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The 'Amārāt, their Sheikh, and the Colonial State: Patronage and Politics in a Partitioned Middle East

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Abstract

How did the era of colonial divide-and-rule in the Arab East—the creation of the new mandates of Great Britain and France—appear to the Bedouin communities who lived through it? This article examines this important period of change from the perspective of a prominent Bedouin sheikh, Fahd Ibn Hadhdhāl of the 'Amārāt ('Anaza). Moving between the southern and western frontiers of Iraq, the 'Amārāt have seldom been the focus of historical enquiry, but their attempts to navigate the disturbed interwar landscape offer a window onto the changing prospects for Bedouin groups across the Arab East. Building on a close reading of colonial sources, the article reveals how important social, economic, and political dynamics of Bedouin life persisted to shape relations within the new mandates, as the 'Amārāt, their sheikh, and the young colonial state all jostled for influence and authority.

Keywords

Bedouin – colonialism – Middle East – nomads – frontiers – Iraq

When I had arrived in Iraq the three great Anaiza divisions... had been under the leadership of three old men, all of them quite outstanding personalities... But the death of Fahad [Ibn Hadhdhāl] and the retirement of Al Nouri [al-Sha'lān] to Damascus left the Ruwalla and the Amarat under the leadership of two young, dashing and perhaps slightly jealous young men.¹

¹ J.B. Glubb, *Arabian Adventures: Ten Years of Joyful Service* (London: Cassell, 1983): 198-199.

Introduction

In the 1920s and 1930s, as British and French officials extended their authority over the arid frontiers of their new Middle Eastern mandates, they often bemoaned the quality of Bedouin leadership in modern times. Sheikhs nowadays, many complained, were cosseted and avaricious, more distant from their tribesmen than their forebears had been. Where once they could be left to their own devices, it increasingly fell to government to supervise sheikhs, to reinforce their authority, and in the last resort, to fill the void.² Historians are less inclined to blame the victim but nonetheless observe a collapse of Bedouin political autonomy in the first half of the twentieth century. The interwar years in particular are seen as a watershed for Bedouin groups across the Arab East, a time when external forces overrode their internal dynamics. The political landscape was recast into the League of Nations mandates of Great Britain and France, while new international boundaries, the advent of mechanised transport, and renewed state proscriptions against intertribal raiding eroded the economic and social foundations of long-range nomadic pastoralism. For Kurt Franz, in his extensive sketch of two thousand years of Bedouin history, the birth of the mandates “rang in the rapid and far-reaching loss of Bedouin autonomy,” as the intrinsic dynamics of Bedouin polities were overwhelmed by the external logics of colonialism and the international state system.³ Besieged on all sides, the *zaman al-shuyūkh* (age of the sheikhs) passed into memory.⁴

This article explores how much freedom and agency the Bedouin retained in the era of colonial “divide-and-rule.” It does so by tracking the fortunes of a particular Bedouin group through those crucial interwar years, attempting to see events through their eyes. In one sense, the case for abrupt discontinuity has gone by default. International and imperial histories of the Middle East

2 T. Dodge, *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation Building and a History Denied* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003): 83-100.

3 K. Franz, “The Bedouin in History or Bedouin History?” *Nomadic Peoples* 15 (2011). For scholarly collections exploring these phenomena in various parts of the Arab East, see *Nomadic Societies in the Middle East and North Africa: Entering the 21st Century*, ed. D. Chatty (Leiden: Brill, 2006); *The Transformation of Nomadic Society in the Arab East*, ed. M. Mundy and B. Musallam (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); *Village, Steppe and State: The Social Origins of Modern Jordan*, ed. E. Rogan and T. Tell (London: British Academic Press, 1994).

4 For the importance of this concept in modern tribal memory, see T. Schoel, “The Hsana’s Revenge: Syrian Tribes and Politics in the Shaykh’s Story,” *Nomadic Peoples* 15 (2011) and A. Shryock, *Nationalism and the Genealogical Imagination: Oral History and Textual Authority in Tribal Jordan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

in this period have been predominantly state-centric. Rather than emphasise Bedouin actors or choices, they present the central authorities as active agents awakening dormant hinterlands and their “marginal” populations. There is little place for Bedouin agency in narratives of the progressive rationalisation of national space, the spread of “law and order,” or the state’s monopolisation of violence.⁵

And yet, Bedouin groups across the interwar Arab East did not find themselves facing fully-sovereign national states—not yet, at least—but colonial states, and ones subject to the new form of mandatory rule at that. This fact is widely taken for granted; the specific dynamics of colonial rule are less frequently explored. Among historians, there is a growing awareness that we may have exaggerated the power of colonial rule, set too much store by its technological innovations, and overstated the speed and extent of its break with the past.⁶ In practice, European mandatory rule often resulted in a proliferation of sources of authority, with multiple, overlapping layers of jurisdiction. In Iraq, for example, the “state” was no homogeneous entity but itself the site of a triangular struggle among the Hashemite court, nationalist politicians, and the many branches of British officialdom. This was especially the case in frontier zones that officials struggled to render “legible,” and where the stakes for asserting control—having a say in border disputes and influencing foreign affairs—were so high.⁷ In these circumstances, how did sheikhs and ordinary

5 For a contemporary example of such narratives, see AIR 10/1348, *Handbook of the Southern Desert of Iraq*, 1 January 1930. Recent scholarship, in contrast, has provided a more nuanced reading of these so-called “marginal” spaces. See, for example: J. Tejel Gorgas and C.S. Scalbert-Yücel, “Introduction.” *Études Rurales* (special issue “Ruralité, Urbanité et Violence au Kurdistan”) 186 (2011); J. Migdal, “Mental Maps and Virtual Checkpoints: Struggles to Construct and Maintain State and Social Boundaries.” In *Boundaries and Belonging: States and Societies in the Struggle to Shape Identities and Local Practices*, ed. J. Migdal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 3–26.

6 In addition to the long-standing interest in how empires have depended on the cooperation of local elites, the recent tendency to explore European imperialism in terms of a multiplicity of networks has emphasised the pluralism and competition of differing imperial agendas, their dependence on (often incomplete) sets of “colonial knowledge,” and the potential for missed connections and unfinished and conflicting enterprises. For comparative studies of the Middle Eastern mandates, alive to the limits of colonial power and the continuities with the Ottoman period, see M. Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence: Security Services and Colonial Disorder After 1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), and *The British and French Mandates in Comparative Perspective*, ed. N. Méouchy and P. Sluglett (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

7 For a reconstruction of the practices of “desert administration” on the frontiers of Egypt, Trans-Jordan, and Iraq, see R.S.G. Fletcher, *British Imperialism and ‘The Tribal Question’: Desert Administration and Nomadic Societies in the Middle East, 1919–1936* (Oxford: Oxford University

Bedouin themselves perceive “the state”? And how far did their own experiences and expectations of power inform the behaviour of government officials, often operating at the geographic limits of their authority?

The ‘Amārāt provide a fascinating case study with which to explore these problems. Part of the well-known ‘Anaza confederation, their migrations could cover a vast area of the southeastern Syrian Desert between Aleppo, Karbala, and the edge of the Nafūd, bordering the French mandate for Syria, the British mandate for Trans-Jordan, and the domains of Ibn Sa‘ūd. Estimates of their size vary considerably, from more than four thousand tents in 1919 to about three thousand in 1932, split between the Jabal (1700) and Dahamsha (1300) subdivisions.⁸ Either way, the ‘Amārāt’s location at the intersection of so many contending parties and in a terrain that interwar states still found difficult to control afforded them a political importance out of proportion to their numbers. Their sheikh in this period, Fahd Ibn Hadhdhāl, was widely seen as a shrewd political operator (“the greatest nomad potentate on the western borders of Iraq”), revered for “his wisdom and skill in tribal diplomacy.”⁹ Like Nūrī al-Sha‘lān of the Ruwala, he employed a clerk to project influence and correspond with actors across the Syrian Desert—and there was much to keep abreast of. The ‘Amārāt’s history is entwined with negotiating a wealth of sectional, tribal, dynastic, international, and imperial interests, from old rivalries with the Shammar to the new factional politics of the Iraq mandate. Nor could Ibn Hadhdhāl take the existence of a single ‘Anaza political community for granted. His family, sheikhs of the Jabal subdivision, claimed a notional authority over the Ḍanā Bishr and, indeed, the entire ‘Anaza confederation; in practice, his standing among the Ḍanā Muslim (especially the Ruwala), with subdivisions such as the Dahamsha, and with ordinary ‘Amārāt tribesmen was a matter of continual negotiation. It was with reference to Ibn Hadhdhāl’s

Press, 2015). For French Syria, see C. Velud, “French Mandate Policy in the Syrian Steppe.” In *The Transformation of Nomadic Society in the Arab East*, ed. M. Mundy and B. Musallam (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 63–81, and D. Neep, *Occupying Syria under the French Mandate: Insurgency, Space and State Formation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012): 165–198.

8 British Library: India Office Records [IOR], L/P&S/10/621, J.I. Eadie, “Note on Nomad Arab Tribes,” 11 August 1919; G. de Gaury, *Review of the ‘Anizah Tribe*, ed. Bruce Ingham (Beirut: Kutub, 2005).

9 A.T. Wilson and G. Bell, *Review of the Civil Administration of Mesopotamia* (London: HMSO, 1920): 41; *A Handbook of Arabia*, ed. G.W. Prothero (London: HMSO, 1920): 49.

authority, after all, that Gertrude Bell described “overlordship among the Bedouin” as “a loose term.”¹⁰

Despite the rich potential of this political field, historical work on the 'Amārāt is still patchy and incomplete. (Within the 'Anaza, the history of the Ruwala is much better known.) Like all attempts to bring a Bedouin perspective to the foreground, it must also wrestle with formidable absences and silences, from the dearth of surviving Bedouin testimony to the exclusion of voices and the denial of alternative pasts by normatively national historiographies.¹¹ But the 'Amārāt's efforts to navigate a fraught political landscape did catch the attention of the region's growing bureaucracies in the early twentieth century. Indeed, the apparent marginality of 'Amārāt territory, located on the borders of multiple antagonistic parties, helped generate the paper trail that has rendered them more visible. During the First World War, the 'Amārāt operated along the flanks of both the British and Ottoman armies. In the 1920s, renewed tensions along the Iraq-Najd frontier sparked a flurry of correspondence about the group. These colonial records are a major source, but fragments of reported speech, and even some Hadhdhāl correspondence, also survive in officials' private papers. Collections of tribal poetry provide a further window into the histories of the 'Amārāt and their sheikhs.¹² Read critically, these materials shed light on the leadership of Ibn Hadhdhāl and even permit us to recover something of the intentions, actions, and tensions among ordinary 'Amārāt tribesmen.

