https://doi.org/10.24035/ijit.29.2026.349			
Received:	1 November 2026	Accepted:	15 February 2026
Revised:	16 January 2026	Published:	15 June 2026
Volume:	29 (June)	Pages:	18-28

To cite:
Asmahan Mostafa Tawfik Khalil, Wael Mohamed Mahmoud Alrefae & Hibah Mohammed Hamad Alsubaie. 2026. Qatar in the Ottoman and British strategies in the Arabian Gulf (1305–1331 AH/1888–1913 CE): A historical study in the light of Ottoman Documents. *International Journal of Islamic Thought*. Vol. 29 (June): 18-28.

Qatar in the Ottoman and British Strategies in the Arabian Gulf (1305–1331 AH/1888–1913 CE): A Historical Study in the Light of Ottoman Documents

ASMAHAN MOSTAFA TAWFIK KHALIL*[1], WAEL MOHAMED MAHMOUD ALREFAE[2] & HIBAH MOHAMMED HAMAD ALSUBAIE[3]

ABSTRACT

This study examines the features of Ottoman and British strategies in the Arabian Gulf during the period (1305–1331 AH/1888–1913 CE), through their direct rivalry over the Qatar Peninsula. The Ottoman state—acting as the Islamic Caliphate—viewed Qatar as part of Muslim lands in al-Ahsa and sought to consolidate its sovereignty through administrative tools (appointment of qaimmaqam and the registration of villages in the salnames), legal measures (memoranda and diplomatic protests), and military action (dispatching ships and troops to protect the coasts). By contrast, Britain embodied the face of Western colonialism, linking its influence in Qatar to securing navigation to India and working to undermine Ottoman sovereignty through Bahrain and Abu Dhabi, using settlement projects in al-Zubarah and al-`Udayd as pretexts for intervention and the consolidation of dominance. The importance of this study lies in showing how Qatar became an arena of confrontation between the Islamic Caliphate, representing the unity of Muslims, and European colonialism, which exploited the Gulf's position and resources. The Ottoman documents further demonstrate that the 1913 Convention was not merely a political settlement but a decisive turning point that, for the first time, recognized Qatar as a distinct entity under the rule of the Al-Thani family—marking the beginning of the consolidation of its political identity within the broader context of rivalry between Islam, represented by the Ottomans, and Western colonialism, represented by Britain.

Keywords:
British imperial strategy, Ottoman archives (BOA), Ottoman sovereignty, Qatar, 1913 London Agreement.

[1]**ASMAHAN MOSTAFA TAWFIK KHALIL*** *(Corresponding Author)*, Ph. D., Professor, at the Dept. of Social Studies, Faculty of Arts, King Faisal University, Al-Ahsa, SAUDI ARABIA. Email: drasmatawfik@gmail.com [ORCID iD: 0000-0002-1374-9948]

[2]**WAEL MOHAMED MAHMOUD ALREFAE,** Ph. D., Assoc. Professor, at the Dept. of Social Studies, Faculty of Arts, King Faisal University, Al-Ahsa, SAUDI ARABIA. Email: wael.m.elrefae@gmail.com [ORCID iD: 0000-0003-0670-9558].

[3]**HIBAH MOHAMMED HAMAD ALSUBAIE**, Ph. D., Assistant Professor, at the Dept. of Social Studies, Faculty of Arts, King Faisal University, Al-Ahsa, SAUDI ARABIA. Email: halsubaie@kfu.edu.sa [ORCID iD: 0000-0004-1246-8890].

Introduction

The Qatar Peninsula emerged as a strategically significant zone in the Arabian Gulf during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, owing to its location along major maritime routes and its integration into the pearl economy of the Gulf. Yet, despite its geopolitical sensitivity, Qatar has remained marginal in much of the historiography of Ottoman–British competition, which has tended to prioritize Bahrain, Kuwait, and Al-Ahsa as principal sites of imperial interaction. As a result, the mechanisms through which sovereignty over Qatar was asserted, contested, and negotiated remain insufficiently examined, particularly from the perspective of Ottoman administrative and legal practice.

This article argues that Qatar occupied a more structurally defined and administratively articulated position within late Ottoman imperial governance than has been acknowledged in existing scholarship. Drawing on a corpus of Ottoman archival documents preserved in the Presidential Ottoman Archives in Istanbul—primarily from the HR.SYS, DH.MKT, and BEO series—this study demonstrates that Ottoman engagement with Qatar was neither symbolic nor episodic. Rather, it was sustained through bureaucratic classification, legal correspondence, and selective military intervention, forming a coherent framework of imperial sovereignty that directly confronted British strategies of indirect control.

