

Lines Drawn in the Sand: Territorial Disputes and GCC Unity

By Yoel Guzansky

With the exceptions of Oman and Iran, the nations of the Persian Gulf are a product of the 20th century, with borders — particularly those of the smaller states — drawn largely by colonial forces. The mandatory system and the corresponding Western model of the state with its clearly determined borders was foreign to many Middle Eastern rulers, who were accustomed to a nomadic lifestyle and tribal raids. The formal delineation of the region's borders became increasingly urgent once oil was discovered, concessions were granted, territorial value rose, and the possibilities for vastly increased income from natural resources became more fully understood.[1]

However, as they gained independence, many states conducted border demarcations bilaterally with Britain, which conducted most of the Gulf states' foreign policies until 1971. This not only excluded those neighbors that shared the borders being negotiated, but the boundaries drawn were often based on vague, temporary demarcations, such as the "southernmost palm tree."[2] In other words, because of such ambiguous and bilateral agreements, combined with aspirations for control over oil fields in border areas, there were difficulties in determining boundaries in desert and tribal regions due **[End Page 543]** to various historical rivalries and sociopolitical interests. In a region where natural resources are the predominant source of state revenue, it is critical to know exactly where one state's oil field starts and another ends.

....

For full article, see:

The Middle East Journal, Volume 70, Number 4, Autumn 2016