ABSTRACT

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ABSTRACT:

From a close reading of the relevant British archival record, this paper demonstrates how the basic future shape of the Saudi-United Arab Emirates borderlands emerged over a critical half-decade through a series of negotiations, consultations and altercations that were anything but concerted. The unhelpful overall context in which the dispute had to both crystallise and then be accommodated was provided by Britain and Saudi Arabia’s diplomatic estrangement at the beginning of the half-decade in question and was then further complicated by the announcement on 9 January 1968 that the regional Pax Britannica would come to an end within four years. It will show how a wider pragmatic concern of tidily capturing hydrocarbon reserves on land and sea within defined national territories began to prevail over any determination to sustain traditional, localised historical claims that were often non-linear and illogical in European sovereignty terms. Yet the ‘messiness of the local’ would return at the turn of the 1970s to threaten the basic territorial trade-off (Buraimi/al-Ain for Khor al-Udaid) that Britain and Saudi Arabia seemed willing to contemplate. This would be the Abu Dhabi Petroleum Company’s major oil find at Zarrara in the Batin region at the turn of the 1970s. No deal was done over the border before 1971 but a hugely complicated territorial equation had now crystallised that would not prove capable of easy territorial resolution in the years and decades that have followed, notwithstanding the conclusion of a boundary agreement between Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in the summer of 1974.

NOTE:
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