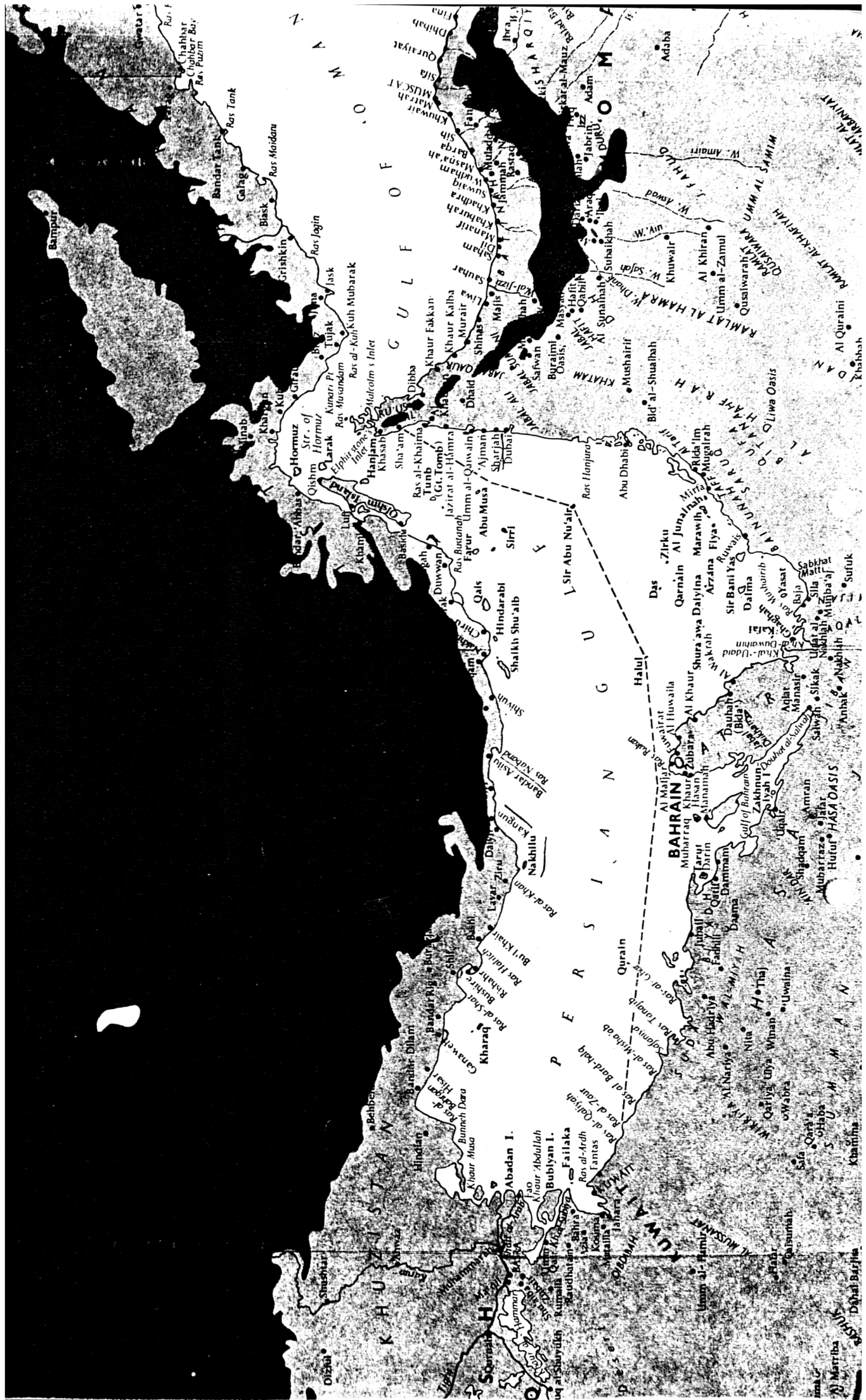


The Qawasim and British Control
of the Arabian Gulf

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Author's Note

While every effort has been made to standardise proper and place names, it will be appreciated that these have undergone variation in transliteration since the middle of the eighteenth century; where archaisms occur, as in contemporary writings, reports and journals, these have been retained so as not to lose the period flavour they lend to the narrative

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S U M M A R Y

THE QAWASIM AND BRITISH CONTROL OF THE ARABIAN GULF

For 150 years after 1820, Oman and the littoral sheikhdoms of the Arabian Gulf were known respectively as Trucial Oman and the Trucial States. This reflected the series of agreements beginning in 1820 progressively extending British control of the external policies of the area, leaving domestic and internal affairs in the hands of the traditional rulers. The trucial system was imposed initially to put down piracy by the Qawasim whose depredations on British trade with India reached a climax at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

For many years an accepted version, the allegations of piracy have recently been challenged; this thesis seeks to investigate the issue using archive material from the Bombay Presidency and from the Cairo Citadel, material not previously investigated. It is the writer's contention that the traditional justification for British intervention and control of the Gulf, namely piracy, does not take into account the influence of Wahhabism or Anglo-French rivalry dating from the Egyptian campaigns of Napoleon. Thus, the trucial system rested on a more varied and complex origin than has generally been accepted and reflects more pervasive British interests than a simple humanitarian motive.

C H A P T E R O N E

The situation in the Gulf in the first half of the eighteenth century

Any discussion of the origins and development of the Al Qawasim and their maritime activities conducted on the eastern side of the Arab Peninsula during the second half of the eighteenth century, when they emerged as a naval force to be reckoned with, requires a preliminary study of the politico-economic situation obtaining in the area during the first half of that century.

We know for instance that the Gulf area constituted a location of strategic importance to countries with a strong interest in East-West trade activity - the Portuguese, Dutch, French and British. All these accordingly had dealings with the rulers of Persia, the local sheiks of Oman, and the leaders of the Qawasim, together with their Wahabi supporters, and notably the Saudis. The local population and its political and social systems were greatly affected by this attention focused on their region.

The Arab Gulf lies between the latitudes of 24-30 degrees in the north, and the longitudes of 48-58 degrees in the east. The temperature during summer is high, with humidity up to 100%, but in winter it can fall as low as 5° centigrade. There is very little rainfall. Winds from the north are invariably cold,

whereas southern winds are dusty and hot. The Gulf covers 97,000 square miles and is 500 miles long stretching from Shatt-al-Arab in the north to the Hormuz straits in the south. It is 180 miles wide at its broadest, narrowing down to 29 miles in the straits of Hormuz.

On the western borders of the Gulf from south to north runs the Oman mountain ridge, followed by a chain of small winding bays dotting the coastline between the Sultanate of Oman and the State of Qatar. The area of Al-Hassa in the northwest is characterized by plains rich in minerals and sulphur springs. Thus, surrounded on one side by mountains and on the other by desert, the coastal Arabs had little choice but to turn to the sea to earn their living, which they did with considerable skill.

Due to its location, the Arab Gulf occupied a prominent place as one of the major trade routes linking East with West before the rounding of the Cape of Good Hope in August 1498. Trade was conducted along two major routes, namely the Red Sea and Egypt, and the Gulf and the north land route.⁽¹⁾ The Gulf was the route along which products from India and China reached the markets of Persia and the North, with exports from the Arab Peninsula, Persia and Europe conveyed by this route to India and the Far East.⁽²⁾ Exports from India were shipped through the Gulf and then conveyed by caravans via Iraq and the north to one of the Mediterranean ports to Europe. As for the Red Sea route,

(1) Lorimer, J G, Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia, Calcutta, Superintendent Government Printing, 1915, Vol 1, p 9.

(2) Kelly, J B, Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1795-1880, Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1968, p 1.

goods were transported by sea to Alexandria or Damietta, where they were loaded on ships bound for Europe.

Amongst the various trading centres of the Gulf, Bahrain benefited greatly from its favourable geographical position, blessed as it was with safe anchorages and harbours, close to the main ports situated in the Gulf. Pearl fishing was the main industry and was conducted along the coast extending from Katif to Dubai, with extensive pearl fisheries being located around Bahrain Island itself. The representative of the East India Company in Basra in 1750 estimated the value of pearl exports from Bahrain to Basra to be 500,000 Indian rupees (about £50,000) per annum. In 1790, the annual value of the pearl trade remained at 500,000 Bombay rupees⁽³⁾, whilst Captain John Malcom, ten years later, estimated the annual export of pearls at 1,000,000 rupees.⁽⁴⁾ The size of the Gulf pearling fleet was considerable:- Captain Robert Taylor, an official of the East India Company, estimated the number of vessels at 1400:

"of which 700 were of larger burthen, 300 intermediate, and 400 of a small size. The larger were manned by one master, fourteen divers, and fourteen assistants, in all twenty-nine men; the intermediate with one master, nine divers, and nine assistants, in all nineteen men; the least with one master, seven divers, and seven assistants, in all fifteen men."⁽⁵⁾

Bahrain imported its foodstuffs and commodities - cotton, sugar, spices, rice, metals, drugs and pine - mainly from India, with grain, dried fruits, dates and coffee being obtained from Persia,

(3) India Office Library and Records (IOR), Factory Records, Persia and Persian Gulf G/29/21 - Manesty and Jones to Governor-in-council; Bombay, 18/12/1790.

(4) Al-Qasimi, The Myth of Arab Piracy in the Gulf, London, Croom Helm, 1986, p 10.

(5) Selections from the records of the Bombay Government, new series no XX IV, 1856 (henceforth Bombay Selections XXIV), compiled and edited by R T Hughes, Cambridge, The Oleander Press, 1985, p 22.

Oman, Basra and Yemen. Bahraini merchant vessels used principally for trading with India numbered some 20 vessels with a loading capacity which varied between 140 and 350 tons. Bahrain had also 100 small trading vessels, the loading capacity of which varied between 40 and 120 tons.(6)

Muscat (now Oman) for its part lies between latitudes 23-24 in the north and longitudes 58-60 in the east, and is coastal territory, bordered inland by the Rub al Khali desert, separating Muscat from the rest of the Arab Peninsula. A chain of mountains, the Al Hajar (eastern and western) reaching a height of 1,000-12,500 metres borders most of its coastline. Muscat played a prominent role in the international trade conducted between India and Arab states due to its position astride the route linking India, the Arab states and Europe; because of its location it was occupied more than once by countries anxious to safeguard trade routes.

With its harbours and bays fit for the anchorage of all types of ships, Muscat was developed by its rulers as a large warehouse or trading zone whereby goods coming from the East and the West could be stored as well as sold; a 5% tax was imposed on goods imported and sold and 2% on goods imported but not sold. No tax was imposed however on exports.(7) A land tax was also levied. The annual revenues from customs and land taxes in 1780 were computed at 120,000 crowns, (8) with trade earnings of

(6) Bombay Selections XXIV, p 566.

(7) IOR, Political and Secret Library, L/P and S/20/C 248 C.

(8) Bombay Selections XXIV, p 288.

Muscat annually amounting to £1,000,000. Most of the goods bound for Muscat were re-exported after collecting custom duties. In addition a duty on slaves was collected at Muscat, amounting to one dollar per head for Africans and Abyssinians, and two dollars for Georgians or Armenians.(9)

The production of foodstuffs in Muscat was limited, with only a few items being considered for export, namely: jute, the principal item, barley, and some fish, salted and dried. The foodstuffs and commodities imported by Muscat indicate its commercial significance at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the ports of despatch as goods as below:

<u>Surat:</u>	coarse piece-goods, silk and cotton fabrics
<u>Bownahur:</u>	oil, cotton and grain
<u>Bombay:</u>	iron, lead and other European goods
<u>Malabar:</u>	rice, spars and timber
<u>The Coromandal Coast:</u>	calicoes and chintz
<u>Bengal:</u>	rice, muslin, sugar, silks and piece-goods
<u>Batavia:</u>	sugar and cloves
<u>The Malay Islands:</u>	spices
<u>Zanzibar:</u>	cowries, rice, wood, elephant's teeth, hides, wax and gums
<u>Qatar and Bahrain:</u>	pearls and black camels
<u>Basra:</u>	dates and copper
<u>Persia:</u>	copper, hardware, brimstone, salt, carpets, camelines and dried fruits
<u>Makran:</u>	sheep, <u>joaree</u> (ie slave girls) and grain

(9) Al-Qasimi, op cit, p 14.

Sind: cotton, cloth, saltpetre, tallow, grain, oil,
hides and indigo⁽¹⁰⁾

This wide-ranging trade activity enabled Muscat to build a merchant fleet comprising 15 vessels with a loading capacity of 400-700 tons, 50 large merchant vessels and 50 smaller vessels.

The Imam's total revenue was said to amount to approximately six lakhs (100,000) German crowns. Muscat, Muttra, Zanzibar, and the slave trade constituted his sources of revenue, estimated as follows:

	<u>German Crowns</u>
Muscat, external, by customs	180,000
Muttra, external, by customs	60,000
Muscat and Muttra, internal	20,000
Zanzibar Island	220,000
Slave trade	80,000
Average annual receipts from other places (approx).	50,000
Total	<u>610,000</u> (11)

The Island of Kharrack lies on the eastern side of the Gulf, with an area of about 4-5 square miles. The island was considered, by virtue of its location, the most important port on the Persian Gulf coast, containing good anchorage for ships and plentiful potable water springs.

There are no reports confirming a significant trading activity in Kharrack during the first half of the eighteenth century; however a simple trade movement did take off around

(10) Bombay Archives, (henceforth BA), Secret and Political Department Diaries, (henceforth SPDD), No 129, Year 1802, p 4596.

(11) Bombay Selections XXIV, p 604.

1760. Kharrack Island was governed from the port of Bushire on the Persian coast. The northwestern part of the island was good for anchorage whereas in the southeastern part, the anchorage was considered risky. Apart from its strategic position in the middle of the Gulf, the attraction Kharrack island held for foreign companies lay in the abundant sweet and potable water springs and its wild fowl. Apart from serving as an excellent port, the island must have been a pleasant place in which to recuperate after a long voyage.

Bushire itself was a town of considerable importance, being the centre of all British and foreign trade activity with Persia. It gained in importance as a commercial market following the economic decline of Bander Abbas, situated on the eastern side of the Gulf, due to the transfer of the East India Company's headquarters to Bushire in 1763. The inhabitants of Bushire were both seafarers and skilful traders, plying their wares between Bushire and both India and Africa. They had, however, to contend with their ruler, a member of the Sunni Mataweesh tribe in Oman, who owned four ships and several large buggalows (commercial vessels), who tended to monopolize most of the freight, refusing merchants to ship their goods on any other vessel until his were loaded.(12)

Bushire's foreign trade was mainly conducted with India, with very little trade with Basra. The total annual value of trade amounted to 20 lakhs of rupees (approximately £200,000). Bushire exported horses, copper, dried fruits, carpets, rose water and wine, which amounted in value to one third of its

(12) Bombay Selections XXIV, p 585.

imports.⁽¹³⁾ The administration of Bushire imported mainly from India, Turkey and some Gulf sheikhdoms cotton and cotton yarn, spices, chinaware, lead, sugar, silk, tobacco and woollen goods. A duty averaging 5% was levied on imports which could be reduced or increased depending on the nature of the imported item. In addition to this a consular tax of 2% was imposed on the goods of British merchants operating in Gulf waters. The revenue gained from this latter tax was divided equally between the local resident and the agent of Bushire; a 3% duty was levied on all goods imported and exported by those trading under the East India Company's protection.⁽¹⁴⁾

The port of Basra lies to the far north of the Arab Gulf, providing an important market for the products of India and Persia, in addition to serving as a warehouse for the products of the Far East. Trade activity in the first half of the eighteenth century generated some 4 million rupees: Basra's share amounted to roughly 3 million rupees.⁽¹⁵⁾

All imports and exports from and to Basra were charged a customs duty calculated according to nationality, which favoured British merchants who paid 3% while other merchants such as Arabs, Armenians, Indians, Persians and Jews paid 8.5%. Non-Europeans suffered also in payment of tax on items which they exported from Iraq, at 5% whilst British merchants paid 3%. The customs duty at 3% was calculated at the actual selling price of

⁽¹³⁾ Report on the Trade of India and Persia, December 1799 in Saldanha, J A, Selection from State Papers, Bombay, Regarding the East India Company's Connection with the Persian Gulf (1600-1800), Calcutta, Superintendent Government Printing, 1908.

⁽¹⁴⁾ BA, Bussorah Diary, no 193, pp 31-34.

⁽¹⁵⁾ Saldanha, J A, op cit, p 398.

the item in Basra, whereas the higher rate was based on a tariff laid down by local statute, while the duty of 7½% paid by local merchants was based upon a scale of values laid down in a daftar (register), which for the most part set an old and arbitrary valuation upon an article far below its real worth.(16)

Transport charges levied on boats using Iraqi waterways, including the Tigris and the Euphrates were calculated per bale (weighing 300-400 English pounds). The charges of shipping one bale from Basra to Baghdad via the Tigris for example amounted to 12 Indian rupees, via the Euphrates to Al-Hulla 15 rupees, and to Shushtar via the Karon river 4 rupees. As for transport from Basra to Aleppo by caravans, which took 80 days, charges on a camel carrying a weight of 700 English pounds were calculated according to the type of goods. A consignment of cloth warranted transport charges of 130 rupees, with 90 rupees being levied for other consignments.(17)

Basra imported goods from India and the Gulf states: cotton fabrics and shawls, rice, sugar, iron, lead and tin; and from Muscat, slaves, African ivory, Arabian coffee, copper and wool. Goods were imported also by land from the north, in particular Aleppo, namely: textiles, silk, satin, gold and silver thread, rose water, jewellery, glass vessels, tobacco, spices and dried fruits. Goods reaching Basra from Persia included, horses, silk, pearls, carpets, glass, cotton, tobacco, dried fruits, iron, copper and wine.

(16) Kelly, J B, op cit, p 37.

(17) Saldanha, J A, op cit, p 445.

Items imported by Basra from the north were often re-exported to Persia, India and Arab countries, whilst goods supplied to Basra from India, Muscat and Persia were re-exported to the north, Aleppo, Baghdad and Turkey.

The port of Bander Abbas, or Gumberoon, an earlier designation, formed one of the most important Persian ports located on the eastern coast of the Gulf because it literally guarded the exit and entry to the Gulf. Whoever had control of it therefore, either for military or commercial purposes, wielded a tremendous influence in the area. This was the logic of the East India Company which established its first commercial agency there. The Gimbroon diaries (Gimbroon being a variant of Gumberoon) now located in the India Office Library indicate its trade; thus in December 1736, about 392 shipments of Carman wool were transported from Bander Abbas to Bombay; in 1744 Bander Abbas sold 1,242 rupees worth of dates, and in early 1748 shipped 2,000 monds of copper for sale in Basra (one mond = 100 pounds weight).

One ship that arrived at Bander Abbas from India on 17 July 1751 had on board 188 bales of broad cloth, 62 bales of carpets, 7 pieces of brocade, 6 of satin, 12 tons of iron, and 3 tons of lead.⁽¹⁸⁾ By late 1755 this trade showed a healthy increase; 1,200 monds of Carman wool were shipped to Bombay, with 3,240 monds pending shipping, 750 monds of which were from Isfahan.⁽¹⁹⁾

In addition to its substantial exports of Carman wool, Bander Abbas exported carpets, tobacco, copper, rose water,

⁽¹⁸⁾ IOR, Gimbroon Diaries, Vol 7, pp 160-170.

⁽¹⁹⁾ IOR, G/29/7, Factory Records.

dried fruits, raw silk, cotton yarn, sulphur and rock salt extracted from Hormuz Island. Its imports from India consisted of various materials, including cotton thread and fabrics, sugar, spices, perfumes, indigo and chinaware.(20)

Ra's Al-Khaimah is situated on a point of land projecting into the sea, located in the north-east, and terminating in a sandbank, parallel with the coast to the west, two and a half miles offshore. The old name for Ra's Al-Khaimah was Julfar, and it was known for its trading activity. The designation of Ra's Al-Khaimah goes back to the practice of the founder of the Qawasim settlements, Sheikh Qawasim, who had the habit of pitching his tent on a point of land a little elevated above the sea-shore, rendering it conspicuous to sailors passing by. For this reason they called the place 'the cape on which stands the tent', or Ra's Al-Khaimah.

The inhabitants of Ra's Al-Khaimah, the Qawasim, were active as merchants, palm owners, ship owners and divers.(21) Two types of vessels, a dhow or bagala, large in size, and a smaller version - the batteel or bakala - were used by Ra's Al-Khaimah for trade. Large ships plied their trade with Yemen, India and journeyed to the coasts of Sind, Muscat and Basra. The small ships often travelled to Bahrain, Katif and to the ports of the eastern coast of the Gulf such as Kankun, Isliway, Lingah and Jasm.

The pearl banks of Ra's Al-Khaimah, famous for the excellent quality of their produce, lay a few miles offshore in 6-7 fathoms

(20) Lorimer, J G, op cit, p 165.

(21) BA, SPDD, Vol 429, Year 1816, pp 985-987.

of water. Approximately 400 boats of differing sizes, 200 large, 100 intermediate and 100 small, were annually involved in the fishing, realizing sales of around 40,000 Persian Tomans, or £2000 per year.(22)

The trade activity in Ra's Al-Khaimah on the import side included horses and dates from Bahrain and Basra, gunpowder, guns, swords, carpets and tobacco from Persia; metals, rice and cotton textiles from Bombay; dates from Oman; coffee from Yemen; slaves from Zanzibar; and wheat from Hormuz, with only pearls, salt and amber available for exportation.(23)

The political manoeuvrings of certain European states were certainly in evidence in the Gulf during the first half of the eighteenth century, their activities often conducted through trading companies - Portuguese, British, Dutch and French. A characteristic feature of these manoeuvrings was the attempt to check one another's ambitions in the area, either by offering help and protection or by exploiting groupings or tribes indigenous to the Gulf including Oman, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Persia and the Qawasim and Saudis. The first half of the eighteenth century witnessed two uncontested European trading powers, Holland and Britain, operating in the Gulf area, which offered a vital passage either to merchants wishing to trade between India and Basra and beyond, or those who wished to maintain a military presence in the area in order to protect vital interests - as in the case of the British government with its presence in India. The exploration of the Cape of Good Hope

(22) IOR, Persian Gulf Residency, R/15/1/20, p 13.

(23) Belgrave, C, The Pirate Coast, Beirut, Librairie du Liban, 1972, p 306.

by Vasco de Gama in 1498 and his arrival in India had helped pave the way for Portugal to monopolize trade in the East, a monopoly that was to last up till the early seventeenth century.

Portugal, however, declined in power as a nation, after falling under Spanish control in 1580; increasingly the Portuguese found it difficult to safeguard their trade, as the attacks from local forces became more frequent and as the back-up support from Lisbon diminished. In 1602, the Portuguese were defeated by the Bahrainis and were driven out of Bander Abbas in 1615 by the Shah, and out of several Gulf sheikhdoms on the coast by 1660. As the Portuguese declined so the British and Dutch presence increased in the Gulf, the latter two powers combining their forces to rid the Gulf of Portuguese influence by the first half of the seventeenth century.⁽²⁴⁾

Britain's naval power had increased dramatically with its victory over the Spanish Armada in 1588, heralding an unprecedented era in the expansion of British trade. In September 1599 a petition was presented to Queen Elizabeth asking for permission to deal in trade with the East, and on 31 December 1600 the London Company of Traders was formed to trade with the East Indies. The Queen's decree provided for the founding of the English East India Company at a capital of £68,873, the original share holders numbering 217. The decree stated that the company had the right to a trade monopoly; the first voyage to the East was undertaken in 1601, followed by a second voyage two years later and a third in 1607.

⁽²⁴⁾ Abu Hakima, A M, Tarikh Sharq Al-Jazirah Al-Arabiyya (History of Eastern Arabia 1750-1800), Beirut, Khayat, 1965, p 171.

The East India Company began searching for bases on the Gulf and other coasts as trading stepping stones leading to India which it reached in 1608, setting up a wool factory in January 1613 in Surat from which trade missions laden made trips to Persia and the Gulf in 1615 in pursuit of new markets. This factory then became the administrative centre headed by a chairman and a board serving other burgeoning factories. The purpose of placing commercial agents in Persia and the Arab states was two-fold; to ensure distribution of British goods throughout the area and to safeguard British mail destined for the East and vice versa. Hence the interest in the Basra agency in particular, due to its location which ensured the rapid arrival of mail by two routes: one via the Red Sea and the other, via the Arab Gulf. Mail travelled by sea from India to England via the Red Sea, Alexandria and the Mediterranean, then overland. A second route passed from India via the Arab Gulf to Kuwait or Basra, then went overland to Aleppo where it proceeded by land via Asia Minor, to Europe, or by sea to Greece or Italy and thence to England.

In 1618, the representatives of the company in Persia managed to obtain concessions from the Shah (with whom they had first established relations in 1616), granting them the right to engage in the silk trade with Persia provided that it was not sold to the Spanish or the Portuguese nor dispatched to Europe via Turkey, this in return for British naval aid in expelling the Portuguese from Hormuz.⁽²⁵⁾ This was the Shah Abbas' main objective after having defeated Turkey in 1618 near Tabriz.

(25) Foster, W, The English Factories in India 1622-1623, calendar of documents in the India Office and British Museum, Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1908, pp vii-xi.

British naval forces accordingly invaded Hormuz achieving victory on 21 April 1622, hardly any resistance having been offered by the Portuguese, approximately 2,600 of whom were transferred to Muscat under British protection. Thus Portuguese influence in the Gulf came to an end and, along with it, for the time being, the lucrative trade attracted to Hormuz which the Shah razed to the ground.⁽²⁶⁾ For this service the British obtained even more concessions from the Shah, including the use of the port of Gumberoon (Bander Abbas) to be used as a factory by the company. Further concessions covered the possibility of taking one half of customs duties collected in Bander Abbas, but this proved a bone of contention between the company and the Shah, who was looking once again to the British navy to help him, this time to expel the Dutch from Muscat.

Having got rid of the Portuguese the Shah proceeded to play off against each other those two great rivals in trade, the Dutch and the British, each trying to establish a foothold in the Gulf with a view to monopolizing trade in the East. The Dutch for their part attempted to do this by bribery, by paying far above the market price for Persian commodities.

The Dutch had begun to appear in the Gulf around 1623 when their East India Company established a centre in Bander Abbas where it sought a monopoly of the silk trade - a step which prompted the British to transfer the East India Company from Bander Abbas to Basra for interests of security. In 1649 Dutch influence reached a new height with fleets arriving on a regular basis. In 1650 for example, a shipment comprising ten vessels

(26) Wilson, A T, The Persian Gulf, Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1928, pp 135-136.

docked containing 1,500,000 pounds of pepper which was bartered for a consignment of Persian silk. The following year another Dutch fleet arrived consisting of 11 vessels laden with goods valued at £100,000. In all the Dutch sent 15 vessels during 1652-3 to Bander Abbas, unloading a total capacity reckoned at £120,000, badly undermining British trade in the area.⁽²⁷⁾ In addition to this the British-Dutch war in Europe in 1652 spilled into the Gulf, occasioning several clashes between British and Dutch vessels which resulted in more injury for the British than the Dutch in terms of vessels lost, badly affecting the British company's performance in the area.

This said, the British East India Company had its earlier concessions confirmed by a decree issued by the Shah through an agreement dated 18 June 1697, similar to that concluded in 1616. The new agreement, however, contained several new clauses, stating that the taxes paid by the company on its imports and exports in Persia should be comparable to those collected by the Turkish government in Aleppo and Constantinople. Another new clause contained the promise of the Shah to settle his debts to the company resulting from its share in the customs at Bander Abbas.⁽²⁸⁾

With the issue of the 1697 decree trade started to improve for the British once again. The Persian ruler visited the British agency in Isfahan on 23 July 1699 but rejected an invitation to visit the Dutch agency; prospects improved even further when negotiations for the merging of the new East India Company with the old London Company got under way in 1709.

⁽²⁷⁾ Lorimer, J G, op cit, p 69.

⁽²⁸⁾ Bruce J, Annals of the Honourable East India Company, London, Cox, Son and Bayliss, 1810, pp 229-230.

Domestic events in Persia, notably the succession of a new ruler, Nadir Shah determined to establish Persia as a naval power, and to make Bushire a headquarters for the Persian fleet conspired to check the progress hitherto made by the East India Company in the field of trade, especially in Bander Abbas which the British were ordered to leave by Nadir Shah's successor, Shah Kareem Khan, ostensibly to avoid a civil war. However, the company began exploring Bander Reek which was found to be a suitable place for the establishment of a factory. The Dutch agency remained in Bander Abbas where it dealt in Carman wool and continued to compete with the British by paying higher prices for commodities; but the domestic Dutch economy was in decline and their companies found it increasingly difficult to compete. They were also dealt a severe blow when they failed to prevent Hormuz falling into the hands of the British in 1760. In addition, a new ruler, Nasser Khan, required the transfer of all foreign agencies based on Bander Abbas to Kishm Island.

Bander Abbas had fallen into the hands of the French in 1758, introducing new players on to the scene; the Dutch presence in the Gulf finally ended under attack from the local rulers, with Arab resistance encountered in Kharrack, (then under lease to the Dutch against an annual tribute payable to the ruler of Kharrack Island) and against a background of inability to compete with the British in terms of trade. A French commercial agency had been established in Bander Abbas as long ago as 1667 but failed to expand French trade in the face of competition presented by the British and the Dutch. As a result the agency was closed down and it was not until 1705 that the French sent a mission to re-establish relations with the Shah. In September 1708 this was followed up by a second treaty granting trade

facilities to the French, exempting them from paying taxes for five years, after which time a tax of 3% would be levied on imports and exports. France did not endorse the treaty until 1711 mainly because the prospects of trade seemed bleak, and because of her involvement in the War of Spanish Succession (1702-1712); as a consequence the only measure taken was to appoint a French consul in Isfahan.

The Seven-years War (1756-1763) between Britain and France spilled into the Gulf. France ordered all British subjects to leave French property and the seizure of British merchant vessels, placing the British on alert in Bander Abbas. Conflict in the Gulf began with a French attack on the British agency there on the morning of 13 October 1759 with three warships. Bombardment began a quarter of a mile off the coast, following by the storming and the setting ablaze of the British agency. At 3.50 pm on the same day the British surrendered.⁽²⁹⁾ Further French attacks were launched against Bushire.

It is clear from the above that European states, as represented by commercial companies operating in the Gulf during the first half of the eighteenth century, contested with one another mainly for the purpose of monopolizing trade and, apart from Portugal, had no intention of colonizing the area. The Arab sheikdoms themselves, like the European companies, conducted their own trade wars that sometimes resulted in open conflict, and led to the emergence and growth of Arab naval power.

The important geo-political location of Oman at the entrance of the Gulf afforded it a key role in the political and

(29) (IOR), L/P and S/20/C-227, p 125.

commercial activities peculiar to the region from the sixteenth century onwards. The election of Imam Nasser Bin Murshid, a member of the Al-Ya'aribah clan, to the leadership of the Omani region of Rastak in 1624 marked a crucial stage in the history of Oman. Under his guidance, civil war was brought to an end, laying the foundation for a unified Oman. Thereafter, Omani energies would be directed against foreign influence on its soil in particular and the Gulf in general. Initial attacks against the Persians and the Portuguese resulted in their expulsion from Ra's Al-Khaimah, followed by successful raids on Sahar, Sor, and Kurriat in 1633. The expulsion of the Portuguese from Muscat, achieved under the leadership of Imam Sultan Bin Saif who succeeded Bin Murshid in 1649, heralded the breakthrough for the Omanis;⁽³⁰⁾ the ridding of foreign presence from Omani territory led ultimately to a recovery of trade and the development of a substantial and effective Omani fleet which frequently sallied forth, attacking Persian, Indian and Portuguese targets. The response of the Persians to Omani attacks was to request the East India Company to help them capture Muscat, offering concessions by way of reward that matched those enjoyed by the Company at Bander Abbas. The Company, however, declined, fearing that heavy British losses might be sustained in the process.

The Imam intensified his attacks against Persia, inflicting a substantial defeat when he launched a raid on the port of Koong. Persia was by this time disposed to come to terms with and seek an alliance with her long term foe, Portugal, in order to check Omani progress, but the Omanis easily undermined this pact by despatching a fleet to the African coast in 1699 where it

(30) Ibn Rziq, H B M, Al-Fath Al Mubin fee sirat al saddat al-Bu-saidiyyin, Oman, Ministry of Culture, 1983, p 283.

successfully raided and destroyed Portuguese colonies in Mombasa, Kilwa and Pemba. A second fleet made its way to Mangalor on the Indian coast where it destroyed the Portuguese agency.