There remain deficiencies and gaps in our sources. European accounts of the 'Amārāt were irregular and superficial before the First World War. Thereafter, they might treat their subjects with romantic enthusiasm one

10 Wilson and Bell, *Review*: 41. Johann Büssow has described the 'Anaza as an imagined community, and one which only occasionally translated into coherent action at its largest possible scale: J. Büssow, “Negotiating the Future of a Bedouin Polity in Mandatory Syria: Political Dynamics of the Sba'a-'Abada During the 1930s,” *Nomadic Peoples* 15 (2011): 70–95. Not all European officials were insensitive to this complexity. D.G. Hogarth, the first director of Britain's wartime Arab Bureau, disliked referring to the 'Anaza “as a *Tribe*—in the singular. It would be much less misleading to call them a *People*. . . . [T]he term Anazeh connotes, theoretically, a racial whole, which in practice includes several constituent units, politically independent of one another, and linked sentimentally by no more than a tradition of remote common origin”: D.G. Hogarth, “Syria. The Anazeh Tribes and Chiefs,” *Arab Bulletin* 32 (1916): 489–491.

11 See *Untold Histories of the Middle East: Recovering Voices from the 19th and 20th Centuries*, ed. A. Singer, C.K. Neumann, and S.A. Somel (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011).

12 For example, the Hadhdhāl clan is a common point of reference in the poetry of the Ṣāfir: B. Ingham, *Bedouin of Northern Arabia: Traditions of the Āl-Ḍhafīr* (New York: KPI, 1986).

minute and colonial condescension the next.¹³ Oral traditions and the new genre of printed tribal histories, meanwhile, often say more about how tribesmen justify their present conditions than they do about the past, and they require separate treatment.¹⁴ But, taken together, there is enough material to begin a re-examination of the impact and operation of the colonial state and to get a better sense of what the end of the “age of the sheikhs” actually looked like on the ground.¹⁵

This article focuses on three episodes in the ‘Amārāt’s history that offer insights into their dynamics and condition between the wars: the impact of war and blockade on desert trade and *musābala* (the seasonal journeys made by Bedouin to purchase supplies and sell livestock); Ibn Hadhdhāl’s efforts to restore the economy of raiding; and the disruption caused by the Ikhwān Revolt of the late 1920s, when powerful Nejdī tribes sought to check the growing influence of Abd al-Aziz Ibn Sa‘ūd. Before turning to these, it is worth summarising what we know of the ‘Amārāt and their sheikh on the eve of the First World War.

Fahd Ibn Hadhdhāl was about seventy years old when Gertrude Bell photographed his camp in April 1914 (Fig. 1), but she found him fully conversant on the state of Baghdadi politics and the future of Turkey.¹⁶ Across the nineteenth century, the Ottomans gave periodic support to ‘Anaza groups in return for protecting pilgrim caravans and to keep the power of the Shammar in check.¹⁷ Fahd’s family had become a part of these attempts to exert Ottoman influence

- 13 Colonel Gerard Leachman spent extended periods among the ‘Amārāt in 1910, 1912, and during the First World War, coming to refer to them as “my favourite tribe,” but made only cursory records of his experiences, perhaps out of secrecy: N.N.E. Bray, *A Paladin of Arabia: The Biography of Brevet Lieut.-Colonel G.E. Leachman* (London: J. Heritage, 1936): 169. English romanticism towards the Bedouin is the subject of K. Tidrick, *Heart-Beguiling Araby: The English Romance with Arabia* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1981).
- 14 W. Lancaster, *The Rwala Bedouin Today* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981): 120; A. Shryock, “Writing Oral History in Tribal Jordan: Developments on the Margins of Literature Culture.” *Anthropology Today* 11 (1995); J. Büssow, “Bedouin Historiography in the Making: An Indigenous History of the Hasana Tribe in Syria.” In *Repräsentationen von Nomaden und Sesshaften in der “Alten Welt,”* ed. L. Prager (Münster: Lit, 2011): 160–183.
- 15 For discussions of the “myths” around tribes, see *Tribes and Power: Nationalism and Ethnicity in the Middle East*, ed. F. Abdul-Jabar and H. Dawod (London: Saqi Books, 2003); *Al-ansāb: La quête des origines. Anthropologie historique de la société tribale arabe*, ed. P. Bonté, E. Conte, C. Hamès, and A.W. Ould Cheikh (Paris: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l’Homme, 1991); P. Crone, “Tribes and States in the Middle East.” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 3 (1993).
- 16 NU, Gertrude Bell Archive, Diary: 22 April 1914.
- 17 See, e.g., J.G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, ‘Oman, and Central Arabia* (Calcutta: Supt. Govt. Printing, 1908–15): 1: 1316, 1436–1438.



FIGURE 1 G. Bell, *Fahd Beg*, April, 1914.

SOURCE: ALBUM Y (1913-4), GERTRUDE BELL ARCHIVE, NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, UK. REPRODUCED WITH PERMISSION.

south and west of the Euphrates. He inherited from his father both an Ottoman title and a sizable arable estate at Razāza, near Karbala, an asset vital to the family's wealth and influence. But, while the Hadhdhāl clan may have acted as useful intermediaries for the Ottoman authorities, contact seems to have been limited and their autonomy and status elevated rather than compromised.¹⁸

Despite possessing extensive agricultural estates, Ibn Hadhdhāl spent several months of the year in the desert grazing his personal herds among other 'Amārāt groups. These movements went beyond those dictated by rainfall and markets: they allowed Ibn Hadhdhāl to renew his influence among disparate groups and over a large grazing territory, to demonstrate his capacity to mediate disputes, and to assert his independence of distant governments. There is also evidence that Ibn Hadhdhāl understood such movements as an asset to his personal reputation, a chance to remind ordinary tribesmen of his own capacity to endure desert hardships.¹⁹ It followed that Ibn Hadhdhāl became a recognised pole of influence in the southeastern Syrian Desert—his hospitality well renowned (and funded by the Razāza estates), his camp a magnet for the

18 Wilson and Bell, *Review*: 41; *Gazetteer of Arabia: A Geographical and Tribal History of the Arabian Peninsula*, ed. S.A. Scoville (Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 1979): 187.

19 See Bray, *Paladin of Arabia*: 419-20.

disaffected and ambitious.²⁰ In a culture in which generosity conferred power and prestige, one British visitor reported up to forty guests regularly dining in Fahd's tent on *mansaf* served on a great copper plate eight feet in diameter.²¹ In the oral tradition of the Ẓafir, who lived on the fringes of the 'Amārāt's influence, the Hadhdhāl sheikhs appear frequently (though not always sympathetically) as symbols of great power in the desert.²²

One source of this considerable influence was the sheikh's willingness and ability to restrict access to the Euphrates market towns. Tensions between the 'Amārāt and the Ruwala late in 1912, for example, precluded the latter from trading at Najaf.²³ Another, less everyday source of influence lay in Ibn Hadhdhāl's ability to marshal an impressive show of force and to sustain it in the field. In 1910 Gerard Leachman, a British agent tasked with making contact with Ibn Rashīd of Ḥā'il, witnessed the "exceptional strength" Fahd could command, as the 'Amārāt, other 'Anaza groups, and Ibn Sa'ūd clashed with the Shammar and Ibn Sa'dūn of the Muntafiq.²⁴ But these shows of force carried risks as well as rewards: two years later, open conflict between the 'Amārāt and the Shammar exacerbated tensions between the Jabal and Dahamsha subdivisions.

By the eve of the First World War, then, we see Ibn Hadhdhāl exhibiting many of the qualities expected of a sheikh: extending hospitality and mediating disputes, securing access to grazing and markets, leading raids and wars, demonstrating a capacity to share in the hardships of ordinary tribesmen, and negotiating resources from neighbouring authorities and governments without surrendering his autonomy.²⁵ In the eyes of one colonial official, that made Ibn Hadhdhāl "one of the most important Bedouin sheikhs in Arabia."²⁶ How well this position would survive changing circumstances remained to be seen.

20 As Gerard Leachman and John Glubb both observed: Glubb, *Arabian Adventures*: 97ff.; Bray, *Paladin of Arabia*: 149.

21 MEC, John Glubb papers (2006 accession), Box 91, John Glubb, "Visit to Ga'ara."

22 Ingham, *Bedouin of Northern Arabia*: texts 5 and 10.

23 G.E. Leachman, "A Journey through Central Arabia." *The Geographical Journal* 43 (1914): 504.

24 G.E. Leachman, "A Journey in North-Eastern Arabia." *The Geographical Journal* 37 (1911): 267. See also Bray, *Paladin of Arabia*: 144, 153.

25 William Lancaster and Thorsten Schoel both provide useful surveys of the role of a sheikh: Lancaster, *Rwala Bedouin Today*: 127-30; Schoel, "Hsana's Revenge": 104-5.

26 Glubb, "Visit to Ga'ara."

1 Trade, Blockade, and the Fortunes of War

For Bedouin groups across the Arab East, the outbreak of the First World War revived existing tensions and engendered new alliances. As the Syrian Desert became a theatre of war between the British and Ottoman empires, a key decision faced by many Bedouin sheikhs was when, and for whom, to declare. By procrastinating too long, they ran the risk of being seen as “wily” or duplicitous, something for which Nūrī al-Sha‘lān became notorious.²⁷ To pledge support too soon, however, risked being perceived as a mere retainer, or hitching one’s wagon to a falling star.

Ibn Hadhdhāl was typical in facing this choice but conspicuously successful in navigating the options. While the British would later claim him as their natural ally in the Shāmiyya desert south and west of the Euphrates, he kept them guessing as the Allied campaign in Mesopotamia floundered. Throughout 1916 and into 1917, when Bedouin groups in the Hijaz began to work with Allied forces, Britain’s intelligence organisation in Cairo, the Arab Bureau, continued to rank the ‘Amārāt sheikh as “doubtful,” even “pro-Turk,” and acting with “characteristic caution.”²⁸ It was only with the fall of Baghdad in March 1917 that Ibn Hadhdhāl declared in Britain’s favour. Even then, British agents complained that he was by no means complaisant, “as he will promise everything and do nothing.”²⁹

That spring, it was hard to know what the relationship between tribal sheikh and occupying power would look like (or even which party had the most to gain). British expectations were hardly exacting. Sir Arnold Wilson, later the Civil Commissioner in Iraq, recalled the official lack of interest in “Arab co-operation” schemes on the Mesopotamian front, many calculating that the potential military advantage was “more than off-set . . . by the probable reactions after the war.”³⁰ For the British and Indian forces fighting their way through Mesopotamia, it was enough that the ‘Amārāt on their western flank remained “quiet” and “unresponsive” to German overtures, even if the ‘Anaza “did little . . . as regards active military operations against the Turks or their

27 The Ruwala did not assist British operations in the Middle East until shortly before the armistice.

28 D.G. Hogarth, “Northern Desert: Jauf el-Amr from East and West.” *Arab Bulletin* 33 (1916): 503; K. Cornwallis (ed.), “The Desert. Movements in East and Centre.” *Arab Bulletin* 44 (1917): 118-9; G.L. Bell, “Mesopotamia. Ismail Bey.” *Arab Bulletin* 45 (1917): 133.

