THE ARABS OF THE GULF

the Upper Gulf during the Afghan troubles in Persia

The history of the Upper Gulf during the period of Afghan domination in Isfahan is not easy to write. On the one hand, there is particularly rich documentation on Basra. The Carmelite chronicle becomes more detailed and the return of the Europeans produced a small amount of English and French and a large amount of Dutch documents. On the other hand, documents on both the Northern and the Southern coastal area of the Upper Gulf are particularly scarce.

We have no documentary evidence at all concerning the Southern coast. We may assume that this is the period during which the Utub tribe, still under the supremacy of the Banu Khalid, consolidated its position of what is now Kuwait and that the present town of Kuwait, at that time still called Grain, grew into being. Of the Banu Khalid themselves, almost no mention is made in European sources of that time. In 1733, the crew of a Dutch ship, the Windhoff, mutinied, and planning to use the ship for piracy, entered the Banu Khalid port of Qatif, but ship and crew were sent by the local authorities to the Dutch establishment in Bandar Abbas.103

Our knowledge of the situation on the Northern coast of the Upper Gulf also remains very limited. Arabistan was still only nominally a Persian province under the independent-minded Mushasha. The Mushasha had supported the Afghan takeover, but it is far from clear if they remained faithful to them: if the attitude of their kinsman Sayyid Ali in Bandar Abbas is any indication, it may be that their attitude was at least ambiguous. Probably, the attitude of the Mushasha was far from consistent. There were great differences of opinion between the members of the family from time to time. During the Afghan crisis, the Mushasha Wali Sayyid Muhammad Khan went over to the Ottoman side. The Ottoman-Persian treaty of 1727 gave Huwayzay to the Ottoman Empire.104

supremacy in the area ended with the advance of Tahmasp Quli Khan. In 1730, Persian forces entered Huwayzay and Sayyid Muhammad Khan had to go into exile in Basra. With the help of the Muntafiq he could return to Huwayzay shortly afterwards, but after the Ottoman-Persian treaty of 1732, when Huwayzay definitively became Persian, he had to retire from the scene. In 1733, Tahmasp Quli Khan replaced the Mushasha Wali Sayyid Ali Khan with his brother Ridha because the former had supported a rebellion in the region.105

Of the area East from there, we know next to nothing. There are no references in European sources to the survival of pockets of local independence claiming loyalty to some Safavi pretender as there were in the Lower Gulf. This is either because the Europeans had little interest in reporting anything about the area, or because it was simply easier for the authorities in Isfahan to control places like Bushahr and there was not much trouble there. Neither do we have any positive indication that the relative prosperity of Bushahr and Bandar Rig, mentioned in 1721, continued in this period.106 It is more probable that there trade declined as it did in the Persian ports of the Lower Gulf.

Basra is the only place whose history can be reconstructed in more detail from the available sources. In 1729, there was some trouble in Basra, of a kind rather typical of the Ottoman system of government. Muhammad Pasha had replaced his Kalitya (lieutenant), the actual Governor of the town with a certain Missiri Oghlu, from whom he had borrowed a lot of money. This Missiri Oghlu tried to get big returns for his ‘investments’ quickly but his extortions caused opposition from the two principal Arab leaders in Basra, Muhammad bin Mani and Shaikh Annis. The former apparently was the Muntafiq leader, but the background of Shaikh Annis is not known. He is mentioned many times in Dutch documents and in the Carmelite

103 ARA, VOC vol. 2262, fol. 6658-6659, 6580-6593. Most mutineers, Europeans and a few Balinese were condemned to heavy punishment by the Dutch Council of Justice in Bandar Abbas, a few were executed.
105 ARA, VOC vol. 2253, fol. 453, 460, which clearly establishes the chronology of 1730 for the occupation of Huwayzay by the Persians; Chronicle, vol. 2, pp. 1192-1193. Caskel, ‘Wali’s, p. 430 has a slightly different chronology of events.
chronicle. The only certain thing is that he was the leader of the Arabs of the immediate surroundings of Basra. His dwelling-place was just outside the town in a place called 'Laredje' which we could not identify. Missirli Oghlu was taken prisoner by Shaikh Annis. The old Kahya, Ibrahim, was re-instated and in order to satisfy the furious people of Basra, Missirli Oghlu was strangled. It was not easy for the Pasha to restore order fully. The Muntafiq remained rebellious and the Banu tended to ally themselves with the Persians. An attempt in 1730 to find a military solution failed because the Qapudan Pasha of Basra (the commander of the fleet of river-craft which policed the area between Baghdad and Basra), had sympathy for the Muntafiq and Muhammad Pasha finally was obliged to reach a settlement with them because the Muntafiq had blocked the access of provisions to the town.

Since 1722, the European traders in Basra had become more active. The Dutch diaries show a regular traffic of French, English and from 1725 also Dutch ships. All European nations were now trying a new way to cut expenses. The treaties between the Ottoman Empire and these powers stipulated that customs duties were limited to 3%, but this had never been applied in Basra, where the Afrasiyab Pashas had claimed double and their successors had brought no change. The French seem to have been the first to succeed in 1731 by paying a large sum to the Pasha. The matter was confirmed by a ferman which was obtained from the Sultan by the French Ambassador in Istanbul. The Dutch Ambassador in Istanbul tried the same in 1729, but he did not obtain anything better than 4% when he finally received a ferman from the Sultan in 1732.

made some attempts of the same kind in 1728-1729, but they only achieved 5%, while their treaty with the Sultan had stipulated 3%. It seems that during the period of civil war in Oman, part of Omani activity in navigation was taken over by Basidu: we find references about the arrival of ships from Basidu in Basra in the remaining Dutch Basra diaries of the period. The rise of Persian power posed a serious threat to the stability of the not so very firmly based rule of the Ottomans in Iraq. They could still fend off an ineptly directed attack by young Shah Tahmasp, but in 1733 Tahmasp Quli Khan himself opened the attack to take back the territories lost by the Afghans. Persian attempts were concentrated on Baghdad: the marshes and rivers East of Basra were hardly an attractive starting point for attacks as long as the Ottomans had more ships than the Persians. Starting his attack on Baghdad, Tahmasp Quli Khan at the end of March 1733, ordered the Banu Lam, the most powerful tribe upstream, to attack Basra. There was no direct sign of an attack for several months. In the summer, the situation in Basra grew more tense. July 1st, Shaikh Annis went out of town to try to convince the Muntafiq leader Muhammad bin Mani not to join the Persians. Muhammad Bin Mani gave Annis a Persian ferman which ordered the Muntafiq to join Mir Sayyid Khan, the Wall of Huwayza, who was with an army besieging Jaza’ir. Mir Sayyid Khan sent presents to Muhammad and asked him to attack Basra. On the 8th of July, it became clear in Basra that the Muntafiq had decided to join the Persians. The Mittelesim cooperated with Shaikh Annis in the defence of the city. At first things looked dangerous, but the timing of the Muntafiq had been bad: within three weeks after their joining the Persian side, the news came of the defeat of the Persian army in front of Baghdad.

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107 Maybe the name is Saredje, this name occurs in Otter, Voyage, vol. I, p. 144.
109 Gollancz, Chronicle, p. 638; ARA, VOC vol. 2091, fol. 4971 (letter by the Governor of Basra to the Company concerning the regulation of trade); ARA, LAT 1095, pp. 61-65, ARA, Calkoen papers 265, 266, 292, 571.
110 ARA, LAT 1095, pp. 621-625 (a copy in the Turkish language of the request of 1729); ARA, Calkoen papers no. 556/12 (the request for equal treatment), 555; VOC vol. 2255 fol. 1417: order by the Pasha to reduce duties on Dutch trade to 4%, cf. Ottoman Archives (Bashbakanlik Arshivi,Istanbul, Ernabi Defteri 22/1 fol. 250): a ferman of 1731 to the Pasha of Aleppo to charge Dutch merchandise coming from Basra with the ordinary duties of 3% only.
112 ARA, VOC 2168, fol. 381-382.
The situation grew easier for Basra. The Persians had problems elsewhere. It became urgent to put an end to the career of Shaikh Ahmad Madanni and other dangerous persons on the Lower Gulf. Subsequently, during a period of detente, the government of Basra was even assisting the Persian army, which had returned to the border-zone with Iraq to put down the independent Arab spirits in Arabistan and on Quban. In February, the Persians attacked their enemies, the Karb on Quban island and held them under siege in a fortress there. There is no news of the outcome in the Dutch reports.

Peace continued around Basra, although the Persians had not lost their ambition to expand their borders in the area. Trade became quite busy. The Persian strategy against the Ottomans was changing. Instead of an attack in the North, they now planned to hit the Ottomans from the South. A fleet was needed for this, but it took time to get it together, and during the time everything continued to be quiet. Only in 1736 was the Persian navy ready for operations, but it was first needed elsewhere to put an end to troubles with the Arabs following the incidents with the widow of Shaikh Rashid of Basidu.

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113 Chronicle, vol. 2, pp. 1193-1195; Gollancz, Chronicle, pp. 640-642; Lockhart, Nadir Shah, p. 68; the Dutch Basra diary of January-July 1733 in VOC vol. 2269, fol. 6601-6613 presents a number of differences in the details of the events with the account in the Carmelite Chronicle.

114 ARA, VOC vol. 1232 (Basra diary, January 1734) fol. 2238 (1038)-2243 (1043).

115 VOC vol. 2323, fol. 2044 (1044) (Dutch Basra Diary 14-2-1734).
not a war of conquest. This meant that the Dutch and the English were not bound by their former self-imposed obligation not to support Persian attacks on Oman. In these circumstances, the Persians considered the Europeans to be fully obliged to help them. This help was not given in the manner in which the Persians had been expecting it. Only as a result of Persian threats were the Europeans willing to offer their ships for transport or for policing the Gulf from time to time. The Dutch East India Company was usually the first to receive requests for help because it had a small warship on station in the Gulf and because it did much more trade in Persia than its English competitor. The rich stores kept by the Dutch Company in Bandar Abbas made it vulnerable to threats: most English shipping and trade was not that of the East India Company itself but of private traders. Some English ships did indeed participate in warfare. The Dutch usually did their utmost to limit their involvement, Dutch ships were only to be used for transportation, not for fighting. The only time Dutch ships used their guns was when the mutiny of the Persian navy of 1740 caused some fears that the ships captured by the mutineers might be used against trade in the Gulf.

The repeated request of the Persians for use of the Dutch ships caused heavy expenditure for the Dutch Company. The Batavia High Government and the Board of Directors in Holland were not satisfied with the policy of their representatives in the Gulf. The Head of the establishment was criticized because his opposition to Persian requests was not considered sufficient, his activities in trade were considered unsatisfactory and his reports were considered to be too full of unimportant details to be readable. Poor Carel Koenad, a German from Hamburg, who was Head of the Dutch establishment in Bandar Abbas, seems to have been afraid at his lonely post, where he was at the mercy of irregular bodies of Nadir Shah’s militia. In his ill-written reports he gave detailed account of events in the area, probably to show how dangerous his situation was. The Directors found his reports unreadable and were forever asking if it would not be better to close down the establishments in the Gulf. Modern historians are just grateful that Koenad wrote his reports which are now an important historical source.

The Directors in Holland were clearly aware that there was something wrong with their trade with the Gulf. They saw the great activity of English private traders and they asked why the Dutch establishments in Basra and Bandar Abbas could not keep up with them. The reply would be that the large machinery of the Dutch Company was too cumbersome to act at every fluctuation in the market. The Directors saw that their representatives in the Gulf were able to enrich themselves in private trade (which was forbidden), and asked why they did not show such zeal for the Company. In fact, there was no solution for their problems. The Directors could still have opened the Gulf for Dutch private trade, but this would not have been a remedy for the losses of the Company: the duties to be levied from private traders would be insufficient to keep up the large and expensive establishment in Bandar Abbas, and private trade would quickly chase the Company’s own trade from the market. The Batavia High Government tried to remedy the situation by taking rather soft measures against fraud (members of the High Government may themselves have been involved in the forbidden private trading with the Gulf) and just waited for the situation to improve. This improvement never came: instead there were heavy losses.

The Batavia High Government hoped to compensate the decline of trade with Persia by an increase of trade with Basra. There was indeed a considerable improvement there, but a large part of the profits in Basra was eaten up by the expenses and the losses in Persia.

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1 In ARA, VOC vol. 2357, fol. 463 the Dutch Director in Bandar Abbas wrote to a high Persian official that the Dutch would do all they could to help the Persians on their own territory, but that they could offer no help against Oman, Basra and India, states which had a treaty of friendship with the Dutch.

2 After Koenad’s departure the Directors in Holland wrote that they had hoped that the times of lengthy, boring, confused and incomprehensible reports by him would be over: ARA, VOC vol. 331, letter of 4-9-1748.
Thanks to Basra, Dutch Gulf trade from time to time showed a profit. But this profit never reached the desired level: the market there was too small and competition with the more flexible private shipping of the English too difficult.

The English were in a somewhat better position. Not that this was a good time for them. As we will see they got more directly involved in the first stages of the war than the Dutch had ever been, probably because the representatives of their company had little authority over the captains of private ships. Later, never having its own ships in the Gulf at crucial moments, the English Company was able to keep out of the worst trouble. The English private shipping did not suffer too much and was slowly diverting from Bandar Abbas to Basra. An increasing portion of this shipping was in reality not English at all, but shipping from India, which now continued under the English flag.

