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Saudi Arabia

10 May 1960

- Record of Saudi Frontier Claims
- Formal Relations of U.K. to Ruler of Abu Dhabi and Sultan of Muscat and Oman

(Secret memo. sent by Pierson Dixon to D.H.)

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(39)

May 10, 1960

From *P. ...*

PART I

Record of Saudi Frontier Claims

Historical

(Note: A more complete account on the period up to 1955 would be found in Volume I of the Duraini memorial, particularly pages 79-109.)

1916-1914

2. The Saudi Government never agreed that they were bound by the "Blue Line" and "Violet Line" of the 1913 and 1914 Anglo-Turkish Conventions (see attached map), but their claims were not in practice pressed until about 1934, when the Saudis granted an oil concession in Eastern Arabia.

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1934-1939

3. There followed five years of more or less intensive discussion of the frontiers. The British Government made a great concession in agreeing to consider anything eastward of the Blue Line. While adhering juristically to the Blue Line they offered to concede a line some 45 miles east of the latter. The Saudi Government, when asked to define its new claims, in 1935 claimed the territory up to the solid red line shown in the attached map. Through their Foreign Minister they said that this line had been arrived at "after the most careful investigation into the actual situation".

4. The British Government then carefully re-examined the tribal situation in the disputed areas. Because they discovered that the grazing grounds of one tribe were more extensive than had been supposed they then offered a further concession to the Saudis, and this line itself was subsequently modified yet further in the Saudi favour. The resulting offer, the "Riyadh Line" of November 25, 1935 is shown as the broken red line on the map. King Ibn Saud rejected this offer the following day.

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5. Discussions then continued till the outbreak of war. In 1937 we offered a yet further retirement on account of the location of some wells (the Safuk Wells) which were found to be farther east than was supposed. King Ibn Saud ignored this and merely repeated his old claims. In subsequent discussions up to the outbreak of war the Saudi Government offered no concession whatever.

1949-1955

6. The issue came to a head when ARAMCO employes made an incursion into what by any account was Abu Dhabi territory. The British Government in protesting invited the Saudi Government to start new discussions about the frontier. On October 4, 1949, the Saudi Government put forward the extreme claim shown by the broken brown line on the attached map. The advance can only be described as startling. No political or other fact had emerged since 1935 to justify it. At an informal meeting between Government representatives at Dammam in 1952 the Saudis, when asked to explain the reason for the advance in their claims, resorted to the extraordinary argument that their 1935 claim had been put forward without instructions from the King. At the same conference in 1952, nevertheless, the British representative made a further concession: they said that if the Saudi 1935 claim were modified so as to leave the Khor al Odaid to Abu Dhabi the British Government would be prepared to take this as a suitable starting point for further discussion of the frontier. That is to say, the British Government were ready in 1952 to consider a Saudi claim far in advance of the line which the British Government in 1935 had described as the utmost limit of the possible. This renewed offer was referred to the King and met no response.

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7. After the adjournment of the Dammam Conference the Saudi Government resorted to force. They sent an official (Turki bin Ataishan) to Buraimi with 40 armed men, violating the territory of Abu Dhabi in order to get there. The Sultan of Muscat gathered his tribes, supported by the then Imam of Oman to march on Buraimi. In view of their numbers and the remoteness of the Saudi party from any succour from Saudi Arabia, we must assume that the Sultan's forces would have either defeated the Saudis or forced them to withdraw. In order to avoid war the British Government agreed to a standstill agreement with the Saudis, whereby both sides should remain in their present position. The Saudis secured great advantage by this agreement. They then disregarded its terms and began, by bribery and intimidation, to undermine the loyalty of tribes owing allegiance to the Sultan and the Ruler. The British Government, with great difficulty, secured the Sultan's agreement to the principle of impartial arbitration. The Saudis demurred. They again violated the standstill agreement by sending further armed forces to Buraimi. The British Government thereupon moved the Trucial Oman Levies into the area and blockaded the Saudi forces. Apparently as a result, the Saudi Government agreed to arbitration.

