

A British Balancing Act:
Britain's Policy of Containment During the 1938 Majlis Movements in Kuwait, Dubai, and
Bahrain

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Notable Historical Actors

Britain

- Trenchard Craven William Fowle: *Senior Political Resident in Persian Gulf*: (Held from 1932-1939).
- Hugh Weightman: *Political Resident in Bahrain*: (Held from 1937-1940).
- Captain Gerald de Guary: *Political Resident in Kuwait*: (Held from 1936-1939).
- Khan Sahib Said Abdul Razzak al-Razzuki: *Political Resident in Sharjah*: (Held from 1936-1945).
- J.B. Howes: *Temporary Political Resident in Bahrain*: (Held from 9/28/38-12/31/38).
- Charles Belgrave: *British Advisor to Bahrain*: (Held from 1926-1957).

Kuwait

- Muhammad al-Barak: *Kuwaiti Youth Activist*: (N/A).
- Sheikh Ahmad Ibn Jabir al-Sabah: *Ruler of Kuwait*: (Lived 1885-1950) (Ruled Kuwait from 1921-1950).
- Sheikh Abdullah bin Salem al-Sabah: *Member of the Ruling Family, President of Executive Majlis Council*: (Lived 1895-1965) (Ruled Kuwait from 1950-1965).
- Al-Sabah Family: *Ruling Family in Kuwait*:
- Khan Bahadur Mulla Saleh: *Sheikh Ahmad's Private Secretary*: (N/A).

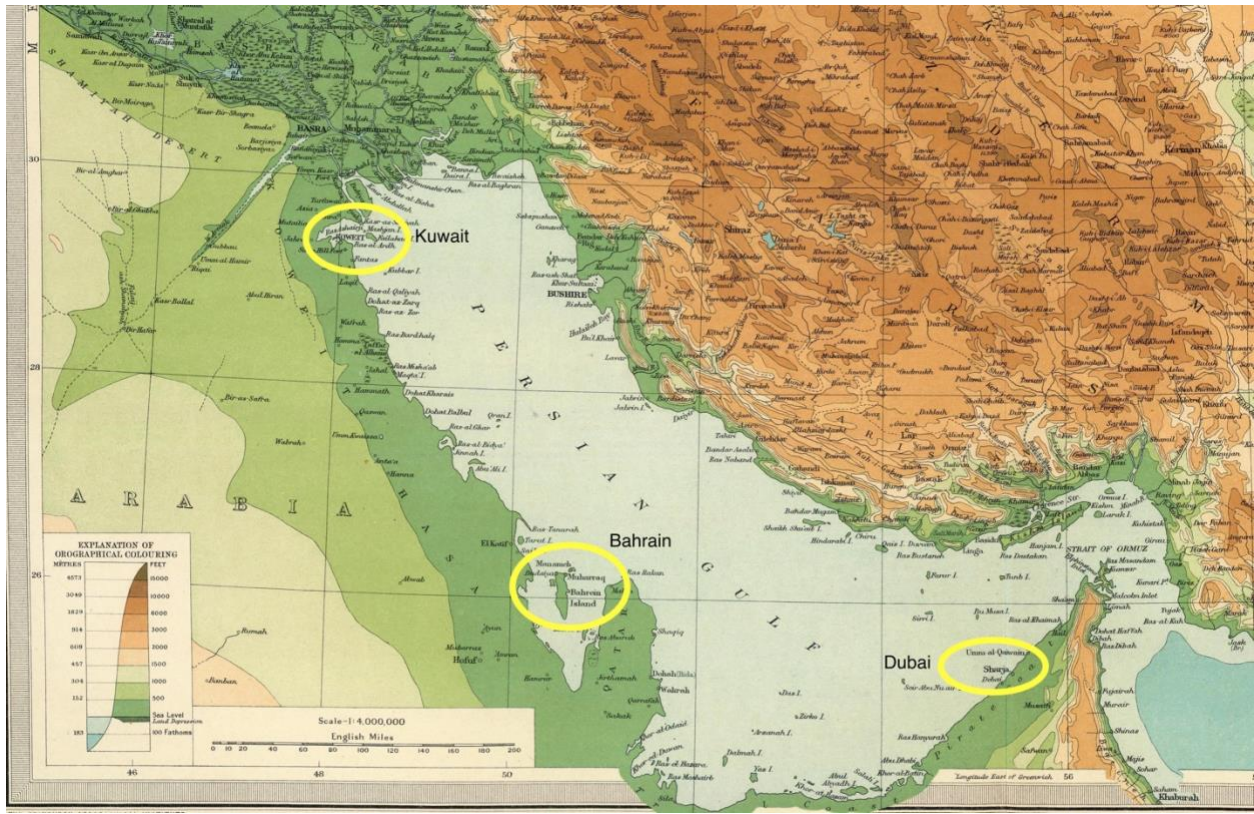
Dubai

- Sheikh Said bin Maktoum bin Hasher al-Maktoum: *Ruler of Dubai*: (Lived 1878-1958) (Ruled from 1912-1958).
- Sheikh Rashid bin Said al-Maktoum: *Sheikh Said's Son*: (Lived 1912-1990) (Ruled from 1958-1990).
- Sheikh Juma bin Maktoum bin Hasher al-Maktoum: *Sheikh Said's Brother*: (Born 1891).
- Sheikh Mana bin Rashid al-Maktoum: *Sheikh Said's Cousin, Leader in Majlis Movement*: (N/A).
- Sheikh Hashar bin Rashid al-Maktoum: *Sheikh Mana's Brother, Leader in Majlis Movement*: (N/A).
- Al-Maktoum Family: *Ruling Family in Dubai*
- Rashid Family: *Subsection of the Al-Maktoum Family, Subsection of the al-Bu Falasah Tribe*
- Hasher Family: *Subsection of the Al-Maktoum Family, Subsection of the al-Bu Falasah Tribe*
- Sultan bin Saqr Al Qasimi II: *Ruling Sheikh of Sharjah*: (Died 1951) (Ruled from 1924-1951).
- al Bu Falasah: *Subsection of the Bani-Yas Confederation*

Bahrain

- Sheikh Isa bin Ali al-Khalifah: *Previous Ruler of Bahrain*: (Lived 1848-1932) (Ruled from 1869-1932).
- Sheikh Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifah: *Ruler of Bahrain*: (Lived 1872-1942) (Ruled 1932-1942).
- Sheikh Abdullah bin Isa al-Khalifah: *Sheikh Hamad's Brother*: (N/A).
- Al-Khalifah Family: *Ruling Family in Bahrain*

Map of the Persian Gulf (1922)



1

¹ John George, Bartholomew. "Persia." Map. *David Rumsey Map Collection*. London, England: John Bartholomew & Co., 1922; Edits made by Colby Cecil.

Introduction

In the early decades of the 20th century, the British became increasingly economically and politically intertwined within Kuwait, Dubai, and Bahrain. Following the discovery of oil and the establishment of strategic civil and military air routes along the Persian Gulf in the 1930's, the importance of political stability in the Gulf became increasingly important to the maintenance of imperial security and trade. When reform movements flared up in Kuwait, Dubai, and Bahrain in 1938, British hegemony in the region was threatened. Several sheikhdoms critical to the British presence in the Persian Gulf experienced a wave of protests in 1938 that aimed at creating an executive majlis (advisory) councils. These councils were intended to curb the power of the ruling sheikhs, open up politics to popular participation in a limited sense, and implement reforms to modernize and institutionalize each sheikhdom. The movement strived to create elected councils that had executive and legislative functions, including tools to draft new laws, create institutions, and veto the decisions of the ruling sheikhs. The 1938 Majlis Movements posed a serious threat to the stability of British supremacy in each sheikhdom, as their regional policy of indirect rule was guaranteed through agreements with the ruling sheikhs, whose positions were challenged by the Majlis Movement. Furthermore, the Majlis Movement represented a popular movement against the sheikhs, limiting the ability of the British to directly intervene against the movement as it would paint the British as anti-democratic and incentivize foreign intervention, namely from Iraq. As a result, the British were left with a delicate political situation following the eruption of Majlis Movements in Kuwait, Dubai, and Bahrain in 1938, that necessitated a political strategy that balanced a policy of non-intervention with the need to contain the geographic and political breadth of the movements.

The political disruption that precipitated from the 1938 Majlis Movement in Kuwait, Dubai, and Bahrain is the main interest of examination. Specifically, this paper aims to address the political strategy the British utilized in the Persian Gulf in the face of the events of 1938 to ensure the continuity of British strategic and economic interests, while maintaining their indirect rule of the region. The thesis argues that Britain utilized a political strategy in 1938 that focused on containing the political and geographic scope of each regions Majlis Movement by providing limited reform in education, health, judicial, and economic institutions, followed by instituting restricted political reform, by establishing advisory councils, and employing political residents to arbitrate compromises between the movement and ruler, ensuring a balance of power, to maintain the ruling sheikh's authority in Kuwait, Dubai, and Bahrain and restrict regional intervention from Iraq, Iran, and nearby sheikhdoms.

Clarifying British political ideology and the specific strategic intervention used in the Majlis Movements of Kuwait, Dubai, and Bahrain in 1938 provides a unique insight into the contradicting relationship between Western powers and democratic politics in the Arabian Peninsula. In 1938, Britain methodically undercut the Persian Gulf's first major democratic political mobilization, upholding monarchical rule in Kuwait, Dubai, and Bahrain, to ensure the colonial power had continued access to exploit the regions strategic and economic assets, at a time when the colonial power championed itself as an exponent of democracy. In the larger historical context, Britain's oppositional relationship with democracy in Kuwait, Dubai, and Bahrain in 1938 provides the foundation for understanding the broader historical character of Western powers in the Arabian Peninsula, in upholding autocratic leaders in the face of popular democratic movements to sustain their own economic or strategic interests in the region. Even though the 1938 Majlis Movements failed in establishing political transformation within the

region, the movements were successful in challenging the ruling sheikhs' political supremacy and British informal rule, forcing the rulers and Britain to take greater accountability for the public's needs, leading to the modernization and development of public institutions in Kuwait, Dubai, and Bahrain.

Historiography

The most comprehensive study into the 1938 Majlis Movements was done by Shaul Yanai in his book, *The Political Transformation of Gulf Tribal States: Elitism and the Social Contract in Kuwait, Bahrain and Dubai, 1918-1970s*. Yanai analyzes all three Majlis Movements in Kuwait, Dubai, and Bahrain through the changes in the power dynamic rooted in tribal tradition between the ruling families, the ruling sheikhs, and the merchant classes, framing the movement as a move for the reestablishment of the merchant class's historical power structure. He argues that the merchant classes in each region lost their economic power and as a result their political power due to changing economic conditions of the time. Centrally, he points to the economic hardships created by the great depression and the creation of Japanese cultured pearls, that led to the collapse of the pearling industry and the British role in establishing financial independence for sheikhs' through air and oil agreements. Yanai acknowledges British involvement within the Majlis Movement in Kuwait, Dubai, and Bahrain but only in guidance with the latter argument. Yanai accurately depicts how British policy became increasingly interested in domestic affairs in the 1930's as a result of "the strategic importance of flight paths to India and the need of oil franchises", however, in interpreting each Majlis Movement in Kuwait, Dubai, and Bahrain, he focuses his attention on the role that British intervention played in the disruption of tribal power dynamics instead of addressing Britain's specific containment strategy.² Although Shaul Yanai

² Shaul Yanai, *The Political Transformation of Gulf Tribal States: Elitism and the Social Contract in Kuwait, Bahrain and Dubai, 1918-1970s* (Sussex, England: Sussex Academic Press, 2014), 11.

goes into depth into British involvement in the Majlis Movements in Kuwait, Dubai, and Bahrain representing them as a factor in the disruption of power between ruling families, the ruling sheikhs, and the merchant classes, he does not specifically address Britain's policy of containment and instead, features British involvement in the 1938 Majlis Movement in relation to traditional tribal power dynamics.

In Rosemarie J. Said's analysis of the Majlis Movement in Dubai, the scholar describes the movement as "the manifestation of a community that formed the economic and financial centre of the Trucial Coast, and temporarily transcended the confines of British rule".³ Similar to Yanai's account, Said emphasizes the role of the economic depression and introduction of Japanese cultured pearls in association with British oil and air agreements with Dubai's ruler, as being central to the initiation for reform among the merchant elite and members of the al Bu Falasah. Furthermore, Said points out the contention that arose from the merchant elite and members of the al Bu Falasah, in response to the ruler of Dubai accepting Britain's policy against Dubai's slave trade and arms traffic. Said provides an excellent account of the conditions that led to Dubai's 1938 Majlis Movement, however, the scholar leaves Britain's role in the movement largely undefined. For example, Said mentions that Britain "advised the ruler to give in to the demand for reform" but omits the political reasoning for Britain's recommendation.⁴ Moreover, the scholar references Britain's assertion that British relations would remain solely with the ruler of Dubai, following the election of an executive council, but provides no description about British reasoning for doing so. Namely, Britain's policy of balancing power between the council and ruler to maintain the ruler's power. Overall, Said Rosemarie provides a thorough account of the political and economic conditions that led to the creation and eventual

³ Rosemarie J. Said, *The 1938 Reform Movement in Dubai*. Beirut, Lebanon: American University, 1970: 249.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 257.

downfall of the Majlis Movement in Dubai, including the basic weakness of the movement's political framework and Britain's interactions in the movement as central reasons for its collapse, but the author does not touch on the political reasoning for Britain's role in the movement.

The only scholar to specifically focus on British political strategy in relation to the 1938 Majlis Movement is Andrew B. Loewenstein: Loewenstein focuses on British political strategy in the 1938 Majlis Movement in Kuwait. He argues the British implemented two strategies during the Kuwait Majlis Movement, "first, promotion of limited liberalization and democratization; and second, when that failed to yield acceptable results, attempts to persuade Kuwait accept unofficial British adviser".⁵ He argues that the British promoted limited liberalization and democratization in Kuwait in order to eliminate the movements increasing association with Iraq. Iraq was the center of Arab Nationalist thought - the unity of the Arabian people under one nation and anti-colonial sentiment - at the time and had broader interests in annexing Kuwait, threatening British indirect rule in Kuwait. Moreover, nationalist movements in Kuwait had ties to Kuwait's Majlis Movement. As a result, Loewenstein asserts that the prospect of Iraqi influence in the majlis movement drove the British to initially advise Sheikh Ahmad to give in to limited reforms demanded by the movement followed by the creation of a majlis council itself, to eliminate the movements need to acquire Iraqi assistance. Although Loewenstein correctly establishes British political strategy in promoting limited reform then recommending the establishment of a majlis council to deter Iraqi intervention, he refrains from acknowledging the process with which British strategy evolved from recommending limited reform to advising an actual majlis council. Particularly, the British only advised the creation of

⁵ Andrew B. Loewenstein, "'The Veiled Protectorate of Kowait': Liberalized Imperialism and British Efforts to Influence Kuwaiti Domestic Policy during the Reign of Sheikh Ahmad al-Jaber, 1938-1950," *Taylor & Francis* Vol. 36, No. 2 (2000): 103.

a majlis council after Kuwait's ruler largely ignored the Majlis Movement and refused to implement reform, which allowed the movement to generate political momentum, eventually necessitating British advisories to suggest the formation of a majlis council.⁶ The British were not engaged in active support for a majlis council until the situation called for such after the movement grew, however, Loewenstein's interpretation infers British support from the beginning. Furthermore, Loewenstein accurately argues that the British attempted to persuade Sheikh Ahmad to accept an unofficial advisor following the failures of limited liberalization and democratization; however, he applies over importance to the strategy. Sheikh Ahmad refused an unofficial British advisor repeatedly, leading the British to focus on other political strategies, such as maintaining a balance of power between the sheikh and the majlis council.⁷ Overall, Loewenstein's interpretation of British political strategies involved with the 1938 Majlis Movement is largely insightful, however, greater emphasis is needed on the evolution of British policy as they shifted from advising limited reform to recommending the formation of an official majlis council and the British strategy of balancing power between the sheikh and council, to derive a comprehensive image of the British political strategy in Kuwait during the 1938 Majlis Movement.

Other scholars have interpreted the 1938 Majlis Movement by describing the movement as a product of Kuwait's underdeveloped administration and newly emerging Arab nationalist groups such as the Kuwaiti Youth, with brief references to British political reasoning and policy.

⁶ See, Translation of Circular released by Kuwait Secret Society, 13 June 1938, Folio 166-170, 'File 4/20 I Koweit Situation', British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/R/15/5/205, in *Qatar Digital Library*; Correspondence from Trenchard Fowle to Secretary to the Government of India, 18 June 1938, Folio 178-180, 'File 4/20 I Koweit Situation', IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

⁷ See, Correspondence from Captain Gerald de Gaury to Trenchard Fowle, 13 June 1938, Folio 144-146, 'File 4/20 I Koweit Situation', IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

Centrally, Kamal Osman Salih argues that the Kuwaiti youth played a major role in bringing the Kuwait reform movement into closer association with Iraq, and initially sparking the merchant and ruling elite to voice their grievances against the Kuwaiti administration. The author argues that after being educated in Iraq, members of the Kuwaiti Youth brought ideas of Arab nationalism such as Arab unity and anti-colonial sentiment to Kuwait and “waged their campaign against the British presence and...pleaded for socio-political reform”, which incited disgruntled merchant elite and members of the ruling family to launch their own grievances against the Kuwaiti administration: particularly, after the public beating of al-Barak, a member of the Kuwaiti Youth who protested British involvement in Kuwait.⁸ Furthermore, Salih asserts that the underdevelopment of the administration of Kuwait in its financial, municipality, and security management was the central reason for the rise of contention in the merchant and ruling elite.

Salih incorporates aspects of British intervention into his analysis, mentioning Britain’s strategic advisory toward Sheikh Ahmed in implementing limited reform and eventually recommending an advisory council. Moreover, he represents the British reasoning for these strategies. Centrally, the risk of Iraqi influence; “[i]n the face of this Iraqi threat... [i]n the British view, the best way to defuse this alarming situation was to encourage the Emir to pursue needed reforms - as outlined earlier by the Kuwaiti agitators”.⁹ Salih correctly interprets the relation between increased Iraqi influence in the Kuwaiti Majlis Movement as a catalyst for increased British intervention in the form of suggestive advisory for reforms initially, and eventually for an official advisory council, but the scholar omits the importance of keeping the ruler in power for Britain’s informal rule in Kuwait. In addition, Salih does not explain Britain’s

⁸ Kamal Osman Salih, “The 1938 Kuwait Legislative Council,” *Middle Eastern Studies* Vol. 28, No. 1 (1992): 70.
⁹Ibid., 73.

policy of balancing power between the ruling sheikh and the council, following the election of an executive council. Consequently, the analysis lacks substantial depth of Britain's political reasoning behind intervention and their overall policy of supporting the sheikh. While Salih provides a well-developed account of the Kuwaiti Youth's role in the Kuwaiti reform movement and illustrates the role that Kuwait's underdeveloped administration played in creating dissatisfaction among merchant and ruling elite, Salih's account only provides limited interpretation of British strategy and policy in Kuwait's movement.

This paper draws on primary source research derived from the archive, British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, to provide a comprehensive account of the political policy and strategies the British implemented to ensure political stability in Kuwait, Dubai, and Bahrain during each region's Majlis Movement in 1938. In particular, the thesis argues that Britain utilized a political strategy in 1938 that focused on containing the political and geographic scope of each region's Majlis Movement by providing limited reform in education, health, judicial, and economic institutions, followed by instituting restricted political reform, by establishing advisory councils, and employing political residents to arbitrate compromises between the movement and ruler, ensuring a balance of power, to maintain the ruling sheikh's authority in Kuwait, Dubai, and Bahrain and restrict regional intervention from Iraq, Iran, and nearby sheikhdoms.

The thesis begins with a contextual history of the British arrival into the Persian Gulf and their ensuing policy of indirect rule. Following, British strategic and economic interests will be illustrated to provide the context to understand Britain's political and economic goals in the region. Subsequently, it details the 1938 Majlis Movements in Kuwait, Dubai, and Bahrain focusing on Britain's implementation of their policy of containment, in utilizing its residencies in the Persian Gulf to contain the political and geographical scope of the three reform movements

and ensure the continuation of British indirect rule. The discussion of each regions Majlis Movement will be broken into three sections: the beginnings of the Majlis Movement, the election of a majlis council, and the end of the Majlis Movement, excluding the Bahrain Majlis movement; the Bahrain Majlis Movement is subdivided by initial reform movements, the beginnings of the Majlis Movement, and the end of the Majlis Movement.

Establishment of British Indirect Rule in the Persian Gulf

The British utilized a combination of military action and political diplomatic activity in the 19th century to secure their position in the Persian Gulf. During the 18th and early 19th century, the Strait of Hormuz was controlled by the al-Qawasim family of Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah.¹⁰ The al-Qawasim family levied tolls on all shipping coming in and out of the Gulf which provided most of the family's revenue.¹¹ The British refused to pay these tolls. In response, the al-Qawasim raided British ships, "an act the British considered piracy".¹² The al-Qawasim family's control of the Strait of Hormuz and subsequently, the regional power's administration and enforcement of shipping tolls was perceived as a threat to British shipping in the region, leading to the colonial power's violent seizure of the al-Qawasim family's control on Persian Gulf shipping.¹³ By portraying al-Qawasim raids as piracy, the British justified their violent assault on the city of Ras al Khaimah and other allied strongholds in 1819-1820.¹⁴ Importantly, the British illustrated their military strength establishing a monopoly on violence in the Gulf, while largely annihilating the city of Ras al Khaimah, an emerging regional political power at the time.¹⁵ In association, the British began survey campaigns to map the Gulf and its shores in the 1820's and

¹⁰ James Onley, "Britain's Informal Empire in the Gulf, 1820-1971." *Journal of Social Affairs* 22, no. 87 (2005): 30.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 6.

¹⁴ Guillemette Crouzet, "The British Empire in India, the Gulf Pearl and the Making of the Middle East." *Middle Eastern Studies* 55, no. 6 (2019): 868.

¹⁵ Ibid.

1830's.¹⁶ The campaigns acted as a cover for increased British presence in the region including heightened British Naval patrols. The British Navy functioned as an avenue for intelligence collection and coercion.¹⁷ Naval patrols established port blockades and asserted military violence to coerce local leaders towards British political objectives.

In congruence with military force the British established British Residencies along the Persian Gulf during the 19th century and first decade of the 20th century to enlarge their political presence. The British Residency was paramount in mobilizing political activity in the Gulf. The residencies were responsible for monitoring and protecting “British interests within their districts, gather[ing] intelligence, enforc[ing] the terms of the treaties, and cultivat[ing] good relations with rulers”.¹⁸ The Residency functioned as the British political representative in the Persian Gulf and established the first British Treaty in the region, the General Treaties of Peace in 1820, succeeded by the Treaty of Perpetual Peace in 1853 which delegated the British Resident as the arbitrator of regional conflicts at sea.¹⁹ To reinforce Gulf residencies, Britain established a Persian Gulf Squadron in 1821 to protect and patrol the waters in the region.²⁰ These initial treaties integrated Britain, specifically the British Residency, into the forefront of Persian Gulf politics, as an overarching judge and jury who oversaw resolutions between conflicting parties, establishing Britain as the “Protector of Peace” in the Persian Gulf.

