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Recommended Citation

Flamm, Lucy, "Iranian Islands?: Bahrain, Abu Masa, and the Tunbs in the Persian Gulf" (2015). *Senior Projects Spring 2015*. 141.

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Iranian Islands?: Bahrain, Abu Masa, and the Tunbs in the Persian Gulf

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by
Lucy Flamm

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
April 28, 2015

*For my grandfathers,
who continue to share their passion for history and humor.*

This project would not exist without the unwavering support of my advisor, Omar Cheta. An acknowledgement does no justice to the wisdom you have generously shared over the past year.

To my professors past and present who never fail to inspire their students:
Elizabeth Holt, Bob Ponte, Ibrahim Dagher, and Gennady Shkliarevsky.

To my friends who make everything better and brighter.

To my family for your love and encouragement.

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*Above: Map of the Persian Gulf (2008)
from the Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection
at the University of Texas, Austin.*



*Above: Map of the lower Persian Gulf (1980)
from the Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection
at the University of Texas, Austin.*

“The islands situated between Sind and Oman in the Persian Sea belong to Persia, the largest of which are Qis and Bahrain.”¹

– Hamdallah Mustawfi
Geographer
1329

Introduction

The abandonment of the Iranian claim to Bahrain is seemingly a benign moment in Iranian history, and those analyzing modern Iran tend to focus on pivotal moments such as the early parliamentary revolution (1905), the Shah’s White Revolution (1963), the Islamic Revolution (1979), the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), or the current dialogue surrounding Iran’s nuclear capabilities. Contemporary scholars of Iran more often than not attempt to construct accurate accounts of these historical developments. As a result, smaller moments are often overlooked to illustrate broader developments affecting Iran, and the greater Middle East. Employing a lens that focuses on one event allows for detailed insight into the intricacies that may be missed in an analysis with a wider scope. Through examining the deliberations over the fate of the Iranian state’s claim to Bahrain between 1968 and 1970 and subsequent territorial disputes one gains a comprehensive understanding of monarchical concerns, constraints, and transforming regional dynamics.

The belief that Bahrain is part of Persia is an outlook expressed in centuries predating the the reign of the last Shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (r. 1941 - 1979).² During his rule the

¹ Hooshang Amirahmadi, *Small Islands, Big Politics: The Tonbs and Abu Musa in the Persian Gulf* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1996), 36.

² In 1935 Reza Shah Pahlavi (r. 1925 - 1941) declared that Persia should be referred to in diplomatic correspondence with foreign states as Iran. To reflect this, the name Persia will be used prior to 1935, and Iran following.

Shah would seemingly quite willingly dispose of all formal links between the two territories. How was he able to achieve such an outcome? Before investigating the process that brought about this result and ensuing changes in sovereignty in the Persian Gulf it is necessary to have a comprehensive understanding of the dual Iranian and British assertion of jurisdiction in Bahrain. Prior to the latter's disengagement from the region and negotiations which garnered the cessation of the Iranian claim, both states viewed themselves as having legal right to the territory.

Pre-1968 Bahrain: Persia Proper

The Iranian claim that Bahrain is part of Persia proper cites early scholarly and artistic work as proof of authority. The Persian geographer and poet Hamdallah Mustawfi is but one example for in the early 14th century he was conveying an attitude of Iranian possession mirrored centuries later by diplomats under the Shah. In his work *Nezhat al-Qulub* Mustawfi put forth a vision of Iran beyond today's borders where "the islands situated between Sind and Oman and in the Persian Sea belong to Persia . . . the largest of which are Qis and Bahrain."³ Mustawfi refers to Bahrain as an entity possessed by Persia, communicating the sense of a shared identity before the era of nationalism. What is also notable is how in this excerpt from *Nezhat al-Qulub* Bahrain is explicitly singled out. Although Mustawfi is using Bahrain to communicate size, one cannot ignore that fact that in the year 1307 Bahrain was not simply an island but an active component of the Persian Empire. Texts from as early as the tenth century, whilst not referring to the island of Bahrain by name, identify the same land as characteristically Persian.⁴ Additional texts like these serve as further evidence of a Persian identity beyond Persia which the Iranian

³ Amirahmadi, *Small Islands, Big Politics*, 36.

⁴ Ibid.

government cited in its 20th century arguments of why Bahrain was neither independent nor a British territory.

The argument for Bahrain as part of Persia is best illustrated by examining the joint arguments put forth before the League of Nations by both London and Tehran between 1928 and 1929. During this time political representatives of both countries aired their grievances on the international stage. Diplomatic personnel in Tehran viewed the recently concluded Treaty of Jeddah between the United Kingdom and the Kingdom of Hedjaz and Nejd as a direct violation of Iran's claim to Bahrain.⁵ In response Fatoullah Khan Pakrevan, the Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iran, crafted a document to be sent to both the Secretary-General of the League and to the British government regarding the history, justification, and legality of Persian jurisdiction over Bahrain.

It is in this letter that the tenets of Iran's case for why Bahrain is formally part of Persia proper is deconstructed. The letter was written by Iran's foremost diplomat at the time and provides the most insight into what members of the Iranian government were thinking. The three facets on which the historically-rooted claim rests is articulated, beginning with the notion of uninterrupted occupation. Pakrevan wrote that with the exception of 1507 to 1622 — the time of Portuguese invasion — Bahrain has always been an integral part of Persia.⁶ Furthermore, it is asserted that international law dictates that a sovereign state is only detached when the lawful

⁵ On May 20, 1927 the Treaty of Jeddah was signed between Great Britain and the Kingdom of the Hedjaz and Nejd. Hedjaz is located on the western coast of Saudi Arabia on the Red Sea, but it was not until 1932 this territory was referred to as Saudi Arabia. For further information on the Kingdom see J.H.W. Verzijl, *International Law in Historical Perspective* (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1973), 470. For reference to the protest of the Persian Government against this treaty see Fatoullah Khan Pakrevan, "Protest of the Persian Government Against Article 6 of the Treaty Concluded Between Great Britain and the Hedjaz on May 20th, 1927," *League of Nations – Official Journal*, (1928): 1358-1362.

⁶ Pakrevan, "Protest of the Persian Government Against Article 6 of the Treaty Concluded Between Great Britain and the Hedjaz on May 20th, 1927," 1361.

owner of the territory officially recognizes its independence. In this case the state was Persia, and since the government had yet to acknowledge Bahraini independence it was still formally part of Iran.⁷ Lastly, the letter highlights that Persia's claim rests on the existence of formal documents that show past rulers of Bahrain expressing their submission to Persian authorities and a history of paying taxes — thus establishing a fiscal relationship between the state and its people.⁸

According to Iran at this time, “no independent State known as Bahrein has ever existed.”⁹

Bahrain is but part of Persia, and ought to be viewed as such in the international community.

The address also acts as a rebuttal against arguments Persian officials believed the British government might try to make. For instance, Pakrevan confronts the issue of language differentiation for whilst in Persia Farsi was the language of the people in Bahrain it remains Arabic. The minister snidely cited the vast size of the British Empire, which spanned across continents speaking different languages thus legitimizing the rule of a Farsi-speaking government over Arabic-speaking peoples. For the same reason, Iran argued that any attempt to invalidate their claim on the basis of geography must be ignored. Neither river, sea, nor ocean can serve to annul a claim, for the British empire had at the time 10,317 miles between London and Nuku'alofa, the capital of the British protectorate of Tonga. Thus, Pakrevan asserted

⁷ The Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs wrote that this was an “international juridical principal” and that “a territory belonging to a sovereign State cannot be lawfully detached so long as the right of ownership has not been transferred by this State to another State as of an official act, in this case by a treaty, or so long as its annexation by another State or its independence have not been recognised by the lawful owner of the territory.” This logic would suggest that since Persia has never “transferred” the “right of ownership” to another party, there is no possibility of Bahrain being “detached” from Iran. See: Pakrevan, "Protest of the Persian Government Against Article 6 of the Treaty Concluded Between Great Britain and the Hedjaz on May 20th, 1927," 1361.

⁸ Ibid. See comments made in the letter to the Secretary-General of the League of Nations by the Acting Minister in which he states that there is in existence “authentic documents . . . in which their [Bahrain] entire submission and loyalty to the central Government”²⁶ is proven. The “tribal chieftains” of Bahrain, Pakrevan asserts, had historical paid taxes to Persia. it is also expressed that whilst some Bahrainis hold a rank as a “hereditary governor,” they are continuously subject to the central government of Persia.

⁹ Pakrevan, "Protest of the Persian Government Against Article 6 of the Treaty Concluded Between Great Britain and the Hedjaz on May 20th, 1927," 1360.

“geographical and racial considerations can . . . be put forward only in the case of a state desiring to justify its claim to annex a new territory.”¹⁰ Bahrain was perceived by the Persian government not as a new claim, but one that had existed for centuries.

Pre-1968 Bahrain: A British Protectorate

The letter to the Secretary-General of the League of Nations drew great criticism from the British Foreign Office¹¹ where Bahrain was viewed as a protectorate of the United Kingdom. The state initially became commercially involved in the Persian Gulf in 1723 when the British East India Company established their first trading factory in Basra, Ottoman Iraq.¹² Located on the Shatt al-Arab river between southernmost Iraq, Kuwait, and Iran, the factory was in a prime location for the expansion efforts of the British Empire.¹³ India was the jewel of Britain’s colonial crown, and Britain’s ability to harness and export India’s resources was therefore dependent on the security of maritime trade routes between the Indian Ocean and Western Europe. Out of fear of such security becoming compromised, London pursued politically-binding agreements with rulers of the small Gulf sheikhdoms which would decades later form the United Arab Emirates — otherwise known at the time as the trucional states.

¹⁰ Pakrevan, "Protest of the Persian Government Against Article 6 of the Treaty Concluded Between Great Britain and the Hedjaz on May 20th, 1927," 1361.

¹¹ Henceforth referred to as the Foreign Office.

¹² Taylor Fain, *American Ascendance and British Retreat in the Persian Gulf Region* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 14.

¹³ See the letter written by Elizabeth I on January 23 1601 in George Birdwood, *The Register of Letters, &c., of the Governour and Company of Merchants of London Trading into the East Indies, 1600-1619* (London: B. Quaritch, 1893), 3.

On March 19, 1891 Queen Victoria signed a Treaty of Friendship, Commerce, and Navigation with the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman.¹⁴ This was the first of many bi-lateral, politically binding agreements multiple sheikhdoms of the Gulf would sign with the United Kingdom over the course of the next decade. The agreement stipulated that the Sultan would not cede territory to any foreign power with the explicit exception of the United Kingdom. Secondly, the Sultan would not formulate new relationships with foreign governments and such proceedings would only be possible with London's approval. In exchange the Sultan would receive protection from any and all external aggression.¹⁵ This treaty became a blueprint for subsequent covenants with other powers in the region. By the turn of the 20th century Yemen, Sudan, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and the trucional states had become either formal or informal protectorates of the United Kingdom.

Thus, when the British Foreign Secretary Austen Chamberlain received a copy of the Persian Foreign Minister's address regarding Bahrain he quickly drafted a response to the "unsupported declarations that Bahrein forms an integral part of Persia."¹⁶ Secretary Chamberlain devoted four entire pages to contesting Iran's contentions, asserting that the claim of uninterrupted occupation was false due to the fact that the troops of the sixth Shah of the Zand dynasty were driven from Bahrain by the Utabi Arabs never to fully reassert their control.¹⁷ Furthermore, he scoffed at Iran's interpretation of "international law." Their back and forth in

¹⁴ The Sultanate of Muscat and Oman was a state that encompassed both present-day Oman and parts of the United Arab Emirates. Muscat is the current capital of the nation of Oman, but in the 19th century this was the name of the territory.

¹⁵ Fain, *American Ascendance and British Retreat in the Persian Gulf Region*, 15.

¹⁶ Austen Chamberlain, "The British Government to the Secretary-General of the League," *League of Nations – Official Journal*, (1929): 790-794.

¹⁷ Chamberlain, "The British Government to the Secretary-General of the League," 791.

front of the League of Nations between 1928 and 1929 brought the issue of the sovereignty of Bahrain to the national stage but no resolution was reached.

The dual British and Iranian claims to Bahrain were able to operate in tandem due to the nature of their contended sovereignty. Officials in neither London nor Tehran made decisions that directly influenced the population of Bahrain. In Tehran, Bahrain was viewed as Persia proper but a lenient policy of autonomous rule was consistently employed to keep peace and stability.¹⁸ Since the second half of the eighteenth century the al-Khalifah family has reigned over Bahrain with the oldest son succeeding his father as monarch.¹⁹ In the mid-twentieth century the dual legal claim, however, would resurface when controversial governmental measures were introduced, as was the case in 1951 when laws were passed to extend the Iranian oil nationalization project to the Bahrain Petroleum Company.²⁰ Similarly, in 1957 when the Iranian Government declared Bahrain Iran's 14th province, London received the news with outcry.²¹ The dispute over rightful sovereignty did not strain the Anglo-Iranian relationship in its entirety. The importance of other issues continued to overshadow arguments over rightful legal jurisdiction and the dispute seemingly came to a standstill. This all changed in January 1968 when the British Prime Minister announced British forces would be disengaging from the Persian Gulf, and the Shah expressed a similar desire to abandon the Iranian states ties to the isle.

¹⁸ Ali Rastbeen, *The Three Iranian Islands of the Persian Gulf: Based on Documents and Historical Evidence* (Paris: Institut International D'Études Stratégiques, 2008), 141.

¹⁹ Rosemarie Said Zahlan, *The Making of the Modern Gulf States: Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 82-84.

²⁰ The nationalization of Iran's oil will be specifically examined in the following chapter of this analysis.

²¹ Roham Alvandi, "Muhammad Reza Pahlavi and the Bahrain Question, 1968-1970," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 37, no. 2 (2010): 162.

The Persian Gulf Post-1968: Negotiations, Abandonment, and Annexation

The question of why the Shah made the decision to abandon the Iranian claim to Bahrain in 1968 is not the focus of this analysis, nor does it have a complex answer. In 1968 there was clear strategic imperative for relinquishing the Iranian states tie to the island.²² Following the 1967 Six Day War, the Shah felt increasingly ostracized by his neighbors for his lack of support for the Palestinian cause. Additionally, the British announcement to withdraw all forces from the Persian Gulf and Arabian Peninsula roused fears about a possible vacuum for influence where the British had been active. The Shah sought to create a regional defense framework for the Persian Gulf, which would protect Iranian oil transports that accounted for 38 per cent of Iranian government spending in 1968.²³ However, the claim to Bahrain remained an obstacle to formalizing such an agreement, and it was with these considerations in mind that the Shah found it key to relinquish the historically-rooted ties between the two territories.²⁴

This research project aims to explore what happens when territory is abandoned, and begins by answering the question of why the Shah kept the negotiations concerning the Iranian claim a secret. What was the process employed to relinquish the claim to the island? Once this outcome was achieved Iranian troops occupied three additional islands in the Persian Gulf: Abu Masa, Greater Tunbs, and Lesser Tunbs. Diplomatic cables identify a possible agreement between Iran and the United Kingdom which would permit an exchange of territory so this research also begs the question of whether there was a “deal” in play for Iran to dispose of her claim to Bahrain and in return get to seize other territory.

²² Alvandi, "Muhammad Reza Pahlavi and the Bahrain Question," 159-162.

²³ Mark J. Gasiorowski, *U.S. foreign policy and the shah: building a client state in Iran* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991): 102-103.

²⁴ Ibid.

Chapter one begins by appraising the relationship between Persia and the United Kingdom in the early twentieth century. I argue that substantial foreign economic activity fostered an anti-imperialist attitude in Iran, which was further exacerbated by the role of external governments in overthrowing the democratically elected Iranian Prime Minister in 1953. Anti-interventionist and specifically anti-British sentiment shaped the negotiations regarding the disposal of the Iranian claim to Bahrain in their entirety. Utilizing archival materials I then go on to piece together the negotiations which took place from January 1968 to March 1970 where the Shah sought to abandon the Iranian claim. The different phases of the 26 months of diplomacy will be highlighted, as well as the faulty chronology commonly employed by other scholars.

Following reconstructing the negotiations that led to the Shah disposing of the longstanding Iranian claim to Bahrain, chapter two employs a thematic account to illustrate varying motivations, considerations, and long-term goals of the parties involved. I assert that diplomatic cables and communiqués reveal four key themes. Firstly, domestic politics were crucial in dictating the course of negotiations for the rulers of both Iran and Bahrain — albeit for very different reasons. Secondly, it becomes apparent that on both the national and international level there was anxiety regarding religious dynamics. It will then be shown how the fate of a security network amongst smaller Gulf states was linked to the outcome of the Bahrain negotiations. Lastly, critical analysis reveals the Shah, whilst concerned with public opinion, acted consistently independent from his political advisers.

Chapter three turns to examining whether or not there was a deal crafted in which the Shah would relinquish the Iranian claim to Bahrain and in return get to seize the islands of Abu Masa, Greater Tunbs, and Lesser Tunbs in the Persian Gulf. The fact of the matter is that on

the eve of British formal withdrawal from the region in 1971 Iran laid claim to new territory after denouncing others, which leaves room for speculation regarding what may have occurred behind closed doors. I argue that historians have missed documented evidence of a British proposal for a packaged settlement. However, evidence of a packaged settlement is not proof that territorial changes were the product of a deal and I conclude that whilst a *quid pro quo* exchange was initially put forth there is not enough evidence that this was the groundwork for territorial changes in November 1971.

Chapter four evaluates these transformations contending that they remain relevant to the Persian Gulf and Arabian Peninsula today. The 2011 uprisings in Bahrain illustrate how a lingering sense of Iranian identity have served as justification for the systematic discrimination of the Shia population of Bahrain. Continued threats of annexation by officials in the Iranian government also serve to heighten tensions between the two states. This chapter exhibits how the Iranian government's continued claim of sovereignty over the islands inhabited by Iranian forces in the autumn of 1971 remains a main point of contention in the relationship between Iran and the United Arab Emirates.

