power thinks it their interest to prevent us.'*¹⁸

During the course of the eighteenth century, the Company received several concessions that granted it the responsibility for overseeing and regulating Indian trade. The investiture by royal fiat in 1759 of the Commodore of the Bombay Marine with the dignity of Admiral of the Empire gave the Bombay Marine the right to fly the Moghul flag but implicitly assumed that the Commodore in accepting the above responsibility would subsequently guarantee the security of the Indian country trade. Such an obligation was a substantial undertaking given the widespread piracy practised on the Indian trade after the collapse of Portuguese authority in the Gulf.¹⁹ Miles noted that:

¹⁸ / Quoted in Ilbert (1915) p23.

¹⁹ / Renegade English and French vessels were the major and most notorious perpetrators of regional piratical endeavours in the eighteenth century. See Qasimi (1988) and Kelly (1968).

*'Since the expulsion of the Portuguese from Muscat the Arabian Sea had ceased to be policed and guarded by their warships no other power had stepped in to afford protection to sea-borne traffic, and the Indians, Persians, and Portuguese had in consequence suffered severely at the ravages done to the commerce by the Arabs, who fearlessly scoured the ocean in all directions with impunity.'*²⁰

Naturally, the Company had extended protection to shipping before to minimise the losses caused by piracy, but as Kelly noted:

*'The dignity of the Mughal Admiral conferred upon the Company's commodore was not an empty one; a duty devolved upon him and upon the Company to safeguard Indian maritime commerce. Protection had been afforded to shipping other than that under the Company's flag in the Persian and Arabian Gulfs before 1759, and it was possible that its continuance after that date could properly be regarded as a legal obligation upon the Company.'*²¹

In effect, the Admiral formalised the obligation of the Company to guarantee Indian trade. It thus offered the Company a leading role on the Arabian seas.

The Company's control over Indian trade was enhanced further by the recognition of Basrah as a consulate under the Ottoman system of Capitulations in 1764.²² The British Agent was thereafter permitted to charge a 2% consulage levy against the value of goods shipped in cargo through Basrah by British protected boats. This was essentially an economic capitulation, allowing the Company a share of third party cargo trade.²³ However, as it was an exclusive agreement, consulage also acted as a crude mechanism for further regulating Indian trade. The Company was subsequently in a position to refuse undesirable boats entry into British Indian ports. Since most shipping under British protection originated in India, in effect, the Company was handed control over a large part of the Indian trade - indeed practically all of it except the Arab trade in the hands of the Al Khalifah and the Qawasim.

Qasimi has suggested that the English popularised and perceived a non-existent increase in piracy since this tended to transfer much of the carrying trade to English vessels.

²⁰ / Miles (1966) p221.

²¹ / Kelly (1968) p61.

²² / See Kelly (1968) pp52-3.

²³ / See Lorimer (1970) part II pp157/8.

Simultaneously, parliament's interest in Company business and its desire to reassert its control over the Company were stimulated in the 1760's by a perceived irresponsibility. There was a general lack of imperial confidence towards the end of the eighteenth century during the crisis leading to the loss of the American colonies, and a growing dissatisfaction with the perceived oppressive nature of the East Indian trade that was visibly flaunted round London by returning Indian officers. The apparent use of the Company's exclusive trading monopoly for private aggrandisement produced a strong anti-monopoly current that argued in favour of a more enlightened parliamentary control of Eastern trade. This opposition expressed itself through the sitting of a 1766 Commons Committee appointed to inquire about the state and condition of the East India Company, a 1772 Secret Parliamentary Committee into the Company's crash, the 1773 Regulating Act, Fox's and Pitt's India Bills and ultimately the impeachment of Warren Hastings.²⁴ The Company initially sought to defend itself against parliamentary interference and undertook in part to reform itself, but when it was obliged to prorogue Parliament in the aftermath of the Crash in order to stay solvent, it placed itself at Parliament's mercy and had no choice but to accept the reforms imposed upon it by Pitt's India Act.

Under the articles of the India Act of 1784, British Home Government institutionalised its checks and controls over the affairs of the East India Company. The Act established a dual structure of formalised parliamentary control regulating the non-commercial aspects of the Company's business. An English Board of Control comprised of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, six members of the Privy Council and one Secretary of State was inaugurated to oversee the Court of Directors and reinforce the Company's responsibility to parliament. The creation of this Board of Control, formally curtailed the independence of the Company as sovereign actor distinct from parliament.

²⁴ / See Watson (1960) pp261-269.

The Company's field representatives still acted with a substantial autonomy on the ground, a fact that minimised the immediate ramifications of more direct parliamentary control. Yet the parliamentary assault of the 1790's transformed the role and nature of the East India Company. It exacerbated the shift towards a predominantly political role for the company, placing greater emphasis on the social costs of trade, the equitable exercise of the powers of the East India Company in the interests of humanity and civilisation, and against the French. As Tuson noted:

*'From the late eighteenth century onwards the Factories were superseded by a complicated network of Residencies and Agencies whose primary functions were no longer economic but almost entirely political - their chief raison d'être being the protection of the sea and overland routes to India and the preservation of the imperial status-quo in the face of growing interference from other European powers.'*²⁵

The emergence of political interests of state that supplanted the more insular economic concerns of the Company thus created the imperative for British intervention in the Arabian Gulf to secure a stable regional peace.

If this parliamentary activity of the 1790's is seen in the context of later developments, then it clearly set in motion the trend for parliament to commandeer the powers and rights bestowed on the Company and the imperial prize that went with them. Subsequent administrative reorganisations that instituted clear channels of authority and introduced greater accountability of personnel were effected through the nineteenth century, extending parliament's control over the Company and its Indian territories. Although formal double government continued until 1858, the power of the Company was broken by the 1820's and control over Eastern affairs was regularised through the Governments of India and Bombay. Privileges that were deemed inexpedient or undesirable were nullified over time. The Company's monopoly privileges were eroded in 1813 and 1833 by the liberalisation of trade; the charter in perpetuity was replaced by an unspecified and indefinite term in 1853 and the Company's naval force was disbanded in 1863. A comprehensive reform of Indian affairs

²⁵ / Tuson (1978) Introduction p. xiii.

occurred in 1858 with the successful passage of Stanley's Act for the Better Government of India which fundamentally restructured the administration of the Eastern Empire. Thereafter India was governed directly by and in the name of the Crown through a Secretary of State. Additionally the property of the Company was transferred to the Crown; the Board of Control was replaced by a fifteen member non-parliamentary council; channels of communication were improved and the civil service was opened up. Conscious attempts were also made to separate the business of India from the general business of parliament. The Chancellor of the Exchequer had been removed from the Board of Control in 1793 and a new position of President of the Board created. This President was eventually replaced in 1858 by the Secretary of State for India and a distinct Indian department of Central Government established. Viewed as a whole, the sum total of these reforms was to reconstitute the Company as a formal colonial government of the East, separating the powers of the Company from the Company itself.

The interventions in the Persian Gulf between 1800 and 1820 that were ostensibly directed at the Qawasim, were spawn from this new political current that represented parliamentary hegemony over the East India Company. The Company's interest in the Persian Gulf had declined in late eighteenth century owing to adverse events and the Company's focus with the Indian mainland. Pestilence, piracy and war inhibited the potential of trade and encouraged the Company to withdraw from its factories: Bushire was abandoned in 1769 after a disagreement with Karim Khan Zand; Basrah deserted in 1773 after an outbreak of plague, and again in 1779 upon the death of Karim Khan.²⁶ The Company had no real presence on the Arabian side of the Gulf before 1800. The Resident at Bushire started an annual tour of the Arabian Coast in 1806, but the English were content to recognise the Imam of Muscat as dominant sea-faring power and encourage him to monitor the Indian trade and contain

²⁶ / Lorimer (1970) part II p 166.

incidents of piracy. Attempts were made to isolate British vessels from piracy and instability through a series of treaties and alliances: an alliance was signed with the Imam of Muscat in 1798, friendly letters were exchanged with Rahman bin Jabir in 1810, friendly overtures were made to the Wahhabis and an unauthorised treaty of friendship was compacted by the Resident in 1816 with the Al Khalifah.²⁷ At the same time the Company disdained to extend its protection to third parties and was reluctant to involve itself in the maelstrom of Gulf maritime affairs. An appeal from the Amirs of Sind for naval protection against the Qawasim was rejected at Bombay on the grounds that piratical attacks on non-British ships were of no concern to the Company.²⁸ However, the re-emergence of the French and the perceived danger that French passage through and influence in the Persian Gulf might pose to Indian interests stimulated the Company to accept responsibility for the general stability of the Persian Gulf. From 1790 imperial dictates and a perceived ethical altruism both demanded the immediate pacification and stabilisation of the Persian Gulf.

The emergence of the French in the Persian Gulf forced the Company to take a more active interest in regional affairs in order to protect their possessions in India. Against the backdrop of the Napoleonic assault, policy-makers in London believed that Napoleon would exploit a route to India through the Persian Gulf and instructed that all possible means to inhibit his progress should be utilised. In a letter to George Grenville, the Secretary of State for the Foreign Office, Henry Dundas, Secretary of State of War and President of the Board of Control, explained that if Bonaparte were to attack India then:

*'Bonaparte will, as much as possible, avoid the dangers of the sea, which is not his element, but trusting to his own exertions and the enthusiasm of his followers, endeavours to accomplish his object by marching to Aleppo, cross the Euphrates, and following the example of Alexander, by following the rivers Euphrates and Tigris, and descending to the Persian Gulph, and thence proceeding along the coast to the Indus.'*²⁹

²⁷ / See Kelly (1968) p126/7.

²⁸ / See Kelly (1968) p131.

²⁹ / quoted in Kelly (1968) p63.

The Company's interest in India required the preservation of the Persian Gulf as a neutral buffer zone, free from any hostile European influence. This could only be done, if the Company itself was prepared to take a leading role in the Persian Gulf and was able to control the region. A strategic battle ensued, in which the conflict over India was transposed to the Persian Gulf. Lorimer mentions 'systematic depredations by French war vessels and privateers against British sea-borne commerce' during this period.³⁰ For their part, the Company demonized the French hoping to discourage local Francophile sympathies. In a very ordinary communication the Resident in the Persian Gulf in 1808, Smith, warned Jaffer Ali Khan to be careful against French, adding that his warnings may be superfluous since:

*'I trust your own discretion and the honorable character you bear will guard you against all their evil propensities and that the almighty who sees all our actions and hears all our secret thoughts will protect the good and just from the oppression of the wicked.'*³¹

Yet despite the Company's best endeavours, French diplomatic intrigues culminated in a series of alliances that undermined British pre-eminence. The French reached an agreement with Persia under the Treaty of Firkenstein in May 1807 and established a Consul at Muscat in either 1807 or 1808. Further the growing intimacy between the Ottomans and the French led to a rupture between the British and the Ottomans in early 1807.

The Company could not directly confront the French with its military resources and therefore attempted to counter French diplomacy with its own diplomatic efforts. Sir William Jones and Sir John Malcolm were sent to the Persian Gulf in May 1807 to secure the Company's regional predominance. Their mission resulted in a Preliminary treaty with the Shah under the terms of which the:

*'Shah annulled all his previous arrangements whatever they might be, with other European powers, and undertook to refuse a passage through Persia to a European army proceeding against the British dominions in India.'*³²

³⁰ / Lorimer (1970) part II p169 estimated French damage to Calcutta shipping in 1807 alone was equivalent to £300,000.

³¹ / BLOIORL R/15/1/10 19/1/1808.

³² / Lorimer (1970) part II p179.

However, since the French had undertaken to guarantee the Persians against Russia, the Company was obliged to promise British support for Persia against any hostile encroachment on that country by a European power and was drawn once more into the mêlée of regional politics. The French effectively broke the isolation that the Company had attempted to cultivate. As Kelly noted:

*The result was to draw Britain into a lasting political relationship with the Ottoman and Persian Empires.*³³

The immediate French threat receded by 1810 since Napoleon concentrated thereafter on the Continental Blockade and the French navy had suffered heavy losses, but Russian manoeuvres around Herat posed a similar threat to the Company's position in India. A further treaty was concluded with Persia in 1814 to offset this Russian danger, yet the Company remained vulnerable to any changes in the status quo. A deep nervousness pervaded the strategic considerations of the Company. In an attempt to improve its position, channels of communication between Residencies and Governments were restructured. The Basrah Residency was abandoned leaving three regional Residencies at Bushire, Muscat and Baghdad. The political business of the Company was concentrated in one residency, and all regional affairs were subject to approval only of the Government of Bombay, which in turn reported to the Government of India at Fort William.³⁴ The Company was subsequently more sensitive to both local and external instability.³⁵ Accordingly, Egyptian moves towards the Arabian Littoral, the decline of the rise of Wahhabis and a resurgence of local piracy in the first twenty years of the nineteenth century had

³³ / See Kelly (1968) p63. Lorimer (1970) part II p214-216.

³⁴ / Lorimer (1970) part II p214-216.

³⁵ / Early primitive means of communication gave the British personnel great licence at their postings. Accordingly the dominant influence of individual residents and agents is a striking feature of early British policy. Individual personnel such as Wilson, Stannus, Hennell, Bruce & Hajee Jaseem had a disproportionate & at times obstructive influence on Bahraini affairs. Before the introduction of a regular steam service, correspondence between Bahrain and Bombay took an average of either two weeks during the NE monsoon, or four to six weeks during the SE monsoon. The introduction of the telegraph greatly reduced the autonomy of the Resident and the potential for conflict between Government and its subordinates by promoting the importance and proximity of the Government and the Indian Office.

developments solidified the Company's resolve to pacify the area once and for all.

There were still those who argued against further responsibilities, indeed the Court of Directors indicated in January 1819 that 'a pacific and unambitious policy' was the best course of action in the foreseeable future,³⁶ but a peaceful policy in the Gulf could only be followed by imposing the hegemony of peace from outside and imposing it on a community dedicated to piracy. Three expeditions, with the express aim of suppressing piracy and establishing maritime tranquillity were thus sent to the Gulf in 1800, 1809 and 1820. Each expedition focused on the destruction of Qasawim 'piratical' settlements on the Arabian Littoral. However the success of the Qawasim in re-establishing their community after the first two expeditions minimised the impact of the Company's military deterrent and failed to introduce the desired security of transit or pacifism. A more comprehensive restructuring of the Persian Gulf was thus contemplated before the Third Expedition in 1820 which heralded the beginnings of an unworkable nineteenth century paradigm for the management of the Gulf.

³⁶/ Quoted in Kelly (1968) p127.

*Chapter Three: Laying the Foundations
The 1820's and the General Treaty*

Pre-invasion discussions within the higher echelons of the Company prior to the Third Expedition indicated the conscious intent behind the Company's intervention in the affairs of the Gulf. It was however a confused synthesis of separate policy objectives that quickly unravelled when put into application. Ostensibly, the Expedition was sent to establish a general peace throughout the Gulf and eradicate piracy; however, resettlement of the Gulf after the Third Expedition spawned an unworkable and impractical paradigm dominated by unresolvable contradictions. The Directors planned to use this expedition to accommodate or marginalise Persia, establish a permanent English military presence, bind the incumbent Sheikhs to good behaviour, and restructure the balance of power to exclude the Qawasim and other recalcitrant parties. The fact that these political ambitions were mutually exclusive was not an immediate cause for concern. Contradictory strands of policy that reflected the changing colonial attitudes were simultaneously followed by the contemporary Resident in the Gulf, Captain Bruce until Company policy approached the ridiculous. Out of the crisis engendered by Bruce's diplomacy in 1822, a system of independent Sheikhs including the Al Khalifah, was established as a mediating layer for managing the affairs of the Gulf, the dominant feature of which was the tension between non-intervention and conspicuous Company patronage for the independent Sheikhs.

The key foci of the Company's pre-Expedition plans in 1820 was the acquisition of a regional military base in the Gulf and the need for effective measures to suppress piracy. By asserting its moral obligation to redress piracy, the Company directly challenged Persia's traditional authority over the Gulf and asserted its own authority. It hoped to achieve a commanding position in the Gulf whilst Persia did not possess the means to confront it. Yet the Company also hoped to avoid intimate involvement in the day to day affairs and disputes of the Gulf. Britain sought the maximum advantage from

the situation whilst incurring the minimum obligation. It proposed to lay waste to the main piratical settlements, establish a deterrent and then adopt a supervisory role, absolving itself from the practical management of Gulf shipping. Nepean, the architect of these plans, was committed to extending the regional influence of the Imam of Muscat, the Company's traditional ally in the Gulf, believing this the surest method of stabilising the local affairs of the region without involving the Company in the maelstrom of Gulf politics. Al Qasimi has suggested that the Third Expedition was the nadir of a policy designed to criminalise and neuter local trade rivals which the Company had pursued, unrelentingly despite Arab attempts to mediate a settlement. Concentrating his research on the correspondence between Taylor and Bruce during 1816 and 1817, he has argued that desirous of securing control of the Indian trade, the British refused to countenance any other course of action apart from military engagement. He wrote that:

*'From this correspondence it becomes absolutely clear that what the British wanted was to allow Indian ships, whether belonging to their subjects or not, to transport all trade in the area at the expense of Arab ships. The British also wanted to grant their protection to goods and ships belonging to other nations, irrespective of their animosity to the Arabs of the Gulf. It also becomes clear that the Arabs were willing to allow British goods and ships to pass unmolested even to unfriendly ports. The desire of the Arabs to reach an agreement with the British was as great as their determination to fight when necessary, but the British appear to have been planning all along to use force, when it became available, to impose their domination on the Gulf.'*¹

Certainly, the clear determination of the British to use force in the early nineteenth century is very evident, although it is arguable whether this was motivated quite so strongly by trade concerns, extending as far back into the 1790's, as Al Qasimi seems to suggest. The foremost consideration raised in private correspondence prior to the Third Expedition was the need to suppress piracy.

To this end, the Company hoped that peace and security could be maintained by a mediating layer of anonymous territorial rulers subject to the most liberal British supervision, and as such showed no favouritism or

¹ / Al Qasimi (1990) p204.

commitment to any local party. As far as Britain was concerned, one proxy Arab ruler was as good as another. Francis Warden, who was co-ordinating the pre-invasion planning, informed Nepean during discussions that:

*'It must be perfectly immaterial to the British Government to what Power or Powers the different islands and ports on the Persian and Arabian shores may devolve, provided the main and sole object of our solicitude, the complete suppression of piracy, be attained.'*²

By virtue of their incumbency, the dominant Sheikhs throughout the Gulf were favoured agents for affecting the suppression of piracy, but no great concern was paid to the rulers themselves. As long as the general layer of petty territorial independent chiefs survived intact, the personal character of these rulers was of no importance to the Company: any layer of petty independent chiefs would have effected British ambitions. As such Britain was prepared to recognise and deal with any impartial party that could guarantee the tranquillity of their territory and their subjects. Thus whilst on the one hand Britain exhibited friendliness towards the Al Khalifah, it was equally prepared to countenance their removal from power. In spite of the fact that friendly correspondence had been exchanged with the Al Khalifah Sheikhs since 1807 and a Treaty of Friendship concluded in 1816,³ serious consideration was given, in the pre-invasion planning stage of the Third Expedition, to the idea of removing the Al Khalifah.

By 1820 the Al Khalifah had become adversely tainted by their association with the Qawasim who were also in alliance with the Wahhabis. At one stage the Resident reported that Bahrain was akin to a piratical settlement.⁴ As far as the Company was concerned, this perceived alliance between the Al Khalifah, the Wahhabis and the Qawasim called into question the Al Khalifahs' commitment to the suppression of piracy. It was considered

² / Warden quoted Kelly (1968) pp141/2.

³ / BLOIORL R/15/1/10 Smith/Edmonstone no.39 dated 30/6/1807 mentions an exchange of letters. The Treaty of Friendship was concluded by Bruce under terms which gave Bahraini vessels favourable entry into Indian ports, but Hennell/ ?? no.44 dated 15/1/1837 (BLOIORL R/15/1/72) mentions that no record can be found of it ever being ratified.

⁴ / See Lorimer (1970) part II p201.

as moral justification for any measures that the Company might choose to pursue against the incumbent rulers. Nepean wrote that:

*'We have no hesitation in offering our opinion that the protection recently afforded by the Shaikh to the Joasmees has been of a character that would in our opinion fully justify any measures which might be adopted for wresting the authority he possesses in that island out of his hands.'*⁵

Accordingly a suggestion that the Al Khalifah be deposed or removed from Bahrain was included in a draft plan submitted by Nepean to the Court of Directors which was subsequently discussed by the higher echelons.⁶

Nepean suggested that in the aftermath of the expeditions the islands of Bahrain be made over to the Imam. However the Governor-General, at that time Mountstuart Elphinstone, dismissed Nepean's plan for the islands, believing such interference in the affairs of Bahrain unnecessary. Elphinstone was prepared to accept a guarantee from the Al Khalifah attesting to their pacifism and hostility to piracy as sufficient indication of their acquiescence to British objectives and saw no need to take action against the Al Khalifah unless confronted with firm evidence of piratical activity. In his reply to Nepean, Elphinstone directed that:

*'We should abstain from all interference in the pretensions which are advanced to the occupation of Bahrain under a distinct explanation to the Sheikh of that Island that so long as he restrains his tribe from the prosecution of acts of oppression on the high seas, and carries on those commercial pursuits in which they would appear to have formerly engaged, the ports of India shall be open to his vessels, and that he may rely upon experiencing from the British Government every degree of encouragement and of friendly intercourse; but that, on the contrary, if any indication of a piratical spirit should manifest themselves, we shall be compelled to adopt those measures of coercion which we are prosecuting against the Joasmees.'*⁷

Yet at the same time Elphinstone sent instructions to General Keir, commander of the Third Expedition, which directed him to make Bahrain over to the Imam of Muscat in the event of him having to take action against the Al Khalifah.⁸ Keir therefore sailed to the Gulf with two standing orders:

⁵ / *ibid.*

⁶ / Nepean letter dated 14/4/1819 quoted in Kelly (1968) p141.

⁷ / Elphinstone in reply to Nepean dated 15/12/1819 quoted in Kelly (1968) p162. The Third Expedition sailed from Bombay on the 3/11/1819 and it is unclear whether Keir was informed of Elphinstone's opinion on this matter. Keir's subsequent actions re: Bahrain were however consistent with general policy.

⁸ / Kelly (1968) p163. Orders were sent on the 26/2/20.

secure the general stability by entering into a compact with local rulers, and eradicate the pirates and piracy by force if necessary.

The Third Expedition met with apparent success. Keir razed Ras Al Khaymah and then negotiated a General Treaty [*see appendix two*] which was signed by all major Arabian chiefs in January and February 1820.⁹ The formal content of this treaty was restricted to the question of piracy, the treaty also laid down a marker for a new regional *modus operandi*. Even though the Treaty appeared at first to merely codify the existing balance of power, the symbiosis of traditional forms of diplomacy and authority with those expressed in the treaty changed the dynamics of the Gulf. The subsequent history of the Gulf was determined by the changes that were introduced by this agreement.

The substantial articles of the treaty embodied resolutions that prohibited 'aggressive' war and criminalised piracy and plunder. The concept of piracy was not admitted to by the seafarers of the Persian Gulf, but certain acts were considered by the East India Company to be a clear violation of their mercantile prerogatives. Piracy was thus defined in article two of the resultant compact as:

*'the killing of men and taking of goods without proclamation, avowal, and the order of a government.'*¹⁰

However, the subtext that became apparent immediately was that Britain reserved the right to distinguish legitimate and piratical acts. The

⁹ / The required guarantee of the Bahraini's peaceful disposition was proffered to General Keir by Sa'id Abdul Jalil bin Sa'id Yasal Tabatabee, who met Keir on behalf of the Al Khalifah Sheikhs in the aftermath of the attack on Ras Al Khaymah. The two parties subsequently concluded a Preliminary Treaty -*see appendix-* on the 5th of February 1820, under the terms of which, the Al Khalifah Sheikhs were admitted to the General Treaty in return for their verbal confirmation of their friendliness to Britain. Once this treaty had been ratified, the Al Khalifah and the state of Bahrain were recognised as legitimate, independent entities, even though their independence still needed to be established in the face of foreign claims for zakat, the on-going conflict with the Jalahimah and the potential threat of war with the Omanis.

¹⁰ / Article Two, General Treaty with the Arab Tribes of the Persian Gulf. See accompanying Appendix Two.

eradication of piracy constituted a legitimate war, and in so defining the concept of legitimate war, Britain had invented a supervisory role for itself that maintained its hegemony.