Previous studies of the Gulf have largely relied on British diplomatic records, framing Qatar mainly as a peripheral space influenced through Bahrain or Abu Dhabi. Works such as Najda Fathi Safwat's *International Relations in the Arabian Gulf 1798–1914* and Suleiman Shahin's *The Arabian Gulf: A Study in Political History 1890–1914* provide valuable insights into imperial rivalry but offer only limited engagement with Qatar as an administratively distinct entity. Even Ali Afifi Ali Ghazi's *Qatar in British Documents 1850–1916*, while comprehensive in its use of British sources, does not examine how Ottoman legal and administrative practices articulated claims of sovereignty over the peninsula. This study addresses that imbalance by foregrounding Ottoman documentary evidence and analyzing it as a system of governance rather than as isolated reports.

Methodologically, the article analyses a selected body of Ottoman documents dating between 1305 and 1331 AH (1888–1913 CE), including telegrams, memoranda, imperial decrees, and official yearbooks (salnames). These materials are examined comparatively according to their administrative genre and political function in order to trace how sovereignty was asserted through paperwork, personnel appointments, and provincial coordination. Particular attention is paid to how different documentary forms—such as telegraphic reports, legal memoranda, and bureaucratic registers—produced distinct but complementary claims of authority, and how these claims were mobilized in response to British naval and diplomatic pressure.

The study advances three main findings. First, Ottoman sovereignty over Qatar was articulated through a layered administrative structure that extended beyond nominal affiliation, incorporating the peninsula into formal bureaucratic hierarchies linked to Basra and Najd. Second, British influence operated not primarily through direct annexation or treaty-making, but through settlement schemes, naval enforcement, and the manipulation of local actors, particularly in contested zones such as al-Zubarah and al-`Udayd. Third, Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed Al Thani emerged as a mediating authority who strategically navigated between Ottoman legal legitimacy and British maritime power, thereby consolidating local rule while limiting external domination.

By reframing the "Qatar question" as a problem of competing models of sovereignty—Ottoman bureaucratic governance versus British informal empire—this article contributes to broader debates on imperial rule, indirect domination, and political authority in the late Ottoman world. It situates Qatar not as a marginal space shaped solely by British intervention, but as an administratively governed territory whose political trajectory was shaped through sustained imperial contestation and local agency on the eve of the First World War.

Historical Context: Imperial Rivalry and the Strategic Setting of Qatar in the Nineteenth-Century Gulf

Since the early nineteenth century, the Arabian Gulf developed into a space of intensified imperial interaction, largely due to its maritime function within the communication routes linking the eastern Mediterranean to India and East Asia. The decline of Portuguese naval presence by the late Eighteenth-century enabled Britain to expand its influence through sustained naval deployment and treaty-based regulation of coastal activity. British expeditions along the Gulf littoral and the General Maritime Treaty of 1820 did not merely suppress maritime violence; they contributed to restructuring authority at sea by placing navigation and coastal order under British supervision (Kelly 1968: 109–115).

Other European actors remained present only marginally. Dutch commercial activity weakened rapidly under British naval superiority, while French interest in the Gulf did not evolve into an operational policy capable of reshaping regional governance. By the mid-nineteenth century, these competing European roles had effectively receded, leaving Britain as the principal external maritime power in the Gulf (Lorimer 1908: 240–242). At the same time, Persian influence diminished under Qajar weakness, particularly following the loss of Bahrain and the contraction of effective leverage over Arab coastal politics, narrowing the balance of power to an increasingly Ottoman–British framework (Al-Ansari 1986: 91–106).

British strategy in the Gulf became explicitly tied to safeguarding maritime routes to India. Through political representation in key ports such as Bushehr and Bahrain, and through a series of agreements with coastal rulers between 1820 and 1853, Britain positioned itself as the dominant external arbiter of maritime security and commercial circulation. This form of control relied less on formal annexation than on naval enforcement, treaty obligations, and the management of local intermediaries, particularly in areas connected to the pearl economy (Al Qasimi 1999: 211–218; Kelly 1968: 145–150).

Ottoman engagement with the Gulf followed a different logic. Although constrained by military and political pressures elsewhere, the Ottoman state-maintained claims of sovereignty over al-Ahsa and adjacent coastal zones through administrative incorporation rather than sustained naval dominance. The campaign associated with Midhat Pasha in al-Ahsa in 1871 marked a decisive moment in this approach, as Qatar was incorporated into the Sanjak of Najd under the Vilayet of Basra, and Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed Al Thani was appointed as an Ottoman *qaimmaqam.* His repeated appearance in official salnames indicates an attempt to institutionalize authority through bureaucratic classification and office-holding rather than through direct coercion (Khalil 2023: 645).

