

## The Ownership of Khor al-Udaid and Al-Ain/ Buraimi Region in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

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### Abstract

*The subject matter of this paper is examination of the status of the areas that were disputed by Abu Dhabi and Saudi Arabia during the nineteenth and twenty century. This study discusses Britain's role as protector of trade routes to and from India and how that role was limited to coastal areas in the Arabian Gulf with a relative lack of interest in inland areas. Of particular note is Great Britain's focus on the Gulf coast (Khor al-Udaid) and its relative lack of interest in inland areas (Al-Ain/Buraimioasis region), with both locations serving as examples of the contrasting British actions in coastal and inland areas.*

**Keywords:** protector-protégé relationship, spheres of influence, Exclusive Agreement, Wahhabi Occupation, *Zaket*, *Ikhwan*, Treaty of Darin, Treaty of Jeddah

### 1. Introduction

This paper examines Britain's role during 1800- 1932. This examination takes place in order to answer one of the research questions to assess Britain's limited role in the coastal areas and inland areas reflected Abu Dhabi-Saudi territorial claims. In line with that, the paper examines Britain relations with Ibn Saud and participation in boundary-making along Ibn Saud's frontiers with Transjordan, Kuwait, and Iraq while leaving his boundaries with Abu Dhabi to the south and east undetermined, in what would become a long-lasting territorial dispute between Saudi Arabia and Abu Dhabi from the 1935 onwards. The paper examines British response/reaction towards developments over Khor al-Udaid's<sup>1</sup> and Al-Ain/ Buraimi's<sup>2</sup> region reflected their concern with maintaining a sphere of influence in the Gulf. Also, this paper examines the Saudi position regarding Khor al-Udaid and Al-Ain/Buraimi region, demonstrating, on the basis of the British archival records and personal interviews, that Saudi Arabia did not exercise sovereignty over Al-Ain/Buraimioasis after 1869, and played no role in the contest over Khor al-Udaid from the 1820s to the early 1930s. At the end it shows the weakness of the Saudis' territorial claims over areas to the west and east of Abu Dhabi. The article argues that from the nineteenth century to the 1930s, Britain remained unusually detached from issues concerning Abu Dhabi's-Saudi's territorial sovereignty, except when these issues related to the maintaining of Britain's sphere of influence in the Gulf.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The term in Arabic means an inlet from a large body of water. Khor al-Udaid is a shallow inlet located on the eastern side of the base of the Qatar peninsula. A coastal inlet at the intersection between modern-day Abu Dhabi, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia

<sup>2</sup>Al-Ain/Al-Buraimi oasis region consists of nine oases/villages, seven of which — Al-Ain, Al-Jaheli, Al-Qattarah, Al-Muwaiji, Al-Hill, Al-Masudi, and Al-Muhtaredh — are today under Abu Dhabi's control, while the remaining three, namely Hamasa, Sa'ara and Buraimi, today belong to the Sultanate of Oman.

<sup>3</sup>For example, when the Ottomans made claims to Khor al-Udaid, Britain recognized Abu Dhabi's sovereignty over Khor al-Udaid and eventually authorized Shaikh Zayid to take act against the Qubaisat tribes who had made three migrations from Liwa to Khor al-Udaid, but only within the context of Britain's obligation to maintain the maritime peace in the Gulf. Otherwise, Britain constrained Abu Dhabi's freedom of action and formalized that constraint under the Exclusive Agreement of 1892.

This paper has been divided into five sections. Section one examines the British role in the Gulf during the nineteenth Century in order to deliver a clear understanding of British's position towards Khor-Udaid and Buraimi Oasis. In section two, Al-Ain/ Buraimi region will be examined in reference to British role and Abu Dhabi-Saudi territorial claims. Section three, will analyse Khor al-Udaid it manifests in British influence and its role in comparing with its role over Al-Ain/ Buraimi Oasis region. This examination takes place in order to prove that the British had recognized Abu Dhabi's territorial claims over Khor al-Udaid in 1871. Moreover, section four will shed lights on the status of Abu Dhabi's territories in nineteenth century and will discuss the rise of Saudi Arabia from 1902 to the early 1930s in order to compare the latter with the situation in Abu Dhabi during the second half of the nineteenth century until the early 1930s. The final section concludes, presenting the results of all the examinations and the relevant analysis.

## **2. The British Role in the Gulf during the Nineteenth Century**

From 1820 onwards, Great Britain gradually assumed the dominant role in the Gulf. Britain had not done this before that date since its goals, which were mostly concerned with the promotion of trade, and restricting the regional involvement of other commercial competitors, were quite narrow. Nor, in fact, was British trade in the Gulf itself particularly substantial. The Gulf was important for Britain primarily because it was one of India's imperial frontiers,<sup>4</sup> which was why a solid presence was needed.

To protect its trade and communication route through the [Arabian] Gulf and prevent the establishment of a foreign naval base there, British India established spheres of influence in Persia and Ottoman Iraq, and offered a series of treaties through which it became increasingly responsible for the protection of central Eastern Arabia and the island of Bahrain. Through these treaties, the British were able to get local rulers to collaborate in the pacification of the Persian Gulf and in the later exclusion of foreign influence threatening British Indian interests.<sup>5</sup>

The treaties made by the British with the Rulers of Oman, the Trucial States (present-day UAE), Qatar, Bahrain, and Kuwait, outlawed piracy, naval warfare, and the slave trade.<sup>6</sup> While the British moved slowly to establish their authority in the Gulf, they gradually took on the role of protector in a protector-protégé relationship, but even then, while they ruled on treaty violations, the ruling Shaikhs were held responsible for enforcing fines and other punishments on their subjects.<sup>7</sup>

British policy gradually began to consider the Arabian Peninsula beyond the immediate coastal areas, since events inland could be just as damaging to Britain's system of alliances as events at sea.<sup>8</sup> Thus, in 1892, Abu Dhabi and the other Trucial States entered into an Exclusive Agreement with Great Britain. Britain gained the exclusive rights to manage the foreign affairs of each Trucial State, and the Trucial States were not allowed to dispose of any land or receive any foreigners from other countries without British permission.<sup>9</sup>

## **3. The Status of the Al-Ain/Buraimi Region and Khor al-Udaid during the Nineteenth Century**

### **• The Al-Ain/Buraimi Oasis Region**

The Al-Ain/Buraimi oasis region, encompassing nine oases/villages, was an obvious objective for Wahhabi conquest. It had been known for centuries for its abundant wells and agricultural production, but its most important attribute was its strategic location as a crossroads connecting the approaches to Oman and Muscat as well as routes east to the coastal shaikhdoms and west inland towards established Wahhabi territory.<sup>10</sup> Al-Shamsi describes it as follows:

<sup>4</sup> J. E. Peterson, "Britain and the Gulf: At the Periphery of Empire," in *The Persian Gulf in History*, ed. Lawrence G. Potter (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 279-280.

<sup>5</sup> James Onley, "The Raj reconsidered: British India's informal empire and spheres of influence in Asia and Africa", *Asian Affairs*, vol. 40, no. 1, 2009, p. 44.

<sup>6</sup> Husain M. Al-Baharna, *The Legal Status of the Gulf States*, (Manchester, UK: University of Manchester, 1971), pp. 26-29.

<sup>7</sup> Alexander Melamid, "Political Geography of Trucial Oman and Qatar," *Geographical Review* 43 (April 1953), p. 197.

<sup>8</sup> J. E. Peterson, Interview, Arizona, 8 January 2011.