All signatories to the Treaty were granted the right to engage in legitimate hostilities, that were distinguished from piracies by the registering of their intention with British Authorities. 'Legitimate' war was regulated through the British Resident, but once registered with the British could be pursued upto the point of submission. This provision for legitimate war was also intended as an outlet for genuine conflict amongst the inhabitants of the Gulf that would isolate Britain from involvement in the intimate affairs of the Gulf. MacLeod, the Political Resident in 1822 and 1823, issued clear instructions to the Commanding Officer of the Persian Gulf Squadron that:

*'In cases evidently of lawful war even amongst the tribes themselves argument and remonstrances are the utmost obstacle we can oppose to the hostilities of the parties, whatever reason we may have to dread the consequences. If they persist we cannot interfere further unless we find their proceedings diverted from their legitimate objects to piracy.'*¹¹

However the general distinction between aggressive and legitimate war remained nebulous and complicated. In addition, the treaty called for a system of local registers supervised by the British to distinguish legitimate from piratical mariners and for the signatories to act collectively to deny piratical vessels rights of passage and harbour.

The real impact of the General Treaty had more to do with its form than its content. Whilst the treaty appeared to be an innocuous agreement between independent rulers of territorial states -albeit signed by the Arabs after British intimidation- for the mutually desirable suppression of piracy and preservation of maritime tranquillity, the Arab chieftains signed the treaty with an authority that they could barely have claimed and would have found hard to justify. Notwithstanding, the treaty recognised them as independent and territorial sovereigns. Once the treaty was ratified, the authority of its

¹¹ / BLOIORL R/15/1/26 MacLeod/ Captain Faithfull undated, rec'd 24/1/1823.

signatories had not only shifted dramatically, but was also formally guaranteed by English law. The novelty of the treaty lay in conjuring into existence a mediating layer of independent, territorial Sheikhs onto whom the Company hoped to pass its responsibility for the pacification and security of the Persian Gulf. The petty Arab chiefs were now recognised as independent territorial sovereigns and made responsible for the misdemeanours and aggressions perpetrated by those who lived in their demarcated territorial area of authority. This created the imperative for the chiefs to assert an authority over these 'subjects' and discourage piracy, even though the subject people themselves may have had little allegiance to the chieftain, lest they themselves incur penalties under the General Treaty.

The conclusion of the General Treaty and the creation of this mediating layer of Arab proxies was expected and appeared to have established a stable Pax Britannica without substantially increasing Britain's obligations. When forwarding the treaty to Bruce, Keir wrote:

*I am led to hope that the impression which has been produced by our success at Ras alKhyma, and Zayha and the conclusion of the above mentioned Treaties will completely settle the Arabian Coast of the Gulf.*¹²

Such sentiment appeared well founded. In contrast to the explicit hostility and intransigence collectively displayed by the local chiefs towards the British at Ras Al Khaymah in 1816, they now appeared to accept British supremacy. Britain appeared to have convincingly established its dominance and imposed a consensus for the suppression of piracy and the stabilisation of the Gulf. However the Treaty was apparently met with sharp rebuff by Elphinstone, and only reluctantly accepted by the Court of Directors.¹³ In the long term, it led to consequences far removed from the pre-invasion planning. A new *modus operandi* was certainly established, but one that acted against British interests throughout the nineteenth century, until the imperial authorities

¹² / BLOIORL R/15/1/21, Keir/Bruce 10/1/20.

¹³ / See Kelly (1968) p104-131 and Al Qasimi (1988) for a more detailed account of the Expeditions.

refashioned the system of independent Arab chiefs into a more formalised colonial relationship managed through Orders-in-Council.

In many respects the Treaty was a failure. The problems that the General Treaty sought to solve, continued unabated. The system of shipping registers designed to eliminate piracy had been already tried and abandoned as unworkable only fifty years previously. When the Agent and Council at Basrah introduced a system of British colours in 1767, by which third-party seafarers paid for the privilege to sail under a British flag, the measure was roundly condemned by the Court of Directors as the 'most extraordinary transaction.'¹⁴ It was noted then that such supervision would exacerbate rather than dampen the instability of the Gulf. The Agent was warned that:

*'You must expect constant complaints that no regard has been paid to the passes, which you have no power to redress, unless the fleet was kept whole years in the Gulf; besides this we must be in a general state of war with all Arabs, and if no notice is taken of the insult, our credit is lost.'*¹⁵

Predictably, the system of registers introduced under the General Treaty suffered the same problems and was rapidly abandoned and had fallen into abeyance by the mid-1820's without making any substantial headway against piracy. Thereafter the British maintained a close supervision of piratical transgressions against shipping, but could not suppress piracy, since the responsibility for redress was placed upon the independent Chiefs.

Since the treaty codified only one side of the contemporary balance of power, it actually compounded regional instability. The consensus reflected in the Treaty was artificially engendered by excluding those parties or issues which could not elicit broad agreement. Keir explained this in a positive light to Bruce, reasoning that the value of the treaty lay precisely in its broad and general nature:

¹⁴ / See Lorimer (1970) part II p160.

¹⁵ / quoted Lorimer (1970) part II pp160/1.

*'All matters of a temporary or individual nature have been included in Preliminary Treaties., with the several chiefs that the General Treaty might be reserved exclusively for arrangements of a permanent nature or such as are common to the whole of the contracting Tribes and it will be observed that it has being so worded as to admit of the accession of future adherents.'*¹⁶

Whilst the treaty appeared to create a peaceful pro-English bloc amongst the local chiefs, it did little to solve individual grievances and conflict which were the real causes of instability. In reality, there was no consensus. At the same time the treaty united those antithetical to the pacified Arabs. Rahman bin Jabir for instance refused to sign, claiming that he was a Wahhabi subject and was subsequently obliged to wage war as a subject of the Wahhabis, i.e. in an alliance with them, if at all.

Additionally the treaty created new problems. It ignored the question of suzerainty, but in no way prompted the Persians, Ottomans and the Imam of Muscat to forgo their claims. The Treaty promoted an uneasy co-existence of counter-claims, that neither recognised nor refuted each other. This artificial stability was repeatedly shattered by attempts of the parties to pursue their claims surreptitiously. Further it impressed upon the local chieftains a greater responsibility to supervise and control their subjects and to suppress maritime disorders. This disrupted the natural relationship between the ruler and their subjects and caused unnecessary social fragmentation. Tribal disputes that might previously have been settled by emigration or conquest, became now a constant source of friction and the potential for discord was exaggerated in the short-term by the territorialisation of authority. Most importantly, where the chiefs could not guarantee their own independence, the burden then fell upon the Company. Britain was obliged to maintain their independence, if it was to preserve the fiction of independent Arab chieftain, but by granting the Chiefs their independence, Britain had absolved itself of responsibility for the Chiefs and proscribed its intervention in the affairs of independent Arab states. British policy, in so far as it committed itself to the system of independent

¹⁶ / BLOIORL R15/1/21, Keir/Bruce 10/1/20.

states was consequently dominated by the tension between intervention or non-intervention and the need to secure British interests in a system that acted against them.

The General Treaty thus heralded the foundation of a new paradigm for the Persian Gulf. It established the foundations for a system of independent states, but from the moment of its inception this system was wracked by unresolvable contradictions that prevented its successful operation and tended to destabilise the Gulf. The most immediate assault upon the new paradigm was the implications of diplomatic initiatives in Tehran between 1820-1822, aimed at securing a military base, which compromised the independence of the very states that Keir was busily recognising. For approximately two years, from 1820-1822, the Company's representative at the Court of Tehran, the Minister Plenipotentiary at the Shah's Court, Henry Bullock and its Resident in the Persian Gulf, Captain Bruce, were involved in discussions with the Persian Government regarding the status of Bahrain. These negotiations resulted in an unratified treaty between Captain Bruce and the Prince of Shiraz in August 1822 that appeared to admit the reasonableness of Persia's claim to suzerainty over Bahrain.¹⁷ Bruce's Treaty appears as one of the most singularly spectacular instances of diplomatically shooting oneself in the foot when placed against the General Treaty. However the actual events of 1822 have been clouded by the controversy surrounding these negotiations and somewhat exaggerated. The Company's representatives at Tehran and Shiraz, Bullock and Bruce, did indeed encourage Persia to subdue Bahrain, but their action was consistent with the apparent demands of a British policy that was momentarily locked in contradiction and riven with confusion.

¹⁷ / This agreement was subsequently used as a foundation for Persia's presentation of its claim over Bahrain to the League of Nations in the 1920's.

During the pre-Expedition discussions, British policy was dominated by the apparent contradiction of interests *vis-à-vis* Bahrain as a mediating link in the fight against piracy and the need for British military base in the Gulf. The successful fulfilment of these ambitions required two diametrically opposed and mutually exclusive courses of action. Britain had either to uphold the independence of Bahrain as recognised by the General Treaty and hold the Bahraini Chief accountable for piratical transgressions by his subjects or in his territories, and so deny Persian influence over the island, or conciliate Persia in order to secure a base by encouraging or acquiescing in Persian encroachments and attacks on the Al Khalifah. This simultaneous diplomatic pressure produced two contradictory strands of policy which imbued British diplomacy with a seemingly schizophrenic lustre. Bullock and Bruce acted with an singular, common commitment to the need for securing a regional base. Whereas as Bullock's diplomacy passed by without controversy, Bruce who was more moderate, suffered censure and disgrace because his actions were no longer appropriate given the changing political configuration of the Gulf in the aftermath of the General Treaty.

Contemporaneous with the conclusion of the General Treaty, Keir had reported the receipt of a letter from the Prince of Shiraz in early 1820 requesting four or five British ships to help transport his army to Bahrain, which he speculated was destined to elucidate Britain's attitude to the island.¹⁸ From 1820 onwards, the Prince of Shiraz had adopted the policy of annually attempting to invade against Bahrain in the hope of reducing tribute to the centre and making good his own taxation. Britain declined the offer since it compromised their adopted policy of non-intervention in the local affairs of the Gulf, but Bullock, who was negotiating the use of either Kishm or Ras Al Khaymah as a British base, suggested that the Company could cooperate, *quid pro quo*, in return for a base. He informed the Court that

¹⁸ / BLOIORL R/15/1/21 Keir/Bruce 10/1/1820.

*'such a grant would not be demanded without the proffer of reciprocal advantages, the British Government as a preliminary testimony of their desire to strengthen the power of Persia had directed you to transfer to the authorities of the Shah such parts on the Persian Coast as you might have occasion to reduce, or such as might voluntarily consent to acknowledge the supremacy of Persia, and that Islands which were now independent might by acts of mediation or compulsion be induced to submit to the Persian Authority.'*¹⁹

Indeed to avoid ambiguity Bullock clarified the implicit substance of his position with particular reference to Bahrain, indicating that:

*'the British Government had learned the desire of the Shah to subdue the Island of Bahrein, and it seemed probable that the Atoobee Shaik might be induced by the mediation of the British Government to pay a tribute to Persia.'*²⁰

At the same time these discussions were taking place, Bruce reported a Persian force had been assembled to assist the Imam against Bahrain, but was being held back until the Imam agreed to pay annual tribute on account of Bahrain and surrender his brother as a hostage against Bahrain's revenues.²¹ Bullock's discussions could therefore only have been interpreted as British acquiescence in Persian designs and could only have encouraged the Shah to prosecute further his ambitions against Bahrain. In this instance the invasion was abandoned since the Imam refused to agree to the Persian conditions by which Persia would offer assistance and disbanded his invasion army.²² No further mention was made of this exchange, since it represented a positive step towards the creation of a British military base. However plans to subdue the islands were renewed in 1822, whilst in the meantime the Company had dismissed the idea of a permanent base and withdrawn the Marine from the Gulf in 1821, preferring instead to exercise its authority against piracy through the mediation of the independent Sheikhs. The priorities of the Company had shifted, yet no circular was passed around spreading the news. This new policy only crystallised in relation to the new situations and events that Britain had to manage. For whatever motives, Bruce mistook the Company's ambivalence towards the Al Khalifah as a disinterest in the abstract

¹⁹ / BLOIORL R/15/1/21 Bullock/Keir dated 10/3/1820.

²⁰ / *ibid.*

²¹ / BLOIORL R/15/1/21 Bruce/Elphinstone dated 7/3/1820.

²² / BLOIORL R/15/1/21 Keir/Bruce dated 22/3/1820 enclosed in Bruce/Elphinstone dated 26/3/1820 reports the disbanding of Persian troops and the cancellation of invasion plans.

independence of Bahrain on a diplomatic level, and in the absence of higher orders continued to advocate an anachronistic policy that threatened to compromise Britain's new interests. Bruce accordingly began to negotiate away the very independence of Bahrain and the Al Khalifah that Keir had recognised not two years previously.

The negotiations that led to the Treaty of Shiraz started when Captain Bruce received an unsolicited royal firman from the Prince of Shiraz on the 28th June demanding his presence in Persia, which he reported back to Warden and requested permission to travel.²³ Having received no direction from Bombay on the correct course of action, but moreover two additional firmans, received on the 4th and the 11th of July,²⁴ Bruce decided to go to Shiraz in a private capacity lest his non-attendance sever the amity between Persia and Britain.²⁵ He therefore left the linguist and broker in charge of the Residency and sailed to Persia on the 22nd July, arriving in Shiraz on the 1st of August, where he was 'met with the greatest attention.'²⁶ On the 2nd of August Bruce presented himself to the Prince Regent of Shiraz before a full court. He reported that the Prince Regent was:

*'very gracious and affable and asked a good deal about Bahrain saying it belonged to Persia and that they had been too long allowed to throw off their allegiance but that this year he trusted to bring them under proper Government.'*²⁷

In addition, the Prince Regent assured Bruce that Persia now trusted British ambitions and sanctioned the need for a military base in the Gulf, whereas previously Persian officials had been reticent to acquiesce in this request panicking over possible British designs on Persia itself. Bruce did record his comments at court, but a comprehensive account of a follow up meeting with the Prince Regent's Minister, Zekee Khan, was sent in dispatch number thirty five.

²³ / BLOIORL R/15/1/25 Bruce/Warden no.25 dated 28/6/1822.

²⁴ / BLOIORL R/15/1/25 See Bruce/Warden nos. 28-30 dated 28/6, 9/7 and 17/7/1822.

²⁵ / BLOIORL R/15/1/25 Bruce/ Secretary to Government of Bombay no.49 dated 9/11/1822 offers an apology for Bruce's behaviour and attempted to provide an explanation.

²⁶ / BLOIORL R/15/1/25 See Bruce/Warden no32 dated 6/8/1822 and no.35 dated 3/9/1822 for account of proceedings at Shiraz.

²⁷ / BLOIORL R/15/1/25 Bruce/Warden no.35 d.6/8/22.

After his appearance at court Bruce met Zekee Khan on the 8th of August to discuss the question of Bahrain, Bruce's position in the Persian Gulf and the possibility of establishing a British military base. The conversation between the two was subsequently transcribed in the form of an agreement, signed by both parties and touted as the Treaty of Shiraz -see *appendix*. Regarding Bahrain, Bruce the Treaty noted that:

*'The island of Bahrein which has always been subordinate to the province of Fars and its possessors, the Bein Attabee Arabs, who have of late been unruly and disobedient and had applied to the commanding Officer of the British Forces for a distinguishing Flag: this Flag if it has been granted, to be withdrawn and no assistance to be rendered to the Bein Attabee Arabs hereafter.'*²⁸

In addition the Treaty discussed the stationing of British troops, granting them the right to station on any Island on the coast of Persia, but attempting to make their presence conditional only on Persian weakness and binding Britain to withdraw them once Persian forces were sufficient to insure tranquillity of the Gulf. It also sought to make British troops available for Persian requisition. Article Four stated that:

*'Should His Royal Highness during the period the British Troops are stationed in the Gulf require the services of one or two Cruizers from the Station to proceed to any of the Islands or Ports of Persia, they are to be furnished, and particularly so on the present occasion when an expedition is in contemplation against Bahrein to reduce it to obedience, His Royal Highness promising after the service may be over to dismiss the vessels with proper honour and respect.'*²⁹

However the Treaty was not a binding agreement and neither party bound themselves to honour its terms. Its preamble and conclusion imply that the agreement was conceived as a formal discussion paper to submit to higher authority. The conclusion indicated that:

*'The Veekeels of the two Governments who now exchange engagements agree to present them to their respective Governments for their consideration and approbation and for the guidance of each other in the case of a change of Governors.'*³⁰

The qualified language of diplomacy used in this document lends credibility to Bruce's claim not to have concluded a Treaty, but merely to have notarised private discussion for higher consideration.

²⁸/ BLOIORL R/15/1/183 PP136-1340. See appendix two.

²⁹/ *ibid.*

³⁰/ *ibid.*

At his meeting with Zekee Khan, Bruce was led to believe that the Prince of Shiraz had the prior agreement of the Shah to conclude agreements in trust. Bruce was also convinced of Persia's resolute ambition to sail against Bahrain in the winter. The inevitable success of such an expedition and the desire of the Prince of Shiraz to mediate a settlement that made Bahrain subordinate to Persia without recourse to hostilities persuaded Bruce to enter negotiations over the status of Bahrain. In addition, Bruce reasoned that placating Persia by sacrificing the independent state of Bahrain would stabilise the Gulf and prevent hostilities and piracies, reasoning that:

*'The Island of Bahrain reverting again under the Authority of Persia will tend more to the tranquility of the Arabian Side of the Gulf than almost any other act and will at once do away the constant petty acts of aggression and retaliation existing between the different branches of the Ben Attobee Arabs, particularly between Abdella bin Ahmed and Rahman bin Jauber.'*³¹

It is understandable why Bruce, believing himself to be acting in a private capacity, acquiesced with Persian diplomacy. However, his negotiations were not appreciated in Bombay. Bruce's ambition to secure a British military base revived Persia's regional influence, compromised the system of independent states and weakened the confederacy against piracy. Since Britain could not hold Persia accountable for piratical outrages conducted by its subjects or in its territories, the expansion of Persian territory undermined Britain's moral and real authority in the region. When reports of events in Shiraz reached the Governor in Council they were met with horror. The Governor in Council observed that:

'the Treaty which has been the result of those negotiations is not only unauthorized, but entirely inconsistent with the views of the Government and with the obligations of the public faith...

...It acknowledges the King of Persia's title to Bahrein of which there is not the least proof and which the British Government cannot assert without injuring the pretensions of the Imaum and the Utoobees.- It promises our aid against every power possessed of an Island in the Gulph; and expressly against the Uttobees with whom we are bound by a Treaty of Friendship and with whose conduct we have every reason to be satisfied...

³¹ / BLOIORL R/15/1/25 Bruce/Warden no.35Pol dated 3/9/18822.

*...The effect of this Treaty would be to compromise the dignity of the British Government and to overturn every part of the policy which it has adopted in relation to the powers of the Persian Gulph.*³²

A rapid rearguard action was immediately launched to wipe Bruce's endeavours from the slate. Bruce was instantaneously removed from office, 'the more clearly to mark his [the Governor in Council's] disapprobation of the whole proceeding.'³³ Elphinstone informed the Prince of Shiraz that:

*'Captain Bruce had been merely directed to return to his duty at Bushire and had received no authority to proceed to Shiraz and no powers or Credentials to enter on any negotiation whatever with your Royal Highness. The treaty which he had concluded is therefore his own act and not that of this Government.'*³⁴

In addition, the Prince Regent of Fars was simultaneously informed that the Treaty was invalid. Elphinstone explained that as far as there was a considered British policy regards the compact:

*'I accordingly disavow it and desire it to be considered exactly as if it had never been written.'*³⁵

The Company then restated British policy before the Al Khalifah, reaffirming their commitment to the independent Sheikhs. The Al Khalifah were informed that:

*'by some unfortunate mistake on his part Captain Bruce the Resident at Bushire having proceeded of his own accord to Shiraz, has concluded without any authority or powers from this Government a Treaty with the Prince Regent of Fars, entirely in opposition to the intentions of the British Government and in contradiction to its engagements with yourself and the Powers in the Persian Gulf.'*³⁶

They were further assured by Elphinstone that:

*'The British Government considers the relations with your state as existing on the same force as from the first and that it is my wish to preserve them undiminished.'*³⁷

This excessive reaction did not reflect any dereliction of duty by Bruce, but was rather an indicator of the changing priorities of British policy in the Gulf. Bruce may have been naive in his dealings at Shiraz, but he

^{32/} BLOIORL R/15/1/26 Farish, Secretary to the Government of Bombay/Bruce no.1491Pol. dated 1/11/1822.

^{33/} *ibid.*

^{34/} BLOIORL R/15/1/183 Elphinstone, Governor-General/Hoossein Alle, Prince Regent of Fars dated 30/10/1822.

^{35/} *ibid.*

^{36/} BLOIORL R/15/1/183 Elphinstone, Governor-General/Sheikh of Bahrain dated 30/10/1822.

^{37/} *ibid.*

acted within the framework of general policy, albeit one that was made obsolete by compact between Keir and the Sheikhs. Much the same encouragement was given to the Persians against Bahrain less than two years before the infamous Treaty of Shiraz, so it would be unfair to portray Bruce as driven by insensibility. His fall from grace was determined by the changing political configuration of the Gulf. The implications of the General Treaty were never explicitly codified: no line was ever drawn excluding Persia and Turkey from the Persian Gulf. This commitment to the independent states only emerged as a reaction to events, and specifically to the negotiations with the Prince of Shiraz. Whilst these events of 1822 appear to negate Britain's commitment to the independent Arab states and Bahrain in particular, they should be seen, not as an aberration of policy, but as an integral part of the process that re-affirmed Britain's commitment to the independent Sheikhs after the General Treaty had been signed. Rather than compromise British policy, the affair of the Treaty of Shiraz as a whole, reaffirmed the system of independent Arab states and, established a precedent for the exclusion of external powers from Bahrain's affairs under cover of the sanctity of Bahrain's independence. As a result of the negotiations at Shiraz, Persia was excluded from its traditional role in the Gulf. To illustrate this point, the Governor of Bombay informed Bruce's replacement after the fact that:

*'The nominal supremacy of Persia over some of the Arabs in the Persian Gulph can never be felt but as an obstruction to all measures for preserving the tranquility of that sea.'*³⁸

In the aftermath of the Treaty of Shiraz, the paramount importance of the independent states and the public defence of the independent states transcended other British policy considerations. Thereafter, Britain became the chief advocate of Bahrain's independence as a necessary prerequisite for fighting piracy and preserving an unrivalled British sphere of influence. The abstract independence of the Chief of Bahrain was a significant obstacle that inhibited the development of external influences in the Gulf and was used as a

³⁸ / BLOIORL R/15/1/29 Bombay/MacLeod no.658Pol. dated 16/5/1823.

mechanism for preserving Britain's local hegemony. For the rest of the nineteenth century, the active propagation and defence of Bahrain's independence was of quintessential importance in securing British dominance in the Persian Gulf, since it provided Britain with the only means to thwart relative claims by foreign powers that would otherwise have been difficult if not impossible to refute. Those powers whose strength and influence imperilled that of Britain were arbitrarily labelled as external powers and found their schemes upon Bahrain confronted with greater British belligerency. Yet in contrast, to this over-riding commitment to the system of independent chiefs, the British steadfastly refused to involve themselves in local Arabian disputes throughout the 1820's declining involvement in the internal affairs of the Gulf.

A conscious policy decision was taken to avoid intimate British involvement in the local quarrels amongst Arabian Chieftains. In the aftermath of the Expeditions, the Company followed a supposedly strict policy with clearly demarcated boundaries of acceptable intervention in the local affairs of the Gulf. The Company's role was restricted to the necessary minimum intervention. This policy was reaffirmed by Elphinstone who reflected that:

*[It] 'has repeatedly and expressly been declared to be to confine our views strictly to the suppression of piracy when it actually subsists, and to abstain from taking part in the disputes of the states of the Gulf, even when within the reach of our maritime power, then is absolutely necessary for the accomplishment of that object.'*³⁹

This conscious non-intervention in the disputes of the Persian Gulf was implicit in the granting of independence to the Arab states. However, the absence of conspicuous British patronage for the proxy Arab chieftains prevented the system of independent states from achieving a stable equilibrium. For the next decade, the Company consistently rejected demands made upon it by the Sheikhs of Bahrain to guarantee their position against the Al Jalahimah and the Imam of Muscat. The Al Khalifah's enemies exercised their legitimate right to wage war against the Al Khalifah and the Persian Gulf

³⁹ / Bombay Secret Proceedings vol.49 Consn. 1 dated 3/1/1821 quoted in Kelly (1968) p181.

was dominated by this belligerency. In order to promote some harmony amongst the independent Arab chiefs, the Company was forced to intervene covertly whilst eschewing direct intervention. This non-intervention was unsurprisingly perceived by the Arab chieftains as a lack of British interest in their security and provoked an animosity amongst the incumbent rulers which left them generally ill-disposed towards the Company officials.