Within this framework, regional actors such as Bahrain and Abu Dhabi exerted pressure over contested coastal zones, particularly al-Zubarah and al-`Udayd. These areas became focal points where imperial strategies intersected with local rivalries, economic interests, and claims of jurisdiction. The consolidation of Al-Thani leadership during the second half of the nineteenth century contributed to the gradual articulation of a more defined political space in Qatar, shaped by the interaction between local authority and competing imperial models (Lorimer 1908: 1643–1646).

Pearling remained central to this dynamic. As a principal economic activity linking Gulf ports to wider Indian Ocean networks, it enhanced the strategic value of coastal settlements and intensified imperial interest in regulating maritime access and taxation. Qatar's geographical position and economic integration thus rendered it particularly sensitive to competing approaches to sovereignty—Ottoman administrative governance on the one hand, and British maritime dominance on the other (Al-Douri 1998: 58–62).

This context clarifies why the period from 1888 to 1913 represents a critical phase in the crystallization of Ottoman and British strategies toward Qatar. By the late nineteenth century, the peninsula stood at the intersection of imperial governance and informal control, making it a revealing case for examining how sovereignty was asserted, contested, and negotiated through administration, documentation, and maritime power in the late Ottoman Gulf.

Qatar Between Ottoman Sovereignty and British Intervention

During the closing decades of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, Qatar emerged as a significant site of contestation within the Ottoman–British struggle over authority in the Arabian Gulf. Ottoman archival documents demonstrate that the "Qatar question" was framed in Istanbul not as a marginal tribal issue, but as a sovereignty file directly linked to regional security and imperial jurisdiction. The documents consistently reveal an Ottoman response structured around three interrelated practices: administrative incorporation, legal documentation, and selective coercive measures.

Ottoman sovereignty over Qatar was articulated first through formal administrative classification. Following its incorporation into the Sanjak of Najd under the Vilayet of Basra, Qatar appeared regularly in the Ottoman salnames as a defined administrative district. These yearbooks record the appointment of Shaykh Jassim bin Muhammad Al-Thani as *qaimmaqam* of Qatar and list his deputies and assistants by name, while also identifying nineteen subordinate villages during the years 1306–1312 AH (1888–1895 CE). This repeated registration indicates the existence of an operative bureaucratic framework rather than a nominal or symbolic affiliation (BOA, HR.SYS.108/10, 1888–1895).

Alongside administrative inscription, Ottoman authority was asserted through sustained legal correspondence. A series of memoranda and formal protests objected to British attempts to impose taxes or exercise jurisdiction over Qatar via Bahrain, explicitly framing such actions as violations of an "exclusively Ottoman district." These objections were preserved within official files and treated as documentary assets to be mobilized in subsequent negotiations. Correspondence thus functioned not merely as communication but as an evidentiary instrument supporting Ottoman claims of sovereignty (BOA, HR.SYS.108/25, 1912).

At moments of heightened tension, Ottoman policy extended beyond legal protest to limited military deterrence. A telegram dated 27 Sha`ban 1307 AH / 17 April 1890 reported the relocation of approximately two hundred families from Qatar to Bahrain and preparations by Shaykh Zayed bin Khalifa of Abu Dhabi for an attack on Qatar, allegedly under British encouragement. In response, the Basra province requested the dispatch of Ottoman troops, an imperial warship, and logistical reinforcement, including the procurement of five hundred camels. These requests were approved by imperial decree, and two military detachments were dispatched from al-Qaṭif to Qatar with readiness for further reinforcement if necessary (BOA, DH.MKT-1719/23, 1890; BOA, DH.MKT-1730/97, 1890). The documents indicate that the Sublime Porte was prepared to complement legal measures with coercive instruments to prevent alterations in the balance of power.

Other records document direct British-backed pressure on Shaykh Jassim in his capacity as Ottoman *qaimmaqam*. A report dated 17 Jumada al-Awwal 1305 AH / 30 January 1888 records that the British consul in the Gulf, supported by the ruler of Bahrain, compelled Shaykh Jassim under threat of force to pay eight thousand rupees and confiscated a chest of pearls deposited in Bahrain. This incident was formally reported to the Basra province as a violation of Ottoman authority (BOA, DH.MKT-1490/79, 1888). In the same year, attacks on Qatari vessels by forces affiliated with Abu Dhabi resulted in loss of life and property, prompting urgent provincial appeals for preventive action (BOA, DH.MKT-1543/2, 1888; BOA, DH.MKT-1554/11, 1888).