In the latter instance the Portuguese accused the British of supplying arms to the Omanis, a claim that was denied by the East India Company. A more likely key to Omani success on this particular campaign may have rested with the help received from the ruler of Pagu in India who granted the Omani rights to build ships in his country. The Omani fleet in 1715 comprised 6 vessels, the largest with 74 cannon and the smallest with 12, together with some smaller boats of 4-8 cannon.⁽³¹⁾ The beginning of the eighteenth century saw the spread of Omani political influence throughout the southern area of the Gulf, and the East African coasts with a strong trade influence obtaining in the Gulf, Iraq and the Arab peninsula. Tribal conflict and civil war checked Omani ambitions during the years 1710-40, forcing the Omani ruler, Saif Bin Sultan II to seek the support of Nadir Shah in suppressing the domestic conflict enveloping his country. The Persian ruler, exploiting the Omani's straightened circumstances, re-occupied part of Omani territory in 1738. As a result, different factions in Oman threw aside their differences and pledged their allegiance to Ahmad Bin Said as Imam in 1741.⁽³²⁾ He rid his country of Persian influence in 1744. The internal unrest and tribal rebellions against the ruling body in

(31) Miles, S B, The Countries and Tribes of the Persian Gulf, London, Harrison, 1919, p 237.

(32) There is some discrepancy on the date of Ahmed Bin Said's accession as Imam; Lorimer says 1744, Wellested 1747, Niebuhr, Miles and Kelly 1749 and Palgrave 1775! The correct date, 1741, is given in Ibn Rziq, op cit, p 386.

Oman continued, however, with Bin Said forced to recruit African slaves as mercenaries to quell the unrest.

Persia also, like Oman, suffered from internal unrest during the first half of the eighteenth century and did not begin to emerge as a power to be reckoned with in the Gulf until the accession of Nadir Shah to the Persian throne in 1726. Earlier, Persia had been subject to Afghan, Ottoman and Russian invasions, keeping them preoccupied on their land borders and out of mischief in the Gulf. Having consolidated his hold on Persia, Nadir Shah turned to building up a naval force, aimed at protecting her against naval invasion inside Gulf waters, whilst at the same time wishing to encourage foreign trade. The country however lacked a naval tradition and Nadir Shah himself lacked naval experience and expertise. He was compelled at first to use Arab sailors and vessels, loaned by Sheikh Rashed, the Arab Governor of Bassido, because the British and Dutch had refused to sell Persia vessels. Later the British and Dutch relented, leasing four vessels to the Shah's navy, under the command of Latif Khan from 1733. Despite setbacks, the Shah proceeded with his plans to build up a modern fleet, enlarging it with three new vessels purchased from Europe in 1734. The ambitions which lay behind his drive to create a modern navy soon became apparent when it launched its first attack against Basra in 1735 from the new naval headquarters of Bushire which the Shah had chosen both for its strategic importance and its location out of the way of commercial shipping.

The attack on Basra, launched to exploit the unstable political situation obtaining there caused by Ottoman-Arab conflict was checked by the British navy, honour bound to

cooperate with the Ottomans ruling Basra. The Persian⁺ navy, sufficiently recovered however to attack and occupy Bahrain in 1736 under the command of Latif Khan, the Shah installing Shaikh Nasser - the ruler of Bushire - as nominal ruler of Bahrain. As we saw earlier, Nadir Shah sought to occupy Muscat, the sentinel of the Gulf. However, the Persian fleet, under the command of Takie Khan who assumed command following the death of Latif Khan, was defeated, largely as a result of a mutiny instigated by Arab sailors in reaction to ill-treatment. Further setbacks for the Persian navy included two further mutinies in 1739 and 1740 which seriously undermined the confidence of the navy; the political situation worsened still further in 1748 when Nadir Shah was assassinated, leaving the country in chaos. The commander of the Persian fleet in Bander Abbas, the Arab Mala Ali Shah, and the ruler of Bushire, Shaikh Nasser, exploited the unrest, tearing Persia apart, each of them seeking to strengthen his influence in the region. That the commander of the Persian fleet should have chosen the Qawasim, a tribe based on the western coast of the Gulf, to side with in a bid to consolidate his naval force in the Gulf, entirely reflected the extent of the tribe's influence and naval power in the area in the middle of the eighteenth century; this will be examined in further detail in the next chapter.

C H A P T E R T W O

The emergence of the Qawasim as a new political power in the Gulf

We saw in the previous chapter how Omani political influence during the first half of the eighteenth century expanded throughout the Gulf region and beyond. But its development was constantly checked by a series of local rebellions which created divisions throughout the Sultanate. This pattern was repeated in the second half of the century, as we shall see in the present chapter, allowing the Qawasim to exploit Omani internal dissent, intervening in Oman's internal affairs by establishing an alliance with one or other of the Omani factions either through inter-marriage or by the promise of military support. On a national level, the Qawasim might back up the Omanis in a conflict with the Persians where it suited their interest. Undoubtedly Oman suffered because the strategic position of the sheikhdom, as sentinel to the entrance of the Gulf, gave any power in control of its territory an advantage over others in trade and naval facilities.

The Persians for their part wanted to increase their power in the Gulf but lacked the necessary navy, or rather naval expertise, relying initially on Arab sailors to man ships purchased from or leased out by British and Dutch companies. Later the Persians were to turn to the Qawasim in a bid to achieve their aim of creating a powerful naval force, a move

indicating both the Persians' weakness and the influence the Qawasim wielded in the Gulf region both as a land force and a naval power. The decline of Portuguese power in the Gulf, the independence of Oman from the European trading companies, and the assassination of Nadir Shah at the hands of his own officers in 1748, all constituted factors which gave a fillip to those Arab tribes inhabiting the Western coast of the Gulf; the Qawasim emerged from their midst to play a key role in the political affairs of the Gulf in the eighteenth century.

The Qawasim's origin is said to be traceable to their ancestor Qasim, from whom they derive their name, which is widespread throughout the Gulf today. Others believe that the origin of their name goes back to the island of Qashm or Jasm situated on the Persian littoral, later to be called Qasimi or Jasimi, hence the appellation Al-Qawasim or Al-Jawasim. The tribe then moved on to places like Ra's Al-Khaimah and Al-Sharjah, in which a distinction is made linguistically in the pronunciation of the letter qaf in Arabic and the letter J, where the latter is substituted for the former. From this practice may have arisen a misunderstanding as to the tribe's origin. Writers like Miles, Niebuhr and Ibn Rziaq however are of the opinion that the Qawasim descend from the Arab Al-Howlah tribe, who emigrated from the port of Siraf on the Persian side of the Gulf and eventually settled down in Ra's Al-Khaimah.⁽¹⁾

As to the political demarcation of the Gulf region, this could hardly be said to exist during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century in any firm sense simply

⁽¹⁾ Niebuhr, C, Travels through Arabia and other Countries in the East, (translated into English by Robert Heron), Edinburgh, Morison & Son, 1792, p 144.

because the concept of nationhood did not exist among the bedouin Arabs. Rather ad hoc borders were established by a tribe, determined by politico-social factors pertaining to the strength of the tribe and its ability to fend off attack and defend its livestock, raised on pasturage limited by the constant shortfall in rain. The desert Arabs led a harsh existence, eking out a livelihood with each tribe vying for what little food and water existed. Settlements were based around artesian wells and oases; the weather patterns determined the bedouin's way of life. The social configuration of the tribe had the Sheikh as its head, wielding theoretically absolute control over the tribe, itself subdivided into clans, each clan led by an amir who pledged his allegiance to the Sheikh. Government was effected by a consultative meeting (majlis) headed by the Sheikh, and attended by all the clan leaders, at which important issues affecting the tribe's welfare would be discussed and important decisions put into effect.

Ra's Al-Khaimah, a thriving port, formed the base of the Qawasim power along with the port of Al-Sharjah located a few miles up the coast. Other ports with a strategic importance under Qawasim control included Umm Al-Qaiwain, Al-Hamra' Island, Al-Rams, Buhabil, 'Ajman, Shanas, Khor Fakkan and Khor Kalba.(2) The tribe's sphere of influence on the Persian side of the Gulf extended from Karrack to Bander Abbas, taking in Linga, Luft, Kunk and Ra's Al-Heti.(3)

The Qawasim thus commanded a strategic position on the Gulf coast which enabled them to play an important role in the

(2) IOR, Bombay Political Proceedings, P/383/13.

(3) Niebuhr, C, op cit, p 144.

region's affairs. They gained their livelihood from fishing and pearl diving, the latter activity lasting four months per annum and constituting the main occupation for the majority of those inhabiting the area known as Hirat. The pearls were sold to Indian traders, mostly from Bombay, for a lucrative price, with the Qawasim monopolizing this and other trade in the area.

In the winter months the locals conducted trade with the Gulf Sheikhdoms, India and the African Coast on a reciprocal basis. Qawasim ships transported dates from Basra to these places, returning with spices, wood, cloth and other necessities. Their monopoly of the trade amongst the Gulf trading partners can be attributed to the skilful manner in which they conducted trade, to their persistence and above all to the sincerity and integrity displayed in all their dealings with local and foreign traders, thus outcompeting all rivals and forging for themselves an excellent reputation.⁽⁴⁾ This is confirmed by Aitchison who describes the Qawasim as pursuing their profession successfully until 1805,⁽⁵⁾ although Francis Warden quotes the later date of 1807 in this respect.⁽⁶⁾ The Qawasim then were trading with the ports of Basra, Bushire and with the Indian and African coasts, occupied the islands of Kishm and Qais on the Persian coast,⁽⁷⁾ and were in possession of a formidable fleet amounting to 500 vessels with a complement of 20,000 men, some of whom were seconded from other tribes which acknowledged the authority of the Qawasim chief in Ra's Al-

(4) Beckingham, J S, Travels in Assyria, Medina and Persia, London, Henry Colburn, 1829, Vol II, p 120.

(5) Aitchison, C U, A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries, Delhi, Manager of Publications, 1933.

(6) Bombay Selections XXIV, p 301.

(7) IOR, Bombay Political Proceedings, P/383/40.

Khaimah. An indication of his domestic wealth may be gained from British reports on the value of the palm crop, estimated at 80,000 rupees per annum, a tenth of which was collected by the treasury as an alms tax.(8)

The assassination of Nadir Shah by his officers in 1748 precipitated general disorder among the population resident on the Persian side of the Gulf, the fleet which he had built up becoming ineffective. In an attempt to check this decline the admiral of the Persian fleet, Mala Ali Shah, made an alliance with the Qawasim in response to increased internal pressure exerted against him by Nasser Khan, the Governor of Lar. This alliance, which took the form of marriage between the Sheikh of the Qawasim and one of Mala Ali Shah's daughters, benefited the tribe more than the Persian leader, making them the strongest naval power in the Gulf, although the alliance greatly aided Mala Ali Shah against his Persian enemies, and Nasser Khan in particular, reputed to be the then most powerful governor ruling on the Persian coast.(9)

Nasser Khan in retaliation to this alliance, launched an attack in 1752 against Mala Ali Shah's power base, Bander Abbas, occupied it and placed him under arrest, to be immediately replaced as governor by a new man, who was also appointed as admiral to the fleet. The Persians however, as discussed in Chapter One, had no tradition of seamanship, and showed little ability to learn. The new admiral understandably could not

(8) BA, SPDD, No 208, Year 1807, (Letter from Captain David Seton, the British Resident at Muscat to the Bombay Government).

(9) Bombay Selections XXIV, pp 300-311 (Warden on "the Joasmee Tribe of Arabs").

organize and run the fleet effectively given this point of weakness, compelling Nasser Khan to free and re-appoint Mala Ali Shah as both governor and admiral of the fleet, although not before the latter had acknowledged Nasser Khan's leadership. Mala Ali Shah was awarded at the same time an annual stipend of 1000 tomans, the equivalent of £500 sterling.⁽¹⁰⁾

Mala Ali Shah, however, reneged on this agreement with Khan some two years later in 1754, declaring his independence and instituting an attack with the help of the Qawasim to seize Hormuz.⁽¹¹⁾ Again with the support of the Qawasim, Mala Ali Shah, now revealing his expansionist leanings, provoked a quarrel in 1755 with Abd Al-Sheikh, leader of Beni Mu'in tribe, and governor of Kishm Island, strategically located at the entrance to the Gulf, and occupied the island. From this vantage point Shah, with Qawasim support, laid siege to the town of Luft for a period of six months, succeeding in breaking down the resistance of the town's inhabitants only after the death of its governor.

Thus, the alliance between Mala Ali Shah and the Qawasim began to take on a new meaning as one conquest followed another, securing for the two parties the shared control of the Persian littoral states, including Bander Abbas, Hormuz, Kishm, Linga, Shinas and ports located on the Arab side of the Gulf, including Ra's Al-Khaimah, Al-Sharjah, Umm Al-Qaiwain, Al-Hamra' Island, Ajman and Khor Fakkan. By virtue of these developments the Qawasim began to emerge as a new power in the Gulf, establishing their presence in Persian territory, consolidating their authority in the tribal areas under their control, and

(10) Saldhana, J A, op cit, p 114.

(11) Ibid, p 99.

strengthening their naval capacity. It was not long, however, before this alliance was put to the test by local rebellions and civil wars. In 1760 for example, the residents of Hormuz rebelled against Mala Ali Shah, imprisoning him after seizing his fleet which had anchored there. The Hormuz rebels however refused to accede to a demand made by Nasser Khan to hand over Mala Ali Shah to him, in order to avoid placing themselves under his influence.⁽¹²⁾ The next rebellion to undermine the Shah-Qawasim alliance was undertaken by the people of Bander Abbas under the leadership of Ja'fur, the brother of Nasser Khan, who seized Mala Ali Shah's fort, forcing his followers to take refuge in nearby islands.⁽¹³⁾ The Qawasim, in fulfilment of their part of the agreement, launched a number of attacks against Hormuz from the sea, with the specific aim of freeing the Shah who lay captive in his own fortress. After several failures the Qawasim, strengthened by reinforcements from Ra's Al-Khaimah, freed him, and returned him to Kishm island.

As for Bander Abbas, now occupied by Ja'fur Khan, this came under a joint Qawasim-Shah attack in 1760 as Mala Ali Shah tried to free his relatives still held captive in Hormuz. The attempt failed. The conflict continued until an agreement was reached in 1763 between the Qawasim-Shah alliance and the Nasser Khan-Beni Mu'in alliance⁽¹⁴⁾ with Hormuz finally submitting to the rule of Mala Ali Shah, a part of Kishm island placed under the rule of the Qawasim, and the Naser Khan-Beni Mu'in alliance managing to hold onto Bander Abbas.⁽¹⁵⁾

(12) Ibid, p 137.

(13) Ibid, p 138.

(14) Ibid, p 158.

(15) Ibid, p 141.

The issues affecting the development of the Qawasim in relation to the internal order of their state were manifold. The leader of the tribe, Sheikh Rashid bin Mutter, renounced his position in 1777 in favour of his son, Suggur, thereafter withdrawing from public life. Suggur inherited several problems affecting the security of his tribe, not the least the bad relationship existing between his tribe and the Beni Mu'in, which he quickly resolved by marrying one of the daughters of the tribe's leader. Sheikh Suggur continued his diplomatic efforts by attempting to mediate between the Persians and the Uttoobe tribe who had seized Bahrain from them. He failed and ended up supporting the Persians in an attack against the very tribe he had been trying to pacify only a few days earlier, because the latter had attacked and confiscated one of the Qawasim ships, killing 18 of its sailors in the process.⁽¹⁶⁾ This joint attack however ended in failure, with the alliance having to withdraw, having sustained many losses, amongst them the nephew of Sheikh Rashid bin Mutter.⁽¹⁷⁾ The Qawasim did not manage to win back Bahrain until 1785 and, not having participated in the Turkish-Arab war, remained inactive between the years 1793-6 when the region enjoyed a period of comparative calm and peace.⁽¹⁸⁾

Paradoxically enough, it was the Omani trading rivals of the Qawasim who had brought about the expulsion of the Portuguese from Ra's Al-Khaimah early in the seventeenth century. Rivalry was to turn into hostility at the beginning of the following century after internal strife concerning the succession to the Imamate considerably weakened the Omani sultanate. With the

(16) Bombay Selections XXIV, pp 300 - 301.

(17) Abu Hakima, A M, op cit, pp 113 - 114.

(18) Bombay Selections XXIV, p 301.

death of Imam Sultan bin Sayf II in 1718, a clear division appeared between the traditional rivals, the Bani Ghafiri, Sunni Arabs from the north who share a common ancestor in the legendary figure of 'Adnan, and the Hinawiyah, Yemenite Arabs whose common ancestor is Qahtan. The Qawasim were drawn into this conflict by virtue of their kinship with the Bani Ghafiri. Under the command of Hamad bin Nasir Al-Ghafiri in alliance with Sheikh Rahmah bin Mutter, 5000 men and a large fleet moved against and laid siege to the Hinawiyah strongholds, succeeding in imposing a joint Ghafiri-Qawasim authority on Oman territory. Hamad set himself up as Imam as a consequence of this victory; the Qawasim managed further to increase their influence in the area without really playing a political role. This quiescent attitude on their part changed on the accession of Ahmad Bin Sa'id Al-Busaid to the Imamate in 1741. Unlike his predecessor, he chose to support the Hinawiyah, the traditional enemies of the Bani Ghafiri and, by extension, the Qawasim, thus involving them more and more in Oman's internal affairs. This conflict led to the battle of Firq, near Nazwa, in 1745,⁽¹⁹⁾ in which Bilarab Bin Hamid Al-Ghafiri was killed, along with many members of his tribe. Their allies the Qawasim were forced to withdraw to Ra's Al-Khaimah, leaving the ground clear for Ahmad bin Sa'id to confirm his rule in Oman and hold on to the office of Imam. In an effort to teach the Qawasim a lesson for interfering in the internal affairs of his sultanate, the Imam launched an attack on Ra's Al-Khaimah with 12,000 men, the two sides clashing at Al-Buraimi without either side enjoying a clear cut victory.

Ahmad bin Sa'id's rule was to endure until 1771, and was

(19) Ibn Rziq, op cit, p 348.

marked by a series of developments involving the Qawasim. Following the battle of Firq, the Imam laid siege to the town and port of Khor Fakkan, located in the Batinah, with a fleet of eight ships and forty of the larger native vessels. The garrison of this port was composed of one thousand Qasimis who gave up the fort and, entreating the clemency of their conqueror, were permitted to return to Sir. The ambition and exertions of Ahmad increased daily: by 1749 he pushed his conquests as far as Khasab, the governor of which, Hassan bin Abdulla, formerly subject to the Qawasim accepting his authority.

While in Khasab, Ahmad received news of the revolt of a member of the house of Yarabi Jaalan; he directed his cousin Khalfan bin Mirhamad to proceed to Ra's Al-Khaimah with the greater part of his fleet, and returned himself to Muscat with three ships, to suppress the revolt. Khalfan, however, found he could make no impression on the Qawasim. Ahmad accordingly sent 'Ali bin Suif with four ships and ten dhows to blockade the ports of Sir until the Qawasim submitted to his authority. 'Ali followed these orders so strictly in the case of Ra's Al-Khaimah, Jazerat Al-Hamra, Fasht, and Sharjah, not even allowing any boat to fish for pearls or undertake a commercial voyage, that the inhabitants of all but Ra's Al-Khaimah were reduced to the last extremity and obliged to acknowledge the supremacy of the Imam in 1753. Ra's Al-Khaimah bore the blockade for a year longer, at the end of which time three of the local leaders, Suggur bin Rashid, Mohamed bin 'Ali and Abdulla bin Maygr, proceeded to Rustaq, to Imam Ahmad, begged that they might be relieved from the attacks of 'Ali bin Suif, and proposed that the Imam have complete possession of the other towns. In return for their support, they would continue to enjoy the revenues of Ra's Al-

Khaimah. The Imam granted their petition, and favoured them with gifts, and robes of honour. Affairs remained in this state until the Imam's death in 1771.(20)

Relations between the Qawasim and the Omanis began to improve as they combined forces in 1772, under the dual leadership of Sheikh Rashid of Ra's Al-Khaimah (who had succeeded his father Sheikh Mutter) and the Imam of Muscat, to destroy Persian gallivats at Bander Abbas, and a magazine which the Persians had established at Linga.(21) But this new-found friendship between the parties did not last long as each realized the revenue to be gained by controlling Gulf waters and monopolizing trade. In 1775, hostilities broke out again as the Qawasim leader Sheikh Rashid seized Persian ships, claiming that they were laden with goods bound for Muscat, when in fact they were heading for Bushire. Relations between the two sides saw-sawed until the accession of Rashid's son, Sheikh Suggur, who managed to build up a fleet and increase his armoury, purchased with money secured through military service provided to leaders of ports located on the Persian littoral. From this solid base the Qawasim extended their sphere of influence over the region, gained mastery over the remainder of the Arab tribes contiguous to their area, and ventured further afield exploiting divisions amongst tribes and parties to seize many towns located on the Persian littoral. Such was their naval mastery of the Gulf waters that they could with impunity impound any ship whose captain refused to accept their authority.

(20) Bombay Selections XXIV, pp 7 - 8.

(21) Ibid, p 301.

In retaliation for this belligerent naval activity on the part of the Qawasim, the Imam Ahmad Bin Sa'id launched an attack against their stronghold in Ra's Al-Khaymah with 12 large and 100 small ships, but failed in his attempt to capture the port due to the treacherous approach to the cape from the sea. This forced his big ships to remain two miles from the shore, rendering their cannon fire ineffective.

In addition the Imam was faced with internal troubles; in 1781 two rebellious sons, Sultan and Sayf, instigated a coup d'etat in Muscat and overthrew their father whilst he was resident in Rustaq. The Imam responded by bombarding the city, calling for his sons' surrender, but the two men refused, instead sending a messenger to the Qawasim leader Sheikh Suggur for help. Suggur's response to this plea typifies the Qawasim mentality; he began to march on Rustaq, rather than acceding to the two sons's plea for help. Sultan and Sayf in desperation turned to their father, fearing a further increase in Qawasim influence in Oman should Suggur succeed; their father pardoned all connected with the rebellion, and forced Suggur to retire to Ra's Al-Khaimah.(22)

The Imamate then fell to Sa'id bin Ahmad bin Sa'id after the death of his father in 1783, initially unopposed by leading Omani notables, including his two brothers, Sultan and Sayf. However, the Imam's maladministration of his sultanate's affairs led to conflict between various parties, which resulted in general unrest sweeping throughout Oman. At this point Sultan and Sayf tried to engineer the overthrow of their incompetent brother,

(22) Ibn Rziaq, op cit, p 350.

significantly with the help of the Qawasim leader, Sheikh Suggur, who declared war against the Imam in 1784, after mobilizing the tribes. The Imam may have proved incompetent in matters of administration, but when it came to the defence of his sultanate and his office he displayed sufficient military skill to hold off the Suggur challenge in the face of severe pressure, forcing his two brothers to flee the country. Sultan took refuge in Jawadir, located on Mikran Island, moving on afterwards to Qilat, where he was warmly received by its governor, Nasser Khan, who gave Jawadir to Sultan and awarded him a stipend equalling half the amount of its annual income.⁽²³⁾ As for Sultan's brother, Sayf, he made his way to East Africa, disembarking at Lamu, where he attempted to establish an independent state, but died before he could achieve his objective.

It is apparent from the above that the Qawasimi-Omani relations were not on a good footing during the era of Imam Sa'id bin Ahmad; they became even worse when the Imam handed down his office to his son, Hamad, in 1786, with the political and administrative power devolving on his shoulders at Rustaq. Hamad assumed the title of "Sayyid" and transferred his political and administrative base to Muscat, where he concentrated on building up a naval fleet. It was not long before he had an opportunity to test its capability, as the Qawasim increased their naval activity in Gulf waters, provoking Hamad to retaliate by attacking the tribe by both land and sea in 1787. Hamad's combined army-navy was led by Muhammad bin Khulfan. This Omani campaign resulted in their occupation of Qawasim territory, including the towns of Khor Fakkan, Al-Hamra' Island and Al Rams Fort.⁽²⁴⁾

⁽²³⁾ Lorimer, J G, op cit, Vol I, p 418.

⁽²⁴⁾ Miles, S B. op cit, p 186.

Sayyid Hamad after a while was obliged to return to Muscat, to quell a rebellion instigated in his absence by his paternal uncle, Sultan bin Ahmad bin Sa'id. The conflict was resolved amicably between both parties through an agreement on which the Sultan, however, reneged when Sayyid died of smallpox in 1792. Thereafter the Sultan, with the support of his tribes behind him, occupied the political capital, Muscat, but was eventually thwarted in his ambitions by the Imam's two brothers, Sa'id bin Ahmad and Qis bin Ahmad. These developments led to the division of Oman into three areas, each ruled by a different person, one being allotted to the Sultan, the second to Qis and the final section to the Imam.(25)

Peace thereafter reigned between the Qawasim and the Omanis, with their respective leaders, Sheikh Suggur and Sultan bin Ahmad, refraining from any hostile action by land or sea. This balance in the relationship between the two sides remained until the appearance of the Wahabi threat, and later took a new twist following the killing of Sultan bin Ahmad in November 1804 by the Qawasim, during an attack on three ships belonging to the Ra's Al-Khaimah fleet.

The origins of the conflict between the Qawasim and the Omanis then go back to their respective lineage groups, the Qawasim hailing from the Bani Ghafiri tribe, and the Omanis on the Al Bu Sa'id line from the Al-Hinawiyah tribes, both of which were engaged in constant skirmishes and raids with each other, aspects of socio-political behaviour which the Qawasim and the Omanis inherited. But the essence of their rivalry lay with the Qawasim's ambitious plans to monopolize trade in the Gulf area

(25) Miles, S B, op cit, p 286.

through superior naval power, and to maintain their authority over the tribes on land. In wielding this authority they proved to be more politically adept than their rivals, who weakened themselves by internal dissension. The naval power of the Qawasim was utilized to extend their political influence in those states located on the Persian side of the Gulf, whilst their tendency to interfere increasing as they became more powerful. Thus the Qawasim forged ahead to become the predominant power in the Gulf, their policy based on a two-pronged strategy, to exploit the divisions appearing in the Arab tribes and to exploit the Persians' inadequate naval power.

CHAPTER THREE

The Wahabi Movement and its effect on the political history of the Gulf (1800 - 1818)

Political development in the Arabian peninsula reflects the religious reforms of the second half of the eighteenth century, the Wahabi movement being generally considered to be the first religious reform movement to have had a significant impact on the social and political life of the peninsula and indeed the entire Islamic world. Its effect on the Qawasim was especially great because, whilst it started as a religious movement in the Nejd area in Saudi Arabia, it later acquired political aims because of the special political situation existing at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

If we consider social and political structures in the Gulf area or the Arabian peninsula before the Wahabi movement came into being we find a situation where the amir, head of the clan, or sheikh, head of the tribe, was considered the highest authority who was to be obeyed by all the clan or tribe members. Each tribe was an independent political institution, each handled its own affairs with little reference to others and each tribe was subject to internal rivalries. Such was life before the rise of the Wahabi movement; after, especially in the second half of the eighteenth century, all the tribal units were unified under one banner, something the Arabian peninsula had not seen since the end of the Caliphate. The first Saudi state, which the Wahabi movement is responsible for creating, included the areas from the Arabian Gulf in the east to the Red Sea in the west and

from Iraq and Syria in the north to Yemen and Muscat in the south; the peoples of this area started to lead lives in an organized systematic way where all were answerable to a centralised authority.(1)

The Wahabi movement was started in the middle of the eighteenth century by Mohamad Bin Abdul Wahab, who was born in 1713 in Al-Ainena, a small town in Nejd, Saudi Arabia. He came of a religious family; his father and grandfather worked as lawyers. Mohamad Bin Abdul Wahab started his studies in Al-Ainena and later visited Medina, Basra and Al-Hassa. He studied theology and deplored the low religious standards in his own country and the places he visited, seeing urgent need for national reform. He believed that religious unity was worth struggling for, and that true religion rested on five principles. The first of these was worship of the one God alone; all else was idolatry, the only sin which disqualifies those who profess Islam from being Muslims. The second was the reassertion of the tenets of Islam purified of false beliefs and corrupt practices. The third principle rested on the return to the idea of the Muslim state; the fourth conferred authority in the state on a leader to be obeyed by all, while the fifth proclaimed the duty of the faithful to spread their message if necessary by force, those rejecting it to be in peril of their lives.

In 1744 a pact was made between Mohamad Bin Abdul Wahab and the Saudi Governor of Daraeia, Mohamad Bin Saud, to proclaim Wahabism and to defend each other.(2) Mohamad Bin Saud married

(1) Abdul Rahim, A A, Tarikh Al-Arab Al-Hadith, (The New Arab History), Cairo University Book Office, n.d., p 84.

(2) Ibn Bishr, Unwan Al-Majd Fi Tarikh Nejd (The History of Nejd), Mecca, Al-Salafia Press, 1930, p 42.

one of Mohamad Bin Wahab's daughters, greatly strengthening the alliance. The movement spread rapidly and by 1773 Riyadh and the Nejd province had become fully converted to Wahabism.⁽³⁾

At the beginning of the 1790s and especially between 1792 - 1795, the Wahabis began military campaigns with an attack on their enemies, the Bani Khalid tribe of Al-Hassa. They defeated the latter in 1795 and were thus able to turn to the eastern littoral of the Arabian Peninsula and to threaten the centre of the Ottoman Sultanate. Their motives were three-fold: first, religious, to destroy enemies and opponents of Wahabism, especially the Shia' who inhabited Al-Hassa province. Second, economic: to capture the fertile oases and the important cities of Al-Hassa, located on the Arabian Gulf, such as Al-Qateef and Ojeer. Their capture would help the Wahabis to increase their revenues and increase their area of hegemony further. And third, political: to teach a lesson to those Nejdí tribes, most of whom were Shias, who had rejected Wahabism and moved to Al-Hassa where they were supported by the Bani Khalid.⁽⁴⁾

Between 1795 and 1801 the Wahabis made further attacks, the most important of which was their attack on Iraq which was held by the Ottomans. In 1810 they attacked southern Syria and threatened Damascus so that south and north Syria came under their authority.⁽⁵⁾ In September 1810 around 20,000 Wahabi warriors, helped by their Yemeni supporters, attacked Yemen, taking advantage of the current political situation in that

⁽³⁾ Kazal, H, Tarikh Al-Jazirah Al-Arabiyyah Fi Ahd Mohammad Bin Abdal-Wahhab (The History of the Arab Peninsula in the Time of Mohamed Bin Abdul Wahab), Beirut, Dar Al-Khootob, 1968, p 265.

⁽⁴⁾ Tarbeen, A, Al-wahdah Al-Arabiyyah Fi Al-Tarikh Al-Arabi Al-Muasir, (Arab Unity in Arab Contemporary History (1800-1958)), Damascus, Al-Edrissi Library, 1970, p 117.

⁽⁵⁾ Ibn Bishr, op cit, p 310.

country. When they reached the port of Al-Hodaida they found the residents of the town aboard their boats, many taking their money and goods with them. After the spoils had been divided, those prisoners who were considered nonbelievers were killed.⁽⁶⁾

The Wahabis then started to look to the countries on the Arabian coast of the Gulf; if these countries were taken over they would be the major power in the area and they could translate their dreams of re-establishing a large muslim state into reality. Furthermore, the commercial activity between the coasts of these countries and the coasts of India and Eastern Africa produced revenues which the Wahabi could use to further their aims, and the naval expertise of the inhabitants and their fleets would allow the Wahabis to spread their beliefs not only in the Arab countries but also to the coasts of India and Africa. Thus - and this is fundamental to the present study - their motives were partly economic, partly political and partly religious.

Writers differed on the exact year the Wahabis headed to the Arabian coast of the Gulf. Miles⁽⁷⁾ says that the Wahabis reached Oman and the Gulf coast in 1797, while Wilson, Kelly, and Lorimer think it was in 1800.⁽⁸⁾ The Saudi Government Memorandum⁽⁹⁾ concerning the Wahabi capture of the Al Buraimi specifies the date to be in 1795, a date confirmed by Philby.⁽¹⁰⁾ However, the writings of Ibn Bishr, who lived at the time and

(6) Ibid, pp 321-313.

(7) Miles, S B, op cit, p 228.

(8) Kelly, J B, op cit, p 102; Wilson, A T, op cit, p 192; and Lorimer, J G, op cit, p 635.

(9) Mudhakkirat Al Hukumah Al-Su'udiyah (Memorandum of the Government of Saudi Arabia: Arbitration for the Settlement of the Territorial Dispute between Muscat and Abu Dhabi on one side and Saudi Arabia on the Other), Cairo, 1955, Vol 1, p 110.

(10) Philby, H J B, Arabia, London, Ernest Benn, 1930, p 79.

wrote in detail about the progress of the movement shows that the first Wahabi sally into the Gulf area was in 1787 when their leader, Sulaiman Ibn Ofaisan, attacked Qatar. (11) He attacked Kuwait in 1793 killing many people, and taking horses and weapons. In 1795, it was he who captured Buraimi to the north west of Muscat, seen as a permanent base from which to attack Oman and the coast to the north from Ra's Musandam to Qatar. Buraimi was made the centre of administrative authority, the Wahabis leaving the local amirs to handle their own affairs provided they were loyal and paid alms to the Wahabi leader in Daraeia.

