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No. 5270

THE BRITISH WITHDRAWAL FROM THE ARABIAN GULF AND ITS
REGIONAL POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES IN THE GULF

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
North Texas State University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

Masoumah Saleh Al-Mubarak, B. A.

Denton, Texas

December, 1976

Al-Mubarak, Masoumah Saleh, The British Withdrawal from the Arabian Gulf and Its Regional Political Consequences in the Gulf. Master of Arts (Political Science), December, 1976, 105 pp., 4 tables, 1 chart, bibliography, 42 titles.

This study has a twofold purpose: to demonstrate the causes of and various responses (British domestic, Iranian, Arabian, American, and Soviet) to the British decision to withdraw and to illustrate the regional political consequences of that withdrawal. The British Labour Government decision resulted primarily from an economic crisis. The various responses to the decision seem to have been motivated by national self-interest. Some of the Gulf states--Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait--predicted that the consequences of the withdrawal would be desirable while others--Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates--predicted that the consequences would not be beneficial. In some ways, both sides were correct in their predictions.

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INTRODUCTION

In January of 1968, the British Labour Government announced its decision to withdraw its military forces from east of Suez, particularly from the Arabian Gulf, by the end of 1971. Although the British decision proved to be a significant turning point in the politics of the Gulf area, the effect of the decision was not fully realized by western nations. As Alvin Cottrell, Director of Research at the Center for Strategic and International Studies of Georgetown University and a noted student of the Gulf area, observed in mid-1970,

The implications of this have not been fully appreciated in the West and especially in the United States. Indeed, it could be argued that relatively few people in the United States, with the exception of a handful of diplomats, military officers,¹ and oil men, know much about the Persian Gulf Area.

The strategic position of the Gulf area,² its mineral and other valuable resources,³ its trade routes, and, above all, the shifting relations of the United States and the Soviet

¹Alvin J. Cottrell, "British Withdrawal from the Persian Gulf," Military Review, 50 (June, 1970), 14-15.

²While Iran refers to this area as the Persian Gulf, present-day Arabs refer to it as the Arabian Gulf, the term which will be used throughout this thesis.

³In 1971, the Arabian Gulf area produced 35 per cent of the global oil production, and it contains some 53-58 per cent of the world reserve as compared to the United States' 7 per cent and the Soviet Union's 14 per cent; R. M. Burrell, The Persian Gulf (New York, 1972), p. 2.

Union in the Indian Ocean and in the Middle East--all of these critical elements make the Gulf area an important part of the world.

Because the British presence had had an impact on the political, economic, cultural, and social aspects of life in the region, great changes occurred in those spheres following the British announcement. All of those changes have been important; however, the main focus of the present study will be on the political consequences in the Gulf region of the British withdrawal, consequences which are continuing today. Most of those who have written about those effects have been primarily concerned with international political and economic consequences. The present study will be limited to effects within the Gulf area itself, covering the period from the British announcement in 1968 through the withdrawal of Iraqi troops from the Kuwaitian post in April of 1973. Further repercussions such as the recently announced withdrawal of the last remaining British soldiers from the Sultanate of Oman will also be considered.⁴

The study is divided into three parts. Chapter I presents a survey of the historical antecedents of the British special position in each of the Gulf states.⁵ The political

⁴The New York Times (New York, July 21, 1976), p. 2.

⁵The Gulf states are Iran, the Republic of Iraq, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the State of Kuwait, the State of Bahrain, the State of Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and the Sultanate of Oman.

changes which have taken place in the region being examined cannot be dissociated from their historical context and William Brewer has appropriately remarked that "the past is not behind us but all around us."⁶ Therefore, the region's past role in world affairs and the significance of the British special position which was altered by that decision in 1968 will be traced.

Chapter II provides a discussion of the British decision to withdraw from the Gulf area, the causes and circumstances which led the Labour Government to take that important step in its foreign policy, the British domestic reaction to the decision, and the Arabian Gulf states' attitudes and responses to the British decision. The economic and geographical importance of the Gulf area, of interest to both the United States and the Soviet Union, prompted different reactions from those two super powers. The United States strongly opposed the withdrawal on the grounds that it would create a power vacuum in the area, constituting an open invitation to the Soviets, who were allegedly waiting at the head of the Gulf in the Iraqi naval port of Um Qasre. American officials suggested the creation of the Gulf Defense Pact⁷ and persuaded the receptive

⁶William D. Brewer, "Yesterday and Tomorrow in the Persian Gulf," The Middle East Journal, 23 (Spring, 1969), 149.