While in the Gulf the Dutch Company basically remained a trading venture, the English Company continued its evolution towards becoming the protector of the private navigation of English subjects from Europe and India. The English Company in the Gulf always did less trade than its Dutch competitor. It received considerable duties from private shipping, but it remains to be seen if these were sufficient for the upkeep of the English establishments, even if they were much smaller than the Dutch lodge in Bandar Abbas. Certainly, the volume of trade in the Gulf had declined considerably, and in the period after 1736, the impoverishment of Farsistan and Oman would have a negative effect on trade in the Lower Gulf. The English representatives in the Gulf kept a rather low profile in face of the dangerous uncertainties of ill-humoured favourites of Nadir Shah. They had to face the expenses of giving presents to Persian lords when their income from trade was dwindling, but for the time being, the English position was stable. The worst thing was the risk that the naval warfare in the Gulf might reach so high that shipping under the English flag would get into direct danger, but this situation had not yet come about, even if English participation on the Persian side brought the danger nearer.

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the conquest of Julfar and the first siege of Muscat

The period of the intervention by Nadir Shah in the Omani civil war is relatively well-documented. In several chapters of his Nadir Shah, Lockhart gives an account of the events which is chiefly based on the English Gombroon diary, on Ruzayq's chronicle as published by Badger and on the English Gombroon-diary. It is not always easy to fit the events as related by the Dutch documents into this framework, mainly because of differences in opinion between the Dutch and the English documents.

In the beginning of 1737, Taqi Khan started his operations in support of the Imam Sayf bin Sultan against Abu'l Arab, Ghafari pretender in Oman Abu'l Arab. Suspicions existed that the Omani demand for help was just a pretext for an attempt to conquer Muscat. From the beginning of April onwards, troops were carried over to Julfar and Khor Fakan. It is not clear what the attitude was of the local authorities there, but it seems that they were not trusted very much by the Persians. Shaikh Rahma of Julfar does not seem to have put up much fight, but he was taken prisoner and brought to Bandar Abbas on a Dutch ship which was requested by the Persians to carry supplies. Once in Bandar Abbas he was treated reasonably well, although he was in fact a prisoner. Khor Fakan was also taken by the Persians without much trouble. The Persians took quite a considerable booty, which caused quarrels between the central authorities and the commanders in the field about their share in it.

At Julfar, the Imam Sayf bin Sultan joined the Persians. Together, they proceeded to the Ghafari interior: first to Buraymi, and then to Ibra, where the Persian troops committed many atrocities. As a consequence of this, Sayf bin Sultan became disgusted with his allies and proceeded alone to Muscat. After the initial successes, the

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3 Saldanha, Persian Gulf Précis, vol. 1, p. 53.
5 Badger, History, pp. 141-142. Lockhart, Nadir Shah, p. 183, puts the separ-
expedition against Oman did not have quick results. The Dutch Director was, in a letter to his colleague on Ceylon, optimistic about the chances of the Persians in Oman, but rather negative about the economic consequences of the war:

...The lower part of Persia and the Arabs are considerably impoverished by the troops of His Majesty under command of the Beglerbeg Muhammad Taqi Khan. There were not so many troops needed to acquire Julfar, which together with Bahrain dominates the entire pearl trade, and which has been brought under the obedience of the Persians. About 11,000 men have been sent under the command of Latif Khan and around this city [Bandar Abbas] there is a camp of about the same number of infantry and cavalry. Every day they have great exertions and pains to get food and fodder. Whenever they lack something, they will obtain it under any pretext. Worse is that trade, because of the ruin of the Arabs, seems to be in decline, while Latif Khan with his army is trying to get the two disputing Imams Sayf bin Sultan and Abu'l Arab under his influence, or to destroy the latter. He has been called in to help the former, and it is to be expected that the last remaining Imam of Muscat will be reduced to the position of a Persian vassal... (ARA, VOC vol. 2448, fol. 989-990)

A new setback for the Persian operations was the outbreak of an epidemic in early autumn. It was reputed to be the plague, and claimed many victims among Persian troops.6 Probably, the delay of decisive operations against Oman was also partly to be interpreted as a consequence of setbacks suffered by Nadir Shah himself in his operations against Qandahar in Afghanistan, which may have lessened the flow of money, men and supplies to the war in the Gulf.7 The mediocre results of the Persian operations caused them, in the

winter of 1737-1738, to look again for help to the two European establishments in Bandar Abbas. There was an incessant trickle of requests for all kinds of equipment which were difficult to obtain for large square-rigged ships such as ropes, anchors, masts and also experienced carpenters. According to the Dutch and English reports, their representatives in Bandar Abbas conceded such requests after much grumbling and opposition.8 It is very well possible that those reports reflect the truth, but we have at least one piece of proof that this was not completely believed by the superiors outside the Gulf. They seem to have suspected sometimes that their representatives in Bandar Abbas had also some private interests in acceding to Persian demands. It is very conceivable that the formal Persian requests for assistance from the official means of the Companies were accompanied by private bribes to Dutch or English officials, even if we have found no formal proof for this. Another way the Persians used of getting the Dutch to give help was by promising assistance in recovering the heavy debt incurred several years ago by the local authorities of Minab.9

Already in the spring of 1737, two Dutch ships, the *Anthonia*, a ‘jacht’ on permanent station in the Gulf and the larger ship *Huys te Forest* (which had transported Shaikh Rahma of Julfar), had been lent to the Persians for the transport of troops and supplies to Julfar and Khor Fakan. They had not been involved in any fighting; their accounting of gunpowder used on this trip shows that the only shots fired were for salutes and for the calling of lighters in Julfar: the large Dutch ships did not dare enter the dangerous harbour of that place.10

Afterwards, Taqi Khan made some friendly gestures to the Dutch but instantly followed them up with new requests for equipment.

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6 EGD 24-11-1737.
7 ARA, VOC vol. 2448, fol. 69.
8 ARA, VOC vol. 2448, fol. 889, 923, 1834-1837 (5 English and as many Dutch ships were used by the Persians for transport; cf. fol. 1994-1999: the ‘Dutch’ ships in question are Arab ships in Dutch service), fol. 1840-1841; EGD 18 IV, 9 V, 16 V, 6-7-1737.
9 ARA, VOC vol. 2448, fol. 76-83.
10 ARA, VOC vol. 2448, fol. 389, 607-609: the ships seem not to have been involved in fighting because the only gunpowder used was for saluting purposes. The English gave the *Halifax*: EGD 4-8-1737.
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In January 1738, the Persians again started asking for the use of the Antonia and the Huys te Forrest, but the Dutch now told Taqi Khan that the larger ship had to depart for Batavia and that they could only put the Antonia at his disposal for the transport of 100 horses. Taqi Khan was very angry because of this and threatened that the Dutch might lose their privileges.11 It was not before February 1738 that there was again a major engagement between Persian and Arab forces, near Bahla in central Oman.12 This again was a Persian victory, and the road to Muscat was open to the Persians. The Imam Sayf bin Sultan fled to the Buraymi area, where he reached an agreement with the Ghafiris. The Ghafiri pretender Abu’l Arab stepped down and Sayf was now the only lawful Imam.13 Unity in Oman did not last long. Soon, the Ghafiri faction elected Sultan bin Murshid as their Imam.14 In this unstable situation, the Persians tried to mobilize all forces available to them to take Muscat. Heavy pressure was again put on the Europeans in Bandar Abbas to obtain some kind of support. Persian pressure on the Dutch was so strong that the possibility arose of an open conflict between the Dutch and Taqi Khan. Instructions were issued by the Head Koenad to put the Dutch establishment and ships in a state of defence. If the Persians showed evil intentions, the Dutch ships were to try to take the Beglerbeg and the Admiral Latif Khan prisoner. Abu’l Hasan, brother of the Beglerbeg and Na’ib of Bandar Abbas, tried to mediate, but the Dutch went as far as preparing to leave Persia entirely.15 Their state of mind is shown by a letter from the Head and Council in Bandar Abbas to the Dutch Residents in Isfahan in which they expressed the desire that Taqi Khan’s operations against Muscat would fail.16

Finally, the Dutch conceded the use of small vessels of local type which their establishment used for carrying supplies. These vessels brought some troops and money to Julfar in July.17 The Persians were not satisfied. Taqi Khan expressed his displeasure in a letter which is a good example of his epistolary style:

Out of friendship I let you know that your letter has reached me in good time. The things you write in your letter have made me think about the motives you mention for not sending the ship of the powerful Dutch Company to me in Julfar. Your aversion in this matter has become clear to me. Thanks be to God that the work in Arabia is now almost finished. Now, I do not need any ships of the powerful Dutch Company. Even if the Sayf of Muscat would oppose me in person, I still have here in Julfar seven to eight ships of His Majesty and a ship of the Company, and 100 small and large vessels of the Arabs and of the subjects of His Majesty. Sayf has only two rotten and damaged ships, so I believe that with God’s blessing my fleet will be able to gain a victory over two rotten ships.

Out of pure friendship I have asked you and the powerful Dutch Company to send a ship, in order to silence evil-speaking people who say that Your Excellency is a friend of the Arabs and that you are ill-disposed towards His Majesty and his empire. But, because you do not distinguish the evil from the good and because your are not glad to be able to be of use to His Majesty, you may stay in such a mood as you are, because I do not need your vessel. I have only asked for it because of the friendship I have for the Dutch Company and its servants. But, when in future any local lord acts in any manner against your servants, please do not write to me about it: it will have no effect.

Please, let me know every day of your well-being and be assured of my good affection.(ARA, VOC vol. 2476, fol. 257-259).

At that time, things were going very wrong for the Persians. The Persian army and navy, proceeding Southward along the coast and assisted by an English ship had tried to attack Muscat in April but this operation had ended in catastrophe. They had taken the town, but failed to take two fortresses. Arab ships had mounted a counter-attack and the Persians were now under siege in Julfar. The defeat at Muscat had been a very heavy one. Almost the entire Persian army had perished. Latif Khan, the Admiral, was killed by a mine at the attack on one of the principal fortresses of Muscat.18 A somewhat later source states that Latif Khan had been poisoned out of jealousy by Taqi Khan during the siege of Muscat by the Persian troops.19 In

11 ARA, VOC vol. 2448, fol. 923-939.
12 EGD 23-2-1738).
13 Badger, History, pp. 142-145.
14 Badger, History, p. 147.
15 ARA, VOC vol. 2448, fol. 939-948.
16 ARA, VOC vol. 2448, fol. 2297.
18 ARA, VOC vol. 2476, fol. 88-89, 182-185, 541, 670-672. EGD 20-4-1738).
19 Lockhart, Nadir Shah, p. 183 quoting EGD of 26-6-1738).
the interior of Oman, the Persian army occupying the Bahla area was defeated. 20

Near Julfar a naval battle was fought between the Arabs and some ships of the Persian navy, accompanied by an English ship which had been chased to the beach by the Arabs. In this fight the Englishman Cook, a former merchant captain who had served the Persians as Director of the Equipment for their navy, was killed. Taqi Khan had been able to escape from the chaos to Bandar Kong with the help of the native vessel of the Dutch paymaster, but the Persian ships were defeated ignominiously, even though the Arabs had not been able to destroy or capture them all. The Dutch commented that the Persians would not have escaped total disaster if the Arab force had been anything like it had been in 1718. The English ship had been captured by the Arabs and it was only released after stern warnings by her captors that never again should the English show themselves on the far side of the Gulf: if the English were to do so, the Arabs would attack and destroy the English establishment in Bandar Abbas. The Persians accused the English of causing the defeat. Julfar was left under siege with only 3000 soldiers to defend it. 21

There are several references in the Dutch archives to these events:

... The ships of the shah returned to Julfar (without Latif Khan and the English Captain Cook, who had been killed in a battle with the Arabs in which also an English ship had participated. The beglerbeg had saved himself in a rowing vessel with the help of the vessel of the Dutch storekeeper to Bandar Kong. He left in Julfar a force of 3000 able-bodied men. Had the Arabs been soldiers like they were in 1718, the whole Persian army would have been destroyed, but their lack of unity has weakened their forces, and the return of the English ship [which assisted the Persian navy] to Bandar Abbas has given the Beglerbeg reasons to allege that the European nations were the cause of the Persian defeat: the English had deserted and the Dutch had refused help. . . . (ARA, VOC vol. 2476, fol. 89-90)

Another Dutch report gives some more details:

... The Arabs have chased the Persians from Muscat and kept their army and navy encircled in Julfar, having blocked them from all supplies. The ships of

20 Badger, History, p. 144.

the Shah have been closed in, and some of them have been chased on the beach in a naval battle. The Persian flagship Fatih Shali was also taken by the Arabs but the English ship, which had been loaned to the Persians for the transport of provisions and which still was there, had been boarded by the Arabs. Its Captain and two seamen had been taken prisoner. Without any more assisting the Persians, the English ship returned here after the English seamen had been warned by the Arabs that they would put fire to the English establishment in Bandar Abbas if the English would dare to return . . . (ARA, VOC 2476, fol. 182-183)

Lockhart has a slightly different version of these and the following events. He sees the Omani force which chased the Persian navy from Muscat to Julfar and attacked it there, as being part of the Persian navy, manned by Arabs who had started a mutiny. There is no support for this in Dutch documents and it must be doubted whether there was question of mutiny of real Persian forces here (like there was in 1740), or that Omani forces and their Arab auxiliaries simply followed the line of their lawful Imam. 22

Because the Persian defeat had not been total, they were able to mount a counter-attack against the Arabs. A sea-battle was fought off Khasab. The main Arab ship, the Matik, caught fire, but the battle remained undecided because the weather grew so bad that fighting had to be discontinued. 23 A large Arab force (reputed to be of 20,000 men) attacked the Persian garrison of Julfar. The Persian commander of this place, Assur Quli Sultan, had just left, but this Arab attack was repelled. 24 The defeats of the Persian forces had given courage to all Arab elements which had some cause for quarrel against the Persians. The Huwala ‘rebellion’ after Rashid’s death in 1736 which had only been superficially subdued by Latif Khan, now flared up

22 Lockhart, Nadir Shah, pp. 183-184 seems to have mixed up matters here a little bit. He probably made a wrong combination of the somewhat muddled account of Otter (Voyage, vol. 2, pp. 130-144) with the English Gomboon diary. The diary has no reference to a mutiny, but only states that the Arabs had equipped a fleet after the Persian debacle at Muscat in order to attack Qism and Basidu (EGD 10-6-1738).
23 ARA, VOC vol. 2476, fol. 132-133: the Dutch see an Arab victory which the Arabs failed to exploit; Lockhart, Nadir Shah, p. 183, sees a Persian victory.
24 ARA, VOC vol. 2476, fol. 132-133.
again in a much stronger manner because it was joined by Shaikh Jabara of Tahiri, who attacked the Persians from Qatif. The Huwala forces attacked Basidu, but later operated mainly in the central portion of the Gulf, where they attacked and besieged Bahrain. The bad situation of the Persian forces might have been provoked by the death of Latif Khan who was considered to be a friend of some Sunni Arab tribes living on the Southern shores of Eastern Persia, who were manning the principal ships of the Persian navy. His successors took the opposite attitude and this might be one of the causes of the mutiny of the next years.