<sup>9</sup> KourosAhmadi, *Islands and International Politics in the Persian Gulf: Abu Musa and Tunbs in Strategic Perspective*, (New York and London: Routledge, 2008), p. 10.

<sup>10</sup> John B. Kelly, "The Buraimi Oasis Dispute," *International Affairs* 32 (July 1956), p.325.

Al-Buraimi oasis is a pivotal point for the crossing of many routes in the eastern part of the Arabian Peninsula, including most of the major approaches from the coastal towns of the Arabian Gulf to the desert hinterlands of Oman. It is also a crossroads of tribes coming from the deserts of Saudi Arabia, and a meeting place of many nomadic tribes in the region...The Al-Buraimi oasis is about 37 square kilometres. It is located approximately half way between Suhar and Abu Dhabi. Its central location gave it its importance in the history of the regions.<sup>11</sup> According to Peterson, Abu Dhabi's presence in Al-Ain/Buraimi substantially predated the arrival in 1800 of the Wahhabi warriors ruled by the Saud family, since the BaniYas, a confederation of tribes loyal to the ruler of Abu Dhabi, had established themselves politically in Al-Ain/Buraimi in the early seventeenth century.<sup>12</sup>

The BaniYas shared the oasis of Liwa only with their allies, the Manasir.<sup>13</sup> Even Wilkinson, who portrays the coastal emirates as weak and without influence inland, acknowledges that by the late eighteenth century the Al-Bu Falah ruling Shaikhs of Abu Dhabi owned property in Al-Ain/Buraimi region and had developed ties with some local Omani tribes.<sup>14</sup>

### **The First Saudi Occupation of Al-Ain/Buraimi Region in 1800**

The Amir of Darayia, Muhammad ibn Saud, supported the new religious reform by Muhammad IbnAbdulaWahhab, and their alliance helped to win over most of the central Arabian Peninsula. According to Hamadi, the Wahhabi movement was initially directed only at religious reform, but it soon became a political movement that made the Kingdom of the House of Saud a significant regional power in the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>15</sup> During their first occupation of Buraimi, the Saudis attempted to place the oasis under its sovereignty. The occupation of Buraimi begun when Ibn Saud sent Salim bin Belal al-Harik, one of his own slaves, to Oman with an armed group of around 70 men. After a lengthy resistance to the Saudi forces most of the tribes, such as BaniYas, al-Shamis and al-Nuaimi, offered their loyalty to the Saudis.<sup>16</sup>

At the same time, many of the Qawasim of Sharjah and Ras al-Khiamah converted to Wahhabism and thus became allies of the Wahhabis during the Saudi territorial expansion, with the Qawasim supporting the Saudi invasion of Buraimi. Documents about the Qawasim role in Buraimi contained in *Records of The Emirates* indicate that one of the Buraimi forts had surrendered to the Imam of Muscat after a long struggle against the Qawasim, and that the combat roles were played by Sultan bin Saqr, Ruler of Sharjah, and Rashid bin Humaid Ruler of Ajman who were allies of Ras-al-Khaimah and who also adopted the Wahhabi doctrine.<sup>17</sup> Wilkinson notes that the Al-Bu Falah Shaikhs of Abu Dhabi and the Sultan of Muscat led tribal resistance against the Qawasim who had allied with the Wahhabis.<sup>18</sup> Regardless of how long Abu Dhabi had been involved in Buraimi, following the Wahhabi invasion of Al-Ain/Buraimi oasis region in 1800, the rulers of Abu Dhabi and Sultan of Muscat would dominate the region for decades to come.

Along with the alliances formed between the Rulers of Abu Dhabi and the Sultan of Muscat to challenge the Wahhabis, Wahhabi expansionism was also challenged by Muhammad Ali Pasha, Governor of Egypt, acting on behalf of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans claimed political authority in many parts of the Arabian Peninsula that were threatened, or already held, by the Wahhabis and it was Muhammad Ali's responsibility to protect the Ottoman claims.

<sup>11</sup>Saeed Mohammed Al-Shamsi, *The Al-Buraimi Dispute: A Case Study in Inter-Arab Politics*, (PhD dissertation, The American University, 1986), p. 36.

<sup>12</sup> J. E. Peterson, "Britain and State Formation in the Gulf: The Case of Abu Dhabi and Shaikh Zayid bin Khalifa" in *New Perspectives on Recording UAE History* (Abu Dhabi: National Centre for Documentation and Research, 2008), p. 210.

<sup>13</sup>Hendrik Van der Meulen, "The Role of Tribal and Kinship Ties in the Politics of the United Arab Emirates", unpublished PhD thesis, Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University, Medford MA, USA, 1997), p. 104.

<sup>14</sup>John C. Wilkinson, "Traditional Concepts of Territory is South East Arabia, *The Demographic Journal* 149 (November 1983), p. 364.

<sup>15</sup>Abdulkarim M. Hamadi, "Saudi Arabia's Territorial Limits: A Study in Law and Politics", PhD thesis, Indiana University, USA, 1981, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> Al-Shamsi, *Al-Buraimi Dispute: a case study in Inter-Arab Politics*, p. 38.

<sup>17</sup> "Wahhabi surrender of Buraimi", in *Records of The Emirates, Primary Documents 1820-1835*, Vol. 1, ed. Penelope Tuson, (Oxford: Archive Editions, 1990), p.605.

<sup>18</sup>Wilkinson, "Traditional Concepts of Territory," p. 364.

He launched his first campaign against the Wahhabis in 1815, defeating them and forcing the Wahhabi Amir, Abdullah Ibn Saud, to acknowledge the Ottoman Sultan as suzerain.<sup>19</sup> In 1818, the Egyptians executed Amir Abdullah in Constantinople, and destroyed Daraiya, the Wahhabi capital.<sup>20</sup>

### The Second Saudi Occupation of Al-Ain/Buraimi Region in 1833

Al-Ain/Buraimi remained unoccupied by Wahhabi soldiers for several years after 1819, since the Wahhabis were without a leader until 1824, when a new Wahhabi Amir, Turki ibn Abdullah, made Riyadh his capital. Under his leadership, Wahhabi expansionism resumed, and with help from the Qawasim he attempted to recover the Buraimi forts that had been captured by the Governor of Egypt. In the context of the reoccupation of the Buraimi forts, the Imam of Oman assured Lieutenant Colonel Stannus that “the present disturbances [in Buraimi] had originated with Sultan ibn Saqr, [Ruler of Sharjah] and Rashid ibn Ahmed [Ruler of Ajman], who took advantage of his late absence at Mecca, where he had proceeded on a pilgrimage to rebuild the fortification of Buraimi.”<sup>21</sup> The events of the second Saudi occupation of Buraimi were also reported in *Records of The Emirates* as follows:

All the Qawasim chiefs are now at Buraimi in the camp of the Wahhabi with whom they have entered into engagements of adherence and submission. The endeavours [sic] of Shaikh Sultan [Ruler of Sharjah] and Shaikh Rashid [Ruler of Ajman] to induce Omar bin Afeesan to commence hostilities with Shaikh Tahnun [ruler of Abu Dhabi] have failed owing to the friendly exertions of the Manasir chiefs to establish a good understanding between these parties. An active correspondence is now carrying on with Abu Dhabi but the Wahhabi leader insists upon the presence and personal submission of [Bani Yas]...in order to collect Zakat.<sup>22</sup>