In conducting this analysis a wide variety of sources are utilized. When engaging with the negotiations themselves *Arabian Boundaries: New Documents, 1966-1975* is employed.²⁵ The multi-volume series is comprised of diplomatic telegrams, communiqués, and briefings as exchanged between British diplomatic personnel in the Persian Gulf. As a result of Britain's thirty-year rule all correspondence and memorandums have been made public — this includes all

²⁵ Richard Schofield and Elizabeth Evans, eds., *Arabian boundaries: new documents : 1966-1975* (Cambridge: Cambridge Archive Edition, 2009).

documents then deemed “secret.”²⁶ Beyond providing insight to ongoing debates and the general negotiation process, the direct quotes of foremost negotiators from Iran and Bahrain as to be relayed to other embassies gained from this correspondence are invaluable. There is no accessible historical record in Iran and Bahrain of these negotiations. Inaccessibility of archives, lack of translation, and limited publishing practices are all contributing factors. In Bahrain, there is no law governing access to diplomatic archives.²⁷

The oral history projects of Zohreh Sullivan at the University of Illinois, the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard University, and the Foundation for Iranian Studies have additionally lent themselves to making this analysis as rigorous and balanced as possible. The records respectively provide insight to the silenced narrative of the middle and lower classes under the reign of the Shah. Furthermore, they offer commentary on the general trends and transformations of Iranian society in the twentieth century. These interviews provide an intimate look into the strategies and concerns of prominent diplomatic officials during the negotiations between 1968 and 1971. The final chapter, which deals with contemporary politics, employs journalistic sources.

²⁶ The thirty-year rule is a law of the United Kingdom which states that all government papers must be released publicly thirty years after they have been drafted. Following the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act in 2010, there is now a twenty-year rule concerning government documents of the United Kingdom. The twenty-year rule was enacted in August 2013.

²⁷ Office of the Historian at the U.S. Department of State, "World Wide Diplomatic Archives Index: Bahrain," U.S. Department of State, <https://history.state.gov/countries/archives/bahrain>.

*“A Great Civilization involves, in the first instance, a choice.”*²⁸

– Mohammad Reza Pahlavi
Shah of Iran
1980

Chapter 1: A Need for Secrecy

Introductory Remarks

On October 28, 1968 Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi wrote to Sir Denis Wright, the British Ambassador to Iran, that in order for the people of Iran to accept his decision to abandon the Iranian claim it was essential to show it had been dropped in conformity with internationally recognized procedures.²⁹ After decades of hotly claiming Bahrain was not an independent state and that it was formally part of Iran, the Shah could not be seen to simply be abandoning territory with reason. The Iranian government had repeatedly professed, as articulated in Iran’s 1928 petition to the League of Nations written by the Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs, that the Bahrain islands belonged to Persia.³⁰ How then was Iran, seemingly out of nowhere to relinquish its claim to what some believed to be Persia proper? Furthermore, how was the Shah to manipulate events so not to appear to be conspiring with the British?

Having established in the introduction that it was from a desire for Arab-Iranian rapprochement that the Shah sought to abandon Iran’s longstanding claim to Bahrain, this chapter will examine why and how the Shah went to such lengths to procure the outcome he

²⁸ Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, *The Shah's Story*, trans. Teresa Waugh (London: Michael Joseph, 1980), 124.

²⁹ Alvandi, "Muhammad Reza Pahlavi and the Bahrain Question," 168.

³⁰ Pakrevan, "Protest of the Persian Government Against Article 6 of the Treaty Concluded Between Great Britain and the Hedjaz on May 20th, 1927," 1360.

desired. I argue that the long history of foreign economic and political activity in Iran nurtured an anti-imperialist and anti-interventionist domestic attitude. By engaging with economic development at the turn of the 20th century and the episode that overthrew the democratically elected Iranian Prime Minister in 1953 it will be displayed why the Shah felt compelled to keep the negotiations with British diplomats between 1968 and 1970 shrouded in secrecy. After a comprehensive analysis of the national landscape I will then reconstruct the phrases of over two years of diplomacy that culminated in the formal relinquishment of the Iranian claim to Bahrain.

Iran's Domestic Landscape

Iranian opposition towards foreign interference has its roots in the domestic conditions at the turn of the twentieth century. Janet Afary, an Iranian academic at the University of California, Santa Barbara, has succinctly written in her work on the Iranian Constitutional Revolution³¹ that “nineteenth-century development in Iran should be characterized as colonial and dependent, serving the best interests of foreign merchants rather than the native community.”³² It was not one distinct social class who suffered from Western³³ interference in domestic socio-economic affairs, but all Iranians. The lower classes and the bourgeoisie were equally afflicted by active foreign economic activity in Iran: peasants could not afford

³¹ The Persian Constitutional Revolution took place between 1905 and 1906. An immediate outcome of the revolution was the creation of parliament in Persia, known as the *Majlis*. For more on the subject see: Nikki R. Keddie, “Iranian Revolutions in Comparative Perspective,” *The American Historical Review* 88, no. 3 (1983): 579-598; and Nader Sohrabi, “Historicizing Revolutions: Constitutional Revolutions in the Ottoman Empire, Iran, and Russia, 1905-1907,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 100, no. 6 (1995): 1383-1447.

³² Janet Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906-1911: Grassroots Democracy, Social Democracy & the Origins of Feminism* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1996), 19.

³³ “Western” in this instance does not refer to the countries that constituted the Western bloc during the Cold War. In Iranian politics “the West” refers to Russia as well. See Vladislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

necessities due to price hikes and middle-class merchants lost trading opportunities as a result of increased foreign import and export practices. During the Constitutional Revolution the bourgeoisie aimed to curtail foreign investment to protect their own interests.³⁴ Thus, discontent with foreign involvement in Iran is found across all Iranian social classes at the turn of the century.

This anti-imperialist stance is very much apparent in Iranian literature. Whilst the majority of the works produced in the modern period are fictional in content and cannot be accepted purely as fact, that does not mean they cannot be utilized in historical analysis of the period. Many works illustrate common themes, motifs, symbols and allusions which display common opposition to foreign social, economic, and political expansion into Persia, the Persian Gulf, and the broader Middle East.³⁵ One example of this is a novel *The Travel Diary of Ebrahim Beyg*, written in 1902, which tells the tale of an Iranian born and raised in Cairo who, upon growing up, decides to venture to Iran, where instead of the paradise his father described Iran to be, finds that:

What is lacking is law. There is no order; hence, the duty of the individual, including the ruler and the ruled, the subject and the official, is unclear. For this reason, there are no schools and no taxes, but bribery, dictatorship and extortion do exist. Cities are left in ruins. Fields are left barren. Waters are stagnant. It is difficult to walk through the alleys for the stench. Beggars have become viziers and viziers have turned to be beggars. Affairs are in the hands of the incompetent. Extortion, turmoil and chaos are rampant.³⁶

³⁴ Hamid Dabashi, *Iran: A People Interrupted* (New York: New Press, 2007), 77.

³⁵ See M. R. Ghanoonparvar, *In a Persian Mirror: Images of the West and Westerners in Iranian Fiction* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993) and Nahid Mozaffari, *Strange Times, My Dear: The PEN Anthology of Contemporary Iranian Literature* (New York: Arcade Pub., 2005) and Dabashi, *Iran: A People Interrupted*.

³⁶ Maragheh-'i Zeynol'abdein, *Siyahatnameh-ye Ebrahim Beyg* (Tehran: Sadaf, 1965/1966) as found in M. R. Ghanoonparvar, *Prophets of Doom: Literature as a Socio-political Phenomenon in Modern Iran* (Lanham, M.D.: University Press of America, 1984), 3.

Zeynol'abdein Maragheh-'i's novel illustrates Iran at the turn of the century and became one of the most popular texts in Iran because it was accessible to the public as result of its tone, realism, and basic syntax.³⁷ The language was not pompous and grandiose as the majority of the works from the period, and resonated with many Iranians.³⁸ The work realistically portrayed the state of the national education system in which there were no school, but more importantly the state of the government in which bribery and extortion went unchecked. Those in power were not there as a result of professional qualifications, but qualified pockets.

Already existing domestic opposition towards external actors became exacerbated by the episode which usurped Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh from power in August 1953. Born in 1882, Mossadegh was a wealthy landowner and lawyer who after many years in public service was elected in 1920 to the Iranian Parliament, better known as the *Majles*. He would become the 60th Prime Minister of Iran with the campaign platform of introducing sweeping social and political reforms. Included in his progressive campaign was a bill submitted to the *Majles* to nationalize the oil industry in Iran. As the leader of the Iranian National Front³⁹ Mossadegh was not alone in seeking the expulsion of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) from Iran. The Islamic clergy welcomed the expulsion of Western corruptive influence from Iran, and other groups viewed the AIOC as the greatest manifestation of foreign intervention in Iran's economy.⁴⁰ Mossadegh's bill roused massive domestic support, and on March 20, 1951 the company was nationalized, taking away both power and profits from the AIOC.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ghanoonparvar, *Prophets of Doom: Literature as a Socio-political Phenomenon in Modern Iran*, 3.

³⁹ The National Front is a political party founded by Mohammad Mossadegh in the late 1940s.

⁴⁰ Mark Lytle, *The Origins of the Iranian-American Alliance, 1941-1953* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1987), 194.

At the time of nationalization the British government owned 50% of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company's stock and utilized the profits to finance the empire.⁴¹ The company's oil-refinery at Abadan was itself valued at over £120 million and was Westminster's single-most expensive overseas investment. Such financial gains from oil production were key for Britain who had spent over a quarter of its national wealth during World War II. With the economy still recovering, the British government could not afford to lose its most lucrative financial resource.⁴² British negotiators sought to draw up an agreement that would address many of Mossadegh's grievances and reverse nationalization but the proposed settlement simply offered Iran too little, too late.⁴³

Authorities in London not only objected to Iran's nationalization as result of the threat to Britain's fiscal situation, but also on the theory that oil produced in Iran was rightfully British. At the time of Mossadegh's nationalization, high-ranking officials from the United Kingdom argued that oil found in Iran was not rightfully Iranian. This is evidenced by the writing of the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Ministry of Fuel and Power who wrote in a letter that:

it was British enterprise, skill and effort which discovered oil under the soil of Persia, which has got the oil out, which has built the refinery, which has developed markets for Persian oil in 30 or 40 countries, with wharves, storage tanks and pumps, road and rail tanks, and other distribution facilities, and also an immense fleet of tankers. This was done at a time when there was no easy outlet for Persian oil in competition with

⁴¹ Mark Gasiorowski, "The 1953 Coup d'état in Iran," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19, no. 3 (1987): 262.

⁴² Fain, *American Ascendance and British Retreat in the Persian Gulf Region*, 33-37 and 218.

⁴³ Ervand Abrahamian, "The 1953 Coup in Iran," *Science of Society* 65 (2001): 185.

the vastly greater American oil industry.⁴⁴

Thus, he argues oil was discovered by William Knox D'arcy, an entrepreneur from Newton Abbot, England, and subsequently refined, produced, and managed by Englishmen for decades following. The Under-Secretary contends that none of these things could have occurred if the Persian government and Persian people had been left to their own devices.⁴⁵

As a result, London authorized a three-track policy consisting of legal maneuvers economic sanctions, and planning of covert operations to reverse nationalization.⁴⁶ Beginning in the spring of 1951 Britain strategized with the pursuit of, as succinctly articulated by the historian Mark Gasiorowski, "reestablish[ing] their control over Iran's oil by either pressuring Mosaddeq into a favorable settlement or by removing him from office."⁴⁷ Endeavors undertaken over the following months included making legal appeals to the International Court of Justice and the United States; a production slowdown by the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company; laying off 20,000 Iranian oil workers at the Abadan oil fields; and pressuring the Shah to install other politicians in Mossadegh's place.⁴⁸ These tactics proved futile, and the dispute remained unresolved.

In autumn of 1951 British officials registered a complaint against Iran on behalf of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company at the meeting of the United Nations Security Council. The British were up in arms, and whilst expressing his refusal to negotiate with representatives of the

⁴⁴ William Roger Louis, *Ends of British Imperialism: the scramble for empire, Suez and decolonisation: collected essays* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 683-684.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Lawrence Paul Elwell-Sutton, *Persian Oil* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1955), 201-232.

⁴⁷ Gasiorowski, "The 1953 Coup d'état in Iran," 262-263.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Foreign Office Mossadegh came before the United Nations in October to utilize what he called, “the ultimate refuge of weak and oppressed nations”⁴⁹ in hope of once and for all ceasing any claim Britain had to Iran’s oil production facilities. Mossadegh commented on the socio-economic state of affairs in Iran and the history of the AIOC’s operations, saying that in the year 1948 alone the company’s accounts revealed that whilst its net value was sixty-one million pounds Iran only received nine million. The Iranian governments yield was three times less than the twenty eight million pounds that were awarded to the British treasury as a result of income tax alone.⁵⁰ Mossadegh made his case to the Council, as he had to the international community prior, for the complete and continued nationalization of oil production in Iran.

At the 560th meeting of the Security Council British officials slandered Mossadegh’s nationalist stance, characterizing the Iranian approach to negotiations as wholeheartedly negative.⁵¹ Defamatory statements were exchanged by all parties, and on the third and final day of the session the Iranian Ambassador to the United States stated on Mossadegh’s behalf that the company would never again operate in Iran through trusteeship nor contract.⁵² The session of the United Nations Security Council voted to postpone discussion of the subject, leaving the British without their desired result and embarrassed on the international stage.

When Mossadegh first arrived in New York, President Harry Truman embraced him and applauded his strength to combat imperialism. With such a pleasant exchange between leaders,

⁴⁹ Mossadegh speech to Security Council: *Security Council Official Records*, 560th Meeting, October 15, 1951. as found in Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men: The Hidden Story of the CIA's Coup in Iran* (New York: Wiley, 2003) 123.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Security Council Official Records, 562nd Meeting, October 17, 1951 as found in Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men*, 127.

⁵² Ibid.

and American political passivity towards the oil debacle in Iran, why then did American decision makers coordinate intervention in Iranian domestic politics just a year following? The answer is found in examining the philosophy of political actors during the Cold War. In the midst of greater conflict with the U.S.S.R. Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, and Turkey made up the “Northern Tier” strategy in which the countries would act as a blockade between Russia and the rest of the Middle East and the Persian Gulf.⁵³ By the time Dwight Eisenhower succeeded Truman some in the administration were no longer assured that the Iranian people universally supported Mossadegh as they had prior. The domestic landscape had transformed, and fearing cracks in their strategy to combat communism and Soviet Union the United States became involved; forever changing the course of Iran’s political future.

The Eisenhower administration’s concerns are illustrated in a policy proposal crafted by the United States National Security Council in November, 1952 which highlights the opportunities for Soviet infiltration in Iran.⁵⁴ The timing of this policy is of great relevance for it was written just weeks following the expulsion of the British diplomatic service upon Mossadegh’s discovery of British plans to overthrow him.⁵⁵ With the Foreign Office no longer able to “unilaterally to assure stability” members of the U.S. National Security Council felt that the U.S.S.R. might gain political control of Iran.⁵⁶ The latter statement was supported by the fact that the

⁵³ Nigel Ashton, "The Hijacking of a Pact: The Formation of the Baghdad Pact and Anglo-American Tensions in the Middle East, 1955-58," *Review of International Studies* 19, no. 2 (1993): 125.

⁵⁴ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952–1954, Volume X, Iran, 1951-1954*, eds. Carl N. Raether and Charles S. Sampson, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1989), Document 240.

⁵⁵ Following British government’s failure to agree to Mossadegh’s proposed oil settlement where Britain would pay reparations to the Iranian government for years of (perceived to be) unfair oil agreements and the further discovery of British schemes to overthrow Mossadegh and install a prominent general in the army Mossadegh moved to expel all members of the British diplomatic service from Tehran. See Gasiorowski, "The 1953 Coup d’état in Iran," and Louis, *Ends of British Imperialism* for more information on British endeavors prior to 1953.

⁵⁶ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952–1954, Volume X, Iran, 1951-1954*, Document 240.

pan-Iranist party which was once united behind Mossadegh and his democratic aims was now split into two factions: pro– and anti–Mossadegh.⁵⁷ Furthermore, the Prime Minister had nearly exhausted Iran’s financial reserves and spending was exceeding revenue; a practice not conducive to delivering on the promises of economic and social betterment which he had pledged to make a reality.⁵⁸ The American government could no longer be certain that Mossadegh would be able to retain control, and the possibility of someone from the communist Tudeh party ascending in domestic politics was viewed as too threatening to ignore. Thus, in August 1953, President Eisenhower authorized the Central Intelligence Agency of the United States to initiate Operation AJAX. Led by Kermit Roosevelt Jr., the grandson of President Theodore Roosevelt, the planned coup succeeded in overthrowing Mosadegh in August 1953.⁵⁹ Whilst the British government had been conspiring to such ends since Mossadegh’s nationalization of the oil industry, for America the decision to usurp the Prime Minister had its origins with the security of his rule in the context of the Cold War. Despite their differing motivations the people of Iran would always remember the interference of America and the United Kingdom in Iran’s domestic politics and their decisive role in determining the future trajectory of political authority in Iran.

The Shah’s loyalty to the Iranian people was increasingly coming into question, and as noted by one of the subjects of Sullivan’s oral history project after Mossadegh was overthrown

⁵⁷ In early November 1952 Mossadegh demanded emergency powers from the *Majles*. This caused a massive backlash from members of parliament and Iranians who believed such a policy would create a more authoritarian government.

⁵⁸ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952–1954, Volume X, Iran, 1951-1954, Document 240.*

⁵⁹ Ervand Abrahamian, *The Coup: 1953, the CIA, and the roots of modern U.S.-Iranian relations* (New York, NY: New Press, 2013). For additional reading see Mark Gasiorowski and Malcolm Byrne, *Mohammad Mosaddeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004); and Mary Ann Heiss, *Empire and Nationhood: the United States, Great Britain, and Iranian Oil, 1950-1954* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); and Lytle, *The Origins of the Iranian-American Alliance, 1941-1953.*

an air of illegitimacy hung around the Shah.⁶⁰ This came greatly as the result of his increasingly militaristic policies and autocratic rule pursued following the coup.⁶¹ Instances of disappearance, torture, and death became the norm as American support allowed for the creation of the military police and intelligence network known as SAVAK.⁶² A month after the Mossadegh had been usurped and the Shah's authority centralized a U.S. colonel working for the Central Intelligence Agency came to Iran to aid the Military Governor of Tehran in training an initial security squad in techniques for intelligence, surveillance, and interrogation.⁶³ As recounted by Hussein Fardust, who later served as the Deputy Head of SAVAK, it was at this time that the small team assisted with liquidating the Shah's opponents through the discovery and eradication of oppositional groups.⁶⁴

The extent SAVAK's control over the Iranian domestic climate is illustrated by an article published in the *New York Times* in 1958. Six days following the military coup which murdered the king of Iraq and brought two generals to power the American newspaper ran a piece on Iran's domestic landscape, and sought to examine if a similar coup would be possible in the neighboring country of Iran.⁶⁵ The article stated that no internal subversion would be possible in Iran, with the Shah retaining complete personal control. In regards to the opinion of the Iranian

⁶⁰ Zohreh Sullivan, *Exiled Memories: Stories of Iranian Diaspora* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 96.

⁶¹ Ali Ansari, *Modern Iran since 1921: the Pahlavis and After* (London: Pearson Education, 2003), 75.