Once the policy of non-intervention had been adopted, the downfall or replacement of individual chiefs was not a matter of British concern. The British were obliged *by their own mandate* not to intervene in any situation that posed a threat to the Al Khalifah, but constrained themselves to merely watch events unfold and countenance the deposition of the local chieftains. This course of inactivity was the only policy open to the British under the system of independent states. However, subsequent British attempts to mediate and suppress conflict suggest that the British found it impossible to minimise their responsibilities and involvement in local affairs because the system of independent states generated more problems than it solved. There was a constant pressure on the Resident to broaden the limits of acceptable intervention and assume wider responsibilities to ensure the pacification of the Gulf, even if this meant ignoring the myth of independence.

The independent chiefs were called upon to penalise instances of piracy and were penalised themselves when their subjects committed piratical injustices, according to the strictures of the General Treaty.⁴⁰ Yet whilst the Bombay administration sought to limit the Company's involvement in the Gulf, the Residents' found it difficult to let the internal dynamics of power to

⁴⁰ / The Al Khalifah were immediately called upon after the General Treaty to surrender all piratical vessels and subsequently at every occasion when pirates appeared to be under their jurisdiction. See BLOIORL R/15/1/22 Bruce/Keir for details of Bruce's visit on 12/1/1820.

stabilise the Gulf for fear of losing moral authority. Both the emergence of anti-British sections amongst the Arabs and the potential for regional instability undermined the British position. The question of surreptitious intervention in the internal affairs of the Gulf whilst preserving neutrality therefore emerged in discussion between MacLeod and Newnham, secretary to the Governor-General at Bombay, who contemplated withholding registers to boats and restricting the movement of vessels to promote peace. These discussions were the start of a near-constant tension throughout the nineteenth century between the Residents in the Persian Gulf and the Governments of Bombay & India as to the importance and application of British neutrality. The Residents applied a constant pressure on their superiors, seeking a redefinition of non-intervention that would permit moderate interference in local affairs. From their position in the field, the license to ban conflict, or make subjective judgements about the efficacy of individual conflicts would have made the work of the Resident and the promotion of British interests considerably easier. The Resident was faced with a seemingly unending series of 'legitimate' disturbances to the stability of the Gulf, yet was restrained by the self-imposed policy of non-intervention from taking those measures that would produce the desired tranquillity of the region.

Local conflict was unavoidable as long as the British declined to interfere in the local dynamics from which it was generated, but the pressure from the Residents was balanced against a reticence of central administration to assume full responsibility for the Gulf. However, no compromise was available. The scope for selective intervention, excepting mediation and negotiation was non-existent. As Newnham explained to MacLeod, the relations with the Arabs under the general treaty:

'will no doubt give great weight to our endeavours to prevent hostilities by means of explanation and mediation, and will even perhaps entitle us to go war with any other power in the Gulf, but when such a war shall once have been announced we can have no further

*control over the proceedings of the Belligerents than maybe be necessary to prevent a renewal of the system of general depredation.*⁴¹

The consensus in Bombay was that attempts to impede the Arabs in legitimate aggression would not merely contradict British policy, but in effect would transform Britain into a rent-an-army. Newnham explained:

*'any of those chiefs who thought himself aggrieved would be entitled to demand redress at the hands of a power which prevented his seeking it by his own means.'*⁴²

However this did not stop the Residents from taking their own initiatives in departing from central policy.

Motivated by an apparently sincere and conscientious desire to effect British ambitions and preserve maritime tranquillity, the Residents repeatedly involved themselves in proscribed affairs and employed proscribed means in their day-to-day work, thereafter presenting their actions to central government as *fait accompli*. The preservation of one consistent British policy thus often took the form of unravelling contradictory initiatives that the Residents had pursued independently. Accordingly, British diplomacy assumed a seemingly inconsistent and haphazard quality. On the one hand it left the Al Khalifah to defend themselves, on the other it discouraged and inhibited the successful prosecution of any scheme against the Al Khalifah by forbidding and restricting hostilities. Immediately after the General Treaty had been concluded the Al Khalifah were plunged into conflict with their traditional enemies, the Al Jalahimah.

The Al Jalahimah had been expected to assist in the expedition against the Qawasim given their enmity towards the Wahhabis and their alliance with the Sultan of Muscat. However, they sailed to Persia instead and sought protection from the Prince of Shiraz, declaring themselves to be Persian subjects. Rahman bin Jabir declined to sign the General Treaty on the

⁴¹ / BLOIORL R/15/1/29 Newnham/MacLeod Pol. no.320 dated 15/3/1823.

⁴² / *ibid.*

grounds that he was under the protection and jurisdiction of Persia, but bound himself not to wage war against the Al Khalifah independently. Although Rahman bin Jabir had built up a semblance of territorial authority around his principal fort at Demaum, the British considered him to be pirate. Thus despite the legitimacy of his claim against the Al Khalifah which the British did not attempt to suppress, Rahman bin Jabir was mandated to pursue this claim in conjunction with either Persia or the Imam of Muscat, both of whom Britain recognised as possessing the sovereign right to undertake legitimate war.⁴³

Accordingly, the Al Jalahimah planned an invasion of Bahrain in early 1820 with assistance from the Persian Governor of Fars. This attempt was unsuccessful and in the process precipitated a British order for the destruction of the Al Jalahimah vessels owing to his piratical activities. Although prosecution of this order would have settled the conflict and delivered the Al Khalifah from their perennial enemy, this order exceeded the self-imposed limits of British jurisdiction since the Al Jalahimah were formally Persian subjects and was consequently rescinded. This turn of events clearly indicated to the Al Jalahimah their freedom from responsibility to the British. Thereafter, aware that their Persian protection could be used as a shield to escape British retribution, the Al Jalahimah continued their attacks on Bahrain with relative impunity. The Al Jalahimah meticulously avoided conflict with British shipping or conflict with the British themselves, but continued to plan further invasions, harass Bahraini dhows and engage in hostile activities against Bahrain that the British deemed piratical throughout the 1820's.

⁴³ / An friendly agreement between Rahman bin Jabir and the Resident was concluded as early as 1808. See BLOIORL R/15/1/10 Rahman bin Jabir/Smith rec'd 13/4/1808, enclosed in Smith/Edmonstone n.d. See also R/15/1/22 Bruce/Elphinstone dated 2/2/1820 for account of meeting with Rahman bin Jabir.

The destabilising nature of this indecisive conflict encouraged Britain to mediate a settlement in 1822 in the interests of general peace. Additionally MacLeod gave orders for a cruiser to be sent to the pearls banks in the vicinity of Bahrain during the pearl season.⁴⁴ At the same time it was stressed that Britain maintained a strict neutrality in the conflict and would not guarantee any settlement between the parties. Initial attempts at mediation were therefore indecisive, but an agreement was successfully brokered by the Company's Resident in the Persian Gulf, Colonel Stannus and signed in February 1824.⁴⁵ However, this provided only a temporary respite. The Al Jalahimah subsequently blockaded the land port of Qatif demanding tribute and started to harass local shipping. This provocative act led to a resumption of hostilities between the Al Khalifah and the Al Jalahimah that continued through 1824 and 1825. The Resident, Colonel Stannus, displaying an overt concern over 'the violent proceedings that were daily taking place not only against the p[e]ople of Katiff but also against the people of Bahrein, Koweit and other Neutrals' sent two ships from the Bombay Marine to impose peace until orders were received, even though this represented a significant departure from standard policy. This action curtailed the conflict, in effect inhibiting the Al Jalahimah whilst preserving the Al Khalifah as incumbent rulers and so tacitly compromising British neutrality.

The requested orders sent to Stannus reaffirmed the established policy of neutrality, instructing Stannus to retire from Demaum and maintain strict neutrality as long as non-combatant vessels were not harassed. Unable to intervene more forcibly, Stannus thus wrote to both parties offering the good offices of the British Government at any stage, but indicated as well the unwillingness of the Company to interfere in any way shape or form in the conflict. Assured that any action would not subsequently provoke a British

⁴⁴ / BLOIORL R/1/27 MacLeod/Hardy, Senior Commanding Officer of the Marine in the Persian Gulf no date c. mid-1823.

⁴⁵ / BLOIORL R/115/1/32 Stannus/Newnham no. 11 dated 7/2/1824 reports the conclusion of the feud and appends an agreement.

reaction, the Al Jalahimah pursued the blockade and campaign against the Al Khalifah with renewed enthusiasm. Abdullah bin Ahmed was informed of the implications of the central policy by Stannus to the effect that:

*'I have apprized Rahma of his being at liberty to prosecute his attacks on Katiffa and to engage in offensive measures with Bahrein without opposition from our Cruizer.- ...Our earnest wish is to prevent disturbances in the Gulf, but the moment that war is resolved on- The parties must exercise their judgement as to the manner of carrying it on and depend entirely on their own resources we d[o not] assume the right of forbidding hostilities and cannot consistently with entire neutrality place any restriction on the progress either as to limit or duration unless they should infringe on the rights of neutrals in which case it would become our duty to interfere and punish the defaulters.'*⁴⁶

Thereafter Stannus attempted mediation on several occasions but without success.⁴⁷ The conflict dragged on through 1826, until the Al Khalifah were finally secured in their position when Rahman bin Jabir died in combat with one of the Khalifah.⁴⁸ Although Rahman's son, Basher bin Rahman vowed to carry on his father's fight against the Al Khalifah, the danger thereafter posed by the Al Jalahimah did not disturb the Al Khalifah and a final settlement was mediated before the British in 1828.⁴⁹ However, the threat from the Imam of Muscat was an equally disturbing source of unrest, which posed a threat to the Al Khalifah until the very end of the 1820's. Again this was a conflict in which the British appeared reluctant to involve themselves, although the tendency of the Resident to intervene unilaterally to the benefit of the incumbent Al Khalifah is clearly visible.

When the Imam attempted to invade Bahrain in 1816, the British encouraged both the Imam and the Al Khalifah to desist from hostilities. These exhortations and Britain's flat refusal to assist the Imam forced the Bahrainis to defend themselves. As a result, the attempted invasion was beaten

⁴⁶ / BLOIORL R/15/1/38 Stannus/ Abdullah bin Ahmed dated 22/4/1826.

⁴⁷ / BLOIORL R/15/1/38 Memorandum of letter Stannus/Imam of Muscat, October 1826 mentions unsuccessful visits by Stannus to Demaum to effect peace.

⁴⁸ / BLOIORL R/15/1/40 Stannus/Newnham no.85 dated 14/12/1826 reports an account 'of a decisive action between Rahman bin Jaber and a Bahrein Buglow, in which the former after a heroic defence, set fire to his magazine and involved both vessels in utter destruction.'

⁴⁹ / BLOIORL R/15/1/48 Extract from Court of Directors in the Pol Dept dated 23/12/28 on Persian Gulf reporting the feud between Jabir and Sheikh of Bahrain satisfactory adjudicated by Resident enclosed in Morris/Res no.1213 Pol dated 12/10/29.

back, but notwithstanding the failure of this invasion, the Imam refused to surrender his claim over Bahrain. It was expected that after signing the General Treaty that the Imam would immediately sail against the Al Khalifah. Keir reported that:

*'His Highness previous to his leaving Ras al Khyma commented to me that his proceeding to Muscat was with the view of making preparations for an independent attack on Bahrain.'*⁵⁰

However, before hostilities broke out, the invasion was pre-empted by the offer of annual tribute to the Imam from the Al Khalifah which the Imam accepted, believing this to be accord with British wishes. The Imam informed Keir that an agreement had been reached implying his subservience to the British was the deciding factor:

*'I understand from the General Contents of your Letters that it was rather your wish that I should make Peace with them, and as I have a great desire to act in strict conformity with your wishes I again write another letter.'*⁵¹

These arrangements placated the Imam temporarily although the Al Khalifah's refusal to render more than MT\$12,000 *ex gratia* led the Imam to resuscitate invasion plans in 1822.⁵² The Imam requested British assistance, should the need arise, to make an attempt against the Al Khalifah in the event of non-payment of tribute, but this was declined. However the Imam forged an alliance with the Prince of Shiraz which was looked upon favourably by the British Resident, Captain Bruce who was midway into his negotiations with the Prince of Shiraz. The Imam subsequently abandoned his invasion plans owing to the small size of his own force and the difficulties in mounting an expedition from Muscat as opposed to Bushire after the Persians had disavowed their interest under pressure from Britain.

Reports surfaced again in June 1828 of the hostile intentions and active preparations of the Imam against Bahrain. Contemporary reports from the Native Agent at Muscat had indicated a general peace, tranquillity, and

⁵⁰ / BLOIORL R/15/1/21 Keir /Bruce dated 10/1/20.

⁵¹ / Lorimer (1970) part II p847 and BLOIORL R/15/1/21 Imam /Keir enclosed in Keir/Bruce dated 21/3/20.

⁵² / Lorimer (1970) part II p852.

friendliness towards the Al Khalifah,⁵³ so the Acting Resident, Hennell, reported that rumours of imminent invasion were unsubstantiated and without foundation. He explained that his opinion was:

*'grounded upon a report received from the Agent at Muscat of H.Higness having sent up several valuable presents, accompanied by a communication couched in the most friendly and amicable terms to Shaik Abdoolla ben Ahmed the Chief of that Island' and secondly 'upon my knowledge of the Imams general character for openness and sincerity.'*⁵⁴

The traditional disposition towards the Imam and friendliness between Muscat and the British partly excused and obscured the preparations that were nonetheless being made. Unexpectedly, as far as the British were concerned, the Imam wrote to the Government of Bombay in July 1828 by the HCC Benares, requesting the Government of Bombay's sanction for a war with the Al Khalifah.⁵⁵ This took the British completely by surprise. On being informed of the Imam's letter by HCC Benares, Hennell reluctantly concluded that:

*'there is but too much reason to believe that he [the Imam] has formed a fixed and settled determination to attempt the redirection of Bahrain to his Authority at all risks and hazards..' and thus 'lay before Government the almost inevitable prospect of a war which however it may terminate can hardly fail to be attended while it lasts with both serious and disastrous consequences.'*⁵⁶

In what can only be construed as a major failure of intelligence operations, the British had failed to take cognisance of the Imam's preparations. The Imam had circumvented pre-emptive British mediation and complied with the terms of the General Treaty.

Once the Imam's intention had been formally communicated and registered, there was subsequently no basis on which the Company could legitimately reject it or actively intervene to prevent the invasion. The Imam's invasion plans was thus registered as a legitimate aggression and the Imam given license to pursue hostilities. Little concern was voiced within the Company over the possibility that the Imam might take control of Bahrain,

⁵³ / See BLOIORL Hennell/Newnham no.40 d.24/6/1828 and R/15/1/38 Hennell/Goolab, Native Agent at Muscat d.2/9/28.

⁵⁴ / BLOIORL R/15/1/47 Hennell/Newnham, Chief Secretary, Government of Bombay no.60 Political d.30/8/1828.

⁵⁵ / BLOIORL R/15/1/47 Agent at Muscat/Hennell dated 13/8/28 mentions Imam's letter by the Benares.

⁵⁶ / *ibid.*

since such an eventuality merely represented the fulfilment of Elphinstone and Nepean's earlier plans. A degree of unease was expressed regarding the ensuing instability that threatened to engulf the region. Some sections of the administration reconsidered the role of Britain in the Gulf and the question of intervention. Britain's commitment to preserve stability and therefore proscribe the conflict was emphasised as more important than the rights of the Imam to engage in legitimate hostilities. Nonetheless Buta, the Secretary to the Government of India at Bombay indicated that:

*'With regard to the general affairs of the Persian Gulf, we should look upon ourselves as the head of a Naval confederacy for the entire suppression of Piracy, and act accordingly. Our superior strength makes the Arbitor to whom others will appeal, and we must take the disadvantages as well as the advantages of such a position.'*⁵⁷

He then looked at the implications of this policy on the question of neutrality instructing that:

*'It is desirable still to abstain from all interference in any Wars not arising from piratical courses; but as the attainment of our principal object that of gradually introducing peaceable habits amongst the various Tribes in the Gulf, will greatly depend upon their ceasing to have recourse to arms upon every occasion in not giving guaranteed or involving Government. you are to take every opportunity of impressing the different chiefs with our desire of their remaining at peace with each other. which it is hoped may be gradually effected by your showing favour and consideration to those who evince a disposition to conform to the Government upon this point.'*⁵⁸

The Resident was still bound not to intervene beyond the offer of mediation in legitimate wars, but was to exert every possible means to promote peace. Policy thus separated into two strands: one maintained British neutrality, as is evident from Hennell's reply to Abdullah bin Ahmed below, and another extended British mediation beyond its previous limits. The Resident's non-guarantee of the Bahrainis and British attempts to protect the Imam of Muscat in the aftermath of the invasion illustrate the scope of this covert intervention.

At the end of August, a plea was received from Abdullah bin Ahmed requesting that the British prevent the Imam's advance. The Shuyukh, having overviewed the situation asked that:

⁵⁷ / BLOIORL R/15/1/46 Buta/Resident dated 22/9/1828 no.1094A Pol.

⁵⁸ / ibid.

*'you will restrain the oppressor from injuring us without any cause being given by plunder or piracy- If you cannot do this, we trust you will prevail on him to wait two months in order that we may prepare our territories and assemble our forces after this war.- notwithstanding therefore Tahnoon being a party to this agreement, he is supporting Syed Said against us. We hope therefore that you will forbid his opposing himself to us.'*⁵⁹

Abdullah bin Ahmed hopefully suggested the British were obliged to intervene after their mediation of the problem in 1822, and indicated that only the British intervention would avert conflict. However whilst Hennell's reply undertook to forbid Sheikh Tahnoon from involving himself in the quarrel, it declined Abdullah bin Ahmed any assistance. By way of explanation, a succinct commentary on the obligations intended upon the British under the treaty of friendship was offered. It is worth quoting in full since it remains the most detailed explanation of British policy under the General Treaty and was itself subsequently used to decline interference:

'I cannot however pass over in silence that part of your letter which hints that the British Government as being party to the General Treaty is bound to restrain one Tribe from commencing Hostilities against another. After the many explanations that have been afforded you upon his part by Captain Stannus, any further exposition on my part must be quite unnecessary, but I may be allowed to observe that the British Authorities both in India and this Gulf have held one invariable line of conduct viz: that of declining all interference in the feuds and wars of the arabian chiefs beyond that of a mutual friend desirous on all occasions of maintaining the general peace and sparing the effusion of Blood by an unbiased and unprejudiced mediation....

*... From this principal of non-intervention in lawful and acknowledged war it must be sufficiently apparent to you that altho' the English government are always most desirous of promoting peace and concord yet that I conceive no objection can exist to yourself strengthening yourself against the attacks of your enemies by such alliances as you may conceive best adapted to that purpose.'*⁶⁰

Both Hennell and Wilson, Resident in the Gulf between 1827 and 1833, attempted to negotiate between the two parties, but the Imam had formed a fixed resolve to gain possession of the islands, by the time they involved themselves. This may have been averted by a British guarantee of the terms of settlement. Although Wilson had no authorisation to offer such a guarantee, taking his lead from Buta, he struck a position that whilst explicitly

⁵⁹ / BLOIORL R/15/1/47 Abdullah bin Ahmed/Resident d.24/8/1828 enclosed in Hennell/Newnham no.60 Political d.30/8/28.

⁶⁰ / BLOIORL R/15/1/47 Hennell/Abdullah bin Ahmed d.30/8/1828 enclosed in Hennell/Newnham no.60 Pol same date.

denying a guarantee, implicitly offered as much, writing to the Abdullah bin Ahmed that although:

*'the British Government will never guarantee any Treaty whatever but if a peace is made, it will not see it broken by either party which may be the aggressor.'*⁶¹

However the Imam could not be discouraged. A formal declaration of war was sent to Abdullah bin Ahmed via the Resident in late August, arriving in Bushire on the 7th of September.⁶² An accompanying letter indicated the Imam's intention to sail in effect, four days later on the 11th September. Hennell wrote immediately to both parties counselling caution, but also stressed in his letter to the Imam that the Company had no plans to interfere.⁶³ It is unclear whether this letter reached the Imam. The Imam's fleet sailed on the 13th September, and arrived at Kishm on the 17th September.⁶⁴ Here it was joined by Sheikh Tahnoon although he had been prohibited from involvement by the British.⁶⁵ Over and above this efforts there was little else that the Resident to do to deter the Imam. Hennell thus adopted the policy of strict non-intervention, instructing from all Company ships to remain invisible whilst the Imam was in the area. Under a letter dated 7/9/28 he advised that:

*'If the Imam takes up a position off Bahrein, advisable that HC Cruizers stay out of sight during operations unless for some special purposes: lest sinister interpretations be formed and false reports get abroad of our having assisted or cooperated with the Imam in his enterprize.'*⁶⁶

On the 5th November the Imam summoned to the Al Khalifah to surrender and that same evening captured the fort at Sitra fort. Six days later the Omani attempted a general landing, but were beaten back by the inhabitants of Bahrain and forced to retire.⁶⁷ The Imam gave up the idea of further aggressive measures against Bahrain and sought mediation, initially

⁶¹ / BLOIORL R/15/1/42 Resident/Abdullah bin Ahmed dated 24/8/1829 enclosed in Wilson/Newnham no.80 Pol. dated 5/9/1829.

⁶² / BLOIORL R/15/1/47 see Hennell/Newnham no.62 d.7/9/28 and enclosures.

⁶³ / BLOIORL R/15/1/47 Hennell/Imam d.7/9/1828 enclosed Hennell/Newnham no.62 d.7/9/1828.

⁶⁴ / BLOIORL R/15/1/47 Hennell/Newnham no.68 d.11/10/28.

⁶⁵ / see Lorimer (1970) part II pp852-854.

⁶⁶ / BLOIORL R/15/1/47 Hennell/Hammerton d.7/9/1828 enclosed in Hennell/Newnham no.62 d.7/9/28.

⁶⁷ / Lorimer gives a detailed account of the incident see pp852-855. A report of events is also found in BLOIORL R/15/1/48 Assoo, Native Agent at Bahrain/Resident dated 16/11/28.

through Wahhabi offices. However when a Wahhabi mediator arrived on the 15th of November Abdullah bin Ahmed Al Khalifah rejected his mediation under the excuse that he was 'not of sufficient consequence to become a mediator.'⁶⁸ The Imam thereafter proposed his terms of settlement through another Beni Saudi mediator. These optimistically included a demand for the restoration of zakat, but were unsurprisingly rejected.⁶⁹ Unable to effect his ambition for the subjection of Bahrain by either peaceful or aggressive measures, the Imam forwent his claim and subsequently sailed for Muscat on the 20th of November without a proper resolution to the conflict.⁷⁰ Hennell's explanation of British obligations under the General Treaty had however drawn attention to the distinction between legitimate and aggressive war of which the Al Khalifah had been previously unaware. Abdullah bin Ahmed thus immediately announced his intention to pursue the Imam back to Muscat and informed the Resident that 'we wish to make war on them in the same manner as they have made war upon us.'⁷¹ Seven 'Utub craft sailed at the end of April undertaking minor piracies at Muscat and returning in mid-June. At the same time, Abdullah bin Ahmed indicated his desire for Britain to mediate peace.⁷²

This new turn of events was not welcomed by the British Government. The Imam's failure to capture Bahrain had weakened his authority and the Al Khalifah's attempts to seek retribution hastened his decline. The Imam had been a trusted ally and central lynch-pin of previous British policy. The British had relied on the Imam to control local shipping and promoted his authority. His threatened collapse provoked an intense bipartisanship amongst the

⁶⁸ /BLOIORL R/15/1/47 Agent, Bahrain/Wilson d.24/11/1828 enclosed in Wilson/Newnham no.85 d.12/12/28.

⁶⁹ /ibid. The other terms of settlement demanded that friendly relations should exist between the two parties, and that Bahrain should provide troops at Imam's request for further expeditions.

⁷⁰ / ibid.

⁷¹ / BLOIORL R/15/1/48 Abdullah bin Ahmed /Resident dated 28/12/1828.