The Ruler of Abu Dhabi then allied with Omani tribal chiefs in Buraimi and rejected the idea of making any payment of *zakat*<sup>23</sup> to the Wahhabis. In 1834, a year after the second Wahhabi occupation of Buraimi, Amir Turki was assassinated and his son, Faisal ibn Turki, succeeded his father as Wahhabi Amir. In 1837, the Egyptians again invaded Buraimi on behalf of the Ottomans and in 1838 defeated the Wahhabis for the second time. The British had not intervened during the first Egyptian invasion of the Arabian Peninsula in 1818, but in 1838, fearing Ottoman intervention in the British sphere of influence; they pressured the Egyptians to withdraw quickly. After that Buraimi was free from military occupation for a several years. The Wahhabis later renewed their sovereignty over Buraimi, but during the early 1840s several local tribes stopped paying *zakat* to the acknowledged Wahhabi leader, Faisal ibn Turki.<sup>24</sup>

### The Third Saudi Occupation of Al-Ain/Buraimi Region in 1848

From 1848 until 1869 the Wahhabis, allied with the House of Saud, again claimed sovereignty over the Al-Ain/Buraimi oasis region. When the Saudi forces attempted to invade the territories of Suhar and Abu Dhabi, the Wahhabi Agent at Buraimi claimed payment of the tribute demanded by the Wahhabi Amir, as a result of which some of the tribal leaders hesitated about making a *zakat* payment.<sup>25</sup> It appeared that in the protector-protégé relationship, the Wahhabis occasionally made a great display of taking on the responsibilities required of the protector. For example, in 1853, Abdullah, son of the Wahhabi Amir Faisal Ibn Turki, sent for the Buraimi tribal chiefs and offered to mediate in their inter-tribal disputes. He then demanded that the Sultan of Muscat pay him *zakat* in exchange for leaving the Sultan’s territories in peace. Captain A. B. Kemball, the acting British Political Resident in the Gulf, intervened at this point and negotiated a *zakat* payment schedule with Amir Abdullah.

<sup>19</sup>Hamadi, “Saudi Arabia’s Territorial Limits,” p. 8.

<sup>20</sup> Kelly, “The Buraimi Oasis Dispute,” pp. 320-1.

<sup>21</sup> “The Buraimi Forts,” in *Records of The Emirates, Primary Documents 1820-1835*, Vol. 1, ed. Penelope Tuson (Oxford: Archive Editions, 1990), p. 677.

<sup>22</sup> “Occupation of Buraimi,” in *Records of The Emirates, Primary Documents 1820-1835*, p.745.

<sup>23</sup>Scholars disagree about the distinction between *zakat* as a religious obligation versus *zakat* as a secular tax. Some have argued that payment of *zakat* is a form of insurance against attack, whereas others maintain that the *zakat* payment signified proof of allegiance and submission. For more information see George A. Lipsky, *Saudi Arabia: Its People, Its Society, Its Culture* (New Haven: HRAF Press), 1959, pp.1-2.

<sup>24</sup>Kelly, “The Buraimi Oasis Dispute” p. 322.

<sup>25</sup> “The Third Wahhabi Occupation of Buraimi 1845-1848,” in *Records of The Emirates, Primary Documents 1835-1853*, Vol. 2, ed. Penelope Tuson (Oxford: Archive Editions, 1990), p.489.

According to Kelly, Amir Abdullah did not stay around for very long after that; nor did he settle any disputes among the tribal shaikhs.<sup>26</sup>

In 1869, the Sultan of Muscat joined the Shaikhs of the Al-Nahyan faction of the Al-Bu Falah to drive the Saudi soldiers out of Buraimi. In 1870 the Wahhabis tried unsuccessfully to recapture Buraimi. In 1871 Sultan QaisIbnAz'an of Muscat claimed sovereignty over Buraimi but lacking sufficient strength to exercise power he assigned the defence of Buraimi to his ally, Shaikh Zayid bin Khalifa of Abu Dhabi.<sup>27</sup> The establishment of the strong alliance between the Ruler of Abu Dhabi and the Sultan of Muscat was reported in the British archival records as follows:

[Sayyid] Azan has written from [Buraimi] dated 1st March, that Shaikh [Zayid] of Abu Dhabi had arrived at [Buraimi] and sworn friendship to him and promised to oppose the Wahabbis' march by force...when [Sayyid] Azan took [Buraimi], he entered into alliance with Abu Dhabi and paying him a proportion of the tribute which previous Sultans of Muscat had paid to Wahhabi Amir, secured the aid of the Abu Dhabi Chief in the protection of the [Buraimi] frontier.<sup>28</sup>

The Ottomans had also captured the Hasa district in Eastern Arabia in 1871, which turned out to be a very important year because it was also the fifth year of an internal power struggle that had followed Amir Faisal's death in 1866,<sup>29</sup> and it would be 30 years before the Wahhabis were again a unified force under Ibn Saud. Importantly, in the 1870s, the Wahhabis lacked the organization and unified leadership that was needed for the operation of an independent state. When the Al-Rashid tribe of Ha'il, who were rivals of the Saud family, captured Riyadh in 1891, the Wahhabi Amir, Abd al-RahmanIbn Faisal Al Saudi, fled to Kuwait with his son, Abdul al-Aziz ibnRahman Al Saud, who was later to be known as Ibn Saud. The Amir and his son spent ten years in exile there.<sup>30</sup>

In the context of the Saudi occupation of Buraimi, scholars have different views in supporting the Saudi claim. Husain M. Al-Baharna, a Bahraini legal historian, supports their claim on Buraimi for the period from 1800 to 1869, pointing out that the Wahhabis held Buraimi "for a period of nearly seventy years."<sup>31</sup> His statement is mostly true but, as is demonstrated above, Wahhabi control of Buraimi did not go uninterrupted or unchallenged. Kelly, however, argues that "the various Wahhabi occupations of [Al-Ain/Buraimi] were little more than hostile incursions for purposes of plunder."<sup>32</sup> This study speculates that neither Al-Baharna's notion of steady possession nor Kelly's idea of intermittent plunder is accurate. It is suggested instead that the Wahhabis may have taken Buraimi by territorial expansion. However, the Saudi themselves claim a legitimate territorial sovereignty at Buraimi that was based on the collecting of *zakat* as well as performing duties associated with the protector-protégé relationship.<sup>33</sup>

In the context of the British involvement in the question of A-Ain/ Buraimi region, Britain did not actively intervene in the affairs of the hinterland. British policy towards Al-Ain/Buraimi region before the development of oil interests there can be summarized as follows:

The British Government has always been averse to the extension of [Wahhabist] influence in Oman. No precedent can be quoted of actual interference between Muscat and [Wahhabi] powers by our Government, but it has always lent moral support to Muscat in the differences of that State with [Wahabbis] by sending vessels-of-war to the Arab Coast when hostilities threatened.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Kelly, *Eastern Arabian Frontiers* (London: Frederick J. Praeger, 1964), p.76.

<sup>27</sup> Kelly, "The Buraimi Oasis Dispute", p. 323.

<sup>28</sup> "The Occupation of Buraimi by SayyidAzzan b. Qais 1869-1870", in *Records of The Emirates, Primary Documents 1853-1871*, Vol. 3, ed. Penelope Tuson (Oxford: Archive Editions, 1990), pp. 386-407.

<sup>29</sup>Kelly, "The Buraimi Oasis Dispute," pp.322-323.

<sup>30</sup> Peter Sluglett, "The Resilience of a Frontier: Ottoman and Iraqi Claims to Kuwait, 1871-1990," *The International History Review* 24 (December 2002), p. 790.

<sup>31</sup>Husain M. Al-Baharna, *The Legal Status of the Gulf States*, p. 220.

<sup>32</sup> Kelly, "The Buraimi Oasis Dispute", p. 325.

