U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE • BUREAU OF INTELLIGENCE AND RESEARCH • ISSUED BY THE GEOGRAPHER

LIMITS IN THE SEAS

No. 24

CONTINENTAL SHELF BOUNDARY

IRAN-SAUDI ARABIA

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INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY STUDY

Series A

LIMITS IN THE SEAS

No. 24

CONTINENTAL SHELF BOUNDARY: IRAN-SAUDI ARABIA

July 6, 1970

The Geographer
Office of the Geographer
Bureau of Intelligence and Research

CONTINENTAL SHELF BOUNDARY: IRAN-SAUDI ARABIA

The Governments of Iran and Saudi Arabia signed an Agreement on October 24, 1968, concerning sovereignty over the islands of Arabi and Farsi, and division of the continental shelf in the Persian Gulf between the two countries. Ratifications were exchanged on January 29, 1969, at which time the Agreement came into force.[1]

Neither country is a party to the Geneva Convention on the Continental Shelf; however, the two countries have adopted the shelf concept in general proclamations which give no precise definition to the shelf. The proclamations are:

Iran: Law of June 19, 1955

Saudi Arabia: (1) Royal Proclamation of May 28, 1949 and superseded by Royal Pronouncement No. 33 of February 16, 1958.

(2) Regulations for the Ownership of Red Sea Resources, Royal Decree No. M/27 of October 1, 1968.

The Continental Shelf Boundary Agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia sets forth the following principles:

Desirous of resolving the difference between them regarding sovereignty over the islands of al-'Arabiyah and Farsi and

Desirous further of determining in a just and accurate manner the boundary line separating the respective submarine areas over which each party is entitled by international law to exercise sovereign rights.

NOW THEREFORE and with due respect to the principles of the law and particular circumstances,

AND after exchanging the credentials, have agreed as follows:

Article 1

The Parties mutually recognize the sovereignty of Saudi Arabia over the islands of Al-'Arabiyah and of Iran over the island of Farsi. Each island shall possess a belt of territorial sea twelve nautical miles in width, measured from the line of lowest low water on each of the said islands.

1./ The principal agreement was accompanied by two exchanges of notes dated the same day as the agreement and effective on its entry into force. One arranged for a joint technical committee to determine agreed positions for certain offshore locations to be

used as geographical reference points in the future. The second interpreted Article 4 as prohibiting drilling operations within the 600-meter zone from installations located outside as well as inside the zone, with the exception of wells for conservation or observation purposes jointly agreed upon.

In the Area where these belts overlap, a boundary line separating the territorial seas of the two islands shall be drawn so as to be equidistant throughout its length from the lowest low water lines on each island.

Article 2

The boundary line separating the submarine areas which appertain to Saudi Arabia from the submarine areas which appertain to Iran shall be a line established as hereinafter provided. Both Parties mutually recognize that each possesses over the seabed and subsoil of the submarine areas on its side of the line sovereign rights for the purpose of exploring and exploiting the natural resources therein.

Article 3

The boundary line referred to in Article 2 shall be:

(a) Except in the vicinity of Al-'Arabiyah and Farsi, the said line is determined by straight lines between the following points whose latitude and longitude are specified hereinbelow:

Point	North Latitude	East Longitude
1	27°10.0'	50°54.0'
2	27°18.5'	50°45.5'
3	27°26.5'	50°37.0'
4	27°56.5'	50°17.5'
5	28°08.5'	50°06.5'
6	28°17.6'	49°56.2'
7	28°21.0'	49°50.9'
8	28°24.7'	49°47.8'
9	28°24.4'	49°47.4'
10	28°27.9'	49°42.0'
11	28°34.8'	49°39.7'
12	28°37.2'	49°36.2'
13	28°40.9'	49°33.5'
14	28°41.3'	49°34.3'

(b) In the vicinity of Al-'Arabiyah and Farsi, a line laid down as follows:

At the point where the line described in paragraph (a) intersects the limit of the

belt of Farsi, the boundary shall follow the limit of that belt on the side facing Saudi Arabia until it meets the boundary line set forth in Article 1 which divides the territorial seas of Farsi and Al-'Arabiyah; thence it shall follow that line easterly until it meets the limit of the belt of territorial sea around Al-'Arabiyah; thence it shall follow the limit of that belt on the side facing Iran until it intersects again the line described in paragraph (a).

