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### 'Status of the Islands of Tamb, Little Tamb, Abu Musa, and Sirri'

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#### About this record

Document outlining the status of the Islands of Tamb, Little Tamb, Abu Musa, and Sirri. It includes the following: an introduction to the status of the islands; a history of the islands prior to 1887; the occupation of Sirri by Persia, 1887; the temporary Persian occupation of Abu Musa and Tamb, 1904; the status of Sirri in 1909; the erection of a lighthouse on Tamb Island, and communications to the Persian Government and the Sheikh of Shargah [Shaikh of Sharjah], 1912-13; statements made by His Majesty's Government to the German Government as to the ownership of Abu Musa, 1907-14; reassertion of the Persian claim to Tamb and Abu Musa, 1923; Persian customs interference at Abu Musa, 1925-26; reassertion of the Persian claim to Tamb, 1928; and a final summary.

Written by John Gilbert Laithwaite of the India Office.

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*Book copy*

INDIA OFFICE B. 397.  
P. 4512/28.

**Status of the Islands of Tamb, Little Tamb, Abu Musa,  
and Sirri.**

**I.—Introductory.**

1. Tamb, Abu Musa, and Sirri are three small islands lying well out in the Persian Gulf between the Trucial Arab coast and the Persian island of Kishm. **Little Tamb**, an uninhabited and waterless island, 1 mile long by  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile wide, 8 miles to the west of Tamb, was agreed by the Government of India, the India Office and the Foreign Office in 1908, to depend from that island.\* **Tamb** itself is an island 17 miles south of the south-west point of Kishm Island and 46 miles north-west of the nearest point on the coast of Trucial Oman, roughly circular in shape, and about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles in diameter. A lighthouse was erected on it by His Majesty's Government in 1913 (see paras. 25 to 28 below). It is sparsely inhabited and almost waterless. It appears probable that deposits of red oxide are to be found both in it and in **Little Tamb**. **Abu Musa** is a larger and more thickly populated island, a few miles nearer to Shargah in Trucial Oman than to Lingah in Persia, with good supplies of water, and valuable deposits of red oxide which have been under exploitation for some years, and royalty in respect of which is paid to the ruling family of Shargah. **Sirri**, 40 miles south by west of Bustaneh, the nearest point on the Persian coast, is more prosperous and fertile than **Tamb**, and, like it, contains deposits of red oxide, though these are apparently unimportant.†

\* I.O. to F.O., Dec. 2 1908, P. 2111/08, 3369/08; F.O. to Messrs. Strick, Jan. 13 1909, P. 2795/08.

Lor. ii, 1908.

Lor. ii, 1275.

Lor. ii, 1830.

† Pol. Res. to G. of I., Jan. 23 1909, P. 360/09.

2. The history and status of these islands is identical. While, however, the Trucial Sheikh of Shargah on the Arab coast still controls **Tamb** and **Abu Musa**, on which he flies his flag, His Majesty's Government, and the Sheikh under protest, have since 1887 tacitly acquiesced in Persian occupation of **Sirri**. The Persian flag was stated to have been hoisted on **Little Tamb** in 1904‡ at the time of the Persian aggression on **Tamb** and **Abu Musa**. It was presumably removed at the same time as it was removed from those islands; but the Political Resident reported in November 1908 that the Shargah flag had not been flown on **Little Tamb** by the Sheikh.§ It is not known whether steps have since been taken to do this.

‡ Pol. Res. to G. of I., April 15 1904.

§ Tel. from Viceroy to S. of S. for I., Nov. 24 1908, P. 2111/08.

3. The islands are claimed by the Trucial Sheikhs of Shargah as representative of the Jowasimi Arab chiefs, one section of whom in the 18th century established themselves by force or alliance at Lingah and elsewhere in South Persia. The Persian claim to the islands has in the past been based on the fact that the Jowasimi Arab Sheikhs of Lingah, under whose administrative control they were for many years prior to 1887, had for long been Persian subjects governing Lingah as Persian officials, and it was suggested that it was in this capacity that they had administered the islands, which had become Persian territory. The latest Persian claim is based on the fact that the islands, together with **Farur**, are shown as Persian in a War Office map of 1887 of which copies were presented to the Shah by the Minister at Teheran, under the orders of Lord Salisbury, in July 1888 (cp. paras. 34 and 36 below).