⁷² /BLOIORL R/15/1/48 contains an account of the conflict reported by the Native Agent and letters from Abdullah bin Ahmed. Agt/Res dated 3/5/1829 reports departure of vessels; Rahman/Res dated 28/5/29 reports desire for British mediation; and Rahman/Res dated 16/6/1829 reports return of Utub and piracies.

administration that strongly opposed the Bahrainis' aggression. The Secretary to the Government of India at Bombay, at this time Morris, agreed with the Resident that:

*'It would be most unwise to allow the power of this deserving Prince and useful Petty state to be destroyed and that of a combination of chiefs substituted in its place.' Since 'This would be alike injurious to our ally from whom we have often derived aid and to the interests of the trade of India which his Father and him have been alike zealous and successful in promoting.'*⁷³

Worse still, from the point of view of the British, the Gulf threatened to become a huge imbroglio of warmongering independent chieftains who fought constantly amongst themselves whilst exercising their right to wage legitimate war, and in the process eroded British influence and destroyed the stability of the region. Wilson noted that:

*'If any attempt were made to alter the former footing of things there could be little hopes of anything like permanence to the peace for men will hardly be satisfied with such changes.'*⁷⁴

Thus it was agreed that Britain would dissuade the Al Khalifah from their attempts against the Imam, disregarding Britain's supposedly neutrality in order to preserve the system of British control and prevent the Gulf from degenerating into a state of generalised disturbance. Accordingly, after contracted negotiations during which the Resident applied significant pressure on the Al Khalifah, a reconciliation was effected on the 2nd of December 1829, a principal condition of which was the mutual recognition of each other's independence and the mutual surrender of claims for tribute.⁷⁵

The successful conclusion of the conflicts with both the Al Jalahimah and the Imam of Muscat in favour of the Al Khalifah thus established the Al Khalifah as unchallenged incumbents. Their success was to a great extent dependent on the covert intervention of the British. Whilst the orthodoxy of non-intervention remained in place throughout the 1820's, Britain had covertly

⁷³ / BLOIORL Morris/Resident no.698 dated 1/7/1829.

⁷⁴ / BLOIORL Draft letter Wilson/Rahman dated 19/6/29.

⁷⁵ / BLOIORL R/15/1/50 Draft Letter Wilson/Imam dated 5/1/30 records conclusion of peace. In the aftermath of this invasion Morris directed the Resident to inform the Imam that the Governor-General considers 'the British government to be so far bound to, and connected with its ally the Imaum of Muscat as to prevent his ruin and downfall by every means in its power.' Morris/Res R/15/1/52 no.467 Pol dated 12/4/1830.

intervened in these conflicts to prevent the proliferation of instability to the unconscious benefit of the Al Khalifah. This interposition, and the Company's insistence that legitimate conflict be registered as distinct from piracy changed the nature of conflict between the Arab communities, and were significant factors that preserved the Al Khalifah in power. The system of legitimate conflict tended to restrict alliances amongst aggressors and so removed the need to maintain defences against an alliance of enemies, an undertaking that the Al Khalifah had found difficult at the best of times. Moreover British measures taken to limit conflict tended to freeze the existing balance of power in the Gulf, and in denying the dispossessed an opportunity to pursue their attacks on Bahrain unhindered, frustrated the success of such attacks and supported the incumbent Al Khalifah.

By the end of the 1820's the Al Khalifah had defeated their traditional enemies and secured both the state of Bahrain and their position as rulers. The system of independent states appeared to have reached a stable equilibrium once the disaffected Al Jalahimah had been marginalised. The Imam had had his power curtailed and the British had set a precedent in defending the existence of the independent states against foreign aggression or rapprochement by Persia. By 1830, the British acknowledged the Al Khalifah as personal rather than *anonymous* rulers of Bahrain, but still maintained a policy of non-intervention in the affairs of the independent states. It might reasonably have been hoped that the 1820's was a decade of teething problems and that now the new paradigm had been firmly established, in the 1830's the system of independent Arab states would be instrumental in the peaceful management of the affairs of the Persian Gulf. Unfortunately, the stability and coherence of the system of independent Arab states was inhibited over the next two decades by renewed foreign claims against Bahrain and internal feuding amongst the Al Khalifah. The change in the balance of regional power in the 1830's exposed the fundamental weaknesses at the core of the nineteenth

century paradigm. The combined effect of these factors prevented the emergence of a durable and independent state of Bahrain. Indeed, the Sheikhs of Bahrain became an impediment to British authority and undermined Britain's influence in the Gulf.

Chapter Four: An Untimely Intervention Interlopers and Invaders

This chapter will consider relations between Britain, Bahrain and external powers in the 1830's and 1840's. Having laid the foundations of the system of independent states in the 1820's and invented a role for itself as the protector against piracy, Britain hoped that affairs of the Gulf would tend towards stability and pacifism. In practice, however the efficacy of the independent Sheikhs to act out their role as agents for stability was moderated by the problems that revolved around their status as independent Chiefs. During the 1830's and '40's, unresolvable contradictions were exposed at the core of the system of independent Sheikhs that prevented its functioning as a viable mechanism for securing British hegemony. In part, the dogged attempts of external powers to raise claims of suzerainty and zakat over Bahrain undermined the independence of Bahrain. The magnitude of these approaches was consistently exacerbated by Britain's policy of non-intervention in the affairs of the Gulf. Additionally, Britain's refusal to guarantee absolutely the status of the independent Arabian chiefs worked against British interests. The Al Khalifah began to encourage other powers to extend their authority over Bahrain, even though their actions compromised their own independence and Britain's imperial authority. After catastrophic Egyptian success in 1840 in undermining Britain's position due to the voluntary submission of the Al Khalifah, the question of controlling the region came to be seen not just in terms of excluding other powers, but also constraining the independent chiefs. Britain was thus moved to increasingly ignore the myth of independence and impose its authority on the Al Khalifah.

The main protagonists who raised a claim against Bahrain during the first half of the nineteenth century were the Persians, the Ottomans, the Wahhabis and the Egyptians. These interested parties refused to accept Britain's declaration of the independence of Bahrain in the General Treaty, and persisted in pursuing their claims of zakat and tutelage. Relations between Britain and these powers fell into a predictable routine with Britain

counterpoising the sovereignty of the islands to any attempt on the part of external powers to establish their suzerainty over the islands, and then denying third parties the practical scope for realising their ambitions. Yet Britain was unable to gain acceptance for the system of independent rulers amongst other powers with a regional interest, except through displays of force. The British were unsure how to react to the question of zakat. As its reaction to growing Wahhabi influence over Bahrain in the 1830's showed, Britain tried to treat the surrender of religious tithes as a purely religious question. This approach however ignored the wider significance of zakat relations.

The Wahhabis had begun to extend their influence during the early 1830's concomitant with the re-emergence of their internal political cohesion and the accession of Turki bin Saud, Amir of the Nejd. They immediately requested tribute from both Bahrain and Oman, which was proffered by Abdullah bin Ahmed in 1830. In return the Wahhabi promised to guarantee Bahrain from external attack although the Al Khalifah were sceptical of Wahhabi ambitions since the mainlanders maintained their arch-enemy, Basher bin Rahman, at Tarut Island.¹ When the Wahhabi chieftain demanded further tribute from the Al Khalifah and the surrender of the fort of Demaum in April 1833² his demands were rejected and Abdullah bin Ahmed initiated a campaign against the Wahhabis with the assistance of the 'Amair section Beni Khalid tribe.³

Conflict between the Abdullah bin Ahmed and the Wahhabi Amir raged the next three years, manifesting itself as a series of piratical incidents, for which the Resident appears to have attempted to exact specific retribution and compensation. In the absence of wider British interference, the Wahhabi

¹ / See Lorimer (1970) part II pp856/7.

² / BLOIORL R/15/1/61 Agent Sharjah/Resident dated 24/4/1833.

³ / BLOIORL R/15/1/61 Agent/Resident dated 16/7/33 reports that Abdullah bin Ahmed returned to Bahrain and decided to break with Wahhabis.

continued to demand tribute according to traditional precedent and in accordance with traditional customs, Abdullah bin Ahmed therefore offered fealty. This act admitted his dependence on the Wahhabis, but the Bahrainis immediately renounced or withheld zakat when they felt strong enough to fight of an attack. Relations between the Wahhabis and the Al Khalifah through the 1830's and 1840's thus fluctuated between amity and hostility proportionate to the relative balance of power. Wahhabi overlordship was momentarily restored in 1836, Abdullah bin Ahmed, weary of a joint Persian/Omani attack, agreed to paid a nominal tribute to the Amir in return for his assistance against external attacks, but this tribute fell into abeyance with the Egyptian invasion of Hasa, and relations between the two parties became increasingly strained. A significant number of inhabitants of Saihat in Al Hasa migrated to Bahrain and the Bahrainis initiated a blockade of the Wahhabi coast.⁴

During the 1840's, when Civil War broke out in Bahrain, the Wahhabi Amir showed a close interest in the dynastic struggle of the Al Khalifah, actively playing of one side against the other. In 1843, Faysal bin Turki helped Muhammed bin Khalifah deal with the splinter Al Khalifah on condition that Muhammed bin Khalifah acknowledge the supremacy of the Wahhabis and pay back-dated tribute.⁵ Muhammed bin Khalifah predictably refused to surrender tribute to the Wahhabi and hostilities broke out between the two parties. Periodic skirmishes occurred for the next two years without any decisive outcome, until the defection in early 1847 of the 'Amair tribe to the Wahhabis tipped the balance between the two combatants in favour of the Wahhabis. Muhammed bin Khalifah thus rapidly arranged a settlement with the Wahhabis, once again acknowledging Wahhabi supremacy and agreeing to surrender an annual tribute of 84,000 Riyals.⁶

⁴ / See Lorimer (1970) part II pp868-70 and pp879-880 for overview of relation between the Al Khalifah and the Wahhabis during the 1840's.

⁵ / See Lorimer (1970) part II p879.

⁶ / *ibid* p880.

It is unclear what attitude the Resident took towards this early Wahhabi influence and the outbreak of conflict between Bahrain and the Wahhabis. Britain did not consider the Wahhabis as a regional rival worthy of concern, but the question of zakat remained problematic. On no account was Britain prepared to acknowledge that tribute or zakat was an admission of dependence which gave the receiving party a right to interfere in Bahraini affairs. Where comment was absolutely necessary, the British attempted to restrict the importance of zakat by treating it as a wholly religious phenomena. When the question arose in 1855, the Resident noted that:

*'As regards the tribute paid by Bahrein to which the Wahabee Ruler would seem to refer as a proof of dependency Whether it be viewed as a religious contribution as its name implies extorted from the fears of the late Abdullah bin Ahmed the Chief of the Island without direct subjugation or whether it be viewed as a condition of the tenure of the territory possessed by the Chiefs of bahrein of the mainland which is more directly open to invasion by the Wahabees and which is in the tenure of which the British Government takes no concern the question has always been carefully avoided by the British Authorities in the Gulf.'*⁷

But the problems surrounding tribute did not disappear with Britain's refusal to acknowledge the significance of the payment of zakat. The demand for zakat remained the commonest method by which external powers attempted to establish a right of interference in Bahrain affairs. In a non-religious context, the payment of tribute expressed relations of submission that did give suzerain authority to the recipient. Since the relationship between the Wahhabis and the Al Khalifah did not affect Britain's ability to manage the Gulf in the 1830's no explicit comment was required. These submissions could not however be ignored, when tribute was surrender to more powerful nations. In such cases, demanding or surrendering zakat was a direct challenge to Britain's hegemony in the Gulf. The co-existence of other suzerain powers with the right and ability to interfere in regional affairs, undermined the ability of the British to punish piratical transgressions by manipulating the Sheikh of Bahrain.

⁷ / BLOIORL R/15/1/132 Kemball/Anderson, Sec. to Gov't of Bombay dated 10/8/18955. See also Secret Letter No.166 dated 31/5/53 and Hennell/Bombay Secret Letter no.336 dated 22/10/51.

Ever since the Treaty of Shiraz, Britain was aware of the need to deny other regional powers an opportunity to extend their influence. This could only be done by squaring up to any challenge offered. The British sought to popularise a position of mutual neutrality towards the independent Arab states amongst other powers, but with little success. The British argued that since Britain did not covertly interfere in Bahraini affairs, this right should be surrendered by other interested parties who ought therefore to relinquish claims over the islands. Kemball explained that:

*'The policy involved in this conduct is founded upon principles which have now met with universal recognition- A foreign power has no right to force upon a particular state a certain individual as a ruler; it leaves that question for the decision of the state itself, but it has a right to demand that other foreign interests shall observe the same forbearance.'*⁸

This contorted sophistry, however, won few converts. To protect Bahrain's independence and its system of managing the Gulf, Britain was obliged to go to the brink of war with its regional rivals. Even then, Britain was not able to defend its regional authority owing to factors outside its control. When Egypt disregarded the diplomatic principle of mutual neutrality and invaded the Gulf in the late 1830's, Britain was helpless to prevent the system of independent states falling apart.

The Egyptians had swept through Central Arabia in the late 1830's under the command of Khurshid Pasha, overcoming the Wahhabi Amir, Faysal bin Turki, after a protracted campaign towards the end of 1838.⁹ This victory gave them control over the territory neighbouring Bahrain, and encouraged them to attack the islands of Bahrain. Both Britain and Al Khalifah were aware of the likelihood of an Egyptian invasion and the probable success of such an endeavour. Hennell had previously reported rumours of a secret agreement between Khurshid Pasha and the Imam of Muscat whereby the latter agreed to pay 30,000 Crowns in tribute if placed in possession of Bahrain, Lahsah and Qatif.¹⁰ Indeed Hennell even observed that:

⁸/ BLOIORL R/15/1/143 Anderson/Kemball no.288 Secret dated 20/11/54.

⁹/ BLOIORL R/15/1/71 Khurshid Pasha's success is reported in Hennell/Secret Committee dated 24/1/1839 Secret.

¹⁰/ BLOIORL R/15/1/72 Hennell/Willoughby no.48 Pol. dated 8/6/37.

*'There can be little doubt however that if no events occur in Europe to shake the power of Mahomed Ally Pasha in Egypt and Syria, his authority will gradually but surely be extended over the tribes inhabiting the Coast of Oman.'*¹¹

Yet there was no obvious course of policy for the British to follow. Britain fell back on its adopted policy of wait-and-see.

As a precaution against Egyptian encroachment, Abdullah bin Ahmed had made indirect approaches to the Resident in January 1839 to inquire about closer relations and Britain's willingness to defend him against Khurshid Pasha. The Bahrainis could not enlist a sufficient force to beat off any Egyptian advance and looked to Britain for protection. Nonetheless, strict adherence to Britain's policy of non-intervention in the Persian Gulf precluded any guarantee of the Sheikh's position, and Britain declined any assistance. A reply was deliberately withheld from the Sheikh rather than outrightly refuse his request. But the net result was that the British chose to leave the Sheikh isolated and exposed to an Egyptian attack. This one act imposed an inevitable conclusion upon the impending crisis and transformed the independent chief of Bahrain from an agent of stability and support-prop for British supremacy into a destabilising impediment that compromised British authority.

When the British formally recognised the Al Khalifah as independent by compacting the general treaty, Britain expected the Chiefs to refrain from compromising their independence, but their very independence prevented Britain from prescribing any course of action. As long as the Bahrain Sheikh was purportedly independent, then the British had to acknowledge that:

*'we possess no right to guide or control the external relations of Sheikh Mahomed ben Khuleefah.'*¹²

The Sheikh enjoyed the sovereign right to determine his foreign policy in his own interests. Once exposed before the Egyptians and rejected by the

¹¹ / BLOIORL R/15/1/71 Hennell/Willoughby, Secretary to Government, Bombay no.13 Secret dated 22/2/39.

¹² / BLOIORL R/15/1/138 Kembal/Malet no.57 dated 11/2/53.

British, the Al Khalifah unsurprisingly exercised this sovereignty to protect their position by responding to the Egyptians in time-honoured fashion.

In the first instance this meant that the Al Khalifah sought assistance from a stronger regional ally to face down the Egyptians. Abdullah bin Ahmed thus approached Persia.¹³ It was reported in January 1839 that:

*'the Chief of Bahrain has applied to the Persian Government for permission to place himself and his Island under its protection in the event of any expedition against his territory being contemplated from Nedgd.'*¹⁴

A Persian envoy, Hajee Qassim, eventually left Bushire on the 3rd of March to offer Bahrain Persian protection in return for their tribute,¹⁵ but Qassim failed completely to achieve any constructive outcome on his visit to Bahrain. Persia became frustrated with the machevellian diplomacy of the Al Khalifah and subsequently withdrew from any further immediate involvement in Bahrain affairs.¹⁶ In consequence, when the Egyptians approached Bahrain, the Al Khalifah were compelled to submit voluntarily in order to protect themselves.

Egyptian encroachment on Bahrain was first felt after the defeat of Faysal, when Khurshid Pasha sent a letter to the Bahrain Shuyukh requesting one of the Amir's sons at Lahsah and restitution of the tribute formerly paid to the Amir Turki.¹⁷ To complement these overtures, a French medic in the service of Khurshid Pasha, Monsieur Anton visited Bahrain on the 27th of

¹³ / Hennell admitted that strictly speaking there was no concrete evidence indicating the Sheikh's desire for closer relations with the British at this time although indirect approaches were made to the Resident in October 1838 through Suleiman bin Jassim. It is clear however that Hennell was aware of the Shuyukh's desire for British protection and assistance against the Egyptians. See BLOIORL R/15/1/71 Hennell/Willoughby, Secretary to Gov't Bombay no.13 Sec. dated 22/2/1839 and the instructions given to Maitland to refer any further inquiries from the Sheikh to Bombay.

¹⁴ / BLOIORL R/15/1/71 Hennell/Secret Committee dated 24/1/1839 Secret.

¹⁵ / op.cit. Hennell/Secret Committee dated 15/3/1839 reports departure of Hajee Qassim adding that Hennell believes the envoy will subsequently reside in Bahrain and receive and remit tribute.

¹⁶ / Three months later, when Khurshid Pasha 'seized' Bahrain, Persia merely sent Hennell a rukum instructing him to testify the validity of the Persian claim over Bahrain and write accordingly to the Egyptians since both countries shared the same interests in the face of this common enemy. See BLOIORL R/15/1/71 Hennell/Secret Committee dated 4/5/1839 no.43.

¹⁷ / *ibid.*

February and subsequently stayed three weeks.¹⁸ He brought correspondence from Khurshid Pasha to the Resident that clearly indicated the Egyptian's ambitions against Bahrain and his means of pursuing them. Citing alleged instances of Bahraini espionage, Khurshid Pasha stated his desire to subject the island, and his hope that through this pre-emptive forewarning, his British friends would sustain no losses and enjoy additional advantages after a successful Egyptian occupation. The Resident was informed that:

'Fugitive Arabs in conjunction with the Heads of the Island Sheik Khuleefa, are daily plotting against my Government attempting to seduce the Chiefs of the Province of Nedgd which have now submitted to me I consequently have determined to make myself master of this Island by force, the moroso, as it forms a principal part of Nedgd and has always been tributary from the period that Saood ruled over the latter country and therefore most justly ought to become subject to the Viceroy of Egypt who is now Lord of Nedgd Lahsah and Kateefect'.

Being aware that many Traders in the Island of Bahrein are commercially connected with the English, I have considered it my duty to communicate with Your Excellency as English Consul General, in order that these Merchants may be aware of my intentions, not wishing that as friends of the British Nation, they should sustain any loss, but on the contrary desiring to favour them in every respect that depends on me and upon my Government, I hope that from the moment that island submits to H.H. Mahomed Ali many more advantages will be derived by these Merchants and by the British Government itself, as the greatest harmony now reigns between the two States.'¹⁹

The Egyptian advance caused great concern both in the immediate sphere, and in the context of European diplomacy. The Resident, however had no standing orders for dealing with so abrupt an approach and was uncertain what course of action to pursue. In the first instance, Hennell wrote requesting orders from Bombay as to the correct course of policy and attempted to freeze the conflict until his orders were received. At the same time, he was aware that doing nothing would create a diplomatic hiatus and give the Egyptians the initiative. Hennell therefore planned a reply that requested Khurshid Pasha to postpone any planned operation against Bahrain until Hennell had received communication from his superiors at Bombay, and did not to express any opinion in the absence of specific authorised instructions save to note that 'the hostile intentions avowed by Your Excellency will be viewed with deep

¹⁸ / BLOIORL R/15/1/71 reported in Hennell/Secret Committee dated 28/2/1839.

¹⁹ / BLOIORL R/15/1/71 Khurshid Pasha/Hennell dated 24 Zil Hadar 1254 a.h. enclosed in Hennell/ Willoughby, Bombay no.14 Sec. dated 2/3/1839.

concern by my Government.²⁰ Notwithstanding Hennell doubted whether the Egyptians were willing to postpone their offensive. Rather he believed that the Egyptians would be more inclined to attack with haste in order to pre-empt any British opposition and interference. On the 2nd of March he informed Willoughby, Secretary to the Governor-General of Bombay that:

*'If the means of transport can be procured I am inclined to think that Khurshid Pasha will attempt the conquest of the Island without delay in order to anticipate any interference of remonstrances which may be offered by us.'*²¹

The Resident's impression of the Egyptians' preparations and strength were reinforced by Monsieur Anton's presence and exaggeration which left Hennell believing that an invasion would be launched eight days after the departure of the Frenchman. Accordingly, a much stronger reply was handed to M. Anton confessing Hennell's deep concern at hostile Egyptian actions and pressing upon Khurshid Pasha that any conflict was best avoided.²²

Monsieur Anton subsequently left on the ninth of March in possession of Hennell's reply to Khurshid Pasha. Hennell did not believe that his paper diplomacy would prevent an Egyptian attack. He observed that:

*'An intimation from the British Government that Bahrein was under its protection and that any attack upon it would be viewed as an act of hostility towards itself would I doubt not be sufficient to put an end to the designs of the Egyptian ruler upon that Island.'*²³

Accordingly, Hennell advocated more aggressive British measures to confront the Egyptians that ignored the policy of non-intervention and guaranteed the Sheikh of Bahrain. Under despatch to the Government of Bombay dated the 22nd February he reasoned that:

*'in some points of view there would be an advantage in counterbalancing his increased and increasing influence in this Quarter by maintaining the independence of the Shaik of Bahrein the only power in the Gulf who might be supported by our naval means alone and perhaps without any considerable expence being incurred in addition to that which our policy in this quarter at present involves.'*²⁴

Hennell intuitively advocated the one policy that would have protected British interests even though this meant turning British policy on its head. His emphasis remained that of confronting the Egyptians rather than reassuring the

²⁰ / BLOIORL R/15/1/71 Hennell/Secret Committee dated 28/2/1839 and Hennell/ Khurshid Pasha dated 28/2/1839 enclosed in above.

²¹ / BLOIORL R/15/1/71 Hennell/Willoughby, Bombay no.14 Secret dated 2/3/1839.

²² / BLOIORL R/15/1/71 Hennell/Secret Committee London dated 6/3/1839 Secret.

²³ / BLOIORL R/15/1/71 Hennell/Willoughby no.13 Secret dated 22/2/1839.

²⁴ / BLOIORL R/15/1/71 Hennell/ Sec. Gov't of Bombay no.13 Secret dated 22/2/1839.

Al Khalifah, but his proposed course of action undercut any Egyptian advance by protecting Bahrain from the dynamics of tutelage and submission. This recommendation was temporarily lost, however, when Admiral Maitland arrived in the Gulf in mid-March on board *HMS Wellesley* carrying Hennell's orders.²⁵ Britain thence launched a two-pronged attack to stand up to the Egyptians.

The *HMS Wellesley* was sent to Bahrain as a demonstration of British naval power to dissuade the Egyptians from extending into the Gulf. To maximise the advantage gained from Maitland's presence, *HMS Wellesley* was despatched to visit Bahrain, Ras Al Khaymah and Lingah. British officials at Bombay believed that Maitland's visit would itself stop further Egyptian adventures against Bahrain, at least temporarily if not permanently. Even the Resident believed that Maitland's presence in the Gulf would turn Khurshid Pasha's attention away from Bahrain towards Baghdad and Bussore.²⁶ Unlike Hennell's proposal, this show of strength was essentially cosmetic and did not protect the Al Khalifah. Lorimer mentions that Maitland was authorised by the Government of India to 'strongly use his influence' to deter the Egyptians from attacking Bahrain, and was additionally instructed to provide every support to the Bahrainis in their resistance, without himself engaging in actual hostilities.²⁷ This specific prohibition of hostilities restricted Maitland's opportunity to act decisively against the Egyptians and still prescribed any British action to defend Bahrain.

²⁵ / BLOIORL R/15/1/71 His arrival is reported in Hennell/Secret Committee dated 21/3/1839
Secret.

²⁶ / *ibid.*

²⁷ / Lorimer (1970) part II p863. Similar instructions appear to have been passed to Hennell, since he intimated his intention at the start of May to send a Cruiser to Bahrain with duplicate orders should the need arise. See BLOIORL R/15/1/71 Hennell dated 2/5/1839
Secret.

However Hennell's letter dated 22nd February had a significant impact upon the Government of India. His clarion warnings of the imminent success of the Egyptians and the urgent necessity for Britain to defend Bahrain led the Government of India to revise its orders. Under date of 18/4/1839 Admiral Maitland was informed that he was now:

'in the event of the Shaikh of Bahrain having claimed British interposition and offered to place his territories under British protection, to assure him of the temporary protection of Her Majesty's squadron in the Gulf, and to intimate to Khurshid Pasha that he had done so, and that it was incumbent on the Egyptians to abstain from further military proceedings until both officers should receive orders from their respective Governments.'