⁷On January 19, 1968, the United States relied on security grouping in the Gulf area, involving Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia to fill the vacuum that

Iranian government to adopt that policy. On the other hand, the Soviets were pleased with the British announcement to withdraw its military forces from the Gulf area because their aim to enhance their influence in that important part of the world, an objective which they had not been able to realize with a major western presence in the area, would be eased. Arguing that any western presence in the Gulf would be a threat to the southern frontier of Russia, the Soviets rejected the idea of a Gulf Defense Pact and encouraged the Iraqi government to adopt an alternative defense policy.

Chapter III, the core of the present study, will consider the political consequences of the British withdrawal. Leaders of the various Gulf states were divided in their responses to the emerging situation. Iran, the Republic of Iraq, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the State of Kuwait considered the withdrawal to be a potentially stabilizing factor, but Bahrain, Qatar, and the Trucial states believed that the withdrawal would cause dramatic changes which would be detrimental to them. The Sultanate of Oman did not share either position because, at that time, the British decision did not effect British forces in the Sultanate.

would be left by the British withdrawal. This suggestion was attacked by Syria, Iraq, and the United Arab Republic; they viewed the American suggestion of a Gulf Defense Pact as a new imperialistic pact similar to the Baghdad Pact. Shahram Chubin and Sapehr Zabih, The Foreign Relations of Iran, a Developing State in a Zone of Great Power and Conflict (Los Angeles, California, 1974), p. 237.

The British decision, although not to be implemented until the end of 1971, caused several immediate changes to take place in the Gulf area. The British presence had outwardly maintained stability within the area for more than a century and a half; most of the states in the region had felt free to assert historic claims which conflicted with similar claims made by other states in the region without either the need to defend such claims or the necessity to forfeit them. Following the British announcement, many of the states began to behave as if the British had already withdrawn. The present study will also demonstrate that the presence of the small British forces in the Gulf area was more important for its political consequences than for its military weight.⁸

⁸Cottrell, pp. 14-20.

CHAPTER I

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE BRITISH POSITION IN THE ARABIAN GULF STATES

The Arabian Gulf States--Iran, the Republic of Iraq, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the State of Kuwait, the State of Bahrain, the State of Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and the Sultanate of Oman¹--form an international region in more than just a geographic sense. The Arabian Gulf itself is an inland sea about five hundred miles long and one hundred miles wide. In recent years, those states in the Gulf area have developed to such an extent that they exert major influence in international economy as well as in international politics.

Although these states appear to be a geographical unity, the British position in each of them was unique. The differences in what caused the British special position in each of the states, in the way the British spread their

¹Ray E. Thoman, "The Persian Gulf Region," Current History, 60 (January, 1971), 38-50.

While Muhammad Sadik and William Snavely used the term Gulf City States which refer to the States of Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, Rupert Hay refers to the Gulf States as Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and the Sultanate of Oman. Muhammad T. Sadik and William P. Snavely, Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates, Colonial Past, Present Problems, and Future Prospects (Lexington, Massachusetts, 1972), p. 3; Rupert Hay, The Persian Gulf States (Washington, D. C., 1959), p. 87.

influence, and in the time that that influence ended, necessitate treating these states individually. It is possible, however, to state that, in general, British policy in the Gulf had two principal objectives. Until the discovery of oil in the region, the main objective of the British was to protect and foster British interests and to discharge those obligations laid upon the British government by the past. Among the most important of those obligations were the preservation of the maritime peace of the Gulf and the defense of the littoral principalities of eastern Arabia against external aggression from such powers as Holland, France, Russia, and Germany. But when oil was discovered during the 1930s and the British investments in oil production grew, the British interests in the Gulf region became predominately territorial. In all treaties between the British government and the states, the Gulf states agreed not to give exploration rights for any portion of their territories to any power without the consent of the British government; thus Great Britain prevented other world powers such as Russia and Germany from benefiting from oil exploration.

As early as 1698, Great Britain, France, and Holland had agreed to join their efforts in patrolling the Gulf to maintain freedom of shipping. Since the Gulf provided the shortest route to the Indian Ocean, a strong competition arose between Britain and Holland for trading predominance in the Gulf; each wished to control the Gulf, for each power

wanted to spread its influence to include the Indian Ocean. The British succeeded.

At the end of the Eighteenth Century, an era in British relations with the Arabian Gulf during which commercial interests had predominated was coming to a close. For nearly two centuries, from 1616 when Britain had started its trade activities with Persia and Iraq through the East India Company, there had been no contact between the British and the Shaikdoms and the petty principalities on the Arabian side of the Gulf even though British ships sometimes stopped in Musqat, a port on the coast of Oman.