Documents from 1911–1912 further reveal British strategies of indirect penetration. Telegrams from the Basra province describe initiatives by British civilian agents to resettle populations from Bahrain in al-Zubarah and to legitimize these moves through promises of protection and financial inducements. Similar requests concerned settlement in al-`Udayd under the pretext of pearling activities. Ottoman authorities interpreted these initiatives as attempts to convert demographic presence into political entitlement. In response, Shaykh Jassim consistently deferred decisions to Istanbul, stating that he lacked authority to approve such measures independently, thereby preventing the creation of local faits accomplis (BOA, HR.SYS.96/4-2; HR.SYS.96/4-3, 1327 AH).

A memorandum transmitted by the Ottoman Embassy in London dated 22 May 1309 AH/3 July 1894 documents British claims that intervention in Qatar had received Ottoman authorization. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs explicitly denied any knowledge of such approval and confirmed that no official authorization had been issued. The absence of central authorization was recorded as evidence that British intervention occurred outside the Ottoman legal framework (BOA, HR.SYS.108/6, 1894).

Taken together, these documents reveal a sustained Ottoman strategy grounded in administrative continuity, legal documentation, and selective coercion. British influence, by contrast, relied on maritime power, regional intermediaries, and procedural ambiguity. This documentary confrontation culminated in the London Agreement of 29 July 1913, which formally terminated Ottoman claims over the Qatar Peninsula and redefined Qatar as a locally governed entity under British protection (BOA, HR.SYS.1881/7, 1917).

The documentary record thus traces two parallel trajectories: an Ottoman trajectory that accumulated administrative and legal evidence of sovereignty over several decades, and a British trajectory that deepened de facto influence through indirect penetration and maritime dominance. Between these trajectories, the leadership of Shaykh Jassim bin Muhammad Al Thani pursued a calibrated balancing strategy, invoking Ottoman authority to resist direct colonial imposition while engaging pragmatically with the dominant maritime power. As reflected in the documents, the Qatar question evolved from a sovereignty dispute articulated through Ottoman legal and administrative claims into an international settlement recognizing local rule within a British-dominated regional order—a transformation that decisively shaped the political trajectory of modern Qatar.

Zubarah and Al-`Udayd as Axes of Regional and International Conflict

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Zubarah and al-`Udayd had ceased to function merely as coastal settlements or pearling ports within the geography of Qatar. Ottoman archival documents reveal that these two locations emerged as structurally sensitive nodes in the regional balance of power, where questions of sovereignty, security, and maritime control converged. Their significance lay not only in their economic potential, but in their capacity to redefine authority along the Qatari coast, making them focal points of contention between the Ottoman state and Britain, as well as between Qatar and neighboring polities such as Bahrain and Abu Dhabi.

From the Ottoman perspective, Zubarah and al-`Udayd were consistently treated as integral components of the district of Qatar, itself administratively attached to Najd and later to the province of Basra. This position was articulated through administrative correspondence, fiscal references, and historical memoranda that emphasized their longstanding subordination to Qatar and their inclusion within Ottoman jurisdiction. Ottoman records repeatedly rejected attempts to detach these areas from Qatar or to reinterpret them as zones of ambiguous allegiance, insisting instead on their incorporation within a coherent administrative and territorial framework.

British policy, by contrast, approached Zubarah and al-`Udayd as opportunities for gradual penetration through indirect means. Ottoman documents from the early 1910s disclose coordinated efforts by British agents, often acting through Bahrain or Abu Dhabi, to introduce settlement schemes under the guise of pearling activity, economic development, or protection of civilians. A telegram from the governor of Basra dated February 1911 reports that British and Abu Dhabi authorities sought permission from the Qatari district governor, Shaykh Jassim bin Mohammed Al Thani, to resettle groups of Bahrainis and others in Zubarah and al-`Udayd (BOA, HR.SYS.108/28, 1911). These initiatives were accompanied by offers of financial compensation and promises of protection, indicating that demographic presence was being instrumentalized as a precursor to political entitlement.

The response of Shaykh Jassim, as documented in the same correspondence, reveals a deliberate strategy of resistance grounded in administrative legality. He emphasized that the

reconstruction and development of Zubarah and al-`Udayd were essential for securing Qatar "by land and sea," describing the two sites as strategic gateways capable of regulating tribal movement, curbing raids, and strengthening state authority. At the same time, he consistently refused to authorize any settlement independently, insisting that such matters of sovereignty required approval from the Sublime Porte. This position effectively prevented British agents from transforming local consent into a legitimizing instrument for intervention, redirecting the dispute from the local level to the imperial center (BOA, HR.SYS.108/28, 1912).

Ottoman administrative correspondence reinforces this interpretation by situating Zubarah and al-`Udayd within a broader project of territorial consolidation. A letter from the Najd governorate dated April 1912 affirmed that archival records demonstrated the historical subordination of both sites to Qatar and noted that they had previously contributed taxes to the state. The same document proposed the establishment of administrative subdistricts, the deployment of military forces, and the stationing of naval vessels to protect the coastline, underscoring that reconstruction was perceived not merely as an economic initiative but as a concrete assertion of sovereignty (BOA, HR.SYS.108/28, 1912).