Tel. tel. 254 to F.O., Aug. 20 1928, P. 4509/28.

4. The recent reassertion of the Persian claim to the island of **Tamb** renders necessary a more detailed examination of the history of that island, and of the islands of **Abu Musa** and **Sirri**, the status of which is identical, than would otherwise have been required. Persian ownership of **Farur** does not appear to have been disputed in the past; the island is in any event in a different category from **Abu Musa**, **Tamb** and **Sirri**, and no reference is made to it in the present Memorandum.

**II.—History of the Islands prior to 1887.**

5. It has proved impossible to trace any reference to the history of the islands in the 17th and 18th centuries. From 1720 the Arabs of Ras-al-

Khaima on the Trucial Coast (hereafter referred to as the Jowasimi) had been active on the Persian littoral of the Gulf, on which before 1727 they seized Basidu. In 1737 they were attacked in their own territory by Persia and appear to have made submission,<sup>6</sup> but it does not seem that Persia retained any hold on Ras-al-Khaima.

\* Lor. i, 631-2.

6. About 1750 a portion of the Jowasimi tribe crossed the Gulf to aid the Persian Governor of Bander Abbas and Ormuz against the then Shah, when they took possession of Lingah, opposite the island of Kishm, and other places on the Persian Coast. Lingah they continued to hold until the deposition by Persia of the last Arab Sheikh of Lingah in 1887. But for a number of years before that date, while Lingah up to about 1882 remained a tribally administered Arab principality, the ruling Sheikhs had gradually come under the power of the Persian Government, having finally acknowledged themselves Persian subjects, paying to the Persian Governor-General of Fars such tribute as he could exact from them, and governing Lingah as Persian officials.

Lor. i, 2063-4.

7. It is not clear whether any effective dominion had been exercised by Persia in the islands of Tamb, Abu Musa and Sirri prior to 1750. It seems entirely clear that no effective dominion was exercised in any of them by her between that date and the seizure of Sirri in 1887. In the intervening period, if not from a much earlier date, the islands were apparently part of the hereditary estates of the Jowasimi Arab Sheikhs, the Sheikhs on the Arab shore having an equal interest with those on the Persian littoral. Their management, administration, and jurisdiction had, however, for many years prior to 1887 by common consent been vested in the chief Jowasimi Sheikh of the Persian coast, viz. the Sheikh of Lingah, but in his capacity of Jowasimi Sheikh and not of Persian official<sup>†</sup>—a state of things which would appear to have arisen from the fact that Tamb was for a period used by Lingah Jowasimi more than by other Jowasimi.<sup>¶</sup> No recognition of Persian suzerainty in respect of any of the islands had been made by the Jowasimi Arabs of Oman.

† Pol. Res. to Minister, Teheran, Aug. 19 1888.  
¶ Tel. from Pol. Res. to S. of S. for I., T. 234, Aug. 22 1928. P. 4558.

8. Up to about 1873, owing to the close connection existing between Tamb and Lingah, the Residency authorities at Bushire took the view that Tamb was Persian, and in the period ending with 1879 several enquiries regarding it are stated to exist in the Residency records. In 1882, however, in reply to an enquiry, the Residency Agent stationed at Shargah, on the Trucial Coast, furnished the Resident with translations of letters to the Sheikh of Shargah which established the rights of the Trucial Chiefs. Copies of these letters were produced in another connection in 1900 by the Residency Agent, who stated that he had himself seen the originals. Endeavours are now being made to see if the originals can be produced.<sup>||</sup>

|| Tel. from Pol. Res. to S. of S. for I., T. 234, Aug. 22 1928.

9. The Persian claim was first asserted in 1887, and has been repeated in 1904, 1923, 1926 and 1928. The history of these incidents is as follows.

