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Qatar: Actors in Arabia (1994)

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Part V



MIRAGE—1994

PROLOGUE

When you travel for the company to far away places on a journey longer than eight hours, hired hands like me are entitled to travel first class. In this way, I've become accustomed to the tony lounge in Heathrow where one can sit, drink tea or coffee, and munch on small sandwiches that have the crusts cut off. You can read all the newspapers from the English-speaking world, watch BBC cable TV news shows, mingle with the swells, and use the shower facilities on the first floor. I've also learned how to wake myself if I begin to snore while seated in the soft chairs.

It was on such a four-hour layover in this lounge in Heathrow's Terminal #4 recently that I came to reflect on the junk in my head about the Middle East and how it got there. My experiences are like most. Childhood stories: Ali Baba & the 40 Thieves. Aladdin & His Lamp. Sinbad the Sailor. In maturity, of course, benign stories with friendly characters dressed in comic clothing were harder to find. There was the Six-Day War in 1968 between Israel and Egypt and Syria, and then Palestinian terrorists, the massacre at the Munich Olympics in 1972, the Yom Kippur War in 1973, the Saudi-led Arab Oil Embargo in 1973-74, the Islamic fundamentalist revolution and the Iran hostage epic in 1978-80. For me these upheavals were the subtext that helped lead me to cross Third Avenue on East 42nd Street from the *Daily News* to the Mobil Oil building in 1979. Had the subject of oil and Arabs not been a daily news topic in 1973, I would not have been assigned the story for my master's project at Columbia, and I would have remained oblivious to the workings of oil and Arabs and Middle East political struggles. And when the newspaper industry in New York was collapsing, instead of seeing opportunity in the oil industry, perhaps I would now be nudging my career along in the insurance industry in Hartford, my hometown.

It was in the lounge in Heathrow as I lulled into the land of Nod that I considered all this. But there was more to it. There were pictures in my head of high adventure, of drama, heroism and the struggle of good over evil; pic-

tures that had origins in other sources. It was the movie by David Lean in 1962 called *Lawrence of Arabia* that had made such impressions. Here was Lawrence, the British agent, organizing the Arab sheiks struggling under the tyranny of the Ottoman Turks to unify and throw off the bonds of servitude and enter the modern family of nations, all with the benign protection of the British Empire. Peter O'Toole, of course, was masterful in his portrayal of the tortured T. E. Lawrence, a genuine historical figure whose own true story was nearly as intriguing as the drama played out in Arabia.

All this came to mind in the spring of 1994 as I was taking my first trip to the Middle East. After 15 years with the company, I was finally going to visit the Arabian Gulf, the home to so much of the turmoil that had been writ large on the world's recent economic and political life, where the conflicts of economic growth, religious freedom, and social change were all focused in one maddening tangle. Seated in Heathrow, playing in my mind were these dreamy images of Lawrence riding across the sands atop that camel, the loose clothing and headdress flying in the winds behind him, holding the pistol, aiming to vanquish evil.

I. TO QATAR

Flying on British Airways, en route to Bahrain, the island emirate connected to Saudi Arabia by a modern causeway, I looked into the darkness and saw below the waters of the Arabian Gulf, the nearly calm surface illuminated by the full moon above. I was over the waterway the western world considered vital to its economic survival, where U.S. Navy warships routinely patrolled, where loads of crude oil from Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and other producers passed on route to the industrial economies of the world.

How had I come to this point? Waiting for the landing, I put down my book and recalled a time less than two years before. I got my first call about the country named Qatar on a Saturday night in the middle of 1992 from Albert Stamford, who was calling from Paris where he was meeting with executives from the French oil company Total. Stamford, then the vice president responsible for European oil and gas producing operations, was doing the deal of his career, which by that time he had decided to take someplace else.

Stamford outlined the agreement he was trying to make. He was going to get Mobil into the middle of the largest natural gas development in history, putting onstream Qatar's North Field. He was calling to warn me that the word of this deal might leak out. Plenty of people in the industry would be trying to scuttle it, including the French. Stamford knew that if the trade press called with bad information, Mobil's best defense was for me to be armed with the straight stuff. We made sure I had the right things to say.

This was prudent and thoughtful management on his part, typical of Stamford, who was an unusual E&P executive; despite their many skills, E&P

managers are usually very suspect of public exposure of any kind since it usually means they have new competitors to worry about and the best defense is silence. This wasn't true in Stamford's case, however. Then again he was an unusual guy.

Stamford, 55, was the highest-ranking black man in Mobil. Stamford had been raised by his mother in Harlem, gone to City College and come up the hard way. But up he had come. Stamford was hired by Mobil Chemical in 1962 after he graduated from MIT with a Ph.D in chemical engineering, the first African American to achieve this particular academic achievement ever. Stamford went into research and was so bright Mobil Chemical cut him loose in 1970 to pursue two more years at MIT, where he was a visiting professor in chemical engineering. Stamford had more than earned his keep. He would in his career work on the research team that created the process to commercialize the manufacture of the Styrofoam cup, and also the process that enabled Mobil to patent a synthetic lubricant known today as Mobil 1, the best motor oil available.

Mobil 1, and its lube equivalents, costs twice the price of regular motor oils but provides the engine parts the best grease shield they can get and (as PR guys like to explain) will increase an engine's efficiency 10 percent. This isn't small stuff. If you spend, say, \$100 a month on gasoline, using Mobil 1 will save you \$120 a year. If you are a chemical engineer working for the fourth largest oil company in the world, you can count inventing something like this as a fair day's work. If you are writing about it you can say Stamford made a genuine contribution to the nation's pocket books.

He was also a nice man who enjoyed the coaching and teaching parts of his duties, which made him a favorite of mine since I understood virtually nothing about science. On my elementary school report cards my teachers used to explain I was a terrible test taker. But I got the average grades I did only because I excelled in that unmeasured aptitude generally classified as classroom discussion. So Stamford and I were naturals; we'd talk.

As Mobil's highest-ranking black, Stamford was also somewhat of a company show horse in the EEO sweepstakes. Though personally shy, Stamford understood the need to attract more minorities into the sciences and worked hard at college recruiting and delivering speeches on campus about how to boost minority student participation in the sciences. Stamford's problem was that he didn't fit in just right. What made Stamford strong also made him vulnerable. Blaming it on racism didn't do it. Stamford's problem with other managers was beyond race. He had a hard time closing on a decision. He'd want to reconsider it again, changing his mind with staffers who were working on the instructions he'd given a few days before. He had a bit of a tin ear for the gang mentality that drove most relationships within Mobil's culture. Mobil's top ranks were dominated by night school grads from Brooklyn and

Queens, not Ivy Leaguers. They wanted to know whose guy were you? Are you with me or with him? This was never stated out loud. But each manager watched other managers for the answer. With Stamford no one was ever sure. The fact that he was black increased the vulnerability nonetheless, because it added to the reality that, in the tribal nature of Mobil's corporate culture, he was nobody's guy.

But Stamford was a very high quality man. He was, obviously, bright and well educated, and over his career he had worked as a manager in London with Mobil Europe and also traveled the world on both marketing & refining and exploration & producing duties. His first marriage had failed and his second wife, a New Englander he'd met at MIT, was white. Mobil wasn't his whole life. Before moving to Washington with the company in 1985, the Stamfords had made their home comfortably with the nobs in Greenwich, no problem. Stamford had friends and associations around the world. Stamford had choices in life.

The collapse of crude prices in 1986, the resulting oversupply of crude oil in the world, and the diminished importance of the Mobil's relationship with Saudi Arabia created the conditions for a large reorganization of responsibilities in Mobil. During the regime of former Mobil President William Tavouareas, the strategy had been to make sure that Mobil's relations with Saudi Arabia were secure and thus an entire Middle East Department, eventually numbering 400, was created to maintain this special relationship with Middle East countries and make sure that Mobil maintained secure access to Saudi crude. If you are a "crude poor" major like Mobil, the game in the world of scarce oil supplies was to make sure that we had a continuing access to Saudi crude.

But with the reduced role of OPEC and the world oversupply of crude oil, Mobil no longer depended on Saudi crude alone. In fact, some of the formal purchase contracts Mobil had with Saudi Arabia forced Mobil's Supply Department to pay more for the oil than it would cost on the spot market. This penalty was a constant irritant within the company. What is the advantage of being forced to pay \$2 more for a barrel of oil? Soon the Saudis came up with the "netback" crude price, which meant that the cost of crude would be determined by how much the refined product was sold for in the market, and the price for the origin crude would be calculated backwards using a "netback" formula.