29 Anon., “Notes. Mesopotamia News.” *Arab Bulletin* 79 (1918): 56.

30 A.T. Wilson, *Mesopotamia, 1917-1920: A Clash of Loyalties; a Personal and Historical Record* (London: Oxford University Press, 1931): 3-4.

allies.”³¹ Fahd’s camp did, however, become an important source of information for the British on desert movements and conditions, as various Bedouin groups fled towards him from Ottoman territory.³²

For the ‘Amārāt and their sheikh, in contrast, the British connection brought access to more concrete resources. Ibn Hadhdhāl received a personal subsidy of twelve thousand rupees a month and protection for his cultivated estates: a more regular income, one officer calculated, than that collected as *khuwwa* before the war.³³ More importantly, British goodwill saw the ‘Amārāt through the disastrous winter of 1917–18. It is hard to overstate the impact this had on Bedouin across the Arab East, as crop failures, locust plagues, wartime requisitions, and an Allied blockade combined in a perfect storm of famine and destitution. ‘Anaza groups crossed the Syrian Desert from west to east to escape these depredations: at one stage, perhaps as many as 100,000 Bedouin were being fed by the British authorities in Mesopotamia.³⁴ Through their sheikh’s support for the British war effort, the ‘Amārāt secured vital supplies of dates and grain and were spared the worst of the shortages.³⁵

Power, prestige, and influence were remarkably fluid in the vacuum between the Ottoman retreat and the British advance. As Britain’s administrative responsibilities in Mesopotamia began to outstrip its knowledge of the country, the ‘Amārāt and their sheikh were able to turn their peripheral location into a political asset. In 1917, the ease with which enemy supplies passed through the Syrian Desert became of increasing concern to the British. Their reports hint at the scale of the problem, with large caravans setting out from

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- 31 D.G. Hogarth, “Obituary: Lieut.-Colonel G.E. Leachman.” *The Geographical Journal* 56 (1920): 326; Wilson and Bell, *Review*: 41.
 - 32 For example: K. Cornwallis (ed.), “Notes. News of Anazeh Tribes.” *Arab Bulletin* 65 (1917): 407–408.
 - 33 Glubb, *Arabian Adventures*: 61. *Khuwwa*, often dismissed as mere extortion, was, in fact, the payment made to a Bedouin group, in cash or in kind, to opt out of the economy of raiding. See Lancaster, *Rwala Bedouin Today*: 121ff.
 - 34 Wilson, *Mesopotamia*: 79. The motivating factor of food security is crucial to Tariq Tell’s analysis of Bedouin wartime politics on the other side of the Syrian Desert: T. Tell, “Guns, Gold and Grain: War and Food Supply in the Making of Transjordan.” In *War, Institutions and Social Change in the Middle East*, ed. S. Heydemann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). Vivid first-hand accounts of conditions in wartime Greater Syria are found in S. Tamari, *Year of the Locust: A Soldier’s Diary and the Erasure of Palestine’s Ottoman Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).
 - 35 In contrast, when the Fad’ān and Sba’a made it to Iraq late in 1917, they “arrived starving”: IOR: L/P&S/10/618, anon. [probably G. Leachman], “Anizah on the Iraq Frontier,” n.d.

Kuwait, Karbala, and Najaf for Hā'il, Aleppo, and Damascus.³⁶ Lacking the expertise or the influence to stop these flows, the British asked Ibn Hadhdhāl to identify smugglers and intercept contraband on their behalf. He seized the opportunity.³⁷ The 'Amārāt's role in regulating desert trade became their most important contribution to the Allied cause. It also provides a window onto the sheikh's attempts to navigate the war, the 'Amārāt's condition in the immediate post-war years, and the persistence of pre-war political dynamics within the conduct of the war itself.

The Anglo-'Amārāt control regime was run through a system of issuing passes, monitoring migrations, and despatching desert patrols. Permits to draw supplies from the markets under government control were issued directly by the British authorities or indirectly through confederate sheikhs, Ibn Hadhdhāl prominent among them.³⁸ Those caught carrying supplies without a pass or deviating from their declared destination were liable to be detained and to have their supplies seized; in some instances, 'Amārāt groups attacked suspected smugglers and kept the supplies for themselves. The system aimed to starve the Ottoman armies of materiel, but also to prevent Iraq's own harvest from "leaking into the desert," lured by the near-famine prices prevailing in Bilād al-Shām.³⁹ It similarly targeted the activities of the Ottomans' Arab allies, including Ibn Rashīd of the Shammar, who professed hostility to Britain in the name of Ottoman authority, while profiting from its absence.⁴⁰ The evidence is fragmentary, but these efforts appear to have had some effect on the Ottomans and their allies.⁴¹ Ibn Hadhdhāl, however, was motivated by something less than loyalty.

At a basic level, by supporting the blockade, the sheikh put the political advantage of increased British goodwill above the short-term pecuniary

36 G.L. Bell, "Mesopotamia. The Situation in Hail." *Arab Bulletin* 57 (1917): 314-316.

37 Glubb, "Visit to Ga'ara."

38 Ibn Hadhdhāl became increasingly important as evidence of Kuwaiti and Saudi participation in smuggling grew and once the Ottoman garrison at Medina fell and the war front shifted further north.

39 K. Cornwallis (ed.), "Mesopotamia. The Najaf-Kerbala district." *Arab Bulletin* 62 (1917): 373-375.

40 G. Bell, "Arabia. North-Eastern Desert, Tribal Fights in the Shamiyah." *Arab Bulletin* 43 (1917): 87-95.

41 The large desert caravans were increasingly disrupted, although officials accepted that smuggling continued "where Fahd Beg had not yet established control," itself a sign of his growing influence: K. Cornwallis (ed.), "Mesopotamia: Affairs at Kerbala." *Arab Bulletin* 69 (1917): 453-454.

advantages of smuggling.⁴² This earned him valuable political capital, which he was not hesitant to cash in. In a letter describing Colonel Leachman, the British officer attached to his camp in this period, he pointed out that the 'Amārāt's record of intercepting Ottoman contraband had rightly reassured the authorities "as to our friendship to the British Government."⁴³ Less prominent 'Amārāt tribesmen may not always have been as restrained or as concerned for British opinion: some were caught releasing smugglers in exchange for payment.⁴⁴ But, in general, their contribution to the blockade guaranteed them preferential access to Euphrates markets for the remainder of the war. It is this concern for keeping markets open for his tribesmen, more than anything else, that explains the timing of Ibn Hadhdhāl's decision to declare for Great Britain.⁴⁵ But the 'Amārāt's role in enforcing the blockade hints at deeper connections between trade, influence, and Bedouin authority, agendas that were never fully lost beneath the ebb and flow of the war.

The first connection concerns the relationship between a sheikh's capacity to secure access to markets and the degree of his political authority. 'Anaza sheikhs had long sought to control the approaches to Euphrates markets for political as well as economic ends. British victories in the riverine zone threatened this position—their officers fell into established patterns of withholding access to extract Bedouin "compliance"—but Fahd's active role in this

42 Nūrī al-Sha'lān's son Nawwaf, in contrast, was thought to be "up to his neck in the contraband business": K. Cornwallis (ed.), "Notes. Kuwait-Damascus Contraband." *Arab Bulletin* 91 (1918): 180-181.

43 Fahd Ibn Hadhdhāl correspondence, cited in Bray, *Paladin of Arabia*: 302-3. The provenance of this correspondence, which concerns the time spent by Colonel Leachman among the 'Amārāt, is now lost. Norman Bray, who reproduces it in his biography of Leachman, was himself drawing on materials collected by Sir Arnold Wilson and St John Philby. It seems probable that one or the other of these two—both of whom also knew Fahd—had asked the sheikh for his memories of Leachman and the war, probably soon after Leachman's death in 1920. As a rare example of the testimony of a sheikh from this period, these recollections are as interesting for their assumptions about what makes a good leader and for how the sheikh describes his relationship with the state as for their depiction of wartime events and personalities.

44 K. Cornwallis (ed.), "Notes. Damascus-Hail Caravan Traffic." *Arab Bulletin* 102 (1918): 308.

45 The British accepted as much and did not consider Ibn Hadhdhāl "likely to come in with us till our frontier on both Euphrates and Tigris is far enough advanced . . . to control the Amarat markets": Hogarth, "Anazeh Tribes and Chiefs": 491. Even so, there is evidence that Ibn Hadhdhāl was concerned about becoming dependent on the British for supplies and may have approached Ibn Sa'ūd, through his nephew Fahd al-Dughaym, to establish an alternate source through the Arabian region of Qaṣīm: K. Cornwallis (ed.), "Supplies from Qasim." *Arab Bulletin* 97 (1918): 256.

desert trade system more than won it back.⁴⁶ With the exception of British political officers, he alone was now permitted to issue passes to trade and conduct *musābala* with the principal market towns of the Euphrates. Due to the disruption to economic life caused by the war, and with the growing apparatus of British bureaucracy at his side, Ibn Hadhdhāl's influence was, if anything, increased. From the autumn of 1917 onwards, shortages drove the Fad'ān and Sba'a "rallying towards Ibn Hadhdhāl." By October, the 'Amārāt had been granted a near monopoly over the carrying trade between Kuwait and Iraq.⁴⁷ Even the Ruwala, who had long exercised considerable autonomy of the nominal 'Anaza chief, and who were loath "to be beholden in any way to Fahad in the procuring of supplies," had to set aside their differences with the 'Amārāt to access Mesopotamian markets.⁴⁸ By the end of the war, the 'Amārāt were involved in seizing contraband and dispatching agents throughout Iraq's Southern Desert, welcoming groups from even further afield and selling camels and other pastoral products to supply Sherifian forces. It is a good indication of the wealth, influence, and largesse that flowed from this position that Ibn Sa'ūd eyed it covetously and was, by 1918, requesting equal rights and privileges.⁴⁹

The second dynamic operating throughout the Anglo-'Amārāt blockade was the ongoing rivalry between the 'Anaza and the Shammar. This enmity had deep roots. Since the early eighteenth century, groups affiliated with both of these great Bedouin confederations clashed as they moved north from Arabia into the Syrian Desert. Driven by political instability and climatic stress, the Shammar were gradually pushed across the Euphrates and into the Jazīra.⁵⁰ These successive waves of migration formed the human landscape into which

46 "It is this need of laying in stocks of supplies," a British report confessed frankly, "that gives the Governments of 'Iraq and Syria their main hold over these birds of the desert": 10R: L/PS/10/621, Eadie, "Nomad Arab Tribes."

