

**Relentless Warrior and Shrewd Tactician: Shaikh
Abdullah bin Ahmad of Bahrain 1795-1849 A Case
Study of Shaikhly Statecraft in the Nineteenth
Century Gulf**

Submitted by

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Abstract

This study examines the political life of Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmad al-Fatih Al Khalifa, the fifth ruler of the Al Khalifa dynasty and the third of that family to rule Bahrain. It is a political biography, examining the tactics used by Shaikh Abdullah and his family to fend off threats from various foes. Those tactics ranged from direct military combat, to entry into temporary protector-protégé relationships, to playing off one foe against another. His ability to employ such tactics effectively enabled him and his family to neutralize or defeat their foes. This study examines local statecraft tactics through the case study of one of the Gulf's greatest nineteenth century statesmen. It also looks at the reasons that resulted in Shaikh Abdullah's political downfall. Those reasons were domestic and external factors that the Shaikh seems to have either ignored or been unable to fully address. That inability and/or shortcoming in addressing those factors would have cost any Gulf ruler his rulership, not just Shaikh Abdullah, as similar aspects prevailed in the other Gulf shaikhdoms. The study examines the life of a political leader whose achievements have been played down, even neglected, by most modern historians in Bahrain and the Gulf. The reason for this neglect lies perhaps in the natural desire of the current ruling branch of the Al Khalifa family to discourage any potential future claim to the throne by the descendants of Shaikh Abdullah, who have lived in exile from Bahrain ever since Shaikh Abdullah's overthrow in 1843.¹

¹ Except for a brief period of time when there was reconciliation between the two family branches that lasted between 1863-1869. Then the family of Shaikh Abdullah returned to Bahrain but their involvement in the 1869 civil war resulted in their permanent exile from that time.