British resistance to these initiatives was neither incidental nor episodic. An Ottoman Foreign Ministry memorandum from November 1911 records that since the early 1890s Britain had consistently objected to Ottoman attempts to reconstruct or administratively activate Zubarah, al-`Udayd, and neighboring coastal sites. The document further notes that verbal assurances extracted from the Ottoman side in 1903 were subsequently used by Britain to block the appointment of Ottoman officials, leaving administrative authority confined to paper without effective implementation on the ground (BOA, HR.SYS.96/4-4, 1911). This pattern reveals a calculated strategy aimed at freezing Ottoman sovereignty in its nominal form while expanding British influence through faits accomplis.

The economic dimension of this struggle is articulated most clearly in a letter written by Shaykh Jassim himself in 1888, later attached to the same archival file. In this letter, he argued that rebuilding Zubarah would redirect trade routes away from Bahrain, restore customs revenues to Qatar, and secure the northern coast against piracy and tribal depredations. He similarly noted that al-`Udayd had formerly been one of Qatar's villages and had paid taxes to the state, but that its decline was the result of British pressure rather than local abandonment (BOA, HR.SYS.108/28, 1888). These statements reveal that reconstruction was understood as a mechanism for redistributing economic and security power along the coast, directly challenging British maritime dominance and the intermediary role of Bahrain.

Ottoman authorities treated the British settlement initiatives not as isolated local disputes but as matters with international implications. Correspondence from December 1911 shows that reports from Basra detailing British attempts to settle Bahrainis in Zubarah were immediately forwarded, together with advisory memoranda, to the Ottoman Embassy in London with instructions to act accordingly (BOA, HR.SYS.96/4-5, 1911). This escalation reflects an awareness that demographic manipulation constituted a form of political intervention requiring diplomatic confrontation at the imperial level rather than ad hoc local management.

What emerges from this documentary corpus is a clear pattern: Zubarah and al-`Udayd functioned as sovereign pressure points where competing conceptions of authority collided. Britain sought to transform them into demographic footholds that would legitimize intervention and protection, while the Ottoman administration—supported by the stance of Shaykh Jassim—worked to preserve their status as administratively and historically subordinate to Qatar. The repeated insistence on referring decisions to Istanbul, the accumulation of archival evidence, and the activation of diplomatic channels all indicate that the Ottoman response was structured, continuous, and consciously legalistic.

Accordingly, Zubarah and al-`Udayd were not peripheral sites in the history of Qatar, but decisive arenas through which the broader Ottoman–British rivalry was negotiated in practice. The struggle over their reconstruction, settlement, and administration illustrates how sovereignty in the Gulf was contested not only through treaties and naval power, but through control of space, population, and documentation. These conflicts laid the groundwork for the

subsequent internationalization of the Qatar question and paved the way for its eventual resolution within the framework of the 1913 agreements, which marked a fundamental reconfiguration of authority in the Gulf.

The 1913 Agreement and the Consolidation of British Influence and Ottoman Withdrawal

The agreement concluded on 29 July 1913 between the Ottoman state and Britain constituted the juridical culmination of a prolonged documentary confrontation over authority in the eastern Arabian Gulf. Ottoman archival records demonstrate that, prior to this settlement, Istanbul persistently asserted Qatar's administrative subordination through formal appointments, fiscal references, and legal objections directed against British attempts to impose new realities in Zubarah and al-`Udayd. The 1913 agreement did not emerge abruptly; rather, it represented the formal closure of a dispute that had been managed for decades through memoranda, protests, and negotiations, and which ultimately exceeded the Ottoman state's capacity for effective enforcement.

The article of the agreement relating to Qatar explicitly stipulated that the Ottoman state relinquished "all claims concerning the Qatar Peninsula," while governance was entrusted to Shaykh Jassim bin Mohammed Al Thani and his successors, alongside a British undertaking to prevent Bahraini interference or annexation (BOA, HR.SYS.111/34-141, 1913). This formulation introduced a fundamental transformation in Qatar's legal status. On the one hand, it constituted the first written international acknowledgment of Qatar as a distinct political entity, no longer subsumed administratively under al-Ahsa or Bahrain. On the other hand, it formalized the Ottoman withdrawal from the Gulf by converting *de facto* erosion of authority into *de jure* renunciation.