E&P got into the Middle East business as a result of the redesign of Mobil's Middle East operations. The promoters of the Saudi "special relationship" were gone. Tav was retired and a memory. His guy, Wally MacDonald, the director in charge of the Middle East Department, was retiring. Now that he was gone, MacDonald's Middle East fiefdom was studied and its various functions divided up among the other operating divisions. E&P got the oil

producing operations in Abu Dhabi and some of the senior staff who were knowledgeable about the region.

At the time, Stamford was responsible for European operations, which included \$2 billion in businesses in Germany, Turkey, the Netherlands, Austria, Cameroon and Australia, which together produced and sold 40 million barrels of oil and 210 billion cubic feet of gas per year. Management simply expanded Stamford's area to include Middle East producing and assigned some of the Middle East staff associated with that business to him until their retirement papers were finalized and they could leave the company. One of those Middle East hands was named Bob O'Manion, who had spent years in Saudi Arabia and also in Abu Dhabi. In 1992, as part of his new duties in E&P, O'Manion escorted Stamford, his new supervisor, around Mobil's Middle East producing operations, visiting the key ministries and oil bureaucrats in the Gulf region.

It happened that Mobil's Middle East group some years before had persuaded the Qatar General Petroleum Corporation (QGPC), the state's oil company, to take on a Mobil manager to help them learn about us and us about them. This was a simple trade, part of the give and take of the region. What it meant was that Mobil had a guy inside the QGPC and he was now Stamford's guy. O'Manion brought Stamford in to visit the managing director, a slender man named Al Jabar, who was a Ph.D out of the University of Tulsa.

Despite all Mobil's effort at relation building, Stamford learned in a matter of moments why the Middle East Department was no longer. It didn't do the job. Despite the quality and commitment and even the treasury controlled by Mobil's Middle East Department's 400-odd people, Dr. Jabar had never learned that Mobil was in the liquefied natural gas business in a very big way. Here Jabar was, sitting on the largest natural gas field in the world, trying his best to get an LNG industrial system established with customers in Asia, Europe, India, wherever, and he didn't know that Mobil's Arun LNG operations in Sumatra supplied 20 percent of Japan's LNG demand.

"You mean you have an LNG business?" Dr. Jabar asked.

"Mobil is the largest supplier of LNG in the Far East," Stamford was saying. "We put Indonesia into the LNG business, and they now supply more LNG than any other country in the world."

Dr. Jabar sat silent. Shell had discovered the North Field in 1971 and more than a decade later was thrown out of the country by Qatar's emir for dawdling or worse. The North Field, the largest natural gas field in the world, was one of the largest gatherings of hydrocarbons anywhere. It contained reserves in excess of 300 trillion cubic feet (CF) of natural gas, which was about 20 times larger than the Arun gas field in Indonesia. Some say reserves may be as high at 1,000 trillion CF. Either number is big enough. This is

enough gas to last two centuries and Asian markets are an eager target. Present demand in Asia is 44 million tons a year, and this is expected to grow to 70 million tons by the year 2000 and 90 million tons by 2010. Buyers could be envisioned in Japan, Korea, Taiwan, China and India.

BP had come in after Shell and weeks before had quit in frustration, giving up after failing to put a deal together. For years there were rumors that the North Field was the giant that couldn't get done. Now, here Dr. Jabar was, in the middle of the most sophisticated oil region in the world, seated across from a man whose company had done in the most remote province in Asia what everyone said could not be done.

Jabar decided that he needed to see more of Stamford. Within days, the outlines of what would turn out to be the deal would be done. Mobil would take 15 percent of the consortium. In exchange Mobil would help find customers in Korea, Japan and elsewhere in Asia, organize the financing, help drill the development wells and help design and build and run the LNG plants. In exchange for this know-how, Mobil would get 15 percent of the action. This was a \$20 billion capital project that could earn Mobil up to \$800 million a year within five years and every year thereafter for as long as the field held out, which most figured would be 200 years.

The man putting this together had achieved the deal of his career, one already dotted with remarkable achievements. But by the time of his tour through the Middle East, Stamford had already decided to put in his papers and retire. No man in his family had ever lived past age 62. Stamford was now 55, eligible to retire, possessing millions in equity. But he was a fourth vice president in a division that he now knew would need only three. He had heard he would be moved to Dallas to head up E&P Research. Stamford decided to spend the final months of 1992 nailing down the deal and then retire.

In Fairfax, Mobil's chairman said, E&P I love you, but Mobil gets 20 percent of the deal, or we walk. The reality of the LNG business in Qatar at this point was that the Qatargas consortium was the only game in town. The so-called Qatargas consortium had been formed in 1984 and earlier in 1992 had signed a sales contract with Chubu Electric Company, the Japanese utility. Chubu promised to purchase 4 million tons of LNG a year beginning in 1997 for 25 years. At that moment, it was this deal or nothing in Qatar. If they couldn't close the Qatargas contract in hand for 4 million tons, nobody else would finance or participate in zip.

In order for Mobil to get into the business, other partners would have to give up shares and they would not give up enough. And getting to that magic 20 percent demanded by the Mobil chairman was hard arithmetic. Since Qatar had to have 65 percent to maintain national honor, the other shares were divided among Total, the French oil company, and Mitsui and Marubeni (Japanese bankrollers). The Japanese had lower shares to begin with and were

willing to give up a bit to keep the project alive, but the place for Mobil to get its percentage was from the French. Talk about honor. They tried to scuttle the deal from the beginning, but they could do nothing. We were in and they had to live with it or face the fate of Shell, which was permanent banishment by the emir.

But Mobil couldn't get the 20 percent threshold. Okay, Stamford said, the Qatargas project was only good for 4 million tons for Chubu anyway. How about we create a second joint venture, with only Mobil and QGPC, say, Mobil 30 percent and Qatar 70 percent? Hey, neat. It would work. The net share to Mobil for both projects was 20 percent, and the second joint venture, named Ras Laffan LNG Company Ltd., was given the right to market the next 10 million tons a year after the first four from Qatargas. In other words, when the Qatargas deal is done, Mobil has 30 percent of the next 10 million tons a year.

The news release we did on the heads of agreement for two projects was issued August 26, 1992. Stamford now had to sell the project inside the company. With projects like this on the boards, other capital projects would face a harder climb. Many of the exploration department partisans said the Qatar projects were low rent: big numbers but very modest returns. Far better to sink the money into our own prospects and wait until we find our own North Field. This argument had romance. Oil guys love to drill wells and find oil. But finding oil is hard; on average you go nine dry holes for every discovery. And with the big benefit available only if you find big fields, Mobil had adopted a strategy of concentrating on finding the big one, gambling big. E&P had spent \$800 million over the past five years on wildcat wells in very remote parts of the planet (Peru, Papua New Guinea, Trinidad, Zimbabwe, Indonesia) and we'd come up with dust.

This was summarized in the fall of 1991, when the exploration team explained their strategy of concentrating their efforts on finding the "elephant" and how they had rights in very valued premium acreage in more than 20 countries that were the most prospective on earth. After drilling these eight high-risk, high-reward wells, our computer technology was enabling Mobil seismologists to see sedimentary basins better than the competition. Our wells were the best, most efficient, most trouble free, always reaching their target objective on budget, and how we were....

"In other words," interrupted Bob Woods, the Executive Committee member then responsible for Mobil Chemical, "you're 0-8."

That brutal remark, though said in a joking way, was the central reality: E&P's exploration strategy had failed. That was why Stamford's package on Qatar had the inevitable edge. It was there and it was ours. All that was required was the buyers in Asia and the financial markets to trust the deal to happen.

What we are talking about here was building an energy supply and transportation system that would stretch from the middle of the Arabian Gulf to Japan. It would take gas from an offshore reserve, 20 percent of which was in Iran, pipe it to shore in Qatar, compress and process this vapor into liquefied form, place it on ships with huge ball-like containers and ship it to customers in Japan who would be required to decide to take this gas for decades and invest in the infrastructure needed to receive, process and transport it to the burner tip where the customer would consume it for energy purposes and pay a price low enough to make the entire process competitive with nuclear, oil and coal. This is the basic and essential infrastructure of an economy.

The essential ingredient is that all parties along the process, the suppliers, the transporters, the buyers and the financiers from the Gulf to the Pacific believe that it will happen. What is required is more than just trust and belief. What is required is as close to a guarantee as you can get in this world: the Armed Forces of the U.S.

II. GULF WAR

I was seated in O'Manion's office getting some background on the deal for the news release and background Q&A book.

"If it weren't the Gulf War, we wouldn't be even talking about this." O'Manion had lived in Saudi Arabia and in the UAE for years and had been in Saudi when Iraq's Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. "No one in the Gulf believed in a million years the United States would do what it did. After Vietnam, people in the Gulf heard the words about protecting U.S. commitments, but no one believed it. You have to hand it to President Bush," O'Manion was saying, genuinely admiring, "he did what was right. It made a tremendous difference in the Gulf. Settled things down for a long time."