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1957-1960

9. Saudi Arabia broke off relations at the time of Suez. Thereafter we took the view that since they had broken them off, the Saudis should take the initiative in resuming them. In response to pressure from our American and other allies however, in July 1957 we conveyed a message that if King Saud was willing to resume relations without prior commitment, we would arrange things so as to avoid any definition of where the initiative came from. We said that we would be willing to discuss any outstanding questions, including Buraimi, after the resumption of relations. The Saudis refused and said they would prefer direct talks to settle the question of Buraimi and the disputed areas. We then suggested a meeting between King Saud and the Sultan, which it was thought might at least clear the air. This was rejected, and the Saudis repeated their demand for a return to arbitration.

10. In February 1958 we then made the concession of offering that representatives of both Governments should meet in Rome or Geneva to discuss the re-establishment of relations and any related problems. The Saudis replied only that they agreed to a meeting to discuss Bahrain and the disputed areas.

11. Informal talks in March 1958 led to the agreement that both sides should refer to their Governments a suggestion for a tripartite meeting between representatives of the two Governments and the Sultan (subject to the Sultan's agreement) to consider arrangements for a fuller meeting which would be held to discuss outstanding problems, this latter meeting to coincide with the resumption of relations. In May 1958 the British Government said that they agreed in principle. The Saudis replied that arbitration offered the best solution, but that they would consider any other proposal put forward to solve the dispute; they ignored the suggestion about a tripartite meeting and the

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resumption of relations. The British Government then re-stated, in August 1958, their willingness to proceed with the offer to meet in Rome or Geneva (see above). In October 1958 the Saudi Government said that they continued to hold the view that relations could not be resumed unless the obstacles in the way of this were removed.

12. From this point onwards the picture will begin to be familiar to Mr Hammarskjöld.

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PART II

(a) Formal Relations of H.M.C. to Ruler of Abu Dhabi and Sultan of Muscat and Oman

The Ruler of Abu Dhabi is bound to H.M.C. by Treaty relations going back to the "General Treaty" of 1820 by which the rulers of the Trucial Coast undertook to keep the peace and H.M.C. in return undertook to protect their shipping from attack. The principal treaty is the Exclusive Agreement of 1892 by which the Ruler undertook not to enter into negotiation with any other power or alienate territory without agreement of H.M.C. In 1903 Lord Curzon declared that so long as the Ruler observed the 1892 agreement, no one would be allowed to infringe their rights and liberties. (It is perhaps no coincidence that the Ruler of Abu Dhabi constantly reminds us of his "rights".)

2. The Sultan of Muscat and Oman is an independent monarch and is not bound by an "Exclusive Agreement" and H.M.G.'s relations with him are based on long-standing connexions going back to 1798. They have helped him in recent years, as they had in the past helped his predecessors, because of this long-standing friendship and our direct interest in the rest of the Persian Gulf access to which is covered by his territory.

3. H.M.G. have therefore no standing to negotiate for or speak for the Sultan of Muscat without his specific agreement. In the case of Abu Dhabi, while the Ruler fully acknowledges that H.M.G. represent him in matters of foreign affairs and usually takes their advice, it has become general practice to consult him in advance about any step they intend taking in this respect.

4. It must also be recognized that the trend of events in the world and in particular recent developments in the Middle East, the constant accusation by the U.A.R. that they are mere /puppets

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puppets of imperialism, the increasing rapidity of communications have all made it the more desirable and possible for both H.M.C. and the Rulers themselves, that the latter should have the greatest possible freedom to decide on their foreign relations in addition to the freedom which they have always enjoyed in their internal administration. Furthermore our general policy of "disengagement" from the internal affairs of the Middle Eastern countries and their mutual quarrels also points to our leaving as much as possible to the local states, while we do not intend to shirk on the very specific obligation which we have to protect them. (In the case of Mesopot, as explained above, the obligation is moral rather than contractual.)

(b) The Rulers and the Saudis

5. The Bani Yas to which the Ruling Family of Abu Dhabi (al bu Falah) belong came originally from the interior of the Oman peninsula, (not from the coast as the Saudis maintain) where they together with the Manasir and the Awamir grazed their flocks. Elements of the Bani Yas settled in Abu Dhabi only in 1761 when water was discovered there. Thereafter they prospered and the Ruling Family began to spread their influence not only along the coast and in their original habitat in the Dhahirah but also, in conjunction with their allies (the Dhawahir) into Buraimi where they have for a long time now occupied six of the nine villages.