The Noaiem tribe were at that time the largest in the Buraimi Oasis. The Wahabi leader thought that the Qawasim could be pressurised to become Wahabis; accordingly he asked the Noaiem leader to try to convert the Qawasim Sheikh, Saqar Bin Rashid Al Qasimi. The attempt failed, which provoked the Wahabi amir in Daraeia to send a force consisting of about 1000 Wahabis under the leadership of Muttlaq Al Mutairi to fight the Qawasim. When Al Mutairi reached Buraimi he first sent a platoon consisting of 200 cavalry accompanied by 500 men from the Noaiem tribe to Ra's Al-Khaimah. They did not attack but instead surrounded it for ten days. The Qawasim, with a force of about 1000 men, counter-attacked and succeeded in breaking the siege, forcing the Wahabis to retreat. Al Mutairi then prepared a force consisting of about 4000 men from tribes under his dominion and led them personally; reaching Ra's Al-Khaimah they surrounded it for 17 days. The Qawasim leader, Saqar Bin Rashid, had no alternative but to offer a settlement whereby he became a Wahabi

(11) Ibn Bishr, op cit, pp 161-209.

and his tribe with him.(12)

The Qawasim conversion to Wahabism directly affected the other tribes under Qawasim leadership in Ra's Al-Khaimah; each under its own leader, not necessarily a nominee of the Qawasim, subsequently embraced Wahabism and acknowledged its allegiance to the Wahabi amir. But the Qawasim retained significant autonomy, as is clear from the treaty signed in Muscat in 1806 without prior consultation with the Wahabi between the British resident, Seton and the Qawasim leader, Sheikh Sultan Bin Saqar.

Salem Al Harq, the local Wahabi amir in Buraimi had first written to Oman's governors in 1800 asking them to convert; they refused. As a result Salem Al Harq, supported by a large force from loyal tribes, surrounded Sahar, one of Oman's coastal cities. The Governor, Qais Bin Ahmad, promptly contacted his brother Sultan Bin Ahmad, Governor of Muscat, and asked for help; he in turn mustered a force of about 12,000 men. Just before they departed for Sahar to break the siege, he was informed that the Wahabi leader had withdrawn his forces by night to Buraimi; the Omani forces followed whereupon the Wahabi leader executed his second withdrawal to Ra's Al-Khaimah asking for help from the Qawasim.(13)

The Qawasim agreed to attack the Omani forces but changed their minds after a withdrawal by other Wahabi forces and concluded a truce with the Governor of Muscat. However the Omanis then pursued the Wahabis to Buraimi; here they were

(12) British Museum Library (BM), Mss Add 23,346, L'am Al Shihab Fi Serat Mohamed Bin Abdul Wahhab, (The History of Mohamed bin Anbdul-Wahab).

(13) Kelly, J B, op cit, p 102.

decisively defeated and the Governor was left with no choice but to settle with the Wahabi leader and acquiesce in their takeover of a place of great strategic importance.

Three years later Sultan Bin Ahmad, made the pilgrimage to Mecca accompanied by a number of conservative Omanis. His journey was made for two reasons: piety and to try to help the Sherief of Mecca in his resistance to Wahabi efforts to capture the city.⁽¹⁴⁾ Just after he left Muscat his nephew, Badir Bin Saif Bin Ahmad, attempted a coup d'état but failed, and escaped to Ajman on the Arabian coast of the Gulf, before leaving for Daraeia the capital of the Wahabis, where he made an alliance with the Amir, Abdul Aziz Bin Mohamad.⁽¹⁵⁾

Meanwhile, the Wahabi leader in Buraimi succeeded in crossing the Al Hajar Al Gharbi mountains in Oman and captured Batinah. At the end of the summer Sultan Bin Ahmad struck a truce with him, this to last for three years during which he would pay alms, allow the Wahabis to promulgate their ideas and beliefs and finally, permit the appointment in Muscat of a lieutenant of the Wahabi amir.⁽¹⁶⁾ In the autumn however the Wahabi from Buraimi attacked Al Soaiq, thus violating the treaty; the Omani forces suffered another defeat, and Sultan Bin Ahmad returned to Muscat to muster fresh forces. While he was making final preparations he learnt that the Wahabis were surrounding Sahar; he decided to break the siege and started there in November 1803. The Wahabi leader thereupon fell back to his camp

(14) Ibn Bishr, op cit, p 435.

(15) Ibn Bishr, op cit, p 435.

(16) Lorimer, J G, op cit, Vol 1, p 425.

in Buraimi after learning that Abdul Aziz Bin Mohamad, had been killed at his prayers.⁽¹⁷⁾ Kelly thought that the Qawasim, headed by Sultan Bin Saqar, took advantage of Wahabi weakness after the death of their Amir to make a peace treaty with Sultan Bin Ahmad, despite the fact that the Qawasim had had no role in the battles. They did so because they feared losing their pearl diving industry.⁽¹⁸⁾ In fact, the Governor of Muscat took the chance of revenge offered by the confusion amongst the Wahabis and the Arab tribes helping them, the Qawasim, in particular. He sought allies from outside the Arab tribes, not finding any except the Bombay government, and the Ottoman state, worried by Wahabi expansionism in the Arabian peninsula and Oman. The Bombay government however did not want to be involved in fighting between Arab tribes in order to protect its postal route between Basra and Aleppo from possible Saudi attacks. Sultan Bin Ahmad therefore took advantage of a military expedition the Ottomans were preparing against the Wahabis and in September 1804 mustered a fleet of 14 ships to participate in the attack under his leadership. He ordered the naval force to head for Basra, but on reaching there, discovered that no Ottoman expedition had been despatched against the Wahabis.⁽¹⁹⁾ Ibn Rziaq, an Omani eyewitness, said that the voyage was made because Sultan Bin Ahmad wanted to obtain ammunition from the Ottoman governor of Basra; when he reached there he was welcomed and given the ammunition he wanted.⁽²⁰⁾ Sayabi, on the other hand, maintains that when Sultan Bin Ahmad reached Basra he was not welcomed and was

(17) Ibn Bishr, op cit, p 264.

(18) Kelly, J B, op cit, p 114.

(19) Lorimer, J G, op cit, Vol 1, p 434.

(20) Ibn Rziaq, op cit, p 438.

treated badly by the governor.⁽²¹⁾ What is certain is that in the middle of November 1804, he set sail for Oman; on the way he changed his flagship near Basido, an island in the Gulf, for a small boat. Separated from the main fleet he found himself engaged by three ships which opened fire; he was hit in the head and killed. According to Kelly, the attacking ships were probably of the Shohoo tribe from Masandam, simply seeking plunder;⁽²²⁾ Arab writers, however, assert that the ships were of the Qawasim, from Ra's Al-Khaimah.⁽²³⁾ The evidence however does not justify concluding that they knew the governor was on board, but the attackers could hardly have not noticed that the boat in question was flying a British flag.

The following year, the Qawasim of Ra's Al-Khaimah joined forces with their kinsmen in Linja on the Persian coast of the Arabian Gulf, attacked Kishm island and took it; then they took Hormuz, and continued to Bander Abbas which had been leased by the Persian government to Muscat for many years. They then besieged Menab, a few miles away from Bander Abbas; the upshot was that the narrow straits of the Gulf virtually passed under Qawasim control.

Meanwhile Oman went through a period of instability; Sultan Bin Ahmad had young sons and before he left for Basra he had handed over the stewardship to Mohammad Bin Nasir Al Jabri, instructing him to take care of his children and to handle the country's affairs for them. When the Sultan died, Qais Bin

⁽²¹⁾ Sayabi, S H, Iydh Al-Maalim Fi Tarikh Al-Qwasm, (The History of Al-Qawasim), Damascus, Damascus Cooperative Press, 1967, pp 183-184.

⁽²²⁾ Kelly, J B, op cit, p 110.

⁽²³⁾ Salmi, N A, Tu-hfat Al-Alyan Fi Sirat Ahl Uman, (History of the People of Oman), Cairo, np, 1928, p 48; Ibn Rziq, op cit, p 439.

Ahmad, Governor of Sahar, protested against his young nephews governing Muscat and besieged the palace; however Bader Bin Saif, who, as previously mentioned, was supported by the Wahabis returned to Muscat in response to a request from Mohammad Bin Nasir Al Jabri to safeguard both the sons of Sultan Bin Ahmad and Muscat; he considered the invitation a good pretext to become Governor of Muscat himself. When, however, he arrived, he found it quite impossible to break the siege alone, so he called on the Wahabis for help; forces from the Buraimi oasis invested Sahar and at the same time Wahabi ammunition arrived at Muscat by sea, along with fifteen ships from Bahrain on instructions from the Wahabi leader in Daraeia.⁽²⁴⁾ After a skirmish the siege was broken and Qais Bin Ahmad retreated to Sahar by sea after signing an agreement with Bader Bin Saif.⁽²⁵⁾ After taking Muscat, this latter depended on the support of the Wahabi in maintaining internal security. The dissident tribes accordingly began to perceive their opposition to his authority as religious as well as political and to fight not only Bader Bin Saif but the Wahabis in general.

Said, the son of Sultan Bin Ahmad, was the first to recognise this; he killed Bader Bin Saif in 1806 and seized power. The Wahabis promptly laid siege to his fortress; the siege did not last long, however, because the number of Wahabis was very small in comparison with the number of Omanis from different tribes supporting the ruler because he had circulated the news that Bader Bin Saif had been killed by the Wahabis: as a result, some of the Omani tribes left the Wahabi force and joined

(24) Badger, G P, History of the Imams and Seyyids of Oman, London, Hakluyt Society, 1871, pp 13 - 14, 262 and 269.

(25) Ibn Rzaq, op cit, p 481.

the supporters of the new ruler.⁽²⁶⁾ Incensed by the loss of Muscat to such a young opponent - Said was only 17 - in autumn 1807 the Wahabi amir in Daraeia sent a large force under the leadership of Muttlaq Al Mutairi, who first attacked Shanas, a city situated on the coast north of Sahar and expelled its ruler, Quais Bin Ahmad, who was the uncle of Said bin Sultan. Early the following year they joined forces and engaged the Wahabi force consisting of Muttlaq's men and those of Sultan Bin Saqar, ruler of Ra's Al-Khaimah and, of course, Qawasim. The two armies met in Al Khwair between Oman and Ra's Al-Khaimah and fought fiercely; the Omanis were defeated and their leader killed together with many of his people. By the end of 1808 most of the Omani ports on the Shomaila coast, notably Khor Fakkan and Fujairah, were in the possession of Muttlaq Al Mutairi; Said Bin Sultan was obliged to sign a peace treaty according to which the whole of Oman came under the authority of the Wahabis.⁽²⁷⁾

Kelly believes that Muttlaq Al Mutairi united with the most powerful leaders of the northern area tribes of Oman, like Ahmad Bin Nasir, the Sheikh of Bani Jaber, and Azan Bin Qais, the Governor of Sahar after his father died in 1808, making each of them responsible for a certain area, though still under the authority of Daraiea.⁽²⁸⁾ This is contradicted by Ibn Rziaq, writing at the time, he makes it clear that Azan was sick with smallpox, and Said still opposed to Wahabism and was still bearing the historic Omani grudge against the Qawasim.⁽²⁹⁾

(26) Ibid, p 490.

(27) Ibn Bishr, op cit, p 306; Ibn Rziaq, op cit, p 521.

(28) Kelly, J B, op cit, p 497.

(29) Ibn Rziaq, op cit, p 497.

The tortuous nature of tribal politics in the Gulf at this time may be deduced from the fact that the Wahabi leader notwithstanding Sultan bin Saqar's collaboration with Muttlaq Al Mutairi, withdrew his support from the ruler of Ra's Al-Khaimah. Kelly believes that Sultan Bin Saqar did not show enough loyalty to Wahabism,(30) while Ibn Rziaq held that the reason was that Sultan Bin Saqar had been corresponding in secret with Said Bin Sultan, asking him for peace between Ra's Al-Khaimah and Muscat.(31) When Hasan Bin Ali, Sultan Bin Saqar's uncle learned of this, he informed the Wahabi amir in Daraiea, who summoned Sultan Bin Saqar to appear before him. This he did, but not before conceding Daba and Khor Fakkan on the Arabian Gulf to the Governor of Muscat. When he reached Daraiea the amir held him in custody for a few days before detailing him deputy commander of a force to attack Syria and Iraq.

Emboldened by the concessions of the Qawasim leader, the ruler of Muscat sent a delegation to the amir in Daraiea asking him to return the port of Shanas and the fortresses seized by Muttlaq Al Mutairi and the Qawasim; but the Wahabi Amir broke faith with the delegation and kept them as hostages, meanwhile ordering his vessels to attack Basra.(32) Seeing no other way to recover his territory, Said Bin Sultan then took what for him must have been a difficult decision even for such a young man: to appeal to the British in Bombay to put an end to the Wahabi occupation of his forts.

This was an important new development; the British, however,

(30) Kelly, J B, op cit, p 110.

(31) Ibn Rziaq, op cit, pp 517-518.

(32) BA, SDD 312, Year 1819, Historical Sketches (Warden), p 432.

recalling Said Bin Sultan's overtures to the French, culminating in 1807 with his signing a treaty of friendship, declined to intervene, advising him to reach a settlement with the Wahabis⁽³³⁾ Unwilling to do this, he sought help from Persia, whose people were Shi'ites and thus the enemies of the Wahabi. The Shah agreed, and sent a force which reached Muscat by sea in January 1811. It was to no avail; some Omanis had embraced Wahabism, and the augmented forces defeated the attackers, in consequence of which the whole of Oman submitted to the authority of the amir in Daraiea.⁽³⁴⁾

Subsequently, the amir sent as envoy in 1811 Ibrahim Bin Abdul Kareem to Shiraz to protest to the Persian government concerning the aid given to Said Bin Sultan so as to keep Persia from interfering in the Wahabi/Omani conflict again. Bin Abdul Kareem succeeded in obtaining the guarantees which he sought: he visited the British resident in Bushire to discover British intentions and to advise that he was authorized to conclude a commercial agreement with Britain. He returned to his country convinced that nothing was to be expected from Britain in the near future, the Bombay government declining to enter into any commercial relations with the Wahabis.⁽³⁵⁾ Apart from this, the government in Bombay while realising that unrest on such a scale affected its overland post between Basra and Aleppo, maintained a policy of benevolent neutrality towards the new Saudi state (which collapsed in 1818) and chose to ignore the religious fellowship which characterised the Qawasim and the Saudis. This policy was entirely pragmatic; the British had neither the

(33) Abdul Rahim, A A, op cit, p 175.

(34) Ibn Bishr, op cit, p 514.

(35) BA, SDD 312; Hughes op cit, pp 434-5.

inclination nor the substantial forces of infantry necessary to engage in a campaign against the Saudis; nor did they have the necessary knowledge of the terrain. Neutrality was virtually the only available option. In 1793, the East India Company had shifted its Gulf premises from Basra to Kuwait after a conflict with the Ottoman authorities. This move coincided with a Wahabi attack on Kuwait, leading the Bombay government to provide the new company centre with guards to protect it. Nonetheless, the Bombay government maintained its neutrality in the conflict between Kuwait and the Wahabis, partly from pure pragmatism, as mentioned above, and partly derived from the fear that the Wahabis, if provoked, would cut its land route for mail. Brydges, the deputy manager of the East India Company, went so far as to say that the company's men were sympathetic to the Wahabis and sent gifts to their sheikhs.⁽³⁶⁾ Renaud, one of the assistants to the British envoy in Basra, admitted that the company did not abide by strict neutrality in the Kuwait/Saudi conflict of 1793 but sided with the Kuwaitis when the company's guards participated in driving back the Wahabi attack.⁽³⁷⁾ Renaud added that upon the instructions of the British resident in Basra, Samuel Manesty, two cannons from a British cruiser were put ashore and the company used them to defend their premises. This affair caused Manesty to order Renaud to travel to Daraiea to restore good relations with the Wahabis. Accordingly this latter was the first European to visit Daraiea in the era of the first Saudi state; he met the Wahabi Amir, Abdul Aziz Bin Saud,

⁽³⁶⁾ Brydges, H J, An Account of the Transactions of His Majesty's Mission to the Court of Persia, London, 1834, Vol 1, pp 12-16.

⁽³⁷⁾ Abu Hakima, A M, History of Kuwait (1750-1965), Kuwait, That Aslasil Press, 1984, pp 130-131.

being received courteously and warmly. Renaud tried to get a promise from the amir for the safety of the mail which moved via the desert route from Basra to Aleppo, but the latter demanded in exchange that the British should mediate for peace with the ruler of Baghdad on his behalf. This the British could not or would not do, so Renaud's mission failed, leaving the British attitude to the Wahabis based on a desire not to antagonise the Saudi state and indeed to maintain good relations but without officially recognising it.(38)

It can be seen that the political development that took place in the second half of the eighteenth century in the Arab peninsula and Oman was basically due to the religious movement of Wahabism, founded by Mohamad Ibn Abdul Wahab. The spread of this movement in the Arab peninsula had enormous implications not only religiously but also politically. Formerly, the head of a tribe was the supreme authority and the tribe was an independent political system, but the whole picture changed with the emergence of the Wahabi movement; all Arab tribes became united under one flag, and formed one state having an independent existence and a political identity. But this union did not come as a result of a universal aspiration, the Wahabis used force and killed many who rejected their teachings; it was because many people had broken away from the movement at its beginning because of its stern extremist interpretation of Islamic monotheism that Mohamad Ibn Abdul Wahab made the alliance with Prince Mohammad Ibn Saud, the ruler of Daraiea, to give his movement a political and military character, thus changing it from

(38) Abdul Rahim, A A, op cit pp 184-185.

a religious movement derived from the Koran and Sunna.⁽³⁹⁾ This alliance shows the political foresight of Prince Mohammad Ibn Saud; he saw that the Saud family had no significant standing at that time. Their sphere of influence was confined to Daraiea with no further control over the rest of the Nejd. The most appropriate way of expanding this sphere of influence was by an appeal to religion; accordingly he made the alliance with Mohamad Ibn Abdul Wahab, which ruled out further alliances by this latter, which could have diminished Mohammad Ibn Saud's power. This alliance was fundamental to the foundation of the first Saudi state; it improved the Saudi family's rank; no sooner had it become widely known in Nejd, than people from all over the area came to Daraiea which became simultaneously the religious, political and military capital.

Initially, the Wahabi movement was strongly opposed by the Qawasim; their leader Saqar Bin Rashid fought them and blocked the spread of the movement on the western coast of the Gulf. Ultimately the Wahabi force besieged Ra's Al-Khaimah, the centre of the Qawasim, and forced them to join the movement. The Qawasim proved loyal and played an important role in expanding Wahabism further and further throughout the Gulf area.

Their loyalty was attributable to the fact that while affiliation to the movement implied religious commitment, the provision of tribute in the shape of alms and the promise of a further one-fifth of any war booty, local rulers were still left with continuing local autonomy. Further, exploiting the conflict between the Wahabi and Muscat and providing the Wahabi with vessels for their fight with the Omanis allowed the Qawasim to

⁽³⁹⁾ Tarbeen, A, op cit, p 116.

take revenge on the Omanis for their competition in Gulf commerce and gave them the opportunity to establish a monopoly in diving for pearls. Finally, the Qawasim could use Wahabism to legitimise interference with British ships in the Gulf, regarding this not as piracy but as jihad. Given that the Bombay government was unwilling to begin a war with the Saudi Wahabi state, attacks by the Qawasim on British ships increased in number with the tacit approval of the Wahabi in Daraiea.

Notwithstanding Qawasim support in the Wahabi struggle against Oman, the ruler of Ra's Al-Khaimah was displaced; his successor enlisted the support of the Qawasim of Linja in the conflict which extended the attacks upon shipping; one-fifth of the booty went to the amir in Daraiea.

Wahabi strategy was, then, simple and straightforward; Qawasim tactics equally so. More and more tribes embraced Wahabism rather than run the risk of being attacked.⁽⁴⁰⁾ Political astuteness was supplemented by political duplicity; thus the agreement concluded in 1803 between Sultan Ibn Ahmad, the ruler of Muscat and Salem Al Harq, the Wahabi leader, was not a genuine treaty, as stated by Lorimer,⁽⁴¹⁾ but a device to gain time until new Wahabi supplies arrived from Daraiea: the Wahabi leader never intended to let Oman alone although he agreed to the treaty. Interestingly, the treaty is not mentioned in contemporary Arab documents, notably those of Ibn Bishr, the scribe who gathered information about the Wahabi movement, nor by Ibn Rziaq, the Omani who also recorded these events.

(40) Samoor, Z, Tarikh Uman Al-Siyyasi Fi Al-NSF Al-awal Mil Al-garn Al-Tasashen (The Political History of Oman in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century), Kuwait, That Aslasil Press, 1985, p 87.

(41) Lorimer, J G, op cit, Vol 1, p 425.

Arab sources however confirm that the Qawasim were responsible for the death of Sultan Bin Ahmad of Muscat on his return from Basra in mid November 1804, contradicting Kelly who says that the identity of the three ships is still unknown.⁽⁴²⁾ Arab sources also confirm that when the Qawasim attacked the Al-Badri they did not know that Sultan Ibn Ahmad was on board. The reason both for their ignorance and for the attack was the Al-Badri was flying the British flag; outnumbered three to one, and small in size; it was too tempting a target.

The death of Sultan Bin Ahmad led to political disturbance in the whole region; Persian forces entered Oman upon the request of the new ruler, and a treaty was also signed between Oman and France in 1807 aiming at resuming relations. The Qawasim benefited from the political upheavals in Oman and worked on strengthening their naval situation as well as their military forces. There were British residents in Muscat and in Bushire and Basra; and British vessels were subjected to Qawasim depredation. To the Bombay government, Wahabism was a politico-religious movement which while expanding did not necessarily require British intervention; hence the care not to get involved in Oman. Qawasim activity in the Gulf was something else, however; it was regarded as piracy.⁽⁴³⁾ Their tenderness towards the Wahabi-Saudi authorities was not, however, attributable to concern about the desert mail. The Bombay government had a much more compelling reason for its apparent lack of response; it knew about Ottoman and Egyptian plans to smash the Wahabi-Saudi alliance and with it the power of the Qawasim.

⁽⁴²⁾ Kelly, J B, op cit, p 168.

⁽⁴³⁾ Public Records Office (PRO), FO/60/1/, Canning to Jones, 28 Aug 1807.

In his study Britain and the Gulf, Kelly does not describe the events which led the Ottomans to try to end the Wahabi movement in Daraiea and enabled Britain to dominate the Gulf, following the expedition of the Bombay government in 1819 against the Qawasim. This omission may be because Kelly did not use the Turkish documents in Cairo. He confirms that the Ottoman empire was weak and submissive when faced with the Wahabi movement; the Turkish documents make clear that what nevertheless forced its hand was that the Wahabi Amir, Al Imam Saud, had prevented pilgrims from Syria and Istanbul from entering Al Madinh Al Mounawara (Medina) in 1805. Among those turned back was the mother of the Ottoman Sultan, Mustofer IV. The Sultan therefore directed his viceroy in Egypt, Mohamed Ali, to invade the Saudi territory, capture Medina and Mecca from the Wahabi and thus put an end to the movement there.(44)

To begin with, Mohamed Ali declined; his finances were poor, he needed a loan from the Ottoman sultan and he proposed a delay in the implementation of the mission.(45) The Sultan insisted and Mohammed Ali finally agreed; the attempt offered him a way out of his financial difficulties, not least by the possibility of obtaining booty from Hijaz.(46) Accordingly in September 1811, Mohamed Ali sent his son Tomson Pasha to lead a military campaign to Hijaz to put an end to the Wahabi movement and to take Mecca and Medina. The attempt was a failure, and Tomson Pasha was obliged to make a truce with the Wahabi amir, Abdulla Bin Saud, before returning to Egypt, where he died. Mohamed Ali did not accept the truce and therefore sent another son, Ibrahim Pasha,

(44) Cairo National Archives, The Citadel, (henceforth NA), Hijaz Portfolios, No 5 Turkish, 1807.

(45) NA, No 4, 1808.

(46) NA, No 7, 1808.

to continue the war against Daraiea. He had a major success in April 1818, which greatly weakened the Wahabi; and it was in this that the Bombay government saw an opportunity to settle with the Qawasim whom it declared to be pirates threatening commerce and the mails: we shall consider the validity of this view in chapter five.

C H A P T E R F O U R

Franco-British rivalry in the Gulf 1798-1810

In the mid-eighteenth century the Arabian Gulf was undergoing political changes which affected East India Company and French trading interests in particular; the commerce of European trading companies were subject to considerable losses in Persia, the main trading zone in the area. The losses were attributable to the chaos and upheaval in Isfahan between 1722 and 1729 on account of the Afghan, and then the Ottoman and the Russian invasions of Persian territory. They were also attributable to Nadir Shah's ambition to achieve quick wealth by forming a Persian fleet in order to monopolise trade. Persia had begun to suffer a stagnation in trade that led to the internal unrest. When in 1747 Nadir Shah was assassinated, this had a further deleterious effect on the economic situation, not only of Persia but of the whole of the Arabian Gulf, since new military forces came to the fore in the political arena, and influenced the developments that took place in the Arabian Gulf at a later date. These changes caused the East India Company to close its factory at Isfahan in 1735, followed by the French closure of their trading factory at Bander Abbas in 1743.

British trading activity in Persia went back to the early seventeenth century; in 1608, the East India Company had sent its first English ship to India under the command of Captain William Hawkins and in January 1613 the East India Company established

the first English trading agency at Surat, on the west coast of India, under Thomas Oldworth. The agency was not commercially profitable, because the quantity of woollen cloths held at Surat, which had been imported from London, were surplus to the requirements of the Indian market; the Company therefore pressed its representative to search for other markets; western Persia was close to the Surat agency, and when it was learned that the markets of Persia would accept the whole quantity held there a cargo of textiles was despatched to Persia on a British merchantman.

The ship put in at Jask on the east coast, and, being well received by the Persian authorities, was able to discharge its cargo in peace. From Jask the Surat agency was able to persuade the Persian authorities to open trading factories at Shiraz and at Isfahan, and to obtain an agreement from the ruler of Persia that conferred on the East India Company the right to trade freely in Persia. The company even had the right to apply English law in Persia in resolving disputes involving its own nationals. The agreement also permitted the East India Company to appoint a permanent English representative resident in Tehran, the Persian ruler promising to supply the company with 1,000 - 2,000 bales of silk annually for export free of customs duty from Jask.(1)

Trade relations between Persia and the East India Company did not develop as much as had been expected; the rapid economic decline in Persia as a result of the Afghan invasion of Persian territory (1722 - 1729) on the one hand and the

(1) IOR, List of Factory Records of the late East India Company, p xxii.

monopolistic commercial and economic ambitions of Nadir Shah on the other caused the company to move its trading factory from Isfahan to a nearby island until such time as Persia should become more stable.⁽²⁾ The company's factory at Bander Abbas was destroyed by the French in 1759, and the company was obliged to move to Basra in 1763. This was a temporary change, because the company considered the Persian market to be lucrative in the long-term. Accordingly, in 1763 it chose the port of Bushire on the Persian Gulf coast as a suitable trading base for its Persian operations.⁽³⁾ In 1769, however, the company was obliged to close its factory there after becoming involved in a dispute between the Persians and Ottoman Empire over ships seized by the Beni Kaab tribe of Oman, over whom both the Persians and Ottomans claimed jurisdiction.

British activity in Iraq as indicated above commenced with the transfer of the company's trading factory from Bander Abbas to Basra in 1763. In view of the importance of the location of Basra for the East India Company, situated as it was on the western littoral of the Arabian Gulf, and the last landfall for the Aleppo-Basra desert mail, the Company gave it residency status; within a year the residency was upgraded to a factory with responsibility for the company's trade with the Gulf; it was also regarded as a consulate, enjoying diplomatic immunity.⁽⁴⁾

Just as a decline in the economic life of Persia occurred as a result of war and internal turmoil, so in 1773 Basra was afflicted by the plague, which brought about a total collapse of

(2) IOR, L/PS/20 C227, p 42.

(3) Aitchison, C U, op cit, pp 33-4.

(4) Lorimer, J G, op cit, vol 1, p 138.

economic activity there; this led to the temporary closure of the factory until the catastrophe was over. A further cause of decline in the East India Company's trade was the Persian siege and capture of Basra (1776-1779). By the end of the century, the factory was recording steady losses; thus:

"The general account of the Basra factory for the year 1792-1793 shows a net loss of RS 63.850, of which RS 59.345 was the cost of the upkeep of the factory."⁽⁵⁾

The average loss on the sale of woollen goods was 24% compared with 19% in the year 1789-1790. Had it not been for the 2% consular tax levied by the company on the traders whose goods destined for Iraq enjoyed the company's protection, additional losses would have been more than 3,000 rupees (£300). The reason the East India Company retained its factory at Basra in the face of these reversals and losses was that, as well as being a post for the company's desert mail, it was regarded as an observation post from which to monitor French activity in the Gulf.⁽⁶⁾

French trading activity was not notable in the Gulf early in the eighteenth century, on account of France's preoccupation with the War of the Spanish Succession (1702-1712), her inability to compete with British and Dutch trade in the East, together with the further diminution of French influence after the Seven Years War (1756-1763). There was some trading activity, but not on a scale comparable with that of the British. The French had, however, obtained in 1665 the consent of the ruler of Persia to an exemption from customs duty at Isfahan for a period of three years. In 1667 France set up a trading factory at Bander Abbas,

⁽⁵⁾ IOR, G/29/19, Account, Profit and Loss, General Books, Busra Factory, 1 May 1792 - 30 April 1793,

⁽⁶⁾ Ibid

but the French company made no profit until the end of the seventeenth century because of active opposition from the English East India Company. In 1705 the French company became moderately successful, having obtained the Persian government's agreement to a five-year tax exemption. Faced with the economic decline that pervaded the Arabian Gulf, Persia and Basra, the French company closed its factory at Bander Abbas in 1743, but their ships continued to visit Persian ports on an irregular basis. A consulate was, however, established in Basra in 1755, which permitted occasional interference with the East India Company's mail, though trading activity remained limited.

It was to be expected that the presence of European merchant ships in a small area like the Gulf would give rise to clashes between the different companies; each company wanted the Gulf as its own exclusive preserve, which led to fierce competition between the East India Company and the French company, and to armed clashes between their vessels. The background to this increased antagonism was the Seven Years War, for which the Arabian Gulf became a secondary theatre. In 1758 the 30-gun French vessel Bristol engaged the East India Company vessels Drake and Peveage. The Bristol was sighted off Bander Abbas by the British, and sailed between the island of Kishm and Hormuz before continuing her trip to Basra to transport wheat: she was intercepted by the British ships on her return from Basra, but without success.⁽⁷⁾ The following year, a French fleet of three warships attacked the East India Company's factory at Bander Abbas, setting fire to it and capturing the company's vessel, Speedwell, anchored off the port.

(7) IOR, L/PS/20 C227, p 125.

Subsequently, when France became involved in the War of American Independence, three French vessels in 1781 captured the East India Company's Beglerbeg, and entered Muscat harbour to capture another British vessel anchored there; they withdrew when the ruler of Muscat came to its defence. After this rebuff, the French vessels intercepted the 50-gun Omani frigate Saleh bound for Basra with a cargo of British goods from India, and captured it. Two months later, Omani forces attacked two French vessels which had put into Muscat harbour for supplies and captured one of them, La Philippine.⁽⁸⁾

Notwithstanding instability in Muscat, the British sought to maintain its trade with Oman; in 1796 the Bombay government sent the ruler of Muscat an envoy to assure him of their goodwill. The ruler's response was to confirm the friendship between Muscat and Bombay: "friends of the Indian government are my friends, and their enemies are my enemies."⁽⁹⁾ This did not mean that Muscat's position at the end of the century was one of simple alignment with the Indian government; the ruler of Muscat did not want to sever his relations with the French, but rather to maintain a position of neutrality in the competition for trade between the East India Company and the French company. With Britain and France again at war this was difficult, and as time went by it was to prove more difficult for the ruler of Muscat to comply with the request of the Governor of Bombay that French and Dutch vessels be not permitted to fly the Omani flag and should help the Bombay government thwart enemy plans.⁽¹⁰⁾ At the time,

(8) Miles, S B, op cit, p 277.

(9) IOR, L/PS/20 C227, letter from the Imam of Muscat to the Government of Bombay, 18 January 1797.

(10) IOR, L/PS/20 C227, letter from Duncan to the Imam of Muscat, Bombay, 25 March 1797.

Bombay could have no appreciation of the magnitude of the plans of the enemy; a year later, in April 1798, the French government issued a formal order for an expedition to Egypt under the command of Napoleon Bonaparte. The order comprised a preamble and six articles; the preamble set out the reasons for the expedition, namely to punish the Mamelukes who were in power in Egypt and who had established relations with the English and treated French traders badly, and at the same time to provide the French with a trade route to the East, since the English controlled the Cape of Good Hope route, and denied its use to French shipping.