<sup>33</sup>It is important to note that the Wahhabis themselves believed their Amir was not just a political leader but a religious authority as well.

<sup>34</sup> "The Occupation of Buraimi" by SayyidAzzan b. Qais 1869-1870, in *Records of The Emirates, Primary Documents 1835-1871*, Vol. 3, ed. Penelope Tuson (Oxford: Archive Editions, 1990), p. 378.

#### 4. Khor al-Udaid

In Arabic the term *khorr* means an inlet from a large body of water. Khor al-Udaid is a shallow inlet located on the eastern side of the base of the Qatar peninsula. One of its earliest descriptions comes from Captain George B. Brucks, who wrote in 1829 about a narrow inlet with a channel no more than fifteen feet deep at high tide and an entrance that was nearly blocked by small islands. He also noted that a small fort near the entrance had been abandoned because of a severe shortage of drinking water. According to Brucks, “this place was used by pirates for securing boats they took.”<sup>35</sup>

Early in the history of the British presence in the Gulf, Brucks briefly stated views that were consistent with the British attitude toward Khor al-Udaid. The inlet was scarcely navigable. The area was barely habitable because the water there was bad. In 1845, Lieutenant A. B. Kemball wrote that the town with the fort by the entrance to the inlet “cannot be approached by our vessels of war within a distance of between three and four miles.”<sup>36</sup> To the British, Khor al-Udaid was therefore worthless and its only relevant characteristic was its use by pirates. Kemball commented that: “in point of appearance it would, perhaps, be difficult to select a more wretched, desolate, and barren-looking spot in the whole of the Gulf,”<sup>37</sup> and towards the end of the nineteenth century, J. G. Lorimer remarked: “there are now no permanent inhabitants at [Khor al-Udaid], and it is not visited by Bedouins from the interior; but fishermen from Abu Dhabi spend some months here in winter, and fine mullet are caught by them.”<sup>38</sup> Over a hundred years later, in 1956, Kelly described the area around the inlet as “a desolate and unmarked tract of Arabia.”<sup>39</sup>

The British probably could not imagine why anyone (other than pirates) would have had any interest in Khor al-Udaid, but it is important to remember the description attached to Khor al-Udaid in addition to Britain’s primary mission in the Gulf, which was to safeguard maritime shipping. Understanding both factors can provide an insight into events of the later nineteenth century, when the British made the decision to acknowledge Abu Dhabi’s sovereignty over Khor al-Udaid. Abu Dhabi’s connection to Khor al-Udaid became known to the British as a result of three attempted migrations of Qubaisat tribal members from Abu Dhabi to Khor al-Udaid. Significantly the Qubaisat had been allies of the Al-Bu Falah, the ruling tribe of Abu Dhabi, since at least the sixteenth century when both tribes had been based at Liwa.<sup>40</sup>

#### First Secession of Qubaisat, 1835

In 1834, Shaikh Khalifa bin Shakhbut was unable to prevent various tribes from raiding British East India Company trade vessels, which led to the British imposing a large fine on the Ruler of Abu Dhabi. In 1835, some members of the Qubaisat, led by Khadim bin Nahman Al-Qubaisi, in protest at Shaikh Khalifa’s attempts to raise money to pay the fine to the British, left Abu Dhabi and went to Khor al-Udaid. As a result, the British held Shaikh Khalifa, Ruler of Abu Dhabi, responsible for collecting the fines from all his subjects on behalf of the British. The Arabian American Oil Company (ARAMCO) reported the following event:

[The] Bani Yas of Abu Dhabi began to make frequent attacks on Persian Gulf shipping, including vessels flying British colors. Punitive action was taken by the British, who levied a heavy indemnity against the tribe. In 1835 members of the section of the Qubaisat of Bani Yas fled to [Khor al-Udaid] in order to escape paying their share of the indemnity.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>35</sup> George B. Brucks, “Memoir Descriptive of the Navigation of the Gulf of Persia,” in *Arabian Gulf Intelligence: Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government, New Series, No. XXIX, 1856*, ed. R. Hughes Thomas (Cambridge: The Oleander Press, 1985), p.557.

<sup>36</sup> A. B. Kemball, “Memoranda on the Resources, Localities, and Relations of the Tribes Inhabiting the Arabian Shores of the Persian Gulf,” in *Arabian Gulf Intelligence: Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government, New Series, No. XXIX, 1856*, ed. R. Hughes Thomas (Cambridge: The Oleander Press 1985), p.109.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p109.

<sup>38</sup> J. G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia*, vol. II B [Calcutta, Superintendent Government Printing, 2 vols. 1908/191 reprinted Farnborough, Hants: Gregg International, 6 vol. 1970, p. 1367.

<sup>39</sup> Kelly, “The Buraimi Oasis Dispute”, p.19.

<sup>40</sup> Van Der Meulen, “The Role of Tribal and Kinship Ties”, p. 135.

<sup>41</sup> Arabian American Oil Company, *The ARAMCO Reports on Al-Hasa and Oman 1950-1955, Vol. 4, “Oman and the Southern Shore of the Persian Gulf”* (Cambridge: Archive Editions, 1990), pp. 163-164

When I interviewed members of the Qubaisat in 2011, they recalled the negative views of their ancestors about the British, and did not express any clear understanding either of the relationship between Abu Dhabi and Britain or of the British role in the Gulf. For example, Abu Ali Qubaisi said:

The Qubaisat and other tribes did not want the English in our territories and for this reason; several tribes engaged in various activities and raided them. We did not understand very much about the papers signed between Abu Dhabi and the English. All the Qubaisat knew was that strange faces were coming in and out of the coast. According to a signed paper [Maritime Truce of 1835], we were punished financially because we engaged in self-defence [the British called it piracy]. Then, we decided to look for a peaceful area to escape from payment and it was Khor al-Udaid.<sup>42</sup>

In 1836, the British pursued the Qubaisat and for this mission Samuel Hennell, the British Resident in the Persian Gulf, sent two ships to the villages of Doha and Wakra at the entrance to Khor al-Udaid. At each stop, an officer told the Rulers that if they did not seize pirates and their boats, the British would fine the people in those settlements.

In fact, the Qubaisat have their own recollections that are at odds with the British record, especially the British charges of piracy. In an interview, Salman Qubaisi said: “the Qubaisat never signed a treaty with the British and they never treated us as being separate from Abu Dhabi. The British often used the excuse of piracy against us, but we never ever participated in piracy activities; it was self-defence.”<sup>43</sup> The Qubaisat were forced to leave Khor al-Udaid in 1837, when Shaikh Khalifa, having received British approval, launched a naval expedition against Khor al-Udaid.<sup>44</sup> According to the British archival records, Shaikh Khalifah of Abu Dhabi obtained permission from Samuel Hennell in May 1837 to launch a large naval expedition to punish the Qubaisat at Khor al-Udaid. With British approval, Shaikh Khalifa’s men killed 53 residents of al-Udaid, took 50 prisoners, and seized 20 boats. The village and a fort were extensively damaged and the settlement’s well was destroyed.<sup>45</sup> It is important to note that Britain’s approval of Abu Dhabi’s punitive raid against the Qubaisat at Khor al-Udaid in 1837 was done in the context of Britain’s responsibility for maintaining the maritime peace against piracy and protecting its trade with India.

It is significant that the Shaikhs routinely consulted the British about actions that might violate the Maritime Truce. In general, the British Resident did not interfere directly in the relationships between the ruling Shaikhs and their subjects, and this present article speculates that when the British approved the naval expedition against the Qubaisat in 1837, the British tacitly acknowledged Abu Dhabi’s sovereignty over Khor al-Udaid.