From 1869, when the Wahhabis were finally expelled from the Oasis by the Sultan of Muscat and Oman, the Sultans have entrusted the Rulers of Abu Dhabi with the defense of the entire Oasis and for many years paid them a subsidy for this purpose, while normally maintaining their own Governor in their villages in the Oasis.

6. The present Ruler of Abu Dhabi, Shaikh Shakhbut, is a lineal descendant of the Ruling House which for the last two hundred years

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has ruled the Bani Yas. He started to rule in 1928. In the course of the last twenty-five or so years he has been under continual pressure from Saudi expansionism both in the West (Khor al Odaid, Sabhat Matti area), the South (al Jiwa Oasis) and the East (Bahrain) of his small State. In particular in 1949 the Saudi Arabian Government laid claim to a large area of Abu Dhabi, which in 1955 they had not claimed, and survey parties entered the area. The Saudi Arabian Government showed no signs of diminishing their claims at the Dammam Conference in 1952 at which Shaikh Shakhbut was personally present. Understandably he viewed the sudden Saudi incursion into Bahrain after the breakdown of the Conference as a decidedly hostile act and his family gave witness of this at the arbitration procedure in 1955, although the villages actually occupied by the Saudis were in fact those under the suzerainty of the Sultan of Muscat. Nor is it surprising that he now regards any move by the Saudi Arabian Government with the utmost suspicion. As an instance of this, it is reported that, when approached about the possibility of a "neutral personage" coming to the area to look into the "refugee" question, he immediately said that there were no refugees from his area, unless the Saudi Arabian Government paid some tribesmen to say that they were refugees.

7. The present Sultan of Muscat and Oman likewise belongs to a family (al Bu Said) which has ruled Muscat for about 200 years. During that period the vicissitudes of the family fortunes have been great and their rule over the interior has been loose but they have by and large always been acknowledged by the tribes of the interior to be responsible for the relations of the territory as a whole with foreign countries; and inhabitants of the interior who were under the internal administrative control of the Imam have nevertheless come to

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the Sultan for such things as passports to enable them to travel abroad. During period 1800-1869 the Wahhabis who are Muslims of an entirely alien creed to the local Ibadhis invaded the domains of the Sultan five times. The Wahhabis are therefore regarded by the Sultan and the majority of their people as their traditional enemies. In the case of the present Sultan this feeling has been reinforced by the fact that it was a renegade and discontented Shaikh Rashid bin Hamad of the Al Ha Shamis section of the Hain tribe (who are Sunnis, not Ibadhis), whose family has acknowledged their ties with Muscat in the past who assisted the Saudi, Emir Turki bin Ataishan to enter Buraimi in 1952 and establish himself in Hamasa (Rashid's village). Nor can he forget that the revolt of the Imam of Oman and the tribes of Jebel Akhdar has been financed by S. Arabia and largely got under weigh when the Saudis were established in Buraimi.

3. The caution with which the Sultan of Muscat is likely to approach any settlement with the Saudis and particularly one which brought the Saudi Government or persons under its control or even under an obligation to it into Buraimi, is therefore understandable.

(c) The Rulers and the Bahraini Dispute

9. The Ruler of Abu Dhabi and the Sultan of Muscat have made no secret of the fact that they are well satisfied with the present position which, in effect, by keeping out landward Saudi interference (as opposed to sea-borne) in their territories makes possible their attempts to improve administration and develop their countries. Without this insulation, they would be hard pressed by Saudi imperialism backed by largesse derived from oil revenues. They do not therefore feel inclined to make any great sacrifices to obtain a resumption of diplomatic relations between H.M.G. and Saudi Arabia particularly when they reflect that these relations continued to exist for more than a year after the breakdown of the Bahraini Arbitration and the declaration of the 1955 Line and

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THE DEFENSE AND SECURITY SERVICE IS ADVISED BY THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

were in fact only broken off because of Suez. Nor can we, in honesty, wish to force the Rulers to sacrifices since we have not really lost much by the absence of relations. It is only in the context of improving our general relations with the Middle Eastern countries and from a general feeling of goodwill towards the House of Saud with which our ties have been traditionally friendly and which now maintains friendly ties with our allies, that we have felt impelled to make a serious attempt to resume relations. But we cannot but agree with the Rulers that, if we ask the Rulers to make concessions, such concessions may be used as a toe-hold from which to take further steps in expansionism either by the present Saudi regime or (such as the anomalies of that regime and the power of military republican forces in the Middle East) by a possible successor Government.