Additionally Maitland was authorised, in the event that no satisfactory response was received from the Egyptians, to the effect that he

*'might inform Khurshid Pasha that he would be held responsible, if he crossed over to the islands of Bahrain, for commencing hostilities against the British Government, whose officers were authorised to defend the principality against invasion until the pleasure of Her Majesty's Government should be known; and after making this declaration, the Admiral might exercise his discretion as to the best means of defending Bahrain.'*²⁸

Admiral Maitland thus attempted to intimidate the Egyptians by posturing around the Gulf in a British gun-boat, but Britain did not offer to explicitly guarantee the position of the Al Khalifah.

Maitland visited Bahrain the penultimate week in April. He concluded that an immediate or imminent Egyptian attack was unlikely,²⁹ and thus reassured set sail on the 27th April for Ras Al Khymah and Lingah. Hennell informed Willoughby on the 22nd of May that:

*'I have no doubt that the display of interest taken in their Affairs by the British Government, and the well timed Arguments of His Excellency and Mr. Edmunds will produce a powerful effect upon the minds not alone of the Tribes on the Coast but also upon those in the interior and will I trust in a very material degree check the progress of Khurshid Pasha's encroachments in the direction of Oman.'*³⁰

Yet at the same time Hennell could not ignore the Egyptian threat and thus sent a forceful correspondence, authorised by Bombay, which protested against Khurshid Pasha's designs on Bahrain and threatened a break in friendly relations. Although the letter has not been traced, Hennell reported its contents to his superiors, noting that:

²⁸ / Lorimer (1970) part II pp863/4.

²⁹ / BLOIORL R/15/1/71 Hennell dated 2/5/1839 reports meeting. A fuller report of the visit is found in Captain Edmunds' transcript of the voyage, mention of which is made in Hennell/Willoughby no.55 Secret dated 22/5/1839.

³⁰ / BLOIORL R/15/1/71 Hennell/Willoughby dated 22/5/1839 no.55 Secret.

*'In this letter I inform the pasha that I have been instructed to remonstrate strongly against him pressing his designs upon Bahrein and further to inform him explicitly that his proceedings are in direct opposition to the understanding existing between His Highness Mahomed Ali and the Government of Great Britain and that should he not attend to the remonstrances of the British Authorities such conduct would probably lead to an interruption of the amity now existing between the two states.'*³¹

This aggressive approach momentarily stopped the Egyptian military advance, but the Al Khalifah still felt pressurised by the Egyptians and exposed. Accordingly, the Pasha was able to convince the Bahrain Sheikhs to acknowledge Egyptian suzerainty and offer tribute without needing to engage in hostilities. News of Bahrain's voluntary submission was communicated to the Resident through one Mr. Effendi at the end of May and was met with total surprise and incredulity.³²

Egyptian control over Bahrain struck a piercing blow at the heart of the system of petty independent states. Concern was expressed about the probable domino effect the surrender of the Al Khalifah would initiate and the possible collapse of the system of independent states, but there was little the British could do to contain or redress the situation. On hearing M. Effendi's report Hennell announced that:

*'I fear this unfortunate concession will have a sinister effect upon our endeavours to induce the Maritime Arabian Chiefs on the Coast to continue for the purpose of opposing the encroachments of the Egyptians.'*³³

At the same time Hennell floundered for any explanation as to the Sheikh's voluntary submission, inquiring rather bemusedly:

*'What motives could possibly have induced the Shaikh of Bahrain to acknowledge /if he has really done so/ the supremacy of Mahomed Ali by consenting to pay him tribute after the support and encouragement he has received from the British Government to maintain his independence inviolate is beyond my power to explain, unless it be that he considers the engagement entered into rather in the light of an alliance than an admission of subjection to the authority of the Pasha.'*³⁴

When pressed for an explanation, the Sheikh explained that his voluntary submission had secured 'virtual immunity' from attack and since Britain had appeared unwilling to defend Bahrain it was a small sacrifice to make to ensure his security,³⁵ but Hennell was initially unable to rationalise the

³¹ / BLOIORL R/15/1/71 Hennell dated 2/5/18839.

³² / BLOIORL R/15/1/71 Hennell no.57 dated 30/5/1839.

³³ / BLOIORL R/15/1/71 Hennell/Secret Committee dated 6/6/1839.

³⁴ / *ibid.*

³⁵ / See Lorimer (1970) part II p865.

situation. At first he refused to accept the accuracy of Mr. Effendi's report until it had been independently verified by HCC Clive.

It was however impossible to ignore the problem posed by Mr. Effendi's report. Even the merest possibility that Effendi's report was correct obliged Hennell to act before HCC Clive returned on the 13th June and confirmed the Egyptian/Bahraini agreement. Hennell therefore returned a contumacious protest to the Pasha refusing to acquiesce or admit even for one moment any of the points of agreement between the Pasha and the Bahrainis: namely that Bahrain was a dependent of Nejd or that Muhammed Ali held any right to possess the island.³⁶ Hennell contemplated launching a counter-attack to drive the Egyptians away, but had no authorisation for the deployment of a land force. The Egyptian/Bahraini condominium was thus a *fait accompli* that could not be unravelled or ignored by Hennell burying his head in the sand.

Hennell continued to execute the necessary diplomatic protests, but the diplomatic initiative had passed to Cairo. Hennell admitted that his actions were meaningless in the absence of a will to militarily re-establish the independence of the Al Khalifah. He thus reported to Bombay that since:

*'under any circumstances I presume the employment of a land force to assist them in the maintenance of their independence is out of the question, the preservation of the Maritime Chiefs from the Egyptian yoke must therefore depend in a great measure upon the language held by H.M. Minister to Mahomed Ally and the measures they may think fit to adopt in the event of no greater attention being paid to their remonstrances than hitherto appears to have been exhibited by the Viceroy.'*³⁷

Fortunately a favourable response from Muhammed Ali suggested that the Egyptian presence in Bahrain might be withdrawn. Hennell used this opportunity to pressure Khurshid Pasha censuring him on the 4th of July to the effect that:

³⁶ / BLOIORL R/15/1/71 Hennell/Khurshid Pasha dated 29/5/1839 enclosed in Hennell no.57 Secret along with the articles of agreement between Muhammed Ali and Abdullah bin Ahmed.

³⁷ / BLOIORL R/15/171 Hennell/ Secret Committee dated 6/6/1839.

*'You appear to be exceeding your own authority in intimidating Chiefs of the Arabian Shore given that you have communicated to me the absence of any orders for the like.'*³⁸

In addition Hennell undertook a whistle-stop tour of the Gulf in an attempt to boost British prestige amongst the Arab Chieftains, wistfully reasoning that he had checked the influence of the Egyptians:

*'by having given encouragement and confidence to those disposed to maintain their connexion with the British and proportionally lowering the hopes and pretensions of [the] opposite party.'*³⁹

However the apparent rift between Muhammed Ali and Khurshid Pasha, and the development of the English/French conflict over Egypt had a much greater impact on the Gulf than Hennell's Gulf tour, since Khurshid Pasha was induced to withdraw from Bahrain and the Gulf in the summer of 1840.⁴⁰

In the aftermath, the British asked themselves how the Egyptians succeeded -albeit temporarily- in establishing a position at the heart of the British system for controlling the Gulf and why Britain was unable to prevent such an occurrence. Abdullah bin Ahmed's voluntary submission was inexplicable and a cause of resentment. There was no recognition however of the contributing factor that the general nature of British diplomacy made to the Egyptians success. As an incumbent High Government, the British had become aggressive advocates and defenders of the *status quo*. Their diplomacy therefore assumed an entrenched defensive character that eschewed hostilities unless absolutely necessary.⁴¹ There was no need for the British to act preemptively since it was assumed that unless disturbed, the status quo was itself a sufficient guarantee of Britain's position and standing. Accordingly, British diplomacy tended to be responsive: diplomatic inertia was only replaced by action when actual disturbances occurred, and the diplomatic initiative lay with those parties, such as the Egyptians, who sought to disturb the status quo. As a

³⁸ / BLOIORL R/15/1/71 Hennell/Khurshid Pasha enclosed in Hennell/ Willoughby Secret B dated 4/7/1839.

³⁹ / Reported in BLOIORL R/15/1/71 Hennell/Campbell, Egypt dated 15/7/1839.

⁴⁰ / Khurshid Pasha evacuation was reported in BLOIORL R/15/1/79 Hennell/Reid, Sec. Gov't. of Bombay, no.62 Secret dated 2/6/40.

⁴¹ / For instance Maitland was only given the freedom to act as he saw fit after a series of incremental expansions to authorised activity had failed to avert the imminent threat of hostilities.

result, Britain's own control over events was tenuous and British initiatives were focused on solving problems rather than pre-empting them. Events often ran a far greater course than was desirable and solutions were found to crisis without any solution to the underlying problems.

The Egyptian invasion highlighted a difference in Britain's and the Al Khalifahs' understanding and use of concept of independence. Britain's commitment to the existence of an independent territorial ruler of Bahrain under a British aegis was a mechanism for attempting to preserve a British sphere of influence without deriving additional responsibilities. The Al Khalifah enjoyed their position as Chiefs at the Company's pleasure. Indeed, amongst the British, it was argued that since Bahrain and the Al Khalifah owed their position to Britain that it could be expected, by reciprocal arrangement, that the Chief of Bahrain would restrain himself from acting against British interests or directives especially with respect to his foreign policy. The Al Khalifah on the other hand believed and acted as if their independence entitled them to act free from restraints. British hegemony was compromised by this fundamental misunderstanding. The British did not expect the Al Khalifah to compromise their standing once they had refused to guarantee the Al Khalifahs' position. They realised too late the unfortunate consequences of this oversight, but there was no other option for the Al Khalifah save for that they pursued. The Bahrain Sheikhs valued their position more than their independence and felt that by sacrificing the latter they might protect the first when both were under threat. Fortuitously, Britain was given an opportunity to reassert its regional authority when the Egyptians withdrew from the Gulf, even though they had secured their suzerainty over Bahrain. To take full advantage of the situation, the British began to consider more direct strategies for managing the Gulf.

Private discussions between London, Bombay and the Resident contemplated the assumption of protectorate status over Bahrain; a British invasion of the island; and the occupation of Bahrain by a third party- the most favoured choice being the Imam of Muscat. The Al Khalifah were now a liability for Britain. The Government of Bombay requested Hennell to submit his opinion on the desirability of closer relations with the Bahrain Sheikh. Initially Hennell appears to have favoured closer relations, observing that:

*'I ventured to submit an opinion that apart from considerations of more general policy I was disposed to consider the establishment of a regular and permanent Authority over the Maritime Arabs of the Persian Gulf as rather conducive than otherwise to our views for the suppression of piracy and the continued tranquillity of this Quarter. The extension of such an Authority over the Petty States would probably be attended with the great advantage of putting an end to their perpetual feuds and quarrels which have tended perhaps more directly than any other cause to cherish the predatory habits.'*⁴²

However, Hennell rapidly changed his mind. Even though the Al Khalifah were British proxies, Hennell felt their perfidy in submitting to the Egyptians and their growing oppressions nullified the benefits of closer relations. He subsequently argued that Britain's position was best defended by supporting Bahrain independence and dealing with the Sheikh in the existing framework.⁴³

Hennell cogently laid down the different issues that had any bearing on the question. He identified five factors had to be taken into account. On the one hand a small revenue would accrue to the British from closer relations with Bahrain, and the announcement that Britain had taken Bahrain under its protection would produce an end to interminable wrangling over tribute and stop external powers from intriguing against the island. On the other hand, Britain could not defend the Sheikh's mainland possession with its naval means alone and would inevitably dragged into Arab feuds with the possibly that much time would be wasted compelling the Sheikh to abide by British decisions,

⁴² / BLOIORL R/15/1/71 Hennell/Wiiloughby no.13 Secret dated 22/2/1839. This initial opinion was originally submitted under date 11/2/1839 and then revised in the above communication. The letter of 11/2/1839 could not be traced.

⁴³ / See *ibid* Secret Letter no.13.

Britain would in effect bind itself to protect Bahrain from all external aggressions, and additionally, in Hennell's own words:

*'In taking Bahrein under British Protection it must however be borne in mind that we place ourselves in direct collision with the claims upon that island entertained by the Governments of Persia and Muscat, claims the justice of which, if we have not openly acknowledged we have assuredly never opposed.'*⁴⁴

In conclusion Hennell submitted that this diplomatic conundrum could only be resolved pragmatically:

*'The question however for consideration appears to me to be whether the advantages to be desired from Bahrein becoming tributary to the British Government in return for being guaranteed against all external enemies would afford an adequate equivalent to the consistent embarrassments which so close and intimate a connexion with an Arab Chieftain occupying the position of Abdoollah ben Ahmed would certainly create.'*⁴⁵

After due consideration, the drawbacks associated with closer relations between Britain and Bahrain induced his superiors to reject the idea. British policy therefore crystallised in consideration of the trade-off between the need to ensure a unity of purpose between Bahrain and Britain and the embarrassment attendant upon closer relations with Bahrain. Instead of responding constructively to underlying causes that provoked the Al Khalifah's submission, the British rejected the idea of guaranteeing Bahrain or associating themselves to any greater degree with the Al Khalifah. They thus rejected the opportunity to construct an alliance of parties that would support British interests and perpetuated the conditions in which the independent chiefs were an obstacle to British ambitions.

Britain still had to find a system for managing the Gulf that precluded a repeat Egyptian disaster. Attention therefore focused on the desirability of occupying Bahrain by force. Bombay solicited Hennell's opinion on the fitness of the Bahrain for invasion in March 1840.⁴⁶ Hennell's reply was decidedly against such a venture, pointing out the inevitable hostility and opposition that it would provoke. He noted that:

'In respect to the practicality of British Troops taking up a position on the Island of Bahrein I have no hesitation in expressing my conviction that this can never be done under an amicable arrangement with Shaik Abdoollah ben Ahmed. The jealous and suspicious temper of this Chief will not allow him even to set foot voluntarily on the deck of

⁴⁴ / *ibid.*

⁴⁵ / *ibid.*

⁴⁶ / The suggestion of occupation was apparently first made in Bombay/Hennell no.478 dated 28/3/1840. See BLOIORL R/15/1/90.

a British vessel, and I feel assured that he would at once reject any propositions of the above nature...

.. The Shaik entertains a deeply rooted dread of the power of the British Government but he is brave and energetic, and unless he found himself deserted by his adherents, would not I am inclined to think submit to have his Island occupied by a foreign power without a struggle, except unless so powerful a force were brought against him as to preclude all hope of a successful opposition.⁴⁷

An interesting variation of this plan was however proposed by Hennell based upon the idea of a third-party invasion. He suggested that Britain would be justified, in the light of Abdullah bin Ahmed's unfriendly disposition, 'in supporting the claims of HH the Imam of Muscat on the Island of Bahrein should such a course be deemed expedient.'⁴⁸ It was noted that if the Imam could be persuaded to invade, this would preclude European interference and Bahrain would revert to a staunch British ally who would pay greater attention to British interests. Indeed so deep was the friendship existing between the two parties that Hennell stated that:

'our influence in the Persian Gulf will be almost as equally promoted and maintained by aiding HH in obtaining possession of that Island as if we took it for ourselves.'⁴⁹

Although the Imam was well-disposed to such a plan, he could not be induced to invade Bahrain without British assistance and subsequently retired to Zanzibar, effectively putting an end to British scheming. Britain thus was obliged to make do as best it could with the system of independent chiefs, making sure that the chiefs could not undermine British interests.

The Al Khalifah therefore remained the independent chiefs of Bahrain. Britain still exercised its authority by directing the Bahraini chief to pursue pirates and upholding the sanctity of Bahrain's independence to ward off Turkey and Persia. However, Britain withdrew its grant of those elements of sovereignty that allowed the Bahraini Sheikhs to compromise Britain's position. In effect it ignored the myth of independence to impose its will. The Shuyukh was surreptitiously presented with unwritten political and ethical precepts not to transgress. He was expected not to compromise his

⁴⁷ / BLOIROL R/15/1/90 Hennell/ Reid no.73 Secret dated 8/6/40. See also Hennell/Reid no.48 Secret dated 21/5/1840.

⁴⁸ / BLOIROL R/15/1/90 Hennell/Reid no.62 Secret dated 2/6/1840.

⁴⁹ / BLOIROL R/15/1/90 Hennell/Reid no.97 Secret dated 4/8/1840.

independence by encouraging external influences, nor exacerbate regional instability through his contumacy. Britain could not prevent Persia and Turkey from raising claim over Bahrain, but Britain now intended to covertly dictate the Bahraini Chiefs response.

Although British interference in the internal affairs of Bahrain had no basis in international law, it was underwritten by Britain's superior military prowess and resources and not something that the Bahraini Chief could indefinitely resist. Britain was aware that an open right to interfere exclusively in Bahraini affairs would not be admitted by any rival party. Accordingly, various contingencies were adopted under which Britain would identify itself more closely with the Sheikh through treaties and even take Bahrain under its protection in the event of foreign powers appearing in the Gulf.⁵⁰ Hennell was specifically directed in a letter from Malet, the then Secretary to the Governor-General at Bombay, under date 14/12/1847 to inquire as to the Sheikh's position on closer connections with British Government and the advisability of a new treaty with Bahrain as a pre-emptive measure against other foreign intrusions.⁵¹ In the immediate short-term however, there was no credible regional rival to Britain's authority and Hennell therefore concluded that:

*There appears to me to be at present an absence of circumstances, sufficiently pressing, to render it advisable for the British Government to involve itself in the embarrassment likely to arise out of a closer or more intimate connection with the present Ruler of Bahrain.*⁵²

Britain therefore disregarded the diplomatic niceties and sought to find a stable equilibrium for managing the Gulf behind the veneer of purportedly independent states. Relations between Britain and Bahrain entered a new phase of semi-coerced unity. Nonetheless, Britain was reluctant to abandon the myth

^{50/} See BLOIORL L/P&S/5/346 Secret Committee, Bombay/Secret Committee London no.23 d.15/3/48 & no.49 d.19/6/48; L/P&S/5/453 enclosure to secret letters no.23: Hennell/Malet 28/12/47 and no.31 d.21/1/48, Sec Committee, Bombay Board Minutes 22/2/48 & 7/3/48.

^{51/} BLOIORL L/P&S/5/453 enclosure to letter no.23: Malet/Hennell no535 14/12/47. See also letter dated 18/10/47 Secret Committee, London/ Secret Committee, Bombay.

^{52/} *ibid.*

of semi-coerced unity. Nonetheless, Britain was reluctant to abandon the myth of independence in its entirety lest it associate itself too closely with the Al Khalifah. Britain thus found that its attempts to control the Sheikh of Bahrain were not totally effective. Ultimately the attempt to stem the instability promoted by the Al Khalifah at a time when Bahrain was degenerating into civil war proved not only unsuccessful, but forced Britain to openly intervene in the internal affairs of Bahrain, jettison the myth of independence and accept responsibility for widespread oppression that its proxy rulers had committed.

Chapter Five: Settling the Question Towards a New Regional Order

This chapter will seek to examine the ramifications of independence within Bahrain. It will explore the manner in which the recognition of the Al Khalifah as independent sovereign rulers in the 1820's produced burgeoning oppression. It will consider the collapse of internal political authority in the late 1830's and 1840's that grew out of this oppression and Britain's decision not to openly enter into closer relations with the Al Khalifah after the Egyptian fiasco. As a result of these two factors, by 1845 Bahraini affairs were dominated by a bitter conflict between two feuding parties that had engulfed the island in Civil War. This war dragged on for the best part of fifteen years until the British intervened decisively, and in so doing, broke the myth of independence.

In the aftermath of the Egyptian crisis, Britain became more insistent that the Al Khalifah show reciprocal goodwill and deference to British interests. Britain imposed a settlement of an internal tribal dispute upon the Al Khalifah mid way through 1839 reasoning that:

*'The interest however which we have taken in his concern and the opposition we have shown to the hostile views of the Egyptian Ruler upon his Island entitles us in my opinion to require him to meet our wishes on the point in question.'*¹

Such was the forcefulness with which British demands were presented thereafter, the sheikhs was often left with no alternative in the long run but to acquiesce, yet no durable pressure could be brought to bear through which the sheikhs would consider British interests as an integral factor determining his own policies and diplomacy. Whilst Britain maintained the charade of non-intervention, hiding behind Bahrain's mythical independence and refusing to involve itself in the affairs of an independent state, the fundamental relationship between the Al Khalifah and the British remained unchanged and *ipso facto* unstable. The Al Khalifah by virtue of their independence retained the license to engage in any oppression they saw fit and were only subject to British sanction *a posteriori*. Accordingly, the Al Khalifah could still exercise a disruptive influence.

¹ / BLOIORL R/15/1/71 Hennell/Willoughby dated 22/5/1839.

As noted in Chapter One, the Al Khalifah had always exercised a tendency for oppression, but this had been traditionally under-exploited owing to the weak position of the Al Khalifah clan. The threat of migration and the renunciation of allegiance kept a check on their despotic tendencies which focused on the Baharnah. The Native Agent noted that by tradition:

*'No fixed taxes are taken from the Inhabitants, but whenever the Sheik requires money, he levies forced contributions particularly on the Bhareinys (or Aborigines of the Island), who being descendents of the old Persian settlers and consequently Sheahs in their religious tenets, are greatly oppressed.'*²

However the recognition of the Al Khalifah as independent rulers freed them from traditional restraints and encouraged their despotic and irresponsible tendencies with disastrous consequences for the peace of the region. The right of the subject populace to migrate was weakened by the responsibility the British placed upon the Sheikhs' to penalise their subjects. Britain accorded support to rulers who wished to keep their populace in check, in order to protect their system of accountability throughout the region. The ruling clique accordingly used these advantages to pursue the exactions unchallenged.

The British were aware of this growing injustice. The Native Agent reported a litany of abuse during the 1830's, but except on one instance when their Native Agent was wronged, turned a blind eye to the Al Khalifah's internal oppression as if the increased propensity and prevalence of oppression was one of the perks of the ruling clique. Describing the two years from 1836 to 1838, Lorimer noted that:

*'The lot of the Sheikh's subjects in Bahrain was growing, from day to day less endurable; and the islands were being rapidly depopulated by emigration. The towns were in a state of ruin and decay, and house rents had fallen to one eighth of what they had been only a few years before. Six sons of the Shaikh pretended to exercise separate and independent power, and their attention was chiefly devoted to extracting money from merchants and other men of means. The ordinary subject in Bahrain had no acknowledged rights; his domestic animals, even, were frequently seized on the pretext of corvee and were not returned.'*³

The unrestricted growth of oppression during the 1830's paralysed the effective workings of government. This absence of government was

² / BLOIORL R/15/1/71 Hennell/Willoughby no.15 Secret dated 2/3/1839.

³ / Lorimer (1970) part II p858.

reported after a feud between two families in 1838 went unpunished, the Native Agent noting that the people 'say that now there is no government in Bahrein whoever has power to do so rights himself with his own hands.'⁴ The banyans had already reached this conclusion a few years previously and responded by migrating wholesale with disastrous consequences for the Bahraini economy.⁵ Yet the British maintained a policy of non-intervention and thus had no open grounds to object to the Al Khalifah's misgovernment. Accordingly, civil society continued to disintegrate until the nexus of political power itself became contentious.

The paralysis of social activity on the island of Bahrain in the 1830's encouraged the fragmentation of authority within the Al Khalifah clan. In the mid-1830's, the Native Agent reported that:

*'The power of the Bahrein Chief has of late years been much weakened by the contumacious conduct of his sons and the divisions which have arisen among his other relations.'*⁶

Lorimer also noted that contemporaneously:

*'The sons of Shaikh 'Abdullah, also, had now provided themselves with retinues of 100 to 300 desperadoes each, and openly defied their father's authority; anarchy and confusion had overspread the whole Shaikdom.'*⁷

Thus, in a very short space of time, the cohesion of the Al Khalifah was not only fragmented but superseded by the formation of two distinct factions, the followers and relatives of Muhammed bin Khalifah and the supporters of the incumbent Sheikh, Abdullah bin Ahmed, both of whom blamed the other for the present unmanageable state of affairs, and in view of the diminishing base from which to extract resources, competed with each other for advantages and power. Once these groupings had become distinct factions, a physical divorce occurred with Muhammed bin Khalifah retiring to the mainland.

⁴/ BLOIORL R/15/1/79 Merza Muhammed Ali/Resident d.22/10/38.