In the meantime, the Dutch were hoping that the defeats suffered by Taqi Khan would cause his final downfall in the favour of the Shah. They saw indications for the Beglerbeg’s downfall in the approach of the army of the Sardar Amir Hasan Khan, a declared enemy of Taqi Khan. Another important appointment was that of Muhammad Ali Beg as Governor of Bahrain. The latter was however not able to reach this island because its fortress was still under siege by the Huwala. Taqi Khan was very successful in explaining his defeats to the Shah. Instead of being punished, he was given new tokens of favour. Rahma bin Matar, who had been held as a hostage at the court of the Shah, was given to Taqi Khan and at the same time appointed as Governor for life of Julfar, an indication also of at least a reconciliation between the Qawasim and the Persian regime. Taqi Khan was given new forces and funds and the order to resume the attack on Muscat.

During the next year however, not much energy was spent on the war with Muscat. It was supposed that the Persians had given up there. Taqi Khan was leading a raid into Baluchistan which had

31 ARA, VOC vol. 2477, fol. 812-813; VOC vol. 2510, fol. 110 (Dutch ship), 118 (English ship Anne), 414-417, 1257-1259.
33 ARA, VOC vol. 2511, fol. 992.
34 ARA, VOC vol. 2511, fol. 206. Letter by the French consul in Basra, Jean Otter, to the French ambassador in Istanbul of July 16th, 1740 in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, NAF 989 p. 58. This document is not only the earliest reference to the Utub in a European source, but it also is the only reference to some cooperation between the Utub and the Huwala, who were always in conflict about the pearlbank of Bahrain. This letter is also resumed in Otter’s book: Otter, Voyage, vol. 2, p. 130.
had killed many others. Afterwards, the concentration of army and navy in Bandar Abbas did cause problems in getting supplies which the Persians were unable to solve. The presence of a half starving army and navy in the area constituted a danger to stability in Bandar Abbas. Still, the bad condition of the Persian forces gave the Dutch some hope that the Persians might give up operations against Oman. This hope increased because there were persistent rumours that the Persian forces would be directed against Al Hasa.

The mutiny of Nadir Shah’s navy

In the fleet, the dangers of mutiny were great. There was no pay for the sailors, there were no provisions for the fleet and problems were aggravated by the possibility of conflicts between the Persian Admiral and the Arab sailors. The navy, still commanded by Mir Ali Khan, was in a bad shape. In the late spring of 1740 some ships had deserted the fleet, and essential pieces of equipment were taken away from the ships in order to avoid any more desertions.

During the summer, a great mutiny hit the Persian fleet. Of this, we have a graphic description in a letter written by Jean Otter, French consul in Basra, to his Ambassador in Istanbul. A literal translation of Otter’s text follows here:

The navy was at anchor in Laft, which is a place near Bandar Abbas and Mir Ali Khan, who was its Admiral, had already joined it there. This Khan who distrusted the Arabs, kept them in a very strict hold and did not allow any one of them to leave his ship. And because they were given nothing for their upkeep, they were obliged to live off dried fish. But they could not live without tobacco and some of them decided to take a small boat to look for it somewhere. The Admiral was informed of this the next day and he sent for Shaikh Mattar son of Shahin who was the Chief of these Arabs. When this man arrived on board of the flagship, he was asked why he had allowed the

36 ARA, VOC vol. 2511, fol. 158, 206, 983-984.
37 ARA, VOC vol. 2511, fol. 992.

boat to leave. He replied that he knew nothing of it but that it should not be disapproved that people went themselves to look for what they needed when they were left in need of everything. This reply infuriated the Khan, who took a knife he had in his belt in order to kill the Shaikh. But instead of hitting him in the breast as he had wanted, he hit his face. The Shaikh, perceiving that he was wounded, took his knife and the Khan, wanting to disarm him, cut his hand. Then, the Shaikh called the Arabs who followed him to help and one of them took the sword of the Khan who stood beside him and having killed the Khan they next killed all the Persians who were on the ship. This act was the start of a revolt and very rapidly the Arabs took over the entire fleet, killed all the Persians who were on it, put fire to the flagship and got away on six other ships, robbing and plundering all they met on their way… (Otter, Voyage, vol. 2, pp. 130-132; the manuscript version is in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale NAF 989 fol. 59v: letter by Otter to the French Ambassador in Istanbul 22-9-1740)

Some remarks must be made on the accuracy of this account. The mention of the burning of the flagship is certainly a mistake, there is no mention of this in the reports of the Dutch Head Koenad under whose nose all happened. Of course Otter, being in Basra, had less accurate information. Another mistake is the name of the Arab shaikh involved. The ‘Mattar’ probably is a mixing up of the names of two important Shaikhs: Rahma bin Matar of the Qawasim of Jurfar and Rahma bin Shahn of Nakhlui. A ‘Mattar bin Shahn’ does not occur in English or Dutch sources. A letter of the Persian Sardar clearly states that it was Rahma bin Shahn, a Shaikh of Nakhlui, who had got away with the flagship the Fatay Shahid. Still in 1756, one of the two Shaikhs of Nakhlui was called Rahma bin Shahn. Except for this apparent slip of the pen, there is no indication that the Qawasim Shaikh Rahma bin Matar was involved in the mutiny.

We will now try to get a clear account of what exactly happened from the Dutch reports. According to them, in summer, the fleet was at anchor in Bandar Abbas. The Arabs manning the fleet had been
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very badly treated by the Persian commanders and finally in the night of August 25th 1740, three of the largest ships of the navy, the former English ships *Fath Shahi*, *Qapitanieye*, *Pal* and the *Tawakkul* (the last had been bought from Shaikh Rashid), left the anchorage of Bandar Abbas under command of three Shaikhs: Shaikh Abdul Shaikh of the Banu Ma‘in, Shaikh Abdul Khur, whose origin is unknown to us, and Shaikh Rahma bin Shahin of Nakhlul. A large number of small vessels followed the example of the large ships. Of the large, European-type ships, only the *Fath Rahmani* remained under the authority of the Persian officers. There was no great unanimity among the leaders of the move. They separated instantly. Rahma sailed with the *Qapitanieye* and the *Fath Shahi*, the largest ship of the fleet, accompanied by most of the small dhows, to Bandar Kong, while Abdul Shaikh with the *Pal* and the *Tawakkul* threatened to capture the few remaining ships which still obeyed the Persian commanders and forced Qishm to pay a contribution.39

The events caused panic, among the Persians as well as the Europeans. The latter were afraid that the Arabs might completely block merchant shipping in the Gulf with this new power.40 At that moment, the English had no ships in the area, but the Dutch had two rather small ships, the *Cronenburg* and the *Middenrak*. Muhammad Bakr Beg, *Na‘ib* of Bandar Abbas retained some optimism regarding the attitude of Abdul Shaikh who was expected to submit himself again to the Shah when the Persians would be able to put up some show of power. He approached the Dutch who at first made the normal refusals, but who relented fearing the prospect of anarchy in the Gulf. Finally, they were quicker than normal in fulfilling the Persian requests. The Dutch ships chased away the mutineers who were threatening to take over the island of Qishm, but Abdul Shaikh escaped and sailed to Suwar while protesting his fidelity to the Shah alleging that he had only taken the ships away because he had been threatened by the Persian Admiral.41

40 ARA, VOC vol. 2546 fol. 1021, 1290.
41 EGD 27-8-1740, 9-9-1740], ARA, VOC vol. 2546, fol. 1406-1438: several

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The rich collection of copies of all kinds of official papers in the Dutch Batavia Incoming Letterbook of 1742 gives a good impression of the confusion and the erratic reactions in Bandar Abbas. One of the most interesting papers is the text of the instructions given early September to the officers of the two Dutch ships which were to give assistance to the Persians. Of no less interest is a report written by the accountant Willem Slaars, who was sent as a liaison officer between the officers of the Dutch ships and the Admiral and officers of a small Persian force which had boarded the Dutch ships for actions against the pirates. Slaars had been selected for this mission because he knew Persian. At first the Persian Admiral was in doubt where to go: to Nakhlulu where Rahma was with the *Fath Shahi*, the *Qapitanieye* and the *Fath Rahmani*, or to Khor Fakan where Abdul Shaikh had retired. They sailed to Nakhlulu, but after only a short time they decided to change course to Khor Fakan. In the meantime, the Persian naval escort captured a small Arab ship. Its *Nakhuda*, who was on his way from Julfar to Qishm with a cargo of salt, was most brutally interrogated by the Persians. This man reported that the *Tawakkul* and *Pal*, commanded by Abdul Shaikh, were in Khor Fakan with a few small vessels. A few days later, orders arrived for the Admiral from the *Sardar* Imam Werdi Khan to change course again and to sail to Nakhlulu where he was with the army in order to consult with him. In the meantime, it was reported that Rahma was with his ships at Shaikh Saib island and at Qays: this news had come from a few sailors who had fled from the ships to Bandar Kong. The two Dutch ships approached the Arab force but because of lack of wind they could not engage in battle until the 17th of September. The two Dutch ships attacked Rahma’s ships, but this was rather a hopeless enterprise: the *Middenrak* and the *Cronenburg* were only small ships with a reduced European crew. The presence of inexperienced Persians on board did nothing to stiffen their fighting reports and letters concerning the expedition of the Dutch ships, ibid. fol. 1664-1680: instructions for the expedition. ARA, VOC vol. 2546, fol. 1728-1731. Otter, Voyage, vol. 2, p. 133.
power. A few Dutch sailors were killed, but finally the two Dutch ships were able to retire in reasonable order.42

In the meantime, the situation of the Persians was not good. Not only had they lost most of their navy, but they were now unable to communicate with the main body of the army which was still on the Arab side of the Gulf. The garrison in Julfar was starving and the Persians had no way to get any more supplies there. They put the Dutch under heavy pressure to assist them in getting supplies safely over to the other side and Carel Koenad, who considered the annihilation of the Persian forces in Julfar a dangerous prospect, did not hesitate in assisting the Persians this time.43 Luckily for the Persians, the mutineers were divided. Early in 1741, there were rumours that there were quarrels among the leaders of the mutiny. It was said that two of the Arabs, Shaikh Rahma and his father Shaikh Shahin planned to return the three large ships of the Persian navy together with some small vessels to the Persians through mediation by the Dutch.44 Meanwhile, the Persians tried to reconstruct their navy. They tried to organize shipyards in the Upper Gulf, to obtain carpenters from the Europeans in Bandar Abbas to work in them and to buy ships from the Dutch. Their requests to the Dutch were refused.45 The Persians went even as far as twice demanding from the Ottoman Mülleselim of Basra an English ship which was in port there, of course without result.46

Another attempt by the Persians, to take an English ship in Bushahr almost by force, also failed because of a clever action by the English Captain.47 Next, the Sardar came with a request for the lending of the Dutch ships present in Bandar Abbas for two expeditions, one to escort the newly-appointed Beglerbeg of Sind to his place and secondly for a new expedition against the remaining mutineers.

42 ARA, VOC vol. 2546, fol. 1430-1438, EGD 27-8-1740J - 9-9-1740J.
43 ARA, VOC vol. 2546, fol. 1684-1690.
44 Letters by Rahma and his father in ARA, VOC vol. 2546, fol. 1813-1816 (cf EGD 24-2, 30-3 and 31-3-1741J).
45 ARA, VOC vol. 2583, fol. 53.