‡ G. of I. Proceedings, Sept. 1888.

### III.—Occupation of Sirri by Persia, 1887.‡

10. In the year 1887 an armed Persian party, with two small cannon, was sent to erect a flagstaff and hoist the Persian flag on Sirri. The Political Resident, the Minister at Teheran, having enquired<sup>§</sup> whether the islands were under British protection, and whether any action at Teheran was necessary, replied that Sirri and Tamb were beyond the zone of Persian interference, and that the islands belonged to Arab Chiefs under British protection in common with Arabs of the Persian littoral. The Resident separately reported to the Government of India that the islands formed part of the hereditary estates of the Jowasimi Arab Sheikhs; that for many years, however, their management, administration and jurisdiction had by common consent been vested in the chief Jowasimi Sheikh on the Persian coast, viz., the Sheikh of Lingah for the time being; that the Jowasimi Sheikhs domiciled on the Persian coast had acquired the status of subjects of Persia, and those who governed Lingah had been, in fact, Persian officials *qua* Lingah; that the Persian claim was doubtless based on these grounds; and that, were it not for the fact that the Arab Sheikhs of the Oman coast jointly owned the islands, the Persian position could not be disputed. The

§ Tel. to Res., Sept. 26 1887.

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Resident supported his statement with the translation of a letter written in 1877 by the Sheikh Ali-bin-Khalifah of Lingah to the Chief of Ras-al-Khaima, in which the former "admits that Tamb is a dependency of the Kowasim of Oman, and that the Persians have no property there nor any right to interfere, save with the consent of the Chief of Ras-al-Khaima." In conclusion, he expressed the opinion that the Persian Government had no good title to the islands in question.||

11. The Sheikh of Shargah protested to the Resident on 16th October 1887 against the Persian action at Sirri, and asked that similar action at Tamb might be prevented. The Government of India felt, however, some difficulty as to the action to be taken, in view of the fact that Persian Jowasimis had joint rights on Sirri and Tamb, and that one Arab Sheikh only had appealed, and it was agreed, in consultation with the Resident, that, no overt action having been taken by Persia in the case of Tamb, representations at Teheran should be confined to the question of Sirri.\*

12. On representations being made, the Persian Government stated† that for nine years Sirri and Tamb had paid taxes to the Persian Government, and that, documents in support of the Persian claim being at Bushire, the Governor had been instructed to explain matters to the Resident. The Governor, however, informed the Resident that "he had no documents relating to the Persian claim, and that he had wired to the Amin-es-Sultan excusing himself from discussing the question with the Resident."‡ Enquiry was independently made of the Chief of Shargah as to the Amin-es-Sultan's statement. The Chief's reply explained the connection of the Governors of Lingah with the island of Sirri, and added that Tamb was uninhabited, and that no taxes had been paid to Persia. He further enclosed three letters from Chiefs of Lingah, admitting the Chief of Shargah's ownership of Tamb.§

13. The Persian Government had meanwhile produced five official letters from a former Sheikh of Lingah (Yusuf-bin-Mahomad) in support of the Persian claim to the two islands.|| The Resident,¶ after examination, replied "that he considered that the documents did not bear out the Persian claim, and that weight should not be attached to the statements of the Sheikh in question, who was a dependant and servant of the Jowasimi Sheikh, Ali-bin-Khalifah [*cp.* para. 10 above], whom he murdered in order himself to become Chief of Lingah," and, the Persian Minister appearing to rely on a statement of Sheikh Yusuf that he had "gone to the island of Sirri to inspect and recover Government (Persian) dues," the Resident wrote that he considered that "this statement could not be accepted as establishing or even supporting the Persian claim to possession, nor as sufficient to deprive the Jowasimi Arab family of their ancient and previously recognised rights on that island." (It may be added that on 29th March 1884 Sheikh Yusuf wrote to the Chief of Ras-al-Khaima fully admitting the possession of Tamb by the Jowasimis.)§§ The Resident further pointed out that the Jowasimi Sheikhs of Lingah had usually also been Deputy-Governors of Lingah on behalf of Persia; they exercised authority on Sirri island, but it was *qua* Jowasimi Sheikh and not *qua* Persian Governor.