⁶² Gholam Afkhami, *The Life and times of the Shah* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 381.

⁶³ Mark Gasiorowski, "Central Intelligence Agency in Persia," *Encyclopedia Iranica*, Originally published December 15, 1991. <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/central-intelligence-agency-cia-in-persia>.

⁶⁴ Hussein Fardust, *The Rise and Fall of the Pahlavi Dynasty: Memoirs of Former General Hussein Fardust*, trans. Ali Akbar Dareini (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1999), 217.

⁶⁵ For more information on the 1958 revolution in Iraq see Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) and Marion and Peter Sluglett, *Iraq since 1958 from Revolution to Dictatorship* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001).

people, *The New York Times* commented that “Iranians say that the Savak (secret police) is so efficient that a conspiracy in the army similar to the one that overthrew King Faisal of Iraq would be unthinkable here.”⁶⁶

Five years later the Shah implemented a series of national reforms known as the White Revolution and which included the expansion of a land reform program, the nationalization of forests and pastures, the enfranchisement of women, and a rural literacy program.⁶⁷ These reforms were ratified to appease public opinion and ensure the stability and durability of the regime.⁶⁸ However, the resiliency of the regime was also solidified by the expansion of SAVAK. Any expression of sentiment seemingly in opposition to the Shah and more broadly the government faced serious repercussions. The award winning Polish journalist Ryszard Kapuściński’s wrote that “all walls can have ears and every door or gate can lead to the secret police.”⁶⁹ His words poignantly illustrated the reality in Iran and the overwhelming sense of fear, loss, and powerlessness, that:

Whoever fell into the grip of that organization disappeared without a trace, sometimes forever. People would vanish suddenly and nobody would know what had happened to them, where to go, whom to ask, whom to appeal to. They might be locked up in a prison, but which one? There were six thousand. An invisible, adamant wall would rise up, before which you stood helpless, unable to take a step forward. Iran belonged to SAVAK, but within the country the police acted like an under-ground organization that appeared then disappeared, hiding its tracks, leaving no forwarding address.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Homer Bigart, "Iran Reported Calm Despite Iraqi Coup," *New York Times*, July 21, 1958.

⁶⁷ Roland Popp, *John F. Kennedy and the 'Thousand Days': New Perspectives on the Foreign and Domestic Policies of the Kennedy Administration* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag, 2007).

⁶⁸ Ansari, *Modern Iran since 1921*, 148.

⁶⁹ Ryszard Kapuściński, *Shah of shahs* (New York: Vintage International, 1992), 46.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

An Amnesty International report estimates that before the fall of the Shah as many as 25,000 to 100,000 political prisoners were subject to interrogation and torture at the hands of the state-sponsored internal repression mechanism.⁷¹

In 1953 in order to preserve their national interests, America and the United Kingdom interfered in Iran's domestic affairs. In its place, they solidified and centralized the power of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. He constructed a repressive state in which the masses of Iran saw their harsh reality as a result of the foreign intervention, and harbored increasing resentment towards both America and the United Kingdom. Thus, in relinquishing Iran's claim to Bahrain — a stance politicians in London had urged for decades — it was crucial for the Shah to not seem as to be at the bidding of London. It was of utmost importance for the Shah to have the veil of "internationally recognized procedures"⁷² as articulated by the Iranian Ambassador to Iran to the Foreign Office in October 1968. However, simply agreeing on an international approach to renouncing Iran's territory did not prescribe a course of action to be undertaken and earlier that year such an approach was not even under consideration by the Shah.

The Negotiations

The twenty six months of shuttle diplomacy that would formally dispose of the Iranian states claim to Bahrain began in January 1968. In a meeting with the Shah in the first week of the new year, the British Minister of State for Foreign Affairs announced the Prime Minister's

⁷¹ Amnesty International, *Amnesty International Briefing: Iran*, 1 November 1976, MDE 13/001/1976, available at: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE13/001/1976/en> [accessed 28 November 2014]

⁷² Alvandi, "Muhammad Reza Pahlavi and the Bahrain Question," 168.

decision to withdraw all British troops from the Persian Gulf. The Shah himself voiced a desire to abandon the longstanding Iranian claim, contending that a public referendum such as a plebiscite, which examined Bahraini public opinion would be necessary.⁷³ This initiated continued conversations between the Shah and diplomatic officials in Tehran and London. As documented by the British Ambassador to Iran in his annual review that year, the Shah was incredibly anxious about the possibility of going “down in history as the man who lightly abandoned his country’s ‘14th Province’”⁷⁴ yet remained adamant about wanting to relinquish Iran’s longstanding claim. Beginning in January 1968 all conversations in regards to Bahrain centered around the Shah’s determination to hold a plebiscite which would serve as justification for relinquishing formal ties to the islands.

However, a plebiscite would not prove to be a viable option. Since the Shah first proposed this course of action the Emir of Bahrain, Isa bin Salman Al-Khalifah (r. 1961 - 1999),⁷⁵ objected for he believed it would trigger domestic violence and that any introduction of procedures aiming to gauge the social attitude would spur further chaos.⁷⁶ Such sentiments were relayed vis-à-vis British diplomatic staff. Since the Iranian government did not recognize the independent status of the Bahraini government, there could not be direct negotiations between the parties.⁷⁷ As a result, British ambassadors and diplomatic officials

⁷³ Alvandi, "Muhammad Reza Pahlavi and the Bahrain Question," 164.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Isa bin Salman al-Khalifah is a descendent of Ahmed bin Muhammad ibn Khalifah, who ruled Bahrain beginning in c. 1783. Descendants of Khalifah continue to reign over Bahrain in 2014. For more information on the history of Bahrain see Fuad Khuri, *Tribe and State in Bahrain: The Transformation of Social and Political Authority in an Arab State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) and Zahlan, *The Making of the Modern Gulf States*.

⁷⁶ The domestic politics of Bahrain will be fully analyzed in subsequent pages following this overview of the progression of negotiations.

⁷⁷ Guidance telegram No. 51 from Foreign Office to certain missions, "The Iranian Claim to Bahrain," 16 March 1970 as found in Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 10: 374.

served as intermediaries for the duration of the negotiations. Following initial conversations in January 1968 the Foreign Office came to view a public referendum as an unfeasible option, as the Emir of Bahrain had argued. Any sort of plebiscite would not be acceptable for it could not, with certainty, bring about the relinquishment of Iran's claim.⁷⁸

Roham Alvandi remains the only historian to engage critically with the negotiations over Iran's claim to Bahrain and he has constructed a timeline for the negotiations which I prove to be not entirely accurate. In his analysis he contends that from January to August 1968 all discussions were concerned with the Shah's wish for a plebiscite and that by December he had agreed to forgo one.⁷⁹ As late as the end of August, in a meeting with the British Ambassador to Iran stationed in Tehran, the Shah expressed in regards to Bahrain that "historically I've got a claim to it, and therefore, if I'm going to give it up . . . I must have some face saving formula."⁸⁰ The Shah remained committed to relinquishing Iran's claim to Bahrain through a plebiscite or public referendum. Similarly, the Ambassador acknowledged that right up until December 1968 conversations regarding Bahrain remained at an impasse due because of a possible plebiscite.⁸¹ The Shah's call for a public referendum did not cease in August 1968 as Alvandi asserts, but extended into the later months of the year.

Right before Christmas, however, progress was made. The Shah became receptive to

⁷⁸ Despatch No. 3/32 from A.D. Parsons, Bahrain Agency, to A.J.D. Stirling, Foreign Office, "Bahrain and Iran," 28 January 1969, with translation from *Al Adhwa* (Bahrain), 23 January 1969 as found in Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 9: 289.

⁷⁹ Alvandi, "Muhammad Reza Pahlavi and the Bahrain Question," 164.

⁸⁰ The Reminiscences of Sir Denis Wright in an interview with Shusha Guppy, on April 11 1986, page 31, in the Oral History of Iran Project of the Foundation for Iranian Studies.

⁸¹ The Reminiscences of Sir Denis Wright, 33.

the idea of utilizing the United Nations as the disposal of the Iranian states claim to Bahrain which had not yet been suggested.⁸² He agreed in secret to forgo a plebiscite in its entirety, and in the first week of the new year made an announcement that shocked negotiators and citizens alike. When asked about Bahrain at a press conference in New Delhi he responded that "I won't enter into details now but anything that will be the expression of the will of the people of Bahrain, we, you, the world will recognise as the will of the people of that Island."⁸³ Whilst representatives of the British Foreign Office, including the British Ambassador to Iran, were aware the Shah had been responsive to the proposed course to abandon the Iranian claim the Shah had given the impression it would be a long time before this could occur due to the need to educate public opinion.⁸⁴ Publicly expressing his willingness to let the people of Bahrain decide their own destiny in January 1969, he signaled a new phase of negotiations in which the parties involved began to seriously consider how to deal with the claim on the international stage.

Both the Shah of Iran and the Emir of Bahrain had accepted exploring the idea of using the United Nations but dozens of procedural questions remained unanswered.⁸⁵ Therefore, between January and August 1969 discussions were concerned with the intricacies that would be key in generating the outcome all desired: the relinquishment of Iran's claim to Bahrain.⁸⁶ Would the United Nations simply send a representative? Correspondence reveals a

⁸² This idea was originally proposed to the British Ambassador to Iran by the Vice President of the Iranian Senate Abbas Masoudi. See *The Reminiscences of Sir Denis Wright*, 33.

⁸³ Foreign Office minute by A.A. Acland, "Bahrain and Iran, and possible UN involvement," 8 January 1968 as found in Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 10: 145.

⁸⁴ *The Reminiscences of Sir Denis Wright*, 33.

⁸⁵ Foreign Office minute by D.J. McCarthy, "Iran and Bahrain," 27 January 1969 as found in Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 9: 282.

⁸⁶ See Alvandi, "Muhammad Reza Pahlavi and the Bahrain Question," for a general synthesis of the expansive diplomatic cables.

debate amongst British diplomats over whom would be a better candidate: a Venezuelan or a Pakistani.⁸⁷ Perhaps instead it would be better to employ the International Court of Justice — the judiciary service of the United Nations. However, putting cases before the Court would require the production of genuine legal documents, and the ruling could not be predicted both in terms of jurisdiction and substance. Even the British, seemingly with the most power on the international stage, readily admitted that proceedings put before the Court could not be fixed so there would be no certainty that the found result would be a Bahraini desire to be independent of Iran.⁸⁸ Additionally, if the Court route were pursued, who would petition the claim? Bahrain was not a Statute of the Court and as such did not possess the right and Iran was out of the question.⁸⁹ The British Foreign Office conducted studies regarding the feasibility of multiple options including negotiation, arbitration or adjudication, and United Nations involvement.⁹⁰ The Iranians, meanwhile, were adamant on having the authority of United Nations Security Council. All proposals suggested seemingly came with too much risk and none were willing to leave anything to chance.

The solution was found in a modified arrangement of a plan of British origin, but eventually Bahraini-proposed joint Anglo-Iranian approach to the Secretary-General of the United Nations U Thant. The Shah had objected to this proposal on the basis that if the United

⁸⁷ Despatch No. NB3/324/1 from D.J. McCarthy, Foreign Office, to M.S. Weir, Bahrain Residency, "Sounds on Opinion on Bahrain," 30 January 1969 as found in Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 9: 291.

⁸⁸ Foreign Office minutes by P.J. Allott, "Bahrain and the ICJ," 27 January 1969 as found in Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 9: 329.

⁸⁹ Foreign Office minutes by P.G. de Courcy-Ireland, "Bahrain and the ICJ," 20 February 1969 and enclosed two minutes by P.J. Allott, "Bahrain and the ICJ," 7 and 8 October 1968 as found in Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 9: 311-315.

⁹⁰ Foreign Office memorandum, "Bahrain and Iran", 16 April 1969 as found in *Arabian Boundaries*. Vol. 9. Farnham Common, Buckinghamshire: Archive Editions, 1988, pp. 363.

Kingdom and Iran appealed to the United Nations in unison, it would appear that they were colluding together which was unacceptable to the Shah who was extremely conscious of how the Iranian public would perceive events. The Shah therefore modified the proposal, suggesting that Iran make the sole approach to the United Nations, and once the mission to Bahrain had occurred, the United Nations Security Council would authorize its findings. This formula provided the the Shah cover for his decision to abandon the Iranian claim and gave him the legitimacy of an international body.⁹¹ Furthermore, the overall abandonment of the notion of a plebiscite would be shifted from the Shah to the United Nations, keeping the Shah's image intact.⁹²

By April 1969 diplomatic personnel from London, Tehran, and Manama had accepted this approach. However, the question persisted of how the Shah was to petition the claim to the United Nations and what methodology was to be employed to gauge the wishes of the Bahraini people. The question of procedure stalled negotiations for months for whilst the Shah wanted to leave all matters to the Secretary-General, British and Bahraini diplomats were committed to having the whole procedure scripted. For months no parties would budge as one British official noted:

We are receiving a mass of telegrams and savingsgrams about the negotiations on this subject. We are very grateful to be kept informed but it is a highly complex affair of drafts, counter-drafts and counter-counter-drafts, bandied about among the five parties to the negotiations; and my head for one is beginning to spin.⁹³

⁹¹Alvandi, "Muhammad Reza Pahlavi and the Bahrain Question," 170.

⁹² Alvandi, "Muhammad Reza Pahlavi and the Bahrain Question," 172.

⁹³ Despatch No. 2/31/2 from A.J.M. Craig, Jeddah, to W.H. Fullerton, Foreign Office, "Bahrain/Iran," 24 July 1969 as found in Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 10: 455.

Members of the Foreign Office were assured that a deadlock had been reached that was unable to be broken by drafting alone.⁹⁴ The Shah, despite supporting the general usage of the United Nations, refused to commit to drafting specifics of a mission to Bahrain. He believed that if he did so he would run risk for being publicly exposed as an architect of Iranian relinquishment. Alvandi argues that out of a wish to move forward the Shah agreed to compromise on the methodology to be employed.⁹⁵ Thus, on September 2 1969, the Shah told the British Ambassador, Sir Denis Wright, that given he was kept in ignorance British and Bahraini diplomatic personnel could dictate the modes of procedure for the future mission.⁹⁶

However, the Secretary-General could not allow the Shah to claim such such blind ignorance. U Thant made clear that the only way he would allow a formal petition to send a United Nations mission to Bahrain was if there was first a secret, informal approach to his offices made by representatives of both Iran and Britain. He contended that this would ensure general agreement regarding the procedures that would soon follow and would serve as an insurance mechanism to hold all parties accountable before it turned into a public affair.⁹⁷ The Shah remained committed to being absent from the process of planning and the principal Iranian negotiator Amir Khosrow Afshar told the British Ambassador in Tehran that “if U

⁹⁴ Despatch No. NB3/324/1 from C.C.R. Battiscombe, Foreign Office, to A.J.M. Craig, Jedda, "Bahrain/Iran," 4 August 1969 as found in Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 10: 462.

⁹⁵ Alvandi, "Muhammad Reza Pahlavi and the Bahrain Question," 172.

⁹⁶ Alvandi, "Muhammad Reza Pahlavi and the Bahrain Question," 172.

⁹⁷ See Caradon (New York) to Foreign Office, 5 November 1969 (2462), FCO 8/951; and Caradon (New York) to Foreign Office, 4 December 1969; and Despatch No. 3/32 from A.J.D. Stirling, Bahrain Agency, to A.A. Acland, Foreign Office, "Bahrain/Iran," 12 November 1969; and enclosed Revised draft order of Procedure including amendments made after discussion with Dr Bunche and Draft Method of Operation including amendments made after discussing with Dr Bunche as found in Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 10: 186-190.

Thant communicated the method of operation to the Iranian Government in any form, written or oral, formal or informal and even if someone just whispered in Vakil's⁹⁸ ear, the Iranians would say that they were opposed to this method of operation." The Secretary-General therefore did not ask the Iranian diplomats to sign a memorandum as he had demanded prior, but instead opted to ask for a vague summary to which the diplomats obliged. With a nonspecific brief crafted, the following morning an official memorandum of the anticipated United Nations mission to Bahrain was delivered to the Iranian embassy in New York.⁹⁹

With an informal approach concluded, the last and final stage of negotiations over Iran's claim to Bahrain began; lasting from December 1969 till March 1970. During this time all parties were concerned with the wording of Iran's formal approach to the United Nations and Secretary-General U Thant. The language had to be legitimate, yet vague enough to allow for the engineered result. For three months all negotiators struggled over what consequences varied phrasings such as "wishes of the inhabitants" and "future status" might have.¹⁰⁰ For example, the word "report" was substituted by more abstract "findings."¹⁰¹ Events could not proceed until all options were exhausted in finding the most perfect choice — a seemingly common theme throughout the entirety of the negotiations.

On March 9, 1970 Mehdi Vakil, the Permanent Representative of Iran to the United Nations formally delivered his petition to the Secretary-General. He expressed in writing the

⁹⁸ Vakil refers to Mehdi Vakil, the Permanent Representative of Iran to the United Nations.

⁹⁹ Alvandi, "Muhammad Reza Pahlavi and the Bahrain Question," 173.

¹⁰⁰ For a general overview see Foreign Office Minute by D.J. McCarthy, "Bahrain/Iran" 29 January 1970 as found in Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 10: 270-272.

¹⁰¹ Informal record of conversation between Mr Arthur and the Iranian Ambassador at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on Thursday 30 October 1969 at 12.15pm as found in Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 10: 180-182.

Iranian desire to have “the wishes of the people of Bahrain . . . ascertained through Your Excellency’s good offices” and a willingness to accept their findings after they had been endorsed by the United Nations Security Council.¹⁰² Adhering to a pre-established timetable, the British soon gave their additional formal support to the Mission of the United Nations to Bahrain.¹⁰³ The Shah had prepared the people of Iran for the outcome he had helped to engineer through distributing pamphlets amongst the armed forces, the civil service, and universities which detailed why the Iranian claim was unsound.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, the Emir of Bahrain had compiled a list of acceptable Bahraini institutions and clubs¹⁰⁵ which would be appropriate to solicit opinion from.¹⁰⁶ After twenty six months of dealing with how Iran was to relinquish its claim and what methodology was to be employed to achieve such an aim, deliberations concluded.

On May 11, 1970, all delegates of the United Nations Security Council voted to adopt the procured findings of the Secretary-Generals appointed mission to Bahrain. Lord Caradon, the British Ambassador to the United Nations, went so far as to say before the Council that it was unnecessary to speak in detail about the vote which had been taken that day. “The task is

¹⁰² Enclosed copy of letter from M. Vakil, representative of Iran to United Nations in Letter from U Thant, Secretary-General United Nations, to Lord Caradon, UK representative to United Nations, 9 March 1970 Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 10: 354.