In the latter half of the 19th century into the 20th century, British involvement in the Persian Gulf grew, as the colonial power began signing numerous pacts and agreements with local leaders that provided security guarantees to selected Arab Rulers, bringing them under Britain's

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ James Onley, *Britain and the Gulf Shaikhdoms, 1820-1971: The Politics of Protection*. (Doha, Qatar: Center for International and Regional Studies, Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar, 2009), 4.

¹⁸ Jeffrey R. Macris, *The Politics and Security of the Gulf: Anglo-American Hegemony and the Shaping of a Region* (Abingdon, England: Taylor & Francis Group, 2010): 14.

¹⁹ Ibid., 16.

²⁰ Onley, *Britain and the Gulf Shaikhdoms*, 5.

security umbrella and “informally within the British Empire”.²¹ In exchange, the sheikhs’ agreed to preserve relations solely with Great Britain and granted Britain “the right to handle interstate diplomacy and military affairs”, shifting Britain from a regional mediator in conflicts between independent battling tribes, to establishing the colonial power as the official sole delegator of the Gulf’s foreign and military affairs, solidifying Britain’s supremacy in the Persian Gulf.²² These agreements maintained that Britain had no dominion over Persian Gulf domestic affairs, establishing Britain’s historical “non-intervention” policy in the Gulf.

Importantly, these British agreements with local sheikhs and future air and oil agreements created a mutually beneficial relationship between the ruler and Britain. British support behind a local sheikh, increased the ruler’s political and economic authority, securing the sheikh’s rule. In return, Britain had greater access to operate within local politics, employing their political residents in the Gulf to further British interests in the region. The dependency of ruling sheikhs political authority with Britain, incentivized their cooperation with British demands: “[i]f the rulers found themselves at odds with British interests and refused British “advice” on the protection of those interests, they risked British intervention”.²³ Gulf residents only kept “in power those rulers who co-operated with him to maintain Pax Britannica, and...[kept] out of power those who did not...intervening personally to punish or remove rulers unwilling to co-operate with him and installing shaikhs who would uphold the Pax Britannica”.²⁴ The political influence Britain held over the stability of sheikhs ruling status and later their economic leverage over rulers through air and oil royalties, provided Britain with significant leverage over rulers, ensuring rulers cooperated with British directives.

²¹ Ibid., 10.

²² Ibid., 8.

²³ Ibid., 13.

²⁴ Ibid., 12.

However, the continuance of British indirect rule in the region depended on maintaining the institution of monarchic rule. Increased political participation and democratization of government in the region, degraded Britain's ability to exert its influence into local politics. Democratic politics by nature open up political participation, making political actors' authority dependent on the people instead of British support, making British opinion less important. Moreover, democratic politics prevented the colonial power from opposing government directives that were at odds with British interests. Opposition towards a democratic government would frame Britain in opposition with the political will of the governed people, which would manifest anti-British sentiment against the colonial power because Britain championed itself as a leader of democratic politics. On the other hand, autocratic governance ensured Britain could oppose the ruling sheikhs, by systematically making the ruler's economic and political authority dependent on British support. In doing so, the British could manipulate rulers to act in accordance with British interests. Furthermore, British opposition towards an autocratic ruler did not have the same political repercussions associated with opposing democratic rule. If the British found a ruler to be in conflict with their interest, the colonial power could intervene into ruling family politics and instate a new ruler behind the scenes, without the risk of creating anti-British sentiment.

In all, by utilizing military and political force, the British cemented their dominance in the Persian Gulf and the continuance of monarchical governance in the region. Under the misguided pretense of removing a "piracy threat" that stemmed from the al-Qawasim family's enforcement of shipping tolls on maritime trade, the British launched a violent campaign in the Gulf, establishing Britain's presence in the region. The British furthered their grasp on the region by implementing a network of political residencies along the Gulf, whose political residents

acquired numerous treaties and agreements with local ruling sheikhs, granting Britain access to local politics and subsequently, establishing Britain's indirect rule over the region.

British Strategic and Economic Interests

Although British interests in the Persian Gulf originated from concerns about protecting Britain's shipping route from India into Persia, Iraq, and Muscat, by the beginning of the 19th century, Britain's dominant interest in the region was the Gulf's geographic importance as a barrier against foreign encroachment into the Indian Ocean and India. Napoleon's invasion of Egypt (1798-1801) and France's later military alliance with Persia (1807-1809) represented a European threat to Britain's monopoly of Indian ocean trade networks and its economic interests in India.²⁵ To limit French influence in the region, Britain secured anti-French treaties in return for British support along the Persian Gulf, establishing a buffer zone against French intrusion.²⁶

During the 1860's the strategic importance of the Persian Gulf towards Britain's economic interests in India multiplied. In 1865, the British established two telegraph lines through the Gulf that provided the British with instant communication with India, making the region "a vital communications corridor" for the British empire.²⁷ In addition, the completion of the Suez Canal in 1869 which cut shipping time from Britain to India in half, made the security of surrounding areas of utmost importance for British policymakers.²⁸

In the latter half of the 19th century, Britain faced European intrusion from Russia and Ottoman expansion into the Persian Gulf. Russia, who had long sought to establish a warm water port, began expanding into Central Asia with aims at establishing a port in the Persian Gulf.²⁹ A

²⁵ Onley, "Britain's Informal Empire in the Gulf," 38-41.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

Russian port in the Persian Gulf posed “a serious maritime threat to India”.³⁰ In step with Russian advancement in the region, the Ottoman empire began encroaching into the Persian Gulf and occupied Hasa and Qatar in 1872.³¹ The Ottoman empire furthered its aims to Eastern Arabia, threatening to annex the entire region. In response to the Russian and Ottoman expansion, the British sought to limit the incursion of foreign influence. As such, the British began solidifying their oversight of the Gulf by signing exclusive agreements with the rulers of “Bahrain (in 1880 and 1892), and Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, ‘Ajman, Umm al-Qaiwan, Ras al Khaimah (in 1888 and 1892)”, bringing them into British protection from foreign aggression.³² The tightening of British influence in the Persian Gulf arose directly out of concerns of foreign encroachment into the Indian ocean which threatened the security of India. Although, by fixing the Persian Gulf under British hegemony, the British were able to create a buffer zone of influence, protecting Britain’s monopoly on the Indian Ocean from foreign powers and preserving the colonial power’s overall influence in the broader region.

The economic importance of the Persian Gulf was small in comparison to its strategic value for the majority of Britain’s presence in the region. In the 18th and 19th century British merchants largely avoided the Persian Gulf because of the perceived threat of piracy and the lack of substantial commercial prospects.³³ Furthermore, despite the Persian Gulf being a market for British Indian goods, “the economic importance of the Gulf Shaikhdoms to British India was small”.³⁴ Other than the pearl industry, the Persian Gulf did not have many economic options for British investment or exploitation. However, after the discovery of oil in the Persian Gulf during

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 37.

³⁴ Ibid.

the first decades of the 20th century, the economic importance of the region for Britain increased dramatically.

In 1909, large oil deposits were found in Iran leading to the establishment of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company. Under pressure from Winston Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty, “the British Government acquired a controlling interest in APOC to secure a reliable oil supply for the Royal Navy” in 1913.³⁵ Churchill successfully convinced the British Government to convert the Royal Navy from coal to oil, making the securing of Persian Gulf oil a top priority for the British.³⁶ As a result, Britain, utilizing their gulf residencies, secured oil agreements with the rulers of Kuwait (1913), Bahrain (1914), Qatar (1916), the Trucial States (Dubai, Sharjah, Abu Dhabi) (1922), and Oman (1923).³⁷ These oil agreements granted Britain the sole right to oil concessions in the region; rulers could “grant oil concessions only to companies approved by the British Government”.³⁸ In exchange rulers received substantial British royalty payments that significantly increase ruler’s personal wealth. Although Britain had abundant coal reserves, the colonial power possessed very little oil.³⁹ The oil deposits found in Iran provided the colonial power the opportunity to become self-sufficient in the increasingly important resource. With substantial influence already established in the Persian Gulf states, Britain sought to secure its control over the regions possible supply of oil, even though oil hadn’t been officially discovered there yet.

The addition of oil in combination with the previous strategic importance of the Gulf, shifted the security and stability of the Persian Gulf to the forefront of British concerns. Following the

³⁵ Onley, *Britain and the Gulf Shaikhdoms*, 14.

³⁶ Macris, *The Politics and Security of the Gulf*, 15.

³⁷ Onley, *Britain and the Gulf Shaikhdoms*, 14.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Macris, *The Politics and Security of the Gulf*, 15.

end of WWI, the British undertook another campaign in the Persian Gulf to acquire air agreements with rulers in the area. Britain sought to expand its imperial airway in the region to “connect the Empire more quickly and protect the Empire more cheaply”.⁴⁰ Imperial air bases increased Britain’s ability to protect its strategic and economic interests in the Persian Gulf and allowed the colonial power to connect its Indian airways with Britain. Throughout the 1920’s and 1930’s Britain obtained air agreements from rulers along the Persian Gulf. In exchange, rulers received British royalties. Britain’s imperial air bases in the Persian Gulf were imperative to British colonial strategy: “[t]o British strategists, the Gulf airfields were almost as important as the Suez Canal”.⁴¹

By the time political agitation arose in Kuwait, Dubai, and Bahrain in 1938, the British had significant strategic and economic interests in the region. In all three sheikhdoms, Britain had imperial air facilities that were crucial for deterring foreign interference in the region and connecting Britain to its Indian colony by air. Moreover, Britain had discovered commercial quantities of oil in Bahrain by 1934 and in Kuwait in 1938, making both regions important for stable oil supplies for the British empire. Although oil had not been discovered in Dubai, geological surveys suggested probable oil reserves in the sheikhdom. Lastly, all three regions access to the Persian Gulf made the stability and security of Kuwait, Dubai, and Bahrain important within the British empire as a barrier to foreign influence or aggression in the Indian Ocean and India. Oil, air bases, and geographic position made Kuwait, Dubai, and Bahrain extremely important for protecting British interests in India, provide much needed oil supplies, and strengthen British military and communication abilities in its empire by connecting Indian

⁴⁰ Onley, *Britain and the Gulf Shaikhdoms*, 14.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

air routes with Britain. With the likelihood of another World War being probable, the Persian Gulf became indispensable to Britain's strategic, economic, and military interests in 1938.

The Beginnings of the Majlis Movement in Kuwait

The public beating of Muhammad al-Barak, perpetrated by Sheikh Sir Ahmad Ibn Jabir as Sabah's (r. 1921-1942) town lieutenant in the end of February 1938, was the catalyst for the political upheaval in Kuwait, that culminated into Kuwait's Majlis Movement. Al-Barak, a taxi driver and Kuwaiti Youth activist, had attended a meeting held by the Kuwaiti Youth and National Bloc.⁴² The Kuwaiti Youth was an emerging youth organization in Kuwait with close ties with Iraq. Several of the organization's founders were students in Iraqi universities, where they became influenced by Arab Nationalist ideas, particularly the Palestinian struggle against Zionism.⁴³ The National Bloc, also influenced by Arab Nationalism and educated, was a movement struggling for Syrian independence from France.⁴⁴ The meeting was held to discuss avenues for Kuwait to integrate into the struggle against Western imperialism, but Sheikh Ahmad feared the meeting was really organized to subvert his rule and declared it illegal.⁴⁵ The organizers ignored the proscription leading to the arrest and detainment of several members. Among the organizers arrested was Al-Barak, who was found guilty "of anonymous wall writings, anti-autocratic propaganda and intrigues" by Sheikh Ahmad's town lieutenant.⁴⁶ The town lieutenant, who was accused of corruption by the public, publicly flogged Al-Barak numerous times until he extracted the names of Al-Barak's accomplices: three prominent merchants.⁴⁷ Those fearful of detainment gathered their followers, armed, and returned to their

⁴² Yanai, *The Political Transformation of Gulf Tribal States*, 108.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁴⁶ Correspondence from Captain Gerald de Gaury to Trenchard Fowle, 19 March 1938, Folio 39, 'File 4/20 I Koweit Situation', IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

places of business to defend themselves while several others fled to Iraq in panic.⁴⁸ All the while, Sheikh Ahmad was in his country residence, seven miles away.⁴⁹ Strategically, the sheikh's secretary persuaded the town lieutenant to issue a statement of reassurance to the merchants, temporarily alleviating tensions.⁵⁰

The British immediately perceived the possible political repercussions associated with Al-Barak's public flogging, as Captain Gerald de Gaury, the British Political Agent in Kuwait, acknowledged: [i]n consequence rebellious parties are forming in favour of: (a) a change of ruler to Sheikh Abdulla Salim... (b) British Protection. (c) Iraq".⁵¹ Furthermore, he noted the presence of an influential group in Kuwait already disposed to Iraqi ideology working in the political sphere, referring to the "Kuwaiti Youth" and the "National Bloc".⁵² Simultaneously, members of the Al-Sabah family were growing impassionate towards Sheikh Ahmad's administration, unsatisfied with the "tiny allowances" afforded to them by the sheikh, who "has saved a very large sum and bought estates abroad".⁵³ Moreover, wealthy members of Kuwait's merchant class had grown impatient with Sheikh Ahmad's inaction to stimulate Kuwait's economy, which had suffered heavily from the global depression and the introduction of Japanese cultured pearls in the 1930's. The public flogging of Al-Barak appeared at a time of political dissatisfaction in several sections of Kuwaiti society, including the educated youth, Kuwait's emerging intelligentsia, members of the ruling family, and the merchant elite. De Gaury attentively

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Correspondence from Captain Gerald de Gaury to Trenchard Fowle, 19 March 1938, Folio 45, 'File 4/20 I Koweit Situation', IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Correspondence from Captain Gerald de Gaury to Brit consul Bushire, 19 March 1938, Folio 39, 'File 4/20 I Koweit Situation', IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

⁵² Ibid., 41.

⁵³ Ibid.

observed the potential dangers that emerging agitation had on Britain's informal rule, noting the necessity of British action:

In these circumstances it has I think to be considered whether silence and inaction on the part of His Britannic Majesty's Government will not be considered, in and outside Kuwait, as tantamount to an abdication of our especial position, and encourage 'Iraq and the pro- Iraq party in Kuwait, to such an extent that we should in face of public opinion soon be unable to maintain our especial position.⁵⁴

The central contention between the ruling family and the merchant elite on one hand, and Sheikh Ahmad on the other, was the interpretation of Sheikh Ahmad's responsibility to Kuwaiti society.⁵⁵ The introduction of Japanese cultured pearls combined with the global depression during the 1930's, decimated Kuwait's pearl industry, the primary source of wealth in the economy. Previously, merchants provided the funds for education facilities, healthcare, and the maintenance of public infrastructure, but as the pearl industry declined, merchants no longer had the financial ability to provide investments.⁵⁶ Both merchant elites and members of the ruling family felt it was the responsibility of the ruler to take over financing health and education facilities. Furthermore, merchant elites and members of the ruling family were frustrated over Sheikh Ahmad's inactivity in removing Kuwait from the economic depression. Many members of the ruling family depended on taxes made from the pearling industry for their economic wellbeing. After the industry's collapse members of the ruling family depended on allowances from Sheikh Ahmad. However, Sheikh Ahmad afforded only "10 percent of the state's revenues...to the al-Sabah family, which left most of the family in destitution".⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Yanai, *The Political Transformation of Gulf Tribal States*, 99.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 100.

In congruence, merchant elites often took out loans from Indian banks to finance their operations during the pearling season, but with the pearl industry in decline many were unable to pay off their debts leaving many bankrupt. As economic hardships increased for both sectors of society, the ruling family and merchant elites increasingly demanded Sheikh Ahmad to take a greater role in relieving the economic crises in Kuwait and financing public institutions. However, Sheikh Ahmad “refused to assume responsibility, claiming that according to tradition it was outside his area of jurisdiction”.⁵⁸ Sheikh Ahmad’s refusal to alleviate the merchant elite’s and the ruling family’s grievances emboldened the two classes to take political action against Sheikh Ahmad’s regime.

In addition to reforms, members of the ruling family and merchant elite sought greater representation and political influence in Kuwait. Historically, the merchant elites had political influence over the sheikh and his family, as the two were financially dependent on the merchant class. The sheikh and ruling family collected taxes from the merchant class and in turn merchant elites gained political influence over Kuwaiti affairs. However, the introduction of cultured pearls from Japan and the global depression during the 1930’s decimated the merchant elite’s economic status, decreasing their political influence over Sheikh Ahmad. Furthermore, as Britain established air facilities in Kuwait and began prospecting for oil, the colonial power made agreements with Sheikh Ahmad that granted the ruler air and oil royalties. These agreements were made solely with Sheikh Ahmad, meaning the air and oil royalties went straight to the ruler. Air and oil royalties increase Sheikh Ahmad’s financial independence which further depreciated the merchant class’s political influence in Kuwait and created tension within the ruling family. Sheikh Ahmad kept the majority of these royalties for himself, leaving only a fraction to be split

⁵⁸ Ibid., 99.

among the ruling family. The depression in Kuwait left the ruling family largely dependent on Sheikh Ahmad for income. This dependence on Sheikh Ahmad for financial stability, granted the ruler even greater political authority over the ruling family. The increasing political and economic power of Sheikh Ahmad during a period of decreasing political and economic power for the ruling family and the merchant elite, created the pretense for both groups to demand for greater political influence in Kuwait, eventually leading to their call for an executive majlis council.

In the first week of April 1938, two articles were released in Iraqi newspapers documenting agitators demands for reforms. The first article briefly called for economic, political, health, and education reforms while the second summarized the need for the latter reforms and the agitators' first predisposition for an official majlis council; "[t]he establishment of a Committee of Counsellors (Majlis Shura), to which all the affairs of the country should be referred, as also the International affairs which directly affect the interests of the country".⁵⁹ Importantly, the call for a majlis council at this point in time was purely advisory; although, dangerously for the British, the movement demanded a council with jurisdiction over foreign affairs, threatening Britain's control over the region. To contain the political momentum of the movement and prevent large-scale political change, British officials began intriguing Sheikh Ahmad to implement limited reform.

Following the release of the agitators demands, Trenchard Fowle, the senior British political resident in the Persian Gulf, sought permission from the India Office in London to approach

⁵⁹ Correspondence from Captain Gerald de Gaury to Hugh Weightmen, 4 April 1938, Folio 39, 'File 4/20 I Koweit Situation', IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*; Translation of an article appeared in the Iraqi newspaper "al-Zaman", 11 April 1938, Folio 69-71, 'File 4/20 I Koweit Situation', IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

Sheikh Ahmad about the increasing agitation towards his administration.⁶⁰ Fowle noted that Britain had no interest in interfering with the sheikh's administration, although they could not be indifferent towards serious incidents that occurred in the state, as Britain was held responsible in some measure by public opinion of other countries for the way in which these incidents were dealt with.⁶¹ Strategically, Fowle presented British opinion towards the recent agitations to Sheikh Ahmad assuring that Britain had no desire to interfere with Kuwait's internal affairs, but manipulated Britain's contractual oversight over Kuwaiti foreign affairs to justify Britain's authority to insert themselves into the ruler's reaction to such events. In this light, Fowle continued asserting that repression to such popular movements only leads to greater momentum, on the other hand, "the maintenance of law and order combined with a sympathetic guidance of the movement into useful channels of activity" certainly reduces the repetition of such unfortunate events.⁶² Presently, Fowle suggests an open attitude towards the movement including the implementation of reforms but, the political resident actively refrains from demanding such from Sheikh Ahmad. However, Fowle submitted "a veiled warning that if the Shaikh does not mend his administration we may have to mend it for him".⁶³

The India Office approved Fowle's suggested communication with Sheikh Ahmad. The British sought to contain the political agitation in Kuwait as quickly as possible because the colonial power worried about the movement's connections to Arab nationalist groups, that had ties to Iraq. Although the reform movement was being primarily orchestrated by members of the ruling family and merchant elite, Arab nationalist groups like the Kuwaiti Youth and National

⁶⁰ Correspondence from Trenchard Fowle to J.P. Gibson, 12 May 1938, Folio 97, 'File 4/20 I Koweit Situation', IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

⁶¹ Correspondence from Trenchard Fowle to J.P. Gibson, 25 April 1938, Folio 97, 'File 4/20 I Koweit Situation', IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 101.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 103.

Bloc had ties to the agitation. If the movement gained enough momentum, the British feared reformers may try increase the scope of their demands to include changes in Kuwait's political administration, threatening Britain's informal rule in the sheikhdom via Sheikh Ahmad.

Furthermore, the British felt inaction towards addressing the existing grievances of the agitators, would cause the reformers to seek foreign aid from Iraq, increasing the geographic scope of the movement.⁶⁴ Kuwaiti relations with Iraq had slowly deteriorated following Iraq's independence in 1932. A central reason for the two governments worsening relationship, revolved around Sheikh Ahmad's lack of effort in reducing illegal arms trading from Kuwait into Iraq. Arms smuggling from Kuwait damaged Iraq's stability by arming rebellious tribes in Southern Iraq, and circumventing import taxes resulting in a loss of income for Iraq's national treasury.⁶⁵ The Iraqi government demanded Sheikh Ahmad address and establish measures to prevent arms smuggling. However, Sheikh Ahmad was reluctant to stop the arms smuggling as it provided an alternative income source for merchants who "were desperate to find an alternative to pearl trade".⁶⁶

Sheikh Ahmad's inaction prompted the Iraqi government to launch a propaganda campaign against the Kuwaiti ruler, depicting him as a backward tyrant. When agitation arose in Kuwait, the Iraqi press took the opportunity to foster resentment towards Sheikh Ahmad and announce their support for the reform movement; "[i]t pains to behold on her borders an Arab territory...in a backward state...we are entitled to sympathize with the (present) movement in Koweit, and will be glad to see it yield the desired results".⁶⁷ The Iraqi government also supported the

⁶⁴ Correspondence from R.T. Peel to Baggalley, 11 May 1938, Folio 97, 'File 4/20 I Koweit Situation', IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

⁶⁵ Yanai, *The Political Transformation of Gulf Tribal States*, 173.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Extract from Iraqi newspaper "Al Isticlal", 26 April 1938, Folio 127-129, 'File 4/20 I Koweit Situation', IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

“Kuwaiti Youth” and the “National Bloc” in Kuwait, including the two group’s opposition towards British colonialism and support for the unification of the Arab people.

Arms smuggling was not the only motive for Iraqi propaganda against Sheikh Ahmad. The Iraqi government also sought to destabilize Kuwait, to further Iraqi influence over the region. Iraq viewed Kuwait as Iraqi territory, “citing the fact that as the heir of Ottoman districts that made up the modern state of Iraq” Kuwait too was within its territory.⁶⁸ King Feisal, the ruler of Iraq at the time, “dreamed of uniting the Arab world under his leadership....[and] opposed the rulers who preferred their personal and political interests and alliances with the European superpowers to the unity of the Arab nation”.⁶⁹ Iraq’s desire to incorporate Kuwait created a serious issue for Britain, who perceived the situation “as a matter of crucial importance from the point of view of imperial strategy”, referencing the importance of the Persian Gulf as a strategical barrier to India and as a communication and transportation midway for Britain to its Indian colony.⁷⁰ Moreover, in 1938, oil prospectors found potentially industrial quantities of oil in Kuwait, making the sheikhdom even more economically and strategically important for Britain. The possible Iraqi threat of annexing Kuwait, in association with the reform movements probable move towards increased political reform in Kuwait’s administration created a necessity for greater British action to maintain political stability.