14. A reply on the lines of the Resident's report was sent to the Amin-es-Sultan by Her Majesty's Minister on 2nd March 1888. The Persian Government, on enquiry being made\*\* as to the grounds on which they had annexed Sirri, replied†† that it was in their possession, being a dependency of Lingah, to which the Legation replied that jurisdiction over Sirri had been exercised by the Governors of Lingah solely in their capacity of Jowasimi Sheikhs, that the traditional rights over Sirri of the Jowasimi Sheikhs had never been disputed and were generally recognised, that the hoisting of the Persian flag altered the existing status, and that it was on this ground that Her Majesty's Government desired that reasons should be shown for this alteration. The note, after adding that while "possession, if of long standing, and undisputed, undoubtedly carried considerable weight . . . the argument would scarcely govern in the present instance," concluded by asking the Persian Government to communicate "the proofs they possess of the former dependence of Sirri island on Persian authority."

|| Pol. Res. to G. of I., Sept. 27 1887.

\* Tel. from Pol. Res. to G. of I., Nov. 15 1887.

† Tel. from C. d'A., Teheran, to Pol. Res., Dec. 10 1887.

‡ Tel. from Pol. Res. to C. d'A., Teheran, Dec. 12 1887.

§ Pol. Res. to C. d'A., Teheran, Feb. 12 1888.

|| C. d'A., Teheran, to Res., Jan. 2 1888.

¶ Res. to C. d'A., Jan. 23 1888.

§§ Pol. Res.'s Memo. of May 1895, P. 985/04.

\*\* Note of Mar. 6 1888.

†† Note of Mar. 10 1888.

15. On the 23th April 1888 the Resident communicated to the Minister at Teheran a copy of the translation of a report drawn up locally for the Amin-es-Sultan, which he had obtained privately, relative to the Persian claims. It appears that "there was nothing fresh in this report beyond a new claim put forward to the island of Abu Musa," which, again to quote the Resident, "has no justification whatever." In the summer of the same year (26th July) the Minister telegraphed to Bushire that a reply had now been received from the Persian Government that "as the Jowasimi Sheikhs were Persian Governors of Lingah, they considered no further proof of the justice of their claim necessary." To this the Resident replied that the Persian reply begged the question, and that the Arab contention as regards Sirri was that the Jowasimi Sheikhs of Lingah represented the family, and derived no right from their position towards the Persian Government.

16. In order to facilitate the disposal of other negotiations, His Majesty's Government decided in August 1888 tacitly to acquiesce in the Persian occupation of Sirri. Save, however, by such acquiescence, to which reference was made in official correspondence with Persia in 1904 (see para. 21 below), they have never in any way admitted or withdrawn their original objections to the claim of the Shah's Government to the ownership of the island, while the Political Resident stated in 1904 that it was equally clear from the Residency records that the Jowasimi Arab Sheikhs of the Pirate Coast had never voluntarily dropped their claim, which they had formally reiterated in 1895, to proprietary rights over Sirri, any more than over Abu Musa and Tamb.

#### IV.—Temporary Persian Occupation of Abu Musa and Tamb, 1904.

17. In January 1903 the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf reported that, trade having to a large extent been diverted from Lingah as the result of the short-sighted policy of the Belgian Customs officials, Lingah merchants were endeavouring to arrange with the Bombay and Persian Navigation Company to make the island of Abu Musa a port of call. He added that, in view of the Sirri incident of 1887, he was apprehensive lest the result might be the advancing of a territorial claim to this island by Persia. The Resident stated that the island undoubtedly belonged to the Jowasimi Sheikh of Shargah, that the Jowasimis did not, however, fly a flag on the island, and that it might be well to advise the Sheikh of Shargah to do so as a sign of ownership. This course was approved and action taken accordingly.