### Second Secession of Qubaisat, 1843

In 1843, the Qubaisat again seceded from control by Abu Dhabi. Following the death of Shaikh Khalifa in 1845, Shaikh Sa’id ibn Tahnun became Ruler of Abu Dhabi, and soon after took the Qubaisat who remained in Abu Dhabi as hostages to prevent them from escaping. In autumn 1849, Shaikh Sa’id played a trick by inviting the Qubaisat in Khor al-Udaid to a lavish reception in Abu Dhabi and issuing a general amnesty for debtors from Qubaisat to encourage them to return. Most of the Qubaisat agreed and sailed over to Abu Dhabi. However, the night after the reception, Shaikh Sa’id secretly ordered his men to strip the sails, masts, and equipment from the boats of the Qubaisat. According to a later summary of events published in the *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia*, “the entrapped [Qubaisat] envoys, thus deprived of the means of escape, found themselves obliged to agree to the terms imposed by the Shaikh [Sa’id ibn Tahnun], which included, beside return from [Khor al-Udaid], the satisfaction of all debts due by the Qubaisat to private creditors and the payment of a fine to himself.”<sup>46</sup>

After demolishing the settlements at Khor al-Udaid for the second time under Shaikh Tahnun’s orders, the Qubaisat tribal leader, Makhtum al-Butti, despatched a messenger to Amir Faisal ibn Turki vigorously petitioning him to rebuild the destroyed settlements at Khor al-Udaid if he wished to establish himself on the coast.

<sup>42</sup> Abu Ali Qubaisi, Interview, 5 November 2011.

<sup>43</sup> Abu Salman Qubaisi, Interview, 5 November 2011.

<sup>44</sup> M. Housen, “Letter to Samuel S. Hennell, British Resident, Persian Gulf”, in *Records of the Emirates: Primary Documents 1820-1958*, Vol. 2 1835-1853, ed. Penelope Tuson (Cambridge: Archive Editions, 1990), 267-269.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., pp. 267-269.

<sup>46</sup> J. G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia*, p.768.

In 1850, when Mullah Hussein, the Agent at Sharjah, learned of al-Butti's message, he sent a letter to Smith S. Hennell, Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, urging him to act so as to prevent the Wahhabis from setting foot in the coastal area. In case the Wahhabis should move into Khor al-Udaid, Mullah Hussein gave his assessment of the situation as follows:

If [Khor al-Udaid] were once re-established many of the inhabitants of [Abu Dhabi] would certainly congregate there and also proceed to [Dubai]. By this means the Ben Yas' capital would be ruined. In my opinion should [Khor al-Udaid] fall into the hands of the [Saudis], all kinds of piracies and irregularities will be committed at Sea — the power of the [Wahhabis] over the ports on the Arabian Coast will be greatly increased and [Khor al-Udaid] will become a refuge and home for all the bad characters in the Gulf. They will plunder at Sea and find an asylum there. It is therefore advisable that steps should be taken to nip the project in the bud. Otherwise it will involve great trouble [on the coast].<sup>47</sup>

This study did not find any details in the British Archive records about the attitude or reaction of the Saudis to Makhtum al-Butti's message. Nor are there even any records of what action was taken by the British to prevent the Wahhabis from stepping in at Khor al-Udaid. In this context, the most significant feature was that the Saudis did not approach Khor al-Udaid to rebuild the settlements that had been devastated.

### **Third Secession of Qubaisat, 1869**

The most serious and complex migration occurred in 1869, when the Qubaisat declared their independence from Abu Dhabi. During the 1860s, Shaikh Zayid bin Khalifa Al-Nahyan, who had ruled Abu Dhabi since 1855, asserted a claim for sovereignty over Khor al-Udaid to the British. In fact, Shaikh Zayid wanted the British to take action to bring the Qubaisat back under the control of Abu Dhabi, which meant that the British had been in contact with the leader of the Qubaisat. More specifically, on 31 July 1871, Colonel Pelly, the British Political Resident in the Gulf (who was aware of Shaikh Zayid's claim on Khor al-Udaid), cited a report from a Major Smith stating that the Qubaisat at Khor al-Udaid had asserted their independence from Abu Dhabi. The report further stated that the Qubaisat wanted to join Great Britain under the Maritime Truce, and that they had also been offered Ottoman protection and so far had not declined the Ottomans' offer.<sup>48</sup>

Thus Pelly and Smith faced an ambiguous situation. On the one hand, the Qubaisat were declaring both their independence from Abu Dhabi and their willingness to become allies of the British. On the other hand, they informed the British that they had been in contact with the Ottomans and had not yet refused to accept Ottoman authority over Khor al-Udaid. The Qubaisat leader, Khadim al-Butti, was clearly attempting to press the British into taking the Qubaisat at Khor al-Udaid under their protection.

For the British, there was an obstacle to recognizing the independence of the Qubaisat at Khor al-Udaid. As Al-Baharna points out, if the British chose to consider the Qubaisat as a dependency of Abu Dhabi, they would be unable to hold the Qubaisat accountable for any truce violations since they had not signed the 1853 Treaty of Perpetual Peace.<sup>49</sup> In an alternative analysis, Peterson argues that the Ottomans' competing claim on Khor al-Udaid forced Britain to recognize Shaikh Zayid's claim, despite Shaikh Zayid's inability actually to control the Qubaisat at Khor al-Udaid.<sup>50</sup>

The Khor al-Udaid situation was further complicated when the Ottomans claimed sovereignty over it. Thus, the claimants at Khor al-Udaid during the 1870s and 1880s were the Ottomans and the Al-Thani Ruler of Qatar, who, according to Kelly, made claims on Khor al-Udaid both on his own authority and in his role as an Ottoman vassal.<sup>51</sup> Arguably, the contest over Khor al-Udaid was between Abu Dhabi and the Qubaisat, between Abu Dhabi and Qatar, and, most importantly, between Great Britain and the Ottoman Empire.

<sup>47</sup> M. Houssen, "Letter to Samuel S. Hennell, British Resident, Persian Gulf," in *Records of the Emirates: Primary Documents*, vol. 2, p. 553.

<sup>48</sup> "Previous History of Odeid, 1837-1876," in J. G. Lorimer, "Persia", *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia*, vol. II B, Calcutta, Superintendent Government Printing, 1970; Part 1 Historical and Political Materials, *Précis of Katar Affairs 1873-1904*, Superintendent Government Printing, India, p.15.

<sup>49</sup> Al-Baharna, *The Legal Status of the Gulf States*, p. 224.

<sup>50</sup> Peterson, "Britain and State Formation in the Gulf", p. 211.

<sup>51</sup> Kelly, *Eastern Arabian Frontiers*, p. 91.



In response to a question about Abu Dhabi's sovereignty over Khor al-Udaid in relation to the other claimants, Peterson points out that the struggle involved two imperial powers, Great Britain and the Ottoman Empire, and their client states, Abu Dhabi and Qatar, respectively. The British were therefore forced to support Abu Dhabi's claim over Khor al-Udaid.<sup>52</sup>

It can be argued that Britain's support for Abu Dhabi played an important role in blocking Ottoman expansion on the coast. It also reveals that the British had their own pragmatic reasons for recognizing Abu Dhabi's sovereignty over Khor al-Udaid and that it might have been protecting its sphere of influence in the coastal areas against interference by the Ottomans. It is also significant that the House of Saud and its Wahhabi allies played no active role in the contest over Khor al-Udaid during the nineteenth century. It was reported that in 1871, the British acknowledged for the first time Abu Dhabi's sovereignty over Khor al-Udaid.<sup>53</sup> Prior to 1871 the British, interestingly, had recognized the Abu Dhabi ruler's authority over *people* but not *territory*<sup>54</sup>, so that whereas the former British position had been more or less consistent with traditional Arabian concepts of sovereignty<sup>55</sup>, the European notion of sovereignty defined by territory was introduced in 1871 with respect to Khor al-Udaid.