47 K. Cornwallis (ed.), "Notes. Koweit Supplies." *Arab Bulletin* 70 (1917): 468.

48 K. Cornwallis (ed.), "Notes. News of Anazeh Tribes." *Arab Bulletin* 65 (1917): 407-8. See also Wilson and Bell, *Review*: 41.

49 R.E. Hamilton (political agent, Kuwait), notes reproduced in K. Cornwallis (ed.), "Ibn Saud and His Neighbours." *Arab Bulletin* 92 (1918): 187-92. Yoav Alon has also observed how "the precarious leadership position" of many sheikhs obliged them "to attract the sponsorship of some higher authority": Alon, "Silent Voices": 93.

50 De Gaury, *Review of 'Anizah*: 22; Franz, "Bedouin in History": 35; Ingham, *Bedouin of Northern Arabia*: 12-14. From the 1830s, the 'Amārāt and other 'Anaza groups regularly sided with the Āl Sa'ūd against the Rashīd dynasty of the Shammar; as recently as 1910 there had been open conflict between the two: Büssow, "Negotiating": 65. See also Lorimer, *Gazetteer*: 1501.

European imperialism now crashed; for some years after the region's partition, its consequences would continue to play out. For the 'Amārāt, Ibn Hadhdhāl's control of the wartime blockade provided a new economic weapon in this long struggle. Shammar groups allied to the Ottomans complained about their restricted freedom of movement and inability to access Euphrates markets. Some initially found relief in smuggling, but from 1917 their loss of access to Najaf and Samāwa took an increasingly heavy toll.⁵¹ Even after the war, as we shall see, Fahd Ibn Hadhdhāl clung to the pass system as a way of staying ahead of the Shammar in a revived competition for opportunities, resources, and patronage.

Finally, the workings of the pass system also provide an insight into established tensions within the 'Amārāt—in particular, Fahd's attempts to retain influence over the Dahamsha. In the past, the sheikhs of this subdivision had claimed to be equal in importance to Ibn Hadhdhāl himself, wintering in separate grazing grounds and enjoying considerable independence of his authority.⁵² During the war, one group of Dahamsha, under Muḥammad Ibn Turkī, chose to camp with the pro-Turk 'Ujaymi al-Sa'dūn. Another, under Muḥammad Ibn Mijlad, offered to join King Hussein in the Hijaz "in order to get round our arrangement with Fahad Ibn Hadhdhāl."⁵³ This, Fahd told the British, angered him more than any amount of Shammar raiding.⁵⁴ He responded by using the pass system, and the threat of withholding permission to trade, in an attempt to rein in the autonomy of these sheikhs. Nor was he afraid to lean on Britain for support when faced with disobedience. Well into the 1920s, the British observed Ibn Hadhdhāl using trade "as a lever for political purposes . . . with a view to giving him control over the Aneizah," and while there is evidence of evasion of the pass system in the later 1920s, it enabled him to act as a kind of gatekeeper for some years more.⁵⁵

51 IOR: L/P&S/12/2082, G. de Gaury, "Note on the Shammar Tribe, Jebel Shammar and the Ibn Rashid Dynasty of Hail now in Abeyance," 29 June 1937.

52 Before the war, British authorities in Kuwait simply assumed that the Dahamsha were as important as Ibn Hadhdhāl, while, during the war, Sharīf Ḥusayn of Mecca corresponded with Fahd Ibn Hadhdhāl and Muḥammad Ibn Mijlad as equals: Lorimer, *Gazetteer*: IIA, 83; K. Cornwallis (ed.), "Intelligence." *Arab Bulletin* 52 (1917): 251.

53 H.St.J.B. Philby, *The Heart of Arabia: A Record of Travel and Exploration* (London: Constable, 1922): 256; K. Cornwallis (ed.), "Ramadi and the Tribes." *Arab Bulletin* 70 (1917): 459-60; K. Cornwallis (ed.), "Mesopotamian Chiefs and King Husein." *Arab Bulletin* 93 (1918): 211-2.

54 AIR 23/292, H. James to Air Staff Intelligence, 13 August 1925.

55 MEC, John Glubb papers, Box 4, file 9, Ramadi reports: 22 March 1923. It testified to his newfound buying power that when, in 1923, Fahd shifted suppliers, redirecting the bulk of

The Dahamsha openly criticised this new state of affairs—Ibn Hadhdhāl, they claimed, had become “too self-assured”—and quickly identified the pass system as a major grievance.⁵⁶ By 1923 several Bedouin groups were reported to have changed their *musābala* patterns rather than “submit to the indignity of soliciting permission from Fahad Beg.”⁵⁷ When Ibn Turki attempted, in 1926, to circumvent the system, threatening to move to Najd if the government did not withdraw it, Fahd even had a British official sent to impress on the sheikh “the futility of trying to kick against Fahad’s control.”⁵⁸

Interestingly, the British were aware that they, and the pass system, were being played in this way. One report freely accepted that their close relationship with any given sheikh would inevitably distort his relations with others.⁵⁹ They even appreciated that embittered Dahamsha sheikhs were well placed to relocate beyond their effective jurisdiction and wished that, in the interests of amity, Fahd might “exercise himself a little more and Government a little less.”⁶⁰ But it is a reminder of the weakness of Britain’s position in the desert that, for the time being at least, they stood by Ibn Hadhdhāl. He had, in British eyes, “long been the main stabilising factor in the Anizah areas”; should the Dahamsha be allowed to break away “Fahad declares that it will be the beginning of unsettlement throughout the Anizah.”⁶¹

The inner workings of the Anglo-‘Amārāt blockade reveal how important Bedouin agendas and concerns continued to operate throughout the turmoil of the First World War. It would also set the tone for the tribe’s interactions with the occupying power in the immediate post-war years. By the mid-1920s, we can glimpse the ‘Amārāt sheikh acting as a mediator in numerous disputes. He supported government claims during the Dayr al-Zūr crisis, a tense stand-off with Arab nationalist forces in the Iraqi-Syrian borderlands. In the south, he took in refugee tribesmen at the government’s request and confiscated loot from those raiding into Najd, all the while preserving his own contacts.⁶²

trade to Shetatah instead of Rahaliyah, the latter town witnessed scenes of disorder and discontent.

56 AIR 23/292, H. James to Air Staff Intelligence, 13 August 1925.

57 AIR 10/1348, *Handbook*: 112. From 1919 to 1923 most of the Dahamsha under Ibn Mijlad, equally indignant, camped in Syria.

58 AIR 23/292, H. James to Air Staff Intelligence, 13 August 1925, 27 August 1925; AIR 23/294, Moore to ‘I’ Branch, 28 September 1926.

59 IOR: L/P&S/10/619: Political Officer, Hillah, “The Future of the Tribal System”.

60 AIR 23/294, Moore to ‘I’ Branch, 28 September 1926.

61 AIR 23/292, H. James to Air Staff Intelligence, 13 August 1925.

62 In 1922 at the Uqair conference, and in 1923 at al-Qa’im and Dayr al-Zūr, Ibn Hadhdhāl was seen as attempting to act “in his now universally established role of general peacemaker

Throughout, what stands out are the opportunities afforded the 'Amārāt and their sheikh as the state of flux that had marked the war years survived the process of partition.⁶³ Britain's limited penetration of Iraq's southern and western frontiers, its unfamiliarity with the country's topography and personalities, the political and fiscal pressures to withdraw its troops, the twin distractions of Turkish revanchism and Kurdish unrest, and its fears of a desert awash with modern rifles, all pushed in the direction of allowing prominent sheikhs wide autonomy in the conduct of their affairs. There were, after all, worse people to back. As a substantial livestock owner, officers reasoned, Ibn Hadhdhāl would necessarily "favour quiet tribal conditions," while his "tactful friendship" with Ibn Sa'ūd afforded "a useful and convenient channel of approach" between two governments that did not yet formally recognise one another.⁶⁴ Allowing prominent 'Anaza sheikhs such latitude "might well shock French theorists of suzerainty," an intelligence officer concluded, but were it to cease "the Administration would have no other machinery available."⁶⁵

2 "Rules for Raiders": Patronage and Politicking in the Mid-1920s

The war had been good to Fahd Ibn Hadhdhāl, but he could not afford to be complacent. His position depended upon balancing the goodwill of the colonial power with the support of ordinary tribesmen. As the decade wore on, that meant navigating a path through the government's growing anxieties about Bedouin raiding.

For the British officials based in Baghdad, raiding was seen, by turns, as harmless sport, a menace to "law and order," an expression of desert anarchy, and a threat to the conduct of foreign policy (or, by some around the Hashemite court, as a way of conducting that policy by other means). It was a stated condition of Ibn Hadhdhāl's lucrative subsidy that he prevent his tribesmen from conducting raids. Among the Bedouin of the Arab East, however, raiding itself fulfilled a vital economic function, as a mechanism for recouping herd losses and redistributing wealth. It was Ibn Hadhdhāl's bold attempt to

and diplomat": MEC, John Glubb papers, Box 4, File 9: 18 May 1923. For mention of Ibn Hadhdhāl's part in the Dayr al-Zūr crisis of 1919-20, see E. Tauber, "The Struggle for Dayr al-Zūr: The Determination of Borders between Syria and Iraq," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 23 (1991).

63 Prothero, *Handbook of Arabia*: 6.

64 AIR 23/292, H. James to Air Staff Intelligence, 13 August 1925.

65 CO 730/105/1, Intelligence Report no. 3, "Syrian Frontier," 4 February 1926. Theory aside, the French mandatory regime also relied on sheikhs' collaboration: Velud, "French Mandate."

square these two constituencies—to satisfy both Baghdad's calls to uphold "law and order" and his supporters' concern for the economy of raiding—that gave rise to one of the most remarkable experiments in government in the history of the mandates.