While the negotiations with Qatar continued, E&P president Patrick Humphrey traveled to Qatar and met the country's leaders face to face. The day before Humphrey arrived, the United States had completed its own negotiations with the State of Qatar, signing a defense treaty with the heir apparent, Sheik Hamad Bin Khalilfa Al-Thani, who was minister of defense and the son of the emir.

This historic document ended British protection for Qatar, which had existed for more than a century, when the British Foreign Ministry piloted by Winston Churchill entered Middle Eastern protection rackets in order to protect oil supplies for the Royal Navy and British Admiralty. In doing so, of course, side effects included the building of British Petroleum and Royal Dutch Shell, as well as the eventual creation of nearly every one of today's states in the Middle East. Now in 1992, the United States was formally signing protection treaties, promising Islamic emirs and kings that the U.S. military could be called on if necessary.

These machinations of state were occurring for their own reasons, and Mobil was simply in the neighborhood to take advantage of the timing. While the security negotiations were underway, the Qatari Foreign Minister, the heir apparent's brother, Sheik Hamad Bin Jassim bin Jabor Al-Thani, mentioned that what Qatar really needed was to develop the North Field and create the kind of economic development the people of his country needed. People with money tend to be happier, he knew, and what was needed after this security agreement was economic development. Humphrey appeared in Doha the day after the treaty was signed, and the U.S. ambassador, Mark Hambley, insisted on personally escorting Humphrey on the courtesy visit to the heir apparent and his brother.

"Remember I told you we would help," the ambassador said to the heir apparent as Humphrey was introduced. "I told you I would bring you America's premier oil company. Here he is."

III. THE COMPETITION

Any notion that any of us in the company had that the U.S. government was doing any of this for Mobil's benefit was quickly dashed. In fact, Mobil was simply a useful tool for State Department styling. No particular effort had been expended by Mobil to get any favors of any kind.

That wasn't true of others, however. We soon learned that some unusual steps were taken by the State Department on behalf of a small shipping company employing 80 people that is operated out of an office building on Sixth Avenue in Midtown Manhattan. The name of the company is ESC, Energy Shipping Company Inc. ESC was started in 1972 by the patriarch C.H. Chang, originally of Hong Kong, and he now operated ESC with his son, Winston Chang. Mobil transportation guys were familiar with ESC, which had a contract to run some LNG loads out of the PT Arun plant in Aceh, Sumatra, to Japan. They were reputable but small. ESC had bid on the shipping contracts for the Qatargas LNG transport between Ras Laffan and Chubu, but they had been outbid by Japanese firms. ESC cried foul and hired some high-priced DC talent to make the case to State. The talent earned their keep. If ESC was small they turned out to be heavyweights when wielding political clout.

Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger wrote Sheik Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, the heir apparent and minister of defense, and said that U.S. interests and commercial presence are linked to the Gulf's security. The Qataris weren't quite sure what to think.

We didn't hear about it until Rep. Lee Hamilton (D-Indiana), chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, wrote Sheik Hamad complaining that ESC had not been treated fairly. "While I'm not in a position to know the facts," Hamilton wrote February 1993, "I share ESC's and the State Department's concerns. I would respectfully request that you take whatever

action is necessary to ensure that the Qatargas contract is awarded to the most qualified and competitive bidder.”

Any junior prosecutor would smell a rat. What was ESC doing to get such help from the United States government? The Qataris, accustomed to the worst, assumed the worst and complained about it to Mobil. The rumor circuit swung into action. A junior commercial attaché in the U.S. Embassy in Doha decided that the real reason that ESC wasn't getting the contract was Mobil. She made it her business to bad-mouth Mobil with every Qatari government official she could find. On a July 4th barbecue in Doha she upbraided the Mobil manager onsite for not doing what the U.S. wanted.

This was something out of Alice in Wonderland. Mobil made appointments with State Department officials to get this straightened out. Before the meeting could be held, Deputy Secretary of State Clifton Wharton, who succeeded Eagleburger, signed a letter prepared by one of his section heads, which mirrored Eagleburger's warning. The United States government supports ESC's efforts and linked U.S. commercial presence to “reinforce mutual security interest in the region.”

Now any deputy secretary can sign a dumb letter prepared by underlings without thinking much about it. And those underlings might simply be listening to a bright lobbyist hired by ESC who once had worked in the State Department and knew the ropes. This was just Washington stuff: standard political business rough and tumble. But, Mobil asked officials in State, Treasury and the White House and Senate and House, did they actually believe that it was in the U.S. government's interest to jeopardize a \$20+ billion energy deal linking the Middle East and the growth economy in Asia and in which an American company has a 20 percent piece? Did these government geniuses wish to risk this for a Midtown Manhattan boat company with 20 employees in the U.S. and 60 employees overseas and an ex-pat owner who employed an overeager lobbying operation based on K Street in D.C.? Did these same letter writing government officials wish this story to be told? The ESC problem soon evaporated.

In Qatar, however, you can never be sure just what will do the job. Arco persuaded former President Bush to write a letter to the emir asking Qatar to let Arco rebid on some offshore acreage that could contain four billion barrels of oil. Arco president Lawton Cook was in town while I was there, but the bureaucrats were unimpressed with Arco's argument, despite Bush's recommendation. They weren't going to get the bid. And former Secretary of State James Baker was advising the Houston gas company, Enron, during its attempts to become the financial backer of the processing, transmission and marketing of four million tons of LNG a year to Israel. Part of Baker's technique to get this deal done was to say Mobil wasn't up to the job and Qatar needed Enron's help. Enron played the game according to its own rules of

intimidation. Once, a Mobil lobbyist was taking a Mobil manager to an official in the Near East Section at the State Department to discuss Mobil's plans in Qatar, and they ran into a lobbyist representing Enron on the way out. The Enron lobbyist took the Mobil lobbyist aside and, without the slightest trace of irony, said: "Mobil, we're going to bury you on Qatar."

IV. LOCAL CONTEXT

Getting Mobil's Qatar deal through the Qatari maze was going to be tricky, too, no matter what other Americans tried to do. The hired help inside the state oil company, Qatar General Petroleum Corporation, was Dr. Jabar, the Ph.D. from the University of Tulsa that Stamford had met. He led a team of oil and gas professionals who were a very competent group. Though a loyal citizen of Qatar, Dr. Jabar was essentially a technocrat with huge power over the industrial and commercial instruments of state. But he was not the state itself. This position was held by members of the hereditary ruling family of this Gulf State, the Al-Thani family.

How the Al-Thanis got to this point requires a look at some history. Qatar occupies a peninsula on the east coast of Saudi Arabia, jutting like a thumb into the Arabian Gulf. This sun-baked brick of a country is about 4,500 square miles of barren hard-pounded sand, uninteresting and unforgiving in the extreme. Qatar's redeeming feature is that it is a peninsula and thus home to strands of beach and water's edge that is often transformed into scenes of coastal beauty.

Water is central to understanding Qatari character. Where the Saudis are a people of the desert, the Qataris are accomplished fishermen and ocean traders whose country was once home to a cultured pearl industry known worldwide and also the center of construction of the Arab ship called the "dhow." In the myths, Sinbad used a dhow, as did the characters from the *Thousand & One Nights*. More realistically, the dhow was used by Arabian sailors and traders in their ventures to Persia, India, Indonesia, and as far away as China.

Various tribes had settled and lived along the coast of Qatar for centuries, Persians, Indians, and Arabs of various varieties. But the latest group of inhabitants trace their origins to the 17th and 18th centuries to the various Bedouin tribes who moved to peninsula from the areas called Hasa and Najd to the west. These early Qatari settlements had little political identity, however, and existed basically as nomadic tribes.

By the mid 18th century, the dominant local power was Persia across the Gulf. For a time, the Omanis to the south along the Arabian peninsula exerted power of the peoples of the Qatari peninsula. By the mid-19th century, the people of Qatar had become pawns in the power struggle between the Omanis and British. The Omanis were seafaring traders and pirates whose

helmsmen had brought Omani power and influence to India and as far east as Indonesia. The British, of course, were in conflict with the Omani pirates to protect their trade with India and Asia.

During this period, Qataris had developed a healthy pearl trade and were also adept at the construction of the dhow. The first source of local power came from the town of Zubara on Qatar's west coast, when the Al-Khalifa family sailed across the 15-mile stretch to the island of Bahrain in 1783. The Al-Khalifa family, a powerful clan, soon came to settle and dominate the island. In time, Qatar became dependent on Bahrain. Though Qataris resented the rule from Bahrain, they were able to control only parts of the peninsula. The struggle between Bahrain and Qatar continues today with a dispute over the ownership of a small island just off Qatar's coast.