The articles directed Bonaparte to assume command of the land and naval forces necessary to occupy Egypt, to drive the English from their possessions in the East, including India, to destroy their trading factories in the Red Sea, and to extend French influence by driving a canal across the Suez isthmus. Throughout, he was to maintain friendly relations with the Ottoman Sultan.(11)

In July the expedition reached Alexandria, annihilated the Mamelukes, and occupied Cairo. Once established in Egypt Napoleon took the initial steps to open a canal from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea in an attempt to divert trade to the East and he threatened the British presence in India by establishing contact with an Indian prince who was hostile to the English, Tipu Sultan of Mysore. Napoleon sent a letter to Tipu Sultan in 1799 urging him to revolt against the British and promising him assistance to this end. Tipu Sultan did not receive it; it went, via the Shereif of Mecca, to the British

(11) Abdul Rahim, A, op cit, p 203.

representative at Mocha, Samuel Wilson.⁽¹²⁾ It was not the case, as Torrens has it, that Tipu Sultan received the letter and sent delegates to Egypt to meet Napoleon, and that the negotiations came to nothing for lack of maritime transport.⁽¹³⁾

Once it was learned that the objective of the expedition was not only Egypt but French expansion in the East and an advance on India British foreign policy stiffened; Napoleon's movements and his overtures to Indian princes, inciting them to rise up against the British administration led inevitably to the idea of expelling the French expedition from Egypt because by pushing the French out of Egypt, the British would remove the French threat to their presence in India in particular and in the East in general. It was recognised that the native forces in India were bound to the Indian government by fear, rather than affection and that these forces would be exploited by the appearance of any new power. "We have won an empire by armed might, and it must continue to rest on armed might, otherwise it will fall by the same means, to a superior power."⁽¹⁴⁾ Further:

"We cannot doubt for a moment that the French Republic would try to exploit this situation to introduce into India the revolutionary machinations she has successfully employed in almost all parts of Europe. We have to extirpate the French presence in Egypt, and as quickly as possible, quite apart from ruling India. We cannot expect continued stability if we allow France to maintain a strong establishment in Egypt."⁽¹⁵⁾

(12) Al-Abid, S, Mawaif Biritanya Min Al-Nashat Al-Firinsi Fi Al-Khlij Al-Arabi, (The British Attitude to the French Activities in the Arabian Gulf), Baghdad, Al-Ani Press, 1979, p 81.

(13) Torrens, W M, The Marquess Wellesley, Architect of Empire, London, 1880, Vol I, p 183.

(14) IOR, L/PS/5/450, Sec. Committee to the Gov-Gen at Bengal, East India House, 18 June 1798.

(15) IOR, L/PS/5/450, H Douglas to Gov-Gen, Bengal, and the Governors-in-Council at Fort St George and Bombay, 27 Nov 1798.

The British government found itself forced actively to confront the anticipated French advance on India to maintain its possessions in India and its trade with the Gulf. Convinced that India could only be occupied from the sea, the land route being too arduous for the French forces, the Indian administration considered it vital to protect the sea routes to India, and decided to make every effort to prevent the French forces from reaching the Red Sea or the Arabian Gulf. (As the subject of this thesis is the Arabian Gulf we will not discuss the Red Sea, but confine ourselves to policy in the Gulf; how policy was decided and executed is explained in Appendix A on the government of India.)

Even before Napoleon's expedition the British government saw Muscat as the key to the Gulf; if it won the cooperation of the Omanis against any French advance it would have a sound base from which to halt French influence. The fear was that France might exploit its trading links with Muscat to set up a French base at this strategic position. Thus, in 1798 Mahdi Ali Khan, a Persian who had long been in the Company's service and who had recently been appointed resident at Bushire, was instructed by the Governor-General of India to visit Muscat before going on to take up his post, to endeavour to make a political alliance between Muscat and the Indian government, to persuade the ruler to allow a company factory to be established in Muscat, and to persuade him to accept a British surgeon instead of a Frenchman as his personal physician. (The company was convinced that the ruler's French surgeon had been instructed to look after French interests in Muscat.) He was not to let the ruler of Muscat succumb to

French influence, and to do all he could to frustrate a possible French invasion.(16)

Mahdi Ali Khan amply fulfilled his instructions when he concluded a political agreement with the ruler on 12 October 1798. (See Appendix B). The ruler of Muscat undertook not to allow France or Holland to have a factory or even to set foot in Muscat or its ports. If a naval encounter should occur between French vessels and those of the East India Company, Omani vessels were to assist the company's ships against their attackers. Mahdi Khan also prevailed upon the ruler of Muscat through this agreement to make it possible to re-establish the factory at Bander Abbas.(17) While the treaty did not extend to the opening of a factory, the ruler being unprepared to sever all possible commerce with France, it only remained for the company to neutralise Persia in order to be safe from French invasion of the sea routes to India.

Having concluded the political agreement with the ruler of Muscat, Mahdi Khan left for his post at Bushire. He met the Persian ruler three times, and was able to convince him to cooperate with the British against the menace of France.(18) In return for the Persian government taking such a stance, the East India Company was ready to supply the Persian army with arms and ammunition.(19) Notwithstanding the fact that the Persian ruler declared that he would arrest any Frenchman arriving on Persian soil, the Indian government then decided to send a full

(16) IOR, SPP/380/71, Gov-in-Council, Draft instructions to the Resident at Bushire, Bombay Castle, 3 Sept, 1798.

(17) IOR, SPP/380/72, Mahdi Ali Khan to Duncan, 14 Oct 1798.

(18) IOR, L/PS/20 C227, Mahdi Ali Khan to the Gov of Bombay, Tehran, 21 Dec 1798.

(19) IOR, SPP/380/73, Duncan to Mahdi Ali Khan, 2 Nov 1798.

diplomatic delegation to Tehran to monitor the political developments occasioned by Napoleon's campaign and assess the likelihood of an invasion of India through Persia. The delegation was to be led by Captain John Malcolm, the assistant resident at Hyderabad.(20)

Malcolm was given full authority to sign an agreement with the Persian ruler to frustrate French expansion, in return for which Persia would receive an annual financial subsidy of 400,000 rupees (£40,000) for a period of three years, the duration of the proposed treaty, the subsidy to be renewable. Regarding the threat from France, the Governor-General left it up to Malcolm to persuade the Persian ruler that it was in his interests to resist: in the event of France attempting to advance on Asia, the Persian ruler could expect strong British naval support when French forces advanced towards his country. If he actually took part in fighting the French, the Indian government would pay him a monthly financial subsidy in return.(21) The Governor-General also asked Malcolm to try to emphasise the importance of commercial cooperation between the Indian and Persian governments. If he convinced the Persian ruler of this he was to try to conclude a commercial convention which would be of a permanent nature and would not terminate on the expiry of the political engagement.

Malcolm's instructions also directed him to go to Muscat on his way to Persia to strive to make its ruler observe to the letter the agreement of 1798. Finally, he was to put an end to the dispute that had recently arisen between the ruler of Muscat

(20) IOR, G/29/21, Duncan to Malcolm, Bombay, 2 Dec 1799.

(21) IOR, G/29/21. Gov-Gen-in-Council to J Duncan, Fort William, 10 Oct 1799.

and the Pasha of Baghdad, a dispute causing complications for the British in view of the alliance existing between the Indian government and the Ottoman Empire; the behaviour of the ruler of Muscat was at odds with the spirit of the agreement that Mahdi Khan had signed, article two of which stipulated that "the friends of one state are the friends of the other".(22)

Malcolm reached Bombay in December 1799. A report on the trade of Persia had been prepared for him by the customs-master and accountant-general of the residency, who recommended that the trade of India with that country should remain predominantly, as it had been to date, in the hands of private merchants. So far as the company's trade was concerned, no specific fresh privileges were being sought. Malcolm might take up with the Shah a proposal that had been made at various times in the past, most recently by Mahdi Ali Khan, that the company should acquire an island off the Persian coast as a site for a factory which could in time become an emporium for Gulf trade.(23)

At the end of December Malcolm left Bombay for Muscat, arriving in January 1800 after a ten-day passage. Unable on his arrival to meet the ruler, and learning that he was at the entrance to the Gulf on board the vessel Gunjava, Malcolm decided to catch up with him near Kishm island. He was well received, and after long discussions spoke of the Governor-General's regret over the ruler's conduct in leaning towards France and having links with the French government. Malcolm expressed his hope that the ruler would now understand that his best policy was to

(22) (IOR), G/29/21, J Duncan to Capt J Malcolm, Bombay, 12 Dec 1799; see also G/29/21, Gov-Gen-in-Council to J Duncan, Fort William, Bombay, 12 Oct 1799.

(23) Saldanha, J A, Selection from State Papers, p.201.

fall in with the British government and uphold the 1798 agreement between the two countries: by upholding the agreement the ruler would not only do service to the political security of the region, but would ensure the economic prosperity of the land over which he ruled. To this end Malcolm offered the services of an Englishman of great talent as an agent of the East India Company. The ruler of Muscat agreed enthusiastically and accepted the surgeon Archibald Boyle to be both his personal physician and the Company's agent in Muscat.⁽²⁴⁾ Malcolm found the ruler of Muscat more prepared to cooperate with the British government than at any time in the past and was thus able to sign an agreement comprising two articles on 18 January 1800. (See Appendix C.) The first article emphasised the importance of the 1798 agreement signed by the ruler and Mahdi Ali Khan; the second gave the British government the right to appoint and install an agent in Muscat, a significant development in Omani-British relations.⁽²⁵⁾

When Malcolm was satisfied that the ruler of Muscat was ready to cooperate and was convinced of his obligation to observe and uphold the 1798 agreement, he left Muscat for Persia, arriving at Bushire on 1 February, where he was well received by Persian trade representatives and by the ruler, Sheikh Nasser. He sent messages to the Persian court, to the prime minister in Tehran and to the Prince Regent in Shiraz explaining to them the purpose of his mission. As he was delayed in meeting the Persian ruler in Tehran because of protocol, he made a number of

(24) IOR, SPP/381/7, Duncan to Assistant Surgeon Boyle, 26 Dec 1799.

(25) IOR G/29/20, Malcolm to Gov-Gen-in-Council, 18 Jan 1800; SPDD No 89 of 1800, Malcolm to Gov. of Bombay (giving result of his negotiation with the ruler of Muscat), 4 Feb 1800; see also Aitchison, C U, op cit, Vol 12, pp 208-9.

enquiries into the political and economic condition of Persia, the result of which was to convince him that a new commercial agreement would be of little use to the Company. Trade with Persia was best left in the hands of private merchants. He was however in favour of acquiring an island site for a factory, but more for political than for commercial reasons. The French expedition to Egypt had exposed the weakness of the Ottoman Empire and made a French advance on India through the Ottoman dominions feasible. An eventual Russian move southwards from the Caspian was also a possibility. An island base would help to some extent to counteract both dangers, besides attracting to it Persian and Turkish merchants seeking security for the conduct of their transactions. If relations between the British government and the Shah became strained, the Pasha of Baghdad might be disposed, through the existence of such a strongpoint in the Gulf, to favour the British. None of the islands in the upper Gulf seemed to Malcolm suitable for a base. Kharg Island was not suitable; it had no safe harbour, it did not command the trade route between India and Persia, nor could it ever become an emporium of consequence.⁽²⁶⁾ Malcolm's preference was for Kishm Island, near the entrance to the Gulf. Properly developed, he believed it might attract to it half the trade that passed through Muscat. It would be administered by a resident who would not be permitted to engage in trade and who would have under his command a force for the defence of the settlement and its trade. The cost of the establishment could be met by a duty of 3% on all imports.⁽²⁷⁾

⁽²⁶⁾ IOR, G/29/22. Malcolm to Wellesley, Bushire, 26 Feb 1800.

⁽²⁷⁾ IOR, G/29/22, Malcolm to Wellesley, Bushire, 1 Feb 1800.

On 16 November 1800 Malcolm was able to meet the Persian ruler at the royal court in Tehran. He was accompanied by an entourage composed of six European gentlemen, two European servants, two surveyors, 42 troopers of the Madras Native Cavalry, 49 Bombay Grenadiers, 68 Indian servants and followers, 103 Persian attendants, and 236 servants and followers belonging to the gentlemen of the mission. Although the Persian government had ordered that supplies should everywhere be forthcoming for the English embassy at the expense of the State, making many of the servants redundant, Malcolm had earlier decided that the success of his mission depended upon the impression that he gave of the power, wealth, and standing of the company, and of himself as its envoy.⁽²⁸⁾ In fact, however, changes in the wider political context since Malcolm's arrival in Persia affected the political aim of the mission, and the importance of the island that Malcolm intended to convert to a strategic base for the East India Company. Of major significance was the diminished threat of a French advance on India, because the French army was not, after the Battle of the Nile, capable of staying for a further long period in the East. As far as Persia was concerned, the threat from Afghanistan under Zaman Shah was held to be diminished.

But nonetheless, Malcolm was determined to arrive at a trade agreement with the Persian ruler, and to consolidate all the company's former concessions, in addition to obtaining new ones, including the lowering of the duty on export goods from 4% to 1%. In the matter of the surrender of the islands of Hanjan and Kishm to the East India Company, Malcolm faced severe resistance from

(28) Kaye, Sir J W, Life and Correspondence of Sir John Malcolm, London, Smith and Elder and Co, 1856, Vol 1, pp 116-117.

the ruler's ministers: despite his feigned lack of interest he was in fact very anxious to obtain this. The Persian ministers were obdurate in their opposition to this request, for they believed that relinquishing any Persian land at that time to the advantage of the East India Company would shortly be followed by the gradual subjugation of other tracts of Persia on the pattern of the expansion the company had achieved in India.⁽²⁹⁾ In the event, Malcolm's mission to Persia yielded two agreements, one political and one commercial, signed in Tehran on 28 January 1801. In the political treaty the two contracting states agreed to provide assistance and mutual aid to stop the King of Afghanistan if he should ever show a resolution to invade India or Persia. They also agreed that if the French army attempted to invade Persia, a joint force should be formed to destroy it. The commercial treaty gave the merchants of the two states the right to travel and carry on their affairs in the territories of both nations in full security and confidence, British traders and merchants being permitted to settle in any of the seaports or cities of Persia free of duties and taxes.

On 23 February 1801 Malcolm left Bushire for Bombay having ratified the two agreements with the Persian ruler, returning quickly because he feared a hardening of the attitude of the Persian ministers: "the only way left to me to hasten the end of negotiations that are becoming more difficult by the moment, and being prolonged indefinitely because of the Persian ministers' deceitful disposition. . ."⁽³⁰⁾ In the view of the Governor-General of India the mission had achieved its objective, even

⁽²⁹⁾ IOR, L/PS/20 C227, Malcolm to Marquis of Wellesley, Humadan, 20 Feb 1801.

⁽³⁰⁾ Ibid

though it had cost about a million rupees (about £100,000); the conclusion of the political agreement with Persia was held to be an excellent achievement because it was a move towards establishing a close liaison with Persia and total British domination of Persia's Gulf coast.(31)

From the Persian viewpoint, the treaty was seen as an instrument enabling it to withstand external pressures and when in 1804 perceptions of a Russian menace to Persia increased, the Persian ruler approached the British government of India for assistance, citing the 1801 agreement. The Indian administration's negative attitude to the request made the Persian ruler look to France for assistance against Russia; accordingly a message was sent to Napoleon expressing the Shah's desire to form an alliance with France. This was an ideal opportunity for France to achieve her objective of destroying the British presence in India; Napoleon, while despising the Persian ruler's need to secure assistance from France after failing to secure it from the British, replied confirming France's concern for Persia's safety and pledging France to recover what Persian land Russia might take.(32)

He also despatched two envoys to Persia, Amadée Jaubert and Adjutant-General Alexander Romieu. Jaubert's brief was a political one, to persuade the Persian ruler to persevere in the war with the Russians and to try to draw up a Franco-Persian alliance in accordance with the Persian ruler's request.

(31) Owen, S J, A Selection from the Despatches, Treaties and other Papers of the Marquess Wellesley during his Government of India, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1877, pp 607-613.

(32) Ramzani, R K, The Foreign Policy of Iran, A Developing Nation in World Affairs, 1500 - 1941, University Press of Virginia, Charlottesville, 1966, p 40.

Romieu's brief was military; he was to provide France with a detailed description of Persia and a report on Persia's military resources.⁽³³⁾ Romieu arrived in Tehran in October 1805, having experienced many hazards on his way to Persia, British agents, who had learned of his assignment, having attempted to obstruct his progress. He was made welcome by Persian officials and had a meeting with the Persian ruler to whom he presented expensive gifts.⁽³⁴⁾ He also met Persian ministers and suggested a Franco-Persian alliance, in return for which France would give the Persian government assistance against the continuing menace from Russia.⁽³⁵⁾ In recognition of the help they received from France the Persian government was to allow France certain maritime concessions in the Gulf, such as the transfer to France of one of Persia's Gulf ports.⁽³⁶⁾ The Persian government hesitated over the decision whether to hand over to France a port on the eastern shore of the Gulf, and fate took a hand when on 15 October 1805 Romieu died of fever.⁽³⁷⁾ France considered this a pretext for her supporters in Persia to accuse the English of having him poisoned by one of their agents.⁽³⁸⁾

Napoleon's other ambassador, Jaubert, was delayed in getting to Tehran because of obstruction by the Turks and did not arrive there until May 1806. He arrived in Persia just in time to complete what Romieu had begun. Persian forces had been routed by Russian forces at Askeran, resulting in the loss by Persia of

⁽³³⁾ Shupp, R F, The European Powers and the Near Eastern Question 1806 - 1807, New York, np, 1931, pp 443 - 4.

⁽³⁴⁾ IOR, G/29/31. Extract of letter from Acting Resident at Bushire to H Jones, 11 Nov 1805.

⁽³⁵⁾ IOR, G/29/31, Translation of letter from Mirza Kuli to H Jones, 20 Nov 1805.

⁽³⁶⁾ IOR, G/29/31, Extract Bombay Consul, 21 Jan 1806.

⁽³⁷⁾ IOR, G/29/31, Jones to Charles Grant, Baghdad, 10 Dec 1805.

⁽³⁸⁾ IOR, G/29/31, Jones to the Chairman, 27 Mar 1806.

Baku and the province of Dagestan. The Persian ruler was therefore more anxious than ever to secure the aid of the French against Russia, particularly as he had received discouraging reports from the Persian ambassador in India. Jaubert did not stay long in Tehran because the climate was bad for his health and because the Persian government wanted to come to a definite understanding with Napoleon as quickly as possible. Accordingly, Jaubert left Tehran accompanied by Mirza Muhammed Khan, the ruler of Caspia, as ambassador empowered to sign a treaty with France. According to the instructions given to Mirza Muhammed Khan the Persian government was prepared to cooperate with France in an operation to invade India, to the extent of sending the Persian army to advance through Kandahar and Kabul and allow the French a base on the Gulf from which to launch operations against the British.(39)

In consequence, in May 1807 a treaty was signed between Napoleon and the Persian ruler's envoy. This Franco-Persian treaty comprised 16 articles in which Napoleon pledged himself to the integrity of Persia and recognised Georgia as part of Persia. He engaged to make every effort to constrain Russia to evacuate that province and to conclude a treaty of peace. A French embassy would be established at the Persian court in a permanent capacity, and arms and military instructors would be supplied to help reorganise the Persian army on European lines. For his part, the Shah was to break off all political and commercial intercourse with the British, to declare war upon them, and to commence hostilities without delay. British

(39) PRO, FO 60/1 (Persia), Instructions of Persian emissary, translated by John Hine (Asst Resident, Baghdad).

officials and merchants resident in Persia were to be expelled and all communications by the Shah's subjects with any British possession was to be forbidden. Should a French squadron appear in the Persian Gulf it was to receive any help required at Persian ports. The Shah was to use his influence to persuade the Afghan states to join him in a descent upon India, and he was to afford every assistance to any French expedition despatched against India.(40)

The agreement revived in stark form the old spectre of a French drive on India; by way of its implementation Napoleon sent a large military mission to Persia under General Claude Gardane, whose instructions of 10 May 1807 required him to achieve two objectives. The first was to aim a blow at the Indian Government by bringing about a rapprochement between Persia and the Ottoman Empire and to highlight the common danger the two countries faced from Russia, to prevent a bilateral settlement between Russia and Persia, and even to incite Persia to attack Russia, while the latter was occupied with events in Europe. Gardane was further instructed to work to stir up hostility between the Persians and the English and to get Persia to cooperate in a projected French invasion of India. He was also to make detailed and exhaustive enquiries into the possibility of a French advance on India through Persia and the Gulf. If such a campaign were launched, it would disembark at Alexandretta and then march across Syria and Mesopotamia to Persia, or would sail around the Cape of Good Hope and disembark near the entrance to the Gulf. Gardane therefore had to ascertain what ports on the Persian coast could provide good anchorages and water and supplies for a fleet large

(40) Kelly, J B, op cit, pp 80-81.

enough to carry 20,000 men. Upon disembarkation of this force Gardane had to be sure that Persian soldiers, to be trained by the officers of the mission, would join it.⁽⁴¹⁾

General Gardane reached the Persian capital Tehran on 4 December 1807 heading a team of 60 military, engineering and technical experts, and two doctors. With him was the Persian ambassador to France, Mirza Muhammed Khan.⁽⁴²⁾ On arrival he was welcomed by the ruler, who conferred upon him the honorific title of Khan.⁽⁴³⁾ After a short time in Tehran General Gardane found himself restricted by the ruler's clearly expressed doubts of France's sincerity concerning the implementation of her agreement with Persia against Russia, now that France and Russia had come to a settlement in Europe. This settlement did not however mean France had abandoned her projects in the East and the planned invasion of India and in Napoleon's view, France had not abrogated her commitment to military and political aid to Persia against Russia. General Gardane's appraisal proposed that the Persian ruler be persuaded that it was possible to regain the Persian territory occupied by Russia through France's mediation rather than by her arms. Gardane managed to conclude two agreements, one military and one commercial. The military agreement provided for Persian purchase of French arms, and the release of the islands of Kharrack and Hormuz into the charge of the officers of the French mission for purposes of fortification. The commercial agreement permitted France to established factories at Bushire and Bander Abbas and granted French

⁽⁴¹⁾ Gardane, Comte Alfred de, (ed), Mission du Général Gardane en Perse sous le Premier Empire, Paris, np, 1865, pp 31-94.

⁽⁴²⁾ IOR, G/29/28, Smith to the Gov-Gen-in-Council, Bushire, 25 Dec 1808.

⁽⁴³⁾ IOR, G/29/28, Smith to the Gov-Gen-in-Council, Bushire, 1 Jan 1809.

merchants concessions in commercial dealings.⁽⁴⁴⁾

In the summer of 1808 Gardane began having some difficulties when it became clear to Persia that France was not serious about implementing her pledges to the Persian government to recover Persian territory, particularly Georgia. Gardane did much to improve the Persian ruler's impression of France by undertaking to guarantee the return of Russian-occupied Persian territory, and arranging a year's truce between Persia and Russia during which there would be no fighting between them.⁽⁴⁵⁾ He also obtained a pledge, that Russian forces would not conduct military operations against Persia before replies could arrive from the French and Russian governments to the proposal made by the Persian ruler that France should mediate and hold negotiations in Paris for a peace between the two countries.⁽⁴⁶⁾ Gardane's position became very weak however when the replies from Russia and from his own government were received. Russia's response to the Persian ruler's request for peace and negotiations was a refusal; the French government's reply was that they were not interested in the suggestion that they should mediate between Persia and Russia. All that they sent was a message of friendship and fellowship with the Persian government. In the light of what had transpired, Mirza Shuffi, the Persian Prime Minister, sent a strongly-worded letter to General Gardane complaining that at a time when his country was fulfilling all its obligations according to the conditions of the alliance, France was doing nothing to put a stop to the Russian

⁽⁴⁴⁾ IOR, G/29/29, Malcolm to Lord Minto, Bushire, 8 Jun 1808.

⁽⁴⁵⁾ IOR, G/29/25, Pasley to Edmonstone, Bushire, 23 Jul 1808.

⁽⁴⁶⁾ IOR, L/PS/5/303, Pasley to F Warden, 22 Aug 1808.

aggression.⁽⁴⁷⁾ At the end of the summer of 1808 Russia threatened to renew the fighting north of Persia unless the Persian government accepted Russia's conditions, which were that the line of the Aras, Kur and Arpatchai rivers should form the border between their two countries. This prompted the Persian ruler for the last time to beg France to intervene, but Napoleon did not reply to Persia's pleas for assistance, being occupied with the war with Spain which had broken out in 1808.

Gardane suffered the consequences of these events, and was quite unable to reach any further understanding with the Persian government. The situation further deteriorated when the Persian government began preparing to fight Russia. Gardane tried to calm the tense situation, sending an officer of the French mission to ask the Russian commander on Persia's northern borders if he would desist from commencing battle, but ill fortune took a hand; the envoy reached the commander much too late to perform his task: the battle had begun before he arrived, and the Russian forces had advanced to lay siege to Erevan. The Persian ruler summoned General Gardane on 23 October and asked him to define the French government's position; if within two months France did not demonstrate the friendship between the two countries, the Persian government would approach the British for discussions and expel Gardane himself from Tehran:

"Persia is in a desperate situation, attacked in the north by a power which she dreads, on the point of being so in the south by the English, who with one hand offer war and with the other a fatal friendship, abandoned by France, her protector and ally. Persia does not know where to find support. . ."⁽⁴⁸⁾

⁽⁴⁷⁾ IOR, G/29/25, Translation of a letter from Mirza Shuffi to Nasorollah Khan, 23 Jul 1808.

⁽⁴⁸⁾ Deherain, H, La Vie de Pierre Ruffin, Orientaliste et Diplomate, 2 vols, Paris, Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1929, Vol II, p 52 (citing letter from Joseph Jouanin).

There was nothing left but for Gardane to prepare to leave Tehran; on 8 February 1809 he had a meeting with the Persian ruler and expressed his wish to do so. He left Tehran for Tabriz in northern Persia a day after the arrival in Persia of a British envoy.

Surprisingly, Napoleon was angry with General Gardane, wanting him to stay on in Tehran to observe developments until such time as the Persian ruler forced him to leave; he informed the Persian ruler in a letter that he had dismissed General Gardane his service because he had left Tehran without permission, and that he would within a short time be sending another ambassador, adding that he appreciated the ruler's reasons for receiving the British envoy.(49)

At the end of 1809 Napoleon despatched Monsieur Joseph Jouanin, a member of the previous French mission, as France's ambassador in Tehran; but he got no further than Azerbaijan in northern Persia, as the Persian ruler ordered the governor of that province to expel him from the country as required by the agreement signed between Persia and Britain.(50)

The vagaries in Franco-Persian relations were well known to the British government in London and the Indian government in Calcutta, thanks largely to the reports of the various residents in the Gulf. Both were acutely aware of the dangers of attempting to stir up Indian rulers in the Mahratta states against the British and equally aware of the perils of any French penetration of India itself. There were, however, distinct

(49) Al-Abid, S, op cit, p 171.

(50) IOR, G/29/27, translation of letter from Hajee Mohammed Hussein Khan to H Jones, 7 Jan 1810.

differences in their respective views on how these perils were to be countered.

For the British government in London, action to counter French influence in Bushire had to be action determined by the current state of Franco-Russian relations, which veered between outright conflict and wary friendship, as well as Britain's relations with Russia, Britain herself then engaged in a war with France which would only end with the defeat of Napoleon in 1815.

Since 1806 the issue of Russian expansion along the Caspian Sea and the extension of the Russian Empire towards India had been a matter of concern to Britain. In that year a detailed memorandum arrived in London pertaining to a possible Russian breakout towards the Caucasus and its bearing on British interests in the East. The British government had to decide whether it should intervene and stop the Russian advance, as otherwise some of the rich silk-producing provinces south of the Caspian Sea might fall into the hands of the Russians; this constituted a threat to British interests in the Gulf, for if the Russians and the French made peace in Europe France might allow Russia to expand in the Gulf. This raised the question of whether Britain should seek to obtain a swift understanding between Russia and Persia, which would block the French, and stop the Russians breaking out towards the south. Britain would have to be prompt in suggesting to the Russians that she mediate in this, because it was believed that the Russians would welcome a peace with Persia that would allow them to keep the territory they had recently occupied. Britain's mediation would also help to maintain her friendly relations with Persia, but Britain could not afford to damage relations with Russia by supplying arms to

Persia in order to improve relations with that country. It did not seem likely that Russia would accept a peace on Persian terms, that is, Russia's withdrawal, the return of Georgia and the liberation of other Russian annexations in Azerbaijan, but Britain could join with Russia to put pressure on the Persian government to accept peace on Russian terms.(51)

In early January 1807 the government in London received an interesting report from the former resident in Baghdad, Harford Jones, who had just returned to London, in which Jones made clear the dangers that would result from a rapprochement between the French and Persian governments: for France to gain a foothold in Persia would constitute a massive threat to Britain's standing in the East, and every effort should be made to prevent that happening. France was not interested in assisting Persia against Russia either through mediation or by force of arms; it was now in Britain's power to achieve this through her mediation, and the British government should urge Russia to sign a peace agreement with Persia to counter the menace of France." The British government should also send a diplomatic mission of embassy status to Tehran without delay, proceeding to Tehran via St Petersburg in order to persuade the Tsar to settle his differences with the Persian government. Jones emphasised that in order for it to have more weight, the mission should represent the British crown and not the East India Company, and that it should also strive to restore Anglo-Persian relations to an amicable footing. In his report, Jones also asserted that it was important to treat the agreements signed between the Persian ruler and France as if they had never existed.(52)

(51) Al-Abid, S, op cit, p 210.

(52) IOR, G/29/27, Memorandum from Jones, London, 7 Jun 1807.

The British had to act quickly, particularly now that the overall situation was aggravated by the reversals in the war with France during the first half of 1807. Throughout the previous year the Ottoman Empire had been inclining towards going over to the French camp, and in February 1807 had severed relations with Britain. As the Ottomans were at war with Russia so Russia became Britain's ally in the east, though there was still a fridity in relations between Russia and Britain in Europe. In the early summer of 1807 the danger to Britain increased when in the east the Ottoman Empire and Persia both went over to France, at a time when Russia was assuming a posture of neutrality.⁽⁵³⁾ This development spurred Britain to adopt Jones' proposal to send a diplomatic mission to Persia with the task of preventing the alliance between Russia and Persia leading to an invasion of India.⁽⁵⁴⁾

The government accepted the memorandum and appointed Jones to head the mission as the representative of the British crown in Persia, to work in liaison with the Governor-General in India and convey to him the authority to sign an agreement with the ruler of Persia.⁽⁵⁵⁾ On 18 August 1807 Jones received final detailed instructions; he was to strive to urge the Persian ruler to adhere in toto to the agreements of 1801. Should he fail in this, he was to try to persuade him to maintain a position of neutrality in relation to both Britain and France. If the Persian ruler did show himself prepared to sever his links with France, Jones was to offer him arms and financial assistance, and

⁽⁵³⁾ Kelly, J B, op cit, pp 81-82.

⁽⁵⁴⁾ IOR, L/PS/5/541, G Halford to Gov-Gen-in-Council, India House, 24 Sept 1807.

⁽⁵⁵⁾ IOR, L/PS/5/541, G Halford to Gov-Gen-in-Council, India House, 1 Jun 1807.

provide him with military experts and naval support in the Gulf. In exchange for this, Persia was to enter into an agreement that would strengthen the British position in the event of an attempted invasion of India by any European country, whether France or Russia. Jones, in short, had to play upon the Persian ruler's fear of Russia in order to convince him that the new friendship between France and Russia exposed his country to great danger. On his way to Persia Jones was to find out how the Pasha of Baghdad viewed Britain, and try to come to an agreement with him. If the Pasha proved to be well disposed to the British, Jones was to offer him the support of Britain against attack, either from the Ottoman Empire or from France or Persia. If the Pasha showed himself hostile to Britain, Jones was to get in touch with the Wahabi prince, Saud Abdel Aziz, who controlled most of the Arabian peninsula, and to ensure his cooperation against a French advance from the Mediterranean. Finally, Jones, if he failed in his mission and it seemed that the Persian ruler was resolute, was to resort to force, for example by inciting internal rebellion against the Persian ruler.(56)

The newly appointed Governor-General, Lord Minto, was unhappy about the London government's decision to send an ambassador such as Jones to Persia from London; Jones was in his view a parasite on the Indian government administration and its policies in the Gulf: "I consider Jones a marplot in our play".(57) The Governor-General also believed that the state of tension in the area could not await the arrival of Jones from London, particularly as Jones was regarded by the authorities in

(56) PRO, FO 60/1, Canning to Jones, 28 Aug 1807.

(57) Kaye, Sir J W, op cit, p 411 (citing letter from Minto to Malcolm, 9 Mar 1808).

Calcutta as an unsuitable person to perform such a delicate mission.⁽⁵⁸⁾ The Governor-General was particularly displeased that Jones was coming into the area as the representative of the British crown because, although he was nominally subject to the authority of the Indian Governor-General, by going to Persia as ambassador of the British crown he would undoubtedly undermine the prestige of the East India Company in the eyes of the rulers of neighbouring countries. Direct contact between London and Persia would diminish the East India Company's autonomy; Minto was anxious to preserve the company's reputation and standing in the area and to cause other countries to look upon it as a sovereign state at a time when, effectively, it was exercising all the authority of such a state.