A new era, one in which political considerations were to become predominant began near the end of the Eighteenth Century. British trade with the Gulf, which had always been a monopoly of the East India Company, began to fail drastically. However, two factors intervened to prolong the East India Company's associations with the Arabian Gulf long after its commercial operations in the area had ceased. One factor was the growing awareness of the Gulf's strategic importance in relation to the defense of the British position in India, especially after the French occupation of Egypt in 1798. The second factor was the company's inability to end depredations committed upon the seaborne commerce of India with Persia and Iraq by some tribes of eastern Arabia

after 1800.² In an effort to end the depredations, the British, in 1820, made an agreement with the Pirate Coast, the Shaikhdoms on the southern shore of the Gulf from Ras-al Khaïma southward. According to the provisions of the treaty, which was known as the "General Treaty," the Pirate Coast Shaikhdoms agreed not to attack any of the British or the Indian ships and to end pirate activity among themselves.³

Although the General Treaty did succeed in reducing attacks upon British and Indian ships, it did little to curb piracies among the tribes of the Gulf area themselves. In a second effort, the Resident of the East India Company effected an agreement of truce at sea between the Shaikhdoms of Sharjah and Abu-Dhabi giving rise to the terms the "Trucial Shaikhdoms" or the "Trucial States." The British government also reserved the right to seize and search any vessel from the trucial shaikhdoms suspected of trading slaves.

Thereafter, the British became more deeply involved in the Arabian Gulf, as shown by their warning the Wahhabi's Amir that the trucial shaikhdoms would be hampered from failing to discharge those obligations which they had contracted with the British respecting the peace of the sea. The British government threatened the Wahhabi's Amir that it would

²J. B. Kelly, "The Legal and Historical Basis of the British Position in the Persian Gulf," from St. Antony's Papers, No. 4, Middle Eastern Affairs, Number One (London, 1958), pp. 119, 122-125.

³William D. Brewer, "Yesterday and Tomorrow in the Persian Gulf," The Middle East Journal, 23 (Spring, 1969), 150.

employ naval means to forestall such an eventuality.⁴ Thus the British government indicated that it seriously intended to protect maritime peace in the Gulf although, in the pre-oil period, that protection was primarily a protection of the passages to India, the most important British colony. Following the discovery of oil, Britain's principal concern became territorial. Since that time its treaties with the countries in the Gulf area included a guarantee that these countries would not give the right of oil exploration on their territories to any government other than the British government. However, despite the seeming geographical unity of the Gulf area and the general policies employed by the British in regard to the entire region, the British position in each of the Gulf states was unique.

Iran

Iran's relations with Britain started in 1598 when Shah Abbas the Great of Persia (1587-1629) sent the two English brothers Sir Antony and Sir Robert Sherley as his ambassadors to the capitals of Europe to seek both trade relations and allies against the Ottoman Empire. In 1616, the East India Company sent its ships to the Gulf to trade with Persia; the company opened several factories in Bander Abbas with branches in Isfahan, the "capital," and in Shiraz. But as a result of the internal anarchy in Persia which followed the Afghan

⁴Kelly, pp. 124-125.

invasion in 1722, most of the factories were closed, and, in 1761, the main seat of British trade was shifted to Basra.⁵

Although Persian-French relations were good at the beginning of the Nineteenth Century, Napoleon's treaty with Russia in 1807 damaged the relations, and Britain was given the green light to move in. From mid-Nineteenth Century, British and Russian rivalry tended to concentrate on Persia. Russia was seeking to spread its influence in the Gulf area while Britain was concerned for the security of India. In 1907, the two rivals reached an agreement in which they divided the Persian territory, Russia taking the northern parts while Britain spread its influence in the southern parts.

In a 1919 treaty with Persia, Britain gained virtual political control of all of Persia. A strong nationalistic sentiment against Britain and against the Persian government was aroused. In a 1921 military revolt, Reza Pahlevi, later Reza Shah, came to power. It was he who changed the name of the country from Persia to Iran. Reza Shah was replaced by his son, Mohamad Reza, in 1942 following the occupation of Iran by both Britain and Russia due to Reza Shah's sympathy for Germany. The new Shah signed a treaty with Britain and Russia; their occupation of Iran became

⁵George E. Kirk, A Short History of the Middle East from the Rise of Islam to Modern Times, 7th edition (New York, 1964), pp. 67-69.

legal according to that treaty.⁶

After the war, the United States and Britain jointly proposed to Russia that all of their troops should be evacuated from Iran by January 1, 1946. But the Russian government rejected the proposal in an attempt to separate Azarbaizan. Both the United States and Britain protested the Russian action.