Late in the summer of 1925, flights of British aircraft flew over the southern and western deserts of Iraq, dropping bundles of leaflets on the Bedouin below. The leaflets announced, to those who could read them, an end to the authorities' attempts to outlaw tribal raiding. Instead, the government of Iraq would now tolerate "internal" raiding between the 'Anaza, Shammar, and Ṣafir. As long as raiding parties remained within national borders, gave notice of their targets, avoided main roads, and left settled populations and travellers alone, raiding and counter-raiding would not be treated as a crime. Improbable as it may sound, these conditions were assembled in a printed list of "Rules for Raiders" and dropped over selected Bedouin camps. Intelligence officers and police posts were issued with logbooks and instructed to keep a record of who raided what from whom. Only "external" raiding, given its implications for foreign relations, would require intervention. The distinction, meaningless to most Bedouin groups, became cemented by legislation in September 1925.⁶⁶

The experiment was controversial, even in its day.⁶⁷ Officials soon confessed their difficulties in registering raiding parties and in separating "internal" raiding from "external" consequences. They struggled to distinguish trans-border raids from "the large numbers of raids which are constantly coming and going," while a system permitting certain tribes to raid in certain circumstances simply added to the confusion of authority in the desert.⁶⁸ Groups long thought to have "abandoned" raiding were motivated to take up arms once more. Before long, reports were received of unauthorised raids conducted outside the "Rules." Attacks on caravans, travellers, and settled tribes proved "lamentably frequent"; a "welter of blood feuds" ensued. In July 1926, the scheme was scrapped; it had lasted less than a year.⁶⁹

66 Glubb, *Arabian Adventures*: 84–91; A.B. Toth, *The Transformation of a Pastoral Economy: Bedouin and States in Northern Arabia, 1850–1950* (PhD diss. Oxford University, 2000): 169–171.

67 "Armed with blue pencil and typewriter," John Glubb remembered of his time as a Special Service Officer in southern Iraq, officials "divided themselves into rival camps": MEC, John Glubb papers 3(205)/7, J.B. Glubb, "Authorised Raiding".

68 FO 371/12993, Plumer to Amery, 20 April 1928; AIR 23/300, Glubb to Air Staff Intelligence, 18 February 1926.

69 AIR 23/375, anon., "Draft Circular to all Mutasarrifs," 29 July 1926; CO 730/105/9, Air Headquarters, "Summary of Intelligence no. 33," 16 August 1926; CO 730/78, CO 46166, Intelligence Report no. 20, 1 October 1925.

The “Rules for Raiders” episode barely features in most histories of Iraq and, where it does, is easily dismissed as a flight of imperial fancy.⁷⁰ There is something hubristic, even absurd, in the image of British aircraft scattering pamphlets across a windblown desert; it recalls Joseph Conrad’s gunboat on the edge of the African bush, “firing into a continent.” Yet such a reading treats the Bedouin themselves too lightly: it fails to acknowledge how much this most unorthodox of policy proscriptions owed to Bedouin pressures and interests. Viewed in the appropriate context, the “Rules for Raiders” scheme is a telling example of how Bedouin political and economic agendas could still drive interwar politics. To see this, we must locate the scheme at the junction of three forces that were buffeting the young mandate for Iraq: the revived competition for resources between the ‘Amārāt and the Shammar; the political pluralism of the mandatory regime; and ongoing tensions within the ‘Amārāt themselves.

Before the state developed a comprehensive, bureaucratic system of “desert administration,” Iraq’s Southern Desert remained a contested space between British officialdom, Saudi expansionism, the Hashemite court, and the Bedouin themselves. The stakes were high for all the parties. For the British, much of their influence in the Middle East rested on balancing the goodwill of Ibn Sa‘ūd and their evolving relationship with the Hashemites. The Foreign Office and India Office, in particular, were anxious to keep the emir of Najd on side: his “more or less ordered” rule offered the best protection for imperial communications, the “independence” of the Persian Gulf and, after Ibn Sa‘ūd’s capture of Mecca and Medina, the quiescence of India’s Muslims.⁷¹ The Hashemite King Fayṣal of Iraq, in contrast, watched the rise of Ibn Sa‘ūd with alarm. He saw the Bedouin groups along his southern frontier as the most ready means of containing, even countering, the threat of Saudi expansion. Ibn Sa‘ūd, for his part, was determined to avoid being encircled to the north by an arc of hostile Hashemite states. In April 1921, even as Fayṣal’s candidacy for the Iraqi throne was being announced, Ibn Sa‘ūd wrote to Fahd Ibn Hadhdhāl claiming authority over all the ‘Anaza.⁷² As these forces jostled for authority

70 For John Glubb, the scheme was the product of the romantic enthusiasm of “the League Football school of thought”: Glubb, *Arabian Adventures*: 90–1. See also his criticism, at the time, of the naivety and “ridiculous ignorance” of the authorities in Baghdad: MEC, John Glubb papers (2006 accession), Box 43, Mesopotamia Diary: 2 December 1925.

71 CO 831/22/2, Cunliffe-Lister to Wauchope (1 February 1933).

72 FO 371/12993, “A Short History of ‘Iraq-Najd Relations from about the Time of the Fall of Hail to Ibn Sa‘ūd’s Protest against the Establishment of the ‘Iraq Police Post at Busaiyah,” encl. in H. Dobbs to L. Amery, 14 April 1928; FO 371/13715, Ibn Sa‘ūd to Gilbert Clayton,

along the Iraq-Najd frontier, they perpetuated that wartime state of flux, and engendered new patterns of patronage, preference, and opportunity. For the 'Amārāt in particular, this would re-energise old enmities with the Shammar.

With the fall of Ḥā'il to Ibn Sa'ūd's forces in November 1921, Saudi power was being projected into the Syrian Desert for the first time in a century, pressing on the frontiers of the Hashemite domains of Trans-Jordan and Iraq. Several Shammar groups associated with the defeated Ibn Rashīd now fled north into Iraq. Many passed through the 'Amārāt to join the Iraqi Shammar in the Jazīra; others remained in 'Amārāt territory and in the vicinity of the frontier. Once in Iraq, however, their hostility to Saudi expansion found a welcome audience in the king. Keen to develop desert connections independent of British control, Fayṣal came to look on the Shammar as his proxy on the frontier, the best instrument available for checking Saudi power. If land grants formed the key currency of Fayṣal's relationship with rural notables, then permission to raid was now being made to work the same way for Bedouin sheikhs. In 1923 the king permitted Shammar groups under 'Ajīl al-Yāwir to raise a desert force to guard the Euphrates line. The following year, he invited al-Yāwir to patrol the Nāṣiriyya and Dīwāniyya provinces (*līwā's*) and repel any attacks by Ikhwān from across the border.⁷³ Before long, he was giving his tacit approval to illicit Shammar raids into Najd itself.⁷⁴ The 'Amārāt were not simply shut out of these lucrative opportunities; they feared they would ultimately face the brunt of Saudi reprisals.

The British were "gravely embarrassed" by these events, fearful of the damage that Fayṣal and the Shammar might do to their own relationship with Ibn Sa'ūd, yet they still balked at the cost and risk of developing their own administrative presence in the desert. So they too tried their hand at managing the desert through patronage. Both 'Ajīl al-Yāwir of the Shammar and Fahd Ibn Hadhdhāl of the 'Amārāt were offered official subsidies to strengthen their hold over their respective followers, curb Bedouin raiding (especially those "embarrassing" trans-border affairs), and monitor the country's new

24 April 1929. For the genealogical ties of the house of Saud to the 'Anaza, see T. Ashkenazi, "The 'Anazah Tribes," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 4 (1948): 226. The best account of Saudi expansionism and the early Saudi state remains: J. Kostiner, *The Making of Saudi Arabia, 1916-1936: From Chieftaincy to Monarchical State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

73 FO 371/12993, "Short History of 'Iraq-Najd Relations"; MEC, John Glubb papers, Box 206, File 10, John Glubb, "Notes on Scheme for Tribal Irregulars—Dulaim Division" n.d. [1923]; AIR 23/291, Lees to Air Staff Intelligence, 20 February 1925.

74 FO 371/12993, "Short History of 'Iraq-Najd Relations"; AIR 23/38, Buss minute, 31 March 1928.

trans-desert routes.⁷⁵ Al-Yāwir ultimately proved unable (or disinclined) to prevent the Shammar from raiding, but Ibn Hadhdhāl became increasingly important to Britain, upholding its interests along Iraq's frontiers while tempering Fayṣal's influence.⁷⁶ When they invited the sheikh to establish and man desert outposts at Muhaywir and Rutba, the British were effectively underwriting a parallel source of authority in the desert, shadowing a Shammari "Desert Police" favoured by the king.⁷⁷

The arrangement had advantages for the 'Amārāt and their sheikh. For Ibn Hadhdhāl, the position again helped his standing as a man of influence on the frontiers of Iraq. He accepted it only on the condition that the government be prepared to underwrite his authority, with police support if necessary.⁷⁸ The patrols, meanwhile, provided a means of checking Shammar activity while renewing the sheikh's private contacts with Ibn Sa'ūd. As the man responsible for confiscating and restoring loot raided from Najd (including on the numerous raids made by the Shammar refugees), he entered an active correspondence with Ibn Sa'ūd's governor at Ḥā'il, taking care to distinguish his actions from those of the Hashemite regime.⁷⁹ Little wonder, then, that the Hadhdhāl clan came to be viewed "with suspicion and dislike at the Palace."⁸⁰

For ordinary 'Amārāt tribesmen too, the patrols formed part of an ongoing struggle for subsidies and positions—a form of maintaining markets, as William Lancaster observed.⁸¹ They guaranteed the 'Amārāt's access to the important springs and wells at Muhaywir, while some also saw an opportunity to keep for themselves the camels seized from raiders and to pursue old vendettas against the Shammar.⁸² These patrols also addressed the favouritism with which the police recruited heavily from among the Shammar and then turned

75 M.F. Jamali, *The New Iraq: Its Problem of Bedouin Education* (New York: Teachers College, Columbia, 1934): 65.

76 Al-Yāwir's subsidy was halved and the funds spent on a unit of armed patrol cars instead: CO 730/105/1, Iraq Political Intelligence Report no. 16 (3 August 1926).

77 AIR 23/292, H. James to Air Staff Intelligence, 22 October 1925.

78 AIR 23/292, H. James to Air Staff Intelligence, 13 August 1925.

79 For Ibn Hadhdhāl's "constant" communications with Ibn Sa'ūd, see MEC, H.R.P. Dickson papers, Box 2/A, File 3: H.R.P. Dickson, "Annual Report on the Hillah Liwa for the Year 1921" [n.d.].