Reports reaching the East India Company from the resident at Bushire in the first weeks of 1808 gave a clear picture of the expansion of French influence in Persia. They confirmed that the Persian ruler had ceded the islands of Hormuz and Kharrack to France, and that France had built commercial factories at the ports of Bander Abbas and Bushire. The reports also contained information that a part of the French army in Poland commanded by General Menon was driving overland through Turkey and Aleppo heading for the Gulf, while a French fleet composed of two ships of the line and four to six frigates carrying several hundred troops had left Rochefort for the East, intending to reach India via the Gulf, exploiting the ports and islands France had obtained from Persia.⁽⁵⁹⁾

⁽⁵⁸⁾ IOR, G/24/28, Minto to Lieut-Gen G Hench, Commander-in-Chief, Fort William, 30 Jan 1808.

⁽⁵⁹⁾ BA, SPDD No 237 of 1808 (intelligence papers received by Malcolm).

The situation appeared critical; Minto therefore resolved to pre-empt Jones and send his own embassy to Tehran under General Malcolm; as the French had established a very impressive embassy for themselves in Tehran, described by Malcolm as the advance guard of the French army, the Indian government decided that the embassy of Malcolm should be just as impressive, "with the portfolio of the diplomatist masking the muzzles of our British guns."⁽⁶⁰⁾ In late January 1808 the Governor-General issued instructions to Malcolm giving him plenipotentiary powers in political affairs and in matters concerning the British government in the Gulf. The instructions also revoked the political authority of the residents in Baghdad, Basra and Bushire and placed them under Malcolm's control. The warships at Bombay were also put at Malcolm's disposal in the Gulf area. The Governor-General expressed his hope that Malcolm would be able to prevent Persia's alliance with France and persuade the Persian ruler not to offer France passage across Persian territory or to permit French soldiers to enter Persia. If he could not do this, Malcolm was to persuade the Persian government to allow British soldiers to use Persian territory to intercept the French army on its march towards India, to strive to prevent the Persian government from ceding any Persian port to France, and to find out all that the British government and East India Company needed to know about the actual state of affairs, the overall extent of the agreements France had entered into with Persia, and the real inclination of the Persian government regarding their implementation.⁽⁶¹⁾

⁽⁶⁰⁾ Kaye, Sir J W, *op cit*, p 402.

⁽⁶¹⁾ BA, SPDD No 225 of 1808, Minto's instructions to Malcolm, 30 Jan 1808.

In March 1808 Malcolm received additional detailed instructions from the Governor-General concerning the mission to Persia: most importantly, he was to find out how far the French had so far progressed in their plans to invade India and the state of the war between Persia and Russia. If Malcolm had found the Persians not well disposed towards France, the British government was prepared to send an expeditionary force to the Gulf to collaborate with Persia against France. If it appeared that the Persians favoured a position of neutrality, then this British force would be useful merely by its presence in the Gulf. Malcolm therefore had to recommend how large this force should be; he was specifically asked to give information only about its size, and was not authorised to take any steps in connection with its employment without having first received explicit instructions from the government in India: "For his information, the government would itself only resort to this step in the case of extreme necessity, to defend British provinces." (62)

The Governor-General had the capacity to send a British force of between 20,000 and 25,000 fighting men on a contingency basis and if convinced that France was attempting to establish herself on the Gulf coast could send a further 4,000 to 5,000. (63) In a personal letter to Malcolm the Governor-General expressed how important his mission was for the Indian government:

"Our hopes rest on a confrontation with France in Persia, and so every means must be used to prevent France from adopting Persia as a base in which to gather her forces to strike a blow against British interests." (64)

(62) IOR, G/29/28, Edmonstone, Secy to Gov-in-Council, to Malcolm, Fort William, 7 Mar 1808.

(63) Ibid

(64) IOR, G/29/28, letter from Minto to Malcolm, 9 Mar 1808.

If a naval force were sent to accompany Malcolm's mission, Minto intended it to be unobtrusive, being nominally Royal Navy and East India Company vessels bound for the Gulf. Minto's aims in this was not to alarm the rulers in the area lest they should adopt an attitude not in the interests of the British in India.

Malcolm's instructions directed him to go to Muscat on his way to Persia, to ascertain the views of its ruler, Said bin Sultan, on Persia handing over the port of Bander Abbas to France, as this port was under his control, and was not under the authority of the Persian government, even though it was on Persia's side of the Gulf. Malcolm was to ensure that the ruler of Muscat would accept the Indian government's assistance in keeping the French away from Bander Abbas and Hormuz in particular and to find out he was disposed towards the East India Company in general.

The opportunities for discord in the conduct of policy in the Gulf were thus present from the start; when Jones, arrived in Bombay on 26 April 1808 he learned for the first time that the East India Company had sent its own embassy which had left Bombay on 17 April bound for Muscat and then Persia on board the warship Lapaych, with an escort of 50 soldiers of the 84th Regiment.⁽⁶⁵⁾ With Malcolm having left Bombay hurriedly before Jones's arrival,⁽⁶⁶⁾ the latter found himself in a quite extraordinary position, and decided to await the outcome of Malcolm's mission to the Gulf before going to Persia himself to carry out his task for the government in London. Accordingly Jones wrote to the East India Company in Bombay explaining that it was better for

⁽⁶⁵⁾ IOR, G/29/29, Malcolm to Minto, Lapaych at sea, 1 May 1808.

⁽⁶⁶⁾ IOR, G/29/29, Malcolm to Minto, Bombay, 15 Apr 1808.

the mission of the British crown, represented by himself, not to lose face in the eyes of Persia or of other countries, and that Malcolm's mission in the Gulf would cause embarrassment if they met in Persia, and that would not be conducive to good results. "Since General Malcolm did not think it appropriate for him to await my arrival in Bombay, there is nothing to guarantee that he would not strip me of my authority upon my arrival in Persia." (67) Jones also sent a similar letter to Minto, the Governor-General of India. (68)

The Governor-General in reply justified himself by saying that the grave situation in Persia had demanded that steps should be taken urgently, and that he had therefore decided to send Malcolm to Tehran for preparatory negotiations and to advise the Persian government of Jones's arrival, adding that Jones must be patient and await the results of Malcolm's mission. (69) At the end of April 1808, the East India Company's mission arrived in Muscat, but Malcolm, in a hurry to conclude his discussions and proceed to Persia, found himself unable to meet the ruler. However, while ashore he did meet the ruler's closest adviser, Mohammed Gholam, and told him of the measures the Indian government intended to take to stop the menace of a French attack, explaining that the ruler of Muscat should maintain his friendly relations with France, but that he should know that the fact that the East India Company allowed him to do this did not mean that they discharged him from assisting and supporting them. When Mohammed Gholam tried to point out to Malcolm that Muscat was neutral in the dispute between Britain and France, Malcolm

(67) IOR, G/29/25, Jones to Duncan, Bombay, 28 Apr 1808.

(68) IOR, G/29/25, Jones to Minto, Bombay, 28 Apr 1808.

(69) IOR, G/29/27, Minto to Jones, 28 May 1808.

was annoyed, and retorted that that was all very well if the French did not come near the Gulf or the Indian coast; but if this did happen, and he did not demonstrate total loyalty to Britain, he would certainly be treated as an enemy. Mohammed Gholam suggested to Malcolm that he should wait to hear the ruler's views on this, but Malcolm, not having time to listen to them, refused and decided to leave for Persia.⁽⁷⁰⁾

Malcolm's high-handed manner in Muscat was quite at odds with Minto's instructions to him. On hearing of it, Minto commented "Malcolm's way of going about his task in Muscat indicates a basic flaw in his behaviour as a whole."⁽⁷¹⁾ Malcolm's attitude in Muscat did not in fact affect the attitude of the ruler, who wanted to maintain his close links with the British, or at least to obtain British assistance in countering the recurrent threat to his country from the Wahabis. Malcolm arrived at Bushire on 10 May 1808, and was warmly received by the governor and officials of the port.⁽⁷²⁾ He adopted the same high-handed manner in Persia that he had with the ruler of Muscat, apparently believing threats rather than the use of diplomacy to be the only way to achieve the object of his journey. It was Malcolm's military background that encouraged him to employ this method and he believed that a military demeanour would impress the Persian officials more than entreaties and pleas. In his view, mild manners would reinforce the Persians' exaggerated notion of their own strength, and convince them of his weakness.

{70} IOR, G/29/27, Malcolm to Minto, Muscat, 1 May 1808.

{71} Kelly, S B, op cit, p 89.

{72} BA, SPDD 237, Malcolm to Edmonstone, 20 May 1808.

In the light of this, Malcolm decided not to go to Tehran himself, but to remain in Bushire and deputise Captain Pasley, an officer of the mission, to go in his stead and meet officials there. On 19 May 1808 Captain Pasley set off for Tehran taking with him a declaration from Malcolm to the Persian ruler's ministers in which he accused the Persian ruler of breaking the two agreements of 1801 by receiving a French mission at his court. The declaration requested the Persian ruler to expel General Gardane and the members of his mission from Persia, otherwise Malcolm as representative of the Indian Governor-General in Persia would not come to Tehran. The declaration also included a threat that the Indian government would stop all commerce between Persia and India if Gardane remained in Persia, with the added military threat that the Indian government would send an expeditionary force to occupy one of Persia's Gulf islands if the Persian government did not comply with his requests.⁽⁷³⁾

Before Pasley left Bushire for Tehran Malcolm told him:

"The King of Persia and his Ministers will be very desirous of my advance, and it is that very consideration that has made me determine not to visit the Court till I have obtained those concessions that I deem indispensable for the honour as well as the interest of the Country."⁽⁷⁴⁾

Malcolm remained optimistic about the results of his action whilst he thought that Pasley had arrived in Tehran, but things did not turn out as he had expected, for he received a letter from Pasley in Shiraz on 11 June 1808 informing him that the Persian government had stopped him going to Tehran and ordered

⁽⁷³⁾ BA, SPDD, No 237 of 1808, Declaration by Malcolm to Ministers of the Shah, 18 May 1808.

⁽⁷⁴⁾ BA, SPDD, No 237 of 1808, Malcolm to Pasley, Bushire, 8 May 1808.

him and Malcolm to get in touch with the Amir of Shiraz, Hussein Ali Mirza, whom the Persian ruler had charged with looking after Persia's relations with the East India Company.⁽⁷⁵⁾ Malcolm took this badly:

"I was concerned to observe the Ministers there not only throw obstacles in the way of his progress to Tehran, but declared they had orders from the King directing me to carry on my negotiations with the Prince-Regent of the province of Fars, and they had heard, without being moved from their purpose, all those reasons which Captain Pasley had in the most firm and spirited manner urged to satisfy them. I would never consent to an arrangement of so humiliating a nature towards myself and the Government I represented."⁽⁷⁶⁾

Malcolm therefore decided to leave Bushire and go aboard his ship Doris at anchor in the harbour, from which he wrote Captain Pasley that he was resolved to leave Bushire and Persia altogether within a month if Pasley was not permitted to go to Tehran. He ended his letter: "Your return and my immediate embarkation for Boussarah or Kharak will bring these triflers to their senses, and awaken them to all the dangers of their situation."⁽⁷⁷⁾ In fact, the threats of Malcolm and Pasley failed to budge the ruler of Shiraz; Pasley left Shiraz at the end of June for Bushire and he and Malcolm sailed from Bushire for India on 12 June.

Malcolm may be considered to have failed in his task, entirely on account of his high-handedness and arrogance. The Persian government had asked not that he should leave Persia, but that his envoy Pasley, who was in Shiraz, should meet the Amir of Shiraz, who was the Persian ruler's plenipotentiary, so that the Persian government in Tehran might avoid antagonising Napoleon's

(75) IOR, G/29/25, Charles Pasley to Brig-Gen Malcolm, Shiraz, 2, 4 & 5 Jun 1808.

(76) Kaye, Sir J W, op cit, p 240.

(77) (IOR), G/29/25, Malcolm to Pasley, Bushire, 9 Jun 1808.

ambassador. In short, the Persian government, cognisant of the dispute between Britain and France, wanted to negotiate with the envoy of the Indian government and at the same time preserve good relations between Persia and France. Nothing demonstrates this better than the letter the Persian ruler's minister Mirza Shufi sent to the deputy of the emir of Shiraz, Nasrullah Khan, bitterly reproaching him for allowing Pasley to leave Shiraz and for allowing Malcolm to leave Bushire - "it would have been better to have them stay and to acquaint them with the Persian government's position, and to find out Britain's precise intentions" - and urging him to report directly there was any new contact with the British, "for the ruler of Persia desires to learn how the British stand".(78)

The Governor-General of India, Minto, was equally displeased with Malcolm's whole conduct in Persia. In his view, Malcolm was at fault in making his cooperation with the Persian government conditional upon the dismissal of Gardane, as Minto made clear in a letter to the Commander-in-Chief, General Hewitt:

"I must say that my confidence has been quite shaken by the reckless manner Malcolm adopted and the bootless methods he followed. . . Persia is an ally of France, and she cannot be made to withdraw from that commitment except by means of convincing reasons put to her in a conciliatory manner, not by intimidation."(79)

The right way, Minto felt, for Malcolm to induce the Persians to withdraw from their commitment to France would have been to exploit the Persian ruler's fear of Russia, and to acquaint him of the alliance between Russia and France. Had he

(78) IOR, G/29/25, Translation of letter from Mirza Shufi to Nasrullah Khan, received from Jofar Ali Khan, 23 July 1808.

(79) Minto, Countess of (ed), Lord Minto in India: Life and Letters of Gilbert Elliot, first Earl of Minto, from 1807 to 1814, while Governor-General of India, London, Longmans, Green and Co, 1880, p 114 (Minto to Lieut-Gen Hewitt, 30 July 1808).

done this, Malcolm would probably have made the Persian ruler lose his trust in the French.

In a letter to Malcolm himself the Governor-General expressed disapproval of his threats to the Persian ruler and enquired if he had thought of how he would carry them out, "because whatever the Persian ruler's position, we may not diminish our strength or use up our resources in an attempt to persuade that large country, whether it be bolstered by a European army or not." (80)

On his way back to India Malcolm fell to pondering how he might yet achieve his objective and punish the Persian ruler for treating him poorly, and promised himself that he would return to the Gulf and to Persia in particular and take possession of one of the Persian islands and appoint himself its governor. He therefore decided not to stop in Bombay but to go straight to the Governor-General's headquarters at Calcutta to explain to him the situation in which he had been in Persia and put to him his counter-plans and ideas with the least possible delay. (81) "I will apprise Lord Minto of all my hopes and intentions . . . a month with Minto will work wonders." (82)

Before arriving in Calcutta Malcolm had decided how he should present the plan to which he wanted the Indian government's agreement. This was essentially to send a military task force to the Gulf as soon as possible, to capture Kharrack Island, and to turn it into a British base that would be of great importance in monitoring developments concerning the French and

(80) IOR, G/29/25, Lord Minto to Malcolm, 12 Aug 1808.

(81) IOR, L/PS/5/303, Pol Consul, 26 Aug 1808.

(82) Kaye, Sir J W, op cit, p 422 (letter from Malcolm to his wife, 12 July 1808).

any other opponents in that part of the Gulf; Malcolm himself would direct the project.⁽⁸³⁾ He recorded his notions on this project in his journal:

"HMS Doris, near Karrack, 8th July.

"The more I contemplate this island, the more I am satisfied it might be made one of the most prosperous settlements in Asia, situated within a few hours' sail of Bushire, Bunder Begh, Bussorah, Grane, Bahrain and Catiff. It would, if under a just and powerful Government, be the common resort of the merchants of Turkey, Arabia, and Persia. . . The chief recommendations of this island are its fine climate and excellent water. . . I could not contemplate this island without thinking it far from improbable that the English Government might be obliged, by the progress of its enemies in this quarter, to take possession of it, and my mind passed rapidly from that idea to the contemplation of myself as the chief instrument in the execution of this plan."⁽⁸⁴⁾

Malcolm arrived in Calcutta on 20 August 1808 and was able during his interviews with the Governor-General, to explain himself in detail and to convince him and the Indian government of the importance of his plan; his detailed arguments were as follows:

"Firstly. That in the event of an attempt to invade India being made by an European State, it was impossible to place any dependence on the efforts of the King of Persia or the Pasha of Baghdad, unless we possessed the immediate power of punishing their hostility and treachery.

"Secondly. That the States of Persia, Eastern Turkey, and Arabia, were, from their actual condition, to be considered less in the light of regular Governments than as countries full of combustible materials, which any nation whose interests it promoted might throw into a flame.

"Thirdly. That though the French and Russians might, no doubt, in their advance, easily conquer those States, in the event of their opposing their progress, it was their obvious policy to avoid any contest with the inhabitants of the country through which they passed, as such must, in its progress, inevitably diminish the resources of those countries, and thereby increase the difficulty of supporting their armies - which difficulty formed the chief, if not the sole, obstacle to their advance.

⁽⁸³⁾ IOR, G/29/25, Malcolm to Minto, 15 Aug 1808.

⁽⁸⁴⁾ Kaye, Sir J W, op cit, pp 424-5 (citing entry in Malcolm's journal).

"Fourthly. That though it was not to be conceived that the King of Persia or Pasha of Baghdad would willingly allow any European army to pass through his country, but there was every ground to expect that the fear of a greater evil was likely not only to make these rulers observe a neutrality, but to dispose them to aid the execution of a plan which they could not resist, and make them desire to indemnify themselves for submission to a power they dreaded by agreeing to share in the plunder of weaker States - a line of policy to which it was too obvious they would be united, and to which their fear, weakness, and avarice made it probable that they would accede.

"Fifthly. That under a contemplation of such occurrences, it appeared of ultimate importance that the English Government should instantly possess itself of means to throw those States that favoured the approach of its enemies into complete confusion and destruction, in order that it might, by diminishing their resources, increase the principal natural obstacle that opposed the advance of an European army, and this system, when that Government had once established a firm footing and a position situated on the confines of Persia and Turkey, it could easily pursue, with a very moderate force, and without any great risk or expenditure.

"Sixthly. That with an established footing in the Gulf of Persia, which must soon become the emporium of our commerce, the seat of our political negotiations, and a depot for our military stores, we should be able to establish a local influence and strength that would not only exclude other European nations from that quarter, but enable us to carry on negotiations and military operations with honour and security to any extent we desired, whereas, without it, we must continue at the mercy of the fluctuating policy of unsteady, impotent, and faithless Courts, adopting expensive and useless measures of defence at every uncertain alarm, and being ultimately obliged either to abandon the scene altogether, or, when danger actually came, to incur the most desperate hazard of complete failure by sending a military expedition which must trust for its subsistence and safety to States who were known, not only from the individual character of their ruler, but from their actual condition and character, to be undeserving of a moment's confidence.

"Seventhly. That there was great danger in any delay, as the plan recommended could only be expected to be beneficial if adopted when there was a time to mature it and to organise all our means of defence before the enemy were too far advanced; otherwise that momentary irritation which must be excited by its adoption would only add to the many other advantages which our want of foresight and attention to our interests in that quarter had already given to our enemies."⁽⁸⁵⁾

(85) Kaye, Sir J W, op cit, pp 433-4.

Notwithstanding his reservations about his diplomatic style, Minto decided that Malcolm should command the proposed expeditionary force to occupy Kharrack Island on Persia's Gulf coast. Orders were issued to the government in Bombay to make preparations to dispatch the expedition, delegating Malcolm as political and military plenipotentiary. Urgent orders were issued at the same time to Jones' mission to delay his departure for Persia and remain in Bombay.

On this occasion, Jones turned the tables on Malcolm; he did not receive the orders because he had already left Bombay and was at sea bound for Bushire, arriving in October 1808. The Governor-General's orders caught up with him in Bushire, but it would have been impossible to call off the mission even if he had wanted to, and it would have been unwise to withdraw. He had either to achieve the object of his mission or finally to prove that the Persian government was hostile to Britain, thereby providing cause and justification for any future military action.(86)

Malcolm meanwhile left Calcutta for Bombay to take command of the military expedition to Persia. While he was at sea bound for Bombay he received an urgent message from Minto informing him that the Indian government had not had a reply from Jones confirming that he had deferred his trip to Persia, and that Malcolm was to delay his expedition and not to leave Bombay.

"Sir Harford Jones can obtain nothing, we know, but a negotiation may with great ease be spun out to any length - possibly till events themselves negotiate for him, or till the invading armies are in possession of the country. . . I cannot tell at what period the transactions he will report to me will enable me to interpose, and if he goes to Shiraz, or negotiates at Bushire, it appears to me that time must be

(86) IOR, G/29/25, Jones to Minto, Bushire, 1 Nov 1808.

allowed to him. In this interval, Karrack must be necessarily suspended. We cannot commit hostilities on Persia while the King of England is negotiating with the King of Persia. . . It appears to me that you should now go to Bussorah, and apply yourself actively to that branch of our affairs.

"You will be at hand to resume the Persian plans when events admit of it. You will have to withdraw Captain Pasley and all your establishment from Bushire. . . Mr Smith should resume his station. . . I send you my first thoughts on this event, which seems to disconcert all our late plans.. . "(87)

There was no time to be lost; Malcolm ordered his baggage to be transferred to another vessel. He was deeply disappointed, and feelings of anger and bitterness were mingled with his disappointment. Why had Sir Harford Jones sailed for the Persian Gulf? Why had he not waited to learn the results of Malcolm's visit to Calcutta? All the circumstances of the case were now recalled and considered as Malcolm took boat for Calcutta.(88) Unprepared to accept such a drastic reduction of his functions, he wrote to Minto to protest against his decision, and to rail against Jones for having been so perverse as to quit Bombay before the orders to remain had arrived. His protest was successful. On 31 November 1808 the Governor-General, issued urgent instructions to Jones to withdraw from Persia. He also issued instructions to Malcolm to continue with the military expedition. When Malcolm arrived at Bombay on 30 November he found that preparations for the expedition were well advanced; a force of 2,000 infantrymen, cavalry, artillery and pioneers had been assembled, and a further 4,000 men could be supplied if Malcolm needed them. All he needed was the final order from the Indian government to depart for Persia.

(87) Kaye, Sir J W, op cit, ppp 437-8 (Lord Minto to Malcolm, Barrakpore, 30 Sept 1808)

(88) Kaye, Sir J W, op cit, pp 437-8; see also Minto, Countess of (ed), op cit, p 128.

Meanwhile, additional instructions, that he should do his utmost to impress upon the minds of the Persian authorities at Bushire that the aim of the expedition was to do no more than ensure India's safety and security, reached Malcolm in mid-December 1808. If he found that the Persian ruler's attitude to France had changed, he was to offer him a force of up to 5,000 men to assist him to counter a Franco-Russian invasion of Persia. If, on the other hand, the Persian ruler had allowed in forces of the Franco-Russian alliance, he was to make the same offer to the Amir of Shiraz, and likewise with the Ottoman authorities in Iraq. Finally, if he considered it to be in the interests of the Indian government to initiate friendly relations with the Wahabis in the Arabian Peninsula, the British government would have no objection.(89)

The final order was not given, however, for developments in the Gulf area led the Governor-General to stop Malcolm leaving Bombay. Reports arriving from Bushire indicated that Jones had been welcomed and that he was shortly expected to go to Tehran. Further the conflict in Spain between Spanish rebels and French forces had made it difficult for Napoleon to apply his energies to projects in the East, and made it unlikely that French forces would invade India.(90)

"The French forces operating in Spain come from all over Europe. . . Napoleon is supervising military operations. . . an attempt to carry out plans to invade India is doubtful at the present time."(91)

The Indian government's orders for Malcolm's expedition not

(89) IOR, Bengal Sec. Letters Received, Vol 10 (i), Gov-Gen-in-Council to Sec. Committee, Fort William, Dec 1808.

(90) IOR, L/PS/5/541, Sec. Committee to the Gov-Gen-in-Council, Whitehall, 6 Sept 1808.

(91) IOR, L/PS/5/541. Sec. Committee to the Gov-Gen-in-Council, Whitehall, 24 Sept 1808.

to leave Bombay affected Malcolm profoundly. He was bitterly disappointed, but recognised the logic of his position:

"The reports of Jones' progress made me consider it my public duty to incur a short delay rather than risk by precipitation the slightest embarrassment to the public service."(92)

Jones himself had left for Bushire with the encouragement of the Governor of Bombay who was out of sympathy with the Governor-General in regard to Malcolm's expedition against Persia, as indicated in a letter to Jones:

"My dependence for putting all this to right is on you, because I conceive from your firmness, resource and activity, you will be with the King, and we shall hear that you are there before this ill-judged, unjustifiable, rash expedition can sail, which, if it once start for the Gulf, will cost the Company Crores and Crores of rupees, and will produce results I tremble to think of. . ."(93)

On leaving Bombay, Jones resolved to send back the warships accompanying him when he arrived on the Persian coast, and place himself under the protection of the Persian government, to give his mission political consequence and demonstrate his good intentions.(94) On 14 October the mission arrived at Bushire where they were met by a number of senior Persian government officials. Tehran was not reached until 14 February 1809. On 12 March 1809, at Tehran, Jones arrived at a preliminary agreement of friendship and alliance between Britain and Persia.(95) The articles were drawn up by Jones on behalf of H M Government and by Muhammed Shufi and Muhammed Hussein Khan on behalf of the

(92) IOR, Home Misc., Vol 737, Malcolm to G Buchan, Bombay, 24 Dec 1808.

(93) Brydges, H J, An Account of the Transactions of HM Mission to the Court of Persia, 2 Vols, London, np, 1834, Vol I, p 170 (citing Duncan's letter).

(94) IOR, L/PS/5/303, Pol. Consul, 27 Sept 1808.

(95) IOR, L/PS/6/171, Gov. of Bombay to the Court of Directors, 14 Jun 1809.

ruler of Persia and the agreement became the basis for Anglo-Persian relations. In article two the Persian ruler committed himself to abrogating any previous agreement or treaty signed with any European country, and not to permit any European force whatsoever to pass through Persia to India. For their part the British government undertook to assist the Persian government in the event of an invasion by a European country, with military forces if necessary, or with financial support and armaments, until the invading forces were expelled.⁽⁹⁶⁾ Such forces, and the amount of financial assistance, were to be defined in "the final agreement". In the event of Britain signing a peace treaty with the countries concerned, she was to do her utmost to mediate and to arrive at a peace between Persia and those countries. If mediation should fail, she was to fulfil her obligations according to the agreement. It was also agreed that in the event of an attack or invasion of British possessions in India by Afghanistan or any other country the ruler of Persia was to supply a military force for the protection of those possessions.

Articles five and six show how far-sighted Jones was, for he decided to provide for the eventuality of forces of Malcolm's expedition landing on Kharrack Island by ensuring that in the event of British forces arriving in the Gulf and landing, with the Persian ruler's permission, on Kharrack Island or at any other Persian port, the Persian ruler was to receive them in friendship; however the landing of British forces was in no way be construed as granting right of possession. Article seven stipulated that Britain should not intervene in the event of war

⁽⁹⁶⁾ IOR, G/29/26, H Jones to R Dundas, 10 Mar 1809.

breaking out between Persia and Afghanistan unless her mediation was requested by the two parties. The eighth and final article affirmed that this was by nature a defence agreement, emphasising that the Persian ruler was constrained not to enter into any agreements hostile to Britain or which might be injurious to British interests in India.⁽⁹⁷⁾ Jones strove to persuade the Persian ruler to cede the island of Kishm to Britain, with the offer of increased annual financial support if he should accept the proposal, but he did not succeed, for the Persian ruler refused to discuss the ceding of Persian possessions. He did, however, agree to diplomatic representation between the two countries, and to send an ambassador to represent him in England.⁽⁹⁸⁾

That Jones succeeded where Malcolm failed is not attributable to Jones' capability and Malcolm's lack of it so much as to circumstances, which had changed in the previous few months. Jones, learning that the Persian ruler had changed his attitude to France after losing hope that she would assist him against Russia, skilfully exploited these changes. He remained in Tehran until the end of 1810, when he returned to London. Early in 1811 the British government decided that the appointment of the ambassador to Persia should be within their competence and not that of the Indian Governor-General, and ordered that Sir Gore Ousley should succeed Jones as ambassador of the British crown.⁽⁹⁹⁾

It may thus be deduced that the increased British interest

(97) Al-Abid, S, op cit, p 272; see also Aitchison, C U, op cit pp 46-9.

(98) IOR, G/29/26, Jones to Dundas, 31 Mar 1809.

(99) Lorimer, J G, op cit, p 177.

in the Gulf area over the period 1798-1810 was primarily a reaction to the efforts of the French in the Gulf and in Persia to establish their influence and set up strategic bases there that would enable them to threaten British possessions in India. Prior to 1798, the Arabian Gulf - both the Arab and the Persian littorals - constituted a secondary theatre in the conflict between Britain and France regarding the occupation of India; there was in the last two decades of the eighteenth century a noticeable decline in the activity of the East India Company, to the extent that it considered withdrawing its factories from the Gulf. However, political and strategic considerations overrode economic and commercial interests, primarily because the French campaign in Egypt made the British government fear an attack on British possessions in India; Napoleon's presence close to the Red Sea and the Gulf, the two passages to India, was seen as a threat to the East India Company's possessions and interests in the East. The British government therefore considered closing these sea routes and preventing the French from reaching India, by conducting a concentrated diplomatic campaign in the Gulf area and in Persia. These resulted in the establishment of residences in Baghdad and Basra so that the desert mail should be saved from falling into the hands of the French, and the signing of political and commercial agreements with Persia and Muscat that guaranteed the British government influence in those countries.

There were two reasons for the period of reduced British activity and of French superiority in the Gulf and in Persia in the period from 1806 to 1808: the first was the belief that the departure of the French from Egypt meant the end of the threat of a French occupation of India; the second was that the Governor-General of India was forbidden from entering into disputes that

arose among the Arabs during the Wahabi expansion. This British quiescence left the field clear for France to sign friendship agreements with Persia through which the Persian government hoped to recover the possessions that Russia had taken from her. In the period 1807 to 1810 the Indian administration was able to reverse its position, and increase its influence in the Gulf and Persia, by political missions which were able to eliminate French activity from Persia and the Gulf as a whole. Throughout that the real reason for the increased involvement in the Gulf area was fear of the French advancing on India through the Gulf or across Persia to capture her interests and possessions in the East.

In conclusion, it may be said that the decisive diplomatic success achieved by the British in Persia, their attainment of total superiority over their French competitors, and the consolidation of that success with a series of agreements with the rulers of Lahore, Kabul and Indus⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ made the British position in the Arabian Gulf more firmly established than it had ever been before. Britain now considered the Arabian Gulf to be of real strategic importance and essential to the defence of her possessions in India, to be defended against penetration by any other country, which might have threatened India, British maritime commerce, and her desert mail. In order to consolidate their presence in the Gulf and extend total sovereignty over the adjoining coastal areas, the British had however to destroy a new force that had appeared on the political scene in the form of the Qawasim, whose repeated attacks on British shipping constituted a considerable threat to the British presence in the Gulf, and also

(100) IOR, L/PS/6/171, Pol. Consul, 20 Jan 1808.

to the East India Company's mail. The East India Company therefore decided to send a military task force to destroy the Qawasim, the consequences of which will be dealt with in Chapter Six.

C H A P T E R F I V E

Qawasim activity in the Gulf

In Chapter Two we saw that the Qawasim were a race of Arabs descended from the inhabitants of Nejd. Ra's Al-Khaimah, a thriving port, formed the base of Qawasim power along with, but to a lesser extent, the port of Sharjah located a few miles up the coast. Other ports of strategic importance under Qawasim control included Umm Al-Qawa'im, Al-Hemra Island, Al-Rams, Buhail, Ajman, Shinas, Khor Fakkan and Khor Kalba. The tribe's sphere of influence on the Persian coast of the Gulf extended from Kharrack to Bander Abbas, taking in Linga, Luft, Kunk and Ras Al-Heti, enabling them to play an important role in the region's affairs.

To understand the Qawasim's role in the Arabian Gulf two periods will be examined, before and after the Wahabi movement reflecting two phases in their political history. Between 1747 and 1800, the Qawasim established themselves as a separate tribe and increasingly dominated trade on the east coast of the Arabian Gulf. During this period, relations between the Qawasim and the East India Company became strained due to attacks by the Qawasim on Company ships. Reference has already been made in Chapter Two to the fact that the alliance in 1751 between the Qawasim and Mala Ali Shah, Governor of Hormuz, Gamberoon and Minaa benefited the Qawasim more than the Persian leader, making them the strongest naval power in the Gulf and increasing their influence over other tribes round that stronghold. Their activity was not

limited to Arab or Persian targets; in December 1778 a brig belonging to the East India Company fought a running battle for three days with six Qawasim vessels from Ra's Al-Khaimah before being captured and held to ransom for 40,000 Rupees.⁽¹⁾ In January 1779 the Success, en route from Basra to Muscat, was set upon by eight to ten ships of the Qawasim fleet, but Success beat them off. In February 1779, two Qawasim ships attacked another Company vessel but were driven off after an engagement lasting 25 minutes.⁽²⁾ In 1790 the Beglerbeg, bound from Bengal to Bushire, was seized by Qawasim ships off Mussendam, where she remained on the rocks for many years.⁽³⁾ In May 1797, the Bassin Snow, under British colours, and charged with public despatches, was taken off Rams by a fleet of dhows belonging to the Qawasim, and was released two days later. In the following October the cruiser Viper was attacked whilst at anchor in Bushire Roads. The Qawasim dhows had arrived about six days before the Viper, under the command of Sheikh Saleh, who was at war with the ruler of Muscat. His aim was to intercept the Omanis who were at Basra. On the day the Viper arrived, Sheikh Saleh had a meeting with the resident at Bushire, when, after strong professions of friendship, he begged that the British would refrain from protecting the Omani dhows, and requested a supply of balls and powder from Viper, which having been furnished, he treacherously attacked the cruiser, but was beaten off.⁽⁴⁾

Between 1797 and 1804 the Qawasim refrained from attacks on Gulf shipping, but abandoned their restraint in the period to

(1) Lorimer, J.G., op cit, vol I, p 634.