Although, as a result of the movements democratic agenda, any British opposition towards the Majlis Movement would be portrayed as hypocritical, as Fowle notes, “it is obvious that as the chief exponents of democracy His Majesty’s government cannot ally themselves with the Shaikhs to stamp these movements out, even if this were practicable. What we can...do, is try by

⁶⁸ Yanai, *The Political Transformation of Gulf Tribal States*, 173.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

exercise of a judicious influence ensure that such movements come to fruition by a process of “peaceful change” and that they should...be well disposed towards us”.⁷¹ Britain’s position as an exponent of democracy and the possible outcome of agitators shifting increased alliances with Iraq opened the possibility of Iraq procuring Kuwait, leaving Britain with a delicate political situation to maneuver, in which the colonial power would shift from a historical pro-sheikh attitude towards presenting limited British support towards the agitator’s demands for reform.

Iraq’s interest in annexing Kuwait and Britain’s inability to go against a democratic movement in Kuwait, forced Britain to establish a political strategy that allowed them to provide enough support for the movement in order to discourage its members from seeking outside aid from Iraq, while refraining from showing outright support in order to avoid direct conflict with Sheikh Ahmad. The resulting strategy was as follows: utilize British political agents, specifically Captain Gerald de Gaury, to firmly advise Sheikh Ahmad to implement limited reform. The political strategy attempted to relieve the growing momentum of the Majlis Movement by giving into some of their demands for improved hospitals and better educational facilities, in hopes of containing what the British considered the more detrimental demands for “[t]he establishment of a Committee of Counsellors...to which all the affairs of the country should be referred, as also the international affairs”.⁷² In theory, the strategy would successfully positioned the British in between supporting both the sheikh and the Majlis Movement while maintaining enough political stability to thwart Iraqi ambitions in Kuwait and deaccelerate the movement’s growing support.

⁷¹ Correspondence from Trenchard Fowle to R.T. Peel, 18 July 1938, Folio 192, ‘File 4/20 I Koweit Situation’, IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

⁷² Correspondence from Captain Gerald de Gaury to Trenchard Fowle, 13 June 1938, Folio 144, ‘File 4/20 I Koweit Situation’, IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*; Translation of an article appeared in the Iraqi newspaper “al-Zaman”, 11 April 1938, Folio 69-71, ‘File 4/20 I Koweit Situation’, IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

Employing Fowle's suggested communication, De Gaury spoke with Sheikh Ahmad about implementing limited reform on June 13, 1938. Sheikh Ahmad responded reluctantly, understating the movement as a localized incident that had "nothing of importance" going as far as stating "there was no popular or democratic movement in Kuwait".⁷³ However, De Gaury continued to emphasize the need for reform eventually persuading the sheikh to undertake health and educational reforms, however, De Gaury had to essentially "put these two examples in his mouth".⁷⁴ In regard to an unofficial British advisor Sheikh Ahmad was unemphatic, shrugging his shoulders in response.⁷⁵ Although Sheikh Ahmad expressed willingness for reforms in his interaction with De Gaury, the sheikh only grudgingly accepted reforms after explicit "recommendation" from De Gaury.

However, when Sheikh Ahmad finally agreed to implement limited reform it was too late: on the same day as the sheikh's meeting with De Gaury, a circular had been distributed throughout Kuwait, stating that a secret society had been formed "which will never turn back until the Almighty wills Victory for the people and shameful failure for the traitors".⁷⁶ The secret society, "The Secret Association of Kuwait", was most likely an umbrella name for all the opposition groups: disgruntled members of the ruling family, merchant elites, Kuwait's intelligentsia, and the educated youth.⁷⁷ As previous advocacy had, the circular detailed the demands of the movement, but distinct from previous public communication, the circular called for the general public to help and join the fight to defend Kuwait from those "responsible for promulgating evil

⁷³ Correspondence from Captain Gerald de Gaury to Trenchard Fowle, 13 June 1938, Folio 144, 'File 4/20 I Koweit Situation', IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, Folio 146.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Translation of Circular released by Kuwait Secret Society, 13 June 1938, Folio 166-170, 'File 4/20 I Koweit Situation', IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

⁷⁷ Yanai, *The Political Transformation of Gulf Tribal States*, 109.

between them, and those who have robbed them of their legal rights”.⁷⁸ Although reform had significant support from the merchant class, the educated youth, and members of the ruling family, the general public did not have severe grievance with Sheikh Ahmad’s administration and largely refrained from the movement: particularly, Shiites, immigrants, and rural villagers in Kuwait remained loyal to Sheikh Ahmad.⁷⁹ Instead, the reformers call for public support was more of a ploy to create the image of popular support for the movement

However, the reform movement continued to declare its support among the public.

Particularly, on June 14, Sheikh Abdullah bin Salem, a member of the ruling family and prominent leader in the reform movement, met with De Gaury to ask the political resident to persuade Sheikh Ahmad to establish reforms: Sheikh Abdulla warned De Gaury “that most of the Kuwaiti society, the merchants, the youth, and ordinary citizens would rise up against” Sheikh Ahmad if the current situation continued.⁸⁰

Sheikh Abdulla’s warning to De Gaury in association with the circular, illustrated to the British the growing momentum of the Majlis Movement; “the idea of a Council...certainly...[had] public opinion in Kuwait behind it” facilitating a turning point in British political strategy towards advising the creation of an advisory majlis council in Kuwait.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Translation of Circular released by Kuwait Secret Society, 13 June 1938, Folio 170, ‘File 4/20 I Koweit Situation’, IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

⁷⁹ Yanai, *The Political Transformation of Gulf Tribal States*, 111.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁸¹ Correspondence from Captain Gerald de Gaury to Trenchard Fowle, 25 June 1938, Folio 186, ‘File 4/20 I Koweit Situation’, IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

Election of a Majlis Council in Kuwait

Five days after the circular appeared in Kuwait, Fowle sent a letter to Sheikh Ahmad suggesting the sheikh form an advisory council.⁸² Fowle reasoned that the establishment of an advisory council would provide an official avenue for agitators to voice their grievances with the administration, which allowed for controlled reform and alleviated the need for public agitation that decreased Kuwait's political stability. Additionally, the Political Resident continued to advise Sheikh Ahmad to implement limited reform. Fowle believed that limited reform combined with creating an official avenue for Kuwaitis to voice their grievances, would eliminate the movement's momentum and allow Sheikh Ahmad to avoid having to establish more detrimental reforms, such as an executive council. Although, Fowle's actual communication with Sheikh Ahmad was toned down and "worded in such a way as to convey that my [Fowle's] advice is merely a suggestion, and that comes personally from me i.e. not from His Majesty's Government".⁸³

In congruence with Sheikh Ahmad's response to Britain's suggestion on limited reform, the sheikh showed no interest in forming an advisory council.⁸⁴ Although, De Gaury inferred Sheikh Ahmad intended to form a council but was stalling "to save his face by not appearing to take precipitate action, as if it had been forced upon him".⁸⁵ However, in favor of the movement, Fowle's communication with the sheikh regarding his suggestion to form an advisory council was leaked to the public and was well received by several leading merchants and notables of the

⁸² Letter from Trenchard Fowle to Sheikh Ahmad al Jabir as Sabah, 18 June 1938, Folio 182, 'File 4/20 I Koweit Situation', IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

⁸³ Correspondence from Trenchard Fowle to Secretary to the Government of India, 18 June 1938, Folio 178-180, 'File 4/20 I Koweit Situation', IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

⁸⁴ Correspondence from Captain Gerald de Gaury to Trenchard Fowle, 25 June 1938, Folio 186, 'File 4/20 I Koweit Situation', IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*.

ruling family.⁸⁶ The public took Fowle's letter as a show of British support for the creation of an advisory council, emboldening leaders in the Majlis Movement: on June 28th, three leading merchants; Salman al-Adsani, Abd al-Latif al Thanian al- Ghanim, and Abdullah bin Hamda al-Saqer, who had behind them a large following, presented a letter to the sheikh asking him to form an executive council.⁸⁷ Following the merchant's letter in association with unofficial British support for an advisory council, Sheikh Ahmad shifted his opinion, agreeing in principle to the formation of an advisory council.⁸⁸

The same night after Salman al-Adsani, Abd al-Latif al Thanian al- Ghanim, and Abdullah bin Hamda al-Saqer presented their letter to Sheikh Ahmad, 150 heads of the leading families of Kuwait gathered and elected among them 14 members to serve on the council.⁸⁹ Of the 14 members in the council, all were Sunni-Arab, 10 belonged to the original Bani Utub tribal confederation that established Kuwait, and nearly all had substantial commercial ties with British India.⁹⁰ Additionally, 5 of the members had extended ties with both the "Kuwaiti Youth" and "National Bloc" and through them with Iraq.⁹¹ The council only had one member from the ruling family, Sheikh Abdullah bin Salem, which was strategically "designed to win the support of the ruler's opponents from within his family and a means of making it clear...that the council had no intentions of usurping the al-Sabah family".⁹²

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Correspondence from Captain Gerald de Gaury to Trenchard Fowle, 29 June 1938, Folio 186, 'File 4/20 I Koweit Situation', IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Correspondence from Captain Gerald de Gaury to Trenchard Fowle, 6th July 1938, Folio 246-254, 'File 4/20 I Koweit Situation', IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

⁹⁰ Yanai, *The Political Transformation of Gulf Tribal States*, 113.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

In response, Sheikh Ahmad frantically gathered his secretaries and the Director of the Municipality, to form an oppositional party that “made desperate efforts to win followers” using “large sums of money, and various privileges” to entice “anyone who would default from the Council”.⁹³ The sheikh’s efforts were futile: members of the council demanded Sheikh Ahmad’s formal approval in writing. Still clinging to hope, Ahmad continued to delay, postponing his formal acceptance to the next day, the 5 of July.⁹⁴ Although, on the fifth Sheikh Ahmad further delayed, stating that he felt unwell, but the sheikh was finally forced to succumb on the morning of the sixth, formally approving in writing the council and its present members; although, only in principle.⁹⁵ The official formation of the council would not occur for another week, when Sheikh Ahmad certified the legitimacy of the council on July 14, 1938.⁹⁶

After Fowle’s initial recommendation for the sheikh to form an advisory council, Britain remained absent in the events leading to the formation of the council. The public awareness of Britain’s support for the council situated Britain in a comfortable position in which the movement and the public felt “at one” with Britain.⁹⁷ Congruently, there was no confliction with Sheikh Ahmad, as Britain’s support for a limited council was leaked to the public, without Britain’s knowledge. Britain discerned the election of a council was inevitable: “[t]he movement against the Shaikh was, as has been seen, overpowering, and a trial of strength between the popular party and the ruler, in which the former was certain to have won, was bound to occur”.⁹⁸

⁹³ Correspondence from Captain Gerald de Gaury to Trenchard Fowle, 6th July 1938, Folio 246-254, ‘File 4/20 I Koweit Situation’, IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 250.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 251.

⁹⁶ Correspondence from Trenchard Fowle to Secretary of State for India, 14 July 1938, Folio 272, ‘File 4/20 I Koweit Situation’, IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

⁹⁷ Correspondence from Captain Gerald de Gaury to Trenchard Fowle, 6th July 1938, Folio 252, ‘File 4/20 I Koweit Situation’, IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

⁹⁸ Correspondence from Trenchard Fowle to R.T. Peel, 18th July 1938, Folio 280-294, ‘File 4/20 I Koweit Situation’, IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

The British had to simply let events unfold. In the end, the election of the council came at a decisive point, as De Guary summarized, “[h]ad the Council been postponed...feeling without any doubt, [the movement] would have grown, and grown rapidly, until at last there had come a serious flare-up, in which, I think it is quite possible that the Sheikh would have lost his life” and “the agitators would have become deeply involved in Iraq”.⁹⁹

The Kuwaiti council submitted a declaration of their function to the sheikh on July 12, 1938. The declaration granted the council with considerable power, degrading Sheikh Ahmad’s control of the country. Specifically, the declaration organized the council as the overseer of nearly all the functions of the state including the law, state budget and revenue, justice, public security, education, public health, and the overall improvement of Kuwait.¹⁰⁰ Importantly, Article 5 of the declaration, declared the President of the majlis council as the “Executing Authority in the State”, while Article 3 established that “any acts of The Shaikh need the council’s consent, whether under this article or any other”, shifting the council from its historical advisory position to an executive governing body.¹⁰¹ The merchant elite and members of the ruling family succeeded in reestablishing their political influence in Kuwait, allowing them to restructure the state to begin providing the funding for public institutions and relieve their economic hardships.

Fowle accounted frustration in Sheikh Ahmad’s reluctance to accept the formation of a council in prior months, remarking “if he had taken the verbal advice of His Majesty’s Government...this council might well have remained advisory instead of an executive one”.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Correspondence from Captain Gerald de Gaury to Trenchard Fowle, 6th July 1938, Folio 252, ‘File 4/20 I Koweit Situation’, IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

¹⁰⁰ Translation of the Law Governing the powers of the Kuwait Administrative Council, 9th July 1938, Folio 266, ‘File 4/20 I Koweit Situation’, IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 268; Correspondence from Trenchard Fowle to R.T. Peel, 18th July 1938, Folio 280-294, ‘File 4/20 I Koweit Situation’, IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

¹⁰² Correspondence from Trenchard Fowle to Secretary of State for India, 16th July 1938, Folio 274, ‘File 4/20 I Koweit Situation’, IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

Although the British supported an advisory council, the colonial power expressed irritation at the council's new executive function. An executive, semi-democratically elected council represented a political threat to Britain's informal rule through Sheikh Ahmad. Moreover, Britain could not actively go against the council because of its democratic character, leaving the British at the will of the council.

Following the creation of the council, Fowle began formulating Britain's new political strategy in Kuwait. The political resident formulated that Britain's principal strategy going forward, should focus on balancing power between Sheikh Ahmad and the council.¹⁰³ In particular, Fowle endeavored to maintain the council's "present confidence, so that they turn to us naturally for unofficial advice" and not Iraq, while explicitly regarding Sheikh Ahmad as the ruler of Kuwait and "officially responsible for Kuwait's relations with His Majesty's Government".¹⁰⁴ Principally, Britain's air and oil agreements would continue to go through the sheikh, even though the council was in charge of the state revenue, affording Sheikh Ahmad considerable financial power over the council. Britain feared the possibility of the council acquiring complete control in Kuwait. Although the council was presently pro-British, Fowle anticipated that as the council's position solidified, it may take on nationalistic tendencies due to its ties with the Kuwaiti Youth and National Bloc.¹⁰⁵

Furthermore, it was thought probable that the Iraqi government would try to use the council as a means of interfering in Kuwait's internal affairs because of the ties Iraq had with the Kuwaiti Youth and National Bloc.¹⁰⁶ Consequently, the majlis council was an unreliable political

¹⁰³ Correspondence from Trenchard Fowle to R.T. Peel, 18th July 1938, Folio 280-294, 'File 4/20 I Koweit Situation', IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 290.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 292; Yanai, *The Political Transformation of Gulf Tribal States*, 113.

¹⁰⁶ Correspondence from Trenchard Fowle to Secretary of State for India, 27th July 1938, Folio 300, 'File 4/20 I Koweit Situation', IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

partner to alliance with. Britain favored delegations with a singular person, Sheikh Ahmad, who had historically been more easily persuaded, due to the ruler's partial dependence on British support for political protection and economic stability. As a result, Britain maintained Sheikh Ahmad's position as the sole delegator of Kuwaiti relations with Britain and directly stated that the sheikh was the ruler of Kuwait, ensuring Kuwait's predominant cashflow, British air and oil royalties, went exclusively through Sheikh Ahmad, allowing Britain to maintain some of Sheikh Ahmad's dwindled authority while limiting the council's political capacity. However, over the ensuing months after the creation of the council, tensions arose between the latter and Sheikh Ahmad, testing Britain's ability to contain political instability in Kuwait.

The End of the Majlis Movement in Kuwait

By August of 1938 tensions began to arise between the majlis council and Sheikh Ahmad, after the council forcefully acquired a large share of the sheikh's arms reserves and began adamantly demanding for the removal of the sheikh's private secretary, Khan Bahadur Mulla Saleh.¹⁰⁷ Khan Bahadur Mulla Saleh, a follower of Shiite religious doctrine, represented a threat to the council. The secretary's close relationship with Sheikh Ahmad provided the Shia population an avenue to voice their opinions with the ruler. The council feared Khan Bahdur Mulla Saleh's influence over Kuwait's Shia population could be utilized by Sheikh Ahmad against the council. The secretary was undoubtedly loyal to Sheikh Ahmad and had already "tried to rouse the Persians, of whom there are about twenty thousand" in hopes "of smashing the [creation of the] Majlis".¹⁰⁸ In addition to the basic political threat that Khan Badhur Mulla

¹⁰⁷ Correspondence from Captain Gerald de Guary to Trenchard Fowle, 9th August 1938, Folio 322, 'File 4/20 I Koweit Situation', IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

¹⁰⁸ Correspondence from Captain Gerald de Guary to Hugh Weightman, 17th August 1938, Folio 392, 'File 4/20 I Koweit Situation', IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

Saleh represented, the council also had fundamental religious differences with the secretary, that bred distrust against the secretary among the council who “regarded the Shiite doctrine as Islamic heresy”.¹⁰⁹ The ingrained distrust rooted from religious differences, in addition to the council’s fears of Khan Bahadur Mulla Saleh’s ability to create Shia opposition towards the council, established the councils determination to remove the secretary.

Following the agitation, Sheikh Ahmad requested for British aid in settling the dispute; specifically, asking De Guary to see the council.¹¹⁰ The sheikh was aware of his dwindling position citing that “the Council...[was] getting too strong for him”, pushing him to align closer with the British.¹¹¹ On August 10, 1938 De Guary met with the council to discuss the present disputes. The council remained adamant about the removal of Khan Bahadur Mulla Saleh, but eventually agreed to allow the military appointment to oversee the arms reserve to remain with Sheikh Ahmad.¹¹² The latter was immensely important as it kept Kuwait’s arms reserve under Sheikh Ahmad’s control, limiting the council’s military capability. De Guary instructed the council that “there must be no disturbances” and that he would acquire a response from Sheikh Ahmad in two days.¹¹³ Although, Sheikh Ahmad circumvented British advisors and sent a negotiator to the council, detailing an ultimatum in which the sheikh would abdicate if he was not allowed to keep Khan Bahadur Mulla Saleh as his private secretary.¹¹⁴

In response to the growing tensions in Kuwait and Sheikh Ahmad’s threat to abdicate, the British continued in their strategy of balancing power between the two parties. Particularly, the

¹⁰⁹ Yanai, *The Political Transformation of Gulf Tribal States*, 175.

¹¹⁰ Correspondence from Captain Gerald de Guary to Trenchard Fowle, 9th August 1938, Folio 322, ‘File 4/20 I Koweit Situation’, IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Correspondence from Captain Gerald de Guary to Trenchard Fowle, 10th August 1938, Folio 334, ‘File 4/20 I Koweit Situation’, IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

India Office suggested that a compromise should be drawn up, in which the council would withdraw their demand for Khan Bahadur Mulla Saleh's removal in return for Sheikh Ahmad dispensing his private secretary's services on his own accord, after an interval of time.¹¹⁵ The compromise functioned as an avenue for the sheikh to protect his reputation while satisfying the wishes of the council. To broker the compromise the India Office sought to utilize De Guary "to induce the Council to withdraw" their demand while informing Sheikh Ahmad that he "would be well advised to make a change on his own initiative".¹¹⁶ The compromise was successful and following a meeting between Sheikh Ahmad and De Guary on August 15, the sheikh agreed to send Khan Bahadur Mulla Saleh on a "long leave".¹¹⁷

Although the British considered the threat of Sheikh Ahmad abdicating over his personal secretary undesirable, the colonial power concluded that open support of the sheikh over the disputed secretary would "only result in our losing favorable position at present held", opening "far more dangerous potentials than possible abdication of present Shaikh".¹¹⁸ Particularly, the British feared open opposition would "present the Council with all the propaganda value and enable them to mobilize public opinion against both the Shaikh and ourselves", hence the British move towards inducing Sheikh Ahmad to release his private secretary despite the possibility of his abdication as a result.¹¹⁹ Presently, the British sided with the council as they needed to retain the council's favorable disposition; the council had relatively a lot of power in swaying public opinion about Britain, particularly if the colonial power opposed the council. Any British

¹¹⁵ Correspondence from India Office to Captain Gerald de Guary, 14th August 1938, Folio 364, 'File 4/20 I Koweit Situation', IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Correspondence from Captain Gerald de Guary to Hugh Weightman, 15th August 1938, Folio 370, 'File 4/20 I Koweit Situation', IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

¹¹⁸ Correspondence from Hugh Weightman to Secretary of State for India, 11th August 1938, Folio 386, 'File 4/20 I Koweit Situation', IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

¹¹⁹ Correspondence from Hugh Weightman to Captain Gerald de Guary, 15th August 1938, Folio 358, 'File 4/20 I Koweit Situation', IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

opposition towards the council would be utilized by Iraqi propaganda to illustrate Britain as anti-democratic. Although, through arbitration the British ensured that the decision over the secretary's departure was formally decided by Sheikh Ahmad, to make sure the sheikh remained favorable to the public and kept Kuwait's arms reserves in Sheikh Ahmad's possession, limiting the council's military capacity, without having to formally oppose the council.

Even though conflict had been avoided, tensions were still apparent between Sheikh Ahmad and the council. The sheikh refused to cooperate with the council and continued to refer to them as "the enemy".¹²⁰ In an attempt to aid the support of the British government against the council, Sheikh Ahmad began adamantly requesting for a British advisor.¹²¹ The British aware of Sheikh Ahmad's intentions, determined the appointment inadvisable. The appointment of a British advisor was detested by the council and the British inferred the appointment would be regarded, at the very least, as a "clear indication of mistrust" of the council on the part of the British.¹²² Thus, the British made it clear to both the sheikh and the council that they would not take side in the disagreement, emphasizing that they recognized the council as "an essential feature of the administration of Kuwait and, by implication...are not prepared to assist in any manoeuvres designed to destroy it", while making it clear that "the Shaikh [is]..the symbol of authority in Kuwait" and "is still responsible for Kuwait's relations with His Majesty's Government".¹²³ Again, the British maintained a position of neutrality between the council and Sheikh Ahmad refusing to upset the balance of power between the parties.

¹²⁰ Correspondence from Hugh Weightman to R.T. Peel, 22 August 1938, Folio 402-416, 'File 4/20 I Koweit Situation', IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 404.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 406.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 406-408.