80 AIR 23/292, H. James to Air Staff Intelligence, 27 August 1925; AIR 23/38, K. Buss minute, 31 March 1928.

81 Lancaster, *Rwala Bedouin Today*: 131.

82 AIR 23/292, H. James to Air Staff Intelligence, 22 October 1925.

a blind eye to Shammari raids (including those against the 'Amārāt).⁸³ As the British intelligence officer at Ramadi observed, Ibn Hadhdhāl was plainly "jealous that the [Dulaym] Desert Police should contain such a preponderance of Shammar (Nejdi, be it noted, not Jazireh) over Anaiza": if he could not do something to redress this, his influence would necessarily suffer.⁸⁴

By the summer of 1925, however, there were signs that 'Amārāt frustration was beginning to boil over. Ibn Hadhdhāl's undertaking to prevent 'Amārāt raids brought him recognition and financial rewards from the government, but it now began to erode his authority among ordinary tribesmen. In June, a group of 'Amārāt raided the Shammar near Ramadi, tired of putting up with Shammar raids. When confronted about this by British officials, the 'Amārāt claimed, not without grounds, that Shammar raids had, for too long, been protected by their close connections with the government police.⁸⁵ Ibn Hadhdhāl now weighed in, accusing 'Ajil al-Yāwir of breaking a recent truce, and telling the Special Service Officer "how delighted he would be if the Government would openly countenance raiding so that he could get his own back."⁸⁶

This was not simply a question of self-defence. Resources may have been particularly scarce in the summer and autumn of 1925. 'Ajil al-Yāwir confessed he could not prevent the Shammar from raiding because "food is scarce, grazing is poor, and hunger and poverty [are] driving his people to crime."⁸⁷ It seems likely that similar pressures were acting upon Fahd Ibn Hadhdhāl: it pushed him to seek a restoration of the economy of raiding, not least to shore up support among members of his own tribe. It is particularly significant that it was the Dahamsha sheikhs—those most impatient with Hadhdhāl control—who were most anxious to see raiding restored. Until recently, it was they who had been "constantly raiding into the Jazireh, and on the whole they were more successful than the Shammar."⁸⁸ They complained expressly about the injustice of a situation in which Fahd profited handsomely from his government subsidy but, by preventing raiding, seemed to be denying others the opportunity of enriching themselves. In the fluid, multi-polar Middle East that partition had helped create, no sheikh could afford to ignore such sentiments for long. Throughout the 1920s, groups disgruntled with Hadhdhāl's ascendancy

83 For a breakdown of the composition of this force, see MEC, John Glubb papers, Box 206, File 10, John Glubb, "Report on the Dulaim Desert Force," 17 March 1923.

84 AIR 23/292, Special Service Officer [SSO] Ramadi report, 20 June 1925.

85 AIR 23/292, SSO to Aviation Baghdad, telegram, 19 June 1925, 8 October 1925.

86 AIR 23/292, SSO Ramadi report, 20 June 1925.

87 CO 730/79, CO49541, Intelligence Report no. 21, 15 October 1925.

88 AIR 23/292, SSO Ramadi report, 20 June 1925.

were prepared to seek out alternative sources of influence, wealth, and largesse; in 1923, for example, Dahamsha "dissatisfied with the Government of Iraq favouring . . . Ibn Hadhdhāl" had visited Ibn Sa'ūd in Najd.⁸⁹

All this forced Ibn Hadhdhāl to act in the economic interests of ordinary tribesmen. In July 1925, Fahd sent his son Maḥrūt to Baghdad to request official permission "to protect themselves from Shammar aggression." Maḥrūt claimed the 'Anaza had lost some two thousand camels to these raids in recent months and sought to draw on his father's influence with the British to have at least some of them restored.⁹⁰ Early in August, Fahd received word that the government would attempt to recover the loot from the Shammar and that, if its efforts proved unsuccessful, counter-raids might be permitted "to make good their losses."⁹¹ Meanwhile, Maḥrūt remained in the capital, pressing his complaints and urging the resumption of raiding. On 24 August, his lobbying paid off. Both Maḥrūt Ibn Hadhdhāl and 'Ajīl al-Yāwir of the Shammar were summoned before the High Commissioner, and during the discussion that followed it became

quite clear that both shaikhs wished to be freed from the undertaking which they had given to the 'Iraq Government last winter that they would prevent raiding between their tribes. They preferred to revert to a state of open warfare on the ground that their tribes wished it; and under the present restraint were falling away from them and taking themselves to Syrian territory where such warfare is not interfered with. Both shaikhs declared that, unless their tribes were permitted to carry on their traditional raiding, they would not be able to keep them together under them and the bulk would desert to Syrian territory. They agreed that if this state of warfare were permitted, they would not bother the government with complaints against each other but would recognise that their only redress lay in retaliation and counter raids.⁹²

89 FO 371/13715, John Glubb, "Seduction of Iraq Tribes by Ibn Saud," 19 March 1929. For Ibn Sa'ūd's conscious policy of welcoming such groups, see J. Kostiner, "Britain and the Northern Frontier of the Saudi State, 1922-1925." In *The Great Powers in the Middle East, 1919-1939*, ed. U. Dann (London: Holmes & Meier, 1988): 42.

90 AIR 23/292, H. James to Air Staff Intelligence, 30 July 1925.

91 AIR 23/292, H. James to Air Staff Intelligence, 13 August 1925.

92 CO 730/78, CO42934, Intelligence Report no. 18, 3 September 1925.

The High Commissioner, Sir Henry Dobbs, responded with a set of conditions, and the ministry and the government were yet to make it all legal, but the “Rules for Raiders” had essentially been set.

Ibn Hadhdhāl's intervention was crucial in overturning British reservations about the scheme. Even then, Dobbs acquiesced in the proposal only “very reluctantly.”⁹³ Knowing how things would later work out, we might wonder why he agreed at all. There were, perhaps, hints of romanticism in the decision: the references to “ancient” predatory habits, or the sporting analogies that peppered British raid reports. But the experiment also reveals the limits of imperial authority over Iraq's arid frontiers at this time. That image of British aircraft scattering leaflets over the desert below should serve as a reminder of the very real difficulties all governments faced in controlling vast, illegible environments in the early twentieth century. Many feared that banning raiding would only drive the Bedouin to flee the state's jurisdiction altogether or so undermine the authority of their principal contacts in the desert as to erase all pretence of influence or control. The alternative—developing a permanent administrative infrastructure—seemed even more daunting. Viewed from this perspective, the “Rules for Raiders” scheme becomes a story of Bedouin sheikhs and ordinary tribesmen negotiating from a position of strength and shaping, in turn, the actions of the state.⁹⁴

British officials weighed the pros and cons of a resumption of raiding and concluded, reluctantly, that the threat to Ibn Hadhdhāl's authority was more than they could afford. The true progenitors of the scheme were the 'Amārāt themselves. For them, it was an attempt to reset the clock back to the war, when the British connection had enabled the 'Amārāt to raid the Shammar with official blessing and support. British accounts at the time described these expeditions in terms of “using friendly Arabs to attack [our] enemies.”⁹⁵ Looking back from the distance of a century, it is less clear who was using whom. In November 1919, for example, the British asked their “great asset,” Ibn Hadhdhāl, to attack the Shammar Jarbah, who had been threatening cultivators in the Dulaym division. The outcome was a success but not just for the British:

93 Ibid.

94 For the limits of the Royal Air Force's experiment in “air control,” see J.B. Glubb, “Air and Ground Forces in Punitive Expeditions,” *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute* 71 (1926): 777–784, and D. Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control: The Royal Air Force, 1919–1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990).

95 Bray, *Paladin of Arabia*: 293. Ibn Hadhdhāl certainly recalled with satisfaction and pride the many raids that he and his sons had launched against the Shammar, the Ottomans, and their allies: Fahd Ibn Hadhdhāl report, cited in Bray, *Paladin of Arabia*: 318–321.

when the 'Amārāt returned, they did so one thousand camels and five hundred sheep richer.⁹⁶

In the eleven months of the "Rules for Raiders" scheme, government policy was similarly being moulded by the force of existing Bedouin dynamics. The scheme is proof of the extraordinary lengths to which the agency of ordinary Bedouin could force sheikhs, and even the state, to go. And if the origins of the licensed raiding scheme had deeper roots, so too did the consequences of its collapse. For Britain, it dealt a blow to a broader vision of managing the steppe through patronage. Ibn Hadhdhāl, meanwhile, was put in the difficult position of forbidding the 'Amārāt from raiding (and returning any loot his tribesmen did happen to take) without the means of launching raids in their defence. This was "a heavy burden" that sheikhs across the Arab East were increasingly being made to carry. "It may be workable in the case of a man with the influence of Fahad," one officer reasoned, but for those in a weaker position "the system will not work so easily."⁹⁷ It was soon put to the test.

3 The 'Amārāt, their Sheikh, and the Ikhwān Revolt

The collapse of the licensed raiding scheme was bound to cause friction between the 'Amārāt and their sheikh, but two events worked together in the late 1920s to make matters even worse.

In 1927, Fahd Ibn Hadhdhāl died, and the colonial sources make clear that his son and successor Maḥrūt did not "carry the influence formerly wielded by his father."⁹⁸ Many blamed this on the weakness of Maḥrūt's personality. Because he had grown up since the arrival of the British and "in the hey-day of the Hadhdhāl fortunes," he had "never been through the fire of tribulation." He was, in short,

born in the purple. Accustomed to spend unlimited money and be treated with great respect both by tribesmen and Government officials, he is inclined to be vain, extravagant and affected. . . . He has always enjoyed a large revenue and strong Government backing. . . . In brief, he is somewhat of a spoilt child.⁹⁹

96 IOR: L/P&S/11/171, File 2643, Major L.M. Yetts, "Diary of the Dulaim Division for the Month of November, 1919."

97 AIR 23/298, Moore to Aviation Baghdad, 8 June 1925.

98 AIR 10/1348, *Handbook*.

99 Ibid.

Such verdicts on Maḥrūt's character were common, but as an explanation of his difficulties as sheikh they leave something to be desired. The importance of a stable succession would have been axiomatic, and most sheikhs would have prepared for the day by gradually introducing their successor to share in their public duties.¹⁰⁰ Why, then, was Fahd's death so disruptive?