18. The question having arisen of advising the Sheikh of Ras-al-Khaima (a sheikhdom at that time and now dependent from the Sheikh of Shargah) to adopt a similar course in regard to the island of Tamb, which belonged to the Ras-al-Khaima section of the Jowasimis, the Resident reported that, so far as he was aware, sovereignty over that island had never been asserted by Persia, that the Sheikh of Shargah in his existing capacity as Ruler of Ras-al-Khaima claimed it as an appanage of the Jowasimis of the Arab coast, and that he was in possession of documentary evidence in the shape of letters from two former Arab Chiefs of Lingah admitting the claim of the Jowasimis of the Arab coast to those islands, as against the claim of the Jowasimis of Lingah. It was decided that the Chief should be advised to hoist his flag on Tamb as on Abu Musa, and this was done.

19. In April 1904 the Viceroy telegraphed that the Belgian Customs officials had placed guards on Abu Musa and Tamb, forcibly removed the Arab flags, erected new flagstaffs and hoisted the Persian flag on both islands. This action led to immediate protest by the Sheikh of Shargah, who appealed to His Majesty's Government, under his treaty relations with them, to take the necessary steps to prevent such interference in his territory.

20. The Government of India, who took a serious view of the incident, proposed<sup>2</sup> to despatch a gunboat to the islands, with a representative of the Sheikh of Shargah on board, to haul down the Persian flag, reinstate the Jowasimi flag and remove the guards to Persian territory. It was decided,† however, to give the Persian Government the opportunity to withdraw from the position they had taken up, and on the 24th May the Minister reported

\* P. 737/04.

† F.O. to I.O.,  
April 23 1904; I.O.  
to F.O., May 4 1904,  
P. 2559/04

that they had telegraphed orders to Bushire to remove the flags and guards from Abu Musa and Tamb, while reserving their right to discuss with His Majesty's Government the respective claims to the island. Their Note,† however, stated that Persia considered "these two islands as its property," and proposed that "neither party" should hoist flags in them pending settlement of the question.

† June 14 1904,  
P. 2904/04.

21. The Note of reply sent to the Persian Government on 15th June 1904, while expressing willingness to transmit to the Government of India any proofs that the claims of Persia to the ownership of these islands outweighed those of the Sheikh of Shargah, stated that the suggestion that the Sheikh of Shargah should not be permitted to replace his flag, hauled down by the Persian Customs officials, could not be accepted, and went on: "I would remind you, in this connection, that we have not insisted on the Persian Government removing their flag from the island of Sirri till the controversy between the two Governments as to the ownership of the island, which originated many years ago, has been reciprocally settled. The position would have been different if the Sheikh of Shargah had removed an existing flag from Tamb and Abu Musa; what he did was to hoist his own flag upon the islands, which were not yet formally occupied by any other Government, and he has the right to fly it as the first occupant until his lawful possession of these islands is disproved."

22. The Persian flags were removed, and the Jowasimi flag of the Chief of Shargah re-hoisted in June 1904. No serious attempt was made by Persia to produce proof of Persian ownership,\* and the discussion lapsed, though in 1905 a complaint by Persia of the erection of new buildings at Tamb by the Sheikh of Shargah was investigated and found to be baseless.†

\* Lor. i, 746, 2138.

23. The opportunity was taken to make it clear to Persia that the status of Sirri was still *sub judice*, a view in which she acquiesced, and the Persian Government were warned in 1905 that "the revival of their claim to Tamb meant the revival of ours to Sirri."

† Teh. tel. to Pol. Res., May 20 1905, P. 1116/05; Pol. Res. to Teh., June 1 1905.

Lor. i, 2138.