The agreement exposes a structural asymmetry between two modes of sovereignty. Ottoman authority over Qatar had been articulated primarily through administrative and documentary instruments: the inclusion of Qatar in official yearbooks, the appointment of a *qaimmaqam*, the payment of salaries, and the accumulation of legal memoranda protesting British actions. These practices reflected a conception of sovereignty grounded in bureaucratic continuity and legal recognition. However, the absence of sustained naval presence and coercive enforcement rendered this sovereignty increasingly nominal. British authority, by contrast, operated through maritime dominance and control of navigation routes, enabling Britain to impose effective influence without formal annexation or explicit legal declaration. The 1913 agreement crystallized this imbalance by acknowledging the exhaustion of Ottoman administrative sovereignty in the face of British maritime power.

The economic provisions of the agreement further clarify the nature of this transition. By guaranteeing Bahraini subjects unrestricted access to pearling grounds such as Zannuniyya without the imposition of new taxes (BOA, HR.SYS.111/34-141, 1913), the agreement secured the continuity of commercial networks aligned with British-controlled Indian Ocean markets. This clause underscores that the dispute over Qatar was not confined to territorial authority but extended to the regulation of maritime economies. Political recognition of Qatar was thus accompanied by economic constraints that embedded it within a British-dominated commercial order, limiting the scope of its fiscal autonomy.

At the local level, the agreement represented a decisive rupture with earlier patterns of subordination. By explicitly excluding Bahrain from any claim over Qatar, the settlement terminated long-standing Bahraini ambitions and transformed local rule in Doha into an internationally acknowledged authority. Ottoman documents indicate that Qatari leadership had repeatedly exploited imperial rivalry to resist Bahraini encroachment; the agreement institutionalized this outcome by embedding it within a bilateral treaty between two imperial powers. In this sense, Qatar's political autonomy emerged less as a product of unilateral assertion than as a negotiated by-product of imperial disengagement.

From the Ottoman perspective, the agreement marked the final stage of imperial retreat in the Gulf. Following the loss of Bahrain to British protection and the failure to establish effective authority in Kuwait, the relinquishment of Qatar signaled the formal conclusion of Ottoman claims along the eastern Arabian coast. Earlier Ottoman memoranda repeatedly recorded that British objections remained unanswered, reflecting a deliberate British strategy of silence aimed at normalizing faits accomplis (BOA, HR.SYS.108/10, 1888–1895). Acceptance of the 1913 settlement thus constituted a pragmatic recalibration of imperial priorities, allowing Istanbul to redirect resources toward more immediate geopolitical crises in Anatolia and the Balkans.

Although the outbreak of the First World War prevented the agreement from being fully implemented, its legal and symbolic significance persisted. It introduced, for the first time, the name of Qatar into an international treaty as a distinct political entity, thereby establishing a precedent that British officials later invoked in interwar correspondence. In this respect, the agreement functioned as a foundational legal reference rather than a transient diplomatic episode, shaping subsequent interpretations of Qatar's status within the international system.

The cumulative evidence indicates that the 1913 agreement did not merely register an Ottoman withdrawal or a British advance; it formalized a transformation in the structure of sovereignty in the Gulf. Ottoman authority, once sustained through administrative continuity and legal assertion, gave way to a system in which British influence operated indirectly through protection, maritime control, and economic integration. Qatar emerged from this process as a locally governed entity endowed with international recognition but situated within a wider framework of British dominance. The agreement thus marked a decisive moment in the reconfiguration of Gulf politics, inaugurating a new phase in which sovereignty was no longer defined by imperial administration alone, but by negotiated autonomy under imperial hegemony.

Conclusion

This article has examined Ottoman archival materials on Qatar between 1888 and 1913 with the aim of clarifying how sovereignty was asserted, contested, and ultimately renegotiated in the eastern Arabian Gulf. Read together, the documents do not portray Qatar as a peripheral tribal arena, but as a dossier of governance managed through multiple institutional channels—provincial reporting (Basra/Najd), central bureaucratic inscription (salnames), and diplomatic/legal correspondence (notably HR.SYS series). The main contribution of this documentary reading lies in demonstrating how Ottoman authority in Qatar was constructed less through continuous coercive capacity than through a repertoire of administrative registration, legal argumentation, and episodic deterrence, and how Britain's influence operated through a contrasting repertoire of maritime power and indirect local instruments.

Three findings emerge from the documentary corpus. First, Ottoman sovereignty was consistently articulated through bureaucratic and legal forms that sought to translate territorial claims into institutional facts. The recurrent inscription of Qatar in administrative yearbooks and the documentation of appointed officials and subordinate villages indicate an attempt to stabilize authority through routinized classification and administrative continuity (BOA, HR.SYS.108/10, 1888–1895). Complementing this, memoranda and protests were preserved as anticipatory legal instruments, explicitly designed to be produced in later negotiations—an approach clearly reflected in the evidence-gathering logic recorded in the London legal adviser's memorandum (BOA, HR.SYS.108/25, 1912). Taken together, these materials suggest that the Ottoman state treated documentation itself as a component of governance, not merely as a record of governance.