Gerald de Gaury, then a British intelligence officer attached to Air Headquarters in Iraq, offered a different assessment. "In assessing [Maḥrūt's] character," he wrote in a 1932 *Review of the 'Anizah Tribe*,

it should be remembered that he suffered from an exceptionally strong and well-known father who lived to a great age, which consequently, and particularly on account of the Oriental custom of keeping the son in the background while the father is alive, gave him a difficult start.¹⁰¹

This hints at a more likely explanation of the hurdles Maḥrūt faced. Fahd had, in fact, begun preparing for his succession before the First World War, but not with Maḥrūt in mind. Maḥrūt's mother was a Shammari, to whom Fahd had been married for a few years, and, after their divorce, the young Maḥrūt was raised with her, away from his father and the 'Amārāt.¹⁰² Meanwhile, another son, Miṭ'ab, was being groomed for the succession, leading 'Amārāt raids during the First World War and helping to enforce the blockade. The British considered Miṭ'ab "a capable man" and issued him his own monthly stipend.¹⁰³ But in December 1918 he was badly wounded in a raid on the Shammar. His death the following month was reported by the British as "a severe loss both to ourselves and to the Anizeh."¹⁰⁴ It was only later, when Fahd had lost other sons to sickness as well as battle, that he "recalled Maḥrūt from the Shammar tents to assume his place as his heir."¹⁰⁵ On his arrival, in 1923, John Glubb reported how "many of the sheikhs dislike Maḥrūt, the son of Fahad," branding him "a model of conceit and idiocy."¹⁰⁶

100 I am grateful to Yoav Alon for drawing this to my attention. Mithqal al-Fayiz of Trans-Jordan's Beni Sakhr, for example, ensured his sons were offered an education, and he inducted his son 'Alif into many of his public duties: Alon, "Silent Voices": 111.

101 De Gaury, *Review of 'Anizah*: 54.

102 Ibid.: 53.

103 IOR, L/P&S/10/620, Tyler, "Diary for Hillah Division"; WO 106/922, General Staff (Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force), "Personalities in the Area Occupied by the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force, or Connected Therewith. 1920" (n.d. [1920]).

104 IOR: L/P&S/10/620, Tyler, "Diary for Hillah Division."

105 De Gaury, *Review of 'Anizah*: 54.

106 MEC, John Glubb papers, Box 4, File 9: 13 April 1923.

Fahd's death was not the only thing to increase tensions among the 'Amārāt in 1927. Later that year, Ibn Sa'ūd's relationship with the Ikhwān—the semi-settled tribes of Wahhabi faith that had been so critical to his earlier expansion—dramatically unravelled. With the conquest of the Hijaz complete and seeking accommodation with Britain's presence in the region, Ibn Sa'ūd had attempted to rein in Ikhwān activism by restricting their raiding, grazing, and trading privileges. The result was the revolt, over the next three years, of large sections of the Mutayr, Harb, and Ajman tribes along the frontiers of Saudi authority. A series of brutal raids began that November; perhaps as many as four hundred Iraqi tribesmen were killed before Ibn Sa'ūd re-established control.¹⁰⁷ Most accounts of the Ikhwān Revolt approach it from a political, diplomatic, or military perspective, exploring its impact on the international relations of Britain, Najd, and Iraq or its place in narratives of Saudi state building.¹⁰⁸ But the crisis generated a wealth of correspondence that also sheds light on the histories of the Bedouin groups who were drawn into its orbit.

The Revolt had an immediate impact on the 'Anaza living in the southern and western deserts of Iraq. From Baghdad, Henry Dobbs reported that "unless effective measures were taken to prevent further raids" and "restore the confidence" of the 'Anaza, there was "a serious danger that they would desert Iraq and join the Akhwan."¹⁰⁹ Grazing conditions made matters even worse. Most of the rain had fallen close to the border the previous winter so that, by March 1928, practically all the nomad "Iraq tribes" were

bunched together close along the Najd frontier where grazing is comparatively plentiful, even the Anaizah having deserted their usual haunts and gone far to the south. Thus they offer to the Najd raiders a bait and target of quite unusual proportions.¹¹⁰

This exerted tremendous pressure on the government and on Maḥrūt Ibn Hadhdhāl to organise some form of active defence and to permit counter-raiding. One Bedouin group was reported to have put on Ikhwān dress in the presence of a British officer and to have denounced the government, saying

107 A.B. Toth, "Conflict and a Pastoral Economy: The Costs of Akhwan Attacks on Tribes in Iraq, 1922-1929," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 11 (2002): 201-227.

108 The politics of the conflict are discussed in Kostiner, *Making of Saudi Arabia*. For its military dimensions, see J. Glubb, *War in the Desert: An R.A.F. Frontier Campaign* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1960).

109 FO 371/12992-4, Monteagle to Clayton, Draft Instructions for Mission, March 1928.

110 AIR 23/36, High Commissioner, Baghdad to Colonial Office, telegram, 1 March 1928.

that, if neither the British nor Iraqi governments could help them, they would be forced to join the Ikhwān.¹¹¹

These voices only became louder when, instead of letting tribes counter-raid, the government ordered them back from the frontier, despite the inevitable herd losses that would be caused by abandoning their grazing grounds.¹¹² Once again, it was the Dahamsha who became the most visible symbol of resentment and unrest. From Dīwāniyya, John Glubb, the administrative inspector, reported "serious danger of the Anaizah seceding unless they see vigorous preparations [for defence]." The Dahamsha of Jazza Ibn Mijlad were openly talking of abandoning Maḥrūt Ibn Hadhdhāl for Najd; half the Ṣafir had already gone over to Ibn Sa'ūd.¹¹³ When the High Commissioner met with Maḥrūt Ibn Hadhdhāl in March, it was all he could do to dissuade him from commencing counter-raiding on his own terms.¹¹⁴

Sensing the stakes, the British did establish a temporary police post to protect the Dahamsha grazing grounds. In an inversion of an earlier turn of phrase, it was now their "stabilization," by Britain, that had become important for "the control of the Anaizah."¹¹⁵ Nonetheless, the official response of the British was still temporary and military in its assumptions. The British Residency and the Air Officer Commanding announced the creation of a cordon sanitaire, a line of defence patrolled by aircraft and armoured cars, behind which all tribes were ordered to retreat. Any Bedouin discovered between that line and the frontier would be considered hostile and liable to attack, creating a considerable buffer between the Euphrates and the frontier but cutting off access to grazing. It also explicitly denied a role in defence for the Bedouin themselves.¹¹⁶ Despite the deteriorating situation, the British remained set against the idea: the shadow of the failure of the licensed raiding experiment, the speed with which it had unravelled, and the unpredictability of its consequences for Britain's relationship with Ibn Sa'ūd hung over this decision.

Fayṣal had no such reservations. In fact, his very enthusiasm for a resumption of Bedouin raiding only hardened British opposition to the idea. For the

111 AIR 23/33, High Commissioner, Baghdad to Secretary of State for Colonies, 29 December 1927.

112 AIR 23/36, High Commissioner, Baghdad to Colonial Office, telegram, 1 March 1928.

113 AIR 23/36, Glubb to Cornwallis, 23 February 1928; AIR 23/36, High Commissioner, Baghdad to Colonial Office, telegram, 1 March 1928.

114 AIR 23/37, H. Dobbs (High Commissioner, Baghdad), untitled note, 10 March 1928.

115 FO 371/ 12992-4, Dobbs to Amery, telegram, 25 May 1928, 31 May 1928; FO 371/ 12992-4, Dobbs to Amery, 31 May 1928.

116 AIR 23/34, R. Jope-Slade, "Situation Report—Southern Desert," 27 January 1928.

king, the Ikhwān Revolt against Ibn Sa'ūd's authority presented an opportunity to step up the conflict with his old dynastic rival. It was an open secret in British circles in Baghdad that Fayṣal was encouraging Bedouin groups along the frontier to assist the Ikhwān; by the latter stages of the revolt, many suspected that a full-fledged conspiracy with Najdi Shammar had been hatched.¹¹⁷ Lobbying for the use of tribal forces was also "part of [a] campaign for obtaining more powers" by the king: a way to strengthen his hand in (and circumvent British supervision of) military affairs.¹¹⁸ Fayṣal made it clear that his own contacts among the Shammar, Dahamsha, and Ṣāfir would form the basis of any tribal force. He remained deeply wary of the Hadhdhāl clan, given their long association with British influence in the desert, and expressly excluded them from his preparations. In 1927, he had been responsible for cutting Fahd's subsidy and actively promoting the feud with the Dahamsha in order to further erode his authority.¹¹⁹ Now, Fayṣal dismissed Fahd's son as a man "absorbed in his personal interests" while reaching out to others in the 'Amārāt, especially Maḥrūt's rivals among the Dahamsha, to join his Bedouin force.¹²⁰ While the High Commissioner was pouring cold water on Maḥrūt's request to take up arms, the king invited several Shammar sheikhs and Ibn Mijlad of the Dahamsha to serve as commanders of any future camel corps.¹²¹

In addition to Fayṣal's attempts to undermine Maḥrūt and the discontent among the 'Amārāt at being unable to raid, financial troubles placed further strain on the relationship between the 'Amārāt and their sheikh. Prohibition of *khuwwa* and frustrated access to grazing affected the prospects of all the nomads of the Shāmiyya, but Ibn Hadhdhāl's privileged position in regulating desert trade meant he perhaps had further to fall. Soon after the revolt began, the British contacted Maḥrūt to resurrect the blockade arrangements that had both demonstrated and enhanced his father's economic power during the First World War. It only then became apparent that Maḥrūt's pass system no longer carried the same force. When the administrative inspector spoke with the sheikh about the blockade, he was surprised to see how "Maḥrūt jumped at the idea" as a way "to recover his old pass system": officials in Baghdad had assumed that it had never declined. It seemed that the permits Maḥrūt issued to conduct *musābala* "ha[d] actually been a dead letter in the last few years,

117 AIR 23/56, Young to Passfield, 21 October 1929.

118 FO 371/12995, Gladwyn Jebb (Foreign Office) minute, 24 October 1928.

119 AIR 23/38, K. Buss, untitled minute, 31 March 1928; AIR 23/295, R.M. Doster to Aviation Baghdad, 17 July 1927.

120 FO 371/12995, E 4661/1/91, "Memorandum by King Faisal", Aug 1928.

121 AIR 23/38, Lt Col. J. I Eadie (for Inspector General, Iraqi Army) to Dobbs, 29 March 1928.

because Anaizah caravans without passes from Ibn Hadhdhāl are allowed by Government officials to buy [supplies] in [the] towns."¹²² Further reports revealed that the *iltizām* (tax farm) Maḥrūt held for the taxation of the 'Anaza was equally unpopular and that evasion was widespread.¹²³

The arrangements devised for the new desert blockade reflected this state of affairs. When the new system went into effect in January 1929, the British and Iraqi authorities permitted many more sheikhs to issue passes than they had during the war. Seven Dahamsha sheikhs, four from the Ṣafīr, and eight from the Shammar were all given this responsibility; Maḥrūt's jurisdiction covered only those wishing to supply in the Dulaym *liwa*.¹²⁴ The British even saw this levelling of the pass system as a chance to improve relations with the Dahamsha, "who have always resented the power" the system had given to the Hadhdhāl clan.¹²⁵ It was, moreover, a position the British were disinclined to reinstate. The Hadhdhāl pass system had been an asset in the past, Glubb wrote to Cornwallis, but "I doubt if it is advisable to go back."¹²⁶ It would only be supported until "the new regime of permanent official control of desert affairs has had time to establish itself."¹²⁷

The decline of the pass system during the 1920s contributed to a general erosion of Maḥrūt's economic influence. His monopoly of the *bāḡ*, the per capita tax on 'Anaza camels, was so easily evaded that, in 1928, officials proposed abolishing it and conducting their own count.¹²⁸ Two years later, 'Anaza caravans were again reported to have found a way around the sheikh's taxes, by avoiding the towns and purchasing their supplies directly from farmers instead.¹²⁹ In a letter of 1930, John Glubb recounted an interview with the tearful sheikh, in which Maḥrūt set out the causes and consequences of his reduced position. He was badly indebted to his agent in Karbala, he said, and could no longer afford to dispense the largesse required to maintain his influence with his followers. His subsidy had been slashed by the Ministry of Finance—a move driven by "political hostility, not genuine economy"—while the revenue from his estates

¹²² AIR 23/38, Glubb to Cornwallis, 30 March 1928.