¹⁰³ Draft brief by A.A. Acland, "Bahrain/Iran: Mr Hayman’s meeting with Mr Winspeare: 11 March," undated, received in registry 6 March 1970 as found in Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 10: 362.

¹⁰⁴ Alvandi, "Muhammad Reza Pahlavi and the Bahrain Question," 174.

¹⁰⁵ “Clubs” in this instance referred to social clubs, and community sports teams.

¹⁰⁶ Despatch No. 3/32 from A.J.D. Stirling, Bahrain Agency, to A.A. Acland, Foreign Office, "Bahrain/Iran," 6 December 1969, enclosed: "Government of Bahrain, List of Clubs, Societies, Councils and Sports Teams" as found Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 10: 207.

completed; the object attained; the success achieved.”¹⁰⁷ In January of 1968 Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi was adamant about relinquishing the Iranian claim to the islands. It had taken over two years of thoughtful deliberation between authorities of the United Kingdom, Bahrain, and Iran, but as of May 11, 1970 the Iranian claim could be justifiably abandoned.

Concluding Remarks

Through tracing the rise of foreign economic actors light was shed on the anti-imperialist and anti-interventionist nature of the Iranian domestic landscape at the turn of the twentieth century. This attitude was exacerbated by the continued role of external forces in overthrowing the Iranian Prime Minister in 1953, and centralizing the Shah’s authority through support for the institutionalized military police network SAVAK. Such an examination was imperative to understanding why the Shah was vehement about keeping negotiations between 1968 and 1970 entirely secret.

Using diplomatic cables to reconstruct the negotiations, I highlighted the different phases of the shuttle diplomacy that led to the relinquishment of the historically-rooted Iranian claim to Bahrain. After learning of the British intent to withdraw all forces from the Persian Gulf by 1971, the Shah made clear in secret his desire to dispose of Iranian ties to the island of Bahrain. The Shah’s initial discussions with the British representatives over the claim were only concerned with holding a public referendum in Bahrain to ascertain the wishes of the people. Out of uncertainty that this would bring about the desired result, and objections from

¹⁰⁷ UN Security Council document No. S/PV1536, extracts from the Provisional Verbatim Record of the Fifteen Hundred and Thirty-Sixth meeting held at HQ, New York, on Monday, 11 May 1970, at 3pm, 11 May 1970 as found in Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 10: 543.

the Emir of Bahrain, such a procedure was ruled out. Instead, all parties agreed to explore utilizing the United Nations. After hashing out logistics and technicalities in the summer of 1969 diplomats of Iran and the United Kingdom made a secret, joint informal approach to the Secretary-General of the United Nations which was followed by a public, formal approach by just Iran once debates over approach and wording had been resolved. This reconstruction also highlighted the false chronology of other scholars. Now that I have detailed how precisely the negotiations unfolded I will turn to recurrent themes as a lens for understanding varying parties strategic motivations, the course of the negotiations themselves, and consequential outcomes.

“Between ourselves, do you suppose that we are acting as traitors to our country by going ahead with this settlement over Bahrain?”¹⁰⁸

– Mohammad Reza Pahlavi
Shah of Iran
1970

Chapter 2: Deconstructing Diplomacy

Introductory Remarks

In analyzing the discussions over the island of Bahrain which took place from January 1968 to March 1971 some topics appear intrinsic to the relinquishment of the Iranian claim. Having established how these negotiations unfolded, a thematic account will now be employed to illustrate varying motivations, considerations, and long-term goals. In reading cables and communiqués there are four distinct themes that prove key to a comprehensive analysis of the deliberations: the importance of domestic politics and opinion in dictating the course of negotiations for the rulers of both Iran and Bahrain — albeit for very different reasons; a concern for religious dynamics in both a national and international context; the fate of a security network amongst smaller Gulf states as linked to the outcome of the Bahrain negotiations; and lastly, the fact that throughout the negotiations the Shah consistently acted independently from his political advisers.

¹⁰⁸ Asadollah Alam, *The Shah and I: the confidential diary of Iran's royal court, 1969-1977* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1991), 129.

Domestic Politics

Whilst international politics encouraged the Shah to abandon his claim to Bahrain publicly in January 1969 it was domestic politics that dictated the ways and means for negotiations to occur.¹⁰⁹ In critically analyzing the discussions that took place with British diplomatic staff it becomes apparent that both Iranian and Bahraini negotiators were motivated in their actions by domestic considerations. The rulers of both states were occupied with how their populations would react to both the absence of an Iranian claim to Bahrain, and how the desired outcome would be achieved. However, whilst the Shah was motivated to provide justification for the relinquishment of Iran's claim and engage with the attitude of the Iranian public, the Emir actively sought to stifle the opportunity for public opinion to be expressed. Both rulers were greatly concerned with their constituents, but for completely opposing reasons.

Beginning in early 1968 the Shah had made it clear to the British Foreign Office in private that he remained eager to dispose of the Iranian government's claim to Bahrain and sought a public referendum to satisfy public opinion.¹¹⁰ After the Shah agreed to forgo seeking a plebiscite, remarks from the meetings of the British Ambassador to Iran and the Iranian Deputy Minister reveal an ongoing concern for appeasing the Iranian public. The latter expressed that the then current British proposal to make an enquiry through the United Nations would not satisfy public opinion in Iran.¹¹¹ Throughout the duration of negotiations, the

¹⁰⁹ See page 12 of the introduction.

¹¹⁰ Enclosed Note "Bahrain and Iran" of Foreign Office Minute by D.J. McCarthy, "Iran and Bahrain," 10 February 1969 as found in Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 9: 301.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

Foreign Office was forced to reposition proposals based on the fact that they did “not really provide a sufficient framework within which the Shah can publicly get off the hook of his claim to Bahrain”¹¹² which was a non-negotiable prerequisite.

From the onset of the Shah’s decision to renounce Iran’s longstanding claim, to debates over methodology, the Shah was occupied with making sure the Iranian public recognized that the matter was a formal legal procedure. Indeed, even after negotiations had been finalized in February 1970 the Shah still turned to his trusted childhood friend and advisor, Asadollah Alam, for assurances about public opinion, asking if “between ourselves, do you suppose that we are acting as traitors to our country by going ahead with this settlement over Bahrain?”¹¹³ All steps of the Shah’s deliberations over the future of the Bahraini claim reflect deep consideration for how the Iranian public would interpret such events. Additionally, it forced British diplomats in their shuttle diplomacy to be constantly aware of how to provide sufficient justification for the Shah to abandon the historically-rooted claim.¹¹⁴

During this process the Emir was constantly reflecting over how the public would react to possible plans for gauging opinion. From the onset of negotiations in 1968 the ruler of Bahrain was vocal about his concern over the introduction of new legislative mechanisms in Bahraini society. As noted in correspondence from the British Political Agent in Bahrain the Emir was greatly engrossed by what the involvement of the UN in the form of a representative to test opinion

¹¹² Foreign Office Minute by D.J. McCarthy, "Bahrain and Iran," 17 April 1969 as found Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 9: 376.

¹¹³ Alam, *The Shah and I*, 129.

¹¹⁴ Foreign Office minute by D.J. McCarthy, "Bahrain and Iran" 22 April 1969 as found in Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 9: 376.

might instigate domestically.¹¹⁵ Bahrain had never had any representative institutions, so to then to initiate the process of composing electoral rolls and arranging voting procedures as to be gauged by a representative of the United Nations could bring unforeseen risks to the stability of the territory.¹¹⁶ Even the British Ambassador to Iran acknowledged that Bahrain simply had “no means of having a referendum” and the logistics of implementing one would be simply unfeasible.¹¹⁷ Whilst there is no documentation of the Emir explicitly stating a desire to keep the monarchy secure, in the midst of a period that had seen the overthrow of multiple monarchical regimes in the Middle East, one cannot overlook the motivation he had to keep ahold of his throne.¹¹⁸ Even the British Political Agent in Bahrain went so far as to comment that long-term future of the Emir’s regime was intertwined with the Bahraini-Iranian dispute.¹¹⁹

In addition to concern for the monarchy and the introduction of democratic principles the Emir was anxious about how encouraging active expression of public opinion might instigate violence amongst the split Sunni–Shia population of Bahrain.¹²⁰ This attitude was not limited to the Emir himself. A senior translator at the British Political Agency in Bahrain, a self-described archetypal middle class Sunni made a comment to the Second Secretary of the

¹¹⁵ Despatch No.4/1 from A.D. Parsons, Bahrain Agency, to D.J. McCarthy, Foreign Office, "Bahrain/Iran" 14 January 1969 as found in Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 9: 255.

¹¹⁶ Despatch No. NB3/1 from D.J. McCarthy, Foreign Office, to C.D. Wiggin, Tehran, "Iran and Bahrain," 15 January 1969 as found in Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 9: 258.

¹¹⁷ The Reminiscences of Sir Denis Wright, 31.

¹¹⁸ This dynamic will be expanded upon in the following pages. For further reading see Malcolm Kerr, *The Arab Cold War: Gamal 'Abd Al-Nasir and His Rivals, 1958-1970* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971).

¹¹⁹ Despatch No. 3/32 from A.D. Parsons, Bahrain Agency, to A.J.D. Stirling, Foreign Office, "Bahrain and Iran," 28 January 1969 as found in Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 9: 287.

¹²⁰ Despatch No.4/1 from A.D. Parsons, Bahrain Agency, to D.J. McCarthy, Foreign Office, "Bahrain/Iran," 14 January 1969 as found in Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 9: 255.

Agency in which he stated a similar concern for the delicate social climate saying that he hoped nothing like the proposed referendum would ever happen in Bahrain.¹²¹ Manama was still recovering from a series of bloody religious clashes which had erupted fourteen years prior.¹²² Throughout the population of Bahrain there remained lingering feelings of distrust.¹²³ Whilst the Bahraini public was not privy to negotiations over a possible plebiscite like this translator, his attitude hints at underlying fears of erupting sectarian violence.

The Religious Dimension

The religious component was not only of concern to the Emir during the negotiations but also British diplomats who had anxiety about how a plebiscite might play out in Bahrain. The British aim in negotiations was not only to help facilitate the ways and means for the Shah to relinquish the claim to Bahrain, but to leave stability in the wake of their withdrawal. There was still religious tension and also a fear that the Shia community of Bahrain would vote to be considered part of Iran out of both dislike and distrust of the Sunni community.¹²⁴ Such an outcome would not be conducive to the Shah abandoning the territorial claim — which he was

¹²¹ Despatch No.4/1 from A.D. Parsons, Bahrain Agency, to D.J. McCarthy, Foreign Office, "Bahrain/Iran," 14 January 1969 as found in Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 9: 254.

¹²² In September 1954 there were a series of clashes between the religious communities of Bahrain. The Annual Report of the Bahrain government illustrates "a series of unexpected incidents" in which on the 20th of September "quarreling" led to "fighting" where "stones and bottles were thrown" and a "mob" descended through the town leading to over sixty casualties. This was followed by further demonstrations and violence which led to the ultimate closing of public spaces such as fish, meat and vegetable markets. Many people did not leave their homes or go to work for over a week. Throughout October there was a continued "state of political unrest." For a full account of the Sunni-Shia clashes in 1954 see Bahrain Government, *Annual Report of the Bahrain Government September 1953 to December 1954*. Manama, Bahrain, (1954): 46-50.

¹²³ Despatch No.4/1 from A.D. Parsons, Bahrain Agency, to D.J. McCarthy, Foreign Office, "Bahrain/Iran," 14 January 1969 as found in Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 9: 254.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

anxious to do.¹²⁵ Furthermore, negotiating personnel from London consistently articulate a concern for temperament of the Bahraini domestic climate. Over 30 pages of diplomatic correspondence reveal concern for how the number of men sent to Bahrain to engage with domestic opinion could, depending on the number sent, further agitate the social landscape.¹²⁶

The early stages of negotiation were inexplicably tied to the existing religious dynamic. The religious component of Bahraini society could not be ignored, and domestic politics remained a key consideration in the ways and means to relinquish Iran's claim to Bahrain. Whilst the Emir of Bahrain was concerned with the domestic religious situation the Shah of Iran and the foremost British negotiators were conscious of the broader regional climate concerning Shia and Sunni Islam. In the recent years Britain had adopted a strategy of balancing Iran and Saudi Arabia — respective bastions of Sunni and Shia Islam in the Middle East — against each other to maintain regional stability.¹²⁷ The same philosophy was behind the British desire to create a security network for the smaller states of the Persian Gulf which was additionally supported by both the Saudi and Iranian governments.

The United Arab Emirates

Just as concern for domestic politics cannot be ignored in analyzing the negotiations over Iran's relinquishment of the claim to Bahrain neither can a different political agenda: the

¹²⁵ Enclosed Note "Bahrain and Iran" of Foreign Office Minute by D.J. McCarthy, "Iran and Bahrain," 10 February 1969, as found in Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 9: 300.

¹²⁶ Despatch No. 4/1 from C.D. Wiggin, Tehran, to D.J. McCarthy, Foreign Office, "Soundings on Opinion in Bahrain," 12 February 1969 as found in Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 9: 304.

¹²⁷ Trita Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance the Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

creation of the United Arab Emirates which was established in December 1971. The deliberations regarding the Iranian governments territorial claim to Bahrain directly influenced the establishment of the federation of emirates, and vice versa. It is necessary to engage with the transforming socio-political dynamics prompted by Egyptian president Gamel Abd al-Nasser¹²⁸ to display why the majority of political actors in the Persian Gulf — both small gulf states and their more powerful neighbors — viewed the institution of security network as key to establishing long-term regional stability.

In 1952 Nasser assumed power as the result of a *coup d'etat* which overthrew the Egyptian monarchy.¹²⁹ During his lengthy tenure as President the charismatic leader would be a proponent of the non-alignment movement, Arab nationalism, Arab socialism, and pan-Arab ideologies with the aim of spreading these anti-colonial nationalist philosophies throughout the Arab world.¹³⁰ Nasser believed that the Arab states needed to work together to purge the region from foreign influence. All monarchies of Middle East were perceived as a continuation of Western influence, instilled by the West and pawns of the West, and thus Nasser sought to replace them with radical republican regimes.¹³¹

The rulers of Iran and Saudi Arabia shared a concern for the spread of revolutionary activities in the Persian Gulf as evidenced by examining their joint efforts to counter Nasser's

¹²⁸ Henceforth referred to as Nasser.

¹²⁹ William Cleveland, *History of the Modern Middle East* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2004), 305. For more information on the Egyptian Revolution in 1952 see Malcolm Kerr, *Egypt under Nasser*. (New York: Foreign Policy Association, 1963); and Anouar Malek, *Egypt: Military Society; the Army Regime, the Left, and Social Change under Nasser* (New York: Random House, 1968).

¹³⁰ For further reading see Youssef Choueiri, *Arab Nationalism-- a History: Nation and State in the Arab World* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000); and Muh Haykal, *Cutting the Lion's Tail: Suez through Egyptian Eyes* (New York: Arbor House, 1987); and Cleveland, *History of the Modern Middle East*.

¹³¹ Kerr, *The Arab Cold War*.

active participation in the North Yemen Civil War between 1962 and 1970.¹³² On September 19, 1962 Imam Ahmad of Yemen died and his son ascended to the throne. Prince Muhammad al-Badr was proclaimed Imam and King but he did not exercise his newfound powers for long, for not even an entire week passed before the commander of the Imam's bodyguard, Abdullah al-Sallal¹³³ launched a coup.¹³⁴ Yemen was proclaimed a republic with the Council of the Revolutionary Command becoming the preceding government.¹³⁵ Unlike the revolutions in Egypt (in 1952) and Iraq (in 1958), the usurped monarch was able to escape and it was from this position he was able to rally support amongst the tribes still loyal to the monarch with the aim of reclaiming his throne. The divided political climate quickly escalated into a full-fledged civil war between supporters of the monarchy and oppositional republican forces. The turmoil in Yemen represented for Nasser the opportunity for anti-monarchical forces to prevail, and a chance to renew his revolutionary credentials.¹³⁶ In pursuit of rapidly centralizing the power of the republican forces Nasser quickly dispatched both men and materiel to the leaders of the newly proclaimed Yemen Arab Republic. At the height of Egyptian involvement there were over 70,000 members of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force fighting on behalf of the new republican regime and this support

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Abdullah al-Sallal should not be confused with Ali Abdullah Saleh. al-Sallal executed the *coup d'etat* which overthrew al-Badr in 1962. Ali Abdullah Saleh was the President of Yemen for 34 years beginning in 1978. Saleh's name may be familiar to those who are following contemporary Yemeni politics and politics of the Gulf, but it is important to make the distinction between the two.

¹³⁴ Taylor Fain, "Unfortunate Arabia: The United States, Great Britain, and Yemen, 1955-1963," *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 12, no. 2 (2008): 132.

¹³⁵ Jesse Ferris, "Soviet Support for Egypt's Intervention in Yemen," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 10, no. 4 (2008): 5.

¹³⁶ Kerr, *The Arab Cold War*, 108.

would continue until 1967.¹³⁷

Egypt was not the only country supporting factions in Yemen. In the past Nasser had sponsored efforts in Saudi Arabia and Jordan to undermine the standing monarchies of the Middle East, and these countries remained wary of what effect the spread of revolutionary uprisings might have on their own regimes.¹³⁸ For however long there was a radical republican government on Saudi Arabia's border there remained a threat to the security of the throne. Thus, as Nasser armed al-Sallal's republican forces Saudi Arabia's King Faisal (r. 1964 -1975)¹³⁹ began to channel both money and weapons to those loyal to the Yemeni monarch with the hope of having his throne restored.¹⁴⁰ Iran additionally sponsored royalist activity on and off during the civil war. King Faisal of Saudi Arabia was motivated by concern for the security of his rule, and the Shah was driven by a fear of the spread of Arab nationalism for Iran was not an Arab state. Egypt was, therefore, a common enemy for both Saudi Arabia and Iran. Whilst limited in their cooperation, they both aimed to curb pan-Arabism and prevent political instability in the region.

The fear of a regional political vacuum was exacerbated the British Prime Minister's announcement in January 1968 that by 1971 United Kingdom was to withdraw all of its troops from the Persian Gulf. Historians disagree on one specific explanation of the decision citing the paradigm of domestic politics, a desire to focus on Europe as opposed to the empire, domestic

¹³⁷ Ferris, "Soviet Support for Egypt's Intervention in Yemen," 7.

¹³⁸ Fain, "Unfortunate Arabia," 132.

¹³⁹ Faisal was seen as a champion of pan-Islamism and anti-Communism. For further reading see Joseph Mann, "King Faisal and the Challenge of Nasser's Revolutionary Ideology," *Middle Eastern Studies* 48, no. 5 (2012) and Nadav Safran, *Saudi Arabia: The Ceaseless Quest for Security* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985).