Second, the documents show that the key arenas of contestation were not Doha alone but the coastal nodes of Zubarah and al-`Udayd, where competing claims were pursued through settlement proposals, protection pretexts, and the management of mobility along the coast. Telegrams forwarded from Basra and Najd reveal that British-linked initiatives framed demographic relocation and "protection" as mechanisms for generating entitlement and intervention, while Ottoman officials and the Qatari *qaimmaqam* sought to neutralize this logic

by deferring decisions to the imperial center and recasting local consent as a matter requiring central authorization (BOA, HR.SYS.96/4-2; HR.SYS.96/4-3, 1327/1911). The documentary significance here is not simply the existence of British pressure, but the identifiable administrative technique through which Ottoman authorities attempted to manage time, procedure, and jurisdiction as tools of resistance to fait accompli politics.

Third, the documents enable a more precise understanding of the 1913 settlement as a juridical endpoint of an earlier documentary struggle. The agreement formalized the Ottoman renunciation of claims over Qatar while simultaneously recognizing local rule and restricting Bahraini interference (BOA, HR.SYS.111/34-141, 1913). Read in the light of the preceding correspondence, the agreement marked the transition from an Ottoman sovereignty expressed in bureaucratic continuity and legal protest to a political order shaped by British maritime predominance and indirect influence. The documentary record thus points to a structural asymmetry between administrative–legal sovereignty and effective maritime power, rather than a simple narrative of imperial "presence" versus "absence."

This analysis also clarifies the position of Shaykh Jassim bin Mohammed Al Thani within the documentary landscape. The sources portray him neither as a passive Ottoman appointee nor as a straightforward British client. Instead, his responses—especially the repeated insistence that crucial decisions required referral to the Sublime Porte—indicate a calibrated strategy to preserve autonomy by instrumentalizing imperial procedure and external rivalry. This observation does not require romanticization of agency; it follows directly from the administrative logic embedded in the documents, where the management of authorization served to block the conversion of local arrangements into binding political precedents.

In historiographical terms, the article's contribution is to shift emphasis from general descriptions of Ottoman–British rivalry to the operational mechanics through which that rivalry was administered: yearbook inscription as evidence of jurisdiction, diplomatic correspondence as a reusable legal archive, and settlement/protection schemes as instruments of indirect penetration. By foregrounding genre and institutional function (telegram, memorandum, embassy note, salname entry), the documentary reading highlights that the "Qatar question" was not only a geopolitical conflict but also a contest over the forms through which sovereignty could be made legible, defensible, and negotiable.

Finally, while the 1913 agreement was disrupted by the First World War, the documents examined here indicate that its significance exceeded immediate implementation. It represented the formal closure of an Ottoman documentary claim and the consolidation of a new regional order in which authority was increasingly shaped by British maritime power and mediated local rule. The Qatari case, therefore, offers a concrete historical instance of how late-imperial governance could persist through paperwork and procedure even as effective control shifted elsewhere—and how that mismatch between documentary sovereignty and coercive capacity became a decisive factor in the political reconfiguration of the Gulf.

Acknowledgement

We extend our highest expressions of gratitude and appreciation to the Deanship of Scientific Research and the Vice Presidency for Graduate Studies and Scientific Research at King Faisal University in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for their support of this project, (Grant No. KFU260350).

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

Author's Contribution Statement

1. **Asmahan Mostafa Tawfik Khalil** contributed to the conceptualization of the study, archival research design, historical analysis, interpretation of Ottoman documents, and drafting of the manuscript.

2. **Wael Mohamed Mahmoud Alrefae** contributed to the analytical framework, contextual interpretation, and critical revision of the manuscript.

3. **Hibah Mohammed Hamad Alsubaie** contributed to literature review, methodological refinement, and editorial review of the final manuscript.
   All authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Ethics Statement

This study is based exclusively on historical archival documents and published sources. It does not involve human participants, personal data, or experimental research. Therefore, ethical approval

References

Al-Ansari, J. (1986). *Relations between Bahrain and Qatar in the Nineteenth Century* (pp. 91–106). Kuwait: University of Bahrain.

BOA, BEO, 727/54489-1-1a. (1896, January 4 / 1311 AH, Jumadi al-Akhir 23). Grand Vizierate Correspondence Office: Bombay Shahbandarate report concerning attacks on Zubarah and related claims of sovereignty.