To protect themselves against the Al-Khalifa clan, Qatari leaders continued to ally themselves with outsiders, among them the Persians, Omanis, Ibrahim Pasha of Iraq and the Wahhabis, who came to dominate Saudi Arabia. In these alliances, Qatar was always the weaker of the partners, becoming the perpetual protectorate and dependent. When the British came to the Gulf to establish treaties and protect their trade against the piracy of the Omani raiders, they treated Qatar as a dependent of Bahrain.

Qatari independence came with the emergence of the Al-Thani tribe, who about the middle of the 19th century became the acknowledged strong clan of the peninsula. The family had first settled at the Gebrin oasis in southern Najd before coming to Qatar in the early 18th century. At first they stayed in the north but in the mid-19th century during the leadership of Mohammed Bin Thani the family moved to Doha and were the first to rule the entire peninsula.

Sheik Mohammed cooperated with the Islamic Khalifate, agreeing with Midhat Pasha, the Wali of Iraq, to allow an Ottoman Turk military force to garrison in Doha in 1872, though 21 years later the garrison was overrun by Qataris. Sheik Mohammed's son, Qassim Bin Mohammed, sought to balance his emirate between British and Ottoman influences, signing an Anglo-Qatari maritime treaty in 1886. His son, Sheik Abdullah Bin Qassim, ruled for 40 years, during which Ottoman rule came to an end.

British influence began its rise after the Anglo-Turkish Treaty in 1913. The U.K.'s trading strength in East India gave impetus to the British desire to control the maritime routes. In 1915, the Turkish garrison was expelled from Doha and the following year Sheik Abdulla agreed to British "protection" of the area. The Al-Thani clan's battles and struggle for dominance in Qatar forced the British to enter the conflicts and eventually sign a treaty in 1916 with Sheik Mohammed Bin Thani. In the wake of this treaty, Qatar's relationship with Bahrain was reduced to payment of an annual tribute.

From then until 1915, the Ottoman Turks' presence was limited. Slowly, power over the peninsula shifted toward the British, who sewed up its rela-

tions with Bahrain, Kuwait and the Trucial States (today's United Arab Emirates).

The peninsula remained a backwater. The collapse of the cultured pearl industry in the 1930s devastated Qatar's economy. What changed everything for Qatar was the discovery of oil in commercial quantities in 1938. Oil was exported for the first time in 1949.

Today, though a junior compared with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, Qatar's oil provides the country its the main source of income. The country opened its first oil refinery in 1983. In 1991, Qatar produced 2,558,200 tons of oil and exported 1,938,400 tons. Natural gas production was 295.1 billion cubic feet. Japan imported 76 percent of Qatar's oil.

After World War II, British rule was diminished and the finally in the early 1970s Britain withdrew its influence east of Suez. On September 3, 1971, the current emir proclaimed the 1916 treaty at an end and declared Qatar an independent, sovereign state. On February 22, 1972, Sheik Khalifa bin Hamad took power over the State and said that the Al-Thani family was thereafter the hereditary power integrated into the rule of state.

The emir is both head of state and head of government. He holds all executive and legislative powers and is assisted by a council of ministers. The position of emir is hereditary within the ruling branch of the Al-Thani family. A 30-member advisory council appointed by the emir analyzed and commands of governments on policies. There are no elections and no political parties. Legal cases are tried by a combination of criminal, civil and shari'a (religious) courts.

The Al-Thani family and tribe run the show in Qatar. You can't be sure, but as many as one-fifth to one-half of the 140,000 citizens of Qatar may be part of the extended Al-Thani clan. Over the years, of course, the family has developed factions and leadership is determined by a consensus among the elder members.

The Al-Thani who took control in 1972 was Sheik Khalifa bin Hamad. In time, he appointed his son heir apparent and another son foreign minister. Dealing with these guys has become tricky. In the middle of 1993, during a visit from a delegation of Mobil brass, the foreign minister claimed that he was responsible for Mobil getting the agreement to join the North Field development team. In return, he wanted \$20 million and an agreement that he and his family should become partners in production at a set rate for the life of the project.

A variety of Mobil executives and staff at various levels in ways both indirect and later directly to the foreign minister's face, said: No deal. It is illegal for an American company to make payments in this way. We pointed to the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act. They pointed to the French who pay bribes readily. We said we'd walk. The conversation stopped.

We learned that the rivalries within the ruling family were anything but simple. The emir's brother was a drug addict, kept happy with a constant supply of cocaine on the coast of France by the foreign minister, his nephew, in order to keep him out of Qatar and out of harm's way in court politics. Others told us the foreign minister was merely the family bagman, acting at the explicit instructions of the heir apparent. Another story held that an Al-Thani cousin was scheming to plant a bomb on the airplane of the heir apparent in a family coup.

Through it all, however, we began to hear from various sources that the Al-Thanis were not pleased with Mobil's entry into the community and that Mobil had not shown that it is a good corporate citizen. This was the reason for my visit: how to develop some visible community relationships that will give Mobil cover to get these guys to call off this talk. This is among the ways people in my job earn a living. I found out on my trip the heir apparent wants Qatar to be the sports capital of the Gulf. Okay. We'll push Doha tennis meets with Boris Becker, Pete Sampras and the international racket set; we'll stage track and field races to make sure the world sees Doha as a sports capital. My job isn't that hard.

But we've got a way to go. During my visit, the general manager and some of his chiefs were invited to the Emiri Dewan, the Al-Thani palace and office building, and attended a reception for those in the Doha community who supported the recent Doha Tennis Open. We'd paid our way to be a sponsor. It was a pleasant luncheon, I was told later. Mobil's general manager and his community relations manager were seated across the table from the heir apparent. Nothing was said openly, but on the way to the table the Mobil executive was told by a palace underling that the Al-Thanis were uncertain about Mobil's contributions to Qatari community life.

V. AS ELSEWHERE

Bahrain turned out to be an airport stop with the ambiance of a new prefab module construction suitable for any of a dozen Midwestern towns. The fluorescent lights were bright and the designers had used red, yellow and black to accent the decor. I made my way to the Gulf Air counter and while waiting fell into conversation with a recently retired computer sales manager from the U.K. He was on his way to Doha, it turned out, now working for a software consultant after a career as Middle East sales manager for Honeywell U.K. We talked a bit about international travel, this being my first time in the Middle East, and other neutral but friendly things.

"How long you going to be in Qatar?"

Just a few days, I said, then turn around and go home.

His eyes went up. "You're from Mobil," he said, "aren't you?"

Well, yes. Was it that obvious? Not really, he said, only he once designed

training software for refinery control rooms (helping operators train for upsets and operating challenges they would likely never face, but if they did once, they would have to do it right or die), and he had worked with Mobil people before, mostly in the corporate purchasing group in New York before the move to Virginia. Mobil is known for sending people long distances for very brief periods. And people were going in and out of Doha for Mobil quickly these days, he said. Of course, Mobil was also a target customer and he was going to be staying longer in hopes of selling more operating software to the QGPC, which would soon have mighty big operating plants if Mobil had its way.

We talked a bit more in the waiting lounge, sipping coffee served by Bahraini waiters. Nothing complicated. Very routine business travel chatter to pass the time.

The Gulf Air flight from Bahrain to Doha took about 40 minutes. I spent the entire time looking out over the darkened Arabian Gulf, picking out the lights of ships and the coastline. Doha finally came into view, stretched out below like a huge lighted grid, with streetlights and the city's larger buildings illuminating the patch of civilization along the coastline. In the terminal, I walked to the left just as instructed back home and went over to the visa desk, where I unfortunately dawdled and allowed several French and Swedish business travelers to sneak in front of me. This bit of maneuvering cost me 15 minutes.

I paid my \$30 tax (U.S. dollars, please) and took the fax showing my Qatar visa filled out to "Robgre T. Collins" to a second window where two bearded men in guard uniforms matched the faxed visa with a letter in a book showing that Mobil Oil Qatar Inc. (MOQI) had invited me in. By this time, the men in line had waited long enough to have developed fraternity; raised eyebrows and shaking heads were the universal language when commenting on bureaucracy and speed.

I was behind the others and one of the guards had disappeared with one of the Swedes' passport. Soon the line got longer than it should and another guard came over and started asking questions in Arabic. A few years ago if I had heard that I'd be in a line like this in a place like this with people who looked and spoke like this taking people's passports....well I would have expected a different feeling than the one I now possessed. This was the most unthreatening scene. This was simple incompetence, benign and innocent. Though you would be a fool to say it, you would have been safe if you had said: Hey, you guys. Get a move on, will you!