¹²³ AIR 23/44, J.B. Glubb, "Monthly Administration Report, Southern Desert area, for the Month of September 1928," October 1928.

¹²⁴ AIR 23/43, Minister of Interior, draft "Prohibition of Musabilah," October 1928.

¹²⁵ AIR 23/38, Cornwallis to Dobbs, 3 April 1928.

¹²⁶ AIR 23/38, Glubb to Cornwallis, 30 March 1928.

¹²⁷ AIR 23/39, Buss to Air Officer Commanding, Iraq, 16 April 1928.

¹²⁸ AIR 23/44, Glubb, "Monthly Administration Report, Southern Desert area, for the Month of September 1928."

¹²⁹ AIR 23/60, Gerald De Gaury (SSO Baghdad) to Air Staff Intelligence, "Desert Tribal News," 8 September 1930.

did not make up the shortfall (“he is not very clever at business,” Glubb added).¹³⁰ Glubb saw two ways out of the dilemma: to shore up Maḥrūt’s position with an increased subsidy or a loan or to cut him loose and “take over the whole business [of tribal control] with government forces.” Neither was without cost or risk, and neither, in fact, was fully carried out. But the events of the Ikhwān Revolt seem to have marked a turning point in Britain’s approach to administering the desert. Hadhdhāl authority was not what it had once been, and, from now on, the government would be increasingly prepared to deal with the tribes itself.

Did this amount to a loss of Bedouin autonomy? Maḥrūt may well have thought so—in a few short years, he had become increasingly marginalised from the dialogue between the ‘Amārāt and the colonial state—but it is not clear that more ordinary tribesmen saw things in those terms. After all, it was their threats of wholesale defection to Najd, combined with the need to head off Fayṣal’s bids for their allegiance, that had drawn the British deeper into desert affairs. Throughout the second half of the 1920s, there is good evidence of ‘Amārāt tribesmen appealing to government, rather than to the sheikh, to defend their central interests.¹³¹ Even those Dahamsha who had already fled to Najd spoke of their readiness to return, but only if Maḥrūt “ceased to be the channel through which Government orders are delivered” and if the government dealt with them directly.¹³² By 1928, Maḥrūt’s subsidy, which had once been so conspicuous, had become merely one of many being paid to “innumerable leaders” throughout the Shāmiyya.¹³³

From this perspective, the growth of direct administration in the steppe need not be seen as antithetical to all forms of Bedouin autonomy. We tend to look at the processes of partition and colonial rule in terms of governments “encapsulating” nomads, binding their future to that of the nation state. From the perspective of many ordinary Bedouin, however, it was they who had negotiated the government into providing valuable services and resources in the face of the Ikhwān threat. Throughout official discussions of how best to respond to the revolt, there is a sense of government being drawn into the desert as much as stamping its loyalties on the Bedouin. Officials found themselves

130 MEC, John Glubb papers, Box 5, File 4: J.B. Glubb to K. Cornwallis, 11 March 1930.

131 See, e.g., AIR 23/30, H. Hindle James (SSO Diwaniyah) to Aviation Baghdad, 12 May 1927; AIR 23/46, J.B. Glubb, “Monthly Administration Report for the Southern Desert area, for the Month of December, 1928,” 14 January 1929.

132 AIR 10/1348, *Handbook*: 138–9; AIR 23/41, Glubb to Cornwallis, Administrative Inspector report for June 1928.

133 FO 371/12995, E 5232/1/91, Gladwyn Jebb (Foreign Office) minute, 8 November 1928.

taking up obligations established by active sheikhs in the recent past and being judged by the expectations of ordinary tribesmen. In Bedouin eyes, government itself became an alternate means of securing generosity, protection, positions, and access to grazing and markets. As William Lancaster explained more than thirty years ago, these were precisely the things that mattered most to ordinary tribesmen.¹³⁴ The focus on the more elite Bedouin interests of independence and political activism, in contrast, may have led us to stress discontinuity unduly. The sheikh of the 'Amārāt—paramount sheikh of the 'Anaza, no less—may have cared a great deal about asserting his autonomy of government. For others, it may have been other forms of autonomy—a freedom from want, perhaps, or a freedom from fear—that were always foremost in their minds.

Conclusion

The three episodes presented here provide a glimpse into the history of a Bedouin group that has seldom been the focus of enquiry. They also suggest the myriad ways in which the Bedouin, their sheikhs, and multiple branches of the state became entangled in a newly partitioned Middle East. Although these episodes were unique, the experience of partition and colonial rule was something shared by Bedouin across the interwar Middle East, and several wider themes emerge.

The first is that the specific characteristics of colonial rule mattered: we should hesitate to equate it with “state building” or “modernity” writ large. For much of the 1920s, the British presence on Iraq's frontiers was more cautious and its objectives more limited. Even the crisis of 1927-28 only coaxed officials in Baghdad reluctantly into a deeper engagement with the steppe. Until then, attempts to manage its affairs through patronage afforded considerable latitude to accomplished Bedouin leaders. Moreover, it is hard to speak of a single, monolithic “state” with reference to the mandates: in French Syria and British Trans-Jordan, too, authority was more often contested between a number of distinct interests and organisations, be they local, imperial, national, or dynastic. Opportunities persisted for many Bedouin groups, and forms of autonomy could be sustained, because of this pluralism at the heart of the mandatory regime. In Iraq's Southern Desert, this manifested itself recurrently in the competing attempts of both British officialdom and the Hashemite court to enlist Bedouin assistance.

¹³⁴ Lancaster, *Rwala Bedouin Today*: 120.

A second theme concerns the economic foundations of Bedouin power. Colonial sources seldom discussed it in these terms, but the idea runs throughout our three episodes, whether in terms of the influence conferred on a sheikh by his control of blockades or pass systems, or in terms of the real pressures applied by more ordinary tribesmen demanding access to pasture, markets, and other resources. For Bedouin leaders, wealth funded the generosity and hospitality so central to their wider influence and standing: in this, and in Fahd and Maḥrūt, we have a tale of two sheikhs. The wider context of partition is also relevant here, although its impact could cut two ways. New international boundaries could weaken Bedouin economies by frustrating access to grazing and shrinking herds. But for some, at least, partition also provided new opportunities. For much of the period, the ‘Amārāt were able to turn their supposed liminality—their position at the geographic limits of multiple states—to real advantage. Ibn Hadhdhāl’s success in the immediate post-war year lay in realising that partition had resulted in a constellation of weaker governments between which he might act as a valued intermediary. Likewise, this multi-polar Middle East provided an outlet for more ordinary tribesmen too, who demonstrated time and again their readiness to move across borders in search of patronage, protection, and gifts.

Finally, our three episodes reveal nomads acting as political catalysts as much as political actors, actively shaping their environment and not simply adapting to it. This should be a reminder, even for scholars working on the modern period, that it remains difficult to deal in the fixed, oppositional categories of “tribe” and “state,” or even, from the ‘Amārāt’s point of view, to discern “intrinsic” from “extrinsic” dynamics.¹³⁵ As the ‘Amārāt, their sheikhs, and multiple representatives of the state all jostled for influence, the southern and western deserts of Iraq became a vast space of negotiations, creating distinct political formations and arrangements that might not otherwise have existed. Both the ongoing ‘Anaza-Shammar rivalry and established Bedouin concerns about accessing markets, for example, permeated the workings of Britain’s wartime blockade. A few years later, Bedouin pressures to restore the economy of raiding combined with renewed intertribal tensions to push the government into an unparalleled experiment in licensing raids. The Ikhwān Revolt certainly weakened the hand of some sheikhs and saw the government take on some of their roles, but officials did so, at least in part, to meet the expectations

135 For the range of thinking about this problem, compare *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*, ed. P.S. Khoury and J. Kostiner (London: I.B. Tauris, 1991), and Crone, “Tribes and States.”

of less prominent Bedouin, whose entreaties drew new authorities into the Syrian Desert to sustain established functions.

Beyond the back-and-forth of the internal/external debate, the 'Amārāt's experiences ultimately suggest a notion of co-production to be more appropriate. During the First World War, as British intelligence officers struggled to sift the rumours and reports emanating from the Syrian Desert, they crudely classified all Bedouin raids as "pro-Turk" or "anti-Turk." But the more astute among them accepted that, "while [these] operations will doubtless react upon ourselves and our enemies, they are primarily directed against one or more of the other Arab leaders."¹³⁶ Bedouin politics, in short, was charged by the war and the war by Bedouin politics, neither being subsumed by the other. In the years that followed, governments may have come to assume greater responsibility for the desert, but their actions still owed much to previous patterns of activity and obligation.

Thinking about these problems within a framework of the mandates can help us to compare and connect disaggregated national histories,¹³⁷ but it is also an invitation to examine more critically the specific political configurations that mandatory rule entailed. As the case of the 'Amārāt makes clear, the expansion of government power and the erosion of Bedouin autonomy was by no means a linear process. It may be some time before we have a more complete history of the Syrian Desert from below, if the sources will ever permit it. But for a topic as vulnerable to false dichotomies such as the relations between "nomads and settlers" and "tribes and states," this might be a good place to start.

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- FO Foreign Office records, National Archives, London
- IOR India Office Records, British Library, London
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- NU Newcastle University Special Collections, Newcastle
- WO War Office records, National Archives, London

¹³⁶ Hogarth, "The Desert": 118.

¹³⁷ R. Khalidi, "Concluding Remarks." In *The British and French Mandates in Comparative Perspective*, ed. N. Méouchy and P. Sluglett: 695-704.

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