10. Sir P. Dixon has already told the Secretary General of the difficulties which we have with the Rulers on the Bahraini question (see our tel Saving 593 to New York of April 14). Briefly the Sultan has no confidence in a return to arbitration and has equally refused to countenance submitting the case to the International Court. He sees in an improvement of Anglo-Saudi relations, quite independent of the Bahraini dispute, the best hope for the establishment of an atmosphere of mutual good faith in which the Bahraini problem might eventually be settled. The Ruler of Abu Dhabi likewise would not agree to arbitration or reference to the International Court because of his general mistrust of the motives and the powers of corruption of the Saudi Government. Our influence over him in this matter is limited by a series of disputes in other respects, e.g. his feeling that we have not actively asserted his rights as against the "upstart" Rulers of Qatar in the Khor al Odaid

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10. Sir P. Dixon has already told the Secretary General of the difficulties which we have with the Rulers on the Buraimi question (see our tel Saving 535 to New York of April 14). Briefly the Sultan has no confidence in a return to arbitration and has equally refused to countenance submitting the case to the International Court. He sees in an improvement of Anglo-Saudi relations, quite independent of the Buraimi dispute, the best hope for the establishment of an atmosphere of mutual good faith in which the Buraimi problem might eventually be settled. The Ruler of Abu Dhabi likewise would not agree to arbitration or reference to the International Court because of his general mistrust of the motives and the powers of corruption of the Saudi Government. Our influence over him in this matter is limited by a series of disputes in other respects, e.g. his feeling that we have not actively asserted his rights as against the "upstart" Rulers of Qatar in the Khor al Odaid area and the islands off the coast, the question of the Ruler's

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jurisdiction over foreigners which, although he legally surrendered it to H.M.G. many years ago, he has been able to assert in practice because of the remoteness of his territory and the fact that until 1950 or thereabouts there was no whole-time British representation in Abu Dhabi or even on the Trucial Coast at all.

11. Moreover our experience of the Ruler of Abu Dhabi is that he does not react well to pressure from us but becomes more intractable, while the Sultan of Muscat tends to make himself inaccessible.

PART III

Saudi Support for the Omani Rebels

Omanis traditionally travel abroad to work in the Gulf States and Saudi Arabia. Those who go to Saudi Arabia are made by the Saudi Arabian authorities to report to the rebel leaders who are based on Dammam. Many are then sent for compulsory military training in Saudi camps and several hundred (probably 500) have been trained in the last year. Some have been sent back, after training, to their villages in Oman in the hope that, if the Saudis send back the rest of the rebels in force, they will join in the rebellion. Several hundred trained men remain in Saudi Arabia under arms, awaiting the order to return to Oman in force.

2. In the meantime individual hardcore rebel terrorists, trained in Saudi Arabia in sabotage and other techniques, have been smuggled into Oman with orders to mine tracks where vehicles pass and to attempt assassinations. The mines are for the most part of U.S. origin and have been supplied by the U.S. for the use of the Saudi forces. They have been handed over by the Saudi authorities to the rebels. Some of the mines recently used may have been hidden in caches after the defeat of the last Saudi-backed rebellion, but at least some have been freshly smuggled in from Saudi Arabia. There can be no doubt that the Saudis are directly encouraging these activities, while nevertheless, continuing to talk in New York about a resumption of relations and a friendly settlement of outstanding problems.

3. The local population is showing increasing hostility to these activities, but in a country nearly the size of

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less than 1,000) the individual thus inevitably succeeds from time to time in blowing up a vehicle and killing or wounding the occupants.

4. We have been authorized to show Mr Hammarokjold a fairly circumstantial CX Report giving an account of the help which the Saudi Arabian Government are extending to the rebels. It is attached.

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Arabian Department
May 10, 1960