On August 2, 1946, the Iranian government announced the reconstructed cabinet. Included in the new cabinet were three members of the Tudeh Party, the Iranian Communist Party. That announcement produced an unexpected reaction from the British; Britain landed troops at Basra and demanded the Qavam Sultanate, the Iranian Prime Minister, to dismiss the Tudeh ministers.⁷

The British position and influence in Iran, strengthened by that August, 1946, action, remained strong until April of 1951, when Dr. Mohammad Mossadagh, an eighty-year-old nationalist leader, succeeded in getting passed a bill which nationalized the entire petroleum industry as the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. However, with the help of the United States, Britain succeeded in having Dr. Mossadagh arrested in 1953; then an agreement was reached which resulted in the founding of the British Petroleum Company, a union of the

⁶Ray L. Cleveland, The Middle East and South Asia 1971, 5th edition (Washington, D. C., 1971), p. 34.

⁷John Marlowe, Iran, a Short Political Guide (London, 1963), pp. 79-83.

Anglo-Iranian Oil Company and other, mostly American, companies.⁸

Since the Mossadagh crisis, the British special position in Iran had diminished while the United States' involvement increased,⁹ primarily due to the rapid growth of American oil investments since that time and the important status of Iran in the United States rivalry with the Soviet Union.

The Republic of Iraq

The fact that Iraq was under the control of the Ottoman Empire did not preclude relations with Britain; those relations were predominantly commercial. The East India Company started trading with Turkish Iraq in the Eighteenth Century, and several factories were opened in Basra. In 1802, the British Resident at Baghdad was promoted to the rank of Consul, a sign of improving British-Iraqi relations.

⁸Mohammad Mossadagh, leader of a small parliamentary group, Jebhe-Ye Melli (National Front), advocated a policy of resistance; he initiated a parliamentary move to prohibit any new oil negotiations with foreign governments. Mossadagh's fall ended the post-war parliamentary multi-party system in which the formulation and conduct of foreign policy were not the exclusive responsibility of the Shah. Thereafter, the United States took over nearly 40 per cent of the British petroleum operation in Iran, and, as a result of the Mossadagh crisis, the Shah of Iran aligned Iran with western powers through the Baghdad Pact. Shahram Chubin and Sepéhrizadeh, The Foreign Relations of Iran, a Developing State in a Zone of Great Power and Conflict (Los Angeles, 1974), pp. 17, 42-43, 66, 146.

⁹Cleveland, p. 35.

During the 1890s, the world powers--Britain, France, and Russia--were in strong competition in the Gulf area due to the Berlin-Baghdad Railway project. Germany obtained the approval of the Ottoman Empire to establish the railroad until Baghdad and Britain took the responsibility of establishing the southern section of the railway from Baghdad to Basra on Shatt-al Arab. Thus, the British succeeded in reducing or nullifying the influence of other world powers in the Gulf area.¹⁰

After World War I, the British influence in Iraq reached its peak. In an agreement, France and Britain divided between them the Ottoman Empire's domains; Syria and Lebanon were placed under French control while Egypt, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and other parts of the Gulf states previously under the control of the Ottoman Empire, were placed under British control. The British crowned an Arab prince, a minor ally in the war from Hijaz, a part of Saudi Arabia, as the Prince of Iraq; thus, Iraq was not ruled by one of its own citizens.

A nationalistic sentiment developed in 1922. As a consequence, Britain agreed to a treaty which promised independence for Iraq after a transitional period of ten years. On October 3, 1932, Iraq became an independent state and was accepted as a member of the League of Nations.

¹⁰Kirk, pp. 74-75, 89-95.

Anti-colonial nationalists of Iraq, however, felt that the new independence was not total because British military bases were still present on Iraqi territory, and British advisors were still influential among governmental officials. After a period of unrest between 1936 and 1941, the unrest led in 1941 to a revolt fomented by Rashid Ali Gailani, who sought to align his country with the Axis powers. The British, with the help of the Arab Legion from Transjordan, put an end to the revolt and gained the Iraqi governmental support once again. Iraq, then, declared war against the Axis Power in 1943, an action which qualified the country to be among the charter members of the United Nations in 1945.

Iraqi nationalist unrest, however, was not quelled, and on July 14, 1958, a revolution in which the Iraqi king was assassinated took place; that day came to be regarded by most Iraqis as the start of their real independence, marking an end to British control. Led by Abdul-Karim Qasim (1958-1963), the revolution resulted in changing the name of the country to the Republic of Iraq. Another revolt in 1963 brought the Baath party into power, and in the 1968 revolt, Major Ahmad Hasan Al Bakr became president of the Republic of Iraq; he is still in power.