However, in September, the British Government received thousands of requests from Kuwaitis, mostly persons of Shia religion, for British Nationality.¹²⁴ The numerous applications for British nationality from Shia Kuwaitis were a result of Shia Kuwaitis' anxiety over their future in Kuwait. The establishment of the majlis council compromised of an entirely Sunni-Arab electorate and the removal of the sheikhs Private Secretary, Khan Bahadur Mulla Saleh, left the Shia population with no representation in government.¹²⁵ Prior to the council, Khan Bahadur Mulla Saleh acted as a facet for Shia representation with the sheikh, as the private secretary was of Shia religion.¹²⁶ Although with his removal demanded by the council, the Shia population in Kuwait were left with no representation in government. The council responded to the large number of applications for British Nationality by releasing a public notice that threatened to deport anyone who applied for foreign nationality, which only increased Shia apprehensions.¹²⁷ Shia contention grew, culminating in several demands including the establishment of "special Shi'ah schools, representation on the Council, and representation on the Municipality Council".¹²⁸

The council's contention with Kuwaitis Shia population was partially rooted in theological differences that made the Sunni dominated council distrust the Shia populations political motives. Stemming from their religious distrust, the council also grew "suspicious of the Shiite community's loyalty because of its Iranian background".¹²⁹ Utilizing the latter arguments, the council refused to agree to any of the Shia community's demands.

¹²⁴ Correspondence from Gerald de Guary to Hugh Weightman, 26 September 1938, Folio 490, 'File 4/20 I Koweit Situation', British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

¹²⁵ Correspondence from Trenchard Fowle to J.P. Gibson, 29 October 1938, Folio 552-562, 'File 4/20 I Koweit Situation', IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 554.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 556.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 558.

¹²⁹ Yanai, *The Political Transformation of Gulf Tribal States*, 175.

The British government rejected the large number of applications for British Nationality citing that the applicants did not meet the criteria needed for British Nationality, referring to the need for applicants to “have long residence in a British possession”.¹³⁰ Although the British did not grant nationality to the growing Shia contention, the colonial power did seek reform from the majlis council to relieve the Shia agitation. The British felt Shia agitation could lead to possible Iranian intervention, being that so many Kuwaiti Shia’s were of Persian origin.¹³¹ Thus, Fowle accompanied by De Guary met with the council and the Shaikh to discuss the recent agitation on the September 15. Although, the two British agents relayed that the Shia agitation was an internal affair, they incorporated the possible Iranian threat emerging out of the agitation as a means to justify British presence. In the meeting the council adamantly refused to accept any of the Shia demands for greater representation and the establishment of specific Shia schools, citing “that Kuwait was Arab territory, and that they wanted it kept as such, free from Persian intrigue and influence”.¹³² Although Fowle agreed that the council did not need to establish Shia schools if it was not disposed to, the Political Resident suggested that greater Shia representation in the majlis and municipality council would be worth considering.¹³³ Fowle explained, “a single Shi’ah representative on the council could not affect the council’s decisions, but would give the Shi’ahs an opportunity of “letting off steam””.¹³⁴ Despite Fowle’s suggestion, the council remained adamant in refusing Shia representation; although, Fowle convinced the council to retract their threat of deportation against Shia agitators, temporarily relieving some tension.¹³⁵

¹³⁰ Correspondence from Trenchard Fowle to J.P. Gibson, 29 October 1938, Folio 552-562, ‘File 4/20 I Koweit Situation’, IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² *Ibid.*, 558.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

Although the Shia agitation had been partially relieved, the council still faced growing resentment from other sections of Kuwait society, including conservatives, merchants who had lost monopolies that were canceled by the council, and an increasing number of the public who were against recent orders by the council such as forbidding dancing and drumming within the city walls.¹³⁶ Despite the growing number of groups in Kuwait that held resentment towards the council, either from differences in belief or disdain for their reformatory measures, the council still held a degree of popularity among the majority population.¹³⁷

Even though many of the reforms instituted by the council were in favor of the merchant elite, particularly the numerous reforms associated with decreases in taxes and duties surrounding trade, the council did address numerous social issues that benefited the majority of the Kuwaiti population.¹³⁸ The council opened three government schools, including one for girls, revamped Kuwait's administration by exchanging corrupt individuals with little experience with higher educated individuals with qualified skills, invested in infrastructure including roads and government buildings, opened numerous markets in the economy that were previously monopolized by the sheikh, and extended access for the public to open shops which had previously been monopolized by the ruling family.¹³⁹ Despite the successful administrative reforms implemented by the council, a growing opposition emerged from conservatives that felt the council went against tribal tradition and the principles of Islam, a growing number of merchant families who felt the council was undermining the merchant's especial position with the ruling family, the Shiite community who were alienated by the council, and members of the

¹³⁶ Correspondence from Gerald de Guary to Trenchard Fowle, 22 December 1938, Folio 5, 'File 4/20 II Kuwait Situation: Constitution and Council', IOR/R/15/5/206, in *QDL*.

¹³⁷ Correspondence from Gerald de Guary to Trenchard Fowle, 17 December 1938, Folio 660, 'File 4/20 I Koweit Situation', IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

¹³⁸ Improvements introduced by the Kuwait Council since its formation, 5th November 1938, Folio 608, 'File 4/20 I Koweit Situation', IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

general public who felt the council was acting in their own interest.¹⁴⁰ By December of 1938, Sheikh Ahmad began making moves towards the dissolution of the council, referencing the “great weight of opposition” towards the council.¹⁴¹

Once Sheikh Ahmad’s decision to disband the council became public on the 18 of December, members of the council along with their police and followers withdrew from their posts around the city and barricaded themselves in the Citadel.¹⁴² Around midday the tension grew between the two parties. Aware of the possibility for violent clashes, De Guary encouraged the two camps to send representatives to arbitrate on their behalf towards a compromise.¹⁴³ Meanwhile, Sheikh Ahmad amassed Bedouin warriors from in and around Kuwait; “[t]he Bedouins in accordance with their customs in war had thrown off their head dresses, and had put on their scarlet, yellow or blue, gold embroidered surcoats”.¹⁴⁴ Importantly, the sheikh had kept good relations with the Bedouin tribes in Kuwait by continuing annual payments to the group through his own wallet after the council voted to discontinue payments.¹⁴⁵ On the other hand, the council did not appreciate the Bedouin tribes in Kuwait as in the council’s “vision of a modern state there was no room for nomadic tribes”, leading to the Bedouin tribes in Kuwait to remain loyal to Sheikh Ahmad.¹⁴⁶

Simultaneously, armed villagers from the nearby village of Qasour trickled into the city to support the sheikh. The people of Qasour were “bitterly against the Council” as the council had

¹⁴⁰ Yanai, *The Political Transformation of Gulf Tribal States*, 174.

¹⁴¹ Correspondence from Gerald de Guary to Trenchard Fowle, 17 December 1938, Folio 660, ‘File 4/20 I Koweit Situation’, IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.; Correspondence from Gerald de Guary to Trenchard Fowle, 17 December 1938, Folio 658, ‘File 4/20 I Koweit Situation’, IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

¹⁴² Correspondence from Gerald de Guary to Trenchard Fowle, 22 December 1938, Folio 5-13, ‘File 4/20 II Kuwait Situation: Constitution and Council’, IOR/R/15/5/206, in *QDL*.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁴⁵ Yanai, *The Political Transformation of Gulf Tribal States*, 211.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

threatened punishment towards the villagers for concealing their baskets of tomatoes with pitted, unripe, or bad tomatoes in Kuwait's markets.¹⁴⁷ Considering the village tomatoes were all pitted, the people immediately answered Sheikh Ahmad's call to arms.¹⁴⁸ Sheikh Ahmad with numerous armed reinforcements jumped on the opportunity to confront the council and its followers. The sheikh, in an attempt to avoid all-out war, issued an ultimatum to the council and their followers to surrender by 3:00 PM or the sheikh and his reinforcements would storm the council's fortification.¹⁴⁹

Despite Sheikh Ahmad's ultimatum, arbitration was successful. Both sides agreed to select four elders from each camp to argue their case before four arbitrators.¹⁵⁰ Strategically, Sheikh Ahmad insisted the arbitration take place inside the Citadel. The council agreed and no sooner had it been accepted, the Citadel was occupied by Sheikh Ahmad's men and the council was told by the four arbitrators that "further negotiations would be abortive but that the sheikh had agreed to a new election provided that he retained the right of veto on the new Council's decisions".¹⁵¹ Sheikh Ahmad "had won the day", owing his success to his ability to maintain Bedouin support and the reformative mishaps of the council in Qasour that allowed him to amass the reinforcements needed to disband the council.¹⁵²

As with the agitation that arose during the creation of the majlis council, following the announcement from Sheikh Ahmad regarding the dissolution of the council, the British undertook a relatively hands-off approach to the agitation. Although the colonial power had sloops on standby to enter Kuwait ports, the British were able to avoid such actions, largely out

¹⁴⁷ Correspondence from Gerald de Guary to Trenchard Fowle, 22 December 1938, Folio 9, 'File 4/20 II Kuwait Situation: Constitution and Council', IOR/R/15/5/206, in *QDL*.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

of luck.¹⁵³ Again, the British were in a precarious position as they could not actively support the sheikh in overthrowing the council even with the growing opposition from conservatives, the Shiite community, select merchant families, and rural Kuwaiti villagers towards the body: British opposition against the council would portray the colonial power as anti-democratic which would have been utilized by Iraq, the “Kuwaiti Youth”, and the “National Bloc” to create anti-British sentiment in Kuwait and elsewhere in the Persian Gulf. Although, the British avoided having to make any definitive stance. By barricading themselves into Kuwait’s citadel, the council and its followers forfeited all control the group had on the town and eliminated their mobility.¹⁵⁴ The “elementary military mistake” removed the council’s ability to amass support or attain sufficient arms to mobilize a resistance against Sheikh Ahmad, providing the sheikh the upper hand.¹⁵⁵ As a result of the council’s retreat into the Citadel, Sheikh Ahmad had ample time to gather his Bedouin reinforcements. From the British perspective, the conflict was surely to go in the favor of the sheikh. Nonetheless, the colonial power was anxious about the possible harm towards their economic assets and British personnel in the region if armed conflict arose.¹⁵⁶

In an attempt to avoid a violent clash between the two parties, De Guary continually urged for arbitration. Fowle notes that De Guary and the arbitration committee’s efforts were instrumental in avoiding armed conflict: “an armed clash was only averted by the efforts of de Guary and the Arbitration Committee”.¹⁵⁷ Besides De Guary’s role in encouraging arbitration between the two camps, the British largely left the agitation play out realizing the nearly certain outcome of the

¹⁵³ Correspondence from Trenchard Fowle to Gerald de Guary, 19 December 1938, Folio 660, ‘File 4/20 I Koweit Situation’, IOR/R/15/5/205, in *QDL*.

¹⁵⁴ Correspondence from Gerald de Guary to Trenchard Fowle, 22 December 1938, Folio 7, ‘File 4/20 II Kuwait Situation: Constitution and Council’, IOR/R/15/5/206, in *QDL*.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ Correspondence from Trenchard Fowle to R.T. Peel, 29 December 1938, Folio 25, ‘File 4/20 II Kuwait Situation: Constitution and Council’, IOR/R/15/5/206, in *QDL*.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

sheikh overtaking the council, which aligned with British interest for continuing their informal rule. Although, throughout the discussions, De Guary made sure that the sheikh confirmed that he had complete ownership of the arms reserve, he would elect a second council, and the sheikh would retain the right to veto council decisions.¹⁵⁸ The British wanted to make sure the power scale tipped in favor of the sheikh, essentially leaving the council powerless against the sheikh. Overall, the British were happy with the outcome of the agitation as R.T Peele, an India Office Correspondent noted, “[i]t is gratifying that the issue of a hectic day lay in favour of the Sheikh” a “favourable result”.¹⁵⁹

The election of the second council took place on December 22, 1938. The council was enlarged to 20 members instead of the previous 14 and was continued to be led under the Presidency of Abdulla Salim.¹⁶⁰ In contrast to the first elected council, the second council was elected by an electorate of 400 people, in hopes of making the election more representative of the Kuwait population.¹⁶¹ Although the second council’s electorate was enlarged, the new council still retained 12 of the original members of the first council.¹⁶² The appointment of former council members was not by chance, in fact, there were many rumors that several people were paid to vote on the behalf of the former members.¹⁶³

Although the second council had been elected it was short-lived. The council refused to agree with Sheikh Ahmad’s revised constitution in which the council would lose all executive

¹⁵⁸ Correspondence from Gerald de Guary to Trenchard Fowle, 22 December 1938, Folio 11, ‘File 4/20 II Kuwait Situation: Constitution and Council’, IOR/R/15/5/206, in *QDL*.

¹⁵⁹ Correspondence from R.T. Peel to Trenchard Fowle, 14 February 1939, Folio 125, ‘File 4/20 II Kuwait Situation: Constitution and Council’, IOR/R/15/5/206, in *QDL*.

¹⁶⁰ Correspondence from Gerald de Guary to Trenchard Fowle, 29 December 1938, Folio 15, ‘File 4/20 II Kuwait Situation: Constitution and Council’, IOR/R/15/5/206, *QDL*.

¹⁶¹ Correspondence from Gerald de Guary to Trenchard Fowle, 27 December 1938, Folio 17, ‘File 4/20 II Kuwait Situation: Constitution and Council’, IOR/R/15/5/206, in *QDL*.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

functions, leaving it as a solely advisory entity.¹⁶⁴ As a result, Sheikh Ahmad disbanded the second council on March 7, 1939, citing the council's pro-Iraqi activities as the primary reasoning.¹⁶⁵ Two days prior to Sheikh Ahmad's announcement, several members of the council joined a delegation that traveled to Baghdad "to request the Iraqi government's aid" in preserving the council.¹⁶⁶ The British, who had kept a close eye on the delegation's activities in Iraq, believed the delegation had come to an agreement with Iraq to depose Sheikh Ahmad.¹⁶⁷ Although there was no concrete evidence, the British warned Sheikh Ahmad, accelerating the ruler's decision to disband the second council.¹⁶⁸

After the dissolution, Sheikh Ahmad began establishing a new advisory council, distinct from the previous two in that members were personally chosen by Sheikh Ahmad, reestablishing Sheikh Ahmad's supremacy over Kuwait. Although, some members of the late council did not embrace Sheikh Ahmad's decision. Three days after the sheikh disbanded the second council, a pro-Iraq emissary, Ahmad bin Manias visited several of the former council members and gave an address, declaring "that the Subah were no longer rulers of Kuwait and that they should resist them until Iraq army arrived" in Kuwait.¹⁶⁹ The former members began distributing leaflets containing the latter message in hopes of stirring agitation and convincing the public that Iraq was coming to their rescue.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁴ Correspondence from Gerald de Guary to Trenchard Fowle, 27 February 1939, Folio 131, 'File 4/20 II Kuwait Situation: Constitution and Council', IOR/R/15/5/206, in *QDL*.

¹⁶⁵ Correspondence from Gerald de Guary to Trenchard Fowle, 7 March 1939, Folio 141, 'File 4/20 II Kuwait Situation: Constitution and Council', IOR/R/15/5/206, in *QDL*.

¹⁶⁶ Yanai, *The Political Transformation of Gulf Tribal States*, 192.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ Correspondence from Gerald de Guary to Trenchard Fowle, 10 March 1939, Folio 151, 'File 4/20 II Kuwait Situation: Constitution and Council', IOR/R/15/5/206, in *QDL*.

¹⁷⁰ Correspondence from Gerald de Guary to Trenchard Fowle, 12 March 1939, Folio 181, 'File 4/20 II Kuwait Situation: Constitution and Council', IOR/R/15/5/206, in *QDL*.

On the morning of the tenth violent agitation arose after Ahmad bin Manias was arrested. While Ahmad bin Manias was being transported to prison Yusuf al-Marzuq, a previous council member associated with the Kuwaiti Youth, accompanied with Muhammad Al Qitami, a follower of the former council, attacked the police which led to Al Qitami getting fatally shot and Yusuf sustaining a bullet wound in the foot.¹⁷¹ The situation was quickly contained, and the same day a trial was completed against Ahmad bin Manias, where he was found guilty of being a traitor and sentenced to death: Manias was shot and publicly hanged in the main square.¹⁷² Additionally, Sheikh Ahmad had the former members of the previous council who had intrigued against him arrested and sentenced to banishment from Kuwait.¹⁷³

With the final agitators against the sheikh dismissed, the Majlis Movement in Kuwait had officially come to an end. Although, Sheikh Ahmad established another council the entity was solely advisory and selected by the sheikh, eliminating any political or economic power within the council. The British supported Sheikh Ahmad's move towards creating a solely advisory council, as De Guary noted "[t]his new Advisory Council... is what we had in mind originally, and it is excellent that the Sheikh has come back to it".¹⁷⁴ For the British, an advisory council functioned as an effective way to prevent future agitation by providing an outlet for public grievances, preventing the public from voicing grievances through public agitation.

In the end Britain's policy of containment was successful in containing the political and geographic scope of Kuwait's Majlis Movement from attaining absolute control over Sheikh Ahmad and preventing large scale Iraqi intervention in Kuwait. Initially, the British utilized their

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 183.

¹⁷² Ibid., 185.

¹⁷³ Correspondence from Trenchard Fowle to Secretary of State India, 11 March 1939, Folio 161-163, 'File 4/20 II Kuwait Situation: Constitution and Council', IOR/R/15/5/206, in *QDL*.

¹⁷⁴ Correspondence from Gerald de Guary to Trenchard Fowle, 27 February 1939, Folio 131, 'File 4/20 II Kuwait Situation: Constitution and Council', IOR/R/15/5/206, in *QDL*.

political resident in Kuwait, Gerald de Guary to persuade Sheikh Ahmad to implement limited reform, followed by an advisory council, in an attempt to appease the movement's administrative demands and avoid substantial political reform. Despite significant British advisement, Sheikh Ahmad initially refused to implement limited reform and an advisory council, which allowed the Majlis Movement to garner greater support among the merchant elite, the intelligentsia, the youth, Iraq, and some members of the ruling family. With significant support behind the movement, including limited British support, Sheikh Ahmad was forced to concede to the reform movement and establish an executive majlis council.

In order to contain the political capabilities of the newly elected council, the British maintained their official relationship with solely Sheikh Ahmad including having British air and oil royalties flow through Sheikh Ahmad, creating a balance of power between Sheikh Ahmad and the council. Although the British were unable to directly oppose the council, the colonial power utilized Gerald de Guary to insert into any conflict between the council and the sheikh, to arbitrate compromise. The British used its role as arbitrator as an avenue to check the council if the body was becoming too powerful, allowing the colonial power to maintain some of Sheikh Ahmad's authority. Once Sheikh Ahmad amassed sufficient support from conservatives, the Shiite community, certain merchant families, Kuwaiti villages, and Kuwait's Bedouin tribes against the council, the British made no effort to maintain the executive council. Instead, under the arbitration efforts of De Guary, Britain made sure that the executive power was fully restored under Sheikh Ahmad's rule, preserving their indirect rule in Kuwait.

The Beginnings of the Majlis Movement in Dubai

The impetus for the development of a Majlis Movement in Dubai occurred in May of 1938, over a dispute over taxi services between the Rashid and Hasher sections of the al-Maktoum family from the larger al Bu Falasah branch of the Bani Yas tribal confederation. Sheikh Said bin Maktoum bin Hasher al-Maktoum (r. 1912-1958), the ruler at the time, son, Sheikh Rashid bin Said al-Maktoum (r. 1958-1990) operated taxi services in Dubai and effectively had a monopoly over the industry.¹⁷⁵ Although, on May 25, Sheikh Rashid bin Said's dominance in the industry was challenged after his second cousin, Sheikh Mana bin Rashid al-Maktoum, a wealthy intellectual who had previously led opposition against Sheikh Said, purchased a car and began offering taxi services between Sharjah and Dubai.¹⁷⁶ Initially, Sheikh Rashid bin Said requested Sheikh Mana to stop any further taxi services in Dubai; however, after Sheikh Mana ignored the request, Sheikh Rashid bin Said accompanied by 30 armed men attacked Sheikh Mana's car on its route to Sharjah.¹⁷⁷ Upon arrival, Sheikh Rashid bin Said acted violently towards the taxi driver, a Persian man from Lingeh, and would have killed the man "had it not been for his brother Shaikh Khalifah".¹⁷⁸ The driver still suffered injury after Sheikh Rashid bin Said stabbed the man with his dagger. Sheikh Rashid bin Said had then attempted to kill one of Sheikh Mana's men who accompanied the driver, but his pistol malfunctioned.¹⁷⁹ Following the incident, both men were imprisoned until midnight the same day, when they were released by notables of the al bu Falasah.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁵Note about local affairs from Khan Sahib Said Abdul Razzak al Razzuki, 31 May 1938, Folio 74-78, 'File 3/1 Local affairs', IOR/R/15/4/11, in *QDL*.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 76.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 78.

Upon hearing of the incident, Sheikh Mana “immediately stopped all the cars of the Sheikh of Dubai from running” causing Sheikh Said to send several notables to Sheikh Mana’s brother, Sheikh Hashar bin Rashid al-Maktoum, requesting that Sheikh Mana allow all taxi cars to resume operation and ask Sheikh Hashar to prevent Sheikh Mana from further reaction until matters could be arranged between the two.¹⁸¹ Under Sheikh Hashar’s advice, Sheikh Mana allowed taxi services to resume, but threatened Sheikh Said that he would “take the law in his own hand if the Shaikh of Dubai failed to do him justice against his son”.¹⁸² Following the incident local opinion shifted against Sheikh Rashid bin Said, who was described as being “rash and childish” for his actions against the innocent driver and servant.¹⁸³ The taxi incident led to several notables of the al bu Falasah to consolidate around Sheikh Mana’s cause, uniting them “against Shaikh Said” and, as public opinion shifted in their favor, the Sheikh Mana faction used the incident “as a peg from which...to air grievance[s]” against Sheikh Said, representing the initial stages of Dubai’s Majlis Movement.¹⁸⁴

Although the taxi dispute sparked Dubai’s reform movement, merchant elites and members of the al Bu Falasah family were already dissatisfied with Sheikh Said, over his inaction to relieve Dubai’s economic depression while the ruler received substantial royalties from Britain, the ruler’s increasingly authoritative rule, his acceptance of British measures to halt Dubai’s slave trade and arms traffic, and over his right to rule in Dubai. As in Kuwait, the great depression and the introduction of Japanese cultured pearls during the 1930’s significantly impacted Dubai’s economy which was largely dependent on the pearl industry. The economic crises directly

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Correspondence from Khan Sahib Said Abdul Razzak al Razzuki to Hugh Weightman, 18 June 1938, Folio 88, ‘File 3/1 Local affairs’, IOR/R/15/4/11, in *QDL*.

affected the leaders of the Dubai reform movement: the notables of the al Bu Falasah, many of whom were merchants and the merchant elite.¹⁸⁵ In contrast, Sheikh Said had increased his economic status during the decade by signing air and oil royalties with Britain that granted the ruler significant financial independence. Sheikh Said's financial independence significantly decreased the merchant elite's authority in Dubai's administration.