⁵/ BLOIORL R/15/1/66 Agent/Resident d.23/1/34 noted that 'All the Hindoos are leaving Bahrain for the Persian Coast as fast as they can as there is no longer any Government in Bahrain.'

⁶/ BLOIORL R/15/1/71 Hennell/Willoughby no.15 Secret dated 2/3/1839.

⁷/ Lorimer (1970) part II p867.

Open conflict broke out in June 1842 when Abdullah bin Ahmed forced Muhammed bin Khalifah to flee to the mainland whence he sought Wahhabi assistance. In the short-term Sheikh Abdullah bin Ahmed regained control over both major islands of Bahrain, but a hostile coalition against Abdullah bin Ahmed rapidly crystallised and he was defeated. Muhammed bin Khalifah was proclaimed Sheikh and Abdullah and his supporter were exiled to Demaum. An immediate counter-attack in conjunction with the Sheikhs of Sharjah and Dubai was proscribed by the British,⁸ who preferred to see peaceful mediation and settlement between the parties and wanted to freeze the new configuration of Bahraini politics, but this turn of events did not decisively terminate the Civil War. Sheikh Abdullah and his sons, who were hereafter known as the 'Al Abdullah,' doggedly pursued their claim against the Al Khalifah from their exile over the next thirteen years. Almost immediately, Abdullah attempted to force the British into supporting his cause, by arguing that he was due assistance under the General Treaty, and deserved support because he had rejected Wahhabi overtures. Notwithstanding, the Resident declined to permit or involve Britain in any further conflict, especially one that would materially benefit the ex-Chief. Abdullah began wandering around the coast of Al Hasa, and eventually Abdullah resettled in Demaum, where owing to enmity between Muhammed bin Khalifah and the Wahhabis, he was given every encouragement in his intrigues.

An uneasy peace was established and held together through the latter half of the 1840's, but each year, imminent invasion of Bahrain was expected at the close of the pearling season and British intervention was requested. The British recognised the legitimacy and existence of discontent without vilifying it, but denied the Al Abdullah the opportunity to successfully pursue their claim. Whilst refusing to directly intervene, Britain undertook to prevent 'any

⁸ / Lorimer (1970) part II p873.

maritime expeditions which are likely to disturb the peace of the Persian Gulf.⁹ Elliot, the Secretary to Governor-General of the Government of India, was thus informed by the Government of Bombay that:

*'it appears to the Governor General very desirable that Maritime hostilities between the Chief of Bahrein and his refugee subjects in Kenn should be prevented.- If British Force in the Persian Gulf should not be sufficient for that purpose, it should temporarily be strengthened.'*¹⁰

This commitment to maritime tranquillity, even though Britain declined to formally decline to admit as much, effectively guaranteed Muhammed bin Khalifah's position since it sought to freeze the *status quo ante* as was. Britain's position was however untenable and subject to assault from all sides. Britain had no sanction over the Al Abdullah and the intemperate oppression of Muhammed bin Khalifah reinforced the legitimacy of the ex-Chief's claim. Without any control over the rebels, Britain could not indefinitely prevent an invasion when the balance of power was shifting so rapidly against Muhammed bin Khalifah. Neither could Britain prevent the Sheikh from seeking out foreign assistance to bolster his position, even though this yet again compromised his independence with adopting a position of explicit support for Muhammed bin Khalifah. These two pressures squeezed Britain's do-nothing policy until Muhammed bin Khalifah attempted to bolster his authority by encouraging Turkish influence in Bahrain in 1847.

Turkish influence over Bahrain was by its very nature antithetical to British strategic considerations. The Board of Directors therefore responded by ruling that any Turkish attempt upon Bahrain 'ought to be resisted by the British Naval Force in the Persian Gulf,' and frustrated Turkish attempts to gain a foothold.¹¹ In acting thus, the British denied Muhammed bin Khalifah the opportunity to strengthen his position against the Al Abdullah. It was unsurprisingly then that Muhammed bin Khalifah thereafter turned to the

⁹/ BLOIORL L/P&S/5/461 enclosure to secret letter no.51/57? Elliot, Secretary to the Government of India with Governor General /Bombay no.328 no date- early 1849.

¹⁰/ BLOIORL L/P&S/5/461 enclosure to secret letter no.51/57? Elliot/Bombay no.345 23/3/49.

¹¹/ See Bombay/Hennell no.334 & reply Hennell/ Bombay no.35 10/5/1847 quoted in R/15/2/84 Haworth/ F.Sec of State India in For Dept no.295Sec 1/9/1927.

British to protect himself. Early in 1849, the Al Khalifah accordingly made a unilateral offer to sacrifice a degree of their sovereignty in return for closer relations with Britain. In a letter to Hennell under date 9/2/49, couched in exaggerated prose, Muhammed bin Khalifah expressed his wish that Bahrain become a British protectorate.¹²

It is not clear whether Muhammed bin Khalifah's offer was a response to Hennell's approaches the previous year or a more subtle attempt by Muhammed bin Khalifah to free himself from British interference by calling Britain's bluff. Contemporary reports from the Native Agent suggested that the offer had been thoroughly discussed amongst the island's nobles and was in all probability a response to the collapse of Bahrain's political and economic stability. It was recorded that the Sheikhs:

*'have no control over any of them [the seceders- rb], nor have they any power over the people of Guttur, the inhabitants also such as the Pearl Divers and Sea faring persons have no means of subsistence after the departure of the Merchants from Bahrein and will leave the Country. The Sheiks therefore are in great distress.'*¹³

The British had already considered the advantages to be gained from closer relations and accordingly disdained the idea. When weighing up the proposal, the British believed that prosperity and stability would return to Bahrain if Britain took an closer interest in Bahraini affairs. Yet since they were responding to the Sheikh's offer and not making a proposition for closer alliance, British attention was drawn to the Al Khalifah's burgeoning oppression, which underpinned the contemporary internal political crisis and had spiralled alarmingly through the previous fifteen years. The undue

¹² / The letter read as follows: 'After compliments: Your letter by the hand of Humad ben Mh^d has reached me, and I have understood what you wrote. Thus I beg to inform you I perceived that all the countries in this quarter are dependent upon one or other of the Sultans as for example the Coast of Fars is dependent upon the Persians, and likewise the people of Koweit and the Wahabee Territories are dependent upon Turkey. and I, as I have at heart, am dependent upon the Exalted (British) Government, and subject to it; and I am certain you will not consent to injury accruing to the dependencies of the Sirkar- accordingly my request of you is, if you approve of what I have at heart and I am bent upon, that you will cause the return to me of those who have seceded from my territories, to the advantage of the country and its inhabitants- otherwise, if you account me dependent upon others, Be pleased to acquaint me with whatever is comfortable to the policy of the British Government.' BLOIORL L/P&S/5/461 enclosure to Secret Letter no.51/57 Muhammed bin Khalifah/Hennell d. 9/2/49.

¹³ / BLOIORL L/P&S/5/461 enclosure to no.51/57? Hennell/Malet no.19 14/3/49 enclosing extract from Hajee Jasseem/Resident 25/2/49.

responsibility that the Company would be forced to take for Muhammed bin Khalifah if the two parties were more intimately linked discouraged Britain from concluding any agreement with this unpalatable ally. Even still, a negative consideration had to be weighed carefully before Muhammed bin Khalifah's proposition was rejected. The British were concerned that accepting the Sheikh's proposal was the only sure way of preventing him from seeking foreign patronage in the event of his overtures being declined. Hennell forwarded the matter to Bombay and London, noting that:

'Were I quite satisfied that in case of his proposition being rejected, Sheik Mahomed ben Khuleefa would rest content in his present position as an independent Chief, I should have no hesitation in repeating my decided opinion that the inconvenience attending a closer connexion with him, would outweigh the advantages arising from such an arrangement. It is however evident from the tenor of the Sheik's letter, that he is strongly impressed by the tranquil and flourishing conditions of Koweit, and the commercial on the Persia Coast; the first as a dependency of the Ottoman Porte, the last, as a subject to the Persian Government

*...It will remain for the Government to decide whether the loss of our influence, likely to accrue in this quarter from the contingency of Bahrein becoming a dependency of either Persia or Turkey is of sufficient importance to counterbalance the trouble and embarrassment which may arise from accepting the proposition of the Chief of that Island, that he should henceforth be considered a subject of Great Britain. It is with diffidence and some hesitation I venture to add, that my own opinion inclines to the negative.'*¹⁴

After due consideration, Elliot wrote back indicating the Governor General's distaste for closer relations.

The British were not the only party to notice Muhammed bin Khalifah's growing oppression. The impending disaster that dominated the Gulf in the 1850's was fuelled by the irresponsible behaviour of the incumbent sheikh. The chief's rapacity lent credence to those who sought to depose him. Hennell noted in August 1850 that:

*'this oppressive and arbitrary conduct has alienated from him his best adherents, and any change in the Government of Bahrein would be handed with satisfaction by nearly all the inhabitants.'*¹⁵

¹⁴ / BLOIORL L/P&S/5/461 enclosures to secret letter no.51/57? Hennell/Malet no.2 Secret d.28/2/49.

¹⁵ / BLOIORL R/15/1/120 Hennell/Malet no.308 dated 13/8/1850. The Native Agent retrospectively explained how this alienation occurred, reporting that: 'The fear of retribution from Ameer Faysal had deprived him of the effective aid of the Beni Hajir Bedouins. upon which he was in the habit of depending in consideration of his alliance by marriage with their Chief and finally the influence of the Ameer or a rising disaffection towards himself threatened at an early date to range the inhabitants of the Guttur Coast on the side of his opponent.' See R/15/1/130 Kembal/Malet dated 3/4/1852.



Each year the credibility and seriousness of rumours of an impending rebel attack grew stronger since the resources of the refugees were greatly strengthened by the migration and defection of many Bahrainis who had suffered from Muhammed bin Khalifah's oppressions. In response, Britain was rather perversely obliged to offer conspicuous patronage to the incumbent sheikh and give license for his oppressions in order to salvage the system of independent states, when given a free choice in the matter months previously, it had rejected closer relations.

Eventually, the Al Abdullah assembled an overwhelming invasion force and contemplated their imminent restoration, but in the Autumn of 1850, when the refugees looked poised on the brink of success, Hennell informed Commodore Porter, the Senior Commanding Officer of the Persian Gulf Squadron, that regardless of the views of the local population:

*'the invasion of Bahrain by the fugitive Uttoobees resident on the island of Kenn is a step directly opposed to the views and policy of the british Government, and I am in possession of instructions to oppose any such attempt.'*¹⁶

The potential restoration of the Al Abdullah through recourse to arms marked a crisis point in the system of independent states. It indicated that in addition to the weaknesses of the British-sponsored independent chieftains in relation to external powers demanding zakat, the independent chief of Bahrain no longer had the requisite authority and means to guarantee and protect his own power from Bahraini pretenders. Britain was revulsed by the sheikh's oppressions, but the deposition of Muhammed bin Khalifah was an assault to Britain's authority in the Gulf that undermined the system of independent sheikhdoms. Britain had either to abandon the system of independent states as unworkable by allowing one of its proxies to be deposed by a third party or abandon the myth of independence and intervene to protect Muhammed bin Khalifah. Under such circumstances, Hennell made no attempt to conceal his positive support for Muhammed bin Khalifah and even offered Muhammed bin

¹⁶ / BLOIORL R/15/1/120 Hennell/Porter no.306 d.10/8/1850.

Khalifah the services of a cruiser to assist in his defence. Commodore Porter was notified by the Resident that given the circumstances:

*'I shall therefore inform the Sheikh of Bahrein that he is at liberty to take his own measures for preventing his enemies from executing a measure so highly detrimental to his interest so long as these measures are confined to the Arabian coast and further that in the event of his apprehending an attack upon Bahrein by Sea, the Government will be prepared to support him by the presence of one or more of its vessels.'*¹⁷

As a result of the substantive favouritism Britain bestowed on Muhammed bin Khalifah, the crisis subsided without further incident. A watershed had however been traversed. Britain had abandoned the myth of non-intervention to intervene when the security of a proxy chiefs was in question.

In the aftermath, Britain's policy of non-intervention in the affairs of the Persian Gulf was not abandoned immediately, indeed an apparent continuity was maintained until 1855 but it underwent a transformation, at least in internal discussions. Non-intervention was now interpreted as a policy of:

*'no more interference in the affairs of that quarter than is absolutely required by a due attention to British interests.'*¹⁸

Whilst this change was subtle, it was clear that continued instability was by definition detrimental to British interests. Since no settlement to conflict between the Al Abdullah and the Al Khalifah could be found that was acceptable to both parties, Britain could therefore, extrapolating from this new foundation of policy, align itself with one or other of the combatants in the hope of bringing a swift end to hostilities out of a due deference for its own interests. Britain thus began to offer more favourable support to Muhammed bin Khalifah. Simultaneously, the Resident suddenly realised the intimate links between the Al Abdullah and the Wahhabis, and by association, the close association between the refugees and the Ottoman Porte, although in truth the more menacing associations with the Ottoman Porte were to be found in

¹⁷ / BLOIORL R/15/1/120 Hennell/Porter no.306 d.10/8/1850.

¹⁸ / Extract of paragraph 2 of Secret Committee, Government of Bombay Despatch d.6/12/50, quoted in BLOIORL R/15/1/125 Malet/Hennell no.17A d.12/1/51.

Muhammed bin Khalifah's approaches that were initiated in November of that year.¹⁹

Britain's conspicuous patronage of Muhammed bin Khalifah did not however avert disaster. The Al Abdullah responded by seeking patronage from the Wahhabi Amir and the Gulf fragmented further into mutually opposed strategic blocs. The threat of war again arose in early 1851 after Bahraini merchants pressurised Muhammed bin Khalifah to settle the question of tribute with the Wahhabi Amir. The Sheikh offered Faysal 2,000 Crowns for the year's tribute,²⁰ but in the language of 'feudal' diplomacy the offer was interpreted not as a legitimate peace offering, but as a sign of weakness. Faysal responded with even greater vehemence, and rejected the offer. Hennell attempted to mediate this initial conflict,²¹ although negotiations rapidly broke down under the pressure of Arabian brinkmanship: since Muhammed bin Khalifah had refused a meeting with Faysal, the Amir refused to negotiate with 'Ali, the Sheikh's brother, and overlord of Doha.²² On the 13th of May, the Native Agent reported the 'failure of all negotiations for peace and the prospect of immediate hostilities between the Chief of that Island and Ameer Faysal the Ruler of Nedjd.'²³ A week later he noted that the Al Khalifah Sheikhs had organised a blockade of Qatif. Three weeks later even still, he reported the outbreak of war. Muhammed bin Khalifah, feeling himself to be secure, had exaggerated the conflict by a cavalier assault against the Wahhabis, however, before Britain chose to respond, Faysal marched to the Qatar Coast in early June. The chief of Doha, its influential merchants, and the settlements at

¹⁹/ Hennell requested orders on how to deal with this encroaching Turkish influence in the Autumn which confounded Bombay since no association between the Abdullah and Turkey had ever before been reported. See BLOIORL R/15/1/125 Malet/Hennell no.378 dated 18/10/51 and Goldsmith/Hennell dated 17/4/52. Muhammed bin Khalifah's overtures are reported in Hennell/Malet no.389 dated 18/11/1850 in R/15/1/120.

²⁰/ See BLOIORL R/15/1/125 Hennell/Malet no.130 3/5/51 enclosing letter from Native Agent/Resident d.26/4/51.

²¹/ BLOIORL R/15/1/125 See Malet/Hennell no.2689 d.23/6/51.

²²/ BLOIORL R/15/1/125 Hennell/Malet no.130 d.3/5/51.

²³/ BLOIORL R/15/1/125 Native Agent/Resident d.13/5/51 enclosed in Hennell/Malet no.158 d.27/5/51.

at Bidda, Wakrah and Fuwairat subsequently repudiated their allegiance to Bahrain, drastically altering the balance of power and threatening the very integrity of Bahrain.²⁴ The fugitive sons of Abdullah immediately set sail from their asylum in Persia.²⁵ In response, Muhammed bin Khalifah escalated the blockade of Qatif, and fomented a scheme to destroy Bidda, but he remained in dire peril. The Resident was thus obliged to underwrite Muhammed bin Khalifah's *locus tenens*, justifying his intimate involvement in the 'Utub quarrel with reference to the collusion of all the hostile parties arrayed against Muhammed bin Khalifah and the Ottoman Porte.

Hennell became particularly fearful that the success of the Al Abdullah would represent an extension of Turkish influence in this Quarter and thus wrote to Colonel Sheil, Consul General and HM's Special Envoy with Plenipotary Powers at the Court of Tehran to request authorisation for active measures to thwart the invasion.²⁶ In the meantime, although he was still unsure of the correct policy to adopt, Hennell attempted to mediate a possible settlement. Britain clearly held a pivotal role in this dispute: the success of the invasion depended upon securing British acquiescence, but British intervention would explicitly contradict its formal policy of not overtly interfering in the quarrel between the Al Abdullah and the Al Khalifah. Whilst Britain had promised to guarantee the Al Khalifah from the Abdullah, it had not envisaged any situations arising where it would be necessary to deploy its military power on Muhammed bin Khalifah's behalf. Britain had expected to pre-empt the outbreak of conflict through its moral intervention. With the threat of imminent war, however, the outcome of this conflict depended entirely upon whether

²⁴ / BLOIORL R/15/1/125. See Hennell/Hammerton no.189 d.6/6/51 and Hennell/Malet no.203 d.18/6/51.

²⁵ / Lorimer (1970) part II suggests this was at the request of Faysal (see p885). However, no mention of this arrangement could be found in the records. Rather it appears the Al Abdullah set sail on the grounds of unsolicited opportunism. See BLOIORL R/15/1/125 Hennell/Malet no.236 d.15/7/51.

²⁶ / BLOIORL R/15/1/125 see Sheil/Hennell no date, reply to Hennell/Sheil 19/5. It was a natural act for the Resident to take. The Consul General at Tehran having previously functioned as responsible authority for Persian Gulf official. Hennell was merely resuscitating the old chain of command.

Hennell chose to honour the commitment to Muhammed bin Khalifah with British Naval power.

The Wahhabi Amir had professed a desire not to estrange the Company during negotiations at the end of June, but Hennell remained ill-disposed toward the Al Abdullah exclaiming when they left Kenn that:

*'I do not consider they possess any further claim upon the good offices of myself or the liberal intentions of their relations of Bahrain.'*²⁷

Additionally Muhammed bin Khalifah exploited Hennell's insecurities professing his intense hostility to falling under Turkish suzerainty and strong desire to be considered 'a dependent of the English.'²⁸ It appears that during the course of his mediations, Hennell had already resolved to diffuse the situation one way or another without adversely affecting the position of Muhammed bin Khalifah when Sheil's reply to his earlier enquiry was received late June. This confessed an absence of authority with which to authorise Hennell to send the Gulf Squadron to Bahrain, but suggested a possible interpretation of current policy that would permit such action: Sheil argued that if the Wahhabi were intimated connected with the Ottoman Porte, then by virtue of the Al Abdullah's connection with the Wahhabi, all the hostile parties arrayed against Bahrain had therefore to be stopped with active measures.²⁹ Hennell immediately communicated this interpretation of policy to Commodore Porter and suggested that if Porter was in agreement, then the Persian Gulf Squadron should assemble at Bahrain, and 'do all in your power to delay the vessels, so far as this can be done by the employment of your naval means, confining any coercive measure entirely to the sea.'³⁰ Accordingly *HCC Clive* and *HCC Tigris* arrived off Bahrain on the 9th of September.

²⁷/ BLOIORL R/15/1/125 Hennell/Malet no.236 15/7/51.

²⁸/ BLOIORL R/15/1/125 Hennell/Malet no.203 d.18/6/51.

²⁹/ BLOIORL R/15/1/125 Sheil/Hennell no date rec'd late June 1851.

³⁰/ BLOIORL R/15/1/125 Hennell/Porter d.1/7/51.

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The Wahhabi Amir had professed a desire not to estrange the Company during negotiations at the end of June, but Hennell remained ill-disposed toward the Al Abdullah exclaiming when they left Kenn that:

*'I do not consider they possess any further claim upon the good offices of myself or the liberal intentions of their relations of Bahrain.'*²⁷

Additionally Muhammed bin Khalifah exploited Hennell's insecurities professing his intense hostility to falling under Turkish suzerainty and strong desire to be considered 'a dependent of the English.'²⁸ It appears that during the course of his mediations, Hennell had already resolved to diffuse the situation one way or another without adversely affecting the position of Muhammed bin Khalifah when Sheil's reply to his earlier enquiry was received late June. This confessed an absence of authority with which to authorise Hennell to send the Gulf Squadron to Bahrain, but suggested a possible interpretation of current policy that would permit such action: Sheil argued that if the Wahhabi were intimated connected with the Ottoman Porte, then by virtue of the Al Abdullah's connection with the Wahhabi, all the hostile parties arrayed against Bahrain had therefore to be stopped with active measures.²⁹ Hennell immediately communicated this interpretation of policy to Commodore Porter and suggested that if Porter was in agreement, then the Persian Gulf Squadron should assemble at Bahrain, and 'do all in your power to delay the vessels, so far as this can be done by the employment of your naval means, confining any coercive measure entirely to the sea.'³⁰ Accordingly *HCC* Clive and *HCC* Tigris arrived off Bahrain on the 9th of September.

²⁷ / BLOIORL R/15/1/125 Hennell/Malet no.236 15/7/51.
²⁸ / BLOIORL R/15/1/125 Hennell/Malet no.203 d.18/6/51.
²⁹ / BLOIORL R/15/1/125 Sheil/Hennell no date rec'd late June 1851.
³⁰ / BLOIORL R/15/1/125 Hennell/Porter d.1/7/51.

The despatch of these cruisers decisively swung the military and strategic balance in favour of Muhammed bin Khalifah. On arrival, Porter disdained the Sheikh enthusiasm for immediate offensive measures against the Kenn fleet, but a British ship joined the blockade to allow the pearlers to set to sea, minimising the economic dislocation caused by the war.³¹ Eventually the Al Abdullah gave up trying to draw out the conflict in the hope of waning British interest and peace was concluded through the mediation of Said bin Tahnoon on 28th July 1951.³² The blockading fleet returned a day later, Doha was restored to Ali bin Khalifah, brother of the Sheikh, and Muhammed bin Abdullah and Faysal retired inland.³³ Muhammed bin Abdullah was settled at Demaum furnished by Faysal with 300 bags of dates and 2,000 Crowns.³⁴ A normal state of affairs resumed, but it was clear that this return to *the status quo ante* was in no small measure due to British intervention. Somewhat poignantly, and honestly, Porter afterwards reported that:

*'After the defection of Bidda and the successful forcing of the blockade of Kateef by the sons of the Ex-Bahrein Chief I think that had it not been for our interference and the opportune arrival of the Squadron in Bahrein the Ameer would have succeeded in his views upon that Island.'*³⁵

Hennell's actions did not meet with complete satisfaction when reported to his superiors. His intervention exceeded that prescribed by his standing orders, but nevertheless his action was not disowned. The outcome of Hennell's intervention was evidently beneficial to British interests. And thus since there was no alternative policy which would prevent a successful invasion by the Al Abdullah in these circumstances, Malet therefore informed Hennell that:

³¹ / BLOIORL R/15/1/125 Porter/Hennell no.124 d.21/7/51 Mubarak bin Abdullah subsequently ran the blockade, 150 died, including Bushire bin Rahman bin Jabir and Rashid bin Abdullah

³² / BLOIORL R/15/1/125 Hajee Jasseem/Resident d.28/7/51 enclosure to Hennell/Malet 5/8/51.

³³ / BLOIORL R/15/1/125 Hajee Jasseem/Hennell d.2/8/51 enclosure to Hennell/Malet 5/8/51.

³⁴ / BLOIORL R/15/1/125 Hennell/Malet no.305A d.22/9/51 Although this last fact nearly drove Muhammed bin Khalifah to initiate another conflict, he was placated by his brother.

³⁵ / BLOIORL R/15/1/125 Hennell/Malet d.5/8/51 enclosing Porter/Hennell d.31/7/51.

*'As your measures were taken in consequence of a letter from Colonel Sheil... the Right Honible the Governor in Council is pleased to permit you to maintain the attitude you have assumed pending orders'*³⁶

At the same time, however, this letter restated the Government's previous commitment to neutrality unless hostilities broke out, and the illegitimacy of pre-emptive British intervention with a view to solving the situation once and for all. Having temporarily solved the question of Civil War, Britain's favouritism towards the Al Khalifah became increasingly unpalatable.