A few moments later, I was nearing the window and I could see my passport and visa and the Mobil Oil Qatar letter moving in the stack in front of the earnest young man reading, stamping and dating the passports. This was slow but he was working at it. Then a thin, bearded man in his early 30s came

inside the booth and stood behind the guards working the passports. He was dressed in what I later learned was called a “thob” and his head was covered by a red and white checkered cloth called a “gitrah” that was secured by a black braided cord. The distinct white thob was a neat, tailored white shirt that extended down the torso into a skirt-like robe. I later was told the thob is cool and comfortable, particularly for the men who had developed somewhat of a belly and didn’t care for belts. The thob and gitrah was the uniform of the Gulf Arabs, worn only by them and not guest workers or visitors. The apparel signified its owners as citizens who had standing in the community and thus were to be treated with respect.

“Mr. Collins,” the man said to the group on the other side of the glass.

I raised my hand and nodded. The Qatari asked in if my passport was there, and I motioned that it was in front of one of the guards. The Qatari, his expression friendly and cooperative, nodded and looked over the paperwork.

“You’re fine,” he said, “you’ll be through in a minute.”

He waved and exited through the guard’s rear door. I never saw him again. But he was right. In a minute the guard had stamped my passport and I was making my way through to an open airport customers’ area where another thob-and-gitrah-clad Qatari walked up to me and introduced himself.

Here was my contact: Samuel Al-Dana, 35, an ’81 liberal arts graduate from Portland State University, a frequent visitor to Hawaii, a former Amoco Qatar employee who had lived in Houston and Chicago on training assignments, who spoke and wrote English beautifully. Samuel, a member of one of the oldest and best connected Qatari families, began his career as a staff member in the Information Section in the Department of Finance and Petroleum, had been with Amoco during its unsuccessful and now suspended exploration effort in Qatar. The Mobil startup team had hired Samuel a year ago, as an expeditor and navigator of Qatari bureaucracy, a chore frequently called public relations in countries where controls are in the hands of a few.

Samuel, of medium height and build, had olive skin and a black beard. The next day, in the midday desert sun, Samuel wore dark sunglasses with somewhat garish gold frames, of a kind favored by Elvis impersonators in Vegas. But Samuel had a warm smile. His was a manner much more informal and familiar than I would have expected from a guy wearing a thob and gitrah in an Islamic country in the Arabian Gulf that shares a peaceful water border with Iran and, alone among the Gulf States, has diplomatic relations with Iraq. How come, I wondered, this was so easy?

Samuel and I had communicated frequently over the past year, electronically, and in company mailings and the bureaucratic routines of my operation. At the Doha airport, we exchanged pleasantries and were walking through the waiting area, crowded with dark-skinned men wearing a wide variety of clothing, from tattered slacks and shirt to the billowy pants, muslin shirts, long

waistcoats and turbans of the subcontinent.

“Pakistani workers,” he explained, “going home or waiting for their friends or family.”

This passed into the mental file for later reference, as did most of my first impressions. Samuel was pleasant and graceful; what this guy had was charm on a very high scale. He had put me at ease quickly. As we walked through the small parking lot to his red, but somewhat tired, Mercedes sedan, I recognized the evening air immediately: this could be Redondo Beach. I started chattering like a ninny, about the flight, how nice he was to meet me and so forth. I was in the middle of the Islamic world for the first time, and it felt like L.A. on a spring night. I was happy to be here.

We drove along a very wide and brightly lighted highway along the coastal corniche, to the hotel Sheraton Doha, constructed on a point of reclaimed land in a design that could easily be put in any Southwestern U.S. city, and which Samuel said was the best hotel in the Mideast. We talked about the next day’s agenda and he explained a bit more about the Pakistani workers.

Qatar has perhaps 140,000 citizens and 300,000 “guest workers,” who are not citizens and who are employed at all levels of the economy. Doha, the capital, is the country’s largest city, with about 350,000 people. The Pakis, bless their hearts, occupy the lowest rung, doing the labor. The Indians, mostly middle class professionals, are perhaps at the highest, or perhaps that is occupied by the Filipinos or Thais, who make up most of the balance, though there are also Yemenis, Palestinians and Jordanians. It will take a while to understand all the social dynamics, but at root you come back to those who wear the thob and gitrah, and who command all others in their homeland who do not. This is more than simply an Upstairs/Downstairs relationship. To witness it at first, you get the feeling of a family estate where you have those who own it and live there and those who work the grounds and do the chores.

How does the visiting American fit in? We are more than guests, I reckon. The modern version, certainly, but more like the latest in a long line of colonial powers who show up in Qatar and assume a role of external authority, like the Persians, Turks, British and now well, the U.S.

In the rotunda of the Sheraton Doha, Samuel tried to be responsive: Having slept on the London-Bahrain leg, I hadn’t eaten in about 10 hours and was starving despite the fact it was 10 p.m. local time. I checked in, put my gear in my room and returned with Samuel to find a place to eat. We went to the lobby, to the breakfast/luncheon nook, and found that the buffet dinner service was just closing. Samuel spoke in Arabic to the headwaiter, and turned to me.

“What do you feel like eating?”

I couldn’t help myself. I plumbed my depths and told the truth.

“Samuel,” I said, “I’d like a cheeseburger.”

Samuel broke into a wide smile, shook his head, as if to say to himself, if politely, well, what can you expect? We both got a charge out of this cross-cultural moment. And within a few minutes we were on the top floor of the hotel at a restaurant named Al Shahaan, where the proprietors had launched an “American Food” promotion. The Al Shahaan had a 360-degree view of Doha as it swept along its coastal confines. Now that it was past 10 p.m., the moon was full and high, casting a white band along the top of the black Gulf waters. The illuminated downtown buildings in the distance, lower than the hotel, and Doha’s avenues and neighborhoods were given symmetry by streetlights and advertisements.

Taking in this scene, Samuel and I discussed the agenda for the visit. The young man who took our order was Thai. I ordered Philadelphia pepper steak, and the fruit and various vegetables, breads and spreads from the salad bar, all of which turned out to be just fine. Despite the hour, Samuel felt compelled to do some work, and asked for a cordless phone, which was delivered on a silver tray. He worked the phone like any accomplished commodities trader on Wall Street, making arrangements with colleagues and changing plans.

His purpose, of course, was to make sure that I, as a headquarters guy, was neutralized and rendered no problem for local management. This is a well-understood game in the corporation, which is a constant struggle in the distribution of power. Local management teams always want more power, people, money and decision-making authority; while headquarters minions always try to either withhold that power or deliver it with the kinds of strings and controls that ensure that the local management does what headquarters wants. People like me on visits like mine serve several functions at once: 1) I am a headquarters resource for local management, able to clear red tape and deliver talent, programs and money for local purposes, 2) a sounding board for unofficial communications of local concerns, problems or desires, and 3) an instrument of organizational discipline, whereby I try to instruct local talent in my group how to behave according to the Mobil way.

What Samuel and I had to do was politely relate with each other so that we both get what we want. In order to do this we had to strike a relationship of trust and confidence as quickly as possible, so that we could believe that each was doing what the other wanted and expected. If we had conflicts about how to do something we must be open and say so right away. So as I chowed down on my Philly pepper steak, Samuel and I were developing a very important thing: a comfort level. And with him it was a breeze.

Samuel explained about his background, some Qatari history, and a bit about Qatari manners and the like. I later learned from others that Samuel’s family, the Al-Danas, were not part of the Al-Thani tribe, but had been allies of the Al-Thanis for generations. Unfortunately for Samuel personally, this

meant that he was among the Qatari elite, but not among the particularly wealthy. Though the Al-Danas were well known as traders, the current generation's wealth was created by the ownership of a Ford dealership. Alas, the Al-Danas who possessed this franchise were from a different branch of the family. Samuel's two brothers were content with their employment in the Political Affairs Section of the Qatari Foreign Ministry. Samuel's career began in the Information Section of the Department of Petroleum & Finance, which had led to his employment at Amoco.

Owing to the hour, the restaurant was nearly empty while I ate, and we conversed overlooking the Gulf and the Doha coastline. But directly behind Samuel, also seated along the window, were two thob-clad Qataris deep in conversation. As far as I could tell, these two men were just two more late eaters, but Samuel every once in a while glanced over his shoulder and furrowed his brow in a disapproving way.