Similar to Kuwait, the foundation of the merchant class's political relationship with Sheikh Said was based on taxes. Prior to British royalties, Sheikh Said depended on taxes from the merchant class for income and in return the merchant elite were given greater representation and political authority in Dubai's administration. However, as the economic crises deepened in Dubai and Sheikh Said became increasingly financially independent from British royalties, the historical relationship collapsed, degrading the merchant elite's authority in Dubai's administration.

Sheikh Said's growing wealth also frustrated members of the al Bu Falasah elite. The group felt that they deserved a share of Sheikh Said's royalties to recoup their losses from the depression. Furthermore, they felt that Sheikh Said was obligated to reinvest the money into public projects such as health services, education facilities, and projects to stimulate Dubai's economy.¹⁸⁶ Sheikh Said had claimed that he "was willing to provide economic assistance when necessary, but refrained from stating exactly when that would be and how much he would give", convincing many that the ruler was never intending to actually do so.¹⁸⁷ Furthermore, Sheikh Said's financial independence made him increasingly politically independent: the ruler "began

¹⁸⁵ Rosemarie J. Said, *The 1938 Reform Movement in Dubai*. Beirut, Lebanon: American University, 1970: 247.

¹⁸⁶ Yanai, *The Political Transformation of Gulf Tribal States*, 120-122.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 122.

breaking tribal tradition that obligated him to consult with senior family members and leading merchants on crucial matters of state”.¹⁸⁸

Headed by Trenchard Fowle, the British during the late 1930’s doubled down on their efforts to halt the slave trade and arms traffic in Dubai. The British had faced international criticisms for the slave institutions in countries they protected. International criticism in association with Fowle’s argumentation that it was Britain’s moral obligation, led to a substantial increase in the manumission of slaves from 1937-1938 in Dubai.¹⁸⁹ British policy, “to aid any freedom-seeking slave as much as possible” drew sharp criticism from the al Bu Falasah branch, who felt the policy would only increase their economic hardships.¹⁹⁰ Although Britain’s pro manumission policy aided in the increased number of freedom-seeking slaves, the main reasons for the pattern was actually the economic collapse of the pearl industry. Slave owners, who largely depended on the pearl industry, went bankrupt in the 1930’s and had trouble just feeding their slaves, leading to more slaves seeking freedom.¹⁹¹ Nevertheless, the al Bu Falasah branch felt that the British policy was “an intentional blow to what was left of their strength as commercial-social elite”.¹⁹²

As the British launched campaigns to halt the slave trade in Dubai, the colonial power simultaneously started cracking down on arms smuggling that went through Dubai into Iran, Iraq and Saudi desert tribes.¹⁹³ Several members of the al Bu Falasah branch and merchant elite had turned to arms smuggling as an alternative source of income after the collapse of the pearl industry. Britain’s crackdown on Dubai’s arms struggle created fear among the elite that they would lose another source of much needed income. Both the merchant elite and al Bu Falasah

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 121.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 122

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid., 123.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

branch pressured Sheikh Said to take a stand against Britain's slave and arms policy but the ruler was in a precarious position. Sheikh Said enjoyed the financial and political independence that he acquired through British air and oil royalties and did not want to risk deteriorating his relationship with the colonial power. The merchant and al Bu Falasah elite felt that Sheikh Said was selling out to British interests over his own peoples, leading the group to organize demonstrations against the ruler in March.¹⁹⁴ Sheikh Said attempted to balance himself between the interests of the commercial-social elite and Britain but in the end sided with the colonial power.

Although the majority of the initial agitation against Sheikh Said was rooted in receding political representation and economic hardship, sections of the Rashid family questioned Sheikh Said's ruling status, particularly, Sheikh Mana. Sheikh Mana saw Sheikh Said as the illegitimate ruler to the throne and had attempted several times to manifest opposition against the ruler among the merchant and al Bu Falasah elite, promising "that under his leadership Dubai would become one of the most modern countries in the Persian Gulf".¹⁹⁵ Sheikh Mana went so far as organizing an assassination against Sheikh Said in 1934.¹⁹⁶ However, Sheikh Mana was unsuccessful in assassinating the ruler and was forced to take an oath of loyalty to Sheikh Said. With his support from Britain and dessert tribes and his ability to maintain enough positive relationships with the commercial-social elite, Sheikh Said was able to maintain his rule throughout the 1930's despite Sheikh Mana's consistent meddling against him. Although, the combination of economic strife, decreased political representation, and Sheikh Said's acceptance of British policy on slave and arms trade in 1938, provided the political atmosphere for Sheikh

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 80.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 83.

Mana to take advantage of the al Bu Falasah and merchant elite grievances, to launch opposition against Sheikh Said.

Beginning in June, agitation began to emerge from Sheikh Mana and the commercial-social elite after mediation over the taxi dispute had still not been settled between Sheikh Said and the Sheikh Mana branch of the al Bu Falasah.¹⁹⁷ Although Sheikh Said attempted to reach a compromise over the dispute, he was limited, “owing to the uncompromising attitude which his wife Hissah, and his son Rashid had adopted” on the matter.¹⁹⁸ Frustrated by Sheikh Said’s inaction, notables of the al Bu Falasah and Sheikh Mana held a private meeting to discuss the situation: they decided to take advantage of the taxi incident to air their grievances with the sheikh. Initially, the notables asked Sheikh Said to establish fixed allowances for the notables; however, after the request was ignored the group decided to further their demands insisting for reforms in the budget and civil list, education, health and sanitation, peace and order, removal of corruption, and freedom in trade and other crafts.¹⁹⁹ Underlying the demand for reform was a warning for Sheikh Said, “[s]hould the Shaikh fail to comply with their request for the above they are determined to enforce them by force”.²⁰⁰

On June 19th, after Sheikh Said had remained silent on the issue of reform, the Sheikh Mana al Bu Falasah section occupied the Deira quarters and its towers.²⁰¹ In response, Sheikh Said amassed 400 Bedouin reinforcements from the dessert and sent a letter to the British resident in Sharjah requesting that he come to Dubai to arrange the removal of foreigners in case violence

¹⁹⁷ Correspondence from Khan Sahib Said Abdul Razzak al Razzuki to Hugh Weightman, 18 June 1938, Folio 88, ‘File 3/1 Local affairs’, IOR/R/15/4/11, in *QDL*.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁰¹ Correspondence from Khan Sahib Said Abdul Razzak al Razzuki to Hugh Weightman, 20 June 1938, Folio 90, ‘File 3/1 Local affairs’, IOR/R/15/4/11, in *QDL*.

broke out.²⁰² The Sharjah political resident, Khan Sahib Said Abdul Razzak al-Razzuki, immediately left for Dubai. With the help of a conciliation committee, Khan Sahib al-Razzuki arranged a truce between the two parties in which it was agreed that “both parties should refrain from hostile acts pending settlement by both of them”.²⁰³

The following day, a meeting was held with Sheikh Juma bin Maktoum bin Hasher al-Maktoum (Sheikh Said’s brother), al Bu Falasah notables, and several leading merchants who supported Sheikh Mana, to discuss the demanded reforms.²⁰⁴ Sheikh Juma agreed on behalf of Sheikh Said to abolish the monopolies held by Sheikh Said and his family, to “look into the question of the employing local people in the Customs and other services”, and “consider the question of allowances when his relatives prove sincere to him”.²⁰⁵ The opposition did not agree to Sheikh Juma’s proposal, refusing to accept unless their allowances were fixed. The refusal prompted Sheikh Juma to message Khan Sahib al-Razzuki requesting he come to Dubai for arbitration.²⁰⁶ Soon after the Sharjah political resident met with Shaikh Said in the evening of the same day. The sheikh stated, “he was ready to share his relatives and those who serve him the loaf which he gets from his country” but only when “they proved sincere to him”.²⁰⁷ Following, Khan Sahib al-Razzuki met with the al Bu Falasah and merchant opposition. After a long talk with the opposition, the Sharjah political resident convinced them to accept the given agreement and to leave the question over allowances for after peace was restored.²⁰⁸ By the end of the day, Sheikh Mana and the opposition had vacated their positions in Dayrah, disarming their men

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Correspondence from Khan Sahib Said Abdul Razzak al Razzuki to Hugh Weightman, 20 June 1938, Folio 106-108, ‘File 3/1 Local affairs’, IOR/R/15/4/11, in *QDL*.

²⁰⁴ Correspondence from Khan Sahib Said Abdul Razzak al Razzuki to Hugh Weightman, 22 June 1938, Folio 116-120, ‘File 3/1 Local affairs’, IOR/R/15/4/11, in *QDL*.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 116.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 118.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 116.

while Sheikh Said sent his Bedouin reinforcements away establishing peace in Dubai.²⁰⁹

Through the Sharjah resident's arbitration efforts, Britain was able to deescalate the situation and retain political stability in Dubai.

Although peace was established in Dubai, it quickly became apparent that Sheikh Said was going to go back on his commitments. During the ensuing months of June, July, and August Sheikh Said masked his inaction towards reforms by holding numerous meetings with the al Bu Falasah and merchant elite to discuss the specificity of implementing reform. For the most part these meetings were cordial and did not give rise to agitation; although, after Sheikh Said formally told the opposition that he was "not going to listen to their demands about allowances", the al Bu Falasah and merchant elite grew impatient.²¹⁰ In response, the opposition threatened Sheikh Said; the sheikh "was bound to abide by his undertaking" and if he refused to act on it, "were going to make him to comply with it".²¹¹ To avoid further physical conflict, Sheikh Said had to appear to be working towards making reforms. Thus, the sheikh agreed to establish a majlis council consisting of al Bu Falasah members and notable members of the merchant elite to begin drafting rules for the implementation of reform.²¹² Although, Sheikh Said had been able to avoid implementing the promised reforms by watering down implementation with endless debating and meeting, the opposition were increasingly becoming restless with the sheikh's inaction, initiating a domino sequence for a large scale Majlis Movement to materialize in Dubai.

In August, J.B Howes, the temporary Political Agent in Bahrain, began corresponding with Khan Sahib al-Razzuki regarding British political strategy towards the conflict in Dubai.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 118.

²¹⁰ Correspondence from Khan Sahib Said Abdul Razzak al Razzuki to Hugh Weightman, 25 July 1938, Folio 150-152, 'File 3/1 Local affairs', IOR/R/15/4/11, in *QDL*.

²¹¹ Ibid., 150.

²¹² Ibid.

Although immediate conflict had been resolved, Howes noted that “the Shaikh’s refusal to stand by his solemn promise to grant redress of grievances in certain respects, is liable at any moment to cause a fresh conflagration”.²¹³ Howe perceived the al Bu Falasah and merchant reformative demands positively, regarding them as “a programme of development, which is suited to the increased importance of Dubai” which Britain “cannot fail to approve”.²¹⁴ In congruence to British reaction in Kuwait, the British perceived reformative measures as a positive development that was desperately needed in the Persian Gulf sheikhdoms. However, Britain only supported reforms within the context of Dubai’s administration and overall development rather than any political changes. In particular, the British supported reform as long as it was consistent with their “general policy of maintaining the authority of the ruling Shaikh”.²¹⁵ Although, the latter policy was dependent on public opinion; “it is contrary to policy to support any Shaikh against public opinion”.²¹⁶ Thus, Howes directed Khan Sahib al-Razzuki to approach Sheikh Said and intrigue him to implement the agreed upon reforms, noting that the ruler’s complaints of the al Bu Falasha’s attitudes were unreasonable “when he himself makes no effort to implement the undertaking he has given to introduce reforms”.²¹⁷ In addition to recommending reform, Howes directed the Sharjah Resident to impress upon Sheikh Said to curb the “hot-headed activities of Rashid”.²¹⁸ Howes recognized the dangers surrounding Sheikh Said’s son who had initiated the initial agitation in June by attacking Sheikh Mana’s men and frequently expressed rash hostility towards the al Bu Falasah. Overall, the British undertook a policy that aimed at directing Sheikh

²¹³ Correspondence from J.B. Howes to Khan Sahib Said Abdul Razzak al Razzuki, 8 August 1938, Folio 188-190, ‘File 3/1 Local affairs’, IOR/R/15/4/11, in *QDL*.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 188.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 190.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Said to implement his promised reforms and restrict the unpredictable activity of Sheikh Rashid bin Said.

Election of a Majlis Council in Dubai

In early September, Sheikh Said traveled to Bahrain where he attempted, unsuccessfully, to enlist British support against the opposition party, led by Sheikh Hashar and Sheikh Mana.²¹⁹ Following, Sheikh Said traveled to Qatar, then Abu Dhabi, with the object of bolstering support and collect arms for the attack he had planned against the Rashid section of the al Bu Falasah and merchant elite: both attempts were unsuccessful as Qatar and Abu Dhabi were pressured under British guidance not to interfere.²²⁰ The British did not want the agitation in Dubai to expand to other Gulf sheikhdoms.

On the sheikh's return to Dubai in mid-September, "the situation was not as favourable as he had expected" and Sheikh Said decided to send representatives to the Rashid family to negotiate the previous June settlement.²²¹ Although, Sheikh Said's negotiations with the Rashid section only left them "exasperated" and resulted in the defection of nearly all members of the al Bu Falasah, even those who had previously supported the sheikh.²²²

By September 15 tensions in Dubai reached a boiling point after Sheikh Said's son, Rashid bin Said, sent 10 armed men to occupy the Nahar tower; a strategically important watchtower in Deira, built in the 19th century to defend Dubai from intruders.²²³ The al Bu Falasah, now united under Sheikh Mana's opposition, met that night and sent a letter to Khan Sahib al-Razzuki

²¹⁹ Correspondence from Hugh Weightman to Trenchard Fowle, 23 October 1938, Folio 309-325, 'File 22/8 Dubai Affairs', IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 311.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² *Ibid.*, 313.

²²³ Correspondence from Khan Sahib Said Abdul Razzak al Razzuki to Hugh Weightman, 18 September 1938, Folio 33, 'File 22/8 Dubai Affairs', IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

requesting a British settlement.²²⁴ The Sharjah resident responded advising “them to not retaliate and promised to go to Dubai in the morning” to talk to Sheikh Said.²²⁵ Although, upon his arrival the political resident decided “not to talk business” with the ruler as “there was no likelihood of any serious development in the situation”.²²⁶ However, Khan Sahib al-Razzuki was misguided in his assumption.

On the 17, Shaikh Said began amassing Bedouin tribesman, which prompted the al Bu Falasah opposition party to occupy the remaining two watchtowers on the Deira side of Dubai. The same day, Khan Sahib al-Razzuki met with Sheikh Said to discuss the recent agitation. However, Sheikh Said seemed confident in the situation and “hinted to [the resident] not to interfere and that he had sent a deputation to come into direct agreement with his relatives”.²²⁷ The deputation consisted of eight neutral members who were sent to meet with the al Bu Falasah reform party, led by Sheikh Mana bin Rashid and Sheikh Hashar bin Rashid, on September 18.²²⁸ The al Bu Falasah continued to demand for increased allowances and reforms in the budget and civil list, education, health and sanitation, peace and order, removal of corruption, and freedom in trade and other crafts.²²⁹ The deputation committee relayed that the sheikh was willing to consider the party’s demands if they vacated the towers they occupied and mediated the situation directly with the sheikh, leaving the British out of it.²³⁰ In response, the reform party stated that they were open to vacating the two watch towers if Shaikh Said demobilized his Bedouin recruits

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Correspondence from Khan Sahib Said Abdul Razzak al Razzuki to Hugh Weightman, 19 September 1938, Folio 37, ‘File 22/8 Dubai Affairs’, IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

²²⁹ Correspondence from Khan Sahib Said Abdul Razzak al Razzuki to Hugh Weightman, 18 June 1938, Folio 88, ‘File 3/1 Local affairs’, IOR/R/15/4/11, in *QDL*.

²³⁰ Correspondence from Khan Sahib Said Abdul Razzak al Razzuki to Hugh Weightman, 19 September 1938, Folio 37-39, ‘File 22/8 Dubai Affairs’, IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

and agreed to their demands through Khan Sahib al-Razzuki.²³¹ After two days of arbitration, the deputation committee had failed to come to any compromise after Sheikh Said refused to give into the reform party's demanded reforms.²³² Frustrated by the deteriorating situation in Dubai, Sheikh Said sent his brother Sheikh Juma to Bahrain, to again ask for British support against the council, followed by another trip to Qatar, to again ask for arms; both attempts were unsuccessful.²³³

In response, Fowle corresponded with Sheikh Said explaining Britain's position in regard to the agitation. Foremost, Fowle made it clear that Britain could not get involved; "it is not the policy of His Majesty's Government to interfere in the internal affairs of the Arab States...these affairs the Shaikhs must settle".²³⁴ Congruent with British behavior in Kuwait, the colonial power was restricted from directly intervening against the opposition. Although there wasn't a direct threat of foreign intervention, unlike Kuwait with Iraq, the British still couldn't outright support the sheikh against a popular movement as it would create anti-British sentiment in and around Dubai. Additionally, Fowle related that Britain had already come to an arrangement with the ruler and the al Bu Falasah opposition in June, referencing the promised reforms that Sheikh Said had agreed to; "[a]s you are aware, in the month of June when there was likelihood of trouble between yourself and the Al Bu Falasa...an arrangement come to between you and Al Bu Falasa by which certain requests which they made...should be granted by you" yet "these arrangements have not yet been put into force".²³⁵ Fowle dismissed Sheikh Said's request for

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

²³² Correspondence from Khan Sahib Said Abdul Razzak al Razzuki to Hugh Weightman, 21 September 1938, Folio 59, 'File 22/8 Dubai Affairs', IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

²³³ Correspondence from Hugh Weightman to Trenchard Fowle, 23 October 1938, Folio 313, 'File 22/8 Dubai Affairs', IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

²³⁴ Correspondence from Trenchard Fowle to Sheikh Said bin Maktoum bin Hasher al-Maktoum, 1 October 1938, Folio 103-109, 'File 22/8 Dubai Affairs', IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 103-105.

British intervention in the matter. Instead, the political resident continued to emphasize the promised reforms the sheikh had agreed too, which had settled the agitation in June. From Fowle's perspective, the conflict had already been alleviated in June with peace only being held back by Sheikh Said's refusal to implement reform. Using the same logic implemented in the recent Kuwait agitation, Fowle stressed that early reform would "deprive those who wished to oppose the Ruler of the popular support on which they relied".²³⁶

Shaikh Said responded to Fowle, noting that he had already given into some of the agitators demands such as freedom, stressing that he had "never agreed to grant them anything else".²³⁷ Principally, the sheikh seemingly ignored any agreements made in June and emphasized that he had attempted to negotiate with the agitators but was impeded by their unfounded, stubborn position. Under Sheikh Said's interpretation of events, the sheikh had no other option but to confront the agitators noting "that nothing will effect settlement between them except fighting".²³⁸

The prospect of violence prompted the British to relate to both parties that they were responsible for any damage to British lives or property.²³⁹ Khan Sahib al-Razzuki further warned British subjects to stay in their homes relating that violence was probable. In addition, a sloop was requested to dock in the Dubai port in order "to ensure the safety of British subjects" and evacuate them if violence escalated.²⁴⁰ In all, Sheikh Said's determination for armed conflict left the British frustrated. The British felt the issue was easily resolvable with the implementation of

²³⁶ Ibid., 105-107.

²³⁷ Correspondence from Sheikh Said bin Maktoum bin Hasher al-Maktoum to Trenchard Fowle, 5 October 1938, Folio 133, 'File 22/8 Dubai Affairs', IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

²³⁸ Correspondence from Hugh Weightman to Captain Gerald de Guary, 6 October 1938, Folio 135, 'File 22/8 Dubai Affairs', IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Correspondence from Hugh Weightman to Captain Gerald de Guary, 6 October 1938, Folio 159, 'File 22/8 Dubai Affairs', IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

a few limited reforms; however, Weightman noted that “there may be some advantage in settlement by fighting”.²⁴¹ Although the situation had escalated, the British did not seem worried with armed conflict, perhaps feeling that Sheikh Said had the strength and numbers to defeat the oppositional party.

By October both parties had occupied opposing sides of the creek that ran through Dubai with Sheikh Said and his followers on the Dubai side and al Bu Falasah on the Deira side.²⁴² A few skirmishes had been exchanged between the parties in the first week of October. Members of al Bu Falasah’s party besieged the Nahar tower held by Shaikh Said on October 6th; however, shortly after Sheikh Said’s men recaptured the tower.²⁴³ The following day further conflict arose near an Imperial airway landing strip prompting British officials to redirect flights to Ras al Khaimah.²⁴⁴ Although, the next day fighting subsided after Sheikh Shakhbut Sin Sultan al-Nahyan (r. 1928-1966), Sheikh Muhammad bin Ali, Sheikh Muhammad bin Suleiman from the surrounding sheikhdoms of Abu Dhabi, Bani Kitab, and Bakha arrived in Dubai and settled a five-day truce between the two parties.²⁴⁵ Shortly after, Sultan bin Saqr al-Qasimi II of Sharjah (r. 1924-1951) and Sheikh Sultan bin Salim al-Qasimi of Ras Al Khaimah (r. 1921-1948) arrived in Dubai to aid in the negotiations.²⁴⁶

²⁴¹ Correspondence from Hugh Weightman to Captain Gerald de Guary, 6 October 1938, Folio 139, ‘File 22/8 Dubai Affairs’, IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

²⁴² Correspondence from Hugh Weightman to Trenchard Fowle, 23 October 1938, Folio 315, ‘File 22/8 Dubai Affairs’, IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

²⁴³ Correspondence from Khan Sahib Said Abdul Razzak al Razzuki to Hugh Weightman, 6 October 1938, Folio 147, ‘File 22/8 Dubai Affairs’, IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

²⁴⁴ Correspondence from Hugh Weightman to Air Office Commanding, Habbaniya, 7 October 1938, Folio 151, ‘File 22/8 Dubai Affairs’, IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

²⁴⁵ Correspondence from Hugh Weightman to Secretary of State India, 11 October 1938, Folio 203, ‘File 22/8 Dubai Affairs’, IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

²⁴⁶ Correspondence from Khan Sahib Said Abdul Razzak al Razzuki to Hugh Weightman, 12 October 1938, Folio 352, ‘File 3/1 Local affairs’, IOR/R/15/4/11, in *QDL*.