(2) IOR, R/15/1/3, extract of letter from John Beaumont (Resident at Bushire) to the Board, 8 Jan 1779.

(3) Miles, S B, op cit, p 284.

(4) Bombay Selections XXIV, p 302 (Warden).

1820 after they embraced Wahabism and sought further to dominate and control the waters of the Gulf.

The acceptance by the Qawasim of Wahabism did not imply their temporal subjection to Wahabi religious leaders. All the latter asked was payment of alms and one-fifth of booty gained in war; the Qawasim exploited the wider support they gained by embracing Wahabism both to further their long-running war with Muscat and to legitimise their activities against East India Company ships as Jihad. The view of contemporary observers, which has persisted until comparatively recently, that "conversion to Wahabism inflamed [the Qawasim's] naturally warlike disposition"⁽⁵⁾, is at best an oversimplification. Wheigham nonetheless thought that Wahabism transformed the Qawasim into fanatic fighters and violent pirates.⁽⁶⁾ Malcolm said that the Qawasim, after they embraced Wahabism, were savage:

"their job is piracy and their religion reason for every attack they carry out."⁽⁷⁾

There was some respite from their action against shipping at the turn of the century until 1803 when the Company's brig Fly, 14 guns, commanded by Lieutenant Mainwaring was attacked off Qais by La Fortune, commanded by the famous privateer, Captain Lememe. The despatches of the Fly were thrown overboard and three of the officers, Mainwaring, Arthurs, and Maitland, were taken to Mauritius. The other officers, having been released, succeeded in recovering the despatches and sailed for Bombay, but were

(5) Curzon, G, Persia and the Persian Question, London, 1892 (new edition London, Frank Cass, 1966), vol II, p 448.

(6) Weigham, H J, The Persian Problem, London, Isbister and Co, 1903, p 81.

7. Malcolm, J, Sketches of Persia, from the Journal of a Traveller in the East, London, Cassell and Co, 1888, vol I, pp 27-8.

captured on the way by a Qawasim squadron, which carried them to Ra's Al-Khaimah. Here they purchased their liberty and then set out for Bushire, which was reached by two survivors only, Pennel and Jowl, the rest having died on the way.(8)

Within weeks of the sultan of Muscat's death in November the following year the Gulf was up in arms, as the Qawasim strove to usurp the maritime supremacy held by Muscat. They captured Bander Abbas and lay siege to Minab, a few miles away. Masters now of the Straits of Hormuz they could strike at any vessel making for or leaving the Gulf. Two European brigs, Shannan and Trimmer, the property of Samuel Manesty, the resident of Basra, were taken at the close of 1804, and in January 1805 a fleet of 40 Qawasim dhows attempted to close upon the Company's 24 gun cruiser Mornington as she passed Polior Island, but were beaten off.(9) Finally, on 30 April, the Company's cruiser Queen was attacked by a very large Qawasim ship near Muscat on her way up to the Gulf. The Qawasim ship had ten guns and a large crew, but after a severe struggle was beaten off.(10)

Kelly distinguished between the attacks in 1804 - 5 and the earlier ones by the tinge of religious fanaticism which accompanied the latter, although he considered it doubtful that they had been deliberately ordered by the Wahabi amir. The Qawasim of Linga had also been converted to the creed, but as yet neither they nor their kinsmen at Ra's Al-Khaimah seemed to be completely under the amir's thumb: they paid him zakat but they did not conform to the usual Wahabi practice of remitting to

(8) Miles, S B, op cit, p 296.

(9) IOR, L/PS/6/169, vol 1, Governor-in-Council (Bombay) to Court of Directors, 26 Feb 1805..

(10) Miles, S B, op cit, p 305.

Daraeia one-fifth of all booty taken.⁽¹¹⁾

This view is however contradicted by the Bombay documents; writing at the time, Warden declared that the Qawasim had been deliberately ordered to attack European vessels by the amir,⁽¹²⁾ a fact confirmed by a letter that Samuel Manesty sent to the Governor General-in-Council:

"The only possible immediate mode of attempting to check the inimical proceeding of the Qawasim Arabs towards English vessels by negotiations is through the medium of their new master, Shaikh Sood Aziz, the present Wahabi Shaikh and I have consequently determined to dispatch a confederal person to Drauah [Daraeia] charged with a letter to the Shaikh explanatory of the unfortunate events which have taken place, and of the necessity of his causing immediate restitution of the Trimmer, of his issuing positive orders to the Qawasim Arabs, whose chief residence is at Rasel Khima [Ra's Al-Khaimah] to observe a friendly conduct towards British vessels in future, and his declaring the nature of his own sentiments towards the British nation."⁽¹³⁾

After the death of the ruler of Muscat, who had held in check Qawasim sea power aimed against Muscat's interests in the Gulf, the Bombay administration felt its interests in the Gulf to be threatened, especially if Muscat were to accept Wahabism. These fears were enhanced by the interference of the French in Muscat, Accordingly, Captain Seton was ordered to Muscat in 1805 to re-open the residency there.

The Bombay government had previously been content to leave the protection of the Gulf's seaborne commerce to Sultan Bin Ahmed, believing him to be a steady influence in Gulf politics, a view not wholly justified by his conduct. Now, it was clear that if Muscat was still to play this role, some

⁽¹¹⁾ Kelly, J B, op cit, p 106.

⁽¹²⁾ Bombay Selections XXIV, p 300, (Warden).

⁽¹³⁾ BA, SPDD 164A, Manesty, Resident at Bushire, to Wellesley, Governor-General-in-Council, Basra, 2 Jan 1805.

support would have to be lent to the sultan's successor. Seton was ordered to help one of the sultan's two sons gain the succession. He was cautioned by the Governor-General, Sir George Barlow:

"to confine his support to the candidate whose pretensions shall appear to be founded on justice, provided that support can be afforded without the hazard of involving the British Government in hosting with Muscat."(14)

The cruiser Mornington was placed under his orders, to be used in support of any move he might make in concert with the new ruler to recover the ships and cargoes taken by the Qawasim. Little freedom of action was left to Seton.

"In your proceedings towards the pirates you are . . . to be particularly cautious to act with the greatest moderation, to aim at pacification by means of negotiations, and to avoid hostilities at all events. . . . You are likewise . . . to keep clear of all disputes with the Wahabis or either of the two Governments of Turkey or Persia."(15)

A similar warning had been issued to the commanders of the Company's cruisers the previous month.(16) When Seton reached Muscat in May 1805 he found the then ruler Bader Bin Saif had decided to recover Bander Abbas and Hormuz from the Qawasim's allies, the Beni Mu'in, and had started to prepare for a big assault by sea and land. Seton decided to help the ruler in this; on 7 June the Muscat fleet with Mornington arrived off Bander Abbas. After a day's bombardment the garrison yielded. A blockade was then imposed on the Beni Mu'in on Kishm Island; After 70 days Seton succeeded in imposing a treaty on the Qawasim in which they promised to hand over the ship Trimmer and its cargo or the value of the cargo in cash.(17)

(16) IOR, L/PS/1/1, Gov-in-Council to Court 26 Feb 1805.

(17) IOR, Boards Collections, Vol 192, Colln 4155, Seton to Duncan, 25 July 1805.

In October an agent arrived at Muscat from Mola Hussein, deputed by the Qawasim to negotiate a peace for them. The instructions of the Bombay administration having been sought, Captain Seton was informed, that in the event of its becoming a party to the peace, it should extend generally to the whole Gulf, and he was to require full indemnification for losses sustained. Captain Seton, finding it impracticable to obey the orders of the government to obtain the required indemnity without having recourse to hostilities which would have involved the government in general warfare, nonetheless judged it advisable to enter into the agreement with the Qawasim.(18)

At Bander Abbas on 6 February 1806, Seton therefore concluded agreements with the representative of Sultan Bin Saqar, the paramount sheikh, binding the Qawasim to respect the property of the East India Company and its subjects. If they failed to do so they would be liable to a fine of 30,000 thalers. Should the Wahabi amir compel the Qawasim to break the peace at sea, they were to give three months' warning of their intention to do so. In return, Seton dropped the claim to the cargo of the Trimmer and informed the Qawasim representative that his tribesmen would be permitted to resume their calls at ports in British India, from which they had been barred since the attacks on the Shannon and the Trimmer. On 29 April the agreement was approved and signed by the Governor General-in-Council.(19)

It was noteworthy that the agreement did not include restrictions on the Qawasim in their relations with other than British, and it gave the Qawasim the right to ignore this

(18) Bombay Selections XXIV, p 304, (Warden).

(19) BA, SPDD No 181 of 1806, Treaty with Al-Qawasim.

agreement if they were forced to do so, because of the possibility of the Wahabi amir calling for Jihad, although it said they should give three months' notice. This said, the agreement was rejected by the Wahabi leaders because Sultan Bin Saqar did not refer to them when he signed the agreement; he was thus felt not to be trusted and it was decided to depose him and place his uncle Hassan bin Ali, the ruler of Ram.s, as the leader of the Qawasim.

The Qawasim themselves respected the terms of the agreement of Bander Abbas largely because of the presence of the East India Company fleet in the Arabian Gulf for two years, consisting of the Royal Navy ship Fox and eight other boats. The reason for having the fleet there was the French presence in Persia in 1806 and the outbreak of warfare by Persia against Russia.

After the renewal of friendly relations between Britain and Persia, Britain withdrew most of its fleet from the Gulf and it returned to Bombay. The Qawasim promptly resumed attacks on East India Company ships and others in the area. They were able to attack ships near the Indian coast north of Bombay, where Lively (an East India Company ship) engaged in a fierce battle with four ships near the Gujerat coast in April 1808, which were beaten off. Nevertheless, the Qawasim during the subsequent months captured 20 ships in the Arabian sea north of Bombay. This success led them to increase their activity in the area, sending a fleet consisting of 50 ships towards Sind and Kutch.(20)

On the afternoon of 2 May 1808, the Company's cruiser Fury, en route from Basra to Bombay with despatches, was attacked a few
(20) Bombay Selections XXIV, p 305 (Warden).

leagues east of Muscat by two dhows manned by upwards of 500 men. After a chase lasting several hours the dhows tried to board but were driven off by the cruiser's stern guns and musket fire. Three weeks later, on 23 May, the Minerva, owned by Samuel Manesty, ran into a fleet of 55 Qawasim vessels off Ras Musandam. She fought them in a running fight for two days before being taken. Most of the crew and many of the passengers were put to death, but among those spared was Mrs Robert Taylor, wife of Lieutenant Taylor of the residency at Bushire, and her infant son. Minerva was taken to Ra's Al-Khaimah where she was stripped of her cargo and fittings and sent to cruise against other merchant shipping. Most of the captives were later released, among them Mrs Taylor, who was bought by an Arab from the Qawasim chief for 670 thalers and ransomed by the resident at Bushire in October 1809 for the sum of 1,000 thalers.(21)

The Qawasim now began to cruise in squadrons of 15 - 20 vessels, each commanded by a naib, or lieutenant, responsible to Husain ibn Ali, the Wahabi vice-regent. Having little in the way of conventional armaments, the Qawasim dhows usually overcame their prey by closing and boarding. Virtually all who resisted, and even those who did not, were butchered.(22)

The Qawasim continued their activities in the Arabian Gulf area in the autumn of 1808. Five of the Qawasim's ships in October attacked the Nautilus owned by the East India Company by the entrance of the Arabian Gulf; after a battle Nautilus was

(21) BA. SPDD No 232 of 1808, Charles Gowant, Commander of Fury, to Money, Superintendent of Marine, Bombay 10 May 1808.

(22) IOR, SPP/383/7, Ali Monjee (passenger on Minerva) to Seton, July 1809.

able to escape, though with loss of life.⁽²³⁾ Three days later the Qawasim attacked the Sylph armed with eight cannon and belonging to the Bombay fleet when it was on its way back to Bombay from Bushire after escorting Jones on his mission to Persia. The Qawasim captured the Sylph but the presence of Nereide nearby equipped with 36 cannon allowed the British to re-take Sylph and sink the Qawasim ship. The incident left 30 sailors dead from Sylph and three wounded.⁽²⁴⁾ If Sylph had fired earlier at the Qawasim these casualties might have been avoided but the captain had adhered strictly to his orders, which were not to provoke the Qawasim and only to open fire if they attacked English ships.⁽²⁵⁾

The attitude of the Bombay government towards the Qawasim reflects both political and military motives. Politically, the Bombay administration did not want to fight the Wahabi in the Arabian peninsula because the motive for the presence of the British in the area was to counter the aims of Napoleon who had increased his activities in Oman and Persia, not to start a new war against the Wahabi amir. From a purely military point of view, Bombay was too short of equipment to declare war against the Qawasim; the government only had 12 ships in 1808 and the occupation of Kharrack Island in 1808 tied down even these. Hence Jones was ordered to contact the Wahabi amir and to ensure his cooperation against the imminent French advance from the Mediterranean;⁽²⁶⁾ for its part, and despite its lack of

(23) BA, SPDD No 255 of 1808, Report from Bennett, Captain of Nautilus, Bombay, 1 Dec 1808.

(24) BA, SPDD No 251 of 1808, Graham, Commander of Sylph, to Money, Bombay 28 Oct 1808.

(25) Buckingham, J S, Travels in Assyria, Medina and Turkey, London, Henry Colburn, 1829, vol 2, pp 236-7.

(26) PRO, FO/60/1, Canning to Jones, 28 Aug 1807.

warships, the Bombay government felt that the attacks carried out by the Qawasim against ships owned by the East India Company and other British ships in the Arabian Gulf left them with little alternative but to take action. On 11 November 1808 the sloop Teignmouth was ordered to sail to the Gulf to do some training in the area between Muscat and Bushire and

"to destroy or capture any of the Qawasim vessels he may fall in with until their chief may be made sensible of the enormity of their aggression and reduced to solicit a restoration of peace on such terms as the same may safely be extended to them."(27)

The Qawasim naval operations had a dramatic effect on trade in India. Malcolm, charged with defending British interests in the Gulf sent Captain Seton to Muscat as resident in January 1809. Wahabi influence had greatly increased, as evinced by the overthrow of the ruler of Ra's Al-Khaimah, Sultan Bin Saqar, who was deported to Daraeia because in 1806 he had signed the Bander Abbas agreement with the British resident without consulting the Wahabi amir. But the matter that most worried the British authorities was that the new Qawasim leader, Hassan bin Ali, asked the Bombay administration to pay tribute to enable the British ships to pass through the Arabian Gulf. Accordingly Seton proposed to Bombay that the British help the ruler of Muscat to maintain the independence of his country from Wahabism, and to limit Qawasim activity and ensure the free passage through the Gulf.(28) After some hesitation the Governor-General-in-Council agreed to send troops to the Gulf. He planned a major offensive against the Qawasim from the sea to expel them from harbours such as Khor Fakkan, Shinas and others, thus limiting

(27) IOR, SPP/380/354, Minute by Duncan, 24 Nov 1808.

(28) BA, SPDD No 325 of 1809, Seton, resident at Muscat, to Bombay Company, 8 Feb 1809.

danger in the future and enabling the ruler of Muscat to improve his defensive powers.

In May 1809, Captain Wainwright, a Royal Navy officer well acquainted with the Gulf, was appointed to lead the expedition.⁽²⁹⁾ Seton and Duncan, Governor of Bombay, were in favour of the expedition proceeding immediately in order that the Qawasim boats should be caught in their ports in summer. Malcolm, however, was for mounting the expedition in September in order to take advantage of favourable weather conditions. As almost all the timber of which the Arab vessels were built was bought in Malabar, it would also be a good auxiliary measure to the Governor-General's plans not to allow any wood to be exported from that province by the Arab timber vessels without special permission.⁽³⁰⁾ Wainwright supported Malcolm's suggestion⁽³¹⁾ and on 7 September Duncan issued his detailed instructions; Ra's Al-Khaimah was to be the main point of attack, and all the Qawasim war fleet was to be destroyed and any other vessels found there. The aim was to control the coast and, if possible occupy other harbours nearby from Rams to Ras Al-Had. Operations were also to be extended to Linga and other Qawasim ports on the Persian Coast, as well as to Luft, the Qawasim stronghold on Kishm Island. Instructions were given to Bruce the new resident at Muscat to help the ruler to destroy all the naval equipment belonging to the Qawasim in that harbour. Wainwright was to assure the Persians that Britain did not have any intention to occupy any part of their territory and, most important of all, he

(29) BA, SPDD No 339 of 1809.

(30) BA, SPDD No 329 of 1809, Malcolm to Duncan, 1 May 1809.

(31) BA, SPDD No 334 of 1809, President's minute by Duncan, 24 Jun 1809.

was not to interfere with the Wahabi amir.⁽³²⁾ The instructions made clear that military operations, except in cases of emergency on land, should be limited to the sea and to the destruction of the pirate vessels and that crews of the ships and the troops embarked on them should not be employed on shore against Wahabi land forces, as the Governor-General had earlier written:

"We consider it of some importance to manifest as much as possible both by declaration and by action, that the expedition is directed, not generally against the tribe of Wahabis but exclusively against the piratical branch of that tribe which has so long infested the commerce of India and the Gulf."⁽³³⁾

On 14 September the expedition sailed from Bombay. The force consisted of the frigates Chiffonne and Caroline (35 and 36 guns) and five cruisers each with between 10 and 20 guns, as well as the gunboat Fury, a bombarding vessel Stromboli (which sank between India and the Gulf) and three transports carrying about 800 European troops and 500 sepoy.⁽³⁴⁾

Owing to contrary winds the squadron did not arrive at Muscat until 23 October, and then spent 10 days taking on water. On their arrival the news reached them of the death of David Seton on 2 August 1809 at his country house at Bushire where he had been taken from Muscat.⁽³⁵⁾ Wainwright was seconded by Captain Smith of the 65th Regiment; they found the ruler of Muscat unenthusiastic about the expedition and gloomy about its prospects. Ten thousand troops at least, he said, would be needed to take Ra's Al-Khaimah. Nor would the frigate guns be of much use in reducing the fortifications, as the approaches to the

(32) BA, SPDD, No 339 of 1809, Warden to Wainwright, 7 Sep 1809.

(33) BA, SPDD, No 339 of 1809, Minto to Duncan, Fort William, 3 Apr 1809.

(34) BA, SPDD, No 339 of 1809, Expedition against the Qawasim.

(35) BA, SPDD, No 346 of 1809, Regrets on the death of Capt Seton at Muscat.

port were too shallow to allow them inshore.(36)

In early November the fleet sailed from Muscat, and on 11 November the whole armament hove to outside Ra's Al-Khaimah. As predicted, because of the shallowness of the water the frigates were not able to approach the town closer than four miles, but the smaller ships like the cruisers and transports could do better and advanced to within two miles.(37) The Minerva, an armed ship in the hands of the Qawasim, retired to the westward of the town under cover of a tower. She was immediately attacked by boats of the squadron, supported by some of the cruisers, taken and burnt. On the following day the town was bombarded for three hours by the small cruisers and gunboats, with considerable effect, after which, Wainwright reported:

"The place having been reconnoitred and the plan of attack formed, the troops were put in the boats early in the morning of the 13th and rowed towards the shore. The Arabs, who were in the mosque at prayer at the instant the gun boats opened their fire, rushed to repel the apparent attack while the main force consisting of His Majesty's 65th Regiment, the flank companies of the 47th. the marines from the frigates and the small party of artillery with a howitzer and field pieces, advanced towards the southern end. The instant they discerned their mistake the Arabs ran towards the point of debarkation with tumultuous shouts; but the grape shot from the gun boats shook them a good deal, and the troops landing in great style soon overpowered them. Brave and skilful in single combat, they were unable to withstand the shock of adversaries acting in a body. By ten o'clock the Qawasim were driven out of the town, the shells and spherical case shot from two howitzers and five field pieces annoying them very much. The former setting fire to some cadjan huts soon spread the conflagration to the town, a great part of which with the whole of the dhows and naval stores were burnt by four o'clock. Thus, in a few hours was this enterprising and powerful people reduced to poverty and weakness.

"Upwards of 50 dhows were destroyed, 30 of them of very large dimensions. The troops embarked on the next day, and the commanders of the armament had the satisfaction to find

(36) PRO, Adm 1/182, Wainwright to Rear Adm W Drury, La Chiffon, Muscat, 31 Oct 1809.

(37) BA, SPDD, No 346 of 1809, Wainwright Report, 14 Nov 1809.

that the service had been performed with the trifling loss of 4 men killed and 19 wounded."(38)

On 15 November, the expedition sailed to the Persian coast to attack the Qawasim there. Two days later, the expedition was off Linga. The town was abandoned on the approach of the ships and 20 Qawasim vessels, nine of them very large, were destroyed without loss of life. The fleet sailed for the eastern end of Kishm Island to attack Luft, which was held by the Qawasim and their allies, the Beni Mu'in. On the 26th the fleet arrived there and Captain Wainwright tried unsuccessfully to induce their sheikh, Mullah Hussein, to surrender. The next day, Wainwright ordered to troops ashore to attack the town. The Beni Mu'in abandoned the town's defences and retired to a large fort perched on top of a steep cliff. The 11 Beni Mu'in vessels, in the harbour were burnt and the gun boats and the cruiser Fury which had been town within musket shot of the port, bombarded the town and fort. The Sheikh of the Beni Mu'in agreed to yield up the place on the following day to the English together with all the property in it belonging to the ruler of Muscat. Casualties in the storming of Luft had been 80 - 90 killed and wounded on the Qawasim side, and 2 men killed and 31 wounded among the attacking troops.(39)

Having accomplished their designs against Linga and Luft, the expedition returned to Muscat, arriving there on 7 December. There they hoped to be joined by the forces of the ruler for the purpose of attacking Shinas, Kalba and Khor Fakkan. On 24

(38) BA, SPDD, No 346 of 1809, Final Report by Wainwright, 14 Nov 1809.

(39) BA, SPDD, No 350 of 1810, Wainwright to Rear-Adm Drury, Muscat, 7 Dec 1809.

December the expedition sailed from Muscat in company with the Omani vessels and troops and arrived at Shinas on the evening of the 31st.

The task confronting them at Shinas was a formidable one. A massive fort commanded the bay. It was known that the garrison had lately been heavily reinforced and supplied to stand a siege, but what Wainwright and Smith did not know was that the reinforcements were Wahabis despatched by Muttlaq Al-Mutairi after the attack on Ra's Al-Khaimah. On 1 January, Wainwright sent a call to surrender to the garrison. It was rejected with derision and soon afterwards the ship and gunboats began their bombardment. The fort was however too distant from the ships to be reduced by these means. On the 2nd, Wainwright and Smith landed troops with mortars and howitzers, without effect. At dawn on the 3rd, however a breach was made in the curtain wall and soon afterwards one of the towers of the fort collapsed. Despite determined resistance by the defenders, the fort was taken later in the day. It had, however, been so badly damaged that the ruler of Muscat, doubting his ability to defend it, did not think it prudent to keep possession of it. Qawasim casualties were over 400: the attacking forces lost two killed and 11 wounded.(40)

Following this action, the ruler of Muscat expressed some hesitation about attacking Khor Fakkan: he feared a similar obstinate resistance to that made at Shinas, which might not end in the same way. Accordingly, the object was abandoned, there being no British interest connected with it, as there were no

(40) BA, SPDD, No 351 of 1810, Smith to Gov-in-Council, 8 Jan 1810.

pirate vessels based at that port.⁽⁴¹⁾

The fleet spent the remainder of January 1810 on the Gulf searching out and destroying any ships belonging to the Qawasim and any pirate vessels. In February the transport with the bulk of the troops sailed for Bombay while the two commanders examined the islands at the entrance to the Gulf in search of a suitable site for a base.

There are different views on the success or otherwise of the Bombay government expedition. Kelly thought it had not been very successful. Several dozen Qawasim dhows and their chief port had been destroyed, but most of the Qawasim fleet had escaped. At the approach of the expedition the Qawasim had concealed many of their dhows in the deep inlets on the western side of the Musandam peninsula, the existence of which was unknown to the expedition's commanders. Other dhows were away on trading voyages or free-booting cruises to the Red Sea and East Africa. No marked benefit accrued to the sultan of Muscat from the attack on Shinas or the chastisement of the Qawasim. Khor Fakkan and the other harbours on the Shamailiyah coast remained in their hands and he continued to lose ground to the Wahabis, abandoning all Oman north and west of the Batinah to them.⁽⁴²⁾

Warden, on the other hand, wrote at the time that the commanders of the expedition had succeeded in their objective, that of destroying all dhows and large boats of the petty chieftains from Rams to Abookelr, on the Arabian side as well as Mongoo on the coast of Persia. The chief of Kharrack, not

⁽⁴¹⁾ Bombay Selections XXIV, p 306 (Warden).

⁽⁴²⁾ Kelly, J B, op cit, p 123.

having any dhows or large boats, was admonished to refrain from giving encouragement or protection to future pirates.⁽⁴³⁾ It could be argued that Kelly was mistaken in thinking that the operation was unsuccessful because he did not differentiate between military and political results. From a military point of view, the operation succeeded in destroying many of the Qawasim ships in the Arabian Gulf area whether these ships were on the Arabian or the Persian coast. Additionally the cruisers Prince of Wales and Benares were on station in the Arabian Gulf to ensure that there was no further piracy in the area. Hence Warden was able to say:

"It was prevalent opinion in the Gulf, founded on the result of this expedition, that the Qawasim had been rendered quite incapable of committing any further depredation by sea."⁽⁴⁴⁾

But from a political point of view however the mission failed because its leaders had been ordered to destroy the Qawasim without touching the Wahabi in the area, and had not forced any agreement with the Qawasim. The operation did not succeed in restoring to the East India Company the ships that the Qawasim had taken nor in obtaining compensation for the goods that the Qawasim had seized; in short, from the political point of view, the expedition had failed, and the Qawasim had reason to be glad of Wahabi support. This was renewed in May 1814 when Abdulla Ibn Saud succeeded as the Wahabi amir, and Qawasim ships appeared again in force off the northern coast of India, and the Arabian Gulf.

In December 1816, 11 Qawasim ships appeared off the coast of Bombay and looted a dozen vessels. In the same year, three

⁽⁴³⁾ Bombay Selections XXIV, p 307.

⁽⁴⁴⁾ Ibid, p 307.

vessels, sailing from Surat under British pass and colours, were taken in the Arabian Gulf and many of their crew murdered. Many other vessels sailing under British protection were captured, together with the company's armed escort, the Turrarow.⁽⁴⁵⁾ Subsequently the Qawasim engaged and defeated the ruler of Muscat and very nearly took the frigate Caroline (32 guns). A Bombay vessel, sailing under British pass and colours, was captured off Muscat, the greater part of her crew put to death and a ransom exacted for the release of the remainder.⁽⁴⁶⁾

The audacity of the Qawasim increased to such a degree that they attacked the Company's cruiser, Aurora, but stood off when the cruiser fired on them.⁽⁴⁷⁾ The Qawasim did not confine their activities to British ships; they also began attacking European and other vessels in the Gulf. In 1818 the American ship, Persia, was chased and fired upon, and a French schooner from Mauritius was boarded and looted. Warden gave more details about their attitude:

"A deputation was sent to Ra's Al-Khaimah to obtain redress for the capture of the vessel in the Arabian Gulf, which failed. The Qawasim explicitly and boldly declared that they would respect the sect of Christians and their property, but none other; they did not consider any part of Western India as ours beside Bombay and Mangalore; that if we interfered in favour of the Hindoos and other unbelievers of India, we might take all India, and Muscat also, when nothing would be left for them to plunder."⁽⁴⁸⁾

Also in 1818 Qawasim boats landed in Busheab, burnt and plundered the village at the western end of the island, carrying off all the cattle, and killing great numbers of inhabitants; at

(45) Ibid, p 310.

(46) Lorimer, J G, op cit, vol I, p 653.

(47) BA, SPDD No 429 of 1816, Bruce, Resident at Bushire, to Governor of Bombay, Bushire, 8 Feb 1818.

(48) Bombay Selections XXIV, pp 310-11.

the close of the year they entered the harbour of Aseeloo, took five large laden buggalows, valued at three lakhs of rupees, and murdered their crews. The inhabitants of Bushire were thrown into the greatest consternation fearing that the Qawasim were contemplating an attack. The Governor with great difficulty restrained the inhabitants from leaving, and retiring further into the interior. The Qawasim fleet remained at Aseeloo for 12 days and then proceeded to Congoon, but finding the place prepared to receive them, they weighed anchor, and, standing to northward, anchored off Daire, where they landed and destroyed a number of date trees. They were repulsed, however, by the inhabitants, and obliged to take to their boats. Generally, however, they met with little real opposition and their vessels proved more speedy than their opponents.

The expedition of 1809, then, had demonstrably not been as successful as Warden made out; far from being "rendered quite incapable of committing any further depredation by sea" the Qawasim had renewed their activity with greater vigour over a wider range; attempts to cajole them into peaceful ways by the despatch of envoys from Bombay in 1816 had been a total failure. The situation was intolerable; but it was open to improvement. Following the instructions of the Ottoman sultan, Egyptian forces had penetrated the Arabian peninsula and were about to fall on the Wahabi power base in Daraeia; were the Qawasim to lose the backing of the Wahabi amir, an opportunity arose for their activities to be halted provided sufficient military power was brought to bear. The decision to do so was taken in Bombay in the summer of 1818.

C H A P T E R S I XThe 1819 expedition and the pacification of the Gulf

The Bombay government's intention to end the practice of piracy in the Gulf, whether it be off the Arab or Persian shores, would necessarily affect its relations with Persia and Turkey if its operation was arduous and lengthy; for political as well as military reasons, the campaign had to be executed quickly as well as efficiently. Accordingly the Governor of Bombay, Sir Euan Nepean, began to collate all the necessary information on the Gulf area relating to the Qawasim ports, their allies, their naval and military power and especially their political disputes. His main source of information was a report presented by Captain Robert Taylor (Assistant Political Attache in the Turkish territory) in the summer of 1818. The report dealt with the main ports used by pirates on the Gulf coast, namely Ra's Al-Khaimah, Al-Jazira, Al Hamra, Umm Al-Qawain, Ajman, Sharjah, Dubai and, to the north, Al Zabara, Khor Hassan, Al Katif, as well as Linga, Kharrack, Nakhiḷu, Luft and Bander Abbas on the Persian coast.

Nepean compared this report with one presented by Brigadier General Lionel Smith who had been joint commander in the British campaign against the pirates in 1809. Smith believed that in order to achieve the destruction of the Qawasim, a campaign had to be launched with a force of no less than 3,000 men, supported by artillery. In addition to these reports, Nepean received some help and advice from a number of naval officers who had worked in the Gulf area and had been involved in operations against the Qawasim in 1816. These officers informed him that the Arab seafaring tribes on the Arabian coast of the Gulf were in a position to provide him with no less than 89 large ships and 161

small ships, as well as a fighting force of approximately 10,000 men.(1)

In September 1818, after studying and discussing with members of his command all the information he had at his disposal relating to the Qawasim's naval power, Nepean submitted a comprehensive report to the Governor-General of India, the Marquis of Hastings. Accompanying his report was a proposal for the immediate preparation of a punitive military expedition against the Qawasim. Upon the successful outcome of this expedition Britain would then set up a naval base in the Gulf, thereby enforcing a system of indirect protectorship by making the ruler of Muscat responsible for the pirate coast and Bahrain.(2)

On 7 November 1818, the Governor-General sent his reply to Nepean, expressing his personal conviction that piracy in the Gulf had to be destroyed, but adding that the expedition needed 5,000 men and not 3,000 as proposed by Smith if it were to accomplish its mission successfully. Such a vast fighting force, the Governor-General added, could not be supplied by India at that time. He therefore advised that such an expedition be postponed until the following year. He suggested that the delay might prove to be beneficial to the British Government, especially following the recent news about the probable fall of Daraeia, the Wahabi stronghold, to Ibrahim Pasha.(3) Such an event would necessarily weaken the power of the Qawasim, or at least decrease the amount of supplies and aid they received from

(1) IOR, G/29/32, Gov-in-Council to Court, 9 Aug 1820.

(2) BA, Selection on Pirates in the Persian Gulf, Vol 74, 1819.