BOA, DH.MKT, 1490/79. (1888, January 30 / 1305 AH, Jumadi Al-Awwal 17). Report/complaint to the Sublime Porte concerning financial coercion against Shaykh Jassim and seizure of pearls.

BOA, DH.MKT, 1543/2. (1888, September 15 / 1306 AH, Muharram 10). Telegram/report on the assault on a Qatari vessel and looting of pearls and money.

BOA, DH.MKT, 1554/11. (1888, October 11 / 1306 AH, Safar 7). Correspondence regarding Shaykh Jassim's response and seeking protection amid repeated attacks.

BOA, DH.MKT, 1719/23. (1890, April 17 / 1307 AH, Sha`ban 27). Basra Province request for troop deployment, warship dispatch, and camel procurement to reinforce Qatar.

BOA, DH.MKT, 1730/97. (1890, June 9 / 1307 AH, Shawwal 28). Imperial approval (irāda) and dispatch of detachments from al-Qaṭīf to Qatar.

BOA, HR.SYS, 96/4-2. (1911, November 24 / 1327 AH, Zulhijjah 1). Ministry of the Interior, Telegraph Office: Basra Province telegram on proposed settlement in Zubarah and related "protection" scheme.

BOA, HR.SYS, 96/4-3. (1911, November 24 / 1327 AH, Zulhijjah 1). Ministry of the Interior, General Directorate of Documents: Basra Province telegram (parallel copy) on Zubarah/al-`Udayd settlement attempts.

BOA, HR.SYS, 96/4-4. (1911, [November]). Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Advisory Office: Memorandum on British objections (1890–1891) and constraints on Ottoman administrative initiatives.

BOA, HR.SYS, 96/4-5. (1911, December). Ministry of Foreign Affairs, General Directorate of Political Affairs: Instruction to the Ottoman Embassy in London regarding the Zubarah settlement initiative.

BOA, HR.SYS, 108/6. (1894, July 3 / 1309 AH, Zulhijjah 29). Memorandum denying British claims of Ottoman authorization for consular intervention in Qatar.

BOA, HR.SYS, 108/10. (1888–1895 / 1306–1312 AH). Ottoman salnames entries relating to Qatar: administrative designation, qaimmaqam appointment, personnel, and affiliated villages.

BOA, HR.SYS, 108/25. (1912, March 17). Legal Adviser Ahmed Rashid memorandum to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs concerning British vessel/tax issue and evidentiary file-building strategy.

BOA, HR.SYS, 108/28. (1888, Ramadan 1305 AH). Letter from the Qatari qaimmaqam Shaykh Jassim Al Thani on the reconstruction and strategic/economic significance of Zubarah/al-ʻUdayd.

BOA, HR.SYS, 108/28. (1911, March 7 / 1327 AH, Rabi` al-Awwal 3). Basra Governor Hasan Rıza telegram to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs concerning settlement initiatives in Zubarah and al-`Udayd.

BOA, HR.SYS, 108/28. (1912, April 9 / 1330 AH, Rabi` al-Thani 22). Najd Governorate correspondence affirming the subordination of Zubarah/al-`Udayd to Qatar and recommending administrative/military measures.

BOA, HR.SYS, 108/28. (1912, April 10 / Rabi` al-Awwal 22). Najd Governorate letter providing historical account of Zubarah/al-`Udayd and related claims.

BOA, HR.SYS, 111/34-14. (1913, July 29). Ministry of Foreign Affairs, General Directorate of Political Affairs: Record of the signing of the 1913 London Agreement (Hakki Pasha–Grey).

BOA, HR.SYS, 111/34-141. (1913, July 29). London Agreement article(s) concerning Qatar and related stipulations.

BOA, HR.SYS, 1881/7. (1917, December 8). Memorandum/correspondence on the Qatari coasts and related diplomatic positions.

Al-Douri, A. A. (1998). *Introduction to the Modern and Contemporary History of the Arabian Gulf* (pp. 58–62). London: Al-Waraq Publishing.

Kelly, J. B. (1968). *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1795–1880* (pp. 109–150). London: Clarendon Press.

Khalil, A. M. T. (2023). The Ottoman–British rivalry in the Arabian Gulf area (1840–1872 A.D.): Ottoman reports as a source. *Human and Social Sciences 50*(1): 638–655. https://doi.org/10.35516/hum.v50i1.303

Lorimer, J. G. (1908). *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia* (Vol. 1: Historical, pp. 240–242). Calcutta: Government Printing Office.

_____ . (1908). *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia* (Vol. 2: Geographical, pp. 1643–1646). Calcutta: Government Printing Office.

Al Qasimi, S. bin M. (1999). *Al-Qawasim and the British Aggression, 1797–1820* (pp. 211–218). Location: Al-Qasimi Publications.