Importantly, the alleged inability of the ruling Shaikh of Abu Dhabi actually to exercise control over Khor al-Udaid is a theme that runs through both the primary and secondary sources. In the case discussed by Peterson (i.e., the decision of the British officially to recognize Shaikh Zayid's sovereignty over Khor al-Udaid in 1871), Shaikh Zayid's difficulty in controlling the Qubaisat resulted from insufficient support from the British side for Shaikh Zayid's position in forcing the Qubaisat to rejoin the Bani Yas. For six years after the British had recognized Shaikh Zayid's sovereignty over Khor al-Udaid, from 1871 to 1877, British officials periodically went on missions in an attempt to reconcile the leader of the Qubaisat and the Ruler of Abu Dhabi. According to Wilkinson, the British continued to acknowledge Abu Dhabi's prescriptive sovereignty over Khor al-Udaid while denying that the Shaikh was strong enough to establish effective occupation there.<sup>56</sup>

In June 1877, Colonel E. C. Ross, Britain's Political Resident in the Gulf, wrote to Shaikh Zayid and assured him that Britain would support his efforts to achieve reconciliation with the Qubaisat at Khor al-Udaid. By December 1877, Colonel Ross had decided that it was not possible to realise a peaceful reconciliation between the Qubaisat and the ruler of Abu Dhabi. According to British Archival records, when another bout of piracy occurred in the vicinity of Khor al-Udaid, Ross authorized a joint naval expedition consisting of the *Teazer*, a British warship, and seventy boats commanded by Shaikh Zayid of Abu Dhabi. The *Teazer* was supposed to meet the Bani Yas fleet at Qaffay Island to stage a coordinated attack, but Shaikh Zayid deviated from the schedule and attacked before the British warship had arrived. However, by the time Shaikh Zayid's fleet reached Khor al-Udaid, the Qubaisat had fled, and by the time the *Teazer* arrived at Udaid, Shaikh Zayid's troops had destroyed the Qubaisat boats and their settlements.<sup>57</sup>

This third and last Qubaisat migration ended quietly without any further British interference. By March 1880, the Qubaisat secession at Khor al-Udaid was at an end, after the Qubaisat leader, Khadim al-Butti, and the last of his followers had gone back to Abu Dhabi, where Shaikh Zayid gave them back their previously confiscated property.<sup>58</sup> The Qubaisat returned to what has remained ever since a central position in Abu Dhabi. The Ruler of Abu Dhabi wished to reinforce ties through marriages between Al-Bu Falah family and the Qubaisat tribe, so in 1900, Shaikh Sultan bin Zayid, who would rule Abu Dhabi between 1922 and 1926, married Shaikha SalamabintButti Al-Qubaisi, reinforcing the strong relations between the Qubaisat and Abu Dhabi's ruling family which dated back for centuries to the days when both had lived at Liwa Oasis. Shaikha Salama duly became the mother of two important future rulers of Abu Dhabi — Shaikh Shakhbut bin Sultan (r. 1928-66) and Shaikh Zayid bin Sultan (r. 1966-2004).<sup>59</sup>

<sup>52</sup> J. E. Peterson, Interview, Arizona, 8 January 2011.

<sup>53</sup> John C. Wilkinson, *Arabia's Frontiers: The Story of Britain's Boundary Drawing in the Desert* (London: I.B. Taurus, 1991), p. 68.

<sup>54</sup> John B. Kelly, "Sovereignty and Jurisdiction in Eastern Arabia," *International Affairs* 34 (January 1958), p. 17.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>56</sup> Wilkinson, *Arabian Frontiers*, p. 279.

<sup>57</sup> "Shaikh Zaid-bin-Khalifah, From 1855", in *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia*, ed. J. G. Lorimer (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, India, 1915), p.770.

<sup>58</sup> "Return of Qubaisat to Abu Dhabi, 1880", in *Records of Qatar, Primary Documents 1820-1960*, Vol. 3, ed. Penelope Tuson (Oxford: Archive Editions, 1991), p. 383.

<sup>59</sup> Van Der Meulen, *The Role of Tribal and Kinship Ties*, p135-136

### **5. The Status of Abu Dhabi's Territories from 1880 to the early 1930s**

Shaikh Zayid is known as “Shaikh Zayid the Great” or “Zayid the First” in Abu Dhabi. He was of the Al-Nahyan family of the Al-Bu Falah tribe, and he developed strong connections in the Buraimi area with Omani tribes such as the Al-Dhawahir and Al-Shwamis, who were allied with the BaniYas tribal confederation of Abu Dhabi. Peterson notes that Shaikh Zayid had influence in the district of al-Dharira, and the tribes sought his mediation in disputes even though the Sultan of Muscat formally claimed sovereignty over them.<sup>60</sup> According to Kelly, by the early 1870s Shaikh Zayid was the most powerful of the Trucial Shaikhs.<sup>61</sup> Even Wilkinson, who consistently portrays Abu Dhabi as a weak British protégé, acknowledges that Abu Dhabi developed “a primitive sense of statehood”<sup>62</sup> under the leadership of Shaikh Zayid.

Following the death of Shaikh Zayid in 1909, Abu Dhabi became unstable until 1928.<sup>63</sup> In 1928, Shaikh Shakhbut bin Sultan became Ruler of Abu Dhabi. The first major challenge that Shaikh Shakhbut had to contend with was the collapse of the Gulf pearling industry in the late 1920s and early 1930s, as the result of a global economic depression and the introduction of cheap Japanese cultured pearls into the world market. There is wide disagreement about the impact of these events on Abu Dhabi's territory. For example, on the one hand Wilkinson writes that because the collapse of the pearling industry deprived Abu Dhabi of revenue, the Al-Bu Falah's influence was confined to Buraimi while western parts of Abu Dhabi's territory were neglected,<sup>64</sup> and Anthony H. Cordesman describes the Trucial States as “a strategic backwater”<sup>65</sup> as a result of the collapse of pearling. On the other hand, Uzi Rabi insists that Shaikh Shakhbut managed his country competently through the collapse of the pearling industry, consolidated his hold on existing Abu Dhabi territory both on the coast and in the interior, and “engaged in a process of territorial expansion.”<sup>66</sup>

These two extreme views of Abu Dhabi during the 1920s and 1930s, one portraying a minor shaikhdom in decline and the other portraying a resilient state, cannot be reconciled. In response to a question about this paradox, Peterson stated: “it is probably true that Abu Dhabi was a minor, poor, entity before oil, but at the same time growing into a type of statehood.”<sup>67</sup> According to Peterson, beginning with the reign of Shaikh Zayid the Great, Abu Dhabi had steadily developed alliances and influence with key tribes in the area, which made Abu Dhabi politically important and capable of remaining a significant shaikhdom during hard times.