Muhammed bin Khalifah became increasingly maverick in his conduct, making no attempt to temper his oppression or consider the consequences of his actions. Not only did the Company cease to benefit from his continued stay in power and were adversely tainted by their support of this oppressive despot, British 'standing' threatened to be engulfed by revolution and/or invasion. The British therefore reverted to their previous policy of strict non-intervention and neutrality, distancing themselves from the incumbent Sheikh. This shift corresponded to the appointment of a new Resident, Captain Kemball, and is evident from the Spring of 1852. In stark contrast to Hennell, during a meeting with the Sheikh in April 1852 Kemball insisted that:

*'he[Muhammed bin Khalifah-rb] must be fully aware that the policy of Government had hitherto enjoined upon its Agents the observance of a perfect neutrality in the quarrels and internal dissensions of the Arab Tribes provided only that its arrangements against the revival of piracy were duly respected and the limits of the Restrictive Line were not transgressed.'*³⁷

The Sheikh's overtures, designed to gauge the depth of his British support were thus thoroughly rebuffed. Having reverted to the previous policy of neutrality, Kemball exercised greater caution than his predecessor, reporting that:

*'it was not my purpose to impress him with such a sense of security as should lead him to relax his efforts in his own defence or to permit him to infer a pledge of protection which circumstances might deny me the opportunity or it might not be consistent with the policy of Government hereafter to redeem.'*³⁸

However, privately, Kemball recognised the dangers of re-asserting neutrality, noting that under the circumstances this tended to encourage greater Turkish influence in Bahrain:

³⁶ / BLOIORL R/15/1/125 Malet/Hennell 24/9/51.

³⁷ / BLOIORL R/15/1/130 Kennell/Malet dated 3/4/52.

³⁸ / *ibid.*

*'The first impulse of Sheik Mahomed ben Khuleefa on finding himself assailed from such a quarter would be to throw himself unreservedly upon our protection and support and were these denied him in his hour of need it must be evident that his next and only resources would be to solicit the aid of his former opponents or in words at the sacrifice of his independence to acknowledge virtually his subjection to the Ottoman Porte.'*³⁹

The preservation of British neutrality had to be weighed against the advantage that the Ottomans would accrue. Through 1853 and 1854 non-intervention became an increasingly difficult position to sustain, since it appeared to sanction an outcome to the conflict, be it Muhammed bin Khalifah accepting Turkish overlordship, or the refugees who were intimately associated with the Wahhabis successfully regaining control of Bahrain, that would adversely affect British interests. The British therefore began to consider means of pre-emptively solving the dispute.

In response to a projected invasion by Faysal in February 1853, British neutrality *vis-à-vis* the 'Utub dispute was restated, it was noted that 'the condition still exists which prompted the deviation from our usual policy of non-interference in the summer of 1851.'⁴⁰ Muhammed bin Khalifah continued to be ever-fearful of his security, but refused to address the root cause of his precariousness: namely his alienation from his subjects. Kemball noted in May 1853 that:

*'His disaffected subjects and recalcitrant debtors flying his authority were daily joining their standard [i.e. the Al Abdullah- rb] and finally their intrigues with the refugees on Kenn as also with his descendents on the Guttur Coast whose allegiance could not be relied on necessitate his maintaining constantly a state of preparation and rendered him liable at every moment to be taken at disadvantage.'*⁴¹

Instead the Sheikh hatched a scheme to blockade the Al Abdullah and force them to move by blocking off their principle means of existence. The Resident was informed of this plan during his annual tour in 1853, but refused to involve British personnel or give Muhammed bin Khalifah free license even though Kemball was suitably impressed that the Sheikh:

*'really thought that he had no alternative but to pursue this course unless the British Government would guarantee his protection from the dangers which threatened him.'*⁴²

³⁹/ BLOIORL R/15/1/130 Kemball/ Malet 29/5/1852.

⁴⁰/ BLOIORL R/15/1/138 Kemball/Malet no.57 dated 11/2/53.

⁴¹/ BLOIORL R/15/1/138 Kemball/Malet no.128 dated 20/5/1853.

⁴²/ *ibid.*

Two factors prevented the British from acquiescing or assisting the Sheikh. The Resident was neither convinced that that British influence was sufficient to effect this end, nor could such interference be reconciled to professed neutrality. He noted that:

*'such a consummation is hardly obtainable by British influence- more direct negotiations with Ameer Fysul for this purpose were they otherwise unobjectionable- could lead to no result unless coupled with a Guarantee for the regular payment of the stipulated tribute by Sheikh Mahomed ben Khuleefa and moreover their removal by our means from the only spot whence they can be allowed to prosecute the recovery of their inheritance would be tantamount to a denial of their right and inconsistent with our professions to exercise no interference in the quarrel of the Uttoobee family.'*⁴³

Kemball thus refused to grant the Sheikh an open license to execute his plans, and instead negotiated a compromise whereby the British promised to interdict if the Al Abdullah began to move from port and acknowledged the legitimacy of any actions Muhammed bin Khalifah might take in these circumstances to stop it. Without British involvement however, Muhammed bin Khalifah's plan floundered, and the prospect of war still loomed.

A skirmish between the refugees and the Al Khalifah in June 1854 threatened to escalate into an all-out conflict, but the despatch of *HCC* Clive and *HCC* Tigris averted further hostilities and the Abdullah agreed to recompense the Bahrain Sheikh. Yet whilst conflict was on this occasion prevented, Commodore Porter was want to report that:

*'However satisfactory the cessation of hostilities thus effected, even though it were limited to the season of the Pearl Fishery, there are I fear indications of an approaching struggle between the rival branches of the Uttoobee family which a mere friendly interposition on my part consistently with the declared Policy of Government may be ineffectual to avert.'*⁴⁴

Less than a month later, despite reports that the Al Abdullah had begun to negotiate their differences with the Sheikh, an unexpected attack involving over 2,000 men was attempted by the refugees. Fortunately, from the British point of view, lest it appear as a result of Hajee Jasseem's 'culpable reticence' that the British were in collusion with the refugees, this invasion was defeated, but as Kemball noted 'its failure was a matter of accident.'⁴⁵ Kemball

⁴³ / BLOIORL R/15/1/132 Kemball/Malet no.6 27/7/1853.

⁴⁴ / BLOIORL R/15/1/143 Commodore Porter report on vents enclosed in Kemball/Anderson, Bombay no.248 Political dated 18/7/54.

⁴⁵ / BLOIORL R/15/1/143 Kemball/Anderson no.262 dated 20/7/1854.

immediately set sail for Bahrain intending to restore British standing and dissuade Muhammed bin Khalifah from exercising his right to declare war not because of some forbearance towards the refugees, but to prevent a potentially embarrassing situation for the British. Indeed, as a result of this surprise attack, British enmity towards the Al Abdullah reached its apex. Kemball fulminated that:

*'while no reliance can be placed upon the forbearance and professed neutrality of Ameer Fysul it is evident also that the exiles at Demaum, taking advantage of the support he affords them, are little disposed to shape their operations by the Rules of open and proclaimed war and seek only an opportunity at a period of profound peace to make a sudden descent upon the Island.'*⁴⁶

However, if Resident failed to persuade Muhammed bin Khalifah not to attack, he noted that:

'Our position would become one of much embarrassment. The occurrences of 1851 would be repeated and our part therein being confined to the defence of the Island would probably terminate in no more satisfactory result.'

At the same time two possible solutions to the conflict presented themselves to Kemball and he therefore requested orders as to the expediency of wider interference, explaining to his superiors that:

*'In order to obtain a final solution of this difficulty the choice of two alternatives seems open to us, either to revert to our previous position of neutrality between the Chiefs of Bahrein and the Wahabee Ruler, or otherwise, to assume at once the office of Arbitrator.'*⁴⁸

During a meeting with Muhammed bin Khalifah on the 4th August - Kemball had arrived the previous day- the Sheikh pointed out British complicity in this latest escapade. Kemball reported that he:

'dwelt with much earnest upon the magnitude of the danger he had so narrowly escaped and in expressing his fears for the future even ascribed indirectly to British Policy the difficulties in which he was involved.'

Muhammed bin Khalifah in effect reiterated the points he had made at an earlier interview with Hajee Jasseem, arguing that the external assistance offered to the Al Abdullah altered the balance of power and that the Al Abdullah only continued to remain a potent threat because the British prohibited the Sheikh from taking any offensive measures. He had previously informed the British Agent that:

⁴⁶ / *ibid.*

⁴⁷ / *ibid.*

⁴⁸ / *ibid.*

⁴⁹ / BLOIORL R/15/1/143 Kemball/Anderson no.1A dated 21/8/1854.

*'Had it not been for the English, these people would never have come down upon us for we were lulled into security.... you know that we had it in our power to seize them but refrained least they /the English/ should say why did you do so?'*⁵⁰

Not only was Kemball unable to deny these substantive allegations, he was so affected as to forget about maritime security and offer to assist Muhammed bin Khalifah in his defence. He reported that:

*'Concurring as I did in the force and validity of these arguments I now informed the Sheikh that tho' my visit to Bahrein had been undertaken with the view if practicable or restoring tranquility -I was prepared nevertheless under certain contingencies to afford him assistance in defending the island and those contingencies having in my opinion arisen it only remained to determine the mode of procedure which should be most consistent with the instruction I hold from Government.'*⁵¹

Consequently, upon Muhammed bin Khalifah's suggestion, Kemball proceeded to send Muhammed bin Abdullah twenty four hours notice of evacuation by HCC Clive.⁵² In sending notice for evacuation to the Al Abdullah, Kemball did not confine himself merely to assist Muhammed bin Khalifah in his defence as per 1851, but initiated a more encompassing intervention that sought to settle the dispute once and for all by denying the Al Abdullah the opportunity to successfully prosecute their claim over Bahrain and thus, effectively nullify it.

The collective patience of the British had been exhausted. British policy in relation to the 'Utub quarrel became decidedly pragmatic and its neutrality was abandoned in order to settle the dispute. Kemball initially justified his position with reference to the greater good. He reasoned that this minor British injustice towards Muhammed bin Abdullah was a prerequisite to the re-establishment of maritime stability, explaining in despatches that:

*'Whatever the hardship to Mohamed ben Abdoolla it would seem but right that the pretensions of one individual which have so often compromised the public tranquility should yield to considerations of the general safety and that he should be at length called upon to relinquish the struggle by accepting the proffered bounty of his rival in any form that may be considered eligible.'*⁵³

The reply from the Secretary to the Government of Bombay, Anderson, gave Kemball retrospective authorisation to pursue the Al Abdullah. It also documented the more pragmatic underpinnings of British policy. Having noted

⁵⁰ / BLOIORL R/15/1/143 Hajee Jasseem/Resident received 23/7/1854 enclosed in Kemball/Anderson no.242 dated 20/7/1854.

⁵¹ / BLOIORL R/15/1/143 Kemball/Anderson no.1A dated 21/8/1854.

⁵² / Reported *ibid.*

⁵³ / *ibid.*

the inability of Muhammed bin Khalifah to recover his rights independently since 1842 -but omitting to mention the Britain's assistance to Muhammed bin Khalifah in times of danger- Anderson pointed out the inescapable instability that stemmed from the 'Utub dispute, noting that:

*'It has been abundantly proved that Sheik Mahomed bin Abdullah's claims can only be supported by the sacrifice of the tranquility of a great part of the Persian Gulf while the power of the present chief, even if eventually overcome, would be sufficient to render that absence of tranquility of very long duration, and then after he shall have been overcome, the means which are now employed by his rival might then be adopted by him.'*⁵⁴

Lest continued instability further undermine British standing and maritime tranquillity, Anderson thus acknowledged the pressing need to act against the Al Abdullah.

Despite repeated professions of friendship and innocence and other attempts to seemingly evade responsibility, Muhammed bin Abdullah was thus encouraged to sign a Treaty of Reconciliation -see *appendices*- at the Resident's insistence on the 24th May 1855. Under the terms of this treaty Muhammed bin Abdullah acknowledged that:

*'from this day hence forward Sheikh Mahomed bin Abdullah on the part of himself and his relatives does renounce all pretension to Chiefship of Bahrein and does bind himself to abstain for the future from any designs upon that island and its dependencies'*⁵⁵

In return, the Sheikh received the title from certain Bahraini villages and was, after the British had revised their policy given the apparent amity between the two parties, additionally permitted continued residence at Demaum. The Treaty was gladly approved by Kemball's superiors, who gushingly flowered him with commendations and praise.⁵⁶ It appeared in the Summer of 1855 that with the Resident's conspicuous support for Muhammed bin Khalifah assured, the dispute had been conclusively settled and a return to stability and prosperity was imminent.

⁵⁴ / BLOIORL R/15/1/142 Anderson/Kemball no.288 Secret dated 20/11/54.

⁵⁵ / See Appendix Three.

⁵⁶ / BLOIORL R/15/1/132 Anderson/Commodore Jones, Acting Resident no.289 dated 23/10/55 and no.384 dated 20/12/55.

The reconciliation was however short-lived. Quarrels over its terms and conditions, and an intransigence on the part of Muhammed bin Khalifah to honour them, led to sporadic aggression on both sides. The threat of a recommencement of hostilities, new invasion scares, and a renewed enthusiasm on the part of foreign powers to push their claims over Bahrain demanded a more enduring solution. Britain blamed Muhammed bin Abdullah for the instability. Kembal's successor, Captain Jones noted that:

*'Sheik Mahomed ben Abdullah has but the one fixed purpose...Rooted deep as it is, neither warning, nor threat, serves to eradicate the feelings for revenge which under every condition is actuating him at Demaum and which has led him to break every form of pledge that he has ever subscribed to.'*⁵⁷

Since no trust could be placed in this Sheikh, Jones argued that:

'The simple question now is, how long is forbearance to be exercised with people so constituted who regard temporizing as pusillanimity, and pervert its humane object to the worst of purposes? Toleration of annually recurring evils from the act of the viciously disposed -it should be remembered- is damaging to small communities struggling for commercial existence amid continued anarchy, especially on coasts so hard featured as those bounding this Gulf.

*The prosperity of years indeed can be laid waste in a day by men actuated with the spirit of the nomadic races of Arabia such as are now actively in arms against the territories of the Chief of Bahrein; for we know destruction is inherent in their nature and, locust like, where they tread, a desert remains behind. In short I lean to the opinion that it is incumbent on all conservative Government to render such pests to society innocuous by any means at their disposal.'*⁵⁸

Britain thus resolved to outlaw the Al Abdullah from the Gulf and forcibly remove them from Demaum in the Winter of 1859 and abandon its policy of non-intervention in its entirety.

The injustice of this action was noted at the time, however there was no ethical foundation to British policy with regard to the 'Utub quarrel. As Jones later admitted when tried to explain British toleration towards and support for Muhammed bin Khalifah:

*'Sheikh Mahomed ben Khuleefa being our own adopted protege, and however deserving of immediate chastisement, it was plain to me that present endurance was preferable to hastily undoing the policy of years.'*⁵⁹

Yet the end of the conflict did not lead to the re-emergence of stability in the Gulf, since Muhammed bin Khalifah was left in a position that allowed him to undermine British influence. Britain's involvement in the Civil War had

⁵⁷ / BLOIORL R/15/1/179 Jones/Anderson dated 11/10/59.

⁵⁸ / *ibid.*

⁵⁹ / BLOIORLR/15/1/179 Jones/Anderson no.2A 7/5/60.

shattered the myth of non-intervention, but left the position of the Bahraini Chief unchanged. The next ten years were characterised by sporadic conflict and instability originating in apparently irresponsible actions on the part of the Bahraini chieftain. It could not however have been otherwise as long as Muhammed bin Khalifah enjoyed any prerogatives as an independent sheikh.

Having tolerated the idiosyncrasies of Sheikh Muhammed for over twenty years, the British reached the inevitable conclusion that a long-term settlement could only be effected by cutting the independent Chief down to size. Britain was therefore driven to depose Muhammed bin Khalifah and replace him with a more pliant relative whilst reserving some matters of state for British consideration only. In the process, the British established their right to veto and decide the succession of Bahrain and shattered the myth of independence for good.

Conclusion.

In 1820, the British had hoped that the system of independent Arab chieftains would promote responsible and 'civilised' government throughout the Gulf, but the net result of British intervention in the 'Utub quarrel was to re-establish Muhammed bin Khalifah as an oppressive and irresponsible, independent despot. Freed from the constraints of the Civil War Muhammed bin Khalifah grew increasingly despotic. Indeed, the Sheikh himself appeared to be the major obstacle preventing a return to regional peace and stability. Commodore Balfour, commander of the Persian Gulf Squadron in 1859, was moved to confess:

*'to being convinced that while a chief of so ill neglected a mind holds sway in Bahrein but little hope can be entertained of its affairs subsiding into a state of tranquility.'*¹

Yet the Sheikh owed his position to Britain, since they alone had guaranteed his position against the refugees and the Wahhabis. As Jones noted:

'Her Majesty's Government representatives in this quarter have ever been authorized to employ and have employed physical force to preserve existing relations and the integrity of Bahrain in particular.

*... To the British Government in short, the present Sheikh of Bahrein is indebted for the security of his possessions, and, in point of fact, for the Rulership as for the past sixteen years nothing but the uniform support we have given him has enabled him to keep his place against civil discord and repeated invasions.'*²

Muhammed bin Khalifah's actions thus reflected on the British themselves. Although Britain had by now abandoned the policy of non-intervention, even direct involvement in the internal affairs of the Gulf was not enough to secure general tranquillity. As long as the British respected any aspect of Bahrain's independence however, Muhammed bin Khalifah could not be voluntarily induced to organise his affairs to Britain's satisfaction.

Between 1859 and 1869 a near-continuous period of disagreements and conflict between Britain and Bahrain was occasionally punctuated by temporary periods of quiescence, but for the most part, the relationship lurched from one crisis to the next. With each successive crisis or flashpoint, Britain intervened more decisively, and incrementally withdrew the Sheikh's

¹ / BLOIORL R/15/1/179 Balfour/Jones 7/10/1859.

² / BLOIORL R/15/1/179 Jones/Lytton, Constantinople 3/6/60.

sovereign prerogatives. The Sheikh on the other hand became a parody of himself, becoming proportionately more antagonistic as he was emasculated, giving the impression that he was committed to his own-self-destruction. The more Britain intervened, the more problematic Muhammed bin Khalifah became. By the mid-1860's, the relationship between Britain and Bahrain was self-defeating. The system of independent states prevented Britain from exercising a satisfactory level of imperial domination out of respect for a mythical independence and gave Muhammed bin Khalifah too much opportunity to undermine Britain's essential strategic interests.

Muhammed bin Khalifah's nominal independence, which he owed to Britain, inhibited British involvement in the internal affairs of Bahrain, and lessened the impact of Britain's attempts to exercise its moral influence and persuasive abilities. Unless British counselling was supported by a display or threat of aggression, Muhammed bin Khalifah ignored it with machiavellian evasions. Captain Jones despaired that:

*'Advice however appears to be wholly lost on such a personage.'*³

The relationship fell into a predictable game of cat and mouse. When the British withheld Muhammed bin Khalifah the opportunity to exercise his sovereign rights in one quarter and placed him under duress, the Sheikh responded by asserting those rights that remained to him in the aftermath of any situation even more forcefully. All the time, Muhammed bin Khalifah refused point-blank to British interests, maintaining that he was independent and therefore sovereign over his own actions. This strictly accurate statement of the Sheikh's legal position was, however, lost on the British who interpreted it as contempt. Captain Jones offered an unflattering summary of his personal relationship with Muhammed bin Khalifah in the 1860's, noting that:

*'Throughout my intercourse with Sheikh Mahomed ben Khuleefa of Bahrein the same ungovernable fits of passion have possessed him, leading him to display at all times the most sovereign contempt for all and everything both in action and in speech.'*⁴

³ / BLOIORL R/15/1/166 Jones/Anderson 10/10/59 no.411.

⁴ / BLOIORL R/15/1/166 Jones/Anderson 10/10/59 no.411.

Such was Muhammed bin Khalifah's pique that he even vented his spleen on the British, exploiting the hierarchical structure of the British administration to do so, and sought to actively encourage Persian and Turkish interest in Bahrain.⁵

In September 1858, when Hajee Jasseem, Britain's Native Agent in Bahrain, commented on the Sheikh's unjust harassment of the banyans, Muhammed bin Khalifah threatened to expel the banyans outright and was quoted as saying that:

*'We do not want British subjects in our Territories. We are not afraid of them. We possess the Turkish flag.'*⁶

This deliberate offence only served to alienate Muhammed bin Khalifah even more, and encouraged the British to question their very commitment to him. It led Jones to conclude that:

*'however magnanimous the Gov. may be there are not wanting those who would annoy him until forbearance reaches a limit which is ruin to the actor. ... nothing in my opinion is more treacherous or more perilous to Bahrein and its ruler than the disposition and temperament of Sheikh Mahomed ben Khuleefa himself.'*⁷

Britain were thus led to withdraw their patronage of their own protégé in an attempt to stabilise Bahraini affairs. The Government of Bombay authorised evacuation from Bahrain in May 1861. British evacuation from Bahrain constituted a renunciation of Britain's support for Muhammed bin Khalifah and destroyed the foundations on which the Sheikh derived his power. It was hoped that the Sheikh would prefer to reconcile himself with the British rather than face imminent dislocation and could thereafter be presented with a series of ultimata to which his agreement would be mandated. Jones accordingly informed Muhammed bin Khalifah that:

*'your having to the present moment met all advances towards a settlement with the same versatile spirit and indifference as last year now compels me to cease intercourse with Bahrein.'*⁸

However, the Sheikh reacted by showing complete disdain and disparaging Britain's ability to coerce a solution or impose its will on him.

^{5/} See BLOIORL R/15/1/132 Kembal/Malet no.2 23/1/54 and no.7 2/7/53.

^{6/} BLOIORL R/15/1/166 Quoted in brief part of letter from Zitto bin Chuppurpooah and Fursoo ibn I. Rahmon, Natives of Sind dated 22nd Muharram 1275a.h. corresponding to 2/9/1858 enclosed in Jones/Anderson no.319 Secret dated 21/9/1858.

^{7/} BLOIORL R/15/1/166 Jones/Muhammed bin Khalifah 10/10/59.

^{8/} BLOIORL R/15/1/179 Jones/Muhammed bin Khalifah 20/5/61.

Britain had to impound two of the Sheikh's warships before a reconciliation could be effected.

As an integral step to rapprochement with the British, Muhammed bin Khalifah was induced to sign a perpetual treaty of friendship- the terms of which specifically elucidated the rights of British Protected Subjects in Bahrain. This agreement known as the Friendly Convention -*see appendix two*- represented the first step towards Britain's assumption of formal protectorate over Bahrain. The Convention elicited a series of binding pledges from the Sheikh as to his future behaviour in return for Britain guaranteeing the Sheikh against maritime aggressions. It was agreed that the only hope for the future of the Gulf lay in formally reasserting Britain's authority. Jones noted that:

*'under no condition other than as a British colony or under a British Government can the internal repose of the Island and territory be secured or tranquility maintained in the Persian Gulf. -If the latter is to be its future state- binding treaties if not stringent ones, can only be effective with dispositions so imputive and wayward as those of its present chief.'*⁹

Muhammed bin Khalifah was therefore obliged to bind himself to renounce all maritime aggressions, to quickly report and redress all instances of piracy by those within his jurisdiction and to accept British arbitration in all future disputes. Thus Convention thus provided a recognisable and legal foundation for future British intervention and retribution in instances when the terms of this contract were breached. In addition the Friendly Convention appeared to have put a stop to the Sheikh's attempts at an independent foreign policy. Whilst this was not expressly mitigated by the Convention, the pledge to recognise British arbitration in cases of dispute could be used to inhibit any further attempts to make Bahrain a dependency of Persia or Turkey.

Nonetheless, Muhammed bin Khalifah disregarded the Convention to pursue further oppressions. The sheikh encouraged both Persia and Turkey to

⁹/ BLOIORL R/15/1/179 Jones/ Anderson no.348 10/11/60.

renew their claims over Bahrain in the hope that he could evade his responsibilities for punishing piracies and oppression. Perversely the Sheikh accepted the suzerainty of both Persia and Turkey simultaneously to protect himself from the British. Britain however disregarded the sheikh's sovereignty in order to secure its hegemony. Captain Jones informed Muhammed bin Khalifah that his initiatives were meaningless:

*'I told him that if he hoisted the colours of every nation under the sea, we should still consider him the independent chief of Bahrein and as such hold him responsible and punish him promptly for any act of aggression by sea or any act of himself or his Tribe that tended to disturb the peace of the Gulf.'*¹⁰

This forthrightness however exposed the emptiness of Bahrain's independence. In reply, Muhammed bin Khalifah fulminated that:

*'You insist upon my being an independent Chief said the Sheikh, in reply (and I confess to my mind somewhat pertinantly) and you refuse to give me the slightest power to act for myself, or settle my own disputes'*¹¹

Not only did Jones empathise with the Bahrain Chief, but the Secretary in Bombay, Rawlinson, was also led to doubt the legality of Britain's position. He communicated these uncertainties to Jones, indicating that:

*'I am not sure that we should be entitled to resent the voluntary surrender of the Sheikh's independence.'*¹²

A two-fold change in British diplomacy thus occurred. The sheikh had pushed his relationship with the British to breaking point and Britain subsequently committed itself to removing him. Equally, the British determined to protect their power and hegemony in the Persian Gulf from the obduracy of the independent chiefs, by compacting formal agreements that retrospectively legitimised those rights that the British enjoyed. When the Bahraini Sheikh laid waste to Doha and Wakrah in 1867, the British resolved to inflict an exemplary punishment. A ship arrived in the Gulf in May 1868 to seek retribution, but since it had forgotten its ammunition, it was not until July 1868 that pressure could be bought to bear on the Sheikh. In the meantime however, Muhammed bin Khalifah had fled Bahrain to avoid

¹⁰/ BLOIORL R/15/1/179 Cruttenden/Jones reply 21/7/60.