#### V.—Status of Sirri, 1909.

24. The question of granting a concession to mine red oxide on Sirri having arisen in 1903-9, His Majesty's Government, after consultation with the Government of India, informed‡ a British firm that, while the status of the island was in dispute, they had never acquiesced in the Persian claim to dispose of concessions on it regardless of Great Britain; and the Minister at Teheran presented a protest to the Persian Government in April 1909 against their action in granting a concession, in which he reminded them of the *caveat* entered by His Majesty's Government and asked them to arrange for the discontinuance of operations on the island by their concessionaire.§

‡ S. of S. for I. to Viceroy, May 13 1908, P. 3168; P.O. to Teh., Sept. 19 1908, P. 3853/08; P.O. to Messrs. Ellinger, Jan. 29 1909, P. 2924/08.

§ Teh. tel. 306 to F.O., April 23 1909, P. 3301/09.

#### VI.—1912-3: Erection of a Lighthouse on Tamb Island. Communications to Persian Government and to Sheikh of Shargah.

25. Early in 1912 it was decided to erect and maintain a lighthouse on Tamb Island.|| With the approval of His Majesty's Government no communication on the subject was made to Persia,¶ but the Political Resident, Sir Percy Cox, was authorised\*\* to obtain the consent of the Sheikh of Shargah, which was granted by the Sheikh subject to an assurance that his rights of sovereignty were not affected.†† Sir Percy Cox, in writing to the Sheikh, added that while it was desirable that the Shargah flag should always be *en evidence* on Tamb, "now at all events this island will be preserved for you by the mere presence of the lighthouse."

|| P. 642/12.

¶ Lord Crewe to G. of I., Secret Desp. 9, Mar. 22 1912, P. 972; Tel. from Viceroy, May 21 1912, P. 1944.

\*\* Tel. from S. of S. for I. to Viceroy, June 13 1912, P. 2229/12.

†† Letters from Pol. Res. to Sheikh, Sept. 28 1912, Oct. 22 1912, P. 4954.

26. In October 1912, in reply to an enquiry by the Governor of the Gulf Ports, Sir Percy Cox stated‡‡ that, with the concurrence of the Sheikh of Shargah, a light was about to be erected there. His Excellency replied that "there was no doubt that the island properly belonged to Persia and that they had to thank the blatant action of the Customs in 1904 for spoiling their case in regard thereto. I rejoined that we considered . . . that it

‡‡ Letter from Pol. Res. to G. of I., Oct. 13 1912, P. 4778/12.

was beyond doubt that the Sheikh of the Jowasimi of Oman owned the island, and, as in dealing with the question we had to reckon with patent facts, it seemed waste of time for us to discuss the question now."

27. In February 1913 the Persian Foreign Office raised the question with the Minister at Teheran, urging that the ownership of the island was contested by Persia. Sir Percy Cox, on reference being made to him, intimated<sup>§§</sup> that he had recently made it clear to the Governor of the Gulf Ports that the ownership of Tamb was not open to question, and added that "since the correspondence of 1905 the subjects of the Sheikh of Shargah and his flag have remained established on the island"; that if the question was now reopened His Majesty's Government would no doubt revive the question of Sirri; but that a flat refusal to discuss it would probably be best.

§§ Tel. from Pol. Res. to Min., Feb. 23 1913, P. 1819/13.

28. The matter does not appear to have been taken further by Persia. The light was exhibited at Tamb on 15th July 1913, and His Majesty's Government agreed that notification of its erection should be made to foreign consular representatives in the usual manner by the Government of India.<sup>|||</sup>

||| F.O. to I.O., July 3 1913, P. 2647/13.

VII.—Statements made by His Majesty's Government to German Government as to ownership of Abu Musa, 1907-14.

29. It may be remarked at this stage that in the lengthy negotiations which took place with the German Government between 1907 and 1914 over the claim of Messrs. Wönckhaus in respect of the cancellation of their red oxide concession in Abu Musa by the Sheikh of Shargah, no reference was made to the Persian Government, who were, indeed, privately reminded by the Chargé d'Affaires in 1908 of the incident of 1904, and warned against any attempt to renew the Persian claim.\* His Majesty's Government consistently referred, in their communications to the German Government, to the "sovereignty" exercised in Abu Musa by the Sheikh, and a quantity of local evidence was produced to show that the ownership of Abu Musa vested in the ruling Sheikh of the Jowasimi of Oman residing at Shargah.† It would clearly have been impossible for His Majesty's Government to have taken the very definite line actually taken by them *vis-à-vis* Germany had the status of the island been, in their view, a matter at all open to dispute.