Toward the end of our meal, these two men called for the check and engaged in some conversation with the waiter. They stood up and were making their way out when the movement of the man who had been directly behind Samuel caught my eye. For one thing, he was a bit plump and his, well, his breasts seemed to protrude just so. I had to catch myself; wait a sec, I thought, was this a woman now? No, I looked again, it was a guy with a very thick black mustache, who now moved his gitrah in a confident brush of the head, moving the cloth as a woman might shake long hair off her face or over her shoulder. What caught my eye, or rather ear, was the very distinct hint of mint in the man's voice. When the two were gone, Samuel said, "I don't know what to make of those two."

I made some noise of recognition, but couldn't quite connect the dots perfectly. I think they were homosexual. Of course, I thought. Gay men on a night out after hours. Hey, wait a sec. "Samuel," I said, speaking to the 1981 humanities grad from Portland State, "you have to forgive me if I ask something that's out of line. But, come on, we're in an Islamic state, in the Middle East. Qatar isn't Saudi Arabia, but isn't that kind of frowned on..."

"Of course," he said, shrugging his shoulders, displaying a life-and-let-live nonchalance.

"But people are people," I said. "Is that it?"

"Here as everywhere."

VI. QATARI TV

The next day we spent doing the chores of meeting the handful of Qatari media and public relations managers we needed to as well as the Mobil managers, who were all very distracted by the surprise visit by the senior brass from Taiwan's Chinese Petroleum Corporation, which was thinking of purchasing 2 million tons of LNG a year from the Ras Laffan joint venture. The

problem was floor price. The Chubu Electric Power Company in Japan had agreed to a price that in effect was about \$2.50 per thousand cubic feet of gas. This was a competitive price for them, below their oil prices, competitive with nuclear and hydro, yet high enough for Mobil to make the whole deal wet, namely, profitable at a return on capital employed (ROCE) that was, if not spectacular, then a respectable 20 percent per year.

With the Japanese agreeing to this price, we knew we were home free. All that remained were the sensitivities of the Koreans and Taiwanese, who hate the Japanese and will only agree to what they do after a period of due deliberation so they can own the decision for themselves. Things were moving along nicely with the Korea Gas people, but for the CPC things were a bit more complicated. Part of the reason for the visit by the chairman of the CPC to Doha was his desire for personal assurance. He wanted to be schmoozed and shown the site where the plant was being built, get taken to dinner. He wanted to kick the tires. He also wanted to be sure that Mobil would show respect. When he visited Mobil's Fairfax office months before, he thought Humphrey's tone was entirely too Teutonic. This perceived snub would require repair visits like the one to Doha and also another Mobil executive to visit Taipei in three weeks for more visits to show respect.

I saw the heads of public relations for Qatar General Petroleum Corporation and the Qatargas LNG Company, whom I had met months before when they came to Fairfax on an orientation and get-acquainted visit. These visits were friendly and continued the trust building necessary for us to function as the projects developed. Each of us represented different groups, either the state oil company, or Qatargas, the joint venture owned by French, Japanese, American and Qatar interests, or, in my case, Mobil. To do our jobs right, we needed to trust each other enough so that in the conduct of protecting our own particular interests, we didn't screw each other up. In other words, we had to cooperate. Based on what we saw of each other, so far, so good.

Samuel made these rounds to the somewhat shabby government offices in downtown Doha in the midday sun without the benefit of air conditioning, as his red Mercedes was decidedly in the used category. This gave me a chance to taste the March mid-90s in this desert capital at its dusty and smoggy best.

We drove to the headquarters of Qatar TV and were stopped at the gate by a uniformed Indian who did not honor Samuel's wave of the hand, instructing him to let us pass. Samuel was perturbed that his instruction was ignored.

"Relax," I teased, "it's me and my blue jacket, white shirt and tie. Dangerous looking."

Samuel acknowledged that might just be so, and he got out of the car to discuss the situation with the guard. We had an appointment to visit Sa'd Al

Rumaihi and we should have been on the guard's admit list. The conversation continued just a bit longer than it should, and I was getting warm in the car with no air conditioning. I turned around to see Samuel putting a key into the trunk of the car, opening the trunk about six inches and instantly slamming it shut.

"He insisted that I open the trunk," Samuel explained, after he got back in the car, "so I opened the trunk for him."

Whatever power game was going on was lost on me. But the opening and shutting of the lid had done it and the Indian guard let us through. "I think he needed to save face," Samuel would later explain, "and be able to say truthfully that I had opened the trunk."

The TV headquarters was a white stucco affair that was near the water. Though the plantings and landscaping efforts were more akin to Stalin, the setting and air reminded me of, say, a Miami building in need of a sprucing up. The corridors were wide and airy. The wall hangings were of recent Arabic-language and Qatari TV productions and showed a certain modern design flair.

When we got to the third floor, a secretary dressed in garish clothing and ample makeup led us through two outer offices to Sa'd Al Rumaihi, the managing director of Qatar TV. Sa'd Al Rumaihi, it turns out, was a well-known Qatari TV personality who had his own talk show. Originally a print journalist, mostly a sports reporter, Sa'd had graduated into television. His claim to fame was his facility with sports trivia, and as a result of his TV skills and visibility he became friendly with the ruling Al-Thani family who apparently liked to rub up against him and his access to the sports world. This relationship turned into real authority for Sa'd as he was named head of Qatari TV, the state network, as well as editor in chief of the Arabic language newspaper.

He was a slightly built man, who had a very pleasant face and speaking voice. He spoke English perfectly and was a very approachable. That afternoon he showed fatigue and was a bit distracted.

"I'm leaving the newspaper job," he explained, "it is just too much. I don't see my sons enough and I work too many hours."

I remarked that two full-time jobs seemed a bit much to me.

"And I'm tired of all the people telling me what to do."

"Who?"

"Oh, those religious fanatics," he said. "You can imagine."

I asked if the fundamentalists were a problem. "Oh, yes," he said, as if talking about the proverbial little old ladies in tennis shoes, "it isn't in the way you might imagine, but dealing with them is time consuming."

We exchanged nice talk about whether QTV wanted Masterpiece Theater type productions sponsorships and the like and this was a total non-starter.

The MOQI GM had thought this was a great idea. But it was clear he was the only one who thought so. Apparently he had listened to the wives of some of his employees complain they don't get to watch good television in Doha. But sponsoring these shows on Qatari TV was another matter. The kind of TV the Qataris liked was the Aaron Spelling adult soap operas like Dallas, Dynasty, Falcon Crest, LA Law, Hill Street Blues, St. Elsewhere and the like. The high-tone, high-end British dramas just weren't of interest. What Sa'd wanted was help with sports programming. This was, of course, no surprise. As I said, the part of my job that requires me to make judgments of this kind isn't that hard.

VII. RAHAAD

We joined Bill Camper, the admin VP for MOQI, swapped stories of the day and aimed toward the Doha Club, a swim and dining club for the business elite where we were to meet Rahaad Al-Senidi, the head of General Services for QGPC. Camper was a somewhat sour corporate bureaucrat who spent the best years of his career in Saudi Arabia as a VP when that affiliate ranked high in the corporate orbit and money was no object. He had signed on to E&P's effort in Doha to get more foreign credits as he neared retirement, but E&P's parsimonious cost-cutting culture was so offensive, his favorite avocation was complaining. Not that he didn't have legitimate complaints. MOQI was in the process of trying to close the deals on two joint ventures worth \$20 billion, and identify the hundreds of people within Mobil who would be seconded to the plants and operations to make sure it all worked according to standard. To do this required considerable bureaucratic skill, which Camper possessed. What he no longer had, however, was the attitude of a believer. He was a short-timer, and everybody around him knew it.

As we passed the gossip of the day en route to the Doha Club, Camper said that though Rahaad was a former PR manager for QGPC, we were meeting him in his capacity as head of the Qatar Amateur Athletics Federation, which had an outstanding request of MOQI for \$50,000 to pay for a track & field meet two weeks away. Normally, such requests are made months, if not a year, in advance. We had corresponded about this in a very routine way weeks before. I thought I had put it off; I made no commitments about using E&P HQ money and had said corporate budgets were probably empty. If you can, I had told Camper, dodge. Standard stuff.

Somehow this message never got through. Camper said Rahaad was expecting an answer about the money this noon. I should be prepared to say how much Mobil was going to give. What? This was a setup or foulup of a bad sort; not how things are supposed to go. I tried to sound neutral, but explained that the corporation tends to support athletics on its own account and for its own reasons. Me simply saying I want the money doesn't do it. They like to spend their own money. As for the E&P money, all I can do is

say: I'll ask management. But that can't be done between now and the lunch at the Doha Club. Come on!

"Rahaad is a friend," Camper was explaining, "and he is asking for help. And it is in our interest to do it. It's not the track, it's maintaining good will. We're going to have to come up with something."