(3) IOR, G/29/38, Gov-Gen-in-Council to Gov-in-Council, Bombay, 7 Nov 1818.

the Wahabis as Ibrahim Pasha advanced further in the Gulf territory. The Marquis of Hastings also stated that in his opinion the first step towards the destruction of piracy should be to seek the cooperation of Ibrahim Pasha.⁽⁴⁾ This could be done by sending a special envoy to congratulate him on his victory and invite him to join forces with the British against the Wahabi pirate ports on the southern shores of the Gulf. The British navy would bombard the ports from the sea, while Ibrahim Pasha's forces would attack them from the land temporarily making Ra's Al-Khaimah their garrison town. As to the proposal that the British should establish a naval base in the Gulf at the end of the campaign, handing Bahrain over to the ruler of Muscat, the Governor-General would only decide on this point when the expedition was imminent.

The role of the Bombay Governor, he stressed, was to closely observe the victories of Ibrahim Pasha with the aim of using them to serve British interests in due course; at the same time, care had to be taken that these victories did not lead to the occupation of the Gulf sheikhdoms and Egyptian control of the Gulf itself, similar to what had happened in the case of the Red Sea. It was, therefore, important for the Governor-General to show sympathy with Ibrahim Pasha at this stage.⁽⁵⁾

This reply from the Governor-General did not meet with approval from the Governor of Bombay. The Marquis of Hastings perceived the future stability and peace of the Gulf as linked to Turkish-Egyptian influence, but this did not appeal to Nepean who approved of cooperating with Ibrahim Pasha solely to attack

(4) BA, SPDD No 310 of 1819, Gov-Gen-in-Council to Bombay Company, 7 Nov 1818.

(5) IOR, L/PS/1/5, Draft to Gov-Gen-in-Council, 5 Jan 1818.

the pirate ports. Nepean believed that peace and stability could be achieved only through the expansion and consolidation of the power of the ruler of Muscat; this could be achieved by awarding him Bahrain and placing under his control the area north of Ra's Al-Khaimah. The region stretching from Ra's Al-Khaimah in the east to Kuwait in the west could then be placed under Turkish-Egyptian protection. Nepean saw this demarcation as being necessary in order not to stretch the ruler of Muscat's resources, enabling him to face up to his enhanced responsibilities and to contribute towards the expense of setting up the British base in the Hormuz Straits, which Nepean believed to be essential.(6)

At a meeting between Nepean and the other members of the Council, on 13 April 1819, Nepean tried to justify his view that it was necessary to place Bahrain under the influence of the ruler of Muscat, even if force had to be used; indeed, force might serve as punishment of the ruler for his readiness to cooperate with the Qawasim. Gradually, two opposing groups began to emerge at the meeting: those who supported Nepean and those who were opposed to the idea of placing Bahrain under Omani rule. Among the latter group was Francis Warden; he believed that the rise in piratical activity was largely due to foolish policies followed by the ruler of Muscat towards the independent tribes that had often threatened his sovereignty. In Warden's opinion, the ruler ought to show more political flexibility towards these tribes; he also believed that the proposed military campaign should be kept to a minimum level, and its purpose should be limited to replacing Hussein Bin Ali as the paramount sheikh of

(6) IOR, P/383/40, Draft letter from Nepean to Gov-Gen-in-Council, no date.

the Qawasim by Sultan Bin Saqar who was not a Wahabi and whom he believed to be the only man able to cooperate with the ruler of Muscat with other Arab tribes, as well as with Persia and Turkey. Warden agreed with Nepean on the necessity of establishing a base on the island of Kishm, but thought that negotiations in that respect should be conducted with the Persian government and not with the ruler of Muscat.(7)

By the end of the meeting, two of the Council's members, Guy Prendergast and Alexander Bell, agreed that the points Warden had put forward deserved closer attention. Nepean, however, was not prepared to be persuaded to withdraw his advocacy of reliance on the sultan of Muscat; he did agree with Warden on one point, namely that the British government should agree with Ibrahim Pasha to the establishment of a base in Ra's Al-Khaimah as suggested earlier by Hastings. However, this was to be an unwritten agreement, made by special envoy of the Governor-General, the envoy also to present a ceremonial sword.(8)

The man chosen for the mission was Captain George Forster Sadlier of the 47th Regiment, selected by Hastings, Governor-General, to convey to Ibrahim Pasha an address of congratulation on the reduction of Daraeia and the proposal for joint action against the pirates.

On 14 April 1819, Sadlier received written instructions to sail in the Company's cruiser Thetis, a brig of war mounting 14 guns, commanded by Captain Tanner, to land on the Arabian coast, with two letters, one from Lord Hastings and the second from Sir

(7) BA, SPDD No 465 of 1819, Board's minute, 29 Apr 1819.

(8) IOR, P/383/40, minutes by G Prendergast, 20 Apr 1819; also BA, SPDD No 311 of 1819, minutes by Bell and Prendergast.

Euan Nepean, together with the ceremonial sword. Specifically, he was to see if Ibrahim Pasha would avail himself of the British Government's help in the reduction of the Qawasim who had become adherents of the Wahabis. If he agreed, the suggestion was that he should besiege Ra's Al-Khaimah by land and the British would attack it from the sea; the Egyptians would then be allowed to garrison the town.(9)

Sadlier sailed from Bombay to Muscat; the wind was light so that he reached Muscat only on 7 May. The next day Sadlier met the ruler of Muscat, offered him presents and the proposal for joint action by the British, Omanis and Egyptians against the pirates.(10) After several 'interviews the ruler agreed to cooperate with the British against the Qawasim, but he strongly refused any alliance between the Omanis and Ibrahim Pasha as he detested the Turks as much as he did the Wahabi; also he believed that some of the Qawasim chiefs were prepared to submit to him and that consequently British and Omani forces would suffice. He himself had for many years coveted the island of Bahrain with its pearl fisheries and trade, and he feared that Ibrahim Pasha planned to occupy it.(11) While the discussions were proceeding, Egyptian forces arrived at Al Hassa, which served to increase his suspicions.

After a long conference, Sadlier failed completely to persuade the ruler of Muscat to join a tripartite alliance between the British, the Omanis and Ibrahim Pasha: they agreed

(9) BA, SPDD No 311 of 1819, Newnham, Acting Chief Secretary to Capt Sadlier, 13 Apr 1819.

(10) BA, SPDD No 312 of 1819, Sadlier to the ruler of Muscat, 15 May 1819.

(11) BA, SPDD No 321 of 1819, Sadlier to Gov-in-Council, Muscat 15 and 17 May 1819.

that Omani troops would not be expected to act in conjunction with the Ottoman forces. The principal object of the ruler was to prevent the introduction of the Turkish army to the Gulf, but as he could not field an equivalent force, this point was not acceptable to the British. He naturally turned his thoughts to forming a barrier against any future encroachments of Ibrahim Pasha, and expressed his hopes that he would find the British government ready to support him in this. Sadlier's reply was invariably that the good relationship which had hitherto existed between Mohammed Ali Pasha and the British government were to be considered the best pledge that could be offered for the future relations which the British government expected and hoped to see established between Ibrahim Pasha and the ruler himself.

Sadlier spent 11 days at Muscat, and it was agreed that Omani forces would co-operate with the British to eliminate piracy in the Gulf; the ruler of Muscat himself would accompany the expedition in a warship and take with him at least 1,000 men who would land and act in conjunction with the British force. He also agreed to cooperate by land with a force of 7,000 infantry, 130 horses and 1,500 camels to proceed by the passes above Ra's Al-Khaimah and invade. Further, he would supply boats to assist in the disembarkation of troops and baggage; he said that he could not promise a greater number than 70, but that if possible he would increase this to 100 boats, each capable of conveying from 30 to 50 men, plus water and firewood, a sufficiency of which would be supplied at his expense.

So far, Sadlier's mission was proving successful; Sadlier himself, in the course of his discussions became convinced that the power of the Qawasim was on the decline since the overthrow

of the Wahabi amir had given rise to a lack of confidence in the different sheikhs towards one another, and a determination of each to advance his own interests if necessary at the expense of his neighbour's. He was therefore was convinced that the situation was very favourable; the lack of a leader of talent and the confined state of the Qawasim since the overthrow of the Wahabis was likely to breed dissension among them, and very few of those who escaped from Daraeia had joined them.

Reporting back to Bombay, Sadlier offered his estimate of the disposition of the Qawasim forces thus:

From the remains of the Wahabi force	approx	300 men
At Bukha		20 men
" Shaam		150-200 men
" Rams		200 men
" Ra's Al-Khaimah and Hamrah, 25 large boats, 71 small and		3000 men
" Oomul Goweyn (ie Umm Al-Qawain), 1 large boat, 30 small and		400 men
" Ajman, 4 large boats, 35 small and		1000 men
" Fusht and Sharjah 12 large boats, 150 small and		1280 men
" Dubai, 4 large boats, 100 small and		800 men

Sadlier's report was sent before he left Muscat for Bushire aboard the cruiser Mercury, which he reached on 7 June. He wished to have information in respect of the situation of the Pasha's camp and also the right roads to Daraeia; he had been informed prior to his arrival that Ibrahim Pasha was preparing to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca immediately after the month of Ramadan, and that it was probable he would return thence to

(12) BA, SPDD No 312 of 1819, Sadlier to Gov-in-Council, 17 May 1819.

Egypt, an officer having been appointed to whom control of Daraeia would be entrusted in Ibrahim Pasha's absence.(13)

It was imperative for the success of his mission that Sadlier make contact with Ibrahim Pasha before his return to Egypt; though the prevailing winds at that season were unfavourable, Sadlier trusted that he would be able to accomplish this part of the task allotted to him. Accordingly, he left Bushire on 16 June for Al-Kateef, reaching the Arab coast at noon on 18 June, but unfortunately he discovered that his pilot was not well acquainted with the coast. He therefore despatched Sheikh Khamees with a letter to the Turkish governor at Al-Kateef, requesting a pilot to take them to Al-Ojeer, which was nearer to Al-Hassa. On 21 June Sadlier landed at the village of Seahat, about three miles below Al-Kateef. He found that the Turkish officers there had little idea of the plans of Ibrahim Pasha; they had been separated from him for a long time and their thoughts and hopes were centred on the expectation of being recalled.(14)

On 28 June 1819 Sadlier left Seahat accompanied by Moushraf Bin Areer and bedouins from the Ajman tribe, despite the Turks' advice not to trust or depend on the bedouins. Sadlier's decision to accompany Bin Areer to Al-Hassa proved, in the event, that the protection of bedouins was much more effective than that of the unhelpful Turks. It was a difficult journey and Sadlier was troubled by fatigue; he reached Al-Hassa on 11 July 1819 and took up residence at the fort of Hufuf. After several visits to

(13) BA, SPDD No 312 of 1819, Sadlier to Gov-in-Council, Bushire, 9 Jun 1819.

(14) BA, SPDD No 312 of 1819, Sadlier to Gov-in-Council, Al-Hassa, 17 July 1819.

the Governor of Quaif, Sadlier learned that the ruler of Al-Hassa had received orders to gather the remaining Turkish soldiers (approximately 250) and send them to Ibrahim Pasha's camp at Sedeer near Daraeia where the Pasha intended to remain for one month; it was also confirmed that Ibrahim Pasha had attacked and totally destroyed Daraeia, leaving nothing but smouldering remains.

Sadlier was disappointed to hear that Ibrahim Pasha had left Al-Hassa before his arrival, for he had expected to meet him there; after a 10 day stay, he left Al-Hassa on 21 July 1819 for Daraeia, where he hoped to join him. After another exhausting trip through the desert he arrived there on 13 August 1819. But the news awaited him that Ibrahim Pasha had already left his nearby camp and had gone ahead to Hejaz. Sadlier remained for 10 days in Daraeia, inspected the ruined town, and on 24 August 1819 he resumed his journey in pursuit of Ibrahim Pasha. After a 10 day march Sadlier arrived at Aneeze, to find it in ruins as he had found Daraeia. After two further days he arrived at Ras where Ibrahim Pasha had set his camp, hoping that this would be the last station in his search, and eager to get back to Bombay by way of Basra. But a further disappointment awaited him; he found that Ibrahim Pasha had left Ras for Medina the day that he had arrived in Aneeze. At that point, Sadlier requested the Pasha's commissioner, Mohamed Efendi to convey his respects to Ibrahim Pasha and appoint him an escort to accompany him back to Basra, thus ending his arduous journey. Mohamed Efendi would not comply with Sadlier's request on the pretext that he had no instructions and could not take responsibility for such a

dangerous matter alone.(15)

In the absence of any alternative, and still hoping to complete his mission successfully, Sadlier accompanied the Turkish garrison heading for Medina; at Elyar Ali, three miles from Medina, he finally caught up with Ibrahim Pasha and gave him the messages from the Governor-General. The Pasha seemed to take interest in the documents and scanned them carefully and appeared to be very pleased with the present of the sword from the Governor-General. He was then told that the destruction of Daraeia was in compliance with orders to his father, Mohamed Ali, directly from the Ottoman court. While this proved the Ottoman government's determination to crush the Wahabis, the Pasha told Sadlier that he considered the Governor-General's proposals of such importance that he would have to seek his father's opinion on them. He added that he had no authorization to give replies to official communications without Mohamed Ali's instructions. Sadlier also learned from the Pasha that the ruler of Muscat had written offering the services of his ships against the Qawasim whenever the Pasha should need them, and that the Pasha had written back to him twice following the fall of Daraeia and the advance of his force towards Al-Hassa informing him of his plans, but that the ruler of Muscat had taken no further action.(16) Sadlier accordingly decided to remain in Arabia until he received Ibrahim Pasha's written reply to the Governor-General's letter. Knowing that communication with Cairo could be very slow, Ibrahim left Ebyar Ali for Jeddah on the Red Sea. having agreed that he would meet Sadlier there after he had heard from Cairo. Sadlier

(15) BA, SPDD No 312 of 1819, Sadlier to Henry Salt, H M Consul General Egypt, 10 Sept 1819.

(16) Sadlier, G F, Diary of a Journey across Arabia during the Year 1819, Bombay, Education Society's Press, 1866, p 99.

himself arrived at Jeddah on 27 September, having thus traversed the Arabian peninsula; he failed to get any information from the Pasha with regard to the reply from Cairo which arrived on 19 October 1819.

Sadlier waited for several days for a second meeting with the Pasha; he then learned that the Pasha was leaving for Egypt on 16 November. He was determined to meet the Pasha once more before his departure and on 12 November Sadlier was finally successful. The Pasha once more apologized for his delay in giving his reply to Sadlier and gave as an excuse his inability to find a trustworthy Arab scribe. He added that when his reply was ready, it would include his regrets that such communication between the British and Turkish governments had not taken place earlier as this would have enabled him better to appreciate the British point of view. He also expressed to Sadlier his wish to send as a gift to the Governor-General an Arab stallion and mare, and to present Sadlier with an Arabian horse in appreciation of his services; further, he had given instructions that a boat be made ready to take him to Mocha. Ibrahim Pasha then enquired of Sadlier as to the Governor-General's full title and form of address, upon which Sadlier gave him a copy of a letter that he was carrying which contained these details. Among the titles attributed to the Governor-General was that of "the Honourable"; this did not appeal to Ibrahim Pasha, who considered such a title to be worthy only of the Prophet Mohamed. In order to maintain the spirit of goodwill, Sadlier quickly changed it to "the Illustrious". A few days later Sadlier learned through one of the Pasha's relatives that the latter's gifts to the Governor-General and to himself had already been loaded on the boat; he was then given some items of accessories and fixtures that were

to accompany the Governor-General's horses. These consisted of a headstall, a breastplate, a silver-mounted gilt saddle and a pair of silver stirrups. On examining these, Sadlier found that they were not new and indeed that they were well-worn; he asked that the bearer take them back, and requested a meeting with Ibrahim Pasha. This proved impossible; he finally met the Pasha's private surgeon, to whom he proceeded to explain why he considered these items to be unworthy of a man in such an exalted position as Hastings.⁽¹⁷⁾ To Sadlier's great surprise, orders were given by Ibrahim Pasha for the horses to be unloaded from the boat and for Sadlier himself to leave forthwith for Mocha; worse still the Pasha then declared his intention upon his arrival in Egypt to cancel the reply he was to give Sadlier and to send a different message to the Governor-General, as well as returning his sword. There was nothing further for Sadlier to do; when on 1 January 1820 the cruiser, Prince of Wales arrived in Jeddah, en route for Mocha, Sadlier decided to embark on it. From Mocha he took ship for Bombay which he reached on 5 May 1820, after a journey across Arabia that had lasted two years.⁽¹⁸⁾

Looking back on these events it is clear that Ibrahim Pasha had had no real wish to meet Sadlier: hence his continuous movement across the desert; his abrupt dismissal of Sadlier and of the Governor-General's proposals were more profound than his disapproval of one of the Governor-General's titles, or the fact that he was displeased by the comment on the quality of the horses he was sending as a gift to the Governor-General, nor was

⁽¹⁷⁾ BA, SPDD No 312 of 1819, Sadlier to H Salt, Jeddah, 14 Nov 1819.

⁽¹⁸⁾ Sadlier, G F, op cit, p 134.

it the fact that the horses' accessories were returned by Sadlier, although that might have been the pretext. The real reason that Ibrahim Pasha was determined to avoid meeting Sadlier in Jeddah was that he had received instructions from his father in Cairo, in which Mohamed Ali told his son not to take Sadlier too seriously, but only to behave carefully and wisely, this was advice which reflected the policy of the Ottoman Sultan in Constantinople.⁽¹⁹⁾ Suspicious as the Turkish government was of British intentions in the Gulf, their apprehension was to some extent justified, for the British had already demonstrated their readiness to act on their own and not to wait for a favourable response to their overtures to Ibrahim Pasha. While the latter had been discussing presents with Sadlier, the British attack on Ra's Al-Khaimah had already begun.

During the Sadlier expedition across the Arabian desert, no message whatever had reached Bombay from him after his departure from Hufuf. This made the Bombay Government Council initially hesitant in arriving at a decision with respect to the military expedition to eliminate the Qawasim. However the reports that had reached the council from their sources in Bushire and earlier from Sadlier himself suggested the unlikelihood of Ibrahim Pasha cooperating with the British. Accordingly, Egyptian-British cooperation was excluded, and they contented themselves with Omani support exemplified in the cooperation of the ruler of Muscat, who had not welcomed the proposed alliance with Ibrahim Pasha as previously mentioned.

To avoid any misunderstanding of the objectives of the

(19) NA, Abdin, N/O 267 letter from Ali Pasha, the Grand Vizier Constantinople, to Mohamed Ali, the Viceroy of Egypt, 31 Mar 1820.

Bombay government military expedition on the part of the Persian government, influenced as it was by the Sheikhs of Linga, Mogoo, Kharrack and Shiro, who - it was believed - had recently thrown themselves into piracy operations,⁽²⁰⁾ Nepean sent Dr Andrew Jukes, the superintending surgeon to the expedition, as an envoy to Muscat, in October 1819. He was to enquire of the ruler, El-Sayed Said, whether he would allow the British expedition to land on Kishm island and provide them with provisions and boats for disembarking the equipment and artillery. He was also commissioned to impart to the ruler of Muscat the magnitude of operations that would be carried out by the expedition, and find out whether he would take part in it, hopes of Ibrahim Pasha's participation being faint, if not utterly excluded. Dr Jukes reported that the ruler of Muscat was perfectly willing to cooperate, and that he had ordered that provisions and other requisites be collected at Bander Abbas, in addition to fitting up 70 boats to disembark the soldiers and equipment. He had also sent 4,000 men from the tribes to march overland towards Ra's Al-Khaimah. He promised he would himself come out with three ships and 600 to 800 men to take part in the naval attack upon Ra's Al-Khaimah.⁽²¹⁾ Conciliatory letters next were sent from the Governor of Bombay to the Governor of Shiraz and to the Persian ruler in Bushire explaining to both of them the role and targets of the military expedition, and urging them to cooperate with the Bombay Government in the extermination of piracy in the Gulf. Major General Sir William Grant Keir was selected to be the political and military commander of the expedition to the Gulf; at his disposal were a little over 3000 men; and the fleet

⁽²⁰⁾ Lorimer, J G, op cit, vol I, p 660.

⁽²¹⁾ IOR, P/383/43, Jukes, Acting Chief Secretary, to Keir, 1 Dec 1819.

consisted of the following warships, cruisers and transport:

Warships

HMS Liverpool (50 guns)

HMS Eden (24 guns)

HMS Curlew (18 guns)

Cruisers

Teignmouth (16 guns)

Ternate (16 guns)

Benares (16 guns)

Aurora (14 guns)

Nautilus (14 guns)

Mercury (14 guns)

Vestal (10 guns)

Ariel (10 guns)

Psyche (10 guns)

In addition, there were 20 transport vessels; three of the cruisers (Ternate, Mercury and Psyche) were already in the Gulf, while the rest assembled in Bombay.(22)

On 27 October 1819 formal orders were given to Keir to proceed to Ra's Al-Khaimah and seize it, to destroy the military fleet of the Qawasim and leave them without any vessel that could be used in any military or naval action.(23) He was also to leave a British garrison at Ra's Al-Khaimah whether Ibrahim Pasha took part in the attack or not. Furthermore, Keir was

(22) BA, SPDD No 312 of 1819, Historical sketch of the Qawasim from 1819 to 1831 by Lt. S Hennen.

(23) BA, SPDD No 314 of 1819, instructions issued by Bombay Government.

ordered after the occupation of Ra's Al-Khaimah to continue to Rams, Sharjah, Al Jazera, Al-Hamra, Ajman and other ports supporting the Qawasim, and to destroy the ships there even though these might be at such ports as Linga and Kharrack on the Persian side.

There were restrictions imposed upon the Bombay forces, precluding them from any operations far from the places where the pirates' vessels were stationed, save in exceptional circumstances. With respect to the Persian coast, they were to observe extreme prudence in order not to infringe the Persian government's sovereignty.⁽²⁴⁾ The final military instructions were for Keir to seek the most appropriate place for erection of a permanent British base in the Gulf zone; as regards political measures to be taken by Keir, these would be provided for later on; this was due to the divergence of opinion in the government council in Bombay already referred to.

If during the period the political attitude of the British government in Bombay vis-à-vis the Gulf and its countries changed, it is also true that the political attitudes of the Qawasim and others evolved. Thus, when Hassan Ibn Rahama, the ruler of Ra's Al-Khaimah, came to learn of the military expedition currently being prepared in Bombay, of the fall of Daraeia at the hands of Ibrahim Pasha and the decline of Wahabi influence and of the attempt by Sultan Bin Saqar, the ruler of Sharjah, and Rashed Ibn Hemaïd, the ruler of Dubai, both of whom had been considered the Qawasim's allies, to make an alliance with the ruler of Muscat, he resolved to ask for aid and

(24) Lorimer, J G, op cit, vol I, p 661.

assistance from the ruler of Linga. Ra's Al-Khaimah, the most strongly fortified town on the Gulf coast, stood on a narrow isthmus running north-east. Some three or four miles in length and less than a mile wide, it had the open sea on one side, and on the other, a creek which provided safe anchorage for dhows. On the sea side it was protected by a long sand bank like a breakwater enclosing a strip of deep water, where light dhows could anchor close below the town walls. At the mouth of the creek, there was a bar only passable at high tide, which rose and fell about six feet. Warships, such as the Liverpool, thus had to lie in the open roadstead, where they would be exposed to the force of the northeast wind.

In the years following the 1809 expedition, fortifications had been built in the form of walls with crenellated towers at intervals, the towers mounted with cannon taken from captured ships. The walls were made of coral stone and mud, and were as much as 15 feet wide at the base, narrowing towards the top. On the land side the walls extended to the edge of the creek with strong towers at each corner. In the centre of this wall was the town gate, defended by two square towers. The citadel, a high, massive building, made of stone, faced the gate, and was considered the strongest building on the Gulf.⁽²⁵⁾ The number of the Qawasim at Ra's Al-Khaimah as assessed at the time amounted to roughly 7,000. However, at the beginning of the military expedition the number of fighting men was nearly 4,000. The rest, women, children and the old, were moved to palm plantations, whilst Hassan Ibn Rahama, his brother Ibrahim and their supporters made ready^{t.} to confront the invasion.

(25) Lorimer, J G, op cit, vol I, p 666 footnote 1.

The real enemy of the expedition was disease; the transports were packed, their sailing qualities varied; no one could forecast the length of the voyage. Extra vessels had been taken on to provide hospital ships, for malaria was always present and an outbreak of cholera or scurvy could inflict more casualties than the Qawasim. After disease, the next problem was water, then the provision of fresh food; and behind all was the necessity to strike speedily.(26)

On Tuesday 13 November 1819, Sir William Grant Keir boarded the Liverpool and sailed from Bombay for the Gulf, accompanied by Curlew and Aurora. The rest of the expedition vessels followed him a few days later; when the fleet arrived at the place designated outside the island of Kishm, General Keir proceeded to Muscat on board the Liverpool to meet the ruler, returning after he had obtained a promise from the ruler that he would offer the necessary assistance to the British expedition: 4,000 men to besiege Ra's Al-Khaimah from the land, as well as two military vessels and 600 men to escort Keir, and provisions and water for the forces.(27) Upon Keir's arrival at the island of Qashim, he was surprised to find that certain vessels of the military expedition had not yet arrived from Bombay; he resolved accordingly to utilize the period of waiting for the arrival of the vessels in exploring the roads leading to Ra's Al-Khaimah.

On 24 November a violent wind blew, compelling the military vessels to resort to an anchorage off the island of Kharrack next to the island of Kishm in the Strait of Hormuz. Four days later

(26) BA, SPDD No 312 of 1819, Bombay President's and Councillor's Minutes (on the expedition against the pirates on the Arab and Persian coasts), 21 July 1819.

(27) BA, SPDD No 312 of 1819, Ruler of Muscat's proceedings against Ra's Al-Khaimah.

the Liverpool set course for Ra's Al-Khaimah with a view to seeking a suitable place for disembarking the force. When Liverpool, commanded by Captain Collier, and Eden, commanded by Captain Loch, arrived off the coast, the peninsula was encircled preventing either entrance or exit. Some Qawasim ships were noticed trying to enter the port by night on 30 November, but were prevented from doing so. On 1 December the Omani fleet commanded by the ruler of Muscat arrived. The fleet was composed of three big vessels and 600 combatants from among the tribesmen. The following day the expedition arrived at Ra's Al-Khaimah and at 5 o'clock in the morning of 3 December boats, loaded with troops, moved in a long line towards the beach, with gunboats on the flanks.(28)

There was little resistance from the Qawasim to the landing, due to the feint attacks conducted by the Nautilus and one of the transports which came close to the Gulf entrance and fired at the town from the eastern side; the inhabitants had not expected such a number of vessels to disembark troops in such a short time. As daylight broke, boats landed the troops unopposed, two miles south-west of the town. By evening, all the stores and equipment were ashore, including two howitzers and two six-pounder guns. The vessels of the ruler of Muscat played a paramount role in the landing and his men were invaluable for their help in disembarking guns and ammunition. The following day, the expedition made ready to shell Ra's Al-Khaimah, while the Qawasim withdrew within the city.

Before nightfall, a detachment of the 65th Battalion

(28) IOR, Boards Collections, F/4/Vol 651, Colln 17855, Kier to Adjutant-Gen, Bombay Army, Ra's Al-Khaimah, 9 Dec 1819.

succeeded in advancing up to a distance of 25 yards from the large quadrangular citadel to reconnoitre. An advanced rampart made of sandbags was set up with a battery of four big guns, 300 yards distant from the southern tower; to its right a battery of mortars was set.⁽²⁹⁾ Throughout the day, shelling from the government ships was continuous supported by the British land batteries. The Qawasim succeeded, however, in destroying the sandbag rampart of the British battery. During the night, Collier brought the Liverpool as close to the town as possible, and the next day (5 December), shelling from both sides, became more intense. The land batteries concentrated on the north-west corner of the main tower, and expected to demolish it without much difficulty, but this solid piece of masonry stood up against the gunfire without any signs of a breach. In the evening, the atmosphere worsened, and morale on both sides fell: the British feared a suicide attack and the Qawasim realised their position was hopeless. On 6 December the British once more began to shell the town and its strongholds; their 18-pounders began breaching the fort, while a couple of howitzers in the battery of the right and a few six-pounders played on the defence of the towers.

The Qawasim reply to this bombardment was weak owing to a serious lack of ammunition; they even fired huge stones from their guns and when the British guns discontinued the shelling, they hastened to gather the shells which had not exploded. They succeeded however in resisting the attacks. During the night, after other guns had been disembarked from the fleet with a view

(29) Lorimer, J G, op cit, vol I, p 666.

to intensifying the shelling, a suicide group from the Qawasim commanded by Ibrahim Ibn Rahama, the brother of the ruler of the town, attacked and took the British position. They also occupied a mortar battery and succeeded in moving one of the howitzers approximately a hundred yards. Later, Major Warren succeeded in re-taking the position with a group from the 65th Regiment, though only after a fierce battle; at least 90 Qawasim were killed, including Ibrahim Ibn Rahama. Before dawn, the Qawasim launched another attack; this time it was repulsed.

The operation had now extended over four days; the Bombay artillery kept on shelling Ra's Al-Khaimah from its positions but General Keir decided that bombarding from ships did not have any positive effect: he therefore disembarked several 24-pounders, as well as new forces to consolidate the land forces already present. Two of the Liverpool's great guns, the 24-pounders from the main deck, were brought ashore and two 18-pounders were placed in the battery on the left; they were manned by specially trained seamen and on 8 December they went into action. This had a deadly effect; and the citadel towers began to be damaged, while the Qawasim found that the unexploded shells did not fit their guns, being too big, and therefore they could only use small grenades and stones.

By evening, the shore guns had breached the walls. During the night of 18 December, there were parleys between the General and an envoy of Sheikh Hassan Ibn Rahama about the possible surrender of the town, but it appeared that the object of the pirates was to gain time: no agreement was reached. On 9 December at dawn, firing was resumed and this time a breach made in the citadel. A group of British sailors followed by forces

under the command of Captain Mariott rushed into the breach, broke into the towers and hoisted the British flag. No resistance whatever was encountered; the Qawasim had retreated to the hills during the night. Thus Ra's Al-Khaimah was occupied; and not only that, but 80 ships of up to 250 tons were taken. Sixty-two guns were also captured on shore, including one 24-pounder.⁽³⁰⁾

The action had taken six days; faced with the loss of his fortified base, his ships and his artillery, the ruler of Ra's Al-Khaimah had no alternative other than to surrender. He declared to General Keir his desire to give himself and his followers up on the understanding that the British government would guarantee their safety. His request being granted, he presented himself to General Keir's camp accompanied by four of his entourage on 10 December and was placed in confinement until further specific instructions.⁽³¹⁾ Meanwhile, the British forces destroyed the citadel and the remaining fortifications; The house of the ruler and the contiguous buildings were kept to serve as accommodation for the soldiers. General Keir did not deem it wise to destroy the vessels that had been captured by the British forces; indeed, he used nine of these ships with British seamen on board; these ships were subsequently permanently taken over by the British. The Qawasim casualties in the siege amounted to 400 killed and wounded; British casualties were four soldiers killed and one wounded. Qawasim casualties might have

(30) For the action of Ra's Al-Khaimah, see IOR, Boards Collections, F/4/Vol 651, Colln 17855, Keir to Adj-Gen, Bombay Army, Ra's Al-Khaimah, 9 Dec 1819 and also BA, Political Dept Diary, No 469 of 1819 (Operation against Persian Gulf Pirates).

(31) IOR, Saldanha, J A, Précis of Correspondence regarding the affairs of the Persian Gulf, (1801 - 53), p 103

been greater had the Omani land force arrived as they abandoned the town; they arrived two days after Ra's Al-Khaimah had been seized. At the request of General Keir, they returned to their country because of the scarcity of provisions and in case their presence should lead to increased problems; nonetheless the ruler of Muscat remained up to 7 January.

The fall of Ra's Al-Khaimah was not the end of the Bombay expedition to the Gulf; it was intended to destroy the Qawasim power wherever it was to be found. General Keir therefore decided to move against certain small towns on the Arab coast where some strongholds and citadels were likely to be found and which protected the Qawasim and their ships. When the expedition arrived at Rams, a small coastal village several miles north of Ra's Al-Khaimah where there were a number of Qawasim vessels, the Curlew, Nautilus, Aurora and two transport vessels blockaded the town until the arrival of the rest of the force.⁽³²⁾ When the British landed, they found it empty of inhabitants. Sheikh Hussein Ibn Aly and his followers had retreated to the village of Al-Dayah on one of the heights at a small entrance of the Gulf two miles from the sea. There they strengthened their position in one of the ancient citadels well known for the solidity of its fortifications.⁽³³⁾ The number of combatants in this stronghold was assessed at nearly 400 men; it was situated on a steep and rugged hill and commanded the passes over the mountains and the road to the south-west along the shore, and was thought by the Arabs to be too high for the elevation of the British guns. The British commanders judged that the defeat of this "invincible"

⁽³²⁾ Lorimer, J G, op cit, Vol I, pp 667-8.