The ships were to be manned by Persian soldiers under the command of the Sardar Imam Werdhi Khan. The Dutch did not want to go to sea under conditions laid down by the Persians. By surprise then, the Persians brought a large number of soldiers onto the Dutch ships. Thereupon, the Dutch sailors refused to remain on board, and disembarked.48 The Persians took over the ships, on which only a few Dutch officers had remained to keep an eye on the Company's possessions, and set out to sea.49 They tried to attack the Arabs on the islands Westward of Qishm. On the 24th of October 1741 they left Bandar Kong and arrived at Qays where they heard that the Fath Shahi had left for Bahrain together with 50 dhows. At Qays, the Dutch ships were attacked by the Arabs. The few remaining Dutchmen on board witnessed how well the Arabs manoeuvred and how clumsy the Persians were. The first accident occurred when a Persian walked on deck with a cartridge of powder in one hand and a lighted match in the other. Several men were killed and wounded. This proved to be insufficient warning for the Persians to operate with more caution. The Persians tried a landing on Qays, which was repelled by the Arabs. The Sardar gave orders to support the landings with artillery-fire from the ships, and was himself on deck, helping to aim the guns. Because they wanted to improve their effect the Persians put double charges in the guns. A small gun exploded and the Sardar and several of his men were killed.50

After this setback for the Persians, the Arabs attacked Bandar Kong, where they arrested Shaikh Madhusor of Bushahr, a notorious adherent of the Persians, and Shahbandar of that town together with

48 ARA, VOC vol. 2583, fol. 55, 498-670. A voluminous correspondence with the Persian authorities on the events can be found in ARA, VOC vol. 2584, fol. 2109-2191 and 2292-2231.
49 ARA, VOC vol. 2583, fol. 671-678.
50 EGD 10-11-1741J. The Dutch were kept informed of the movements of their ships by some officers who had stayed on board with the intention of keeping an eye on the possessions of the Company and, if possible to take them back, especially the first mate Jan Zion who was promoted to Captain as a reward for his services: ARA, VOC vol. 2583, fol. 770-785; ARA, VOC vol. 2584 fol. 2228-2240 and 2692-2701.
the Shahbandar of Bandar Kong. In this bad situation, the Shah returned to his trusted adviser, Taqi Khan. This favourite reappeared on the scene in his old dignity as Beglerbeg of Farsistan. He instantly started new operations against the Arabs. Meanwhile, the Dutch were licking their wounds. The matter of the confiscation of the two ships rankled very much and the ship *Ridderkerk* was wrecked on a trip to bring the newly appointed Governor of Sind, Muzafar Ali Khan, to his district. The Dutch had been obliged to grant this concession because otherwise the Persians refused to return the ships taken by the late Sardar Imam Weri Khan. The new Sardar, Ala Weri Khan made new requests for carpenters to be used on the shipyards of the Shah but such requests were refused. The English seem to have sold ships to the Persians.

In the spring of 1742, the Persians were recovering. Their forces under Kalb Ali Khan obtained a victory over a Huwala naval force at Khasab. The Arab leader Rahma tried to flee with the *Fath Shafi*, once the flagship of the Persian navy. He was wrecked on Cape Ras al Had on his way to Mocha. He managed to get away with a dozen men and fled into the mountains. For some time, nothing was heard of him, but then much later he reappeared in Nakhilu. The other leader of the mutiny, Abdul Shaikh of Laft, who had two smaller ships and still kept the widow of Rashid of Basidu (or of Jabara of Tahir) with him, finally surrendered to the Persians.

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**Note 51** Otter, *Voyage*, vol. 2, p. 145.


**Note 53** ARA, VOC vol. 2584, fol. 2414-2483; cf. ARA, VOC vol. 2610, fol. 248-250.

**Note 54** ARA, VOC vol. 2584, fol. 2161-2164, 2374-2376. The sale of English ships in *Otter, Voyage*, vol. 2, pp. 162-163, who remarks that as usual Taqi Khan was cheating over the payment for these ships.


**Note 56** ARA, VOC vol. 2610 (Persia part 3) fol. 57. Rahma bin Shahan is mentioned again in a Dutch report of 1756 as ruler of Nakhilu: Kniphausen report, fol. 4v (=Floor, *Description*, p. 168).

**Note 57** ARA, VOC vol. 2610 (Persia part 3) fol. 157.

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**NADIR SHAH’S WARS IN OMAN**

**Final operations against Oman**

Now that the mutiny was over, Nadir Shah had his hands free again to break the back of the tenacious defence of the Omani opposition. First of all, the Shah had to obtain a new navy: many from the best ships from the old one had disappeared. Now, the Persian navy was to be reinforced with several ships bought in Surat by the Persian Governor of occupied Hindustan. Two other ships were bought in Surat from the English Company officials in that place. In Bushahr two ships were bought, one from a private French trader and one from a private English trader. This made the Persian navy again a force to be reckoned with and this opened new possibilities for a war against Muscat. None of the ships seemed to have been very large and well armed, but still they must have constituted a superior force.

There were some new perspectives for the Persians in Oman. The Imam Sayf bin Sultan had lost almost all authority in the centre of Oman since Sultan bin Murshid had been elected Imam by the Ghafir in Nazwa in 1738. Finally, Sayf lost the town of Muscat to the forces of his adversary under command of a certain Sayf bin Muhanna. For Sayf bin Sultan the only option was now to turn to the Persians in Jufar for help. The Huwala joined the opposition against Sayf bin Sultan and occupied Khasab. The Persians, hoping

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**Note 59** Lockhart, *Nadir Shah*, p. 216; Otter, *Voyage*, vol. 2, p. 163; Badger, *History*, pp. 145-157. The conquest of the town of Muscat by a certain ‘Seyhe’ is confirmed in a Dutch document: ARA, VOC vol. 2610 (Persia part 2), fol. 262. Lockhart discusses the chronology of the appointment of Sultan bin Murshid as Imam. According to a Zanzibarese source quoted in Guillain, *Documents*, vol. 1, p. 535, it was in February 1742, according to Ruzayq’s chronicle (published in Badger, *History*, p. 145) it was 1738/9. Lockhart disagrees with Ruzayq’s date stating that it was only in 1742 that the Persians requested help from the English to assist Sayf bin Sultan against the rebels. Lockhart’s argument does not seem conclusive. In Ruzayq’s account there is some time between the proclamation of Sultan bin Murshid as Imam and the conquest of Muscat by his adherents, and in the same account it was only after the fall of Muscat that Sayf bin Sultan turned to the Persians for help.
to regain prestige, started their operations in grand style. Many dignitaries and troops flocked together in Bandar Abbas for the attack which was scheduled for the early Spring of 1743. The presence of so many hungry troops and of so many high officers who were ever demanding presents caused a breakdown in trade.61 First, the Huwala were chased from Khasab.62 Persian operations started with a siege of Suwar by Kalb Ali Khan. This was on the advice of Sayf bin Sultan. This siege did not proceed well and the Persian suffered heavy losses. Then, Persian troops fell in an ambush at Matrah and finally, the Persian fleet suffered a defeat at Suwadi against the Huwala.63 These were only temporary setbacks for the Persians. The Persian navy and a second body of troops were sent to Muscat. The new attack on Muscat of the now very large navy of thirteen three-masted ships met with quick success. Sayf bin Sultan was set up as a puppet ruler; the fortresses of Muscat were manned by garrisons of two thirds Persians and one third Arabs.64

But the Persian victory was not really complete. Suwar was still holding out under Ahmad bin Sa'id. The Ghafir Imam Sultan bin Murshid had retired there, but he was killed during the siege. A large Persian force under Kalb Ali Khan was besieging this place and did not make much progress.65 The Persians had conquered Muscat but they had not achieved effective control in the area. It seems a guerilla war then started which would prove to be very costly to the Persians. A considerable Persian force had been am-

bushed and exterminated by Arab tribesmen.66 The Persian leaders wanted to send more troops to the Arab side of the Gulf, but the soldiers who had been assembled for some time in Bandar Abbas had become settled there and did not want to be transferred to the other side. Meanwhile, the Arabs were so bold as to attack the rear of the Persian army, causing large losses, but finally the Arabs were chased back to the mountains leaving many dead and wounded.67 After a siege of apparently about four months, Ahmad bin Sa'id, the commander of Suwar agreed a conditional capitulation with the Persians in July 1743. He was confirmed as Governor of Suwar. About the same time, the ill-fated Imam Sayf bin Sultan died. There were no more Omari pretenders, and Oman was Persian.68

The war had lasted six years. It had been a singularly ill-conducted affair. If anything, it showed the weakness of Nadir Shah's empire. The fact that the Persians even after the capitulation of Suwar were exercising pressure on the Dutch to help with transporting supplies to Jufar and Khor Fakan shows that even with their large new navy the Persians were either afraid of Arab attacks in the Gulf or unable to organise a satisfactory system of supply.69 Thus, the war ended in the same ramshackle manner as it had been conducted.

the rebellion of Taqi Khan

It is remarkable how weak the structure of the empire patched together by Nadir Shah really was. From 1743 on, cracks appeared everywhere. A side-effect of all troubles, but a significant one, was the Dutch decision to give silk trade in Persia up forever. The silk trade had once been the principal reason for their presence in the area.70 It is a historical fact that tyranny rarely has really trustworthy

60 Otter, Voyage, vol. 2, pp. 163-164.
64 ARA, VOC vol. 2610, (Persia part 3) fol. 157; Lockhart, Nadir Shah, p. 217; Badger, History, p. 148 (a rather vague account). Lockhart has quite a romantic story about Taqi Khan obtaining the fortresses by getting the Imam and the Omari officers drunk: a story first recorded by Niebuhr, Beschreibung, p. 300, many years after the events but without any real confirmation.
66 VOC 2610(Persia part 3), fol. 160-161.
67 ARA, VOC vol. 2610(Persia part 3) fol. 160-161.
68 The capture of Suwar, with the remark that the Shaikh had defended it most valiantly, in ECD 21-7-1743J, cf. Lockhart, Nadir Shah, pp. 217-218 and Badger, History, pp. 149-150.
69 ARA, VOC 2610(Persia part 3), fol. 174-176.
servants because at a despotic court there is always a fierce competition between favourites. There are often intrigues where one minister tries to obtain the elimination of a competitor. Immediately after the conquest of Muscat, Kalb Ali Khan, commander of the Persian army in Oman, seems to have tried to destroy the reputation of Taqi Khan. First Taqi Khan was accused of past malversation with the buying of English ships for the navy and also of malversation in his former function of Mustaafi al manatik (intendant of the domanial revenues). He was called to report at the court but it seems that he had no confidence in the outcome. Instead, he started to call on important dignitaries, who might be expected to view his stand with sympathy, to come and join him on the Arab side of the Gulf. Kalb Ali Khan was arrested on the orders of the Beglerbeg Taqi Khan.

The Sardar Muhammad Husayn Khan then publicly declared Taqi Khan to be a rebel in letters to the English, the Dutch and to the Wokil (administrator, or deputy-commander) of the Persian navy Mulla Ali Shah. Mulla Ali Shah in his turn asked for the help of a Dutch ship. Written orders from Nadir Shah were received to the effect that the possessions of the Beglerbeg and the ships of the navy were to be delivered into the custody of the Dutch. A force of 500 soldiers of the Shah appeared and attacked the house of the Na’ib of Bandar Abbas under the cover of the Dutch artillery. The English tried to mediate and finally helped the Na’ib to escape. In October 1743, the Sardar asked the Dutch for the loan of their ship on station, the Valk, to carry him and his retinue to Julfar. As usual the Dutch first refused this request, but finally, under heavy pressure, acceded it. Arriving on the other side of the Gulf, the Sardar presented to Taqi Khan a ragan (writ) of Nadir Shah ordering Taqi Khan to make restitution of all money that had been paid to him for the war in Oman. Taqi Khan first replied that he was willing to pay, but was actually unable to do so and asked for a delay. On this, the Sardar replied that Taqi Khan should be very careful, because he, the Sardar, had with him another letter of the Shah, with which were packed some silken strangling cords. The Beglerbeg grew furious and ordered the Sardar and his followers to be killed immediately. This order seems not to have been executed. Next, the Taqi Khan formally proclaimed a rebellion with the part of the navy which was under his command. He sent a messenger to the Governor of Bandar Abbas who had just started to put the fortresses of Larak, Hormuz and Qism into a state of defence.

In Bandar Abbas it seemed that the local Na’ib, Muhammad Bakr Beg planned to join the rebellion. When a naval squadron of Muzafar Ali Khan, the Governor of Sind, appeared off Bandar Abbas, he declared on behalf of Taqi Khan that the Governor of Sind was a rebel and asked the Europeans in Bandar Abbas for help with an attack he planned with the three large ships of the Shah’s navy against the ships of the Governor of Sind. Muzafar was able by a ruse to take a number of the ships of the Persian navy (i.e. the ships under command of the Na’ib) which were at anchor off Bandar Abbas. Envoy of Taqi Khan asked the Dutch to join forces with the large ship Fath Rahmani, which was to return from Julfar under the orders of Taqi Khan and to attack the Sindi ships. He threatened that he would land in Bandar Abbas and ruin the Dutch establishment if the Dutch did not act according to his wishes. Muhammad Bakr Beg, according to the Dutch, the evil genius of Taqi Khan, told them that he had a force of 4000 men ready to attack them. Of course, the Dutch were forbidden by the Sardar to help Taqi Khan. Shortly afterwards, Taqi Khan left Bandar Abbas for Shiraz. In March,

70 ARA, VOC vol. 330, letter of the directors in Holland of 2-9-1743.
72 ARA, VOC vol. 2680, fol. 44.
73 ARA, VOC vol. 2680, fol. 51.
74 ARA, VOC vol. 2680, fol. 55 and resolution of the political council in Bandar Abbas of 8-10-1743, bound behind fol. 192.
75 VOC vol. 2680, fol. 39-41 and resolution of the council in Bandar Abbas of 14-11-1743, bound behind fol. 192.
76 VOC vol. 2680, Resolution of the political council in Bandar Abbas 23-12-1743, bound behind fol. 192.
of the rebellion of Taqi Khan, only the first in a long series of upheavals which would shake the Persian coast of the Upper Gulf.

the end of Nadir Shah’s rule

The suppression of Taqi Khan’s rebellion did not fundamentally ameliorate the position of the central government of Persia in the region of the Strait of Hormuz and the Gulf of Oman. The Persian crown was confronted with considerable difficulties in maintaining its power in this region. It seems that the Arab tribes of Qishm and the more Westward parts of the Southern coast had lost a little of their spirit of independence and had suffered morally from the failure of the mutiny of the fleet, but this seems only to have been a temporary respite. Meanwhile, the central Persian authorities do not seem to have had much grip on the local authorities around Bandar Abbas. However, the most insecure element in the Persian control over the Gulf was the army manning the garrisons on the Arab coast. The country did not produce sufficiently to feed and pay these troops and in all the circumstances, it was a difficult task to get provisions and pay over to the other side. As a consequence, the risk of mutiny in this area must have been considerable.