The arrival of neighboring sheikhs worried British officials, prompting Fowle to release a statement to any Trucial Coast sheikhs' who showed signs of interfering in Dubai for their own ends, to in effect "keep out".²⁴⁷ The personal interests of each sheikh in the conflict were thought "only to make the quarrel more bitter" thus the British felt "it is essential that the rulers of other Shaikhdoms on the Trucial Coast should hold completely aloof from Dubai".²⁴⁸ The British worried that the addition of regional sheikhs into the Dubai conflict could cause a "general split along the Coast into hostile parties with dangerous potentialities".²⁴⁹ Particularly, if armed conflict arose Sheikh Muhammad of Bani Kitab was expected to take sides with al Bu Falasah, while Sheikh Shakhbut of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Sultan bin Saqr al-Qasimi of Sharjah, and Sheikh Sultan bin Salim al-Qasimi of Ras al Khaimah, appeared on the side of Sheikh Said.²⁵⁰ In hopes of keeping the agitation from spreading into a regional conflict, the British made it clear to visiting sheikhs' that the British would not tolerate any political meddling in the Dubai agitation.²⁵¹

On the October 12, Shaikh Shakhbut crossed over into the al Bu Falasah controlled Deira side, to discuss terms for peace with Sheikh Hashar and Sheikh Mana, on Sheikh Said's behalf.²⁵² The agitators related their previous demands and for the first time demanded an

²⁴⁷ Correspondence from Hugh Weightman to Captain Gerald de Guary, 11 October 1938, Folio 205, 'File 22/8 Dubai Affairs', IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

²⁴⁸ Correspondence from Hugh Weightman to Khan Sahib Said Abdul Razzak al Razzuki, 11 October 1938, Folio 207, 'File 22/8 Dubai Affairs', IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

²⁴⁹ Correspondence from Hugh Weightman to Captain Gerald de Guary, 11 October 1938, Folio 205, 'File 22/8 Dubai Affairs', IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

²⁵⁰ Correspondence from Khan Sahib Said Abdul Razzak al Razzuki to Hugh Weightman, 10 October 1938, Folio 324, 'File 3/1 Local affairs', IOR/R/15/4/11, in *QDL*.

²⁵¹ Although, the released statement did not contain any particular economic and or political repercussions, in general the Sheikhs' of the Persian Gulf tended to not directly quarrel with Britain. The Sheikhs' depended on the British for protection from greater regional powers: Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Iran. Furthermore, the air and oil agreements made with many of these Sheikhs' represented a major political and economic asset that was not worth risking.

²⁵² Correspondence from Khan Sahib Said Abdul Razzak al Razzuki to Hugh Weightman, 12 October 1938, Folio 221, 'File 22/8 Dubai Affairs', IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

executive majlis council.²⁵³ The reformists, inspired by the Kuwaiti Majlis movement's recent success, intended on adopting the constitution of the Kuwait Legislative Assembly.²⁵⁴ Shaikh Shakhbut on behalf of Sheikh Said, stated that they were willing to accept all their demands except the establishment of an executive council; although, the reformist refused to accept any agreement without the addition of an executive council.²⁵⁵ By this point, the reformists had a strong position: they had control over half of Dubai, had support from nearly all of the al Bu Falasah notables and merchant elites, and had seized the Deira customs seizing economic activity in Dubai.²⁵⁶ As in Kuwait, the sheikh's eventual acceptance to implement reforms had come too late. Sheikh Said's reluctance to give into any demands of the agitators allowed them to garner greater support in Dubai, granting them greater negotiation power. With the balance of power tipping towards the reformist, the logical step was to push for an executive council which would supply the reformists with the continued ability to shape Dubai's affairs.

With Sheikh Said's position in Dubai weakening and the possibility of conflict spreading along the Persian coast, the British decided it was time to get more involved in Dubai. Specifically, Hugh Weightman, the Political Resident in Bahrain, was sent to Dubai on October 16 to mediate a compromise between the two parties.²⁵⁷ Upon arrival Weightman noted, "the Shaikh's position was even weaker than it had been a few days earlier, that he was much chastened in spirit, and that he was prepared to accept almost any terms I could obtain for

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Correspondence from Khan Sahib Said Abdul Razzak al Razzuki to Hugh Weightman, 13 October 1938, Folio 356, 'File 3/1 Local affairs', IOR/R/15/4/11, in *QDL*.

²⁵⁵ Correspondence from Khan Sahib Said Abdul Razzak al Razzuki to Hugh Weightman, 12 October 1938, Folio 221, 'File 22/8 Dubai Affairs', IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Correspondence from Hugh Weightman to Trenchard Fowle, 23 October 1938, Folio 309-325, 'File 22/8 Dubai Affairs', IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

him”.²⁵⁸ Weightman held mediations on the sloop, H.M.S Deptford the next day. The political resident met with the al Bu Falasah reformists where the party laid out their terms for agreement. Centrally, the al Bu Falasah demanded a council ““on the lines of that established in Kuwait” to take over all administrative and executive functions” of Dubai, essentially leaving Sheikh Said as a mere figure head.²⁵⁹ Weightman made it clear that the relations with Britain would still be conducted with the sheikh, not the council, which ensued into a long discussion with which Weightman “suggested that the obvious solution was to provide for an administration conducted by the Shaikh acting in collaboration with a majlis”.²⁶⁰ Centrally, Weightman aimed to avoid having the sheikh “be excluded from all share in the administration”.²⁶¹

The al Bu Falasah members thought over the suggestion overnight and the next day agreed to Weightmans addition. Meanwhile, Weightman visited Sheikh Said on the morning of the 18 to relate the potential solution and stress that the sheikh would remain the head of the state who Britain’s official relations would continue to be conducted with.²⁶² Sheikh Said agreed to the compromise and on the following day a final meeting was held with both Sheikh Said and representatives of the al Bu Falasah, to officially sign the terms of agreement.²⁶³ The official agreement established an executive majlis council in Dubai, consisting of 15 members “selected by the principal people of Dubai” under the presidentship of the Ruler of Dubai.²⁶⁴ The council consisted of several leading merchants and notables of the al Bu Falasah including Sheikh Mana and Sheikh Hashar. The council “dealt with all matters concerning the affairs of the State”

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 317.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 317-319.

²⁶¹ Ibid., 319.

²⁶² Ibid., 321.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Agreement Between the Sheikh of Dubai and Members of the al Bu Falasah, 23 October 1938, Folio 327, ‘File 22/8 Dubai Affairs’, IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

including all the income and expenditure of the state with an “allowance of 1/8th of the total revenue of the State” being afforded to the Ruler.²⁶⁵ The Majlis Movement in Dubai led by Sheikh Mana and Sheikh Hashar had succeeded.

Having experienced a successful election of a majlis council in Kuwait just a few months prior to Dubai’s election, the British already had a strategy to use in Dubai: balance power between the sheikh and the majlis council. In particular, the British as they did in Kuwait maintained that Sheikh Said was the ruler of Dubai and that British relations would continue to be conducted with the sheikh alone.²⁶⁶ Although, Dubai’s council differentiated itself from Kuwait’s model in that Sheikh Said headed the council as president, garnering him greater political control over the council’s general affairs. The addition of Sheikh Said as the president of the majlis council was intently manufactured by Weightman, to make sure that Sheikh Said did not cede all his power. As the primary arbitrator in the mediations prior to the council formation, Weightman had strong influence in the final agreement. The political resident utilized this influence to ensure the council did not overpower the dwindling position of Sheikh Said. Thus, Weightman secured the stipulation in the final agreement between Sheikh Said and the al Bu Falasah that the sheikh would preside over the council as president. However, Weightman’s last ditch effort to maintain Sheikh Said’s political power in Dubai was not entirely effective. Technically, Sheikh Said did have a better political position as head of the council, but the sheikh was still bounded by the council’s authority as he was legally responsible to enforce “all decisions arrived at by the majority of the Majlis”.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Correspondence from Hugh Weightman to Trenchard Fowle, 23 October 1938, Folio 317, ‘File 22/8 Dubai Affairs’, IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

²⁶⁷ Agreement Between the Sheikh of Dubai and Members of the al Bu Falasah, 23 October 1938, Folio 327, ‘File 22/8 Dubai Affairs’, IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

Furthermore, as in Kuwait, within Dubai's constitution, the majlis council had authority of "all the income and expenditure (of the State)" which included British air and oil royalties.²⁶⁸ However, the British maintained that relations between Dubai and Britain be done solely through the ruling sheikh and "there would be no change in existing arrangements based on Treaty and on long practice".²⁶⁹ Even though the funds were under the authority of Dubai's majlis council, the money still flowed through Sheikh Said, granting the ruler significant economic power over the council. In congruence with Kuwait's elected council, the British made sure to maintain the rulers power; centrally, through the continuation of having the sheikh as the sole avenue for British relations which garnered Sheikh Said control over air and oil royalties, salvaging his diminished power and limiting the political capacity of Dubai's majlis council. However, over the following months after the creation of Dubai's majlis council, tensions would arise between al Bu Falasah and Sheikh Said testing Britain's ability to maintain political stability.

The End of the Majlis Movement in Dubai

Following its conception, the majlis council in Dubai immediately began implementing reforms. First and foremost, the council sought to implement economic reforms to alleviate the economic hardships facing many of the al Bu Falasah and merchant elite. As such, the council lowered the customs duty on imports to 2 percent and eliminated custom duties on exports in an effort to stimulate trade and incentivize merchants in the region to do business in Dubai.²⁷⁰ Additionally, the council restructured Dubai's customs agency, reappointing several important positions in both the Dubai and Deira customs agencies including the Director, Assistant

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Correspondence from Hugh Weightman to Trenchard Fowle, 23 October 1938, Folio 321, 'File 22/8 Dubai Affairs', IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

²⁷⁰ Translation of minutes of Dubai Majlis, 29 October 1938, Folio 353, 'File 22/8 Dubai Affairs', IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

Director, Clerks, and inspectors and established respective salaries of each position.²⁷¹ A municipal council was created to oversee and institute civil projects.²⁷² To finance municipal and educational projects, the council decided on an import tax and established a council of merchants to implement it.²⁷³ Under the leadership of Sheikh Mana bin Rashid, three schools were opened.²⁷⁴ Additionally, the council improved health services in Dubai, establishing free public health clinics and appointed people to be responsible for sanitation.²⁷⁵ Although some of the reforms implemented were enjoyed by the entire population, the main focus of the majlis council's reformative measures was aimed at the restoration of economic stability within the merchant and al Bu Falasah elite classes; particularly, for those who aided Sheikh Mana and Sheikh Hashar in their revolt against Sheikh Said.²⁷⁶

Tension over Dubai's majlis council within the general public was rooted in dissatisfaction over the council's reforms. Particularly, the people of Dubai felt that "the Majlis had done nothing in the interest of the public and instead of bringing good, it had been an ill omen".²⁷⁷ Although, the majlis council had made definitive improvements in Dubai: better sanitation practices, increased education, increased healthcare access, and improvements to customs which benefited the general public of Dubai, the people of Dubai were not misguided in the majlis council's personal intentionality within their reforms. When the Sheikh Mana faction of the al Bu Falasah revolted against Sheikh Said, "they secretly promised to give the leaders good posts and money" and when the movement proved successful, "they appointed their own relatives and

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Rosemarie J. Said, *The 1938 Reform Movement in Dubai*. Beirut, Lebanon: American University, 1970: 259.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Yanai, *The Political Transformation of Gulf Tribal States*, 201.

²⁷⁶ Correspondence from Khan Sahib Said Abdul Razzak al Razzuki to Hugh Weightman, 27 March 1939, Folio 403, 'File 22/8 Dubai Affairs', IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

²⁷⁷ Correspondence from Khan Sahib Said Abdul Razzak al Razzuki to Hugh Weightman, 23 March 1939, Folio 385, 'File 22/8 Dubai Affairs', IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

friends and left the rest”.²⁷⁸ Although, in doing so, the majlis council alienated all other members of society, fanning the fire of contention against themselves; overwhelmingly, “the feeling spread that for one despot there had merely been substituted a board of despotism” representing the end of the majlis council’s support within the public.²⁷⁹

Beginning in March 1939, the tensions in Dubai reached a boiling point after a notable of Deira, Hamad bin Majid bin Futtaim, asked the majlis council to fire a number of employees in the customs agency “on the grounds that they drink liquor and do not pray”.²⁸⁰ In response, Sheikh Hashar bin Rashid threatened to arrest Hamad. Although, Sheikh Hashar bin Rashid’s threats did not deter Hamad, who stated that “he was not afraid and that had it not been for him they would have not reached their present position” blaming the majlis council for appointing reckless employees.²⁸¹ Sheikh Mana, who had been in Bombay, was called by telegram to return to Dubai.²⁸² Sheikh Mana arrived in Dubai on March 19th and immediately met with Hamad in an attempt “to please him”.²⁸³ However, Hamad refused to listen to Sheikh Mana unless some of the customs employees, some members of the majlis council, and the director of the customs agency were fired, which Sheikh Mana related “was not possible without any cause”.²⁸⁴ Following the meeting, several guards who were employed by the majlis and other notables joined Hamad’s cause and “promised to help Hamad if he used arms against the members of the Majlis”.²⁸⁵

²⁷⁸ Correspondence from Khan Sahib Said Abdul Razzak al Razzuki to Hugh Weightman, 27 March 1939, Folio 403, ‘File 22/8 Dubai Affairs’, IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

²⁷⁹ Correspondence from Hugh Weightman to Trenchard Fowle, 6 April 1939, Folio 493, ‘File 22/8 Dubai Affairs’, IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

²⁸⁰ Correspondence from Khan Sahib Said Abdul Razzak al Razzuki to Hugh Weightman, 23 March 1939, Folio 385-387, ‘File 22/8 Dubai Affairs’, IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*

²⁸² *Ibid.*

²⁸³ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

While agitation began to stir following the Hamad incident with Sheikh Mana, Sheikh Said held a wedding ceremony for his son, Sheikh Rashid who was preparing to marry the daughter of Hamadan bin Zaid, the late uncle of Shaikh Shakhbut of Abu Dhabi.²⁸⁶ The marriage ceremony was a thirty-day celebration that began on March 7 with fifteen days of festivities in Dubai followed by fifteen more days in Deira.²⁸⁷ On March 22 the wedding procession entered Deira, the majlis council's stronghold, to continue the month-long ceremony. The council allowed the wedding procession into Deira because under tribal custom, "at the time of a wedding, and especially in the case of the ruling family, all violence was forbidden in order to allow the honored guests to arrive safely".²⁸⁸ Although, the council still held anxieties over Sheikh Said's true intentions surrounding the wedding. In particular, Sheikh Mana explained to Khan Sahib al-Razzuki on March 26^t that "Shaikh Sa'id had been giving presents to the people and enticing them by various means and getting promise from them that they would be under his orders", which in combination with "the large number of men crossing every day [into Deira] for the marriage ceremony", left the majlis council in a precarious position.²⁸⁹ Despite the council's anxieties, they allowed Sheikh Said's "desert tribesmen to enter Deira with their weapons in order to perform the traditional firing of weapons into the air as an expression of their participation in the families' happiness", illustrating the council's heavy faith in Sheikh Said to not break tribal custom.²⁹⁰

The day after Sheikh Mana expressed his anxieties to the Sharjah resident, the Marar, a subsection of the Bani Yas tribe, announced their opposition to the majlis council while taking an

²⁸⁶ Ibid, 387.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Yanai, *The Political Transformation of Gulf Tribal States*, 208.

²⁸⁹ Correspondence from Khan Sahib Said Abdul Razzak al Razzuki to Hugh Weightman, 27 March 1939, Folio 399-403, 'File 22/8 Dubai Affairs', IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

²⁹⁰ Yanai, *The Political Transformation of Gulf Tribal States*, 208.

“oath that they would help Shaikh Sa’id against the Majlis if he wants to abolish it”.²⁹¹ However, the Marar tribe’s Chief, Sheikh Murjan bin Sultan, was a member of the majlis council, prompting tribal members to threaten Shaikh Murjan with deposition unless he resigned from his post.²⁹² Sheikh Murjan complied with their wishes and resigned from his position, provoking the rest of the council to put “extra guards in the Bari Nahar tower and take possession of two Murrabbas’as (posts) at Daira...supplied with food and supplies [and armed men] to guard against sudden attack”.²⁹³ In doing so, the council had officially forfeited any responsibility of the sheikh to abide by the October agreement signed by both parties: Sheikh Said communicated to the council that their actions were in violation of their agreement and a “breach of their oath” making the agreement void.²⁹⁴ With the October agreement void, public opinion against the majlis council, and several hundred-armed tribesmen loyal to the sheikh in Deira, Sheikh Said was in an optimal position to reclaim his supremacy.

On the evening of October 29, Sheikh Said and his party crossed into Deira for the daily wedding celebration, the signal was given, and within “a few minutes the whole of Daira, with the exception of one fort, one block house and two houses, fell into [Sheikh Said’s] hands”.²⁹⁵ During the attack, Sheikh Maktoum bin Hasher bin al-Maktoum, the nephew of Sheikh Said, went to the Deira customs with 40 men where he encountered Sheikh Hashar outside and shot him dead.²⁹⁶ Upon entering the customs office, the armed group shot five more individuals

²⁹¹ Correspondence from Khan Sahib Said Abdul Razzak al Razzuki to Hugh Weightman, 23 March 1939, Folio 385, ‘File 22/8 Dubai Affairs’, IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

²⁹² Correspondence from Khan Sahib Said Abdul Razzak al Razzuki to Hugh Weightman, 27 March 1939, Folio 399, ‘File 22/8 Dubai Affairs’, IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁵ Correspondence from Hugh Weightman to Trenchard Fowle, 6 April 1939, Folio 495, ‘File 22/8 Dubai Affairs’, IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

²⁹⁶ Correspondence from Khan Sahib Said Abdul Razzak al Razzuki to Hugh Weightman, 31 March 1939, Folio 427, ‘File 22/8 Dubai Affairs’, IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

including Sheikh Hashar's son. Additionally, Sheikh Said's forces captured the Dubai customs where they seized several customs officials and imprisoned them. During the confusion, Sheikh Mana, several members of the majlis council, and their supporters fled to Sheikh Mana's house in Deira where they barricaded themselves in.²⁹⁷ As night fell Deira had been almost entirely captured by Sheikh Said forces with the exception of Sheikh Mana's house and a Muruba fort in North Deira.²⁹⁸ In the morning, Sheikh Said's forces bombarded Sheikh Mana's house.²⁹⁹ Sheikh Mana narrowly escaped under cover fire from his supporters and fled to Sharjah.³⁰⁰ Shortly after, the Muruba fell in North Deira leaving "the whole town in possession of [the] Shaikh".³⁰¹

The British, who most likely knew of Sheikh Said's plan, did little to interfere.³⁰² Following initial reports of Sheikh Said's surprise attack, Khan Sahib al-Razzuki immediately went to Dubai and warned Sheikh Said about British subjects and property.³⁰³ The Sharjah resident proceeded to check on residents in Dubai who related their safety: Sheikh Said had made sure to place "sufficient guards for them".³⁰⁴ Sheikh Said was consistently reminded of his responsibility for the safety of British subjects and property by Britain and thus made sure the surprise attack did not interfere with their safety.³⁰⁵ By the time the resident had concluded his inspection of the safety of British subjects, Sheikh Said had taken over nearly all of Deira; thus, the British simply

²⁹⁷ Correspondence from Khan Sahib Said Abdul Razzak al Razzuki to Hugh Weightman, 30 March 1939, Folio 419, 'File 22/8 Dubai Affairs', IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

²⁹⁸ Correspondence from Khan Sahib Said Abdul Razzak al Razzuki to Hugh Weightman, 31 March 1939, Folio 429, 'File 22/8 Dubai Affairs', IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁰¹ Correspondence from Hugh Weightman to Trenchard Fowle, 1 April 1939, Folio 441, 'File 22/8 Dubai Affairs', IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

³⁰² Correspondence from Khan Sahib Said Abdul Razzak al Razzuki to Hugh Weightman, 27 March 1939, Folio 403, 'File 22/8 Dubai Affairs', IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

³⁰³ Correspondence from Hugh Weightman to Trenchard Fowle, 1 April 1939, Folio 441, 'File 22/8 Dubai Affairs', IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

³⁰⁴ Correspondence from Khan Sahib Said Abdul Razzak al Razzuki to Hugh Weightman, 30 March 1939, Folio 419, 'File 22/8 Dubai Affairs', IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

³⁰⁵ Correspondence from Hugh Weightman to Khan Sahib Said Abdul Razzak al Razzuki, 29 March 1939, Folio 395, 'File 22/8 Dubai Affairs', IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

let the events unfold. Although the British had supported many of the administrative reforms implemented by the council, the colonial power never sought to have an executive body with authority over the ruler. The British favored indirectly governing Dubai through the sheikh alone versus a legislative body and now that the council had implemented reforms, Sheikh Said would have to maintain the publicly desired ones, making the power transition favorable in British eyes.

However, the British were concerned with the aftermath of Sheikh Said's surprise attack; in particular, the British aimed to secure the establishment of an advisory council from Sheikh Said, "in order to offset reactionary influences either on the part of the Shaikh who might revert to irresponsible despotism, or on the part of the public who might turn against him once more on little provocation".³⁰⁶ In other words, the British wanted to assure the continuity of political stability under the authority of the sheikh. To achieve such, Weightman flew to Dubai to meet with Sheikh Said.³⁰⁷ On Weightman's first meeting, Sheikh Said agreed in principle to the formation of an advisory council but made no effort to solidify his intent to actually establish one.³⁰⁸ After hearing Sheikh Said's reply, Fowle related to Weightman the necessity for Sheikh Said's appointment of the council to occur before Weightman left Dubai. Fowle felt if the sheikh didn't, he would "probably not appoint one at all and we shall have recurrence trouble".³⁰⁹ Considering Sheikh Said's past repudiation surrounding the June reformatory promises, Fowle needed Weightman to be present to induce Sheikh Said to follow through. As such, Weightman

³⁰⁶ Correspondence from Hugh Weightman to Trenchard Fowle, 6 April 1939, Folio 497, 'File 22/8 Dubai Affairs', IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁹ Correspondence from Trenchard Fowle to Hugh Weightman, April 1939, Folio 475, 'File 22/8 Dubai Affairs', IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

visited Sheikh Said the following day where “the Shaikh was induced to summon a Majlis at which he would announce the appointment of this Advisory Council”.³¹⁰

Although Dubai had come under the sole authority of Sheikh Said once again, the previous members of the executive majlis council under the leadership of Sheikh Mana still represented a threat towards Dubai’s stability. The settlement of Sheikh Mana and his followers in nearby Sharjah worried Sheikh Said. The ruler of Dubai confiscated Sheikh Mana and his follower’s properties using the assets as leverage against them. Particularly, Sheikh Said promised to return the reformers property on the condition that they “should live in a place other than Sharjah”.³¹¹ Sheikh Mana adamantly refused stating that it would be ineffective for him and his followers to live anywhere else, noting that his economic and familial ties to the area would be severed if he were to move any farther away.³¹² Shaikh Said had little patience towards the settlement of the previous reformers and “warned the Shaikh of Sharjah that if he allowed them to live in Sharjah he would stop his motor cars and would think of more effective measures”, hinting at the sheikh’s willingness to inflict war against the nearby sheikhdom if the previous reformers were not kicked out.³¹³ Sheikh Said’s warning was effective: Sultan bin Saqr Al Qasimi II refused permission to Sheikh Mana and his party to settle in Sharjah, noting that “their presence was going to lead to trouble”.³¹⁴

³¹⁰ Correspondence from Hugh Weightman to Trenchard Fowle, 6 April 1939, Folio 499, ‘File 22/8 Dubai Affairs’, IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

³¹¹ Correspondence from Khan Sahib Said Abdul Razzak al Razzuki to Hugh Weightman, 8 April 1939, Folio 505, ‘File 22/8 Dubai Affairs’, IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

³¹² *Ibid.*

³¹³ *Ibid.*

³¹⁴ Correspondence from Khan Sahib Said Abdul Razzak al Razzuki to Hugh Weightman, 12 April 1939, Folio 531, ‘File 22/8 Dubai Affairs’, IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

Following the Sheikh of Sharjah's decision, Sheikh Mana and his party sought refuge in Ajman, but the political refugees were denied access.³¹⁵ In a continued effort, the political refugees sought access in Umm-al-Qaiwain. Again, Sheikh Mana and his followers were denied entry. Underlying the continued rejection were secret efforts being made by Sheikh Said, "to prevent other Shaikhs allowing party in their countries", exacerbating the problem.³¹⁶ In truth, Sheikh Said wished to have Sheikh Mana and his followers settle in Abu Dhabi or Ras al Khaimah, the two areas the party refused to go.³¹⁷ Over the ensuing months tensions rose between Dubai and Sharjah over the political refugee's presence in Sharjah. Although Sultan bin Saqr Al Qasimi II had denied permission to Sheikh Mana and his party to settle in Sharjah, the ruler refused to kick them out stating that it was against Arab custom to deny them refuge.³¹⁸

The issue over Sheikh Mana and his followers culminated in Sheikh Said nearly attacking Sharjah; however, the conflict was narrowly avoided after Weightman convinced Sheikh Mana and his followers to resettle in Ras al Khaimah relieving tensions.³¹⁹ Although, in October, Sheikh Said still paranoid of an insurrection, tortured and gauged out the eyes of five men who had been rumored to have connections to Sheikh Mana, sending out a clear message to Sheikh Mana that he would not tolerate any meddling in Dubai.³²⁰ However, Sheikh Mana was undeterred and made plans for one final effort against Sheikh Said. On January 26, 1940, Sheikh

³¹⁵ Correspondence from Khan Sahib Said Abdul Razzak al Razzuki to Hugh Weightman, 13 April 1939, Folio 549, 'File 22/8 Dubai Affairs', IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

³¹⁶ Correspondence from Khan Sahib Said Abdul Razzak al Razzuki to Hugh Weightman, 15 April 1939, Folio 559, 'File 22/8 Dubai Affairs', IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

³¹⁷ Correspondence from Hugh Weightman to Khan Sahib Said Abdul Razzak al Razzuki, 16 April 1939, Folio 561, 'File 22/8 Dubai Affairs', IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

³¹⁸ Correspondence from Trenchard Fowle to Secretary of State India, 20 April 1939, Folio 593, 'File 22/8 Dubai Affairs', IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

³¹⁹ Rosemarie J. Said, *The 1938 Reform Movement in Dubai*. Beirut, Lebanon: American University, 1970: 262.