¹⁴⁰ Jesse Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble: how intervention in Yemen caused the Six-Day War and the decline of Egyptian power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 262-294.

institutional inertia, and maintaining party unity as possible causes.¹⁴¹ William Roger Louis argues that the British left the Gulf as part of a broader plan to limit spending to rescue the British economy.¹⁴² The British pound had been recently devalued from \$2.80 to \$2.40, and ending the presence of troops east of Suez was viewed as a way to cut government spending.¹⁴³ Despite varying historical interpretations, the declaration was made and the plan of policy was adhered to. Following the British decision to “withdraw” from the Gulf one question remained: what was to be the fate of the trucial states?¹⁴⁴ British forces were not only serving as protection for national oil interests but also aiming to maintain general stability.¹⁴⁵

For nearly a century states in the Persian Gulf had been protectorates of the United Kingdom. The emirates themselves feared the leave of the British as but an opportunity for greater powers of the region to vie for political dominance in their territory. On separate occasions the sheikhs of Abu Dhabi and Dubai contacted the Foreign Office offering to fund the cost of having British troops remain in the region.¹⁴⁶ However, due to disputes amongst the British Labour Party and domestic economic difficulties the Secretary of State for Defense declined. What then was to be course of action upon formal British disengagement from the

¹⁴¹ See Fain, *American Ascendance and British Retreat in the Persian Gulf Region*, 141-168 and Glen Balfour-Paul, *The End of Empire in the Middle East: Britain's Relinquishment of Power in Her Last Three Arab dependencies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) and John Dumbrell, "The Johnson Administration and the British Labour Government: Vietnam, the Pound and East of Suez," *Journal of American Studies* 30, no. 2 (1996): 211-31.

¹⁴² William Roger Louis, "The British Withdrawal from the Gulf, 1967-71," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 31, no. 1 (2003): 83-84.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ See pages the introduction of this thesis for a general history of the trucial states. The trucial states were seven small emirates in the south eastern part of the Persian Gulf which included Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Dubai, Ras al-Khaimah, Sharjah, Umm al-Qaiwain and Nejd. In 1971 the federation of the United Arab Emirates succeeded the independent bodies of the trucial states.

¹⁴⁵ J.B. Kelly, *Arabia, The Gulf and the West* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), 47-48.

¹⁴⁶ Fain, *American Ascendance and British Retreat in the Persian Gulf Region*, 172.

region? The United Kingdom wanted to preserve their respective interests, and saw a solution in the established independence of Bahrain and Qatar, and their joint membership in a newly created federation which would include the seven trucial states.¹⁴⁷

The British desire for this union was motivated by the belief a formal federation would counter competing quests for dominance in the Persian Gulf — namely between Saudi Arabia and Iran. After the Six Day War the Foreign Office no longer perceived Egypt as its greatest threat, but rather by a possible rivalry for regional dominance between Riyadh and Tehran.¹⁴⁸ The creation of a federation of the seven trucial states, Bahrain and Qatar would therefore be an assurance to the stability of the Gulf and British oil interests.¹⁴⁹ The British were motivated to be instigators and facilitators in the process of Iran relinquishing the claim to Bahrain because its status determined the fate of regional stability. The hope of generating an outcome favorable to their own interest motivated the United Kingdom to play such an active role in the negotiations over territory in the Persian Gulf.

Despite the Foreign Office's belief that Saudi Arabia would utilize British withdrawal as a chance to further assert her own interest, the Saudi King viewed the decision with similar disdain to the Sheikhs of Abu Dhabi and Dubai. He remarked to Herman Eilts, the American Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, of his anxiety concerning British disengagement and "railed against [the] Labour government's 'irresponsibility.'"¹⁵⁰ Once it appeared that the British stance could not be swayed, Faisal embraced the notion of a federation in its

¹⁴⁷ Louis, "The British Withdrawal from the Gulf," 101.

¹⁴⁸ Fain, *American Ascendance and British Retreat in the Persian Gulf Region*, 173.

¹⁴⁹ Louis, "The British Withdrawal from the Gulf," 101.

¹⁵⁰ "Future of Persian Gulf," Department of State Telegram, Dhahran to Washington, 14 January 1968 as found in Fain, *American Ascendance and British Retreat in the Persian Gulf Region*, 175.

embryonic stage and continued to support it in the years following. In an interview with the *New York Times* in May 1968 the King remarked that there was no need for a political vacuum with anticipated British departure.¹⁵¹ Faisal viewed Arab socialism espoused by Nasser as of the utmost threat to the stability of his rule for it sought the fall of all monarchies in the region. The creation of the federation of Arab emirates would therefore limit the Gulf states individual susceptibility to these external threats, and as a result King Faisal became an active proponent of the federation that would become the United Arab Emirates.

Iran could not recognize or support a union as it was originally proposed by the rulers of the seven tracial states of Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Dubai, Sharjah, Umm al-Quwain, Ras al-Khaimah, and Fujairah, in conjunction with Bahrain and Qatar.¹⁵² The reason for this was because amongst those wanting to create an Arab federation was Bahrain — who, as detailed earlier, Iran viewed as an Iranian province. However, the Iranian objection to the establishment of what would become the United Arab Emirates should not be construed as a complaint against the institution of such a security network in the Gulf. Rather, the Shah viewed it of the utmost importance such a framework exist to limit the ability of other regional powers to gain influence.¹⁵³ The small states of the Gulf, whilst wealthy as a result of oil and mineral concessions, did not have the resources to protect themselves from the military might of their larger neighbors. However, the formation of such a political confederation was remained unacceptable to Iran, as long as their claim to Bahrain was

¹⁵¹ Drew Middleton, "Faisal Says U.S. Policies Spur Rampant Mideast Communism," *New York Times*, May 23, 1968.

¹⁵² Guidance telegram No. 51 from Foreign Office to certain missions, "The Iranian Claim to Bahrain," 16 March 1970 as found in Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 10: 380.

¹⁵³ Alam, *The Shah and I*, 31.

undisposed of.¹⁵⁴

With a united stance against the spread of Nasser's political ideologies King Faisal of Saudi Arabia and the Shah of Iran sought to create a regional security network for the emirates of the Gulf. Whilst following the Six-Day War Nasser's diminished reputation and power was recognized, there was still fear of a political vacuum.¹⁵⁵ Additionally, the Shah was becoming increasingly concerned with Iraq's aggressive regional ambitions.¹⁵⁶ The creation of such a federation would prevent both the spread of Nasserism and the further subversion of monarchial regimes. Additionally, it would maintain security of smaller Gulf states who were not individually capable of protecting themselves. Throughout the duration of the negotiations, the fate of Iran's claim to Bahrain appears to be intimately intertwined with the establishment of what would be the United Arab Emirates.

The Shah: An Independent Actor?

In thematically illustrating the negotiations over Bahrain which took place between January 1968 and March 1970 there is one last point that cannot be ignored; namely, the Shah as a politician independent of his advisers. As established in the first thematic deconstruction the Shah was greatly constrained in his decision-making by his regard for domestic opinion of his actions. However, when it came to decision-making amongst those holding office the Shah repeatedly acted autonomously, often taking a different stance than his advisers and foreign

¹⁵⁴ Guidance telegram No. 51 from Foreign Office to certain missions, "The Iranian Claim to Bahrain," 16 March 1970 as found in Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 10: 380.

¹⁵⁵ James R. Brennan, "Radio Cairo and the Decolonization of East Africa, 1953-1964," in *Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives*. (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2010), 173-195.

¹⁵⁶ Alam, *The Shah and I*.

ministers. Diplomatic cables serve as evidence, as in one episode where after the Shah had publicly committed himself to abandoning the Iranian claim to Bahrain the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs heatedly objected, contending that Bahrain was as much a part of Iran as Surrey was of England.¹⁵⁷ Multiple high level diplomatic officials did not wish for the Shah to succeed with relinquishing the Iranian claim. The Shah's commitment to disposal shows that during this time he was a figure crafting policy alone and not giving in to the political wishes of others. His decision making process, as argued by Roham Alvandi who is the only scholar to analyze the Bahrain negotiations, reflects an ability not to be hindered by the opinions of his upper level officials.¹⁵⁸

The notion of the Shah acting independently throughout the Bahrain negotiations is supported when examining the circle of those involved in the deliberations. Whilst the decision to abandon the Iranian claim to Bahrain was initially the Shah and the Shah's alone, following that commitment there was the opportunity to widen the circle of those involved. However, an entire year after this pledge Abbas Aram, the Iranian Ambassador to the United Kingdom, had been kept in the dark by his own government and did not know of any developments regarding Bahrain. At this point the Shah had resolved to both forgo a plebiscite and to explore international options.¹⁵⁹

In analyzing hundreds of diplomatic cables exchanged between the British Resident in the Gulf and members of various British embassies in the region it is repeatedly expressed that

¹⁵⁷ The Reminiscences of Sir Denis Wright, 33.

¹⁵⁸ Alvandi, "Muhammad Reza Pahlavi and the Bahrain Question,"

¹⁵⁹ Foreign Office Minute by D.J. McCarthy, "Iran and Bahrain," 27 January 1969 as found in Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 9: 280.

personnel should have a complete disregard for the comments of high-level Iranian officials. In March 1969 the Shah embarked on his annual holiday to go skiing in Switzerland with his family. Soon after he departed from Tehran a prominent state official made a comment in a meeting with British diplomats and stated that Iran might consider physical action to reinforce that Bahrain was formally part of Iran.¹⁶⁰ The British diplomatic authorities in Tehran gave his words little consideration. A high-level member of the British Foreign Office commented that “what matters is exchanges with the Shah and not the various moves of Iranian officials”¹⁶¹ suggesting that the comments of Iranian officials could almost be disregarded wholeheartedly.

Over time the Foreign Office eventually came to the conclusion that it was only conversations with the Shah that truly mattered.¹⁶² These episodes highlight how whilst the Shah was at all times thinking about how the Iranian people would perceive his actions, he repeatedly acted independently from his most prominent political advisers whose opinions diverged from his own.¹⁶³

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter a thematic approach illustrated the importance of domestic politics and public opinion to both the Shah of Iran and the Emir of Bahrain in contrasting ways.

Throughout the duration of the negotiations over the disposal of the historically-rooted claim

¹⁶⁰ Foreign Office Minute by A.A. Acland, "Bahrain and Iran," 16 April 1969 as found in Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 9: 367.

¹⁶¹ Foreign Office Minute by D.J. McCarthy, "Bahrain/Iran," 21 March 1969 as found in Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 9: 348.

¹⁶² Despatch No. 4/1 from C.D. Wiggin, Tehran, to A.A. Acland, Foreign Office, "Bahrain and Iran/the ICJ," 6 March 1969 as found in Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 9: 337.

¹⁶³ Alvandi, "Muhammad Reza Pahlavi and the Bahrain Question."

the Shah had a high regard for public opinion and was conscious of gauging their perception. This contrasts greatly to the Emir's aim to limit the opportunities for it to be expressed. Additionally, it has been shown that throughout the deliberations there was an overwhelming concern for religious dynamics and how changes might instigate chaos in Bahrain. British diplomats at all levels were also conscious of the dynamic between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Additionally, the negotiations reveal how the fate of the security network that would become the United Arab Emirates could not be separated from the fate of an independent Bahrain. Lastly, this deconstructed account illustrated how whilst constrained by public opinion the Shah acted independently from his political advisors.

Bahrain declared independence in 1971, but this was not the only territorial change in the Gulf. Due to an agreement with the ruler of what is now the Emirate of Sharjah Iran was granted the northern half of the island of Abu Masa. At this time the Shah also requisitioned the islands of Greater Tunbs and Lesser Tunbs. On the eve of British retreat from the Persian Gulf the Shah laid claim to new territory after denouncing ties to Bahrain, which leaves room for speculation regarding what may have occurred behind closed doors between the British Prime Minister's announcement of future withdrawal from the Persian Gulf, and physical withdrawal in 1971. The following chapter aims to engage with the existent historical evidence concerning a deal crafted between diplomatic authorities of Tehran and London concerning the islands of Abu Masa, Greater Tunbs, and Lesser Tunbs.

“After all, it was not often that countries gave up claims, however unjustified, and it was bound to occur to the Iranians sooner or later that they might get something out of the renunciation of their claim to Bahrain if they carried it through.”¹⁶⁴

– Geoffrey George Arthur
British Foreign Service Officer
1969

Chapter 3: Deal or No Deal

Introductory Remarks

The British Prime Minister’s January 1968 announcement of intent to withdraw all British troops from Aden to Singapore signaled the disintegration of the informal British Empire. Sir Geoffrey Arthur was the last appointed Political Resident in the Persian Gulf on behalf of the United Kingdom and on December 19, 1971 following years of negotiations over the Shah’s historically-rooted claim to Bahrain he illustrated for Foreign Secretary Lord Home the scene before him of the HMS *Achilles* and HMS *Intrepid* departing from the port of Bahrain. “There was no ceremony as the last British fighting unit withdrew from the Persian Gulf,” he wrote, “a British merchant vessel in the opposite berth blew her siren, and *Intrepid’s* lone piper, scarcely audible above the bustle of the port, played what sounded like some Gaelic lament. That was all.”¹⁶⁵ But that was not all. The last few days of formal British presence in the Persian Gulf in the 1970s was not without additional territorial changes excluding Bahrain.

¹⁶⁴ Foreign Office minute by G.G. Arthur, 2 April 1969 as found in Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 9: 358.

¹⁶⁵ “The Withdrawal of British Forces from the Gulf,” Her Majesty’s Political Resident in Bahrain to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Diplomatic Report No. 171/72, NB 10/1, 2 February 1972 as found in Fain, *American Ascendance and British Retreat in the Persian Gulf Region*, 169.

Nineteen days prior, on November 30 1971 Iranian forces landed on both the Greater Tunbs and Lesser Tunbs islands in addition to the northern part of Abu Masa.¹⁶⁶ On the Tunbs islands, the takeover was neither peaceful nor welcomed as rioting broke out. Inhabitants were shipped on fishing boats off the island, and seven people were killed in the outbreak of hostilities.¹⁶⁷ There was still another sunrise till Britain's protective treaty with the islands expired, yet Britain did not respond to Iranian forces occupying the Tunbs. As explored earlier in this historical analysis of the region, the Shah had publicly committed himself to relinquishing the Iranian claim to Bahrain with British departure from the Gulf. The fact remains that on the eve of British retreat from the region Iran laid claim to new territory after denouncing formal ties to Bahrain. Was Iran's occupation of the Tunbs islands therefore part of a pre-established agreement? This chapter argues that despite discussions of a deal in the early stages of the negotiations, there is not enough evidence to suggest the Iranian troops occupation in late 1971 was the result of such a *quid pro quo* agreement.¹⁶⁸

The Islands: A Geographical and Historical Evaluation

The islands of Abu Masa, Greater Tunbs and Lesser Tunbs are located in the main sea lane for entering and exiting the Persian Gulf at the Sea of Hormuz. Greater Tunbs is located just 30 miles from the Iranian port of Lingeh, and 40 miles from what is now the Emirate of Ras al-Khaimah.¹⁶⁹ The geography of the island is perhaps best described by its name, which in the

¹⁶⁶ Richard Mobley, "The Tunbs and Musa Islands: Britain's Perspective," *Middle East Journal* 57, no. 4 (2003): 627.

¹⁶⁷ Mobley, "The Tunbs and Musa," 643.

¹⁶⁸ *Quid pro quo* is a Latin term for trading something for something.

¹⁶⁹ Amirahmadi, *Small Islands, Big Politics*, 33.

Persian dialect spoken in southern Iran closest to the coast translates to “hill.” A tiny territory, it is estimated that in 1970 approximately 150 Arabs lived on the island of Greater Tunb.¹⁷⁰

Meanwhile, the completely uninhabitable Lesser Tunbs lies just eight miles southwest.¹⁷¹ A little further off the coast of Lingeh one will find Abu Masa with its rich fertile soils. The three islands share a strategic geographical location but when considering territorial changes in 1971 in the Persian Gulf they cannot be evaluated equally.

The reason for this lies in the fact that there was a legal agreement allowing for the Shah to annex the northern part of Abu Masa. In November 1971 the ruler of Sharjah, a trucial state, and Mohammad Reza Shah signed an accord known as the Memorandum of Understanding, which formally detailed jurisdiction for the island of Abu Masa. Prior to 1971, the United Kingdom conducted diplomacy on behalf of the ruler of Sharjah for which it had a protective treaty with reaching back to the 1880s.¹⁷² In anticipation of British withdrawal, the new agreement created a fresh system of authority in which both the ruler of Sharjah and the Shah would have joint, yet separate, administration over Abu Masa. Neither would recognize the claim of sovereignty made by the other in which it was argued the island was respectively Arab or Persian. Instead, based on agreed areas of occupation (Iran the northern half of the island, and Sharjah the southern half of the island), each would have complete jurisdiction to bear their own

¹⁷⁰ Mobley, "The Tunbs and Musa," 628.

¹⁷¹ Pirouz Mojtahed-Zadeh, *Boundary Politics and International Boundaries of Iran: With Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan Republic, Bahrain, (the Autonomous Republic of Ganjah) Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, and the United Arab Emirates* (Boca Raton, FL: Universal Publishers, 2006), 305.

¹⁷² See the introduction of this research for a general synopsis.

flag, fish the island, and the right to a set division of energy resources.¹⁷³ Indeed, when Iran's forces arrived to Abu Masa in late November the ruler of Sharjah's brother welcomed the troops himself.¹⁷⁴

With the Memorandum of Understanding legitimizing partial Iranian authority on the island and allowing for an influx of Iranian forces Abu Masa is therefore differentiated from the Tunbs where there was no similar agreement made between the ruler of what is now the Emirate of Ras al-Khaimah and the Shah. Yet, on the same day Iranian forces arrived on Abu Masa they occupied the Tunbs islands; sending all inhabitants back to Ras al-Khaimah on small fishing boats with outcry from the ruler of Ras al-Khaimah himself.¹⁷⁵ However, was this supplemental seizure given the green light by London in exchange for the Shah abandoning the historically-rooted claim to Bahrain the Foreign Office so desired?

I contend that there is not enough evidence to suggest that territorial changes in November 1971 in the Persian Gulf were the product of a packaged agreement. However, this does not make such an inquiry irrelevant. Rather, my findings contribute to the historiography of the event, and discredit the argument that the Iranian officials believed they had secured the islands was without a valid foundation. In conducting such an investigation I reviewed hundreds of diplomatic telegrams, communiqués, memorandums, and briefings as exchanged by British diplomatic personnel in the region at the time.¹⁷⁶ Furthermore, I have examined Iranian memoirs,

¹⁷³ Memorandum of Understanding, 18 November 1971, as found in Pirouz Mojtahed-Zadeh, *The Islands of Tunb and Abu Musa: An Iranian Argument in Search of Peace and Co-operation in the Persian Gulf*, Occasional Paper 15 (London: University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, Centre of Near and Middle Eastern Studies, 1995).