In the meantime, Nadir Shah, having more or less brought the Arab tribes to subjection, started a desperate project to ameliorate the situation of his finances. He organized a large fleet of local ships which were to go pearlring for the benefit of his Treasury. This virtually stopped trade movement inside the Gulf because local shipping for transporting merchandise was no longer available. There is no information about the results of this project, but it seems to have been a gamble which almost certainly must have failed. This move of Arab shipping to the pearl bank might very well have been

78 ARA, VOC vol. 2680, resolution of the political council in Bandar Abbas of 22-3-1744 with the suspected letter inserted, bound behind fol. 192.

79 ARA, VOC vol. 2680, resolution of the political council in Bandar Abbas, 9-4-1744, bound behind f. 192, with some correspondence was exchanged between the Dutch and Amir Mir Ali about the best way of operating in the Bandar Abbas region.


81 Dutch sources on this period are very scarce owing to the fact that the Dutch factory was in disarray because of the death of several high officials. The main source for the years 1746 and 1747 remains the English Gombroon diary supplemented by only a few short references in Dutch reports.
the moment, not clearly specified in the sources, in which the al Haram tribe of the Naband area finally asserted its control over Bahrain.

A new crisis came in the autumn of 1746, and at a very bad moment: the Shah already had to cope with a rebellion of Fath Ali Khan in Kerman. The population of the occupied territory of Oman refused to pay the taxes due to the Persians and this meant that the Persian troops remained without sufficient provisions and pay. During the winter, at the other end of the Gulf, Arabs in the Bushahr region, acting together ‘with a powerful Shaikh beyond Bahrain’ (probably the Banu Khalid) started a rebellion. They plundered the town and overpowered three ships from the Western squadron of the Persian fleet. A strong force under Khalij Khan as Sardar was sent to bring the Arab side of the Gulf to heel again. At first, this commander hardly did anything, but extorted all kinds of goods from the traders before he left Bandar Abbas for the other side of the Gulf. But before Khalij Khan had been able to take much action there, this Sardar was called back by the Shah. Of course, anybody being called back by Nadir from a mission was never sure what would happen to him, so it is understandable that this commander started a mutiny instead of returning to Bandar Abbas.

The news of mutiny in the army on the Arab side came to Bandar Abbas on the last day of March 1747. At that date, a ship arrived from Julfar which had been sent to bring back the Sardar Khalij Khan, but while officially announcing the speedy arrival of the Sardar, its

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82 The proceedings of the Dutch council in Bandar Abbas mention on 10-5-1746 that 300 trankeys have been equipped for pearling (ARA, VOC vol. 2705, fol. 340-341).
83 There is a short reference to the events in the Dutch report of 20-2-1747 (ARA, VOC vol. 2705, fol. 534 and 539).
84 EGD 11-10-1746.
85 EGD 9-1-1747.
86 Dutch report of 20-2-1747 (ARA, VOC vol. 2705, fol. 539).
87 Dutch report of 22-12-1747 (ARA, VOC vol. 2724, fol. 13).

Captain reported privately - according to the English Gombroon diary - that the Sardar was in revolt and was in correspondence with the rebels in Laristan, where there also seems to have been a beginning of mutiny among the soldiers. Already on the 2nd of April, the first trankeys carrying rebels appeared under Laraq. Two thousand soldiers from the Persian army in Julfar were disembarked at Bandar Abbas that day and occupied its fortress and seized the Governor Falsalali Sultan who tried to resist them. Some other representatives of the central government were also taken prisoner. Amir Mir Ali was reputed to be the leader of this group of rebels, but a few days later Amir Mir Ali wrote a letter to Nadir Shah that he was not in revolt but that he was a prisoner of his officers.

The English in Bandar Abbas were highly alarmed by the new developments and called upon the Deputy-commander of the navy, Mulla Ali Shah, who was with a considerable naval force at Bandar Kong, to send a force to protect Bandar Abbas. But this last remaining representative of the central authority was not so quick to take action. In the meantime, ever more ships arrived from the Arab side of the Gulf bringing troops. When finally on April 16th, no less than 40 trankeys appeared from the other side, Mulla Ali Shah tried to intervene, but to no avail, and rebel troops of 'Talij' (Khalij?) Khan were landed. The troops marched to Bandar Kong, while Mulla Ali Shah finally started to use the navy to make any further landings impossible.

The power of Mulla Ali Shah as the last remaining representative of the central authority was greatly reduced because his family was caught in a new revolt in Bushahr. There, the Western squadron of the Persian navy had finally been broken up. The newly appointed Admiral had remained faithful to the Shah and left Bushahr with four ships, while the other ships had been taken over by their Captains for their own use. As those Captains belonged to several different tribes there was no unity among them, the English even
feared that fighting might break out between the different factions. It is understandable that Mulla Ali Shah was more interested in rescuing his family from Bushahr than in boosting the declining authority of the Shah.\textsuperscript{91}

While his hold on the Gulf area was crumbling away and rebellions were breaking out in other areas, Nadir Shah was murdered on June 19th 1747. The news took some time to reach all parts of his enormous but disorganized empire and caused incredible chaos.

the Upper Gulf benefits from trouble in the Lower Gulf

Nadir Shah’s activities brought events in the Upper and Lower Gulf in closer connection with each other. Never since Imam Quli Khan’s failed projects of 1625 had there been such a breadth of opportunity for Persian policy. But as it had been in the time of Imam Quli Khan, the means at the disposal of the Persian government were far from equal to its grand plans. Nadir (then still Tahmasp Quli Khan), after failing to conquer Iraq from the Ottomans in 1733, planned to deal it an economic blow. His expedition against Muscat was not just a revival of a traditional desire for expansion on the Arabian peninsula (which had been started by Imam Quli Khan), but also a survival of the policy of breaking the trade links between the Ottoman Empire and India.

One of the direct consequences of the new Persian policy was a shift in the economic centre of gravity of the Gulf from the Lower Gulf to the Upper Gulf. The difficulties the Persian government had in maintaining some kind of order in Bandar Abbas and to keep its connections with central Persia safe were very great. The warfare with Muscat and the uprisings of the Huwala cannot have contributed to the prosperity in the Lower Gulf. With the decrease in economic importance of the Lower Gulf, Basra, remaining more or less constant, grew relatively more important. But also, the Persian government was stimulating the activity of its own Upper Gulf port of Bushahr and as the economic capacity of Persia had become limited, this must have been to the detriment of Bandar Abbas. There could be more than one reason for this. Bandar Abbas was not a good harbour and the tribes in the area were not conspicuous for loyalty to the Shah. Another reason could be that the Persians wanted a naval basis near Bushahr, and only a trade port could provide the infrastructure for a navy.

In the development of Bushahr, its Shahbandar and later Governor, the Matarish Shaikh Madhkur bin Gamir played an important part. In the conflict between the Huwala tribes and Persia, he continued the traditional anti-Huwala stand of Bushahr, which made him a favourite of the Persian government.\textsuperscript{92}

In its desire to make Bushahr prosperous, the Persian government went quite far. In his letter of invitation to the Dutch, Taqi Khan told them that they were free to build an establishment anywhere they liked between the town of Bushahr and the fortress of Nadir.\textsuperscript{93} This apparently means that the Dutch would be free to build just such a fortress outside the town as they had in Bandar Abbas. The Persian offer was not un welcomed to the Dutch council in Bandar Abbas: with the interruption in Basra trade and the greed of the present Ottoman officials there, an alternative for Basra could be attractive. Moreover, trade in Bandar Abbas was also slow. The Dutch complained that trade in cotton cloth had slackened because exportation to the Arab side of the Gulf had been cut off by the war. The Basra trade was also considered by the Dutch to be damaged by the English who carried on a dumping policy which was of no advantage to themselves, as evidence their many bankruptcies.\textsuperscript{94} This did not mean that Koenad and his council were thinking of radical steps: they would not consider more than a limited experiment. An establishment would have to be built there, the dwellings in the city were not suitable for Europeans. Storage space for merchandise had to be built because the local caravansaray was too small. Building in

\textsuperscript{91} EGD 3-5, 4-5, 7-5 and 26-5-1747.

\textsuperscript{92} ARA, VOC 2546, fol. 1472-1474.

\textsuperscript{93} Letter by the Beglerbeg of 23-5-1737 in ARA, VOC vol. 2448, fol. 369.

\textsuperscript{94} ARA, VOC vol. 2448, fol. 1815; ARA, VOC vol. 2447, fol. 369, 377-378.
Bushahr would also be quite a problem: the climate would be bad for European craftsmen, so the building would have to be made from sections prefabricated in Java.\(^{95}\)

The diary kept by the Dutch at Bushahr clearly shows Persian intentions in the Upper Gulf. They were building up the place as a base for the army and navy in the Upper Gulf. A Dutch presence there would come in handy to them because they could then always ask to ‘borrow’ or ‘buy’ scarce pieces of equipment or means of transport. It was a disappointment to the Persian military authorities that the Dutch sent only one small ship and even then came to the conclusion that Bushahr was only a small market with scarcely sufficient capacity for them.\(^{96}\)

In his general policy to abolish the hereditary governorships of some provinces, and also to clear the way to Ottoman Iraq, Nadir Shah removed the Shiite Arab Mushasha from the position of Wali of Huwayza, a function which had been theirs for centuries. Instead their chief Farajallah received the governorship of a comparatively minor district: that of Dawra (in this case Fallahiya).\(^{97}\)

In the Ottoman Empire, Persian plans caused some anxiety from time to time. There was always the threat of a Persian attack. In 1737, Ahmad Pasha of Baghdad personally visited Basra, apparently to see if the defence forces were in good order at the time of Nadir Shah’s intervention in nearby Huwayza. This lasted some time before the first signs of direct Persian interference appeared.\(^{98}\)

However, under the Persian threat, some changes in the administration of Basra were made.\(^{99}\) In fact, the situation in Basra seems to have improved considerably and many ships came down from

Baghdad again. Relations between the Dutch and the local government remained tense. In 1738, the Dutch representatives in Basra had to ask the Dutch Ambassador in Istanbul to plead their cause at the Porte.\(^{100}\) The improvement of the situation in Basra did not last a long time. The local government could not maintain peace with the Muntafiq. Arabs perforated the dikes and the countryside around the town was inundated. Drinking water was almost impossible to get. There were some indications that Persian agents were behind this Arab move. The results of Dutch trade in Basra became so bad that the political council in Bandar Abbas proposed to the Batavia High Government that the establishment should be closed.\(^{101}\)

In 1740, Persian envoys in Baghdad demanded the surrender of Basra to the Persians. This was followed by a new uprising of the Muntafiq, who blocked the town. Ahmad Pasha of Baghdad was able to restore communications, but he took no decisive steps against the Muntafiq. Their Shaikh Sa’dun took courage from that and pitched his tents just outside Basra, claiming to be its ruler. There was a speedy reaction from Baghdad and Sa’dun was taken prisoner and summarily executed.\(^{102}\) Strangely enough, the Ottomans appointed a new Chief of the Muntafiq, Abdallah, brother of Sa’dun on the recommendation of Nadir Shah.\(^{103}\) There was also trouble with the Ka’b, who stood under close Ottoman control at that time. Their Shaikh ‘Thamas’ was assassinated by some members of his family. The Ottoman Government was implicated in this affair and appointed a new Shaikh, but this man was not popular with his tribe, and there came a rebellion. Otter, who apparently was in a prophetic mood, noted that the Ka’b were not as strong as the Muntafiq, but could become a considerable nuisance for the shipping between Basra and the sea.\(^{104}\) When Nadir Shah resumed hostilities with the

\(^{95}\) ARA, VOC vol. 2448, fol. 436-519: planning of the expedition to Bushahr by the political council, ibid. fol. 881-884 about the building.

\(^{96}\) ARA, VOC vol. 2448, fol. 1518-1542: diary by the commissioners in Bushahr, August - November 1737. Illustrative references are on fol. 1536-1537. Apparently an important intention of the Persian authorities in attracting merchants to Bushahr was to be able to extort bullion from them if needed.


\(^{98}\) ARA, VOC vol. 2448, fol. 137.

\(^{99}\) ARA, VOC vol. 2476, fol. 474-475.

\(^{100}\) ARA, VOC vol. 2448, fol. 1927-1930; VOC vol. 2476, fol. 61-62.

\(^{101}\) ARA, VOC vol. 2476, fol. 54-60, Longrigg, Four centuries, p. 150.


\(^{103}\) Otter, Voyage, vol. 2, p. 174-175.
Turks in 1743, the Banu Lam and the Muntafiq attacked Basra again. The town withstood these attacks. Another uprising of the Muntafiq, in 1747, led to a new destruction of dikes and was followed by a serious epidemic in Basra. At the same time, the Banu Ka‘b caused problems. Under their Shaikh Salman, they had made use of the turmoil caused by Nadir Shah’s death by occupying large stretches on the Iranian side of the border. At the same time they caused serious trouble for Basra by occupying Dawasir on the left bank of the Shatt al Arab and blocking the entry of the river. The trouble seems to have had no serious consequences for the economic and strategic position of Basra. Nadir Shah was busy elsewhere and the Arabs alone were not strong enough to attack the town.

References on events on the Southern coast of the Upper Gulf always remain rare. After the failure of Persian operations in Oman in 1738 and the following uprising of the Huwala, the Banu Khalid and the Utub seem to have cooperated with Shaikh Jabara of Tahir in an attempt against Bahrain. The Persians planned an attack on the Banu Khalid in 1740, but the mutiny of the Persian navy which immediately followed made this impossible. Afterwards, the Banu Khalid and the Utub seem to have stayed outside the troubles in the area.