The map prepared by the A.M. Service Corps of Engineers U.S. Army compiled in 1966 was used and shall be used as the basis for the measurement of the coordinates described above and the Boundary Line is illustrated in a copy of the said map signed and attached hereto.

Article 4

Each party agrees that no oil drilling operations shall be conducted by or under its authority within a zone extending five hundred (500) meters in width in the submarine areas on its side of the Boundary Line described in Article 3, said zone to be measured from said boundary.

Article 5

This Agreement is done in duplicate in the Arabic and Persian languages, both texts being equally authentic. An English translation thereof is also signed by both Parties and annexed thereto.

This Agreement shall enter into force upon the date of exchange of the instruments of ratification which shall take place at Jeddah as soon as possible.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the above-named plenipotentiaries, duly authorized by their respective Governments, have signed this Agreement.

DONE at Teheran, this Second day of Sha'ban, 1388 (Hejira calendar), corresponding to the Second day of Aban, 1347 (Iranian calendar), and to the Twenty Fourth day of October, 1968.

ANALYSIS

The 1968 Agreement on the continental shelf boundary (CSB) is a modification of the median line agreement initialed by the two countries on December 13, 1965, but never ratified. The 1965 Agreement was never ratified because of the reluctance of the Iranians, who apparently felt that the Agreement did not provide an equitable division of the seabed resources; this view predominated after new mineral resources were discovered in the northern zone of the 1965 CSB. The revisions of the 1965 CSB affected the line between

points 8 and 14. The 1965 CSB was essentially a straight line that gave half-effect[1] to the island of Khark (29° 12' 30"N.; 50°18' 30"E). The 1969 CSB now crosses and recrosses and 1965 line, without a great deal of deviation from the latter.

Basic to any agreement on the CSB was settlement of claims to sovereignty over the islands of Farsi and Arabi. This problem was settled by the 1965 Agreement which granted sovereign rights over Farsi to Iran and Arabi to Saudi Arabia. Line ABCD of the CSB represents a modification of the equidistance principle reflecting the Agreement's division of sovereign rights over the two islands in question.

An initial problem in delimiting the CSB was obtaining an accurate map of the coastlines of the respective countries. The Governments of Iran and Saudi Arabia requested the United States Government to survey the respective coastlines and identify basic reference points for the delimitation of the CSB. In 1966, the U.S. Army Map Service (TOPOCOM) compiled a chart of the area which was used in negotiating the 1968 Agreement. For purposes of this study the following chart was used: U.S. Naval Oceanographic Chart H. O. 3653, 1st Edition, April 21, 1958; Revised 7/15/68.

Underlying the delimitation of the CSB is the principle of equidistance with the implementation of selected modifications. Essentially the line connecting points 1 and 6 is an equidistance line although not precisely so. The segment ABCD is based on a "local" equidistant line involving a median line and a territorial sea boundary. The line connecting points 8 and 14 zigzags across the median line and therefore deviates from the equidistance principle to a degree, although the line does approximate a median line delimitation.

The CSB has a length of 138.75 nautical miles and is comprised of 16 terminal or turning points. The average depth at the 16 points is 26.5 fathoms, with a depth range from 20 to 40 fathoms. These generalized data do not include any physical characteristics of the CSB segment A-4-5-D. This latter segment is not a part of the effective jurisdictional CSB dividing the seabed. However, points 4 and 5 do determine the vector of the lines connecting points 3 and 4.

Generally, the CSB can be divided into four geographical segments. The first segment of the CSB extends from Point 1 to Point A for a distance of 45.5 nautical miles, with an average depth at the four points of 32.8 fathoms. This segment is essentially an equidistant line between the two respective mainlands. Point 1, the southern terminus, is logically the site where the Bahrain-Saudi Arabia CSB, if extended northeasterly, would intersect the Iran-Saudi Arabia CSB. The extension of the Bahrain-Saudi Arabia CSB from Point 14 never specified a northern terminus because of jurisdictional disputes