\* Tel. tel. 6 to F.O. Jan. 6 1908.

† Cf. e.g. Memo. to German Govt. under Sir E. Grey's letter to Count Metternich, Dec. 6 1911, P. 4859/11.

VIII.—Reassertion of Persian Claim to Tamb and Abu Musa, 1923.

30. In 1923 the Minister at Teheran reported that he had learned confidentially that the Persian concessionaire of the Hormuz red oxide concession, Moin-ut-Tujjar, a person of great wealth and considerable political influence, was urging the Persian Government to raise the Persian claim to Abu Musa, couple it with that to Bahrein, and refer both to the League of Nations †

\* Tel. tel. 133 to F.O., April 27 1923, P. 1625/23.

Sir P. Loraine was instructed by the Foreign Office to draw the attention of the Prime Minister to the incident of 1904, when His Majesty's Government had been prepared to take naval action to remove the Persian flag from Tamb and Abu Musa, and hint that revival of the Persian claim might lead His Majesty's Government to take the measures then contemplated.‡

‡ F.O. tel. 88, May 1 1923, P. 1647/23.

31. The Minister made the required communication to the Prime Minister, making, however, no reference to Tamb in his Aide Memoire. His Highness made no reply on the matter of Abu Musa.¶ Ten days later a Note asserting Persian rights over both Tamb and Abu Musa, "of which notification was made to His Majesty's Legation in the year 1903-4," having been addressed to the Minister by the Persian Foreign Office, Sir P. Loraine adopted an uncompromising attitude, and returned the Note to the Prime Minister with a strongly worded covering letter.¶ It seemed probable that the despatch of the Note was due to ignorance on the part of the Acting Foreign Minister of the communication which had been made to the Prime Minister, and, the position of His Majesty's Government having been made clear, the incident went no further.

¶ Tel. Desp. 229, May 18 1925, P. 2644.

¶ Tel. Desp. 236, May 23 1925, P. 2653.

IX.—Persian Customs Interference at Abu Musa, 1925-6.

32. In the autumn of 1925 the Persian customs authorities sent a launch to Abu Musa which inspected the red oxide and removed one bag. On a protest being made, they replied that Abu Musa belonged to Persia. Energetic action was taken at Teheran by His Majesty's Minister, who reminded the Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs of the 1923 correspondence, and subsequently warned him privately that persistence in the Persian claim would make it necessary "to request the Government of India to despatch a ship of war to Abu Musa to uphold the rights of the Sheikh of Shargah."\*\* The Persian Government withdrew, and the customs authorities were instructed "not to take any steps in Abu Musa or Tamb pending reply from Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding status of these islands."

\*\* Teh. Desp. 258  
to F.O., May 31  
1926, P. 2243/26.

X.—Reassertion of Persian Claim to Tamb, 1928.

33. In July 1928 a Persian customs launch, which had been operating from Tamb for about two months, seized off the south of the island a Debai dhow carrying passengers to Khassab, on the Arab coast, with a small cargo of sugar and dates, and brought it to Lingah, where the cargo was confiscated as smuggled and the passengers imprisoned. The incident created a very serious situation on the Trucial Coast, the Trucial Chiefs being restrained only with difficulty from immediate reprisals; and its possible reactions proved a matter of grave concern to the Government of India.

34. Strong diplomatic representations by His Majesty's Government at Teheran secured the release of the dhow and its passengers and crew. The cargo remains under seizure, and a claim for compensation has been met by a reiteration of the Persian claim to ownership of Tamb, based, according to the Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs, on a British Note dated 27th July 1888, signed by His Majesty's Minister under instructions from the Marquess of Salisbury, then Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, communicating a map "recently issued by the Intelligence Department of the War Office" for presentation to the Shah on behalf of Her Majesty's Government. The Chargé d'Affaires has indicated that the argument is unsubstantial, while the fact cannot clearly in itself affect the validity of the Arab claim; but it is clear that in the forthcoming negotiations with Persia, not only the immediate Tamb incident, on which the Government of India have expressed themselves very strongly, but the position of Abu Musa, to which also a claim has now been preferred by Persia, (and of Sirri) will come up for disposal.