¹⁷⁴ Pirouz Mojtahed-Zadeh, *Security and territoriality in the Persian Gulf* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 1999), 214.

¹⁷⁵ Mobley, "The Tunbs and Musa," 643.

¹⁷⁶ See the introduction of this thesis for further information regarding the United Kingdom's declassification process.

and the limited academic work done on the subject of Greater Tunbs and Lesser Tunbs. Contrary to the common scholarly opinion, I assert that at one point the British Foreign Office did suggest a packaged settlement offer, but by 1971 this offer was not still part of the negotiating process nor was it ever formalized.

Evidence of a Deal

Whilst researching the diplomacy that led to the relinquishment of the longstanding Iranian claim to Bahrain I founded repeated references to a possible deal in both Iranian and British sources. For example, early memorandums from the Foreign Office forecasted what was to occur with formal British departure from the Persian Gulf and this should not be immediately dismissed as coincidence. Sir Denis Wright, British Ambassador to Iran, commented in a meeting in March 1968 that he believed the Shah “would go for the islands as soon as we left”¹⁷⁷ and his prediction three years later became the status quo. Ambassador Wright’s foresight does not imply a legal agreement of any kind, but his view is mirrored in Iranian sources which makes one question what exactly was going on behind closed doors.

The Shah’s most trusted confidant, Asadollah Alam, recorded the day-to-day events of the Iranian court in a diary that was published posthumously. In his journal I found clear indications of a possible deal. Alam writes that the British Ambassador had hinted that if the Shah was to back the creation of a federation of the Emirates Iran might be called upon to occupy islands in

¹⁷⁷ Alvandi, "Muhammad Reza Pahlavi and the Bahrain Question."

the Gulf.¹⁷⁸ Similarly, he documented the Shah was “sure he’d bagged the islands” following his declaration to allow the people of Bahrain to decide their own destiny in January 1969.¹⁷⁹

Whilst I contend the territorial changes in November 1971 were not the product of a settlement deal between the Shah and British diplomats, this does not mean there was never a possible deal. Rather, between spring of 1968 and autumn of 1969 negotiators in both Tehran and London were giving serious consideration for a packaged agreement. Published archival material retrospectively acknowledges a standing packaged deal in which Bahraini independence was linked to Abu Masa and the Tunbs.¹⁸⁰ In examining wires from the British Residency in Bahrain to the Arabian Department of the Foreign Office in London there are repeated references to this agreement. One high-level staffer wrote to another contemplating what might happen if negotiators decided to revive the idea of a packaged deal.¹⁸¹ To “revive” the concept indicates that at one point such a bargain was actively being considered. The prior existence of a deal is supported by diplomatic briefs articulating a similar possibility of recreating a joint settlement in the same fashion to that which had been conceived the year before.¹⁸² With statements such as “when we put forward our package proposal last year” one cannot dispute that at one point a *quid pro quo* exchange at the negotiating table.¹⁸³ However, discussions of a deal before 1971 are

¹⁷⁸ Alam, *The Shah and I*, 44.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ During my research process I was not able to have access to the volume of published archival material which would have dealt with the early months of 1968. It is during this time a deal would have been explicitly articulated. Whilst this investigation would have benefitted from utilizing this source, conclusions can be drawn without it.

¹⁸¹ Despatch No. 4/5 from Sir Crawford, Bahrain Residency, to D.J. McCarthy, Foreign Office, "The Gulf Islands," 15 April 1969 as found in Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 9: 361.

¹⁸² Foreign Office minute by A.A. Acland, "Bahrain and Iran," 16 April 1969 as found in Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 9: 373.

¹⁸³ Foreign Office minute by D.J. McCarthy, "Bahrain and Iran," 17 April 1969 as found in Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 9: 375.

not evidence of a settlement justifying the arrival of Iranian troops at the Tunbs in November 1971.

Rather, during the negotiations British diplomats concluded that it would be easier to reach a solution regarding the islands of Abu Masa, Greater Tunbs, and Lesser Tunbs once the Iranian claim to Bahrain had been disposed of.¹⁸⁴ By April 1969 the Foreign Office was actively resisting any linking between Bahrain and the other islands, and representatives of the Foreign Office were consistent in expressing to the Shah and Iranian negotiators that they could not consider a package deal and the Shah should look to pursuing individual agreements with the rulers of Sharjah and Ras-al-Khaimah independently.¹⁸⁵ As succinctly noted by a British official in correspondence: "it is not for us to tell one ruler that he should give up part of his territory to benefit another."¹⁸⁶ The evidence suggests that the Foreign Office originally proposed a packaged deal in 1968 that was never formally agreed upon. By the following year, British diplomats were treating the issue of the islands and Bahrain separately. Archival material does provide proof of a deal, but more than a year before Iran moved to station troops to the Tunbs islands British officials were rejecting any sort of settlement.

¹⁸⁴ Foreign Office minute by G.G. Arthur, 2 April 1969 as found in Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 9: 358.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, and Minutes from J.A.N. Graham to A.A. Acland, 29 April 1969, and from D.J. McCarthy to J.A.N. Graham, 30 April 1969 as found in Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 9: 389.

¹⁸⁶ Papers entitled "Iranian Claims in the Persian Gulf: Bahrain, Abu Musa, and the Tunbs: Talking Points" and "Iranian Claims in the Persian Gulf: Bahrain, Abu Musa and the Tunbs: Background Brief," undated, received in Registry 13 May 1969 as found in Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 9: 399.

A Failure to Protect

If one accepts the evidence that the Foreign Office did not authorize the Iranian occupation of islands in exchange for the Shah relinquishing the historically-rooted claim to Bahrain then why did London not uphold its agreement to protect the islands? Beginning in early 1968 the British government explored both diplomatic and military means to solve the territorial disputes over the islands in the Persian Gulf. Time and money went into crafting contingency plans for the event of an Iranian seizure of the Tunbs. Known by the codename of PENSUM, if Iran was to seize Greater Tunbs and Lesser Tunbs British forces would occupy Abu Masa. Additionally, there two other contingency plans known as PAMPERO and BUDLET/ACCOLL.¹⁸⁷ Despite such plans London pursued no such path to counter Iran's actions.

Correspondence illustrates that the Foreign Office was aiming to "implement a policy of deterrence through bluff" and despite the institution of contingency plans London was not committed to using force. One Foreign Office official stated retrospectively in an interview that British diplomats had done their best to help the Shah achieve negotiated settlements and even going so far as to suggest the outright Iranian purchase of the Tunbs islands by the Shah. The Foreign Office even explored the possibility of a three-way bargain in which the Sirri Island would be awarded to Iran, Abu Musa awarded to the Sharjah, and the sale of the Tunbs of Iran.¹⁸⁸

Whilst diplomatic resolve was achieved with the ruler of Abu Masa no agreement was reached regarding the ruler of Ras al-Khaimah concerning the Tunbs islands. Without forces stationed the British government could not continue its treaty to protect the islands.¹⁸⁹ Some

¹⁸⁷ Mobley, "The Tunbs and Musa," 633-634.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Telegram No. 1852 from UK Mission to the United Nations, New York, to Foreign Office, 30 November 1971 as found in Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 12: 609.

diplomatic personnel were vehemently in favor of military action, but in the midst of general withdrawal from the region and a broader plan for British extraction from extraneous obligations, the Foreign Office would not act to save two islands; one of which entirely uninhabitable.¹⁹⁰

Such a failure to act is not an indication of a deal but rather the product of realist policies pursued by the British diplomats. Furthermore, if the Iranian occupation was but a pre-coordinated exercise like that which culminated in the relinquishment of the historically rooted claim it would be similarly documented. *Arabian Boundaries: New Documents, 1966-1975* is comprised of all British diplomatic correspondence concerning territorial changes in the Persian Gulf region. Memorandums and briefings from early on in the negotiations explicitly refer to a deal and the failure of the deal to actually manifest. If in fact a deal had been agreed upon for November 1971 when Iran sent troops to the Tunbs islands, there would have been references to the Foreign Office's consent.

Historiography

In analyzing the evolution of the debate over a possible *quid pro quo* exchange of territory between Iran and the United Kingdom over the Greater Tunbs, Lesser Tunbs, and Bahrain, most scholarly analysis fails to acknowledge that one time this exchange was an integral part of London's negotiating strategy. Whilst I have concluded that no deal was formalized, when it is portrayed in other works it is solely Iranian diplomatic personnel who are trying to orchestrate a deal. This has no doubt slanted a comprehensive understanding of events

¹⁹⁰ Mobley, "The Tunbs and Musa," 628.

and the possibility of British support for an exchange of territory has not been given due credence.

Beyond ignoring the substantial consideration British officials gave to a packaged deal regarding Bahrain and the islands, historiography also fails to acknowledge the regional belief that a deal was crafted. Immediately following Iranian troops landing on the Tunbs islands rumors began circulating that the British government had made an agreement with the ruler of Ras Al-Khaimah in which the Shah could seize the Tunbs islands.¹⁹¹ In Baghdad the seizure of the islands was perceived as yet another British betrayal for the Foreign Office was still responsible for their protection.¹⁹² Similarly in Libya, the second most prominent government official¹⁹³ articulated that “Britain bore responsibility for defending the islands. If Britain did not react to the Iranian occupation, this would prove positive in Libyan eyes that it had taken place with British connivance.”¹⁹⁴ Deal or no deal, it was perceived as the former and with Sheikh Saqr, the ruler of Ras al-Khaimah looking to take the issue to both the Arab League and the United Nations Security Council it was seemingly a debate that was not going away anytime soon.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹¹ Telegram No. 453 from Dubai to Foreign Office, 30 November 1971 as found in Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 12: 596.

¹⁹² Telegram No. 1195 from Baghdad to Foreign Office, 30 November 1971 as found in Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 12: 598.

¹⁹³ Major Abdessalam Jalloud participated in the coup in September 1969 which brought Muammar al-Qaddafi to power. He would become one of Qaddafi’s most trusted advisors and Prime Minister of Libya.

¹⁹⁴ Telegram 1302 from Tripoli to Foreign Office, 30 November 1971 as found in Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 12: 603.

¹⁹⁵ Telegram 214 from Doha to Foreign Office, 1 December 1971 as found in Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 12: 619.

Concluding Remarks

The British government was formally obligated to protect the islands, yet it did not act in November 1971. Prior to this date the Foreign Office had been active in pursuing a diplomatic solution to the known dispute over the Greater and Lesser Tunbs. With Abu Masa, diplomacy had been successful when the rulers agreed to postpone a formal clause stating whether the island was indeed Arab or Persian from the Memorandum of Understanding.¹⁹⁶ In regards to the Greater and Lesser Tunbs, negotiations between the Ruler of Ras Al-Khaimah and the Shah did not culminate in a similar treaty despite encouragement from the Foreign Office. Whilst not reacting to Iranian's seizure of the islands, there is no concrete evidence suggesting a deal. Between 1968 and 1971 there were multiple discussions amongst British and Iranian negotiators regarding a *quid pro quo* exchange of territory, which is often ignored. The existence of such talks is not proof that these discussions were the premise for Iranian troops seizing the Tunbs without approval in 1971. Since then the seizure of the Tunbs by Iranian forces continues to be regarded by the United Arab Emirates as an "occupation."¹⁹⁷ The following chapter will examine how the Iranian claims to Abu Masa and the Tunbs continue to impact its relations with its neighbors, and how even Iran's abandoned claim to Bahrain has had significant repercussions on the domestic politics of Bahrain.

¹⁹⁶ Telegram 1302 from Tripoli to Foreign Office, 30 November 1971 as found in Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 12: 604.

¹⁹⁷ See U.N. Doc. A/47/516: Resolution 5223/98/3, September 13, 1992; and the close of the thirteenth summit of the Gulf Cooperation Council in which Abu Dhabi called on Iran to "terminate its occupation of Greater and Lesser Tunb islands which belong to the United Arab Emirates." See Amirahmadi, *Small Islands, Big Politics*, 27.

“The principal demand of the Bahraini people today is to return this province, which was separated from Iran, to its mother, Islamic Iran.”¹⁹⁸

– Hossein Shariatmadari
Editor-in-Chief of *Kayhan*
2007

Chapter 4: Enduring Relevance

Introductory Remarks

During the reign of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi the Iranian state repeatedly expressed legal jurisdiction over Bahrain.¹⁹⁹ Negotiations beginning in 1968 formally abandoned the Iranian claim to the island, but nearly 45 years after Iran’s approach to the United Nations Secretary-General the Iranian connection remains relevant. This is evident when examining the current Iranian political discourse concerned with annexing Bahrain. This inquiry then turns to evaluating Bahrain’s domestic policies where through embracing the lens of monarchical considerations one is a witness to the evolving strategies of the ruling family. In 1999 the Emir of Bahrain²⁰⁰ was succeeded by his son, Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifah (r. 1999 - present)²⁰¹ and their treatment of domestic religious demographics is intricately tied in with the notion of an Iranian claim to Bahrain.

¹⁹⁸ Mansharof and Rapoport. "Tensions in Iran-Bahrain Relations After Kayhan Editor Claims Bahrain Is Inseparable Part of Iran." The Middle East Media Research Institute. Inquiry & Analysis Series Report No. 379. August 3, 2007. <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/251/0/2314.htm>.

¹⁹⁹ Zahlan, *The Making of the Modern Gulf States*, 48.

²⁰⁰ Henceforth in this chapter known as the Emir.

²⁰¹ Henceforth in this chapter known as King Hamad.

Just as the relationship between Tehran and Manama remains strained, the relationship between the United Arab Emirates and Iran is uneasy as a result of Iran's continued contention that it has sovereignty over the islands of Abu Masa, Greater Tunbs, and Lesser Tunbs. The governments of Iran and the UAE have consistently asserted that each possesses rightful sovereignty over the near-uninhabitable but strategically significant islands. The gravity of the disagreement is found in the fact that the question of legal jurisdiction over the islands has made it onto the agenda of not only regional but also international political summits. Iran continues to contend that three islands in the Gulf are rightfully Iranian despite their function as a source of extreme dispute with Iran's neighbors. As a result, the islands have grown to take on an importance beyond their geographically strategic value.

Annexing Bahrain

Despite formal relinquishment in 1971, the notion of Bahrain as an Iranian province has remained prevalent in Iranian political discourse. The first time the claim arose following the 1968-1971 negotiations was in the midst of the Islamic Revolution in 1979.²⁰² In an aim to export the revolution which had ousted the Shah, Ayatollah Sadeq Rouhani²⁰³ called for the Islamic Republic to annex Bahrain if the Emir of Bahrain did not adopt a similar model of Islamic governance.²⁰⁴ Whilst this was not a statement of the formal Foreign Ministry of the

²⁰² Shaul Bakhash, *The Reign of the Ayatollahs: Iran and the Islamic Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 126-127 as found in Joseph Kechichian, *Oman and the World: The Emergence of an Independent Foreign Policy* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1995), 114 and Rouhollah Ramazani, *The Gulf Cooperation Council: Record and Analysis*. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1988), 7.

²⁰³ Ayatollah Sadeq Rouhani should not be confused with Hassan Rouhani, the current President of Iran. Sadeq Rouhani is a Grand Ayatollah in Iran which means he possesses supreme legal authority for Twelver Shia Muslims. There are only 64 people with the title of Grand Ayatollah world-wide.

²⁰⁴ Michael Hudson, "Bahrain, the Gulf's 'Guinea-Pig Society,'" *New York Times*, November 1, 1979.

Islamic Republic, nor the opinion of Ayatollah Khomeini, the foremost leader of the Islamic Revolution, the cry for such action reveals that a reassertion of Iran's territorial claim was not out of the question in 1979.

Possible annexation has been legitimized by more contemporary discourse in the Iranian political sphere. In 2007 an editorial by the editor-in-chief of *Kayhan*, an Iranian daily, stirred Iran-Bahrain relations. Hossein Shariatmadari wrote that:

Bahrain is part of Iran's soil, having been separated from it through an illegal conspiracy [spawned] by... Shah [Pahlavi, in conjunction with] the American and British governments. The principal demand of the Bahraini people today is to return this province, which was separated from Iran, to its mother, Islamic Iran.²⁰⁵

Shariatmadari also formally serves as a representative of Supreme Leader Ali Hussein Khamenei, so his claims that Bahrain was an inseparable part of Iran triggered Bahraini anxiety about future action of the Iranian government. Whilst the situation was tempered through diplomatic back channels and espousing that Shariatmadari's editorial was a personal view, and not that of the government of Iran, tensions flared again in 2012.²⁰⁶ *Kayhan* printed another editorial claiming that the Islamic Republic maintains the right to return Bahrain, a separated province, to Iran. Furthermore, the editorial contended that Bahrainis consider themselves Iranians, and that reports indicated they were eager to formally return to Iran.²⁰⁷

One might contend that such statements are simply rhetorical and do not reflect an actual threat of annexation. However, the fact that this is a sentiment repeatedly expressed shows that

²⁰⁵ Mansharof and Rapoport, "Tensions in Iran-Bahrain Relations After Kayhan Editor Claims Bahrain Is Inseparable Part of Iran."

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Shahira Salloum, "Bahrain: A Hot Potato Across The Persian Gulf," *Al Akhbar English*, May 18, 2012. <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/7427>.

the historic claim to Bahrain is something to be tapped into, and something not entirely of the past, but of the present.

Then and Now: Monarchial Strategies of the Al-Khalifah Family

The contemporary relevance of Iran's historically-rooted claim to Bahrain is also apparent when examining contemporary politics of the Persian Gulf. The historical negotiations provide a window to the geopolitical considerations of the Emir of Bahrain and the Shah of Iran. The depth of insight available reveals that since the negotiations there has been a dramatic change in monarchial strategies in Bahrain. The policies pursued by the Emir in the earlier negotiations vary considerably from his son, King Hamad, during the 2011 uprising in Bahrain. Both sought to preserve the security of the monarchy, but aimed to achieve this in completely contrasting manners.

During the deliberations over Iran's claim to Bahrain, the former Emir continuously objected to the Iranian suggestion of a plebiscite on the basis it would trigger the escalation of domestic religious tensions.²⁰⁸ The outcome of the negotiations over the claim to Bahrain were directly tied to the security of the monarchy,²⁰⁹ and the Sunni ruler knew the memories of the 1953-1954 Sunni-Shia riots remained vivid and sought to avoid a public referendum that may have led to exacerbating religious tensions.²¹⁰ The Emir viewed religious dissent as something

²⁰⁸ Despatch No.4/1 from A.D. Parsons, Bahrain Agency, to D.J. McCarthy, Foreign Office, "Bahrain/Iran" 14 January 1969 as found in Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 9: 255.