This request and communication had simply fallen between the cracks. Perhaps I was being styled or maneuvered. More likely they were not focusing on procedures. But now what? We sat down on what I was surprised to see was a patio, with tile floor and white wrought iron furniture, like a country club. Again the pepper steak, but I was also introduced to an eggplant-dip paste. It had lemon, olive oil, olives and minced and blended eggplant. I could have eaten this stuff by the bowlful.

Rahaad arrived after a few moments. He was about six feet tall, somewhat plump, and gracious. He and Camper spoke like friends about gossip in town. I realized that Camper genuinely liked this guy. Rahaad was a key Qatari, an official asking Mobil for money for his favorite civic project. But Camper was also trying to do a friend a favor, honest. At its best, this is what you try for in the places far from home where you have operations. You're a foreigner, sure. But if done right, our guys become one of their guys, naturally, in a kind of civic/corporate communion.

This wasn't a setup, I now realized. It was a mix-up. Rahaad made a pitch about needing Mobil's support. I bobbed and weaved, and said I was here on a visit surveying various programs and would have to let him know later about the specific amount. But what I had in mind was a longer-term relationship...etc. This was an old dodge: don't give him what he asks for now, but promise him we'd like to do more later. (Which was the truth. I later made a pitch to support pro tennis in Doha, and also to put Doha on the IAAF Mobil Track & Field Grand Prix circuit, which would get TV exposure over EuroSport, SkyNet, ESPN and the rest (billions of viewers worldwide).

Rahaad sensed he'd boxed me, and that I couldn't make the money commitment then, but that I was being sincere. He had a boisterous personality and escalated the moment. You are being a friend to Qatar...you must see more of my country...your visit is too short...you must come to my home tonight for a traditional Arab dinner and I will show you Arab hospitality...

Holy mackerel. Was I ready for this? Rahaad, a perfectly nice sort here on this country club patio, but he's got on this thob and gitrah, and I've got absolutely no idea what this implied...tents and dates and sheep on spikes over fire and sipping coffee and hookah pipes... Into Rahaad's home! What if I make some faux pas...do something insulting...

Camper quickly saw an out. The delegation from the China Petroleum Corporation was in town for more sniff tests. Having me around would complicate and perhaps misfire the evening's "you can trust us" session (oh, by the

way, here's a new guy you don't know). Getting me out of the way and into a Qatari's care was just the thing. Samuel stayed silent. There would be no rescue from this so that I could while away my spare evening hours safely glazed watching BBC on the hotel room tube.



Samuel picked me up at the hotel and we drove over after dark. Away from the corniche along the waterfront, Doha's streets turned more narrow, and the buildings lost their color. Now after dark, they were a uniform dark earth color, with a few modern street signs, about half were illuminated. I could imagine this town as a film set for some North African town during an English drama placed between the wars. I looked over at Samuel as he wound his way through a few highway underpasses. We were having the most natural conversation, about business, world politics, U.S. schools, Doha ruling family politics. But I was looking at a bearded young man wearing the gitrah and thob. I was struck that such an easy, friendly conversation could be taking place with a fellow dressed like this in a setting but a missile's distance from Teheran and Baghdad.

We turned off into a grid network of streets where homes were placed on quarter- and half-acre lots behind seven- and eight-foot-high solid mortar and cement block fences. There was only one episode of graffiti, in Arabic. For all I knew, it could have said: Go Orioles! The streets were in poor repair, potholes having been left to grow longer than they should. Street lighting was poor and Samuel had to ask directions at a small shopping center, which looked like the Doha version of a row strip of shops next to a 7-11. Samuel leaned out the window.

"Salaam aleikum," Samuel said, using the standard Arabic greeting.

"Aleikum salaam," the man said in the standard reply.

Samuel then asked and received directions, which enabled him to confidently make two turns down the dark walled streets. If this was that States, I'd be feeling unsafe. But a block down, Samuel slowed as he saw a Qatari man, who turned out to be Rahaad walking on the street. After we got out Rahaad greeted us and led us to his wrought iron gate into an inner courtyard. It was neatly sculpted, somewhat like a tasteful miniature golf course with a few miniature hills, lighted with various colors of low garden lights. The air was a cool 65 and dry and pleasant. Rahaad said gardening was his vanity and called attention to the various palm and shrub plantings here and there. What dominated the courtyard was an aluminum and glass circular aluminum and glass, well, gazebo. Except inside was a Persian rug covering the entire interior floor and pillows and arm rests arranged in circular fashion.

"You can see this is a traditional Arab meeting place," Rahaad said, "where we have family gatherings and so forth."

“No tent,” I was saying.

“Yes,” Rahaad agreed, smiling. “In fact, it’s air conditioned.”

We had a laugh about that as he led me inside, with somewhat of a fanfare, welcoming me to his home. Though it had mild design touches that were obviously Islamic, this could easily have been an upper-middle-class home in Chevy Chase, Maryland. It was well done, if a bit garish for my taste. Many of the knickknacks were decorated in gold. We removed our shoes and went into what was obviously the formal living room, a long rectangular room with matching blue easy chairs and sofas arranged around the edge of the room. Suspended from the ceiling were two very large and very bright gold and crystal chandeliers, both illuminating the room with a bright white light, erasing any possibility of subtle shadings or shadows. Framed pieces were hung from the walls, including a gold rendering of an open Koran. It would be here that a Catholic family would have put the framed picture of the pope, perhaps from a Vatican visit.

The most unusual decoration I saw was a large poster-size photograph of an Arab woman clothed in brown and gold silks with necklaces and chains suspended from her ears and neck, with her forehead and cheeks covered by nearly transparent silk that was open at the eyes.

At no time while at Rahaad’s home did I see his wife. The only woman I saw was a Thai servant, dressed in slacks and a sport shirt, the kind of clothing you might pick up at Wal-Mart. She was a pleasant woman who poured coffee and tea, eager to please. Rahaad paid her no mind, ignoring her comings and goings except to accept the odd pour of tea from time to time.

I had not known what to expect about how women were integrated into the affairs of the workday. I am not sure what I expected; perhaps a more conservative Islamic culture where women were simply not seen in public. However, in the hotel and the shopping areas, I saw many Bedouin women, clothed in black, with the head and face covered and only the eyes showing. At first this appeared like a feature from the Discovery channel, but here in the desert sun and wind, these women appeared as natural as shadows, with the folds of their garments billowing and playing in the winds, naturally forming to their body shapes, offering the hint of their beauty; all unexpectedly alluring.

In MOQI’s office, as I would expect, there were many women employed as secretaries and administrative help. Most were Indian or Thai. I saw several Muslims owing to the conservative headdress and modest dresses, though these women were likely Palestinians from Jordan or Yemenis. No Qatari women worked at Mobil. But many Qatari women were employed at government offices, mostly as secretaries. Their dress ranged from conservative headdress and schoolmarm dress to the fashions favored by garish sales clerk.

The most inviting conversation came from the concierge at the Doha

Sheraton, a very well-spoken Thai who called me by name and made professional hotel employee chatter about the comings and goings of so many Mobil people. In Rahaad's home, however, the only family members I saw were two of his sons, one about 10 the other about 15, who were not introduced. It was all Rahaad, who was grand and friendly. We talked for perhaps a half-hour, sipping Arabic coffee and munching on hors d'oeuvres.

Several times during the evening, Rahaad's eyes became unfocused and he would pay attention to a vibration in the pocket of his thob that was a Motorola pager. He would take the pager out, inspect the number and push the file button. Once he excused himself and used a phone on the other side of the room to call someone.

As he was making the call, Samuel and I joked about how Qatari men had taken the modern world so completely to heart. In the pocket of near every thob I saw in Doha was the telltale clamp of the pocket pager. This was the hot-wired Islamic world tied together by satellite.

"It makes us all feel important," said Samuel.

When Rahaad came back he joined in the conversation.

"How do you square all this technology and the changes that will result with the conservative nature of Islamic society?" I asked, now comfortable enough with these two to ask the question at the center of every Westerner.

"This is a concern," Rahaad said, "but this shouldn't be a problem. People can get accustomed to change."

As if to make the point, Rahaad explained that his call was from one of his friends asking where he was. A group of his friends regularly gathers on this night of the week for a get-together, which, Rahaad pointed out, included a meal and conversation over cocktails. Rahaad seemed to enjoy confounding me and my view of Islamic life in Qatar.

It turned out that Rahaad loves the States. "Do you know where I like best," he asked. I said which. "Orlando!"

Rahaad told about taking his wife and four children every year to a condo in Orlando where he spends \$1,500 a week for a month. They swim in the pool, visit all the theme parks, Disney World and the rest, enjoy the food and entertainment. It is their vacation home away from home.