³²⁰ Correspondence from Khan Sahib Said Abdul Razzak al Razzuki to Hugh Weightman, 19 October 1939, Folio 293, 'File 22/8 Dubai Affairs', IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

Mana sent his son with a force of 200 men to attack Dubai.³²¹ Sheikh Said, previously aware of a probable attack had defensive measures in place and sent his son with reinforcements to meet the attackers, defeating Sheikh Mana's forces. In their defeat, Sheikh Mana and his followers were banished from the country by the British and forced to relocate to Bombay.³²² With nearly all of Sheikh Said's contenders for authority banished to India or dead the sheikh had cemented his position as ruler of Dubai.

In the end Britain's policy of containment was successful in containing the political and geographic scope of Dubai's Majlis Movement from attaining absolute control over Sheikh Said and preventing regional interference from nearby sheikhdoms in Dubai. Initially, the British utilized their political resident in Sharjah, Khan Sahib al-Razzuki, to persuade Sheikh Said to implement limited reform, followed by an advisory council, in an attempt to appease the movement's administrative demands and avoid substantial political reform. Despite significant British advisement, Sheikh Said initially refused to implement limited reform and an advisory council which allowed the Majlis Movement to garner greater support among the merchant elite and al Bu Falasah notables and take over half of Dubai. By the time, the Majlis Movement demanded an executive council, Sheikh Said's political position was considerably weakened and was forced to concede to the reform movement and establish an executive majlis council.

In order to contain the political capabilities of the newly elected council, Weightman, the political resident in Bahrain, arbitrated a compromise between the ruler and the reformers to have Sheikh Said be the president of the executive council, saving some of Sheikh Said's political influence. Moreover, the British maintained their official relationship with solely Sheikh

³²¹ Correspondence from Khan Sahib Said Abdul Razzak al Razzuki to Hugh Weightman, 26 January 1940, Folio 449, 'File 22/8 Dubai Affairs', IOR/R/15/2/2009, in *QDL*.

³²² Yanai, *The Political Transformation of Gulf Tribal States*, 209.

Said including having British air and oil royalties flow through Sheikh Said, creating a balance of power between the sheikh and the council. Although the British were unable to directly oppose the council, the colonial power attempted to maintain as much of the ruler's political and economic power they could. Once Sheikh Said amassed sufficient support and launched a surprise attack against the council, the British did not get involved and made no effort to maintain the executive council. Although, the British, utilizing Weightman, did ensure Sheikh Said created an advisory council, but the council was politically powerless against the ruler, and was only established as a means to prevent further agitation against his administration.

Initial Reform Movements in Bahrain

Unlike in Kuwait and Dubai, where modernization and institutionalization didn't take place in a large scale until the latter half of the 1930's, Bahrain experienced high levels of modernization and institutionalization beginning in the 1920's. Early reforms in Bahrain stemmed from increased contention between Shia and Sunni communities in the region. Although Bahrain had a Shia majority population, the political and economic power rested in the hands of Sunni leaders. These tensions culminated in a general strike in 1922 by the Shiite community to protest the government's ill-treatment. The reformers called for comprehensive changes in Bahrain's judicial, tax, and administration systems, to establish greater representation and equality for the Shiite community.³²³ The strike caught the attention of the British, who "felt that the religious tension threatened Bahrain's stability and invited undesirable parties to intervene — Persia for the Baharana, and the Saudis for the Sunni tribal groups".³²⁴ As a result, British officials urged Sheikh Isa ibn Ali Al Khalifa (r. 1869-1932) to institute reforms. However, British officials soon realized that reforms were never going to be passed under Sheikh Isa. leading to a British led

³²³ Ibid., 46.

³²⁴ Ibid., 45.

process of ousting the ruler.³²⁵ In April of 1923, Sheikh Isa announced his “retirement” appointing his son, Sheikh Sir Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifah (r. 1932-1942) as ruler.³²⁶ Although Sheikh Hamad technically became ruler, the public recognized Sheikh Isa as the legitimate ruler until his death in 1932.

Under British pressure, Sheikh Hamad compromised with Bahrain’s Shiite population leading to the initiation of reforms in health, security, industry, education, infrastructure, and the administration during the ensuing decade.³²⁷ Importantly, these reforms were largely done and planned by British officials. In particular, Charles Belgrave looked after economic and judicial matters, G.N Bowler controlled state revenues and customs, and L.S Parker served as chief of police for Bahrain.³²⁸ During the process of instating Sheikh Hamad as ruler, the British pressured the new ruler to accept an official British advisor, Charles Belgrave, who then instated numerous British officials into Bahrain’s administration, making British influence significantly larger in Bahrain than in Kuwait or Dubai. Sheikh Hamad, unlike Sheikh Ahmad (Kuwait) or Sheikh Said (Dubai), was far more open to British guidance and participation in his administration. The ruler perceived the British as a solution to hostile social groups who opposed his rule; the arrangement “was convenient for him since they [the British] were outside of Bahrain’s social-tribal system” thus they did not pose a threat to his rule unlike members of the Sunni elite.³²⁹

Although the reforms of the 1920’s contributed to a decline in Shiite agitation in Bahrain, the Shiite community still felt contention towards the state over the judicial system. The court

³²⁵ Ibid., 48.

³²⁶ Ibid., 49

³²⁷ Ibid., 132.

³²⁸ Ibid., 133.

³²⁹ Ibid., 134.

system was almost completely controlled by the al-Khalifa family.³³⁰ Most judges did not have any formal legal training and instead relied on tribal custom for verdicts.³³¹ Without any formal legal codes, the Shiite community felt verdicts were arbitrarily decided “without any regard to the truth of the facts” in the case.³³²

In 1935, Shiite aggravation boiled over after a bad date harvest in 1934, led to several Shiite tenant farmers unable to pay their debts to the owners of the groves, who were mostly members of the al-Khalifa family.³³³ Unsurprisingly, the courts ruled that Shiite farmers must sell their properties to pay off their debts or face long prison sentences.³³⁴ Shiite farmers felt the court verdicts were arbitrarily decided in favor the al-Khalifa family, leading the Shiite community to call for comprehensive reform of the judicial system.³³⁵ Namely, the reforms focused on changes to the process of appointing judges and the establishment of a uniform legal code.³³⁶ In addition to judicial reforms, Shiite reformers called for greater representation in Bahrain’s municipal council, ministry of education, and other state institutions.³³⁷ Sheikh Hamad agreed to reforming the judicial system but adamantly rejected calls for greater representation.³³⁸ In response, Shiite reformers threatened to incite rebellion, sabotage infrastructure, and damage oil fields.³³⁹ However, the Shiite reformers underestimated their support from the broader Shiite community who were not prepared to wage “a violent political struggle to achieve” the reformers goals.³⁴⁰

Additionally, the British government refused to join forces with Shiite opposition, citing that the

³³⁰ Ibid., 136.

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Ibid.

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ Ibid.

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ Ibid.

³³⁹ Ibid., 137.

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 138.

acceptance of the Shiite's demands would undermine Sunni supremacy which threatened British strategic and economic interests in Bahrain.³⁴¹ Without general support from the Shiite community or Britain, the Shiite reformers were left isolated leading to the dissipation of the reform movement.

Beginnings of a Majlis Movement in Bahrain

By early October of 1938, news of Kuwait's successful Majlis Movement was widely known in Bahrain. However, the story circulating in the public framed the British as active participants in supporting the council in opposition of Kuwait's ruler.³⁴² The Bahrain political resident, Hugh Weightman, sought to dismiss the rumors surrounding Britain's role in the Kuwait's reform movement. Weightman met with Sheikh Hamad to clear any confusion the ruler had surrounding Britain's role in Kuwait. Furthermore, Weightman suggested a public propaganda campaign, to eliminate "any suspicion that a "Reform Party" might expect support from us" in Bahrain.³⁴³ Although news of Dubai's reform movement had been dispersed in Bahrain, Weightman had less concern over potential confusion in the British role there. Weightman reasoned that because Bahrain had relatively close contact with Dubai in comparison to Kuwait, Bahrain would receive a clearer story of Dubai's reform movement.³⁴⁴ Despite Weightman's efforts to reframe British involvement in Kuwait, Bahraini agitators had taken the opportunity to launch their complaints against Bahrain's administration.

The economic conditions in Bahrain, like much of the world at this time, were poor due to the great depression. Simultaneously, the emergence of Japanese cultured pearls in the 1930's

³⁴¹ Ibid.

³⁴² Correspondence from Hugh Weightman to Trenchard Fowle, 27 October 1938, Folio 225-245, 'File 19/169 II (C 76) Agitation in Bahrain', IOR/R/15/1/343, in *QDL*.

³⁴³ Ibid., 229.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

decimated Bahrain's central industry, pearl diving. Bahrain was able to weather some of these economic hardships after oil was discovered in the region in 1934. Labor associated with pearl diving shifted into oil industries and construction. However, Bahrain's oil industry was not immune to the global depression and as the depression worsened layoffs increased. Moreover, the initial high level of employment demanded by the oil industry was no longer needed after the construction of oil infrastructure was completed in 1938, leaving hundreds unemployed.³⁴⁵ The combined effects of the global depression, Japanese cultured pearls, and decreased labor demand from Bahrain's oil industry left high unemployment, providing "fertile grounds for the growth of agitation".³⁴⁶ Weightman suggested the formation of several new industries including manufacturing buttons, further infrastructure construction, and collective farming for villages in Bahrain's rural areas, in an attempt to alleviate political agitation.³⁴⁷

Furthermore, as had occurred in Kuwait and Dubai, oil and air agreements with Britain had increasingly made Sheikh Hamad consolidate his political authority, degrading Sunni-merchant elite's and members of the ruling family's political influence in Bahrain's administration. In congruence, air and oil royalties in combination with shifts in Bahrain's economy disrupted the historical relationship between merchant elites and the sheikh. Previously, the sheikh and ruling family depended on taxes from the merchant class for income and in return Sunni and Shia merchant elites gained political influence in Bahrain's affairs. Although air and oil royalties granted Sheikh Hamad with increased financial independence, decreasing his financial dependence on the merchant class. The combined effects of the economic depression in Bahrain

³⁴⁵ Ibid., 231.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

and British air and oil royalties left many in the merchant elite and select members of the ruling family increasingly frustrated.

Namely, several merchant elites in the Shia community, led by Syed Said Khalif, Syed Ahmad Alawi, Muhammad Ali al-Tajir, and Muhsein al-Tajir began voicing their grievances against Sheikh Ahmad.³⁴⁸ Their main concerns were concentrated on economic reforms and reforming the Bahrain courts, particularly the Shia Shera Court. Although, the wealthy merchants also sought for greater representation in the administration and educational reform. On the other hand, agitation was also stirring among the Sunni-Arab merchant elite, led by Yusef Fakhro, Yusef Qanu, Khalil Maed, and Abd al-Rahman al-Zini.³⁴⁹ The Sunni-Arab merchant-elite central demands surrounded economic reforms, followed by greater political representation in the state's mechanisms and the Bahrain Petroleum Company.³⁵⁰ In spite of religious differences, both groups crossed sectarian divides and released a copy of their joint-demands on October 26.

The alliance between Shia and Sunni merchant elites was unprecedented in Bahrain: “historically, social and religious rivalry had precluded the possibility of cooperation”.³⁵¹ However, the development in Bahrain that had occurred in the past decade, including the expansion of state institutions, the unification of the education system, and the combined employment of both sections in Bahrain's oil company, brought greater cooperation between Shia and Sunni members of society.³⁵² Moreover, the shared economic hardship brought on by

³⁴⁸ Correspondence from Hugh Weightman to Trenchard Fowle, 27 October 1938, Folio 225, ‘File 19/169 II (C 76) Agitation in Bahrain’, IOR/R/15/1/343, in *QDL*; Yanai, *The Political Transformation of Gulf Tribal States*, 143.

³⁴⁹ Correspondence from Hugh Weightman to Trenchard Fowle, 27 October 1938, Folio 225, ‘File 19/169 II (C 76) Agitation in Bahrain’, IOR/R/15/1/343, in *QDL*; Yanai, *The Political Transformation of Gulf Tribal States*, 143.

³⁵⁰ Correspondence from Hugh Weightman to Trenchard Fowle, 27 October 1938, Folio 225, ‘File 19/169 II (C 76) Agitation in Bahrain’, IOR/R/15/1/343, in *QDL*; Yanai, *The Political Transformation of Gulf Tribal States*, 139.

³⁵¹ Yanai, *The Political Transformation of Gulf Tribal States*, 143.

³⁵² *Ibid.*

the global depression, Japanese Pearls, and the completion of oil infrastructure in Bahrain provided both sections of the merchant elite a common grievance. It should be noted, the Shia and Sunni populations in Bahrain were not intrinsically at odds with each other. The British played an important role in facilitating ethno-sectarian divides among the Shia and Sunni community by establishing uneven distributions of power in society, in the colonial powers system of divided rule.³⁵³

The joint-reformers, demanded for reforms in the education system, the Bahrain law courts, the police department, the Shia Sharia courts, BAPCO, the municipality, the passport department, the electric department, the customs department, the minor's estate department, the Majlis El Tijarah, and the state jail. The main points of contention involved in the education department, law courts, municipality, electric department, minor's estate department, passport department, and the police department were the unqualified nature of people who held important positions in each and overall corruption.³⁵⁴ Additionally, many reformers had personal interests in acquiring these positions. As for the Shia Sharia courts, the group noted its inefficiency and demanded Qadhi's be elected, as the current officials "are not wanted by the people".³⁵⁵ On the other hand, the reformers argued that BAPCO favored foreign labor from India over local labor, paying foreign workers higher wages while treating local labor poorly.³⁵⁶ Similar complaints were also given for the customs department. Lastly, the Bahrain reformers wanted members of the committee of commerce to be elected rather than appointed by the government.³⁵⁷ Overall,

³⁵³ Omar Hesham AlShehabi, "Contested Modernity: Divided Rule and the Birth of Sectarianism, Nationalism, and Absolutism in Bahrain." *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 44, no. 3 (2016): 355.

³⁵⁴ Copy of Report from Charles Belgrave, 26 October 1938, Folio 249-263, 'File 19/169 II (C 76) Agitation in Bahrain', IOR/R/15/1/343, in *QDL*.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 251.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 253.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 261.

the Bahrain reformers sought broad administrative, educational, economic, judicial, and political reform to re-establish their economic status and increase their political influence in Bahrain.

Weightman, unfettered by reformer's demands, noted that "[t]his stuff [demanded reforms] need not to be taken seriously, for, apart from the portion dealing with Courts, it does not represent real public demand for change".³⁵⁸ In Weightman's analysis of the Bahraini agitation for reform, he derived four main points of contention that needed attention: Bahrain courts, including the Shia Sharia courts, unemployment, education, and public health.³⁵⁹ Of the four, as previously stated, court reform was the highest priority, followed by the stimulation of Bahrain's economy to foster higher employment. The British viewed Shia contention against the state to be particularly dangerous given their large majority in Bahrain. Moreover, the British felt by implementing court reforms, a long-held contention among the Shia population, would remove popular support of the reform movement from the Shia community

On October 27, the reformers furthered their demands, calling for the creation of a council of administration like that in Kuwait, consisting of 10 members: 5 Bahrainis and 5 Arabs.³⁶⁰ In addition, the reformers insisted that Charles Belgrave, the British political advisor in Bahrain who held substantial administrative and judicial authority in Bahrain, resign. Although, the group was willing to compromise on the condition that Belgrave become a financial advisor associated exclusively with handling BAPCO financials.³⁶¹ The reformers, mainly from the Sunni merchant-elite with some support from Shia merchant-elite, felt Belgrave's large influence in

³⁵⁸ Correspondence from Hugh Weightman to Trenchard Fowle, 29 October 1938, Folio 247, 'File 19/169 II (C 76) Agitation in Bahrain', IOR/R/15/1/343, in *QDL*.

³⁵⁹ Correspondence from Hugh Weightman to Trenchard Fowle, 27 October 1938, Folio 243, 'File 19/169 II (C 76) Agitation in Bahrain', IOR/R/15/1/343, in *QDL*.

³⁶⁰ Copy of Report from Charles Belgrave, 27 October 1938, Folio 265, 'File 19/169 II (C 76) Agitation in Bahrain', IOR/R/15/1/343, in *QDL*.

³⁶¹ Copy of Report from Charles Belgrave, 26 October 1938, Folio 249, 'File 19/169 II (C 76) Agitation in Bahrain', IOR/R/15/1/343, in *QDL*.

Bahrain's administration represented British colonization in Bahrain, reflecting a shift in members of the merchant elite towards Arab nationalist ideas in Bahrain.

A week after the reformers furthered their demands, Weightman met with Belgrave and Sheikh Hamad's brother, Sheikh Abdullah bin Isa (d.1966) in Bahrain to discuss the agitation.³⁶² Sheikh Abdullah, representing Sheikh Hamad, noted that the administration needed some reform, namely the court system. The ruler's brother, in congruence with Belgrave and Weightman, reasoned that court reforms would extinguish most of the general public's support for reform. The majority of Bahrain's population was of Shia religion and the group's main complaint, rooted in the early reform movements in the 1920's and 1934, was reform in the Shia Sheria courts. Sheikh Hamad, under guidance from Sheikh Abdullah and Belgrave, wasted no time in addressing the Shia Sheria courts. Immediately after the meeting, several judges and officials in the Shia Sheria courts were dismissed including Sheikh Ali bin Jafer, who had been a main object of complaint from the Shia community.³⁶³ In addition, several Sheria court judges were put on nine-month probation periods including Sheikh Baqr, Sheikh Ali bin Hasan, and a newly appointed Sheikh Mohammad Al Kari.³⁶⁴ The temporary probational period, created greater accountability for the judges, as their positions were subject to change if their actions were contested during probation. The reforms were "received favourably by the Shias in general".³⁶⁵

Discussion during the meeting shifted towards the question of reforming the Bahrain courts. Weightman suggested Bahrain send young members of the Al Khalifah family to Egypt for legal training, before returning to Bahrain. Sheikh Abdullah suggested that the option would not be

³⁶² Correspondence from Hugh Weightman to Trenchard Fowle, 5 November 1938, Folio 267-271, 'File 19/169 II (C 76) Agitation in Bahrain', IOR/R/15/1/343, in *QDL*.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, 269,

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

accepted by Sheikh Hamad.³⁶⁶ After some discussion, the three men agreed on a final solution to find two retired judges who were “well- qualified and reputable “men of law”” and bring them to Bahrain to aid in codifying the law in Bahrain and train current Al Khalifah judges in the newly established legal code and generally “how things should be done”.³⁶⁷ Sheikh Hamad agreed “strongly” and directed Belgrave with the responsibility of finding two qualified men at once.³⁶⁸

Later in the day, a deputation of the leading Shia reformers met with Belgrave to discuss some of their grievances with the proposed reforms. The deputation’s main complaint surrounded around a lack of Shia representation in Bahrain courts. Particularly, the deputation felt “it was entirely wrong that all the judges should be appointed from the Al Khalifah family whether they had qualifications or not”.³⁶⁹ Although the deputation did admit to not having any qualified person for the position. In connection, the deputation brought up concerns about the Bahrain’s education system, stating that it favored Sunni and Arab Bahraini’s over Shia or Baharna individuals: the lack of qualified Shia individuals for a judgeship position was a result of their disproportionate educational opportunities.³⁷⁰ Although Belgrave told the deputation that it was their responsibility to speak up and voice their grievances before the educational committee, the political resident did promise that a general survey of Bahrain’s educational system would be conducted.³⁷¹ Overall, the deputation was generally pleased with Belgrave’s responses.

Unlike Sheikh Ahmad in Kuwait or Sheikh Said in Dubai, Sheikh Hamad embraced a strategy focused on “removing any genuine cause for complaint before it could be used

³⁶⁶ Ibid., 267.

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 269.

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ Ibid., 271.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

effectively for the purpose of agitation” even stating that he would adopt “this [strategy] as the main basis for future policy”.³⁷² Sheikh Hamad’s acceptance of limited reforms allowed the ruler to undercut momentum in the Bahrain reform movement. Intelligently, the sheikh was aware of the potential power of the Shia population in that they constituted the majority of the population. Moreover, the unification of Sunni and Shia reformers, inspired by the Kuwait and Dubai reform movements, represented an even greater threat. In prior reform movements in Bahrain, like the 1934 movement, Sunni-Arabs were fairly united in opposition of Shia reformers allowing Sheikh Hamad to limit the reforms accepted. However, with a united front, the 1938 reform movement had the potential to force an executive majlis council, similar to those seen in Dubai and Kuwait, onto Sheikh Hamad. Thus, the sheikh wasted little time in addressing the main concern of the Shia reformers, the court systems, disintegrating the majority of the Shia community’s contention with the administration, severely diminishing the scope of Bahrain’s reform movement.