Teh. tel. 255 to  
F.O., Aug. 20 1928,  
P. 4509.

Teh. tel. 259, Aug. 23  
1928, P. 4601.

XI.—Summary.

35. The effective occupation of Sirri by Persia since 1887, and the tacit acquiescence in that occupation of His Majesty's Government, make it difficult, if not impossible, at this stage to dispute the Persian claim, though His Majesty's Government are not stopped by any formal admission on their part from using the Shargah claim to the island for bargaining purposes.

36. The position is different as regards Tamb and Abu Musa. At no stage has the Persian claim been formally admitted, and at no stage has it been allowed to pass unquestioned. The argument in support of the latest Persian claim as set out in para. 34 above could be strengthened, so far as it has any value, by reference to the fact that the islands are also shown in Persian colours on Lord Curzon's (unofficial) Map of Persia of 1892, and on the Survey of India Map of 1897.\* While, however, the error in question is extremely regrettable from the standpoint of His Majesty's Government, it cannot be taken as a formal declaration by His Majesty's Government of their view of the status of the islands, nor, it is suggested, can it be regarded as of substantial importance in view of the consistent repudiation, before and after the dates mentioned, of the Persian claim.

\* Teh. tel. to  
Viceroy, April 20  
1904, P. 2559/04.



37. As regards the merits of that claim, the historical summary above shows that the history of the islands prior to 1750 is obscure; that since that date such authority and such effective occupation as there has been has had its source in the Jowasimi Arabs, who between 1750 and 1820 exercised in the Gulf a maritime control uncontested by Persia. There is nothing to show that those Arabs, having obtained a footing on the Persian coast, thence derived authority over outlying islands. Probability suggests rather that they carried with them to their new settlement a position in the islands which they already possessed. The fact that a section of these Arab intruders later acquired the status of Persian subjects, and held their authority on the Persian coast in subordination to the Persian Government as local Chiefs or Governors, cannot affect any original rights the Jowasimi tribes on the Arab and the Jowasimi tribes on the Persian littoral may have had in common; an intimate connection appears to have been maintained between the two sections of the tribe, and the islands remained their common property and did not become Persian territory; nor, the islands being held by a Sheikh only on behalf of the tribes, had an individual power to alienate any sovereign territorial rights which he might enjoy *qua* ruler of these tribes.† Finally, *de facto* possession resting with the Jowasimi Arabs of the Trucial Coast, it would appear to be for Persia, in the absence of evidence at any stage of effective Persian occupation or of acknowledgment by the Trucial Arabs of Persian overlordship in the islands, to prove the case for alteration of the *status quo*.

Pol. Res. to Minister,  
Teheran, Dec. 13  
1898.

† Viceroy to S. of S.  
for I., Feb. 16 1908,  
P. 864/08

38. As between His Majesty's Government and the Trucial Chiefs concerned, the latter, under their treaty engagements, are entitled to the protection of His Majesty's Government and are not themselves allowed to communicate or negotiate direct with any foreign Power. Apart from the fact that their claim to the islands has consistently been upheld by His Majesty's Government, it was on the initiative of His Majesty's Government that the Jowasimi Sheikh of Shargah and Ras-al-Khaima hoisted his flag on Tamb and Abu Musa in 1903 (see paras. 17 and 18 above).

39. The satisfactory disposal of the matter is important in view of its immediate reactions on the Trucial Coast, and the wider reactions on Mohammedan feeling in India of disturbance in that region. But its importance from its possible reactions on the relations of the Trucial Chiefs with Ibn Saud is hardly less great.

INDIA OFFICE,  
24th August 1928.

J. G. L.