"They are so nice," he is saying of the condo operators. "They know us and always welcome us back."

When it came time to eat, Rahaad grandly stood up and with a wave of the arm said: "Now is time for Arab hospitality."

And he led me into a separate dining room. It was brightly lighted by the suspended chandelier, suspended over the most dramatic meal setting I've ever seen. There was no table and no chairs. Atop a beautiful Persian rug was a large platter surrounded by smaller plates of fruit, vegetables and prepared dishes. The centerpiece was a round platter nearly four feet across upon which

an entire roasted lamb sat on a bed of yellow rice, boiled eggs, olives, tomatoes and peppers. The lamb had been carved into pieces, legs, torso, and head.

Rahaad and Samuel enjoyed watching my reaction, which was genuine surprise as the amount and the setting. I sat down, and Rahaad made elaborate display of the carving implements and leaned over to carefully carve off a piece of thigh for my place. He served me rice with a spoon and invited me to help myself from the side dishes.

When he was satisfied that I was comfortably served, he said, "Now I shall show you the Arab way."

With that he put down the knives and serving spoons and leaned over the torso of the lamb. With an open hand Rahaad simply grabbed a handful of bone and flesh from the torso. When he had the amount he wanted he ripped it from the lamb, laughing at my reaction, and raised the meat to his mouth and took a large bite. This was all accomplished with theatrical flair, obviously done so that I could see the difference. He was showing off with complete joy. We laughed together, all enjoying the moment. Rahaad was perfectly comfortable when I stayed with my knife and fork, while he and Samuel ate with their hands.

VIII. ABU DHABI

My trip home took me through Abu Dhabi, one of seven emirates in the country called United Arab Emirates, a federation of 2.1 million people. Unlike Doha or Bahrain, the Abu Dhabi airport is an ugly affair, like a purple Las Vegas casino. If Doha was Omaha, Abu Dhabi was Jersey City. When I changed planes, the first person I saw was a gray-uniformed man in his late 20s with pockmarked face and a beard, holding a machine gun aimed at the passengers as they stepped off the plane. I got my transfer ticket from the desk and went to the first-class lounge to wait. I thought about going to the duty-free store until two other guards, also dressed in gray uniforms and also carrying machine guns, stopped me and demanded my passport. They didn't speak English and wanted to see my visa. I explained I didn't have one and that I was a transfer passenger and here was a ticket. I had to watch their machine guns for five minutes before they realized that they didn't need to talk with me anymore.

Hours later at Heathrow, the IRA fortunately suspended its mortar campaign and I was able to sit quietly in the lounge and read through the papers I had collected in Doha, Abu Dhabi, Bahrain and London.

The world's news pages show the tensions created when power is being pulled toward the center and to the edges at the same time, and how people alienated from the process turn toward the familiar warmth and security of their religion or tribes.

John Major, lampooned as the "Poodle of Brussels," was told by a Tory

backbencher on March 29 to quit. The last time an MP did that to his PM was 1963 when Macmillan was told to quit at the height of the Profumo sex scandal. The tiff centered on the rights of EC membership and was caused by the Major government's compromise on the European Union's voting rights issues. The deal seemed to strengthen the hand of smaller countries when Norway, Sweden, Finland and Austria join next year. What this would do is centralize power in Brussels, and thus delute the U.K.'s independence.

Crime, particularly by young folks, was making news. A London judge ruled that a child of 14 can be tried as an adult for capital offenses. The Chinese Han rulers of Singapore resisted world criticism for the punishment they intended to carry out on an 18-year-old American nitwit who joined some pals in a 10-day spree of spray painting cars, behaving like a ninny, and being caught with stolen street signs in his bedroom. His mother stunned this ordered community when she denied any knowledge of these signs in her son's room. "That's Michael's room and he won't allow anyone in there," she said, confirming what everyone thinks to be true of spoiled Americans.

For his crimes, the Confucian rulers of Singapore sentenced the kid to four months and six whacks on the backside with a six-foot bamboo rod swung by a martial arts master. This punishment has caught the attention of the world, particularly the American listeners to radio talk shows who thought the punishment was fine. Americans are fed up with coddling criminals. President Clinton voiced the politically correct tone, however, calling the punishment barbaric. Singapore seemed not to care. They think the fact the West tolerates bad behavior is its problem.

In Italy, Silvio Berlusconi, a right-wing publisher and TV station owner who entered politics for the first time three months ago, led a fascist party called Freedom Alliance Party to victory in parliamentary elections. He seemed to be riding the same wave of populism favored by Ross Perot in the U.S. recently, and follows the political injections favored by publisher/editor/owners Rupert Murdoch, William Randolph Hearst, Lord Beaverbrook and Conrad Black.

Croatian Christians and Bosnian Muslims agreed to a new federation to stop the war in the former Yugoslavia and counter the war of the Orthodox Serbs. In South Africa, Zulu riots in Johannesburg led to 60 deaths in street fighting. The Islamic religious party in Turkey won municipal elections in Ankara and Istanbul. In Yemen, a British businessman was kidnapped.

The pages of the Abu Dhabi newspaper read like a Jersey City crime sheet. Police mug shot photos of four bad guys illustrated the perps in a shootout and murder in a downtown street, which was also illustrated. The victim was a Paki, and the perps Palestinians. The paper also ran a short story of the kidnapping of a British businessman in Dubai.

South Korean president Kim Young Sam was in Peking encouraging the

work of Chinese leaders in their efforts to reduce the tension created by North Korea's drive to build nuclear weapons. Reading this reminded me of John Kim, Mobil's general manager from Seoul, whom I saw in Doha. He was there as part of the marketing team working with the Chinese Power Corporation of Taipei as they decided whether to sign to purchase 2 million tons of LNG a year from Mobil's Ras Laffan joint venture.

"Come on, Tom," Kim said when I asked about the North. I've been worried about Sun Oak's cousins in Seoul. John is an American of Korean ancestry who has listened to me talk about my own Korean family connection in the past. We talk like cousins. "It's like asking somebody in Los Angeles about earthquakes. If it comes, I figure we're 20 minutes away. What can you do? I don't worry about it."

IX. THE IRISH ACTOR

While waiting in the Heathrow lounge, I drifted off. In my mind appeared the image of Lawrence of Arabia from the 1962 David Lean movie. I tried to recall the details, and found them escaping me in the shadows of waiting room slumber. The British accents around me nurtured this bid of reverie. How it is that we have views in our heads? When I got home, I took out the Encyclopedia Britannica to fill out the historical details about the actual person.

Thomas Edward (T. E.) Lawrence was the second son of five children born in 1888 to Sir Thomas Chapman and Sara Maden, who had been employed as the governess of Chapman's daughters in Westmeath, Ireland. Chapman left his wife and daughters, fled Ireland with his mistress and set up house with his mistress, first in Wales and then in Oxford. T. E. took the alias his father used for a last name and excelled in school, where he became an archaeologist. His studies led him to the Middle East where he traveled widely, wrote scholarly works and, at the beginning of World War I, found himself ideally suited to extend British influence and undermine the Ottoman Turks in Arabia. Lawrence befriended and organized Arab sheiks and fomented rebellions that eventually earned him wrath of the Turks and world fame and distinction from the promoters of the British hegemony. Lawrence gained much of this fame through the lectures of filmmaker-journalist-propagandist Lowell Thomas, who touted Lawrence as a kind of Anglo-Arabian knight for empire. It was a romantic myth, but Lawrence, a skilled writer and storyteller, published works of considerable distinction. He died in 1935 after a motorcycle accident.

Gathering my things to get on the plane, I came upon the back of a slender man about my height, with long graying hair curling over the back of his collar. He wore a felt brimmed hat with the front snapped down and at an angle. His great blue trench coat hung off his shoulders and around his frame

in a way that reminded me almost perfectly of my father, who resides among the dead now six years.

I guessed him to be in his late 60s. I could see the side of man's face, and the texture of his skin and the sunken way his cheeks appeared was eerie to me. Just as I passed him, he turned to a boy of about 10, with whom he was obviously traveling, and helped the youngster with his book bag and coat.

I turned to find my way to the aircraft and thought nothing more about the encounter. Except to recall the episode this clearly now as I write. What implanted it in my mind was a moment mid flight over the Atlantic. I was seated in first class in the first row, and it was time to rearrange my bones and stretch.

I turned around and saw seated in the back of the first class cabin the man I had seen in the lounge. Still wearing his tie and sport coat with a kerchief in the pocket, he was reading a hardback book unfolded atop his thin legs. It could have been a vision of my father. It seems gene pools will out. But instead, there illuminated in the reading light sat Peter O'Toole, the Irish actor who had gained fame 34 years before starring in Lawrence of Arabia.