**economic consequences of the years of chaos**

The Afghan crisis had caused a crisis in the economy of the Gulf. Arab tribes had been able to fill some of the gaps caused by the chaos in Persia, but the rule of Nadir Shah brought new problems. In the

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105 *Continuatio*, p. 66; *Chronicle*, vol. 2, p. 1198; Perry, ‘Banu Ka‘b’, p. 134 mentions that the Ka‘b participated in this attack, referring to a Persian source.
108 ARA, VOC vol. 2476, fol. 1097-1098; VOC vol. 2511, fol. 206 (plan to send Persian fleet against Qatif.

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end, it seems that the economic situation in the Gulf in 1747 was fundamentally different from that before 1720. The economic changes in Persia are amply described in a Dutch document of 1756. It is a long survey of the possibilities of different kinds of merchandise to be bought or sold in Persia. On the one hand, the Dutch observer sees a complete breakdown of the production of merchandise for export because of insecurity. On the other hand, the treasures robbed by Nadir Shah had increased the availability of silver and gold coins, so that the buying power was still very considerable. This was an interesting observation, but the Dutch could only take a small advantage of this situation because they had difficulties in obtaining the best merchandise to send to the Persian market. The English private shipping, less hampered by bureaucracy, could take better advantage and the increase in English trade mentioned by Amin may be caused by this situation.

The decline of Dutch trade also caused a decline of the already small interest the directors had in reading the reports from Bandar Abbas. Carel Koenad had written very lengthy reports. His successor started in the same way, but the Directors in Holland were not happy with this and wrote accordingly to the Batavia High Government, deploping ‘the lengthy, boring and lachrymose stories of sundry unimportant events’ and insisting on ‘orderly, concise reports in merchants’ style’.

The Arabs also suffered. The war against Oman, and the conflicts between Persia and Arab tribes took place in the area which had been up to then the turning point of much of the trade between the Gulf and India. The impoverishment of the region of Bandar Abbas, the wars around Qishm, and Persian troops between Julfar and Muscat all caused considerable damage to the economic system in which the Arab traders operated. The coastal region of the Arabian peninsula recovered, but the region of Bandar Abbas never could,
because this area was subject to repercussions of internal instability in Persia.

CHAPTER 9
THE ARABS TAKE OVER

disintegration of Persian authority on the coast of the Lower Gulf

On June 24th, 1747 (two weeks after the events), first rumours of the assassination of Nadir Shah reached the region of Bandar Abbas. In that area, where a state of anarchy already existed before Nadir Shah’s death, the situation remained unclear. The rebel troops having left already in the beginning of May (end of April Julian style), the region had fallen again under the authority of Mulla Ali Shah. This dignitary only showed a vague loyalty to the Persian Empire. He was an Arab and in case of emergency tended to cooperate with Arab tribes rather than with Persian authorities. He was obliged to limit his loyalty to Persia even more because he was under the pressure of rebels in Dashtistan who had, just before Nadir Shah’s death, overrun Bushahr and taken his wife and children captive.

In the face of this dangerous situation, the English approached the Dutch in order to work out some common course of action for future emergencies, but the Dutch had lost interest in the area and expected to be evacuated soon if the losses in trade in Bandar Abbas were to continue. Probably as a reaction to the rumours about Nadir Shah’s death, the few Persian troops in Oman that had remained after the mutiny of March 1747 became desperate. It was recorded

1 EGD 8-6-1747]. More reliable news came on 30-7-1747].
2 EGD 24-4 - 25-4-1747].
3 EGD 25-4-1747].
4 EGD 22-4-1747, 22-5-1747].
5 EGD 25-8-1747]: A Dutch report covering this period (ARA, VOC vol. 2748, fol. 93) only mentions a vague cooperation with the English.
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on the 20th of August (Julian date, August 31 in our calendar) in the English diary that:

...this morning about 200 soldiers arrived from the Arab shore and are the people who kept possession of Muscat, where news arriving that Nadir Shah was dead, the natives took the fort from them, killed their officers and transported these people to this side...[EGD 20-8-1747].

This passage in the diary supports the trend of the account in the Omani chronicle by Ruzayq that Ahmad bin Sa'id, the wali of Suwar, had invited the Persian officers for a banquet in Barqa which proved to be an ambush. After the death of the officers, some survivors were allowed to leave to Persia. 6

Such was the inglorious end of Nadir Shah’s long Muscat war. Not until September was the death of Nadir Shah formally announced in Bandar Abbas. 7 At first it seemed in Bandar Abbas that Nadir’s nephew and murderer Ali Quli Khan, who took the name of Adil Shah, had the power reasonably secure in his hands. In reality, the situation was highly unstable, and there was no firmly established central authority in Persia any more. 8

The disappearance of the Persian troops from Julfar and Muscat brought about a vacuum in Oman. There were still two powers there: Shaikh Rahmat bin Matar, who had been recognized by Nadir Shah as hereditary Governor of Julfar in 1740 and Ahmad bin Sa'id, the governor of Suwar, who had kept his position intact after submitting to the Persians. With the departure of the Persians, both were able to seize power in their districts. Muscat, after throwing out the Persian garrison, submitted to Ahmad bin Sa'id who was proclaimed Imam. 9 But Ahmad bin Sa'id was too late in extending his authority also to the West. There, Rahmat bin Matar was already well established and this Shaikh refused to recognize the authority of the Al bu Sa'id. The ruler of Oman was unable to reduce the Qawasim and a new independent Arab state was born. The boundary between Oman and this new Qawasim state ran beyond Musandam. 10 In later years, there were several attempts by the Imam to recover his authority over Sir. It is said that Oman recognized Sir’s independence in about 1761, but hostilities continued after that date. 11 There is some confusion about the place where the residence of the Shaikh of the Qawasim was. Niebuhr refers to it as a place Sör near Sharjah which had a good harbour, while the Kniphausen report of 1756 calls this place Zur. It is possible that both Kniphausen and Niebuhr are mistaken and that the place they wanted to describe is either Julfar or modern Ras al Khaima. It is not fully excluded that their information is accurate. In that case, the orthography of the Kniphausen report suggests Zora between Sharjah and Umm al Qawain. The Kniphausen report of 1756 gives an interesting picture of the town of the Qawasim:

Zur is a reasonably large town which is fortified in the local manner and which has some pieces of artillery. It is inhabited by a tribe of the Houlas [Huwala] called Qassim. 12 These have been in earlier times subject to the Imam of Mascatta, but they do not recognize his authority any more and several expeditions by the Imam to bring this place under his obedience have been in vain, because he can not achieve anything against the Shaikh of the Qassim called Tschaid or Rahma eben Mutter, who is supported by several Bedu tribes from the desert. 13

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6 Risso, Oman and Muscat, p. 41 referring Badger, Chronicle, pp. 153-154, but mentioning that another, unpublished Omani Chronicle has a less dramatic account, simply mentioning a Persian withdrawal. The English diary seems to support Ruzayq’s version.
7 EGD 17-9-1747.
8 EGD 20-8-1747; ARA, VOC vol. 2748, fol. 83-86.
11 Risso, Oman and Muscat, pp. 54-56. Risso confuses Rahmat bin Matar with his brother Rashid in this context. Risso’s mention that the Omanis would have agreed with the Shaikhs Saqr bin Rashid bin Matar and Abdallah bin Matar al-Qasimi is based on Miles, Countries and tribes, p. 269 and Lorimer, Gazetteer, historical part, vol. 1A 135, which are rather secondary and not always accurate sources.
12 The Qawasim are not considered as a real tribe in works on the more modern history and demography of the Gulf. They should rather be considered as a family leading a federation of mixed elements.
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among the Huwala rulers, having of his own people 400 well-armed men with firearms in Zur, which has a good harbour where the largest ships can find shelter. There may be about 60 vessels there of which the most are large and well-provisioned and navigate down to Mocha. In this place itself there is a rather considerable trade as well of pearls as of some merchandise and provisions which are carried into the desert... (ARA, Aanw. 1e Afd. 1889, 23b fol. 12)

Muscat is in the same source depicted as a considerable centre of trade, although the authority of the Imam Ahmad bin Sa'id had suffered from the troubles in the previous years:

Muscat is sufficiently known to the Europeans. It is situated on the entrance of the Gulf and it is very well placed for the exchange of merchandise. The native vessels of the Gulf bring there dates, wheat, liquorice-root, rosewater, raisins, almonds, tobacco and other such coarse merchandise, which are carried there by vessels from the opposite coast and from Malabar, like ketchery, rice, coconuts, kapok, bamboo and tin. The principal trade of Muscat is the exchange of these articles. Practically no other merchandise but food is sold in the country itself, which is inhabited by Bedus or Arabs who live in tents, except for a little iron, lead, tin and coarse rough brown or blue linen [rather cotton, the Dutch word lijnwaard is ambiguous] as comes from Dabul. The merchants, by being always exactly instructed on the prices of merchandise in the Gulf, do nevertheless have a good profit. They also buy other merchandise and carry them into the Gulf to Basra, but they will not buy anything unless they expect to obtain a profit of 25%. The Imam of Muscat still possesses the fortress of Mombasa on the coast of Africa, long before conquered on the Portuguese. Yearly, his ships sail there, carrying dates, wheat, and coarse cotton cloth, and return with coconuts, cair fibre, ivory, slaves and ambergris. The earlier mentioned reason [the extreme licenciency of the Imam] is the cause why the Governor of Mombasa sends very little of his revenues to the Imam and obeys him even less. The seapower of the Imam presently consists of 2 small ships, of which one is unusable. He has replaced this by buying a beautiful new ship of 600 tons in Bombay. He has also two

13 There is some confusion about this name. The report apparently considers Tchaid (or Chaudeed) and Rahma as one and the same person. The English Combroon diary calls the Sheikh of Juffar in 1751 'Chaued', but before and afterwards 'Rama'. According to Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qasimi Chaudeed probably is a sobriquet. The wording of the Dutch source supports this view. Another Dutch source, of 1729, mentions however a 'Sheikh Saved son of Rahma', it is not uncommon to name the father after the son, which would give Abu Saved for Rahma, cf. ARA, VOC vol. 2152, fol. 7707-7707v.

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gallivats. The subjects of the Imam are known to be had soldiers, and his military force only consists of Kaffirs or African slaves from Mombasa, who are a nation very able in war. In old times the Imams had 4,000 of such, but the present Imam could not recruit more than 500 of them, who all have flintlocks and straight swords, which they are very well able to handle. This is his entire military power... (ARA, Aanw. 1e Afd. 1889, 23b fol. 13-13v)

It had been particularly difficult for Ahmad bin Sa'id to establish his authority in the Omani colonies in Eastern Africa. Ahmad was able to appoint his nominee as Wali of Zanzibar, but the Wali of Mombasa did not recognize the establishment of the new ruling dynasty in Oman. Ahmad soon gave up all attempts to force Mombasa to obedience. Ahmad bin Sa'id encountered opposition from tribal leaders in Oman as well. For a considerable time, Oman did not return to its former glory as a political power, but Risso is right in indicating considerable economic expansion. In fact, Oman was the only power which obtained any advantage from the decline of Bandar Abbas and the European trade on the Gulf. The Omanis obtained a considerable share in the importation of coffee and sugar to the Gulf, although we are inclined to think that this Omani shipping succeeded to the Surati shipping between Mocha, India and the Gulf. 16

The Persians had fully disappeared from the Arabian side of the Gulf, but Arab tribal leaders were in control everywhere, also on the Persian side of the Gulf. A Dutch report of 1749 remarks 'every Arab lord has become an independent Ruler'. 17 There were several powerful persons in the area, and as long as no firm central authority

14 Risso, Muscat and Oman, pp. 120-121. A Dutch report in ARA, VOC 9101, Muscat, p. 85, mentions the sending of a naval expedition by Ahmad bin Sa'id to Oman in the early spring of 1758.
15 Risso, Muscat and Oman, pp. 44-45.
16 Risso, Oman and Muscat, pp. 76-82. It should be considered that the European share in the trade of coffee in the Gulf had always been secondary, while the Omanis were involved in the shipping of sugar to Basra as early as 1645, and that Surati shipping was as prominent in Basra in the seventeenth century as Omani shipping became in the later part of the eighteenth century.
17 ARA, VOC vol. 2766, part Basra fol. 63.
was established in Persia, the local competitors for power in the coastal area of Eastern Farsistan fought for control of Bandar Abbas, Qishm, Hormuz and the remains of Nadir Shah’s navy. Each of these local powers allied himself with such a contender for the throne of Persia as would seem the most sympathetic to his private interests. The two principal competitors in the area of Bandar Abbas were the Wakil of the navy, Mulla Ali Shah and the Banu Ma’in tribe, which dominated part of Qishm.

At first, the initiative was with the Banu Ma’in, who had the support of the government of Adil Shah. In September 1747, there was an uprising at the naval base of Laft on Qishm by the Banu Ma’in under Shaikh Abdul Shaikh, a former naval officer who had been one of the principal leaders of the great mutiny of the Persian navy, and the Al Ali of Bandar Sharak. The rebels were joined by one of the ships of the Persian navy, which was commanded by a brother of Abdul Shaikh.18

During the winter of 1747, Adil Shah tried to get his authority firmly established in the area of Bandar Abbas. He appointed Mirza Abu Talib as Governor of the town. The new administration was hostile to Mulla Ali Shah. Mirza Abu Talib tried to take Mulla Ali Shah prisoner, but the latter had received some warning from the Dutch and did not leave his ships, while the Shah’s agents had no way to take him from there. Mirza Abu Talib openly supported Shaikh Abdul Shaikh who finally, with the help of the Al Ali, chased Mulla Ali Shah away from Bandar Abbas in May 1748. Adil Shah’s Beglerbeg of Shiraz was working on plans to resume war in Oman, a dark prospect for the South-Eastern part of Persia.19 The plans never came to execution, because there were revolutionary changes in the Persian central government. Adil Shah was defeated in battle by his brother Ibrahim and executed. Ibrahim Shah’s takeover was not undisputed: Sharukh, grandson of Nadir also took the crown and had considerable support.