⁽³³⁾ BA, SPDD No 315 of 1820, Keir to Warden (fall of Ra's Al-Khaimah), 6 Jan 1820.

fortress would destroy the morale of the Qawasim in the other parts of the country; a task force to destroy it was created under the command of Major Warren. He was given the 65th Regiment under Captain Dunlop Digby, the flank companies of the 1st/2nd Native Infantry under Captain John Cocke, and a force ordinance commanded by Lieutenant William Morky of the Bombay Artillery, consisting of two brass 12-pounders, four field pieces and eight-inch mortars.

On 18 December, the British forces marched on Al-Dayah. General Keir arrived the same day, accompanied by Captain Collier, on board the Liverpool, in order himself to supervise the course of operations. In the evening, the expedition marched towards the citadel; the Qawasim opened fire to repulse them. On 19 December during the shelling, the Qawasim retreated to the stronghold, fighting every inch of the way. When Sheikh Hassan Ibn Aly was called to surrender he did not respond; though the mortars had been shelling the citadel uninterruptedly, no damage whatever was caused to it; the fortification and defences were stronger than the British expedition had anticipated. Consequently, the British commanders were compelled to bring reinforcements from the 47th Regiment and the 1st Battalion, 3rd Native Infantry. More importantly, two 24-pounders were landed from Liverpool, and with great difficulty were hauled by sailors from Curlew up the hill from Rams to Al-Dayah. In the evening, the 24-pounders were ready to breach the fort on the north-east and the 12-pounders were directed toward the sheikh's house to the west; the shelling began the following day and on 22 December at noon the citadel wall was breached and the citadel surrendered. Within a couple of hours, the capture of Al-Dayah was complete; fifteen guns were found and seized. Warren entered

and hoisted the British flag above the citadel and the house of the ruler after he and the defenders had surrendered on condition that their lives would be spared; the number of prisoners taken was estimated at 398 men and 400 women and children. General Keir ordered the release of a number of prisoners who had had nothing to do with the fighting, allowing them to go with their families to the village of Shemeil close to Seir. Only 169 men, including Sheikh Hussein Ibn Aly and the elements closely connected with him remained in captivity; they were removed to Ra's Al-Khaimah then placed in confinement with the others. The British forces casualties amounted to four killed including one officer and 16 wounded, one of whom died later.⁽³⁴⁾ Having destroyed the citadel, the house of Sheikh Hussein Ibn Aly and all the other fortifications, the expedition then returned to Ra's Al-Khaimah on 26 December.

Once back, General Keir considered how to reach a political settlement with the Qawasim, which would ensure that they were no longer a threat on the seas, in particular between Basra and Bombay. He was increasingly concerned with the fate of the captive leaders, including Hassan Ibn Rahama and Hussein Ibn Aly, particularly when he realised a few days after the confinement of Hassan Ibn Rahama that there was grave disruption among the Arabs because of his capture; he realized that a continuation of his captivity would result in political obstruction to good relations with the inhabitants of the neighbouring regions, relations which had to be based on trust and peace.⁽³⁵⁾ Accordingly as Keir had

⁽³⁴⁾ IOR, Boards Collections, F/4/Vol 651, Colln No 17855.

⁽³⁵⁾ IOR, Saldanha, J A, Precis of Correspondence Regarding the Affairs of the Persian Gulf, (1801-53), p 154.

not received any new instructions relating to the measures to be taken after the completion of the military expedition, he decided to set Hassan Ibn Rahama free on condition that he would not repeat his previous behaviour. It was a shrewd move; the decision was welcomed by the inhabitants who demonstrated their trust in Keir in return, by coming in large numbers to buy rice and dates that they had left in Ra's Al-Khaimah.

Other judgements proved equally well grounded; the fall of Al-Dayah, considered by the Arabs to be impregnable was an important factor in the Arab coast surrender to General Keir, as was the decision of a group of Qawasim after the fall and overall destruction of Ra's Al-Khaimah to choose peace rather than fight the British forces. Sheikh Qadib Ibn Ahmed, the ruler of Jazerat Al-Hamra, came to Ra's Al-Khaimah after he had been granted safe-conduct to offer his surrender. He was followed by Sheikh Sultan Bin Saqar, of Sharjah on 5 January 1820 and Mohamed Ibn Hassah, the ruler of Dubai, who was not more than nine years old. The rest of the sheikhdoms surrendered in succession, namely Sheikh Shakhbut Ibn Dhiyab, father of Tahnun Ibn Shakhbut, the ruler of Abu Dhabi from El-Buflah, and the Sheikhs of Ajman and Umm Al-Qawain. It was a total capitulation; the whole operation had lasted barely a month, and the Bombay forces had clearly demonstrated that any further resistance was useless.

The troupes could not, however, be kept at length on station in the Gulf; the weather also was worsening and the fleet had completed its task. Mindful of saving time, General Keir hastened, as a first step, to enter into primary treaties with all those rulers who had surrendered, dealing with each one separately, stipulating the special commitments pledged by each

sheikh. General Keir imposed as a condition that these treaties be signed prior to the time at which each sheikh should re-enter into a detailed peace treaty. The first among the sheikhs who signed a preliminary treaty was Sheikh Sultan Bin Saqar, the ruler of Sharjah, on 6 January 1820, followed by Hassan Ibn Rahama, the ruler of Ra's Al-Khaimah on 8 January, then successively the legal guardian of Mohamed Ibn Hassah, the boy Sheikh of Dubai on 9 January, Sheikh Shakhbut Ibn Dhiyab on 11 January and on 15 January the Sheikh of Rams, Hussein Ibn Aly, who had been freed with his supporters with a view to facilitating negotiations in case he should die in captivity after disease had spread among the prisoners.

The preliminary treaty concluded with Sultan Bin Saqar, incorporated four clauses stipulating that he should hand over to General Keir the strongholds, guns and vessels kept at Sharjah, Ajman and Umm Al-Qawain, and any captives in the zones subordinated to him, and should prohibit his ships from sailing. In compensation, the General would leave at his disposal the boats designed for pearling and fishing; the rest of the ships were to be at the disposal of Keir. As an added inducement, the expedition forces were not to be allowed to destroy the towns. After the fulfilment of these commitments, Sultan Bin Saqar would be allowed to enter into a general peace treaty. The treaty concluded with Hassan Ibn Rahama, though similar to the treaty signed by Sultan Bin Saqar, contained his recognition of the British occupation of Ra's Al-Khaimah and the strongholds in the palm plantations close to them. The preliminary treaty concluded with the Sheikh of Abu Dhabi left the citadel and towers untouched out of consideration for the ruler of Muscat who had asked this favour but it was also stipulated that the ships in

dependent zones must be handed over; the preliminary treaty concluded with Hassan Ibn Aly did not differ significantly from this. To monitor the capability and willingness of the sheikhs to execute their commitments, General Keir determined that British vessels patrol the Arab coast; they would also destroy any actual or potential pockets of resistance.

Thus, on 17 January 1820 a garrison of 800 sepoy and some artillery were left at Ra's Al-Khaimah and the expedition turned to the other Qawasim ports. Jazirat Al-Hamra was found deserted, but the fortifications and larger vessels were destroyed at Dubai. It was then reported that 10 pirate vessels had taken refuge in Bahrain, and a naval force was sent to destroy them there; they met with no resistance and accomplished their mission.⁽³⁶⁾ The operation was not entirely without incident, however, for in the course of the descent on Bahrain, three vessels had been observed in Asseeloo on the Persian coast; two were from Kharrack and one from Dubai. Loch, Captain of the Eden promptly captured them and burned the vessels from Kharrack. Later, finding two more armed ships from Linga in Congoon, he ordered that they also be burned.

To avoid embarrassment with the Persian authorities, Keir arranged for Bruce the British resident in Bushire, to determine whether the inhabitants of the ports Kharrack and Linga had been responsible for piracy; Bruce reported back that the people of Kharrack had plundered a ship that had been wrecked near Qais in 1814. A second such incident had been committed by the inhabitants of Linga the following year. Under the circumstances, Keir deemed it prudent not to proceed to extend his

(36) Lorimer, J G, op cit, vol I, p 669.

search-and-destroy policy to the Persian side of the Gulf; an added consideration was that the Governor of Bombay thought the enterprise risky and indeed in March ordered that the owners of the ships destroyed by Loch be indemnified.(37)

Keir had already got the signatures of the rulers of the sheikhdoms to a general peace treaty supplementing the bilateral preliminary instruments; it was brief, consisting of 11 clauses; its opening words were:

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

Article I of the treaty prohibited acts of piracy and made a distinction between robbery, piracy and legitimate war; article III compelled the Arabs to hoist a distinctive flag on their ships while article IV expounded the British political role in the Gulf. The measures to be taken on the Arab ships, to spread discipline and peace on the seas, was stipulated in Article V. In the remaining clauses, the treaty dealt with the question of peace in the region through the commitment of the Arab tribes on the Gulf coast to the principles of humane conduct and cooperation with the British Government; article VI prohibited slave trading. The treaty concluded by affirming the liberty of the reconciled sheikhs to visit the European ports in India with the guarantee of protection against any aggression, and affirming the necessity of signing the treaty once more from time to time.(38)

The first to sign the general treaty was Hassan Ibn Rahama,

(37) IOR, P/383/46, Minutes by Elphinstone, 15 March 1820.

(38) See Appendix D.

who had been refused recognition as Sheikh of Ra's Al-Khaimah when the preliminary treaty permitted British occupation; he was however acknowledged as ruler of Al-Khatt and Al-Falahia, two locations contiguous to Ra's Al-Khaimah. General Keir then convoked him in the afternoon of the same day in his capacity as a ruler of Al-Khatt and Al-Falahia to sign the general peace treaty, signed also on the same day and at the same place by Hassan Ben Rahama and Qadib Ibn Ahmed. On 11 January Sheikh Shakhbut Ibn Dhiyab signed; Hussein Ibn Aly signed at Rams on 15 January. Zayed Ibn Seif signed on behalf of his nephew, the Sheikh of Abu Dhabi in Sharjah on 28 January, Sultan Bin Saqar in Sharjah on 4 February. The next day, an envoy of the Sheikh of Bahrain came to Sharjah and signed. Lastly, Rashed Ibn Hamid, the Sheikh of Ajman and Abdulla Ibn Nahshan, the Sheikh of Umm Al-Qawain signed the treaty at El-Falahia on 15 March.

The terms of the general treaty reveal that General Keir had in some way been compelled to adapt to existing circumstances; he had not received any instructions from his government relating to the expedition after the fulfilment of its mission. His personal desire was to give the British government a greater opportunity to pursue their policy vis-à-vis the sheikhdoms on the basis of fraternity and mutual cooperation after the Qawasim's political and military force had been definitively suppressed. Once this was done, their independence could be recognised while providing Britain with the right of political and military interference in their affairs. His approach did not however please the ruler of Muscat who considered the settlement to be greatly indulgent vis-à-vis the Qawasim. The instructions from the Bombay government for which Keir had been impatiently waiting, were issued by Elphinstone, the Governor-in-Council who had succeeded Nepean,

shortly after the despatch of the military expedition; they arrived on 28 January. The instructions consisted of an extract of Elphinstone's recommendations which he had sent to the Governor-General on 15 December with regard to the policy that must be followed by General Keir in the Gulf.⁽³⁹⁾ They confirmed the policy of destroying all Qawasim bases in the Gulf and of appointing a local agent at Ra's Al-Khaimah to make sure of the commercial character of every ship leaving; furthermore, Keir was to foster the Qawasim's commercial spirit by allowing them freely to visit Indian ports. In any event, all the ships in the Gulf would be subject to regular inspection by the British fleet; British ships should be allowed to enter the port of Ra's Al-Khaimah at any time, and British armed ships should consolidate their position at the port entrance, or any neighbouring entrance.

Elphinstone also suggested that Hassan Ibn Rahama be discharged from the sheikhdом and a successor, willing to comply with British policy be nominated. Furthermore, all petty states on the eastern coast of the Gulf, which had been subordinated to the Persian government prior to the Qawasim supremacy, were to return to their former allegiance; the ownership of the Al-Seer was to be assigned to the government of Muscat. Elphinstone also stressed the importance of creating a permanent British base in the Gulf, important for exerting direct control over the Gulf, since a naval force positioned at such a base would enable the British government to watch over the ports of the Gulf and seize any ship having a military character. Finally, Keir was to prohibit the importing of timber for shipbuilding from India to any

(94) IOR, P/383/53, Gov-in-Council to Gov-Gen-in-Council, Bombay, 15 Dec 1819.

part of the Gulf.(40)

Keir judged these instructions not inconsistent with the settlements made with the sheikhs of the region and the treaty he had concluded with them and accordingly sent Elphinstone a copy, hoping that it meet with his approval. The Governor, however, who had eulogised General Keir's command of the military operation and supported the humanity of his subsequent policy, disapproved of the settlement owing to General Keir's "immoderate tolerance" of the Qawasim, particularly with respect to setting free the two leaders Hassan Ibn Rahama and Hussein Ibn Aly, as well as the lack of such provisions as the destruction of military vessels and strongholds. The rules for the regulation of shipping in the Gulf were perceived as the weak points in the treaty, since they did not provide an adequate guarantee of the Qawasim's further good behaviour; the documents and statements referred to in the treaty only incorporated reference to the port from which the ship had sailed. In Elphinstone's opinion, to be more effective these statements should have stipulated that a deterrent punishment would be inflicted upon ships with either false papers or no papers at all. As for the rest, clauses which appeared beneficial, such as the pledge to abstain from practising piracy and slave trading, Elphinstone deemed as illusory since there were no firm guarantees that they would be adhered to. As things stood, however, Elphinstone did not have any opportunity to change the treaty; any alteration would have been considered by the Arab signatories as a violation of what had been agreed. Hence Elphinstone had no alternative other than to ask the Governor-General to ratify, which was done without

(40) IOR, P/383/32.

further amendment.(41)

General Keir only received Elphinstone's critical comments on his way back to Bombay, after the termination of the expedition. He did not hesitate to defend vehemently his action and the settlement concluded with the Arabs and wrote a report in reply to the points to which Elphinstone had objected. He sent it to the government in Bombay on 11 April 1820. In the report, he agreed with Elphinstone's point on piracy, that one could not rely on promises alone; for this very reason the naval force in charge of the patrol in the Gulf must be on the alert, keep a good watch and suppress the first indication of any return to piracy, the more so because Article II of the treaty had stipulated that capital punishment and confiscation of property should be inflicted on any one committing piratical acts. He argued that one could not say that the treaty failed to specify the punishment to be inflicted on anyone not observing the treaty provisions; as for the destruction of the strongholds and the Qawasim ships, this constituted one of the most important and essential results of the expedition and had been underscored by the treaty itself.

As for the critical comments pertaining to his treating the captives with indulgence and setting Hussein Ibn Aly and his followers at liberty, this was in the first place due to the fact that a great number of them suffered from illness and wounds, and had therefore been released lest their death in captivity should lead to disagreeable political consequences. Moreover, they

(41) IOR, Saldanha, J A, op cit, (report from Keir to Gov-in-Council, 11 Apr 1820), pp 113-16.

surrendered of their own free will and pledged their allegiance to Keir after they had witnessed his behaviour towards the captives and his setting a great number of them at liberty at Al-Dayah. Had they anticipated the rigorous restriction imposed by Elphinstone, they would not have acted in this manner. Moreover, General Keir stated in his report that had the Qawasim declined to surrender, he would have been compelled to enter a long war with them, an eventuality in conflict with the instructions ordering him to distance himself from the coast as quickly as possible. As for the replacement of existing leaders by others, this would require that the British government continue to bolster up and support them, a matter which would involve the government in the domestic problems of the tribes and would lead to more interference in the region in the future; concerning the prohibition on wood from India and in particular ship timber, General Keir deemed that the British government was in a position to impose such a prohibition in India itself; there was no need to make reference to it in a treaty with the Qawasim. Moreover, any measures the Government might like to impose or enforce, could be imposed at any time provided they were in accord with the general spirit of the treaty.(42)

In March 1820, most of the military vessels returned to Bombay, announcing the end of the British naval expedition to the Qawasim ports. Since Keir had not received any instructions to establish an island as a British base he had no alternative but to leave a British garrison in Ra's Al-Khaimah, no fewer than 1160 men with 40 gunners and an artillery battery, 60 sailors and 160 European infantrymen. He appointed Captain Thompson from the

(42) Lorimer, J G, op cit, pp 673-4.

cavalry squadron head of this garrison, before leaving the Gulf on 16 March 1820 and returning to Bombay.⁽⁴³⁾ Subsequently, orders were given to Thompson to remove his forces to the island of Kishm after asking permission from the ruler of Muscat, and to evacuate the region of Ra's Al-Khaimah after ensuring that no fortifications were left there. He was then to deliver the town to Sheikh Sultan Bin Saqar or any other suitable local sheikh.⁽⁴⁴⁾ On 18 July 1820 Thompson and his forces departed from Ra's Al-Khaimah in the direction of Kishm; Sultan Bin Saqar refused to be ruler over Ra's Al-Khaimah and by default it reverted to Hassan Bin Rahama.

The British forces were not however able to stay on the island of Kishm owing to the insalubrious climate and problems raised by the Persian government over the occupation. These factors led the Bombay government and the Governor-General to consider a plan for a naval presence in the Gulf consisting of six armed vessels, three of which would take the island of Qais as a base and patrol the Arab ports from Rams to Dubai on a regular basis, and two to carry messages and envoys between Muscat and Basra. The sixth would be devoted to communications with Bombay. At the end of 1821, the British government accepted the plan and agreed that Qais should be the base from which the patrol ships operated owing to its proximity to the Arab coast; a small storehouse was erected for supplies and an anchorage built for the armed boats guarded by a small group of Indian soldiers.

(43) IOR, P/383/32.

(44) BA, SPDD No 316 of 1820, Warden to officer commanding withdrawal of British troops from Ra's Al-Khaimah to Qashim, 13 Apr 1820.

While less than the military base originally envisaged, the naval patrol proved entirely adequate to police the Gulf now that the Qawasim power had been destroyed and in consequence their pre-eminence in the Gulf sheikhdoms ended. Ibrahim Pasha had put an end to the first Saudi state and in so doing had dramatically increased Qawasim vulnerability to the British; the British for their part, notwithstanding the early reservations of the Governor of Bombay on the durability of Keir's pacification, by their readiness to accommodate Qawasim commerce encouraged their acceptance of a diminished political role in the Gulf as Wahabism lost its drive to expand. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, fears of a French penetration of the Gulf as a preliminary to penetration of India had meant that the Gulf had remained high on the security agendas of the home governments in London and of the governors of Bombay and the governors-general in Calcutta; with this spectre removed in 1815 with the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo, subsequent concerns involving other powers notably Germany led to the elaboration of further treaties and truces so that what had been known as the Pirate coast became the Trucial coast. Content to police the waters and to keep out of tribal politics on the peninsula itself, British influence was to remain pre-eminent for a century and a half; it rested on action over a few months in 1819, which brought to an end the pretensions of the Qawasim.

C H A P T E R S E V E N

Conclusions

This study set out to examine the political impact of the Qawasim from the middle of the eighteenth century until their power was destroyed at the hand of the British in 1820. The conventional wisdom of such writers as Lorimer and later Kelly was that the British were motivated by a desire to keep open an important commercial and mail route and that the Qawasim while professing Wahabism were mainly motivated by considerations of piratical plunder. While partly true, these are incomplete explanations, as is the counter-argument that the Qawasim were proto-nationalists concerned to forge one nation in the Gulf, only peripherally interested in the proceeds of piracy and much more influenced by the desire to maintain their commerce from the ruthless competition of the East India Company; the most recent sustained argument to this end published by Al-Qasimi in 1986 has the revelatory title "The Myth of Arab Piracy in the Gulf". Both sides to the conflict had more subtle motives relating to the broader political environment.

The British on the one hand were engaged in bitter rivalry if not actual warfare with France throughout the period under review; the only interludes of peace were the years 1748-1756, 1763-1777 and 1783-1789. Losing their Canadian empire to the British in the Western hemisphere led to the French helping to

deprive Britain of her American colonies in the War of Independence; in the Eastern hemisphere the British were able to consolidate themselves in the Carnatic and Bengal and to confirm their role as legatees of the Portuguese in Bombay. French advisers however still fanned anti-British sentiment in the central Mahratta states as well as training native armies. The trading companies of both countries jockeyed for position in the Gulf, notably in Persia and the British in particular kept a close watch on the desert mail which accompanied overland trade from Basra to the Mediterranean. Providing as they did the bulk of the political reporting available to the authorities in Britain and in India, British company agents ensured that their interests were high on the policy agenda in both places. Napoleon's Egyptian campaign at the turn of the century ensured that for the next 15 years the security of the land route to India via the Gulf coastline became a major preoccupation; even with Napoleon safe in St Helena and the fear of French penetration removed, the British were prepared to take the opportunity to put their security on a permanent and sound basis; the opportunity was created by the piratical activity of the Qawasim and the erosion of Wahabism in Arabia by Ibrahim Pasha.

The Qawasim, on the other hand have most recently been portrayed by Al-Qasimi as early Arab nationalists, whose main political goal was to unify the Arab side of the Gulf and whose main economic thrust was to expand their share of the trade in the Gulf and the north-west Indian Ocean. Both were important; but both were the outcome of the espousal of Wahabism by the Qawasim at a time when the collapse of Persian power gave them the chance to establish themselves as the predominant naval power in the Gulf, and when tribal rivalry on land coupled with the

zeal to expand Wahabism provided the opportunity for the Qawasim to establish themselves as the predominant grouping on land while legitimising their attack on shipping by appealing to the jihad against unbelievers.

Thus, motives of both British and Qawasim policy were mixed. Incensed as the East India Company was at the treatment of Hindu crews taken by the Qawasim, they were concerned with the immediate aspects of activity they could only accept as piracy, being unable to accept the concept of jihad. The attitude of the governments in Britain and India were coloured by longer term considerations relating to the security of India; once these were relaxed following the defeat of Napoleon and the crushing of Qawasim power, they took care not to become embroiled in the seething politics of the peninsula while maintaining an essentially police role at sea.

That which confirmed the British success in 1820 and the subsequent pacification was the moderation of Keir as made manifest in the readiness not to inflict punishment and in the terms of the general treaty; readiness to open Indian ports to Qawasim vessels now no longer supported by warships reduced hostility and made them as much as the British beneficiaries of the pacification process. The collapse of Saudi power in Daraeia restored Turkish authority for the remainder of the century; it was only to crumble when Britain encouraged the Arab revolt and the final decay of the Ottoman Empire. No longer pressed for zakat and booty and under constant British surveillance, the Qawasim settled for a share in regional commerce and freedom to indulge in the dynastic and territorial squabbles which were to characterise Gulf politics. British tutelage was to endure for a

century and a half, sufficiently benevolent for there to be general dismay amongst the sheikhdoms and emirates in 1968 when the British government announced the withdrawal of its military forces by the end of the decade; the various trucial agreements including the 1820 treaty were rescinded, to be replaced by bilateral agreements as against imposed settlements. A further chapter in the history of the Gulf had been concluded and with it the violence which had attended its beginning.

A P P E N D I X A

The government of India

Two important Acts of Parliament determined the government of the British possessions in India; the first of these was Lord North's Regulatory Act 1773 which remodelled the constitution of the Company at home, remodelled its constitution in India and tentatively and incompletely subjected the Company to the supervision of the British government while subjecting the presidencies of Bombay and Madras to the supervision of the Council of Bengal; the Governor of Bengal was designated Governor-General of India, assisted by a council of four with whom he shared authority, having a casting vote only when there was an equal division in the council. The Crown supervised the actions of the Company, its directors being required to lay before the treasury all correspondence from India dealing with the revenues it handled in relations with Indian rulers, and before a secretary of state everything dealing with civil or military administration.

In practice, the lack of provision against difficulties that might arise were the council to outvote the governor-general proved to be a problem; further the clause giving Calcutta control over Bombay and Madras worked badly. While the latter were prohibited from engaging in hostilities or making treaties

without the consent of Calcutta, two exceptions were admitted, namely, unless the case were one of such imminent necessity as to make it dangerous to await the arrival of orders or unless the local government had received orders direct from home. According to the Act, the governor-general could only be removed by the Crown on representation from the court of directors; following committees on enquiry on the administration of justice and the causes of the war in the Carnatic, the General Court of the Company resolved to defy a vote in the House of Commons recalling Warren Hastings, the first governor-general. The directors ultimately agreed to approach the Crown for his recall, but the letter of recall was never sent as the General Court of the Company voted by a large majority to rescind the resolution.

The Regulatory Act had clearly broken down; it had neither given the state a definite control over the Company, nor the directors a definite control over their servants, nor the governor-general a definite control over his council, nor the Calcutta presidency a definite control over Bombay and Madras. An attempt by Fox to remedy the problem in 1783 failed; his successor, Pitt, introduced his India Bill in January 1784, adroitly dissolved Parliament to secure a triumphant majority and thus secure the passage of the Bill in August of the same year.

The Act established a board of control consisting of a secretary of state, the chancellor of the exchequer and four privy councillors. Urgent or secret orders of "the Commissioners for the Affairs of India" might be transmitted to India via a secret committee of three directors, and the court of proprietors of the company was deprived of any right to annul or suspend any resolution of the directors approved by the board. The governor-

general assisted by a council of three was to be supreme over the other governors in all questions of war, revenue and diplomacy; only company officers were to be appointed members of the council, this to obviate a repetition of the calamities which had followed the establishment of four outsiders as Warren Hasting's council in 1776.

The board of control obviously provided for control by the government of the day, its two most important members changing with each ministry. They did not, however, exercise patronage and could not appoint or dismiss the Company's servants in India, but they had access to all the Company's papers and their approval was required for all dispatches relating to other than commercial business. In case of emergency they could send their own drafts to the secret committee of the directors, to be signed and sent out in the name of the Company. The secret committee afforded the court of directors a show of independence though liable to the complete control of the board; according to the Act, the secret committee was to consist of not more than three directors; in practice it nearly always consisted of two, the chairman and deputy chairman of the court. Clearly the ultimate direction had passed to the cabinet; for the most part the directors of the Company were satisfied that they were left with the patronage and the right of dismissing their servants. Supplementary legislation in 1786 empowered the governor-general in special cases to override the majority of his council and enabled the governor-general to hold also in emergencies the office of commander-in-chief.

Pitt's India Act defined the relations between the British government and the Company possessions in India until 1858 when

the Company ceased to exist; however, changes in practice occurred, notably the loss of its powers by the board of control, powers which became concentrated in the hands of the board's president. The position of the president as regards the cabinet varied; some presidents were members, others not. Similarly, relations with the court of directors also varied. In practice, despite the superiority of the board of control and its access to the cabinet, and despite its power of sending orders through the secret committee of the directors, which the latter could neither discuss nor disclose, policy was determined when disputes arose on a basis of compromise. In the last resort and in matters of real importance, the government of the day could impose its will upon the most factious court of directors or on the most independent of governors-general, while the governor-general had to run the risk of determining policy without support in the House of Commons. Further, under the new system, the governor-general could enforce his will over the subordinate presidencies, orders from the government of Bengal to be obeyed in every case except where contrary ones had been received from England as yet unknown to the superintending government.

One consequence of the 1784 Act, the curtailing of the patronage of the home authorities, had effect upon the calibre of government in India. The Act forbade vacancies in the councils to be filled by other than covenanted servants of the company except in the case of the governors-general, the governors and the commanders-in-chief, and confined promotions to due order of seniority except in special cases notifiable to the court of directors. The covenanted servants benefited from the change, which removed the necessity and opportunity for intrigue; the system of appointing the governors-general straight from England

also on the whole worked well; many of them were noblemen with a wide experience of affairs whose representations carried more weight with the home authorities than would have been the case with the Company's servants.

Bengal set the pattern for the subordinate presidencies of Bombay and Madras. There the governors each had a council of two civil members with the commander-in-chief when that post was not joined to that of the governor. Under the Governor-in-Council were three boards - the Board of Trade, the Board of Revenue and the Military Board. These conducted the detailed administration of the presidency and were normally headed by a member of the council. Ultimate responsibility, as in the case of Bengal was vested in the governor who enjoyed the same power of overruling the council as the governor-general.

A P P E N D I X B

Treaty concluded between the Honourable East India Company
and His Highness the Imaum of Muskat, under the date the
12th of October 1798

Deed of Agreement from the State of Oman (Muskat), the place of shelter, under the approbation of the Imaum, the Director, Syud Sultan, (whose grandeur be eternal!) to the high and potent English Company, (whose greatness be perpetuated!) as comprehended in the following articles:

Article I

From the intervention of the Nuwab Etmandood Duola Mirza Mehdy Ali Khan Bahadoor Hushmunt Jung, never shall there be any deviation from this Kuolnamah.

Article II

From the recital of the said Nuwab, my heart has become disposed to an increase of the friendship with that State, and from this day forth the friend of that Sirkar is the friend of this, and the friend of this Sirkar is to be the friend of that Sirkar; and in the same way the enemy of this is to be the enemy of that.

Article III

Whereas frequent applications have been made, and are still making, by the French and Dutch people, for a factory, ie a place to seat themselves in, either at Muskat or Bunder Abbas, or at the other ports of this Sirkar, it is therefore written, that whilst warfare shall continue between the English Company and them, never shall, from respect to the Company's freindship, be given to them throughout all my territories a place to fix or seat themselves in, nor shall they get even ground to stand upon, within this State.

Article IV

As there is a person of the French nation who has been for these several years in my service, and who hath now gone in command of one of my vessels to the Mauritius, I shall, immediately on his return, dismiss him from my service, and expel him.

Article V

In the event of any French vessel coming to water at Muskat, she shall not be allowed to enter the cove into which the English vessels are admitted, but remain outside the cove; and in case of hostilities ensuing here between the French and English ships, the army, and navy, and people of this Government shall take part in hostility with the English, but on the high seas I am not to interfere.

Article VI

On the occurrence of any shipwreck of a vessel, or vessels, appertaining to the English, there shall certainly be aid and

comfort afforded on the part of this Government, nor shall the property be seized on.

Article VII

In the port of Bunder Abbas (Gombroon), whenever the English shall be disposed to establish a factory, making it as a fort, I have no objection to their fortifying the same, and mounting guns thereon, as many as they list, and to forty or fifty English gentlemen residing there, with seven or eight hundred English sepoy; and for the rest, the rate of duties on goods, on buying and selling, will be on the same footing as at Bussora and Abusheher.

Dated 1st of Jumadee-ool-Awul 1213, Hijree (or the 12th of October 1798 AD).

A P P E N D I X C

Further treaty between the Honourable East India Company and His
Highness the Imaum of Muskat, concluded on the
18th of January 1800

Agreement entered into by the Imaum of the 'State of Oman, the place of shelter, with Captain John Malcolm, Bahadoor, Envoy from the Right Honorable the Governor General, dated the 21st of Shaban 1214, Hijree (or the 18th of January 1800, AD).

Article I

The Kuolnamah entered into on the 1st Jumadee-ool-Awul, Hijree 1213 (12th October 1798) by the Imaum Syud Sultan, through Nuwab Etmandood Duola Mehdy Ali Khan Bahadoor Hushmunt Jung, remains fixed and in full force.

Article II

As improper reports of a tendency to interrupt the existing harmony, and create misunderstanding between the two States, have gone abroad, and have been communicated to the Right Honorable the Governor General, the Earl of Mornington, K P, with a view to prevent such evils in future, we, actuated by sentiments of reciprocal friendship, agree that an English gentleman of respectability, on the part of the Honorable Company, shall always reside at the port of Muskat, and be an Agent through whom

all intercourse between the States shall be conducted, in order that the actions of each Government may be fairly and justly stated, and that no opportunity may be afforded to designing men, who are ever eager to promote dissensions; and that the friendship of the two States may remain unshaken till the end of time, and till the sun and moon have finished their revolving career.

Sealed in my presence, and delivered to me by the Imaum, on board the Gunjava, on the 18th January 1800.

(signed) John Malcolm,

Envoy.

A P P E N D I X DGeneral treaty with the Arab tribes of the Persian
Gulf, 1820

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

Article 1

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

Article 2

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

Article 3

The friendly (lit. the pacificated) Arabs shall carry by land and sea a red flag, with or without letters in it, at their option, and this shall be in a border of white, the breadth of the white in the border being equal to the breadth of the red, as represented in the margin (the whole forming the flag known in the British Navy by the title of white pierced red), this shall be the flag of the friendly Arabs, and they shall use it and no other.

Article 4

The pacificated tribes shall all of them continue in their former relations, with the exception that they shall be at peace with the British Government, and shall not fight with each other, and the flag shall be a symbol of this only and of nothing further.

Article 5

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

Article 6

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

Article 7

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

Article 8

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

Article 9

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

Article 10

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

Article 11

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

(The Treaty was signed by Keir at Ra's Al-Khaimah on 8 January 1820, and then at varying dates thereafter by the pirate sheikhs. The above is Thompson's translation.)

B I B L I O G R A P H Y

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A. The primary documents on which this study has been based are listed according to their locations.

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