²⁰⁹ Despatch No. 3/32 from A.D. Parsons, Bahrain Agency, to A.J.D. Stirling, Foreign Office, "Bahrain and Iran," 28 January 1969 as found in Schofield and Evans, *Arabian boundaries: new documents*, 9: 287.

²¹⁰ Bahrain Government, *Annual Report of the Bahrain Government September 1953 to December 1954*, 46-50 and Zahlan, *The Making of the Modern Gulf State*, 57.

that would prove harmful to both the Bahraini independence movement and the durability of his regime.

In contrast his son King Hamad, who came to power in 1999, viewed the exacerbation of religious tensions as key to maintaining the stability of his rule. This is most evident in the policies pursued during the 2011 demonstrations in Bahrain for social, economic, and governmental reform. That January, a wave a political upheaval swept across the Middle East as a response to the self-immolation of Mohamad Bouazizi on the streets of Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia. Across the region demands for societal change were espoused and demonstrations broke out in Oman, Yemen, Egypt, Syria, and Morocco. Whilst thousands were in Tahrir Square in Cairo voicing their desire for the resignation of Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak, social media platforms were beginning to be utilized in Bahrain to call for similar protests with an aim of transforming civil society.

The first days of demonstrations in Bahrain in February, 2011 were confined to remote Shia communities, but the demonstrations as a whole were not limited to the Shia population.²¹¹ In late February, members of the Shia majority were leading the majority of protests but the desire for systemic change was widespread and increased as a response to the outbreak of police brutality and numerous deaths at the hands of Bahraini security forces. A probe into the 2011 protests sponsored by King Hamad himself would later report both Sunni and Shia Bahrainis were involved in the protests.²¹² The report itself acknowledges the participation of Sunni actors, and is proof of demonstrations not being limited to the Shia population of Bahrain. This is

²¹¹ Kristian Ulrichsen, *After the Arab Spring: power shift in the Middle East?: Bahrain's aborted revolution*. IDEAS reports - special reports, Kitchen, Nicholas (ed.) 2012 ,SR011, LSE IDEAS, London School of Economics and Political Science, London, 29.

²¹² Mahmoud Cherif Bassiouni et al., Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, BICI Website (Manama), December 10, 2011, www.bici.org.bh/BICIreportEN.pdf (accessed March 31, 2015).

further evidenced when analyzing the protests themselves during which the people chanted that they were not Sunnis or Shias, but only Bahrainis.²¹³ There was a united desire for a greater democratic process and economic opportunity domestically. However, it would be careless to contend that all were in favor of such political changes, and many Sunnis at the outbreak of demonstrations were dismissive of protestors.²¹⁴ Despite varying opinions, in late February 2011 it is estimated that one out of every six Bahraini citizens were protesting in Manama.²¹⁵

The domestic religious dynamic was utilized by King Hamad to solidify his position domestically which was threatened by political demonstrations. In January Ben Ali, the President of Tunisia, had been ousted; marking the first time widespread public protests had usurped an Arab leader.²¹⁶ Similarly, in February, President Hosni Mubarak who had ruled Egypt for three decades resigned — surrendering to the thousands of protestors who had demanded he abandon his post.²¹⁷ Those protesting in Tunisia and Egypt had not only demonstrated against high levels of unemployment, lack of democratic processes, and limited opportunities but also for the departure of their authoritarian rulers. When protests began in Bahrain, King Hamad was fearful of the security of his regime, and he exploited the religious dynamic in order to maintain power.

The different status of Sunni and Shia Bahrainis is evident when analyzing Bahraini society itself. The first Bahraini census was conducted in 1941 and revealed that the Shia

²¹³ Ulrichsen, Kristian, *After the Arab Spring*, 29.

²¹⁴ Michael Slackman, "Sunnis in Bahrain, Occupying Comfortable Niche, are Dismissive of Protesters," *New York Times*, February 18, 2011.

²¹⁵ Ulrichsen, Kristian, *After the Arab Spring*, 29.

²¹⁶ David Kirkpatrick, "President of Tunisia Flees, Capitulating to Protesters," *New York Times*, January 15, 2011.

²¹⁷ David Kirkpatrick, "Mubarak Out," *New York Times*, February 12, 2011.

population made up 53 per cent of the entire population.²¹⁸ Since then, the Shia population has grown exponentially and according to a 2010 census 75 per cent of the country's population subscribes to Shia Islam.²¹⁹ There are entire cities in Bahrain such as Riffa, the second largest in the Kingdom of Bahrain with a population of over 110,000, in which Shias are not allowed to rent homes or purchase land. Any Sunnis with Iranian ancestry are also prohibited from living in the area.²²⁰ Furthermore, any Bahraini who falls into either of those two categories is not allowed to hold a position in the police or armed forces. Employment is a serious issue for the Shia population of Bahrain for the country's largest employer is the Ministry of Interior and thus the Shia population is limited in its socio-economic opportunities.²²¹ Political representation is further restricted by procedural politics, and the country has been divided into imbalanced sectarian constituencies. As one global report concluded: "in the southern governorate, which the many newly naturalized persons reside, a block of around 2000 voters hold a seat in parliament, whilst in the central and northern governorates, that are majority Shiite areas, block of around 7800 voters hold one."²²²

Despite varied living experiences, the demonstrations that began in 2011 cannot be explained by religion. It was strategic action by King Hamad which transformed the character of turbulence in Bahrain into a sectarian issue. Protestors subscribing to both Sunni and Shia Islam

²¹⁸ Fahim Qubain, "Social Classes and Tensions in Bahrain," *Middle East Journal* 9, no. 3 (1955): 269-280.

²¹⁹ Laura Guazzone, "Gulf Co-operation Council: The Security Policies," *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* 30, no. 2 (1988): 134-148.

²²⁰ Maryam Al-Khawja, "Beneath Bahrain's Shia-versus-Sunni narrative, only the tyrants benefit," *The Guardian*, last modified October 27, 2012, accessed April 24, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/oct/27/bahrain-shia-versus-sunni-narrative>.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Bahrain Center for Human Rights, "Sectarian Discrimination in the Kingdom of Bahrain: The Unwritten Law," Paper presented at World Association of Non-Governmental Organizations (WANGO) Annual Conference, Bangkok, Thailand, 2003. Accessed April 24, 2015. <http://www.bahrainrights.org/node/384>.

were camped out in Pearl Square to demonstrate against the regime and in favor of democratic reform.²²³ Al Wafaq, the largest political group²²⁴ in Bahrain and also a Shia political group, expressed during the protests that their actions were additionally fueled by the Shia population “suffer[ing] systematic discrimination at the hands of the Sunni dynasty ruling Bahrain.”²²⁵ Overarching demands, however, mirrored those of protestors in Bahrain’s neighboring countries: a desire for reform under monarchical rule. The demonstrations in early 2011 represent the discriminatory, not sectarian, nature of Bahraini society.²²⁶ However, after February 2011 the nature of discord was altered.

Following the outbreak of dissent, King Hamad aimed to break the unity of the original movement through playing up religious tensions.²²⁷ Through drawing attention to and perpetuating rhetoric of religious difference he managed to divert attention away from his regime and on to the Shia population of Bahrain. As highlighted by Gregory Gause²²⁸ in a report for the Brookings Doha Center, the original situation itself was not sectarian, but was transformed by the regime into oppositional religious violence.²²⁹ Through highlighting the historically grounded claim to Bahrain and Iran’s alleged influence on the Bahraini Shia community, the religious situation was exploited to maintain the security of the monarchy. Domestic turmoil was

²²³ Reese Erlich, "In Bahrain, a growing Sunni-Shia rift," *GlobalPost*, March 13, 2013. <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/regions/middle-east/130315/bahrain-growing-sunni-shia-rift>.

²²⁴ In Bahrain political parties are illegal. However, in 2005 the Political Societies Act authorizes “political societies” which serves the same purpose and function as a political party without the title.

²²⁵ Associated Press, "Shiite Party In Bahrain Leaves Talks With Rulers," *New York Times*, July 18, 2011.

²²⁶ Shirin Sadeghi, "The Fabrication of Bahrain’s Shiite-Sunni Divide," *Huffington Post*, March 13, 2011.

²²⁷ Reese, "In Bahrain, a growing Sunni-Shia rift."

²²⁸ Gregory Gause III is a non-resident senior fellow of the Brookings Doha Center, a branch of the Brookings Institution. He is the author of one of the most up-to-date analyses of the *International Relations of the Persian Gulf*.

²²⁹ Gause, Gregory, "Beyond Sectarianism: The New Middle East Cold War," Brookings Doha Center, July 2014, 16.

both externalized in the Iranian connection to Bahrain, and internalized in the domestic Shia population.

In early March increasing numbers of people took to the streets. Whilst more radical Shia political groups wanted the abdication of the monarchy, the largest political party in Bahrain²³⁰ wanted to establish a constitutional monarchy.²³¹ In the first month of protests many had been killed, and hundreds had been injured from acts of police brutality which included firing live rounds on thousands of protestors who had been marching.²³² With increasingly violent clashes between security forces and demonstrators, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) announced that it would, for the first time, authorize collective military action to suppress popular revolt.²³³ On March 14 nearly 1,500 GCC troops entered Bahrain.

The alleged close link between the Bahraini people and the Iran allowed for King Hamad to utilize sectarian divisions to sustain the ruling power structure.²³⁴ King Hamad justified outside intervention with the argument that the Bahraini uprising was the result of foreign (Iranian) intervention in Bahrain's domestic politics.²³⁵ The Shia population of Bahrain has long

²³⁰ In November 2010 thousands of classified diplomatic cables from US embassies world wide were leaked to the public. Amongst them was a cable from the United States Ambassador to the Kingdom of Bahrain, Joseph Adam Ereli, in which it is acknowledged that al Wefaq is the largest political party in Bahrain in terms of its membership and its strength at the polls. Ambassador Adam Ereli, "US embassy cables: Guide to Bahrain's politics WikiLeaks cable: 04MANAMA000592," *The Guardian*, last modified February 15, 2011, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/16841>.

²³¹ "Hardline Shi'ite groups demand republic in Bahrain," *Reuters*. March 8, 2011. <http://ca.reuters.com/article/topNews/idCATRE7273FG20110308?sp=true>.

²³² Joe Parkinson, Sam Dagher, and Sam Solomon, "Death Toll Mounts in the Gulf," *Wall Street Journal*, February 19, 2011, [Page #], accessed April 24, 2015, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748704900004576151632161951462>.

²³³ Ethan Bronner and Michael Slackman, "Saudis, Fearful of Iran, Send Troops to Bahrain to Quell Protests," *New York Times*, March 15, 2011.

²³⁴ Sadeghi, "The Fabrication of Bahrain's Shiite-Sunni Divide."

²³⁵ Kristin Smith Diwan, "Bahrain's Shia Question: What the United States Gets Wrong About Sectarianism," *Foreign Affairs*, March 2, 2011, [Page #], <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67555/kristin-smith-diwan/bahraains-shia-question>.

been viewed by the Bahraini government as a “potential Iranian fifth column”²³⁶ — an attitude that has its origins in the discovery of coup plot backed by the Islamic Republic after the fall of the Shah.²³⁷ This stated mission of the GCC forces was not only to support King Hamad’s government against its domestic challengers but also, specifically, to deter Iran’s participation.²³⁸ In response to such outside intervention on the following day thousands of Bahrainis took to the streets of Manama and protested in front of the Saudi embassy.²³⁹ The demonstrations turned violent with over 200 people injured and two killed.²⁴⁰ With the onset of increasing violence King Hamad thus presented himself and the greater monarchy as not only a stabilizing force, but as the protector of the Sunni community from the Shia majority.²⁴¹ He enacted a State of National Safety²⁴² and authorized excessive use of force to put down protests. King Hamad justified his position both through citing a threat to national security and playing up social divisions. As a result he was able to prevent a cross-sectarian opposition front and diffuse unified demands for reform.²⁴³

²³⁶ Dalia Dassa Kaye and Frederic M. Wehrey, "A Nuclear Iran: The Reactions of Neighbours," *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* 49, no. 2, (2007): 116 as found in Mabon, Simon, “The Battle for Bahrain: Iranian-Saudi Rivalry” *Middle East Policy* 19, no. 2 (2012): 85.

²³⁷ In 1981 73 Bahrainis were convicted of attempting to stage a coup to overthrow the Emir and it was revealed they had been both financed and trained by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

²³⁸ Simon Henderson, "State of Emergency," *Foreign Policy*, June 7, 2011, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/06/07/state_of_emergency

²³⁹ Associated Press. "Two Killed in Bahrain Violence Despite Martial Law." *BBC News*. March 15, 2011. Accessed February 3, 2015. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-12751464>. and Ethan Bronner, "State of Emergency Declared in Bahrain," *New York Times*, Mar 16, 2011.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Diwan, "Bahrain’s Shia Question."

²⁴² The equivalent of martial law. See Bassiouni et al., Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, 260.

²⁴³ Rasheed Abou-Alsamh, "Sunnis Versus Shiites: Why the Arab Spring Isn’t Happening (Yet) In the Gulf Countries," *International Business Times*, last modified August 9, 2013, <http://www.ibtimes.com/sunnis-versus-shiites-why-arab-spring-isnt-happening-yet-gulf-countries-1376105>.

Original demonstrations acted as a catalyst for deflecting social problems away from the monarchy and onto the Shia population of Bahrain; which has continued to this day. King Hamad has contended since February 2011 that the political activities of the Shia community of Bahrain is a threat to the national security of Bahrain and has employed a \$32 million dollar public relations campaign to persuade the public of this.²⁴⁴ Yet, there was no credible evidence in 2011 that Iran played a part in Bahrain's uprising.²⁴⁵ The autumn after protests first broke out King Hamad established an independent commission to look into the origins of the uprising and examine how reconciliation might occur. The investigation was chaired by Mahmoud Cherif Bassiouni²⁴⁶ and despite the links between the Commission of Inquiry and King Hamad no proof of an Iranian connection was found in the formal report.²⁴⁷

At the time of this analysis in 2015 there have not been any new empirical links made between Iran and the Shia community in Bahrain.²⁴⁸ It was this original claim of Iranian interference in Bahraini domestic politics that triggered allowed for King Hamad to legitimize violence against Bahraini citizens, centralize his rule, and target the Shia population. To this day King Hamad continues to exploit the link between the Shia population of Bahrain and Iran. Since 2011 further governmental crackdown has continued to disenfranchise the Shia population.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁴ Glenn Greenwald, "Why didn't CNN's international arm air own documentary on Bahrain's Arab Spring repression?" *The Guardian*, September 4, 2012. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/sep/04/cnn-international-documentary-bahrain-arab-spring-repression>

²⁴⁵ Ulrichsen, *After the Arab Spring*, 30.

²⁴⁶ Mahmoud Cherif Baassiouni is an Egyptian known world-wide for his work relating to international criminal law and war crimes. He led the UN Security Council efforts to examine war crimes in former Yugoslavia in the 1990s and was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1999.

²⁴⁷ Ulrichsen, *After the Arab Spring*, 30.

²⁴⁸ Michael Slackman, "The Proxy Battle in Bahrain," *New York Times*, March 20, 2011.

²⁴⁹ Souad Makhennet, "Bahrain's Shiite-Sunni Animosities Linger on a Campus a Year After Clashes," *New York Times*, March 28, 2012.

Currently, a prominent Shia cleric awaits trial for illegally instigating political change.²⁵⁰ The largest political group in Bahrain, a Shia political party, has been banned by the Bahraini government.²⁵¹ Furthermore, the Interior Ministry continues to revoke the citizenship of many Shias with the aim of “protect[ing] the security and stability of Bahrain.”²⁵²

Unresolved Controversy

The continued relevance of Iran’s historical claims to territory in the Persian Gulf is apparent when looking beyond Bahrain to the islands of Abu Masa, Greater Tunbs, and Lesser Tunbs. Whilst Iran did not have formal agreement allowing it to seize the islands of Greater and Lesser Tunbs in November 1971 the Shah had procured an agreement, known as the Memorandum of Understanding, with the Ruler of Sharjah to legally seize the northern half of the island of Abu Masa — the details of which are detailed in the prior chapter of this analysis. Yet, since 1971 when the settlement was ratified, the government of the United Arab Emirates protests that Iran has breached the terms of the agreement and that the Iranian government occupies parts of the island not allocated to it in the 1971 Memorandum of Understanding.²⁵³

The animosity of the government of the United Arab Emirates towards Iran concerning the island of Abu Masa is not entirely unwarranted. Following the signing of bi-lateral

²⁵⁰ Kareem Fahim, "Calls to Free Leading Cleric in Bahrain," *New York Times*, March 20, 2011.

²⁵¹ Farshita Saeed, and Angus McDowall, "Bahrain opposition confirms it will boycott election," *Reuters*, October 11, 2014. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/10/11/us-bahrain-election-idUSKCN0I00JV20141011>.

²⁵² Associated Press, "Bahrain: 72 People Are Stripped of Their Citizenship," *New York Times*, February 1, 2015. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/01/world/middleeast/bahrain-72-people-are-stripped-of-their-citizenship.html>.

²⁵³ Permanent Mission of the United Arab Emirates to the United Nations, Statement Regarding the Occupation of the Three Islands, Website of the Permanent Mission of the United Arab Emirates to the United Nations, undated, <http://www.un.int/wcm/content/site/uae/cache/offonce/home/pid/19811;jsessionid=68BBE6070F7BBFD2E3192C4815667402>.

agreements between Gulf states and outside powers in the early 1990s the Iranian government was increasingly concerned that the UAE might send foreign nationals to the island of Abu Masa—which it had increasingly been doing with Egyptians.²⁵⁴ It was soon affirmed by Iranian diplomats that all governmental representatives of the UAE had been expelled from Abu Masa.²⁵⁵ Those with citizenship from the UAE living on Abu Masa were forced to obtain Iranian documents to leave the island, and by August 1992 non-UAE citizens were being both expelled from the island and denied entry.²⁵⁶ As highlighted by one scholar of the dispute, once both educators and families were allowed to return to the island that November a state of normalcy resumed. However, “normal” in this context means lingering dispute over island sovereignty and persistence of aggressive rhetoric between the two states.

Controversy has prevailed, and both Iran and the United Arab Emirates continue to quarrel over the current status of sovereignty of the tiny island. The visit of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to Abu Masa in April 2012 solicited multiple statements from both Abdullah bin Zayed, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the UAE, and officials from other Gulf states who condemned his “flagrant violation” of the UAE’s jurisdiction over the island.²⁵⁷ This stance

²⁵⁴ Marschall, Christin. *Iran's Persian Gulf Policy from Khomeini to Khatami* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 124.

²⁵⁵ Associate Press, "Iran Silent on Expulsions," *New York Times*, April 16, 1992.