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18 EGD 8-9 and 8-10:1747.
19 EGD 7-11:1747, 2-1, 11-1, 13-1 and 18-3:1748; ARA, VOC vol. 2748, fol. 87-92.

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Ibrahim was able to extend his influence to Laristan for a short time only. He never enjoyed undisputed mastery there, because many dignitaries supported Sharukh.20 In the summer of 1749, large parts of Ibrahim’s army deserted and Sharukh defeated his nephew and competitor. There were some hopes that Sharukh might bring stability, but in the same year the shadows lengthened in the North. From there came a strong army of Afghans under Muhammad. With this army was also Taqi Khan, who after his reconciliation with Nadir Shah had been appointed Governor of Kabul. In fact, this is the last mention we find of this person who for so long a time had played a prominent part in events in the Gulf. This army occupied Herat, but did not proceed to the South.21

At first, it seemed that the troubles in the North would not prevent Sharukh from establishing his authority in the region of the Garm-sirat. Apparently, he counted on the adversaries of Adil Shah. Mulla Ali Shah was fully back in power in Bandar Abbas. Sharukh wrote letters to the English and the Dutch saying that Mulla Ali Shah was his representative in Bandar Abbas and asked them to give this Admiral all the help he might require. A Dutch report shows scepticism about the extent of Sharukh’s authority. Salih Khan, Sharukh’s Beglerbeg in Shiraz, was without much real power there. Salih had appointed a certain Nasir as Sultan of Bandar Abbas, but the local authorities did not admit this dignity.22 However, Sharukh soon

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20 EGD 6-1, 29-1, 29-3:1749.
21 ARA, VOC vol. 2766(Aramon part 1), fol. 33-34: letter of 25-12-1749; EGD 1-8, 19-9, 20-10, 4-11 and 20-11:1748, 29-1, 7-7 and 21-7:1749. The gap in the English Gomroon diary of the end of 1749 and the beginning of 1750 may partly be covered by the Dutch reports in ARA, VOC vol. 2766(Aramon parts 1 and 2). Most books on the history of Persia seemed to have lost trace in the complex of events following Nadir Shah’s death. One of the best accounts is Hanway, A Historical Account, vol. 1, pp. 296-298 and its sequel in Peysonnel, A Historical Account, pp. 28-40. A most useful general account of the events is in the account of the state of affairs written by the Dutch resident in Bandar Abbas for his successor in 1755 (ARA, VOC vol. 2885, Aramon part 1, fol. 1-4). An interesting source is a note among the papers of the Dutch embassy in Turkey titled ‘Relation abrégée des révolutions en Perse’, ARA, LAT 596a.
disappeared from the scene. In 1750 he was blinded and deposed. He was replaced by a Safavi pretender, a certain Shah Isma‘il, who in reality was only a puppet of some powerful military leaders. These were Ali Merdim Khan, a Bakhtiar leader, who was appointed Lieutenant of the Empire (Wakil i-dawla) and Karim Khan Zand who was to be the Commander-in-Chief of the army. Later in 1750, the new rulers extended their influence to the South. Salih Khan surrendered Shiraz to the Bakhtiari. Nasir, who after his unsuccessful mission to Bandar Abbas had been promoted to the governorship of Laristan, also joined the Bakhtiaris, together with an Arab leader from Laristan, Shaikh Muhammad Siyad.

The new situation looked dangerous. Ali Merdim Khan’s troops had treated the few remaining Europeans in Isfahan very badly and the Europeans in Bandar Abbas feared that they would get no better treatment if the Bakhtiaris arrived there. The English and the Dutch were molested by Mulla Ali Shah’s men in August 1750. Meanwhile, there were rumours that Abdul Shaikh of the Banu Ma’in was conspiring with the Imam of Oman. At one moment, the Europeans were planning to help Mulla Ali Shah against the Banu Ma’in and Oman. The Dutch and the English re-considered plans to evacuate their establishments. In November 1750, there were rumours of the approach of Ali Merdim Khan. The reputation of the Bakhtiar Lieutenant of the Empire was such that in Bandar Abbas all old disputes were forgotten. The Dutch, the English, Mulla Ali Shah and Abdul Shaikh together planned a retreat to Qishm.

The cooperative spirit between the factions in Bandar Abbas did not last long. In December 1750, Abdallah Khan arrived as agent of Shah Isma‘il in Bandar Abbas. The leaders of Minab and of the Baluchi tried to bring Mulla Ali Shah over to the side of Shah Isma‘il and his two warlords. There were some rumours that they might succeed in this and that Bandar Abbas might come under Bakhtiari control. This was a most unattractive prospect for the Dutch and the English.

Early in 1751, a Dutch ship arrived at Bandar Abbas which offered the Dutch the opportunity to evacuate their establishment, while the English sent away most of their valuables on this ship. For some time, only the English remained in Bandar Abbas. The Dutch held on to their establishment in Basra, but the Batavia High Government was not yet ready to give up its establishment in Bandar Abbas. The Governor General disapproved of the decision taken by the Resident in Bandar Abbas to retire, and a new Resident was sent some time later to re-open the Dutch establishment in the large old building on a somewhat humbler footing. The English in Bandar Abbas had also been suggesting to their superiors that they should occupy Bahrain in order to acquire a safe place in the Gulf outside the reach of the contenders in Persia. The mentality in Bombay was the same as in Batavia and no permission was given for adventures.

The panic among the Europeans in Bandar Abbas was premature. Early in 1751, opposition was building up against the Bakhtiaris and their supporters. Karim Khan had turned against Ali Merdim Khan and Shah Isma‘il. Nasir Khan joined this movement and remained in control of Laristan. Karim Khan, who had earlier been the military commander of the Bakhtiar movement, defeated Ali Merdim Khan and entered Isfahan.

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22 ARA, VOC vol. 2766 (part Persia 1) fol. 36; (part Persia 2), fol. 213 (there is no English account of this owing to a gap in the Gombroni diary).
23 ARA, VOC vol. 2766 (Gamron part 2), fol. 213-214(10-9-1750); VOC vol. 2767 (Gamron) fol. 21-23, 55-58; EGD 10-9-1750).
24 EGD4-11 and 9-11-1750J, 3-1-1751]; Perry, Karim Khan, pp. 19-23.
25 Perry, Karim Khan, p. 23.
26 VOC vol. 2767 (part Gamron), fol. 56, 60-61, 64; EGD 28 and 29-11-1750).
27 EGD 13-12 - 14-12-1750).
28 ARA, VOC vol. 2787, (Gamron part 2), p. 72; VOC vol. 2824 (part Gamron), p. 17; EGD 27-2-1751J; ARA, VOC vol. 781-782: Resolutions High Government vol. 840, 2-7-1751, 9 and 20-6-1752. A list of the new staff in ARA, VOC vol. 2843 fol. 27: 23 persons of which 11 military, 2 sailors, a resident, some clerks and an under-surgeon. The English were rather impressed with the military force with which the Dutch returned: IOL, Fr, G29/17 fol. 187.
29 IOL, G29/17, report of 18-1-1751.
30 Perry, Karim Khan, pp. 30-31; ARA VOC vol. 2767 (Gamron) fol. 61-62. See Perry, Karim Khan, pp. 117-118 for an account on the start of the career of Nasir Khan of Lar, which is rather different from the account in the English
Mulla Ali Shah quickly forgot plans for surrender to the Bakhtiaris. Sharukh, blind and without power, played no further part in the events. In Bandar Abbas itself, there were representatives of the Government of Isfahan, who had no real power and who still do not seem to have been able to supplant completely the representatives sent before by other pretenders to the throne. Authority in Bandar Abbas depended on alliances with influential people in the regions: Arab tribal leaders or Mulla Ali Shah. Dutch and English reports did complain a lot about Mulla Ali Shah who was forever asking for merchandise and equipment for his ships but never paid up. Nevertheless, Mulla Ali Shah's government in Bandar Abbas seems to have been not so bad. The Dutch were on the whole not unhappy with him: he was no tyrant, or rather was unable to behave as a tyrant because the Arab Shaikhs in the region were powerful enough to prevent this and he had to be careful. The English were very much against him and tended to cooperate with any of his adversaries.

Mulla Ali Shah and the Huwala

Since 1751, Farsistan was dominated by two persons, Karim Khan in Shiraz and Nasir Khan in Lar. The position of Bandar Abbas was still disputed. Nasir Khan was trying to establish his influence in the town, but Mulla Ali Shah tried to maintain his independence. Nasir Khan's principal adherents in the area were the Banu Ma'in. Mulla Ali Shah claimed to be a supporter of Karim Khan, but communications between Bandar Abbas and Shiraz were hardly possible as long as Nasir Khan ruled in Lar.

It might seem exaggerated to pay much attention to the antics by which Mulla Ali Shah, a half-forgotten Persian naval commander, was able to cling to some regional power. The appearances are wrong: Mulla Ali Shah played an essential part in the tribal conflicts of the time, and these tribal wars have determined the political map of the Gulf of our days.

The weakest point in Mulla Ali Shah's position was that he had little power on land and that any strong land-based force might endanger his supplies. However, he commanded the strongest naval force in the Gulf. This made him a much desired ally for any Arab shaikh in the Gulf who wanted a quarrel with his neighbours, but on the other hand it made him a target for attacks by adventurers who would like to capture the Persian fleet. At first, things went relatively well for Mulla Ali Shah. The Al Ali of Sharak changed sides and became allies of Mulla Ali Shah. Of course, it was risky for Mulla Ali Shah to take sides in tribal warfare, but, probably because of material services rendered, he was from time to time willing to give some help to those who asked him. The first Arab tribe who tried to get the weight of Nadir Shah's navy on their side were the Al Ali. They attacked the main body of the Huwala, but shortly afterwards, one of the Persian ships they had borrowed from Mulla Ali Shah was captured by their adversaries. This gave Shaikh Abdul Shaikh of the Banu Ma'in a good opportunity to attack Mulla Ali Shah, but his attempt to capture the fleet failed. Then, Mulla Ali Shah found a split in the alliance of his adversaries. On 18 March 1751, there is a report about an agreement between Mulla Ali Shah and Shaikh Rahma of Julfar. This was a strange alliance. The Shaikh was an ally of the Huwala against Ali bin Khalfan, the Shaikh of the Al Ali of Sharak, and he stated that he would continue to participate in the war against Sharak. On the other hand, Shaikh Rahma promised to assist Mulla Ali Shah against his enemies. Apparently, Shaikh Rahma desired changes in Sharak, but wanted to maintain Mulla Shah in power in Bandar Abbas.

Gombroon Diary of 1750-1751.
31 EGD 13-11-1750).
32 EGD 26-9-1750j; ARA, VOC vol. 2767 (part Gamron), fol. 63.

33 EGD 5-12-1750j.
34 EGD 5-3 and 10-3-1751j.
35 EGD 13-3-1751j.
36 For a short period, the name of the Shaikh of Julfar mentioned in the English Gombroon Diary is 'Chaueed'. See about this name note 13 of this chapter.
37 EGD 18-3-1751j.
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At first, this alliance had no practical consequences. A coalition of Arab tribes went to war against Mulla Ali Shah. The Huwala Arabs of Tahiri under their Shaikh Hatim attacked the Al Ali with the final intention of turning against Mulla Ali Shah and seizing the Persian navy. This situation caused considerable fears with the Europeans who foresaw complete anarchy if the tribes were to overthrow the last representative of regular government in the area and thus get hold of the remains of Nadir Shah’s navy.

It seems that the attempt of the Huwala of Tahiri to take over the navy failed, but pressure on Mulla Ali Shah continued. From Lar, a strong Arab tribal leader, Shaikh Muhammad Siyad (in some sources he is called Mahmud) called all the Huwala to attack Mulla Ali Shah and his allies, the Al Ali of Sharak. Mulla Ali Shah’s agents were chased away from the sulphur and brimstone mines, which with the decline of trade had become the main direct revenue of Bandar Abbas. The English too were opposed to Mulla Ali Shah. They were allies of Shaikh Abdul Shaikh of the Banu Ma’in, and were in conflict with Sharak because the Sharak Arabs had taken some British ships. The Huwala under Shaikh Hatim of the Nasur finally managed to take Sharak and took the Shaikh Ali bin Khalfan of the Al Ali as their prisoner away to Tahiri, leaving some reliable members of the Al Ali in power. From then on Sharak was hostile again to Mulla Ali Shah. The Shaikhs Rahma and Hatim now put Mulla Ali Shah under heavy pressure to hand the fleet over to them. This pressure was not kept up. Shaikh Rahma had the first to leave the Huwala coalition against Mulla Ali Shah, and now married one of the Wakil’s daughters. It is not so difficult to imagine

why the pressure on Mulla Ali Shah fell so suddenly away. The island of Bahrain, which for decades had been dominated by Huwala elements, was threatened by the Arabs of the Upper Gulf. The attention of the Huwala veered to the Central Gulf.

THE ARABS TAKE OVER

The seizure of Bahrain by Shaikh Nasir of Bushahr

One of the most valuable possessions of Persia on the Gulf was the island of Bahrain which Latif Khan had regained for the Shah in 1736. This intermezzo of Persian rule in Bahrain did not last a long time. Probably at the time of the death of Nadir Shah, the Haram tribe of the Nband area, one of the tribes of the Huwala group, which had already some claim on the island, managed to establish their full authority there. However, this supremacy of the Lower Gulf tribes in the Bahrain area was not undisputed.