[1]The half-effect line is that line constructed so as to divide equally the area between (1) a line equidistant from the Saudi Arabian mainland and the island of Khark (full effect), and (2) a line equidistant from both the mainland of Iran and Saudi Arabia: Khark (no-effect), that is, when Khark is given full-effect it is considered to be part of the mainland, and when Khark is given no-effect, it is ignored in determining the equidistant line.

between Iran and Bahrain.[2]

Another problem to be resolved in the southern reaches of the Iran-Saudi Arabia CSB, are the questions of Bahrain-Qatar[3] and Bahrain-Iran agreements. Point 1 of the Iran-Qatar CSB would intersect the northwesterly trending line of the Iran-Qatar CSB. From the eventually delimited terminal point (Point 1) of the Iran-Qatar CSB, to the point where a future Bahrain-Iran CSB would intersect the Bahrain-Saudi Arabia CSB, is an area which would require a Bahrain-Iran agreement to complete the complex of CSB's in this part of the Persian Gulf.

The second segment of the CSB is that line connecting points A-B-C-D. This segment has a length of 48.5 nautical miles with an average depth of 27.25 fathoms at the four CSB points. The line A-4-5-D (see heavy dashed line on map), although based on the equidistance principle, is not an integral part of the delimited CSB. Points 4 and 5 are important in that they control the vector of the overall CSB.

The "S" shaped CSB connecting points A-B-C-D is based partially on the equidistance principle and partially on the delimitation of the territorial sea of the two islands in the vicinity. In the 1968 Agreement, as well as the null 1965 Agreement, Iranian and Saudi Arabian sovereignty was recognized over Farsi and Arabi respectively.[4] The CSB segment AB (7.75 n.m.) gives full-effect to the Arabi 12-mile territorial sea and segment CD (20.5 n.m.) gives full effect to the Farsi 12-mile territorial sea. Then a "local" median line (6.5 n.m. from each of the islands) was drawn in an east-west direction, with the resulting segment BC which is 20.25 nautical miles long. The delimitation of the "local" median line is consistent with Article 12 of the Territorial Sea Convention of 1958. Farsi and Arabi have no other effect on the CSB except for the above mentioned delimitation of the island's territorial sea and the "local" median line.

The third sector of the CSB, points D-6-7-8, gives half-effect to the Iranian island of Khark (see footnote 1)[5]. The distance from Point D to Point 8 is 21 nautical miles, with an average depth of 26.75 fathoms at the CSB points.

The line from Point 8 to Point 14 marks the fourth segment of the CSB.

TABLE I. PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE IRAN-SAUDI ARABIA CONTINENTAL SHELF BOUNDARY

NOTE: This table is concerned with only those points which are a part of the operational Continental Shelf Boundary; the points 4 and 5 are listed in Table II.

[2]Iran had claimed Bahrain until 1970.

[3]There is a dispute between Bahrain and Qatar relative to certain islands lying between the two countries.

[4] The Saudi and Iranian dispute over the two islands existed for years. These normally uninhabited islands have housed military garrisons in the past. The maximum elevation on both islands is about 10 feet.

[5] Khark, 17 n.m. from the Iranian mainland is about 3x4 n.m., with a maximum elevation of 284 feet.

In the columns under "Distance land to CSB Point", the distance is given from the CSB point to both the nearest offshore island and to the mainland.