### **6. The Rise of Saudi Arabia in the Early Decades of the 20th Century**

#### **The Period 1902-13**

Wilkinson argues that the process of establishing international zones that ended up as fixed boundaries in the Arabian Peninsula began in 1902.<sup>68</sup> Between 1902 and 1905, the British and Ottomans agreed on a frontier in the southwest of the Arabian Peninsula that separated the British protectorate of Aden from the Ottoman district of Yemen. The Anglo-Ottoman Convention of 1913 established an eastern boundary called the Blue Line that ran due south from Zakhnuniya Island, west of the Qatar peninsula, to a point in the Empty Quarter (Rub al-Khali).<sup>69</sup>

<sup>60</sup>Peterson, “Britain and State Formation in the Gulf,” 210.

<sup>61</sup> Kelly, *Eastern Arabian Frontiers*, p.94.

<sup>62</sup> J. C. Wilkinson, “The Oman Question: The Background to the Political Geography of South-East Arabia,” *The Geographical Journal* 137 (September 1971), p.366.

<sup>63</sup> Ali M. Khalifa, *The United Arab Emirates: Unity in Fragmentation* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1979), 105.

<sup>64</sup> Wilkinson, *Arabia's Frontiers: The Story of Britain's*, p. 283.

<sup>65</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman, *The Gulf and the Search for Strategic Stability: Saudi Arabia, the Military Balance in the Gulf, and Trends in the Arab-Israeli Military Balance* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1984), p. 415.

<sup>66</sup> Uzi Rabi, “Oil Politics and Tribal Rulers in Eastern Arabia: The Reign of Shakhbut (1928-1966),” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 33 (May 2006), p. 42.

<sup>67</sup> J. E. Peterson, Interview, Arizona, 8 January 2011.

<sup>68</sup> Wilkinson, *Arabia's Frontiers*, p.xvi

<sup>69</sup>It is important to note that the 1913 Convention was never ratified by the Ottomans. The British would use the Blue line to define Ibn Saud's boundaries east of the Blue Line in the Anglo-Saudi territorial negotiations (1934-1955).

In March 1914, the British and Ottomans agreed to a Violet Line that connected the southern end of the Blue Line with the Aden-Yemen frontier that had been established earlier, and this latter Convention was duly ratified by the Ottomans.<sup>70</sup>

In 1902 a dormant regional force came back to life again — this was Wahhabi expansionism allied with the House of Saud. During the years in which the British and the Ottomans were agreed on their respective zones of influence, Ibn Saud, who had become the Wahhabi Amir after the death of his father, had followed a policy of conquest and expansion. He organized his own Wahhabi movement by settling the Wahhabi brotherhood, the *Ikhwan*, in villages. These villages provided the *Ikhwan* with agricultural and commercial experience, exposure to religious instruction, and military training and arms. The *Ikhwan* thus became versatile fighters in the service of Wahhabi expansion under Ibn Saud.<sup>71</sup>

In 1905, Ibn Saud conquered the southern part of Najd, and in 1906, defeated his family rivals, the Al-Rashid tribe of Ha'il, and killed Ibn Rashid, their leader.<sup>72</sup> Beginning in 1903, he chose to build connections with British officials in the Arabian Peninsula, and during his years of conquest he tried, albeit unsuccessfully, to enter into a protector-protégé relationship with Britain. For example, in 1903, Ibn Saud sent a message to Captain Prideaux to the effect that the Russians had approached him but he preferred to establish a relationship with the British. In 1906, Sir Percy Cox, British High Commissioner, and Captain W. H. Shakespeare both advised the British government that it was important to establish an official relationship with Ibn Saud. However, despite the efforts of Ibn Saud's envoys and local British officials, the British government did not commit themselves to a formal relationship with Ibn Saud.<sup>73</sup>

When asked about Ibn Saud's approach to the British and their refusal to establish relations with him, Ivor Lucas argued that the British avoided official relations with Ibn Saud because "they were backing Sherif Husain of the [Hijaz] as the leader most likely to promote their interests in Arabia (hence the Arab Revolt in World War I)."<sup>74</sup> In this context, the present study speculates that Ibn Saud attempted to establish a relationship with the British as a way of gaining British approval in delimiting his boundaries.

On the other hand, Ibn Saud's attempts to establish a relationship with a patron were more successful with the Ottomans. In 1905, the Ottomans appointed him governor of southern Najd. Peter Sluglett argues that even if a local ruler accepted an Ottoman title, that did not necessarily mean that the local ruler's territory was part of the Ottoman bureaucratic state.<sup>75</sup> Hamadi suggests that the Ottomans officially recognized the authority of Ibn Saud over the Najd and other districts in exchange for Ibn Saud's acceptance of "the *nominal* suzerainty of Turkey."<sup>76</sup> By 1913, his status had risen since he had succeeded in conquering Hasa, an eastern Arabian province that had been held by the Ottomans since 1871. According to Daniel Silverfarb, after his conquest of Hasa, Ibn Saud "...was probably the most powerful ruler in the Arabian Peninsula."<sup>77</sup>

### **The Status of Saudi's Territories from World War I to the Early 1930s**

According to Hamadi, the outbreak of war between Great Britain and the Ottoman Empire on 5 November 1914 forced the British to abandon their long-standing policy of avoiding commitments in central Arabia.<sup>78</sup> The British Government therefore sent Captain W. H. Shakespeare to Najd to meet Ibn Saud for the purpose of influencing him to remain a neutral party in the event of war. After many meetings, Ibn Saud was successfully persuaded, and agreed to sign the Treaty of Darin with the British in 1915. Under this Treaty, the British agreed to Ibn Saud's demand for a delimitation of his kingdom, although they delayed for several years over defining a boundary between Najd and Hijaz.

<sup>70</sup> Schofield, "Borders and Territoriality in the Gulf", p.19.

<sup>71</sup> Abdulrahman R. Al-Shamlan, *The Evolution of the National Boundaries in the Southeastern Arabian Peninsula*, PhD thesis, University of Michigan, USA, 1987, pp.37-39.

<sup>72</sup> Hamadi, "Saudi Arabia's Territorial Limits", p.14.

<sup>73</sup> ShafiAldamer, *Saudi Arabia and Britain, Changing Relationships, 1939-1953* (Reading, UK: Ithaca Press, 2003), p.5.

<sup>74</sup> Ivor Lucas, *Correspondence*, 26 October, 2010.

<sup>75</sup> Sluglett, "The Resilience of a Frontier", p.793.

<sup>76</sup> Hamadi, "Saudi Arabia's Territorial Limits", p. 17.

<sup>77</sup> Daniel Silverfarb, "The Anglo-Najd Treaty of 1915," *Middle Eastern Studies* 16 (October 1980): p.167.[emphasis added]

<sup>78</sup> Hamadi, "Saudi Arabia's Territorial Limits", p.18.

Somewhat later, during the early 1920s, the British successfully negotiated settlements of the borders between Ibn Saud's kingdom with Kuwait, Iraq, and Transjordan.<sup>79</sup> However, the negotiating of frontiers did not necessarily mean a mutually satisfactory result. For example, in the case of the Kuwait-Saudi Neutral Zone established in 1922, Sir Percy Cox successfully insisted on imposing "a defined boundary that was not known to the people in Arabia"<sup>80</sup> and was strongly opposed by Ibn Saud.