¹¹/ *ibid.*

¹²/ BLOIORL R/15/1/179 Rawlinson/Jones dated 4/5/60.

responsibility. An agreement was therefore concluded with the brother of Muhammed bin Khalifah under the terms of which it was agreed that the incumbent Sheikh had forfeited the Chieftainship of Bahrain and Muhammed bin Khalifah was outlawed. Britain thus recognised Sheikh Ali bin Khalifah as the sole and legitimate ruler of Bahrain, and settled the question of Bahrain's independence.

In thus deposing and outlawing the incumbent and formally sovereign chief of Bahrain, Britain shattered the myth of independence and heralded the beginning of a new phase of colonial domination. Privately the British had never accepted that the Al Khalifah or any other Arab chieftain were truly independent. Since they owed their independence to Britain, it was unthinkable that this independence would bestow upon the Al Khalifah the right to contradict British interests. Yet over the course of the nineteenth century, the independence of Bahrain had become an obstacle that prevented Britain from protecting its essential strategic interests. The British persevered with the system of independent states up to the point at which its own proxies turned around and attempted to use their independence to undermine British hegemony. When this happened, Britain withheld the contentious aspects of sovereignty from the Sheikhs and imposed its own interests by force. The sovereign rights of the independent chiefs to conduct their own foreign policy, generate their own income through oppression, and wage war on their enemies were thus incrementally ignored, until ultimately Britain disregarded the sovereign right of the Al Khalifah to elect their own leader.

This encroaching British activity in the Persian Gulf, and specifically in Bahrain affairs can be evidenced in Britain's variable attitude to the question of succession. In 1834 Bahraini tribal elders agreed to the replacement of the Amir, Khalifah bin Sulman, by his son, Muhammed bin Khalifah without interference or outside pressure. In 1842 Britain tacitly supported the

derobing of Abdullah bin Ahmed and having conveyed this information to interested parties, in practice guaranteeing the success of any coup de main, subsequently watched impassively as Muhammed bin Khalifah assumed individual control. In 1869 Isa bin Khalifah was appointed Sheikh by the British Resident, given Muhammed bin Khalifah's unsatisfactory behaviour, and the break down of local authority. The nineteenth century history of Bahrain was thus a history of an unworkable experiment in independence that was defined by the opposition of Britain's and Bahrain's strategic interests. Since the independence of the Al Khalifah did not safeguard British hegemony, the system of neutral benevolence was thus replaced by a tendency for Britain to exercise more direct control of Bahraini affairs. Once the myth of independence had been shattered and the British began to create the formal foundations for its exercise of power, the relationship was inevitably reconstructed as a protectorate under the Foreign Jurisdiction Acts and an Order-in-Council. And thus, one of the more bizarre features of Bahraini history emerges. Although Britain spent the best part of the nineteenth century proclaiming Bahrain's mythical independence, Bahrain was granted its independence for a second time in 1971, although it had never formally been colonised.

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| V/23 | Administration Reports 1873- 1900 |

A Brief Chronology of Bahrain/British Relations.

- 1808 Exchange of letters Britain and Rahman bin Jabir.
- 1810 Treaty of Friendship with Rahman bin Jabir.
- 1814 Nepean considers offering Sultan of Musqat possession of Bahrain in return for assistance against Qawasim.
- 1816 Sultan of Muscat attacks Bahrain, but intervention of the Resident reduces effect. Treaty of Friendship signed.
- 1820 Bahrain made a party to the Treaty of Peace.
- 1822 Treaty of Shiraz, [Bruce & Governor of Fars].
- 1826 Attempted British mediation between Abdullah bin Ahmed and Rahman bin Jabir.
- 1828/9 Imam of Muscat threatens invasion. British mediate.
- 1830 Bahrain submits to Wahhabis.
- 1835 Al bin 'Ali & Al Bu 'Ainain migrate to Abu Dhabi.
- 1839 Threatened Egyptian invasion of Bahrain. Sheikh offers sovereignty to British Government and is refused. Bahrain subsequently submits to the Egyptians.
- 1840 British consider occupation of Bahrain.
- 1842/3 Civil War. Muhammed bin Khalifah, Isa bin Tareef & Bashir bin Rahman defeat Abdullah bin Ahmed. Abdullah bin Ahmed expelled. Muhammed bin Khalifah becomes sole Sheikh.
- 1853 Threatened invasion of Bahrain by Faysal.
- 1855 British mediate between Al Khalifah & Al Abdullah leading to agreement in May.
- 1856 Agreement of 1856 binds the Sheikh to hand over slaves to British vessels of war, and to seize and deliver boats which carry them, to the British Resident.
- 1860 Muhammed bin Khalifah extends invitation for protection to both Persia and Turkey.
- 1861 Friendly Convention with Independent Ruler of Bahrain.
- 1867 Muhammed bin Khalifah and Zaid lay waste to Qatar.
- 1868 Muhammed flees Bahrain. 'Ali becomes sole Sheikh.
- 1869 Muhammed bin Khalifah attacks Bahrain, and is joined by Muhammed bin Abdullah and Nasir bin Mubarak. 'Ali killed. Muhammed bin Abdullah declares himself. Sheikh. Muhammed bin Khalifah denounced by British as a pirate and deported to India. Isa bin 'Ali appointed Amir.
- 1880 Agreement of 22.11.1880.
- 1892 Exclusive Agreement of 13.3.92.
- 1898 Isa bin 'Ali binds himself to prohibit arms dealing through Bahrain territory.
- 1900 First Appointment of British Political Assistant for Bahrain.
- 1913 First Order in Council passed under Foreign Jurisdiction Acts, but not applied until 1925.

Translation of the General Treaty with the Arab Tribes of the Persian Gulf, 1820¹

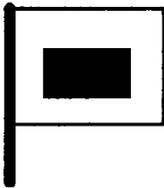
In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate!
Praise be to God, who hath ordained peace to be a blessing to his creatures.
There is established a lasting peace between the British Government and the Arab tribes, who are parties to this contract, on the following conditions:-

Article 1.

There shall be a cessation of plunder and piracy by land and by sea on the part of the Arabs, who are parties to this contract, for ever.

Article 2.

If any individual of the people of the Arabs contracting shall attack any that pass by land or sea of any nation whatsoever, in the way of plunder and piracy and not of acknowledged war, he shall be accounted an enemy of all mankind and shall be held to have forfeited both life and goods. And acknowledged is that which is proclaimed, avowed, and ordered by government against government; and the killing of men and taking of goods without proclamation, avowal, and the order of a government, is plunder and piracy.



Article 3

The friendly (literally pacificated) Arabs shall carry by land and sea a red flag, the breadth of the white in the border being equal to the breadth of the red, as represented in the margin, (the whole forming the flag known in the British Navy by the title of white pierced red), and this shall be the flag of the friendly Arabs, and they shall use it and no other.

Article 4.

The pacificated tribes shall all of them continue in their former relations, the exception that they shall be at peace with the British Government, and shall no fight with each other, and the flag shall be a symbol of this only and of nothing further.

Article 5.

The vessels of the friendly Arabs shall all of them have in their possession a paper (Register) signed with the signature of their Chief, in which shall be the name of the vessel, its length, its breadth, and how many Karahs it holds. And they shall also have in their possession another writing (Port Clearance) signed with the signature of their Chief, in which shall be the name of the owner, the name of the Nacodah, the number of men, and the number of arms, from whence it sailed, at what time, and to what port bound. And if a British or other vessel meets them, they shall produce the Register and the Clearance.

1/ Aitchison (1932) p192.

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Article 6

The friendly Arabs, if they choose, shall send an envoy to the British Residency in the Persian Gulf with the necessary accompaniments, and he shall remain there for the transaction of their business with the Residency; and the British Government, if it chooses, shall send an envoy also to them in the like manner; and the envoy shall add his signature to the signature of the Chief in the paper (Register) of their vessels, which contains the length of the vessel, its breadth, and tonnage; the signature of the envoy to be renewed every year. Also all such envoys shall be at the expense of their own party.

Article 7.

If any tribe, or others, shall not desist from plunder and piracy, the friendly Arabs shall act against them according to their ability and circumstances, and an arrangement for this purpose shall take place between the friendly Arabs and the British at the time when such plunder and piracy shall occur.

Article 8.

The putting men to death after they have given up their arms, is an act of piracy and not of acknowledged war; and if any tribe shall put to death any persons, either mahomedans or others, after they have given up their arms, such tribe shall be held to have broken the peace; and the friendly Arabs shall act against them in conjunction with the British, and, God willing, the war against them shall not cease until the surrender of those who performed the act and of those who ordered it.

Article 9.

The carrying off of slaves, men, women, or children from the coasts of Africa or elsewhere, and transporting them in vessels, is plunder and piracy, and the friendly Arabs shall do nothing of this nature.

Article 10.

The vessels of the friendly Arabs, bearing their flag above described, shall enter into all the British ports and into the ports of the allies of the British so far as they shall be able to effect it; and they shall buy and sell therein, and if any shall attack them, the British Government shall take notice of it.

Article 11.

These conditions aforesaid shall be common to all tribes and persons, who shall hereafter adhere thereto in the same manner as to those who adhere to them at the time present. End of Articles.

Issued at Ras-ool- khyra, in triplicate, at mid-day, on Saturday, the twenty-second of the month of Rabe-ul-Awal, in the year of the Hegira one thousand two hundred and thirty-five, corresponding to the eighth of January one thousand eight hundred and twenty, and signed by the contracting parties at the places and times under written.

Signed at Ras-ool-khyra at the time of issue by

(Signed) W. Grant Keir

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Major General.

(Signed) **Hassun bin Rahmah**,
Sheikh of Hatt and Faleia, formerly of Ras-ool-khyma.

(Signed) **Razib bin Ahmed**, Sheikh of Jourat al Kamra.

(An exact Translation) (Signed) **T.P. Thompson**, Captain 17th Light
Dragoons & Interpreter

Later signed by **Sheikhs Shakbout, Hassun bin Ali, Saeed bin Syf, Sultan bin Suggur, Syud Abdool Jalel bin Syud Yas, Suleman bin Ahmed bin Khalifa, Abdoola bin Ahmed bin Khalifa, Rashid bin Hamad, Abdoolla bin Rashid.**

Ratified by the Governor General in Council on 2nd April 1820.

Translation of Preliminary Treaty with the Shaikh of Bahrain 1820.²

In the name of God the merciful, the compassionate!

Know all men there hath come into the presence of general William Grant Keir the Saeed Abdool Jalil, Vakil on the part of Shaikh Suleiman bin Ahmed and Abdulla bin Ahmed and there have passed between the General and the said Abdool Jalil, on the part of the above named the following stipulation.

Article 1.

That the Sheikhs shall not permit from henceforth, in Bahrein or its dependencies, the sale of any commodities which have been procured by means of plunder and piracy, nor allow their people to sell anything of any kind whatsoever to such persons as may be engaged in the practice of plunder and piracy; and if any of their people shall act contrary hereto, it shall be equivalent to an act of piracy on the part of such individuals.

Article 2.

That they shall deliver up all the Indian prisoners who may be in their possession.

Article 3.

The Sheikhs Suleiman bin Ahmad and Abdulla bin Ahmad shall be admitted to the terms of the general Treaty with the friendly Arabs. End of Articles.

²/ Aitchison (1932) p233.

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Issued at Sharjah in triplicate on Saturday, the twentieth of the month of Rabeool Thany, in the year of the Hegira one thousand two hundred and thirty five, corresponding to the fifth of February one thousand eight hundred and twenty.

W.G. Keir, Major General

The above articles accepted by me in quality of Vakeel of the Shaikhs named above.

Saeed Abdool Jalil bin Saeed Yasal Tabatabee.

Translation of an agreement proposed by His Highness Housein Ali Mirza through his Minister Zekee Khan and discussed between him and William Bruce Esquire Resident of Bushire on the 8th August 1822.³

Preamble.

As the arrangement and settlement of the affairs of subjects are entrusted to Kings and their Governors and the prosperity of States depends upon the unanimity and friendship existing between Governors of adjoining Provinces for this purpose the States of Great Britain and Persia entered into terms of amity and good understanding that the subjects of each and their Forces might enjoy tranquillity and prosperity. The Governors of Provinces adjacent had maintained this appearance and had rested satisfied with and actually fulfilling them. Two years previous to this, it became necessary to suppress the piratical acts committed by the Joassmes for which purpose troops arrived from India in the Gulf of Persia and a few acts were committed by them aroneously which did not accord with the good understanding existing with this State, in consequence of which His Royal Highness Hoosein Ali Mirza, Kajar, deemed it advisable for the good of his Government, to make known these acts of misunderstanding to the Government appertaining nearest to his own that they might beware of what had occurred, that some explanations might be offered for His Royal Highness to act upon and for this reason deputed Mirza Baugher, Military Secretary, to proceed to Bombay at the time that the Honorable Mount Stuart Elphinstone was Governor of it and of its dependencies, and he came to an explanation with the Honorable the Governor who showed every wish and inclination to preserve the good understanding and for which purpose deputed Captain Bruce as the Honorable company's Resident to Bushire as the Government Agent after he arrived, his Royal Highness directed his attendance and on the 8th of August 1822, or 20th Zilkad, 1237, Higree at Shiraz, came to an amiable discussion and understanding with Mohammed Zekee Khan, Serdar and Minister of Fars, the following engagements being agreed upon-

First- That the Vekeels of the two States, Mohammed Zekee Khan, and Captain Bruce, shall enter into friendly discussions and explanations tending to cement the ties of amity and good understanding between the Governors of the adjacent countries.

³/ BLOIOLR R/15/1/183 pp136-140.

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Fifth. Such vessels and stores as His Royal Highness may require, to be at liberty to purchase then on any of the Ports o India without molestation from the Government.

The Vekeels of the two Governments who now exchange engagements agree to present them to their respective Governments for their consideration and approbation and for the guidance of each other in the case of change of Governors.

30th August 1822

/Signed/ Will Bruce, Resident with his seal in Persian

The Persian Version having the seal of Mohammed Zekee with his autograph.

/Signed/ William Bruce

30th August (Ls/S.)

Friendly Convention between Jones & Mohamed bin Khuleefa dated 31st May 1861.⁴

Preliminary- Considering the tribe disorders which arise and are perpetrated from maritime aggression in the Persian Gulf, I, Sheikh Mohamed bin Khuleefa, independent ruler of Bahrein, on my part and on that of my heirs and successors, in the presence of the Chiefs and elders who are witnesses to this document, do subscribe and agree to a perpetual Treaty of peace and friendship with the British Government, having for its object the advancement of trade and the security of all classes of people navigating or considering upon the coasts of this sea:-

Article 1.

I recognise as valid and in force all former Treaties and Conventions agreed to between the Chiefs of Bahrein and the British Government, either direct or through the mediation of its representatives in this Gulf.

Article 2.

I agree to abstain from all maritime aggressions of every description, from the prosecution of war, piracy, and slavery by sea, so long as I receive the support of the British Government in the maintenance of the security of my own possessions against similar aggressions directed against them by the Chiefs and tribes of this Gulf.

Article 3.

In order that the above engagements may be fulfilled I agree to make known all aggressions and depredations which may be designed, or have taken place at sea, against myself, territories, or subjects, as early as possible, to the British Resident in the Persian Gulf as the arbitrator in such cases, promising

⁴ Aitchison (1932) pp 234-236.

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that no act of aggression or retaliation shall be committed at sea by Bahreinis or in the name of Bahrein, by myself or others under me, on other tribes, without his consent or that of the British Government, if it should be necessary to procure it. And the British Resident engages that he will forthwith take the necessary steps for obtaining reparation for every injury proved to have been inflicted, or in the course of infliction by sea upon Bahrein or upon its dependencies in this Gulf. In like manner, I, Shaikh Mahomed bin Khuleefa, will afford full redress for all maritime offences, which in justice can be charged against my subjects or myself, as the ruler of Bahrein.

Article 4.

British subjects of every denomination, it is understood, may reside in, and carry on their lawful trade in the territories of Bahrein, their goods being subject only to an *ad valorem* duty of 5%, in cash or in kind. This amount once paid shall not be demanded again on the same goods if exported from Bahrein to other places: and in respect to the treatment of British subjects and dependants they shall receive the treatment and consideration of the subjects and dependants of the most favoured people. All offences which they may commit, or which may be committed against them, shall be reserved for the decision of the British Resident, provident the British Agent located at Bahrein shall fail to adjust them satisfactorily. In the like manner the British Resident will use his good offices for the welfare of the subjects of Bahrein in the ports of the maritime Arab tribes of this Gulf in alliance with the British Government.

Article 5.

These articles of alliance shall have effect from the date of ratification or approval by the British Government.

Done at Bahrain, this twentieth day of Zilkad, in the year Hegira 1277, corresponding with the thirty- first day of May 1861.

Felix Jones, Political Resident in the Persian Gulf.

Seal of Sheikh Mohamed, Ruler of Bahrein.

Seal of Ali bin Khuleefa, Brother of the Amir.

Elders of Bahrein and Witnesses to this Convention

Hamad bin Muhamed,

Khuleefa bin Muhamed,

Ahmed bin Mubarak.

Approved by the Governor General in Council 9th October 1861.

Ratified by the Government of Bombay 25th February 1862.

Agreement comprising the terms of reconciliation between Sheikh Mahamed bin Khuleefah, the Chief of Bahrein and Sheikh Mahomed bin Abdullah, son of the late Abdullah bin Ahmed ex-Chief of that island.¹

Translation-Praise be to him who has given Peace to be the means of adjusting the affairs of mankind and of promoting harmony among all classes of his creatures and peace and reverence be to our Lord Mahomed and to his honoured descendents.

These words of sincerity and truth are inscribed in evidence of the reconciliation that has been effected between Sheikh Mahomed bin Khuleefah Cheif of Bahrein for himself and his adherents the Al Khuleefah on the one side and Sheikh Mahomed bin Abdullah for himself and his adherents the Al Abdullah on the other on the following terms:

that from this day hence forward Sheikh Mahomed bin Abdullah on the part of himself and his relatives does renounce all pretension to the Chiefship of Bahrein and does bind himself to abstain for the future from any designs upon that island and its dependencies and in consideration hereof Sheikh Mahomed bin Khuleefah on the part of himself and his relatives does engage to assign certain villages +(meaning the plantations belonging thereto) situated on the island as communicated below to be held by Sheikh Mahomed bin Abdullah and he Sheikh Mahomed bin Abdullah shall be at liberty to appoint an agent on the spot to receive the income derived from the said villages who shall be treated with all the consideration due toward him- This clearly understood by the present engagement that Sheikh Mahomed bin Abdullah shall break off his present connection with Ameer Fysul in all matters militating against the observance of his obligations above recorded and further that he shall not receive under his protection (collect around him) the enemies of Shaikh Mahomed bin Khuleefah or the subjects of that chief who may secede from Bahrein with hostile intentions against him as for example the Al Bin Ali the Jalahimah and others like them- The above agreement having been concluded through the mediation of the British Resident in the Persian Gulf with general interests of Peace and more especially with a view to the maintenance of good order and tranquility at sea it is further agreed between the contracting parties that if any differences shall arise affecting its observance such difference shall be submitted to the arbitration of the same functionary and on no account shall recourse be had to violence or arbitrary procedure until his decision shall have been declared and if his decision should not be satisfactory to both parties then must the question at issue be referred to the British Government in Bombay who will determine what course should be adopted for the vindication of this agreement and no more- The villages referred to in the body of this document are Sitrah and Sar, and Jezirah and Juddum and Houz ibn Buttye, the last including seven villages/plantations rzt Jidah, Zirkal, Jammud, Barboorah, Moeyderet, Ukkur, and Farsiyah- and of the above God is the best witness and agent.

¹/ BLOIOR R/15/1/132 Enclosure to Kemball to Anderson dated 26/5/1855, at sea.

appendix three.

-Executed and writted on the seventh day of the auspicious month
Rumzan in the year 1271.

[24 May 1855]

appendix five.

Record of British Personel with Responsibility for Bahrain 1815-1927.

Resident- Bushire.

| | | | |
|------------------------------|---|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| Lt William Bruce | 1808- 7/1822 | | |
| James Dow i/c | 11/19- 1/20 | | |
| | 5/20- 1/22 | | |
| Asst Surgeon John Tod | i/c 1/22- 3/22 | | |
| Capt John MacLeod | 12/1822- 8/23 | | |
| | [died] | | |
| Capt Henry Hardy | 10/23- 12/23 | | Natve Agent- Bahrain. |
| Col Ephraim Gerrish | 12/23- 1/27 | | |
| Stannus | | | |
| Capt David Wilson | 1/27- 3/31 | Assoo | 5/27-4/29 |
| i/c Lt Samuel Hennell | 3/31-1/32 | Rahman | 5-7/29 |
| David Anderson Blane | 1/32- 6/34 | Chundoo | 7/29-4/33 atg to 6/31 |
| Lt Samuel Hennell | 6/34- c 7/35 | Khoodel | 1/34 |
| | acting | | |
| Surgeon Thomas MacKenzie | c 7/35- 10/35 | | |
| Mjr James Morrison | 10/35- 10/37 | Merza Mahomed Ally | 5/37-11/38 |
| Lt Sameul Hennell | 5/38-3/52 | | |
| Col Henry Dundas | officating 1/42- | | |
| Robertson | 4/43 | | |
| Lt Arnold Burrowes | 4/43- 12/43 offg | | |
| Kemball | | | |
| Capt Arnold Burrowes | 3/52- 7/55 | Hajee Jasseem | 2/49-60 |
| Kemball | | | |
| Capt James Felix Jones | 10/55- 4/62 offg 7/56 | | |
| Capt Herbert Frederick | 4/62- 11/62 offg | Hajee Ibrahim | actg 3/62 |
| Disbrowe | | | |
| Lt- Col Lewis Pelly | 11/62- 10/72 acting to 3/63 offg to 4/64 | Ahmed Abdoo Rasool | 10/74 |
| Lt Col Edward Charles Ross | 10/72- 3/91 actg to 77 | K. W. | 8/77 |
| Lt Col William Francis | 5/76-77 acting | | |
| Prideaux | | | |
| Lt Col Samuel Barrett Miles | 1885- 10/86 acting | | |
| Lt Col Adelbert Cecil Talbot | 1891-5/93 offg to 8/91 | | |
| Capt Stuart Hall Godfrey | 5/93-6/93 ic | | |
| Mjr James Hayes Salder | 6/93- 7/93 acting | | |
| James Adair Crawford | 7/93- 12/93 ic | | |
| Mjr James Hayes Salder | 12/93- 1/94 acting | | |
| Col Frederick Alexander | 1/94- 6/97 | Mohammed Rahim Saffir | 1897-1900 |
| Watson | | | |

Political Agent- Bahrain.

| | | | |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| Lt Col Malcolm John Meade | 6/97- 4/1900 offg to 3/98 | John Francis Gaskin | 2/1900- 10/04 PA ic |
| Lt Col Charles Arnold | 4/1900- 4/04 acting | Capt Francis Belville | 10/04- 5/09 |
| Kemball | | Pirdeaux | |
| Mjr Percy Zachariah Cox | 4/04- 12/13 offg to 10/05 | Capt Charles Fraser | 5/09- 11/10 |
| Mjr Arthur Prescott Trevor | 8/09- 5/10 ic | Mackenzie | |
| | | Mjr Stuart George Knox | 11/10- 4/11 |
| | | Capt David L R. Lorimer | 4/11- 11/12 |



Records of the Native Agent in Bahrain are incomplete. Dates refer to verifiable mention in records and not period of service. During the 1870, the First Political Assistant at Bushire, Charles Grant was want to spend a period of the year in residence at Bahrain. Information for table taken from Tuson(1978) & records of BLOIOR.