CSB Point	Distance between CSB points	Depth at CSB Point	Distance, Land to CSB Point, (n.m.) (I-island; M-mainland)	
			Iran	Saudi Arabia
1		40	Nakhilu (I)-(50)	--
	11.5		Ra's-e Jabrin (M) (53.5)	(50.5) (M) North of Ra's at Tannura
2		33	Nakhilu (I)-(49)	(38) (I) Al Jurayd
	11.0		Ra's-e Jabrin (M) (51)	(50) (M) S. of Ra's al Ghar
3		30	- -	(38.5) (I) Janah
	23.0		Ra's-e Khan (M) (51)	(49.5) (M) S. of Ra's al Ghar
A		28	Farsi (I) (18)	(12) (I) Arabi
	7.75		N. of Ra's-e Khan (M) (50)	(56.3) (M) N. of Al Jubayl
B		30	Farsi (I) (12)	(12) (I) Arabi
	20.25		N. of Ra's-e Khan (M) (50)	(59.7) (M) N. of Al Jubayl
C		20	Farsi (I) (12)	(12) (I) Arabi
	20.5		Karri (M) (69.5)	(43.6) (M) N. of Ra's al Badi'ah
D		31	Farsi (I) (12)	(24) (I) Arabi
	10.5		S. of Ameri (M) (57.6)	(58.3) (M) Zor al Audhan
6		28	Khark (I) (58.5)	(25.5) (I) Al Hurqus
	6.0		Damaqeh Rishahr (M) (59)	(58.5) (M) Zor al Audhan
7	4.5	25	Khark (I) (57)	(26.5) (I) Al Hurqus
			Damaqeh Rishahr (M) (61.25	(57.75) (M) S. of Ra's as Saffaniya
8	0.75	23	Khark (I) (55	(29.25) (I) Al Hurqus
			Damaqeh Rishahr (M) (61.75)	(57) (M) S. of Ra's as Saffaniya
9		23	Khark (I) (55.5)	(29) (I) Al Hurqus
	6.0		Damaqeh Rishahr (M) (62)	(56.25) (M) S. of Ra's as Saffaniya
10		22	Khark (I) (55)	(31.5) (I) Al Hurqus
	7.25		Ra's osh Shatt (M) (63.5)	(54) (M) S. of Ra's as Saffaniya
11		23	Khark (I) (51)	(38.5) (I) Al Hurqus
	4.75		Ra's osh Shatt (M) (61.5)	(56.75) (M) S. of Ra's as Saffaniya
12		23	Khark (I) (51.5)	(41.25) (I) Al Hurqus
	4.0		Ra's osh Shatt (M) (63.5	(55.5) (M) S. of Ra's as Saffaniya
13		23	Khark (I) (51)	(42) (I) Qaru
	1.0		Ra's osh Shatt (M) (64)	(56.25) (M) Ra's al Khafji
14		23	Khark (I) (50)	(42.75) (I) Qaru
			Ra's osh Shatt (M) (63)	(57.25) (M) Ra's al Khafji

1. These are the coordinates for the two points not shown on the attached map.

Khark	29° 12' 30" N.	50° 18' 30" E.
Ra's osh Shatt	29° 06' N	50° 40' E.

TABLE II. PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE IRAN-SAUDI ARABIA CONTINENTAL SHELF BOUNDARY (Points 4 and 5)

Point	Distance to Point (n.m.)	Depth at at Point (fathom)	Distance to Land Point, (n.m.) (I-island; M-mainland)	
			Iran	Saudi Arabia
4	A = 12 5 = 15.5	30	Farsi (I) (6.7) N. of Ra's-e Khan (M) (53)	(11) (I) Arabi (59.5) (M) S. of Al Batinah
5	D = 2.5	31	Farsi (I) (9.6) Ameri (M) (56.5)	(22) (I) Arabi (58.5) (M) N. of Ra's al Badiah

SUMMARY

The CSB utilizes a modification of the equidistance principle. Although the CSB is not precisely a median line in its entirety, there is an effort to approach such a line whenever feasible. The important contributions of this Agreement are the methods employed in delimiting the shelf in the presence of offshore islands located many miles from the mainland; and further, the method employed in assigning an effect to a large island proximal to the mainland.

The CSB around the islands of Arabi and Farsi was delimited by giving effect to the 12-mile territorial seas of the respective islands, this is in conjunction with a "local" median line between the two islands. This solution is similar to the one employed by Italy and Yugoslavia concerning offshore islands in the Adriatic Sea.[6]

The other important contribution of the Agreement was the method of assigning an effective weight to an island lying close to the mainland. Khark, a rather large island lying 17 n.m. off the coast, was given half-effect in delimiting portions of the CSB. The half-effect principle is a trade off between considering the island as part of the mainland (full-effect) or completely ignoring the island (no-effect).

Complete delimitation of the boundaries on the continental shelf in the southern reaches of the Iran-Saudi Arabi CSB will not be possible until agreements between Bahrain-Qatar, and Bahrain-Iran are effected and until some possible accompanying adjustments in the Iran-Qatar and Bahrain-Saudi Arabia agreements are made.