Shaikh Nasir of Bushahr was interested in acquiring the rich island. He was a declared enemy of the Huwala tribes of the Lower Gulf. Under Nadir Shah he had been a most loyal subject of Persia. Because of this he had experienced very bad treatment when the Huwala overpowered the Persian fleet in 1740. His family, the Al Matarish, was of Omari and Sunni origin, but had gone over to the Shiite creed in order to be agreeable to their Persian overlords. This was hardly a way to preserve friendship with the Sunni Arabs of the Lower Gulf.

38 EGD 5-4 and 21-4-1751J. Strangely enough, the English Gombroon Diary mentions elsewhere that Hatim was a near kinsman of Mulla Ali Shah: EGD 27-3-1752.
39 EGD 2-4 and 5-4-1751J.
40 EGD 1-5; 3-5. There are now references to Ali bin Khalfan on 26-6-1751J: Ali bin Khalfan, former ruler of Sharak escaped from his captivity and asked the help of Mulla Ali Shah, but did not obtain it because Mulla Ali Shah had become an ally of the Huwala.
41 EGD 17-5-1751.
42 EGD 28-5-1751J. Risse, Oman and Muscat, p. 54, has a rather inaccurate short mention of the events and confuses Shaikh Rahma with his brother Rashid bin Matar.
43 ARA, VOC vol. 2864, Bahrain project bound between Kharg part 1, fol. 52 and 53: Kniphofusen report fol. 7 (=Floor, Description, p. 172); Niebuhr, Beschreibung, pp. 330-331.
44 Shaikh Nasir’s fate during the mutiny of Nadir Shah’s navy is described in ARA, VOC vol. 2546 fol. 1272-1274. His later career is recorded in the Kniphofusen report, fol. 7 (=Floor, ‘Description’, p. 172), in Niebuhr’s Reise, vol. 2, p. 293 and in Niebuhr, Beschreibung, pp. 315-316.
Shaikh Nasir took rather a long time to conquer Bahrain. He organized (probably in 1750) an expedition in cooperation with Mir Nasr, the Zaaab Ruler of Bandar Rig, whose family also originated from Oman, but had like Shaikh Nasir’s Omani ancestors gone over to the Shiite faction. Together, they attacked Bahrain. This operation succeeded, but Mir Nasr was able to cheat his ally out of his lawful share. Mir Nasr was not very successful in keeping his new possession. His main establishment, Bandar Rig was attacked by his western neighbour, Qayd Hathir, the Ruler of Ganaveh, and when Mir Nasr was occupied in defending this place, the Al Haram were able to regain Bahrain.

Shaikh Nasir, still looking for an opportunity to conquer Bahrain, then concluded an alliance with the Utub of Kuwait. This tribe, relative newcomers to the naval scene of the Gulf, had a lot of manpower and many small ships, but it was not very well equipped for warfare. Shaikh Nasir’s promise of free fishing on the Bahrain pearl banks was very attractive to them. They were old enemies of the Huwala groups, partly because of old conflicts about the pearl banks, but probably also because the Huwala, with their superior naval equipment, were able to hinder the Utub in expanding their trade. Shaikh Nasir was better equipped than the Utub, he had a few remnants of the western squadron of Nadir Shah’s navy at his disposal.\[45\]

Shaikh Nasir’s siege of Bahrain ended in failure when the Al Haram called in the help of other Huwala groups. Shaikh Nasir suffered heavy losses. The threat posed to Bahrain by Shaikh Nasir was the cause of the sudden reconciliation between the Huwala and Mulla Ali Shah which is mentioned in the previous pages. Mulla Ali Shah allowed the Huwala to use some of his ships for a punitive expedition against Bushahr, but the combined Arab force was unable to take that town.\[46\]

His alliance with the Huwala put Mulla Ali Shah into new trouble. He had offended Nasir Khan of Lar and his former ally Shaikh Ali bin Khalfan, the deposed ruler of Sharak who was still roaming about with some ships as a privateer.\[47\] In January 1752, Nasir Khan appeared with an army in Bandar Abbas and took Mulla Ali Shah prisoner. In order to maintain permanent pressure on the local powers, Nasir Khan took hostages from all the people involved: a brother of Ali bin Khalfan and the children of Mulla Ali Shah.\[48\] Nasir Khan received a large sum of money as a ‘present’ from Shaikh Abdul Shaikh of the Banu Ma’in, Mulla Ali Shah’s worst enemy.\[49\] Having sufficient hostages to keep control of Bandar Abbas, Nasir Khan felt that it was safe to reestablish Mulla Ali Shah in power, obliging the latter to pay heavily for this favour.\[50\] An attempt by Nasir Khan to reunite the Al Ali failed, finally Ali bin Khalfan was killed by his relatives who were in power in Sharak.\[51\] Mulla Ali Shah was in control, but he showed himself to be a most unreliable agent for Nasir Khan. Once Nasir Khan had left, Mulla Ali Shah went his own way and in November 1753 he even occupied the fortress of Hormuz.\[52\]

\[45\] The best source of the events are the accounts by Kniphausen and Van der Hulst in their project for the conquest of Bahrain (VOC 2864, part Kharg between fol. 52 and 53), in the report on the peoples of the Gulf, ARA, Kniphausen report fol. 5v-7 (=Floor, ‘Description’, pp. 170-172) cf. Perry, Karim Khan, p. 151. Risso’s view on the events (in Oman and Muscat, p. 53) is that the operations against Bahrain had been conducted on behalf of Karim Khan to recover the island usurped by the Huwala. Risso’s view is an overestimation of Persian power at that time.
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In all these troubles on the Lower Gulf, it must have seemed attractive to powerful persons in the Upper Gulf to extend their influence. Shaikh Nasir of Bushahr perceived that the situation was favourable for a new attempt against Bahrain. The Huwala alliance was weakened because the powerful Nasur branch of the Huwala, which had up to then supported the Al Haram, could be induced to leave the coalition. Several factors seem to have contributed to this defection, although in 1754, Shaikh Nasir had executed a most damaging attack on Tahir, the town of the Nasur.53 Probably, Hatim, the Shaikh of the Nasur was not unwilling to change sides because the Nasur had their own claims on the island dating from the years before 1736. There also was a lot of money involved: Shaikh Nasir had to pay heavily for the alliance with Tahir and he had to concede for the future a large annual payment out of the revenues of Bahrain. Helped by the Utub and Shaikh Hatim, Shaikh Nasir was finally able to acquire the island, but he had to grant the Utub free access to the pearlbanks and make heavy yearly payments to Shaikh Hatim.54

The lack of unity of the Huwala was the cause of the loss of Bahrain. This diminished the territory dominated by this group of tribes. Only the Qawasim still had control of large stretches of land, the other tribes had nothing except some small towns on the Southern coast of Persia and several of these tribes were soon forced into an existence of maritime nomads.

the alliance between Mulla Ali Shah and Shaikh Rahma Al Qasimi.

In 1754, Nasir Khan tried to take advantage from reverses recently suffered by his adversary Karim Khan. Karim Khan’s forces had been repeatedly defeated by Azad Khan, a leader from Azerbaidjian, who even conquered Isfahan.55 From time to time, Nasir Khan kept trying to assert his power over the area of Bandar Abbas, but Mulla Ali Shah, with the assistance of Shaikh Rahma of Julfar, was just able to maintain himself. Mulla Ali Shah now openly posed as an ally of Karim Khan, but this did not mean much because Nasir Khan’s territory impeded any direct contact.

In 1754 Nasir Khan had tried to conclude an alliance against Mulla Ali Shah with Shaikh Abdul Shaikh of the Banu Ma’in and the Shari‘at of Minab.56 This attack in the autumn of 1754 was a failure. Nasir Khan’s armies suffered several defeats against Huwala armies and he withdrew his forces.57 In December 1754, Nasir Khan again tried to get a firm grip on Bandar Abbas. Mulla Ali Shah retired to Hormuz, the strongest fortress of the area which could not be approached as long as Mulla Ali Shah had some naval power. The only danger for Mulla Ali Shah was that the English, his enemies, wanted that island for themselves.58 Nasir Khan was kept from turning in force against Mulla Ali Shah because he was confronted with trouble from another side. Karim Khan’s forces after some time regained the initiative on Azad Khan. They soon regained Isfahan and also Shiraz, the capital of the province adjacent to Nasir Khan’s territory. Karim Khan was now the most powerful person in Persia and Nasir Khan’s party was in trouble.59

While Nasir Khan was busy against Karim Khan, his allies the Banu Ma’in of Laft turned against Mulla Ali Shah. Abdallah, a nephew of Shaikh Abdul Shaikh attacked the fortress of Qishm, which was a naval station under the authority of Mulla Ali Shah. Mulla Ali Shah took his countermeasures in time and his ally Shaikh Rahma of Julfar also arrived off Qishm. Rahma captured a large trankey from the Banu Ma’in. Mulla Ali Shah wanted to take revenge on the Banu Ma’in for the attack on Qishm and together with Rahma he attacked Abdul Shaikh’s stronghold, Laft, in May 1755. The attack

53 EGD 9-5-1754.
54 Kniphausen report fol. 6v-7 (=Floor, ‘Description’, p. 172); ARA, VOC vol. 2468, Bahrain project between part Khang fol. 52 and 53.
55 EGD 7-9-1754.
56 EGD 9-9-1754.
57 EGD 14-9-1754.
58 EGD 29-12-1754, 20-3-1755; ARA VOC vol. 2843 (part Gamron), fol. 23-24.
59 Perry, Karim Khan, pp. 57-61.
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came at the right moment: Nasir Khan was busy fending off an offensive by Karim Khan's forces. The place was conquered only after Shaikh Abdul Shaikh had died of old age. The Banu Ma'in left the town and settled elsewhere on Qishm. 60

At that time, the situation in the interior of Persia had become slightly less complicated. Karim Khan had defeated most of his competitors. One of the most dangerous had been Muhammad Husayn Khan Qajar, whose base was in the area of Tabriz in the far North. Nasir Khan of Lar supported the Qajar pretender, but Karim Khan was the stronger and defeated the army of the Qajar. Karim Khan pursued his drive to the South by establishing relations with Mulla Ali Shah and Arab opponents of Nasir Khan. 61 On his Eastern front, Karim Khan had insufficient strength to attack Nasir Khan and he gave up his advance. Nasir Khan then tried without much effect to subdue the Arab allies of Karim Khan in the Hormuz area and Mulla Ali Shah. Although Mulla Ali Shah had been recognized as Governor of Bandar Abbas by Nasir Khan in 1752, he had never ceased to be among Nasir Khan's opponents and he seems never to have paid taxes to his overlord. 62

Meanwhile, Shaikh Rahma was planning to settle old accounts. In the autumn of 1756, he set forth with the Fath Rabani (one of the large ships originally bought from the English for the Persian navy) and a number of lesser vessels to attack Shaikh Hatim of Tahiri, probably as a revenge for the complicity of the latter in the assassination of one of the two rulers of the Harms. But after some time Rahma and Hatim seem to have reached a settlement, even if in later times they had some new conflicts. 63

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In the same year 1756, the English almost got involved in a conflict with one of the most important sections of the Huwa group. The inhabitants of Kangun, under their Shaikh Hajar, seem to have taken the cargo of an English ship which ran aground in their territory. Although Shaikh Hajar of Kangun and his people had a good reputation with the Dutch as quiet traders and sailors, the English decided to attack him, but the Captain of the ship sent for this mission thought better of it for strategic reasons and because he did not think the Shaikh behaved so badly. 64 If anything, the English Gombroon diary of that time shows the weakness of the English resources at the outbreak of the Seven Years' war. They hesitated to establish themselves in Bandar Rig because of fear of Dutch opposition (overlooking the fact that the Dutch in the Gulf would never be permitted by their superiors to do anything serious against their European competitors). 65

The situation got worse for the English when Mulla Ali Shah, who clearly appreciated the weakness of the English, started to make nasty gestures in their direction. The former Wakis of the navy felt that as a father-in-law of Rahma bin Matar and as owner of Hormuz, he had no reason in the least to fear the English and he seems to have planned to extort any money needed to satisfy Nasir Khan from them. Mulla Ali Shah seems to have thought that Nasir Khan would let him be if he was paid. As a warning to the English, he arrested one of their brokers and carried him to Hormuz. 66 The Dutch were not in danger of such acts of violence. There might have existed exaggerated opinions of their power in the Gulf. The Dutch certainly were not powerless: being neutral in the European war of that time they had their hands free and no attacks to fear from other Euro-

60 EGD 12-5, 13-5, 16-5, 21-5, 29-5, 24-6-1755; Kniphausen-report fol. 12 (=Floor, ‘Description’, pp. 177-178); Perry, Karim Khan, pp. 118-119.
61 EGD 6-3, 9-5, 26-5, 8-8-1755; ARA, VOC vol. 2885 (part Gamron 1A), fol. 3-4; (part Gamron 2), fol. 3; (part Kharg 3), fol. 10-11.
62 EGD 24-8-1756, 5-1-1757, 15-4-1757.
64 EGD 14-9, 9-10, 4-12-1756. A Dutch source of 1756, contrary to the English view, has a very positive opinion on the Shaikh of Kangun, who is described as a peaceful man: Kniphausen report fol 4v (=Floor, ‘Description’ pp. 169-170). Saldanha, Persian Gulf Précis, vol. I, pp. 106, 109; Perry, Karim Khan, p. 158 has a very exaggerated negative view on Hajar: he sees him as a very bad pirate, although his opinion is based on this incident only.
65 EGD 5-12-1756.
66 EGD 8-6-1757, 21-6-1757.