Although Sheikh Hamad’s individual openness to reforms was significant in diminishing the scope of Bahrain’s 1938 Majlis Movement, the sheikh did not have much of an option to refuse reform implementation. Sheikh Hamad’s ruling status, established in 1923, was directly a result of British intervention. The British feared Persian and Saudi Arabian intervention in Bahrain in 1922 after large scale protests erupted from the Shiite community. Sheikh Isa, the previous ruler of Bahrain, was unyielding toward reforming his administration. As a result, the British pushed Sheikh Isa out of power, instating Sheikh Hamad as ruler, under the presupposition that Sheikh Hamad would allow limited reform for the Shiite community. From the beginning, Sheikh Hamad’s ruling position in Bahrain was determinant on being responsive to reforms. In order to

³⁷² Ibid., 269.

ensure the application of reforms, the British pressured Sheikh Hamad to accept a British advisor, Charles Belgrave, which integrated Britain into Bahrain's administration, essentially guarantying that the policy would be utilized. Even though Britain had a decisive role in establishing a policy of reform in Bahrain, it should not be understood that the colonial power orchestrated it entirely. Britain set up the political pressures in favor of a pro-reform policy in Bahrain, but Sheikh Hamad made the decision to actually follow the policy.

The End of the Majlis Movement in Bahrain

On November 6, three days after Weightman's meeting with Sheikh Abdullah and Belgrave, further agitation erupted in Bahrain. Workers in the Bahrain Petroleum Company held a partial strike in the company's offices and oil fields led by semi-skilled employees including transport drivers, gaugers, and "office boys".³⁷³ In addition, a number of field workers picketed on the road from Manamah to the oil fields. In short time, the protest was shut down, leading to several arrests. Later in the day, a large crowd of young men gathered in front of the Juma Mosque in Manama, demanding to see Weightman.³⁷⁴ The group chanted pro-reform slogans, calling for British support. The political resident refused to see the group. In response, the protesters marched to the marketplace, paralyzing commercial activity. The Bahraini police arrived shortly after and forcibly dispersed the demonstrators; several protesters were arrested and/or sustained injuries.³⁷⁵ After meeting with Belgrave and Weightman, the Bahrain Petroleum company released a statement threatening dismissal for employees who did not return to work by the next

³⁷³ Correspondence from Hugh Weightman to Trenchard Fowle, 12 November 1938, Folio 283-291, 'File 19/169 II (C 76) Agitation in Bahrain', IOR/R/15/1/343, in *QDL*.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 283.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

day. The statement had the desired effect as “[o]n Tuesday the Bahrain Petroleum Company was practically up to full strength”.³⁷⁶

Notably, the latter demonstrations differed from previous in that the Shia community refrained from protesting, excluding a few Shiite merchant elites. Although there were “strenuous efforts... made to induce the Baharna to join in”, the community was generally “pleased with the overhaul of the Shia Sheria courts”.³⁷⁷ The Shia reformers had succeeded in acquiring their primary demand. Although many of the Shia reformers demands were not accepted, the Shia merchant reformers realized their ability to protest had dwindled with the acceptance of court reform. The main contributor to the initial reformers acquiring the broader Shia community’s support was from discontent with the courts. Additional reforms were not a priority for the broader community and perhaps, learning from the previous 1934 reform movement, the Shia merchant leaders of the 1938 reform movement realized further agitation would not yield greater reform without the whole community behind them. Additionally, the leaders likely did not want to risk losing the administration’s support for court reforms by demonstrating further. With the exodus of support from the Shia community from the 1938 Majlis Movement, the Sunni merchant elite were left isolated from popular support, leading to these merchant’s attention to turn to an emerging youth movement in Bahrain, the Shabab al Ummah (The National Youth).³⁷⁸

The National Youth materialized from Bahrain’s emerging young intelligentsia, who had greater education than their parents and worked in the Bahrain Petroleum Company, government

³⁷⁶ Ibid., 285.

³⁷⁷ Ibid.

³⁷⁸ Correspondence from Hugh Weightman to Trenchard Fowle, 19 November 1938, Folio 321-335, ‘File 19/169 II (C 76) Agitation in Bahrain’, IOR/R/15/1/343, in *QDL*.

offices, and firms in Manamah.³⁷⁹ The partial strike and the demonstrations in early November were orchestrated by the National Youth. The group demanded public elections for positions in the administration, the general democratization of the state, educational reform, judicial reform, prohibition of foreign labor in favor of domestic labor, and the release of demonstrators who had been arrested.³⁸⁰

The political group was influenced by Arab nationalism from their “teachers, Arabic newspapers and radio programs broadcast from Iraq and Egypt”: however, the emergence of the National Youth in Bahrain was founded on the desire to increase the economic opportunity for these newly educated youths rather than establishing a new political order.³⁸¹ Instead, Arab nationalistic ideas were used as a means to “whip up the revolutionary fervour of [the] youth” and establish an ideological base to argue against the employment of foreign labor over domestic workers, using the ideology as a tool rather than an end goal.³⁸²

The National Youth’s main contentions were with the ruling family and the Bahrain Petroleum Company. The newly educated youth knew “that they...[were] better educated than the ruling family”.³⁸³ Despite the groups higher educational level, the ruling family held much higher paying and influential positions which naturally created frustration in the educated youth. Furthermore, members of the National Youth were dissatisfied with the lower paying positions they received in the Bahrain Petroleum Company in comparison to the higher paying positions awarded to foreign workers, mainly Indian labor.³⁸⁴ The newly educated youth expected high

³⁷⁹ Ibid, 323.

³⁸⁰ Correspondence from The National Youth to Hugh Weightman, 4 November 1938, Folio 293, ‘File 19/169 II (C 76) Agitation in Bahrain’, IOR/R/15/1/343, in *QDL*.

³⁸¹ Yanai, *The Political Transformation of Gulf Tribal States*, 145.

³⁸² Correspondence from Hugh Weightman to Trenchard Fowle, 26 November 1938, Folio 351-359, ‘File 19/169 II (C 76) Agitation in Bahrain’, IOR/R/15/1/343, in *QDL*.

³⁸³ Correspondence from Hugh Weightman to Trenchard Fowle, 19 November 1938, Folio 321-335, ‘File 19/169 II (C 76) Agitation in Bahrain’, IOR/R/15/1/343, in *QDL*.

³⁸⁴ Ibid., 325.

paying jobs after receiving their education, but in reality, they only received low paying manual labor positions.³⁸⁵ The problem was that these individuals did not value education in of itself, rather education was viewed as a means for social mobility. As a result, these young intelligentsia generally had “poor work ethic and a low-level of education” in comparison to foreign workers and many failed entrance exams for higher level positions.³⁸⁶

The British were divided on the appropriate response in Bahrain following the National Youth’s demonstrations in November. Fowle argued that Bahrain’s agitation rooted from a lack of legal means to put forward their grievances, “and are therefore reduced to illegal channels” to communicate their concerns.³⁸⁷ Thus, the political resident felt the obvious solution was to create an advisory majlis council whose members were appointed by Sheikh Hamad. The council allowed for demonstrators to voice their grievances directly with Sheikh Hamad relieving the need for protests or strikes. Fowle assessed Bahrain’s movement under the same lens as Kuwait and Dubai’s reform movements, assuming all three movements were synonymous. Under Fowle’s reasoning, if Sheikh Hamad did not create an advisory majlis council for the people to voice their concerns, the reform movement would “no doubt grow in power” and result in an executive majlis council being forced upon the ruler, as Kuwait and Dubai’s reform movements had done to each sheikhdom’s rulers.³⁸⁸

Both Weightman and Belgrave contested Fowles claim that the people of Bahrain had no legal means to forward grievances, citing Sheikh Hamad’s daily majlis that was publicly accessible, Belgrave’s accessibility to the public, and the municipal council which allowed

³⁸⁵ Yanai, *The Political Transformation of Gulf Tribal States*, 149.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 145.

³⁸⁷ Correspondence from Trenchard Fowle to Hugh Weightman, 17 November 1938, Folio 307, ‘File 19/169 II (C 76) Agitation in Bahrain’, IOR/R/15/1/343, in *QDL*.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

public attendance.³⁸⁹ The fact that no complaints were being made using these avenues, after judicial reforms were agreed to, illustrated to Weightman and Belgrave “the absence of genuine complaint and of a genuine popular movement, but also that the agitators themselves realized the...perversity of their case...[t]hey could not afford to come into the open” and thus turned to “misrepresentation and false rumour” to instigate agitation which “they hoped to profit” from.³⁹⁰ In particular, Weightman and Belgrave described the current agitation in Bahrain as the product of “personal prejudice, personal animosities and personal ambitions” of the merchant elite that drew strength from the emerging “nationalistic youth movement and very confused and generally untrue reports of “reform” elsewhere”, noting that “apart from the matter of the Courts there are no specific public grievances”.³⁹¹ As a result, Weightman and Belgrave viewed the only appropriate action needed was clear communication about Britain’s role in Kuwait and Dubai’s Majlis Movements, which would remove much of the movements strength.

Moreover, Weightman and Belgrave viewed any greater intrusion such as the suggestion of an advisory council, to be detrimental to Britain’s position in Bahrain. The reason being was rooted in the misperception that Britain sponsored Kuwait and Dubai’s council, “partly because of our [Britain’s] dissatisfaction with the Shaikh’s administrations...to Bahrain the word “Council” denotes the degradation of a Shaikh following gross maladministration”.³⁹² By supporting an advisory council, it would appear as if Britain disapproved of Sheikh Hamad’s administration even after the ruler accepted British supported reforms, leading to the detriment in

³⁸⁹ Correspondence from Hugh Weightman to Trenchard Fowle, 26 November 1938, Folio 355, ‘File 19/169 II (C 76) Agitation in Bahrain’, IOR/R/15/1/343, in *QDL*.

³⁹⁰ Correspondence from Hugh Weightman to Trenchard Fowle, 26 November 1938, Folio 355, ‘File 19/169 II (C 76) Agitation in Bahrain’, IOR/R/15/1/343, in *QDL*.

³⁹¹ Correspondence from Hugh Weightman to Trenchard Fowle, 19 November 1938, Folio 341, ‘File 19/169 II (C 76) Agitation in Bahrain’, IOR/R/15/1/343, in *QDL*.

³⁹² Correspondence from Hugh Weightman to Trenchard Fowle, 26 November 1938, Folio 357, ‘File 19/169 II (C 76) Agitation in Bahrain’, IOR/R/15/1/343, in *QDL*.

Britain's relations with the ruler. Furthermore, the policy affirmed a degree of British support for the current agitations demands, which would likely lead the people of Bahrain to begin to believe that the current agitation was "right after all".³⁹³

Instead, Weightman and Belgrave advocated for a hands-off policy except for a public statement to express Britain's support for the people's increased association with the government, specifically by methods of evolution rather than "activities of the revolutionary", in other words publicly stating the British did not support the National Youth agitation.³⁹⁴ Rumors had continued to be spread in Bahrain that "the agitators [would]...have the support of the Agency".³⁹⁵ Weightman strongly supported establishing counterpropaganda in Bahrain to dismiss these rumors. The political resident reasoned that the rumors only kept "the idea of forcible agitation alive".³⁹⁶ A British publicity campaign aimed at changing the narrative of Britain's role in Kuwait, would degrade the National Youth's potential to create genuine public support against Sheikh Hamad's administration, making the policy central to Weightman's strategy for containing the Bahraini agitation.

Additionally, Belgrave and Weightman supported establishing a Bahrain government representative within the Bahrain Petroleum Company, to arbitrate "the ideas and views of employers and employees to one another".³⁹⁷ Seeing that disgruntled employees of the Bahrain Petroleum Company was the main component of the November agitation, Belgrave and Weightman sought to create an avenue which these employees could voice their opinions without having to result in public agitation or demonstrations. However, Weightman asserted

³⁹³ Ibid.

³⁹⁴ Ibid., 355.

³⁹⁵ Correspondence from Hugh Weightman to Trenchard Fowle, 12 November 1938, Folio 283-291, 'File 19/169 II (C 76) Agitation in Bahrain', IOR/R/15/1/343, in *QDL*.

³⁹⁶ Ibid., 287.

³⁹⁷ Ibid., 289.

that the appointment could not take place under the threat of agitation and strikes. The political resident was committed to not providing any kind of legitimacy to reformers.

In the end, Belgrave and Weightman's arguments prevailed over Fowle's assertions for an advisory council in Bahrain. The suggestion of creating an advisory council was abandoned. Fowle, after a lengthy discourse with Weightman, conceded, noting that "any advice from us to the Shaikh and his Family to change its for a more democratic one, even the modified one of a nominated Advisory Council, would not be palatable and would make us unpopular with them".³⁹⁸ Although Fowle still believed that an advisory council would need to be created in Bahrain at some point in time. In Fowle's opinion, without a "duly constituted body, through which [grievances] can be ventilated" it will continue to be "difficult for those who are discontented to call attention to their grievances except by the unconstitutional means of rowdy agitation".³⁹⁹ Fowle held tightly the belief that Kuwait and Dubai's reform movements were foundationally similar to Bahrain's movement. In both Kuwait and Dubai, Fowle recommended an advisory council following the collapse of executive councils in each sheikhdom. In Fowle's mind, these advisory councils granted the people of Kuwait and Dubai a channel to voice their grievances and thus prevented further agitation, thus the same should be applied in Bahrain.

However, Fowle failed to acknowledge the distinct differences between Bahrain in comparison to Dubai and Kuwait. During the 1920's and again in 1934, Bahrain implemented numerous reforms that led the sheikhdom to become the most modern and institutionalized state in the Persian Gulf during the period. Many of the demanded reforms in Kuwait and Dubai, excluding an executive majlis council, had already been instituted in Bahrain prior to 1938. The

³⁹⁸ Correspondence from Trenchard Fowle to Sir Aubrey Metcalfe, 14 April 1939, Folio 121, 'File 19/169 III (C 80) Bahrain Reforms', IOR/R/15/1/344, in *QDL*.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 113.

main grievance that led to the Majlis Movement in Bahrain was the Shiite community's contention with Bahrain's court system. Although, the Shiite community eventually included greater representation into their demands, it did not take precedent. Instead, court reform was the main priority and after judicial reforms were implemented, the Shiite community dropped out of the movement being largely satisfied with the granted reforms in the courts. Moreover, unlike in Kuwait and Dubai, Britain had a large influence in the Bahraini administration, allowing the British greater agency to convince Sheikh Hamad to implement needed reforms, decreasing the likelihood of successful agitation. Fowle's inability to separate Kuwait and Dubai's experiences with their Majlis Movements in 1938 from Bahrain's, led him to exaggerate the level of popular support Bahrain's Majlis Movement had and its basic aims.

Ultimately, the British launched a relatively successful public campaign to clear up the misconception of Britain's role in Kuwait's Majlis Movement. Additionally, a Bahrain government representative position in the Bahrain Petroleum company was established allowing disgruntled employees an avenue to voice their grievances. Through this representative, with the cooperation of Belgrave and Weightman, the Bahrain Petroleum company "was persuaded to cooperate with the Bahrain government and grant the local workers extra pay, improved labor conditions, and professional training".⁴⁰⁰ The latter reforms appeased the majority of the oil workers grievances and "prevented further clashes with the government".⁴⁰¹ The initiation of limited reforms advised and partially implemented by Britain led to the eventual collapse of Bahrain's Majlis Movement. Particularly, Sheikh Hamad's open response to Weightman and Belgrave's early suggestions for judicial and education reform led to the general appeasement of the Shia community leaving the initial merchant-elite leaders of the movement without popular

⁴⁰⁰ Yanai, *The Political Transformation of Gulf Tribal States*, 153.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

support. Although, the introduction of young educated reformers and disgruntled oil workers under the leadership of the National Youth, provided the merchant elite a new avenue to pressure reform. However, the momentum for reform was quickly diminished after the British established an oil worker representative in the Bahrain oil company, providing an outlet for worker grievance, and eventually aid in the Bahrain oil company providing reform. Overall Sheikh Hamad's willingness towards limited reforms, allowed Weightman and Belgrave to accelerate the implementation of reform in Bahrain's judicial system, education department, and eventually the Bahrain Petroleum Company, decelerating the political momentum of Bahrain's reform movement and thus inhibiting the political scope of the movement in establishing a new political order. With the main grievances of the reform movement's being granted the movement dissipated into the background of Bahraini politics, securing Sheikh Hamad's rule and Britain's indirect rule over Bahrain.

Conclusion

The wave of protests in 1938 that aimed at creating an executive majlis councils in Kuwait, Dubai, and Bahrain represented a threat to the British presence in the Persian Gulf. These councils were intended to curb the power of the ruling sheikhs, open up politics to popular participation in a limited sense, and implement reforms to modernize and institutionalize each sheikhdom. The movement strived to create elected councils that had executive and legislative functions, including tools to draft new laws, create institutions, and veto the decisions of the ruling sheikhs. Although Britain supported administrative reforms, the colonial power intervened in Kuwait, Dubai, and Bahrain to contain the limited democratic aims of the movement. Britain's regional policy of indirect rule was guaranteed through agreements with the ruling sheikhs, whose positions were challenged by the Majlis Movement. The possibility for political

transformation directly affected Britain's ability to maintain its indirect control of the region, thus threatening its strategic and economic interests including oil, air bases, communication networks, and the empire's protection of India. To ensure the political status quo, Britain devised a strategy of containment that aimed at limiting the political and geographic scope of Kuwait, Dubai, and Bahrain's reform movements. Although, because these Majlis Movements represented a popular movement against the ruling sheikhs, Britain was unable to directly intervene against the movement as it would paint the British as anti-democratic and incentivize foreign intervention, namely from Iraq.

As a result, British officials were forced into applying indirect intervention to ensure the stability of each ruling sheikhs' political authority. Utilizing the colonial power's political residencies along the Persian Gulf, the British sent political residents to each ruler, to convince them to implement limited administration reform, followed by limited political reform, in recommending the creation of an advisory council. In doing so, the British sought to prevent intervention from nearby sheikhdoms or foreign powers and undermine the political momentum for reform: particularly, for political reform. If limited reform was unsuccessful and executive councils were established, Britain undertook a strategy focused on balancing power between the ruler and council in each region. Namely, the British kept their relationship solely with each sheikhdom's ruler, ensuring air and oil royalties flowed through the sheikh, maintaining the ruler's financial power over each council. Furthermore, the colonial power made sure to intervene if conflict arose in order to arbitrate solutions that favored the ruler and deescalated further agitation. By maintaining a balance of power, the British contained the political capabilities of these elected councils from establishing long-lasting political changes, and ensured the ruling sheikhs retained their supremacy. Lastly, the British refrained from

intervention when the ruling sheikhs launched opposition against the executive council and its followers. From the British perspective, the reform movements had accomplished establishing administrative reforms in Kuwait, Dubai, and Bahrain but in doing so attempted to change the political status quo, threatening British strategic and economic interests. As a result, Britain remained absent during the collapse of the Majlis Movements, indirectly granting the rulers permission to retake their absolute rule.

Although these Majlis Movements failed to transform the political landscape of Kuwait, Dubai, and Bahrain, they did succeed in displaying the political repercussion of ignoring the public's grievances. In doing so, reformers demonstrated to both the rulers and Britain, their ability to manifest their political will against the ruler if their grievances were not addressed. Reformers' ability to create semi-popular opposition, forced ruling sheikhs to take greater responsibility for their subject's needs, ushering in a new era of accountability, where rulers were liable for maintaining and reforming public institutions: healthcare, education, judicial systems, infrastructure, sanitation, and economic establishments. Overall, the Majlis Movements in Kuwait, Dubai, and Bahrain played a significant role in changing the perception of the ruler's responsibility towards society, initiating the modernization and development of Kuwait, Dubai, and Bahrain.

Clarifying British political ideology and the specific strategic intervention used in the Majlis Movements of Kuwait, Dubai, and Bahrain in 1938 provides a unique insight into the contradicting relationship between Western powers and democratic politics in the Arabian Peninsula. Particularly, the reform movement in 1938, illustrates Britain's role in methodically undercutting the Persian Gulf's first major democratic political mobilization while systematically upholding monarchical rule in Kuwait, Dubai, and Bahrain, to ensure continued British access to

the regions strategic and economic assets, at a time when the colonial power championed itself as an exponent of democracy. With that being said, the British involvement in these reform movements is not entirely surprising, given the abundant examples of British colonial rule suppressing popular movements in colonies and regions of influence.

However, when Britain's suppression of democratic politics in 1938 is examined within the larger historical context of democratic politics in the Arabian Peninsula, Britain's oppositional relationship with democracy in Kuwait, Dubai, and Bahrain becomes incredibly important in illustrating the continuity of Western opposition towards democratic politics in the region. Particularly, Britain's role in the 1938 Majlis Movements provides an early example of the ensuing historical role that Western powers would continue to play in aligning with monarchical powers and circumventing democratic politics, ensuring the stability of their economic and strategic interests in the Arabian Peninsula: the United States and Britain's alignment with Arab monarchies to establish opposition towards socialist movements calling for democracy during the 1950s into the 1970s, the United States continued support of Saudi Arabia in the face of Saudi repression of Islamist movements calling for democracy in the 1990s, and the Euro-American preservation of alliances with Saudi Arabia and other Arab monarchies despite their crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrations in Bahrain and other regions during the Arab spring in 2011.⁴⁰² Under this broader historical perspective, it becomes clear that Britain's initial policy of containing the democratic scope of the 1938 Majlis Movements and their alliances with monarchical rule in Kuwait, Dubai, and Bahrain to ensure their access to strategic and economic

⁴⁰² See, Toby Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf: Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the Arab Spring That Wasn't* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), 10, 26-27, 126; Toby Matthiesen. "The Cold War and the Communist Party of Saudi Arabia, 1975–1991." *Journal of Cold War Studies* 22, no. 3 (2020): 32–62; Mohammed Turki A. Al-Sudairi, "Marx's Arabian Apostles: The Rise and Fall of the Saudi Communist Movement." *The Middle East Journal* 73, no. 3 (2019): 438–457.

interest, was not confined to this particular history. In fact, Britain's policy of maintaining the authority of ruling sheikhs to sustain British access to strategic and economic interests in 1938 became the blueprint for Western powers in their interaction with democratic politics in the Arabian Peninsula. By upholding monarchies, the British and later the United States ensured a mutually beneficial relationship, where monarchical rulers remained in power while the West had reliable access to their strategic and economic assets. The hostile nature of Western powers historical relationship with democratic politics in the Arabian Peninsula discredits the notion that the region is fundamentally opposed to democratic ideology, highlighting that it is not the people of the Arabian Peninsula who are opposed to democratic governance, rather it is Western powers who champion democracy, who have historically opposed democratic developments and sustained authoritative rule in the Arabian Peninsula.

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