[6] See, U.S. Department of State, Office of the Geographer, Continental Shelf Boundary: Italy-Yugoslavia, International Boundary Study, Series A, Limits in the Seas, No. 9, February 20, 1970.

Iran - Saudi Arabia Continental Shelf Boundary

Iran-Saudi Arabia Continental Shelf Boundary

1. 27°10.0′N. Lat. 50°54.0′E. Long.
2. 27°18.5′N. Lat. 50°45.5′E. Long.
3. 27°26.5′N. Lat. 50°37.0′E. Long.
4. 27°56.5′N. Lat. 50°17.5′E. Long.
5. 28°08.5′N. Lat. 50°06.5′E. Long.
6. 28°17.6′N. Lat. 49°56.2′E. Long.
7. 28°21.0′N. Lat. 49°50.9′E. Long.
8. 28°24.7′N. Lat. 49°47.8′E. Long.
9. 28°24.4′N. Lat. 49°47.4′E. Long.
10. 28°27.9′N. Lat. 49°42.0′E. Long.
11. 28°34.8′N. Lat. 49°39.7′E. Long.
12. 28°37.2′N. Lat. 49°36.2′E. Long.
13. 28°40.9′N. Lat. 49°33.5′E. Long.
14. 28°41.3′N. Lat. 49°34.3′E. Long.

Coordinates not specified in the Agreement, but are part of the Continental Shelf Boundary

- A. 27°46.2′N. Lat. 50°24.1′E. Long.
- B. 27°53.2′N. Lat. 50°22.0′E. Long.
- C. 27°52.8′N. Lat. 49°59.1′E. Long.
- D. 28°10.1′N. Lat. 50°04.5′E. Long.

Bahrain-Saudi Arabia Continental Shelf Boundary

14. 26°59′30″N. Lat. 50°46′24″E. Long.

Iran-Qatar Continental Shelf Boundary

2. 27°00′35″N. Lat. 51°23′00″E. Long.

Iran-Saudi Arabia Continental Shelf Boundary

Terminal or turning point

Source of Data: Office of the Geographer, Department of State

BOUNDARY REPRESENTATION IS NOT NECESSARILY AUTHORITATIVE

COMPILATION DATA

U. S. Navy Surveys
British Admiralty Chart 2883 . . . . 1:350,000, Ed. 1955
British Admiralty Chart 2884 . . . . 1:350,000, Ed. 1956
U. S. Army Map Service Series K501, K502
Miscellaneous data

CONVERSION TABLE
FATHOMS AND FEET TO METERS

Fathoms	Feet 0	1	2	3	4	5
	Meters					
0	0	0.3	0.6	0.9	1.2	1.5
1	1.8	2.1	2.4	2.7	3.0	3.4
2	3.7	4.0	4.3	4.6	4.9	5.2
3	5.5	5.8	6.1	6.4	6.7	7.0
4	7.3	7.6	7.9	8.2	8.5	8.8
5	9.1	9.4	9.8	10.1	10.4	10.7
6	11.0	11.3	11.6	11.9	12.2	12.5
7	12.8	13.1	13.4	13.7	14.0	14.3
8	14.6	14.9	15.2	15.5	15.8	16.1
9	16.4	16.8	17.1	17.4	17.7	18.0
10	18.3	18.6	18.9	19.2	19.5	19.8

GLOSSARY

'Ayn	spring, well
Bandar	anchorage, bay, harbor
Dawhat	bay
Fasht	bank, reef
Jabal	hill (s), mountain
Jazirat, Jazireh	island
Kasr	shoal
Kasrat	islet, reef
Khalij	bay, gulf
Khawr	bay, inlet
Khir	bay, channel, inlet, lagoon, lake, strait
Kuh	hill, mountain (s), peak, range
Nafud	desert
Qal'ah	fort
Qulleh	hill, mountain, peak
Ra's	cape, point, reef extremity
Rid, Ridhaneh	stream
Sabkhat	salt marsh, spring

Iran-Saudi Arabia Continental Shelf Boundary

Terminal or turning point

CAUTION
Numerous reefs and drying banks exist in the unsurveyed area inclosed by the dashed lines.

CONTINUED ON CHART 3639

CONTINUED ON CHART 3660

From H.O. 3653, 1st Edition, April 21, 1958; Revised 7/15/68

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