As for Ibn Saud's eastern and southern frontiers, the British took no action at all during the years immediately following World War I. Julian Walker states: "the limit of Empty Quarter was unknown to the British at that time."<sup>81</sup> Asked why the British did not delimit Saudi Arabia's eastern and southern boundaries, Peterson commented,

First, borders had to be arranged with Transjordan and Iraq because they were British mandates. Sir Percy Cox settled the Saudi-Kuwaiti boundary to the Saudis' great advantage because he wanted Ibn Saud's allegiance as an ally. There didn't seem to be as great an urgency elsewhere, nor were Ibn Saud's eyes as firmly fixed [toward the British protégés] as they were on northern Najd and of course al-Hijaz, as well as Asir.<sup>82</sup>

Apparently, British officials never considered the issue of Ibn Saud's southern and eastern frontiers. Given wartime pressures and Britain's responsibilities toward Transjordan, Iraq, and Kuwait, Peterson presents a logical speculation as to why delimitation of Ibn Saud's eastern and southern borders was not a priority for the British during and immediately after World War I. Delimiting boundaries between Saudi Arabia and the Gulf protégé states probably never occurred to British policy makers who were more focused on maintaining Britain's overall position in the region.

Certainly Ibn Saud, after concluding the 1915 treaty with the British, spent the rest of World War I defending his rule against internal rebellions and outside encroachment. By 1920, he had defeated the Al-Rashid, and by 1925, he had defeated the Hashemites of Hijaz, and his capture of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina meant that his status rose even higher. He then approached the British again to establish a new treaty that would reflect his new status. In May 1927, he signed the Treaty of Jeddah, through which the British gave him substantial concessions; Britain also formally recognized Ibn Saud's kingdom as an independent state. Silverfarb describes the 1927 Treaty of Jeddah as the beginning of the end of British power in the Middle East, with Britain attempting to maintain its dominance "at a time when its will and power to maintain its position by force were diminishing."<sup>83</sup>

Ibn Saud himself was perceived as a 'holy warrior' among both Arabs and Europeans. St. John B. Philby, for example, who was a British adviser to Ibn Saud, states that Ibn Saud relied primarily on religious faith as he organized nomadic tribesmen into an orderly society.<sup>84</sup> Al-Shaikh also notes that when Ibn Saud backed away from the limitless expansion of Wahhabi ideology, "[he] was persuaded by the British government to accept [the Western concept of the territorial limit of states], despite strong opposition from his army the *Ikhwan*."<sup>85</sup> However, while there were many members of the *Ikhwan* among Ibn Saud's soldiers, Ibn Saud's armed forces did not consist exclusively of *Ikhwan*. Furthermore, Ibn Saud's fighters themselves had battled elements of the *Ikhwan* as early as 1916. By the middle of the 1920s, the *Ikhwan* were raiding into Transjordan, Iraq, and Kuwait, even after Ibn Saud had settled his borders with those countries. This *Ikhwan* raiding in the 1920s reinforced the existing British fears of Wahhabi violence and territorial conquest.<sup>86</sup> Joseph Kostiner states that as time passed, the *Ikhwan* had become "the most fanatical adherents of the territorial and religious expansion of the Wahhabi state."<sup>87</sup> In contrast, by the 1920s, Ibn Saud's project was to build a modern state that he could control and pass on as a hereditary kingdom.

<sup>79</sup>Silverfarb, "The Anglo-Najd Treaty of 1915", p. 175.

<sup>80</sup>Abdullatif A. Al-Shaikh, Saudi Arabia and its Gulf Co-operation Neighbours: A Study in International Boundary Management, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Durham, UK, 2001), 26.

<sup>81</sup> Julian Walker, Interview, 23 September 2010

<sup>82</sup> J. E. Peterson, Interview, Arizona, 8 January 2011.

<sup>83</sup> Daniel Silverfarb, "The Treaty of Jeddah in May 1927", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 18, July 1982: p.283.

<sup>84</sup> St. John B. Philby, "The New Reign in Saudi Arabia," *Foreign Affairs* 32 (April 1954): 450-451.

<sup>85</sup> Al-Shaikh, "Saudi Arabia and its Gulf Co-operation Council Neighbours, p. 95.

<sup>86</sup> J. E. Peterson, Interview, Arizona, 8 January 2010.

<sup>87</sup> Joseph Kostiner, "On Instruments and Their Designers: The Ikhwan of Najd and the Emergence of the Saudi State", *Middle Eastern Studies* 21 (July 1985), p. 397.

Importantly, the religiously militant *Ikhwan* challenged Ibn Saud's authority; this was a serious problem, especially after 1927, when the Treaty of Jeddah defined his kingdom as an independent state. At the same time, Ibn Saud faced a domestic threat in the form of a longstanding ideology that rejected compromise and limits to Wahhabi expansionism.<sup>88</sup> In this context, Ibn Saud moved to address the problem that set domestic religious opposition against a developing modern state, by consulting with prominent imams of mosques, who afterwards issued a *fatwa*<sup>89</sup>, in support of Ibn Saud in his struggle against the *Ikhwan*. With British assistance Ibn Saud's army defeated the *Ikhwan* at the Battle of Sabila in 1929,<sup>90</sup> after which the *Ikhwan* lost their influence in Ibn Saud's kingdom, which he named in 1932 "The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia". Ibn Saud had survived by dropping the Wahhabi extremes of expansionism; yet, as Wilkinson writes, "even after Ibn Saud accepted the constraints of the 'civilized' nations he had no inherent notion of what the limits of his state should be."<sup>91</sup> Whereas Ibn Saud's kingdom was established in 1932 as the independent Kingdom Saudi Arabia, Abu Dhabi had been under increasing forms of British influence and protection for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and did not become a fully independent state until 1971.

## 7. Conclusion

This study concludes that despite periodic Saudi occupation of the Al-Ain/Buraimi oasis region from 1800 to 1869, there is no documentary evidence in the British Archive records to show that the British took any action with respect to Al-Ain/Buraimioasis region apart from the occasion in 1838, when the British persuaded the Ottomans to withdraw their Egyptian army from the Arabian Peninsula. However, Britain, as protector of the maritime peace, found itself obliged to take action regarding Khor al-Udaid, especially when the Ottomans interfered in the affairs of Khor al-Udaid in the 1870s. As a result, the British intervened so as to protect its sphere of influence by containing Ottoman influence in the coastal area. This study concludes that after 1869 Saudi Arabia did not exercise sovereignty over any part of Buraimi; instead it was jointly administered by the Sultan of Oman and Ruler of Abu Dhabi. In the case of Khor al-Udaid, Saudi Arabia and its allies played no role in the contest over Khor al-Udaid. The study also identifies the striking contrast between Abu Dhabi's development and that of Saudi Arabia from 1820 to the early 1930s. While Saudi Arabia became an independent state in 1932, Abu Dhabi remained a British protected state.

It concludes that Britain's role in the Gulf during the nineteenth century was focused almost exclusively on the coast, which explains why the British had never considered drawing the boundaries in the Arabian Gulf. British policy gradually began to consider the Arabian Peninsula beyond the immediate coast,<sup>92</sup> and during the 1920s and 1930s Britain participated in delimiting Ibn Saud's boundaries with Kuwait, Iraq, and Trans-Jordan. However, the British took no action with regard to drawing boundaries between Abu Dhabi and Saudi Arabia, and this, as a result, would contribute significantly to a longstanding territorial dispute that would involve both Khor al-Udaid and the Al-Ain/Buraimi oasis region. In the late 1930s, as oil became the prominent consideration with respect to defining territorial sovereignty, Britain's failure to delimit the eastern and southern frontiers of Ibn Saud's kingdom led to a deep and persistent controversy over Abu Dhabi's and Saudi Arabia's conflicting claims.

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<sup>88</sup> Wilkinson, *Arabia's Frontiers*, p. xix.

<sup>89</sup> Islamic concept means religious judgment.

<sup>90</sup> Hamadi, "Saudi Arabia's Territorial Limits", p.53.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xvi.

<sup>92</sup> J. E. Peterson, Interview, Arizona, 8 January 2011.