²⁵⁶ Youssef Ibrahim, "Dispute Over Gulf Islands Worsens Iran-Arab Ties," *New York Times*, October 4, 1992 and Marschall, *Iran's Persian Gulf Policy from Khomeini to Khatami*, 124.

²⁵⁷ The official news agency of the United Arab Emirates, *Wakalat Anba'a al Emirat*, reported on the words of the Minister of Foreign Affairs which was then picked up by international broadcasting services. CNN Wire Staff, "Ahmadinejad's visit to island prompts UAE to recall Iran ambassador," *CNN* April 12, 2012, <http://edition.cnn.com/2012/04/12/world/meast/uae-iran-ambassador-recall/>

remains unchanged, and just six months ago bin Zayed expressed his anger over the hoisting of the Iranian flag over the part of Abu Masa adjudicated to the UAE.²⁵⁸

Past attempts to garner a diplomatic solution between the two parties over the current state of sovereignty have failed. For both Iran and the UAE, the sovereignty of Abu Masa is a vexing issue despite the Memorandum of Understanding which was signed in 1971. There was no similar agreement reached regarding the Greater Tunbs and Lesser Tunbs islands, and thus from the moment troops arrived at the island Iran's presence remains both controversial and contested. With declarations of animosity from the past few months there can be no disagreement that the islands remain central to current tensions between both Iran and the UAE.

The Islands: A Source of Iranian Nationalism

The Iranian government continues to contend that the islands of Abu Masa, Greater Tunbs, and Lesser Tunbs fall under the legal jurisdiction of the Iranian state. Beyond geographical value, the islands are an active source for nationalist rhetoric. During the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad between 2005 and 2013 Iran's nuclear program similarly served as a source of pride. During this time a columnist for Time Magazine in Tehran commented in an interview that:

a year ago [in 2005], there was no strong or collective opinion among young people on the nuclear issue. Today, it's a completely different atmosphere. Most young people, you know--secular, middle-class, traditional or otherwise--have been really convinced by the nationalist

²⁵⁸ Statement of His Highness Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nayhan, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Emirates, General Debate of the 69th Session Session of the United Nations General Assembly, New York, September 27 2014.

rhetoric of the president, that this is a national right and, sort of see this as the cornerstone for Iran being strong in the region, and in the world.²⁵⁹

Iran became increasingly isolated both diplomatically and economically and it is within this context the nuclear program took on a sense of national significance. This is further evidenced by the issue of a new *rial*²⁶⁰ note with the image of electrons and an atom, and frequent national announcements regarding advancements in uranium enrichment.²⁶¹

In 2006 the United Nations adopted Resolution 1969 to impose sanctions with the aim of deterring the development of Iran's nuclear program. These sanctions, in addition to further sanctions enforced by the United States²⁶² and the European Union, have had damaging ramifications beyond the energy sector and made it extremely difficult for Iran to conduct trade and commerce.²⁶³ As a result, multiple industries throughout Iran have collapsed²⁶⁴ and there remains little job security, few opportunities, and high unemployment.²⁶⁵ In 2012, it was reported that the automobile industry alone had directly or indirectly accounted for the layoffs of 2 million workers. Throughout the country families are suffering which is affirmed by further statistics: a survey conducted by the Central Bank of Iran concluded that in 2012, 22.5 per cent of Iranian

²⁵⁹ "National Pride Fuels Iran's Nuclear Drive " Azadeh Moaveni Interview with Renee Montagne. National Public Radio. May 03 2006. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5378508>.

²⁶⁰ Iranian currency.

²⁶¹ Evaleila Pesaran, *Iran's Struggle for Economic Independence Reform and Counter-reform in the Post-revolutionary Era* (London: Routledge, 2011), 181.

²⁶² The United States has imposed sanctions against Iran since the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Since then, it has also been at the forefront of nations instituting sanctions against Iran in addition to those through the United Nations.

²⁶³ Industries still operating in 2012 were doing so at around 40-50 per cent capacity. See International Campaign for Human Rights, "A Growing Crisis," 2013, 98-102. http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2013/04/growing_crisis/.

²⁶⁴ Joe Gordon, "The human costs of the Iran sanctions," *Foreign Policy* October 18, 2013. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/10/18/the-human-costs-of-the-iran-sanctions/>.

²⁶⁵ Frances Harrison, "Huge cost of Iranian brain drain," *BBC News* 8 January, 2007. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6240287.stm.

families had universal unemployment — meaning all members of the family were unemployed. General standards of living have decreased as the government has been unable to profit off of its oil exports during sanctions, falling behind Iraqi production for the first time since the beginning of the Iran-Iraq war.²⁶⁶ It is with this backdrop that the territorial disputes over Abu Masa and the Tunbs become both a distraction from internal domestic problems, and a source for national pride.

Through maintaining its claim to the islands in the Persian Gulf the Iranian government is affirming its position in the region. Some members of Iranian legislature have suggested that Iran formally declare Abu Masa an Iranian province, and other Iranian officials have suggested that the street where the embassy of the United Arab Emirates is located in Tehran be renamed Abu Masa.²⁶⁷ In similar fashion to the function of the Iranian nuclear program under Ahmadinejad, Abu Masa, Greater Tunbs, and Lesser Tunbs have been brought to the forefront of national discourse and exploited as a source for national sentiment.²⁶⁸ The dispute over the islands between Iran and the United Arab Emirates remains as controversial as ever with the situation today mirroring that which it was in 1971 where neither of the parties involved accepted each others claim to sovereignty and each maintained its own claim as righteous. What has changed however, is role of the islands in terms of Iranian identity.

²⁶⁶ Javier Blas, "Iraqi Oil Output Overtakes Iran's," *Financial Times*, August 10, 2012.

²⁶⁷ Thomas Erdbrink, "A Tiny Island Is Where Iran Makes a Stand," *New York Times*, May 1, 2012.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

The Arab Islands

The controversial argument over the sovereignty of the three islands is not limited to discussions between Iran and the United Arab Emirates. Abdullah bin Zayed, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the UAE, remains vigilant in articulating his country's disapproval of the Iranian occupation of all three islands on the international stage.²⁶⁹ He has repeatedly reiterated the desire of the UAE for the international community to resolve the dispute under the provision of international law, or through taking the case to the International Court of Justice.²⁷⁰ The renowned Iranian historian Pirouz Mojtahed-Zadeh has argued that in recent years the United Arab Emirates has aimed to both politicize and internationalize the island disputes in the Persian Gulf:

Like the way the Arabs began to refer to the Palestinian lands occupied by Israel as the "Occupied Arabic lands" in order to make the issue a *cause celebre* at the Arab World level, Abu Dhabi too has been referring to the islands of the Tunbs and Abu Musa as the "Occupied Arab Lands" in order to turn the issue of its claims on these islands into a *cause celebre* at the Middle East level as a symbol of Arab national resistance to the Iranian influence in the Persian Gulf.²⁷¹

This is seemingly not a new phenomena, for the islands have repeatedly been drawn into the discourse of other conflicts. Such is the case when examining the war which broke out in 1980 between the newly-established Islamic Republic of Iran and Iraq. Increasing border clashes and dispute over the Shatt al-Arab waterway led to the termination of their joint border agreement

²⁶⁹ United Nations, "United Arab Emirates, at UN, demands restoration of sovereignty over Persian Gulf Islands," United Nations News Centre, last modified September 28, 2013, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=46124&Kw1=uae&Kw2=&Kw3=#.VNllaMYb3KA>.

²⁷⁰ Statement of His Highness Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nayhan, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Emirates. General Debate of the 69th Session Session of the United Nations General Assembly. New York. 27 September 2014.

²⁷¹ Rastbeen, *The Three Iranian Islands of the Persian Gulf*, 97.

and Iraqi President Saddam Hussein moved to station one third of Iraq's forces on the Iranian border before invading the Islamic Republic in late September.²⁷² One of the stipulations put forth by Iraqi President Saddam Hussein before Iraqi forces would withdraw from Iran was the "return to Arab sovereignty" of Abu Musa, and the Tunbs.²⁷³ He did not mean for the islands to now be ruled by Ba'athist Iraq, but for a return of full authority of the islands to the United Arab Emirates. Hussein's request was a supplemental clause to greater demands but the fact the islands were included show how the dispute has been intertwined with broader politics in the Persian Gulf. Iran's presence on Abu Musa and the Tunbs for other states in the region has therefore taken on symbolism for Iran's perceived to be expansionist aims — what one scholar once called *Pax Iranica*.²⁷⁴

Such internationalization of the islands dispute is apparent when examining the diplomacy of the Gulf Cooperation Council. The importance of the islands beyond the United Arab Emirates is evidenced by the fact that during the 2006 GCC summit the issue of island sovereignty was written into the agenda for the meeting of Arab Gulf leaders. Furthermore, the press release of the summit detailed that all in attendance supported "the right of the State of the UAE to regain sovereignty over her three islands, which are the Greater and the Lesser Tunbs and Abu Musa, and over the territorial waters, the airspace, the continental shelf, and the economic zone of the three islands, as they are an integral part of the State of the United Arab

²⁷² Associated Press, "Iraq Ends 1975 Border Pact with Iran as Frontier Clashes Continue," *New York Times*, September 18, 1980.

²⁷³ Pranay Gupte, "Iraq Warns of Hostilities Till 'Rights' are Granted," *New York Times*, November 5, 1980.

²⁷⁴ In 1974 a lecturer in Contemporary History of the Near and Middle East at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London wrote that "From the point of view of some of the smaller States of the Gulf who could not look after their own defense, the *Pax Iranica* might not be so very different from the *Pax Britannica*." See R.M. Burrell, "Iranian Foreign Policy During the Last Decade," *Asian Affairs* 5, no. 1 (1974): 12.

Emirates.”²⁷⁵ The controversy has also taken on a more international component, for the subject of the islands was featured in the statement of the GCC-EU Joint Council meeting in 2007. Thus, even beyond the Persian Gulf itself the territorial disputes remain intrinsic to Gulf affairs.²⁷⁶

Concluding Remarks

This chapter began by evaluating the role of the historically rooted Iranian link to Bahrain in contemporary political discourse. Iranian officials continue to threaten to annex Bahrain and this rhetoric reaffirms that the Iran-Bahrain bond is not one of the past, but relevant to the present. The importance of the claim abandoned nearly 45 years ago is visible when examining the strategy employed by King Hamad of Bahrain, which I argue is intricately intertwined with the formally disposed Iranian claim. The alleged connection between Iran, the regional bastion of Shia Islam, and the Shia population of Bahrain continues to serve as justification for excessive use of governmental force and institutionalized discrimination. The seizure of the Tunbs islands remains equally as relevant to contemporary affairs in the Persian Gulf. Iran’s occupation of the islands continues to dictate the temperature of the relationship between Iran and the United Arab Emirates, and have come to serve a new function as a source of nationalist pride.

²⁷⁵ The Closing Statement of the Twenty-Seventh Session of the Supreme Council of the Cooperation Council of Arab States of the Gulf (GCC). Jaber Summit. Riyadh-Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. 10 December 2006. <https://www.gcc-sg.org/eng/indexf5cf.html?action=Sec-Show&ID=129>.

²⁷⁶ Joint Communiqué of the 17th GCC-EU Joint Council and Ministerial Meeting, Riyadh, May 8, 2007, <http://www.mofa.gov.sa/Detail.asp?InNewsIteamID=64622>.

“No people can live in the past — not even its own past. But if it no longer has a link with its history, it must of necessity perish.”²⁷⁷

– Mohammad Reza Pahlavi
Shah of Iran
1980

Conclusion

From January 1968 to March 1970 representatives from Iran, Bahrain, and the United Kingdom negotiated to reach a settlement relinquishing formal Iranian ties to Bahrain. Through utilizing the auspices of the United Nations the Iranian claim was disposed of, but additional territorial changes soon ensued in the Persian Gulf. In November 1971 Iranian forces landed on the northern half of Abu Masa, and both the Greater Tunbs and Lesser Tunbs islands. Whilst the Shah had garnered an agreement known as the Memorandum of Understanding to inhabit part of Abu Masa, no such resolve was reached in regards to the Tunbs. The status of Iran’s involvement regarding the three islands, and especially the Tunbs, remains subject to both controversy and contempt. Through contextualizing instances of diplomacy, I have sought to explore what it means for territory to be abandoned. In formulating a case in which Iran both abandoned and seized territory, a commentary on statecraft and sovereignty emerges which is able to lend itself towards further research of the Persian Gulf both past and present.

The first chapter of this analysis began by framing the relationship between Iran and the United Kingdom at the turn of the twentieth century. To illustrate common opposition to foreign activities in Iran I highlighted specific episodes of economic exploitation. This sentiment was exacerbated by the role of the American government in overthrowing the democratically elected

²⁷⁷ Pahlavi, *The Shah's Story*, 15.

Prime Minister. Oral history projects and memoirs detailed how foreign governments support for the development of the Shah's militarized police network, SAVAK, further amplified existing attitudes. With the British Prime Minister's declaration to withdraw forces from the Persian Gulf the Shah sought to abandon the claim that was causing tension between him and his neighbors: the Iranian claim of sovereignty over Bahrain. To determine how the disposal of the claim was achieved hundreds of pages of diplomatic correspondence was read. In reconstructing the twenty six months of shuttle diplomacy the different phases of the negotiations, beginning with the Shah demanding a plebiscite and ending with an approach to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, were highlighted. Furthermore, the chronology put forth by other scholars was proven faulty and reworked to be true to the negotiations themselves.

The second chapter utilized a thematic approach to engage with the intricacies of the negotiations. I contend that throughout the duration of the deliberations both the Shah of Iran and the Emir of Bahrain were vehemently concerned with domestic politics. However, such obsession for public opinion was for completely opposing reasons. Whilst the Shah was engaging with domestic attitude towards Bahrain and the United Kingdom, the Emir of Bahrain sought to limit all possible expression of opinion, believing that the introduction of new legislative mechanisms into civil society might instigate both political and religious chaos. After evaluating attitudes towards religion, I maintain the abandonment of the Bahrain claim can not be separated from creation of a formal union of the smaller Gulf states now known as the United Arab Emirates. Lastly, I contend that throughout the negotiations the Shah was constrained by his concern for public opinion, but ultimately acted independently from his political advisers.

Following the disposal of the formal Iranian claim to Bahrain, chapter three explores how Iranian troops occupied three other islands in the Persian Gulf: Abu Masa, Greater Tunbs, and Lesser Tunbs. Historiography of the event has entirely ignored that at one point a *quid pro quo* was an integral part of Britain's negotiating strategy. Such an argument is further evidenced by retrospective references to a negotiated packaged settlement. However, it has been proven that British diplomatic officials rejected links between Bahrain and the other islands and were continuously advocating for negotiated settlements with individual rulers of the islands. Therefore, there is simply not enough evidence to conclude that territorial changes in November 1971 came as the result of a deal crafted between British and Iranian officials.

Whilst the Shah sought to abandon the Iranian states claim to formal claim to Bahrain it is not a thing of the past. Chapter four of this analysis began by evaluating the role of the historically rooted Iranian link to Bahrain in contemporary political discourse. Some in the Iranian political sphere continue to call for annexation to reunite the alleged province with Iran which reaffirms that the Iran-Bahrain bond is not one of the past, but relevant to the present. The importance of the formal claim abandoned nearly 45 years ago is visible when examining the strategies employed by King Hamad of Bahrain. The alleged connection between Iran, the regional bastion of Shia Islam, and the Shia population of Bahrain continues to serve as justification for excessive use of governmental force and institutionalized discrimination. Similarly, the Abu Masa and the Tunbs remain a source of debate for the governments of Iran and the United Arab Emirates. Their contested sovereignty has been disputed on the international stage, and representatives of the UAE continue to call for the matter to be resolved through the

United Nations. Iran's increased diplomatic and economic isolation in the recent years has also brought forward the islands in terms of national consciousness.

The case of the abandonment of the formal Iranian claim to Bahrain and subsequent seizure of islands in the Persian Gulf provides insight to how diplomatic results were garnered. Close evaluation reveals that there was no predetermined path from point A to point B. Generated outcomes were due to confronting challenges with persistence and compromise. The Shah's commitment to abandoning the historically-rooted claim to Bahrain was not enough, but required considerable thought over methodology and specifics. As illustrated in this analysis there were multiple instances when negotiations could have come to a halt, or dramatically changed course. For instance, beginning in 1969 the Foreign Office attempted to broker individual deals between the Shah and the rulers of the Abu Masa and Tunbs islands which the Shah had made clear he desired. One notion put forth encompassed a three way trade in which the Sirri island would be awarded to Iran, Abu Masa to the Sharjah, and the Tunbs would be sold to Iran.²⁷⁸ Had such proposals been ratified the landscape of sovereignty in the Persian Gulf would vary from what presently exists.

An in-depth approach to these negotiations reveals the true nature of diplomacy in which statecraft was conducted, primarily, by rulers. The Shah of Iran and the Emir of Bahrain were most active in the discussions that brought about a joint approach to the United Nations. Whilst other high-level officials took meetings with representatives of the United Kingdom, the majority of the deliberations included the two monarchs themselves and not their foreign ministers or other spokesmen of the state. The Shah and Emir respectively navigated the challenges of

²⁷⁸ Mobley, "The Tunbs and Musa," 633-634.

political decision making on their own. This point is further evidenced by the fact that more than one year into the deliberations regarding Bahrain the Iranian Ambassador to the United Kingdom, the party whom the Shah was negotiating with, did not know that the Shah had committed to dispose of the Iranian claim.

In examining what happens when territory is formally abandoned the cost of altering the state of territorial sovereignty becomes rapidly apparent. There were many ramifications to the disposal of the Iranian claim which have set the temperament for Iran's relationship with its neighbors. At the time the negotiations were heralded by those involved as an instance of successful international diplomacy, but to date the connection between Iran and Bahrain, although formally relinquished, has caused immense tension for the two governments. Similarly, the subsequent move of Iranian forces to the coasts of Abu Masa, Greater Tunbs, and Lesser Tunbs in the autumn of 1971 continues to strain the relationship between Iran and the United Arab Emirates. A close reading of the history of the Persian Gulf illustrates how the past cannot be separated from the present, and is key to understanding the political climate of the region.

The disposal of a territorial claim is not a phenomena unique to Iran, nor the Persian Gulf, nor the Middle East. When embraced in abstracts the research narrated in this thesis is of one state abandoning its ties to another territory in a broader period that saw the restructuring of maps, polities, and loyalties. The dramatic transformation of regional dynamics could be used to describe other recent historical events such as the collapse of the Soviet Union, and many of the territorial disputes that grace the headlines of newspapers each day. Historical conditions of the past will never completely mirror those of the present, but the insight drawn from this instance of diplomacy lends itself towards further comprehension of changing global dynamics.

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