The major persistent internal problem faced by Iraq since 1925 has been the problem of integration of the Kurds; the Kurds rebelled in 1925, again in 1930-1933, 1943-1945,

1961-1966, and in 1969. In 1970, the Iraqi government attempted to end the Kurdish problem by instituting a new policy which recognized the Kurdish people as a national community.¹¹

Iraq has also had two disputes with its neighbors. A dispute with Iran over the right to use Shatt-al Arab passes erupted in 1969 when the treaty of 1937 was nullified by the Iranian government. The Iranian reaction was a consequence of an Iraqi demand that all vessels which used the pass of Shatt-al Arab must fly the Iraqi flag.¹² The second dispute, a border dispute with Kuwait, became critical in 1961. Both of these disputes will be more fully detailed in a subsequent part of the present study.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Until the outbreak of World War I, Saudi Arabia was under the influence of the Ottoman Empire and had neither treaties nor agreements with the British government. The Saudi Amir, from time to time, threatened the small neighboring shaikhdoms. The British government, in 1866, obtained a promise from the Amir that he would not attack or interfere in the affairs of the small shaikhdoms although he would

¹¹Cleveland, pp. 38-39.

¹²Chubin and Zaphir, p. 186.

continue to expect to receive the Zakat¹³ from them. After the death of Faisal ibn Turki, the Saudi Amir, his two sons struggled for succession in Najed. In May of 1871, the Ottoman Empire dispatched an expedition against the areas of the country which supported Saud, the younger son; the Ottoman Wali¹⁴ in Baghdad appointed Abdulla, the older son, as gaimmagam.¹⁵ The British government chose not to intervene because Saudi Arabia was considered a part of the Ottoman Empire.

In 1902, the British succeeded in establishing friendly relations with the Saudi Amir Abdul-Rahman ibn Faisal and his son Abdul-Aziz. In 1906 he proposed that the British government displace the Turks from Al-Hasa, seeking to subscribe to the trucial system, thereby securing the protection of the British government against any Turkish attempts by sea to spread their influence. Due to these developments, the British hostility toward the Wahhabis disappeared.

Abdul Aziz, ibn Saud, succeeded in expelling the Turks from Al-Hasa in 1913. In December of 1915, he signed the first formal treaty with the British government in which the British recognized Abdul Aziz' independence and assured him

¹³Zakat-Zakah, an annual alms tax or poor rate that each Moslem is expected to pay as a religious duty and that is used for charitable and religious purposes; Webster's Third New International Dictionary (1961).

¹⁴Wali-an Arab provincial governor; Webster's.

¹⁵Gaimmagam-Kaimmakam, a lieutenant or deputy in the service of the Ottoman Empire; Webster's.

aid in the event of his being attacked by any foreign power.¹⁶ Ibn Saud, on his part, promised the British that he would not join the Turks against the British in the war; for that promise, he was rewarded with \$25,000 a year.¹⁷

In 1927 Britain signed another treaty with Abdul Aziz, ibn Saud; the treaty gave the British the legal right to conduct the foreign relations of Saudi Arabia. In 1932, Abdul Aziz, ibn Saud, succeeded in establishing the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, declaring himself to be the King of Saudi Arabia instead of Amir Nejed.

The discovery of oil in Al-Hasa by the British in 1938 signalled a new era for Saudi Arabia. Vast changes began to take place there; however, almost nothing was done to modernize the country even during the reign of King Abdul Aziz's son, King Saud, until the reign of King Faisal, who took the throne on November 2, 1964.

Saudi Arabia had difficulties in its relations with some of the neighboring countries. It had adverse relations with the People's Democratic of Yemen, which country was regarded in Saudi Arabia much as Cuba is in the United States. However, the two governments announced their agreement on March 9, 1976, to establish diplomatic relations.¹⁸

¹⁶Kelly, pp. 121-129.

¹⁷Cleveland, p. 72.

¹⁸Keessing Contemporary Archives, XXII (Bristol, May 7, 1976), p. 27712A.

In addition to its problems with Yemen, Saudi Arabia also has had disputes with Abu Dhabi and the Sultanate of Oman on the Buraimi Oasis.

The State of Kuwait

Kuwait's inhabitants were not given to piracy, nor had they taken any part in the slave trade; therefore, they did not sign the General Treaty of 1820 with the British. Moreover, Kuwait's status vis-à-vis the Ottoman Empire was not clear.¹⁹ The Turkish influence there was undeniable, especially after 1870 when the Turks claimed Kuwait as a part of their dominion. The Shaikh of Kuwait chose either to acquiesce to the claim or to ignore it as it suited his convenience.

In May of 1896, the ruler of Kuwait, Shaikh Mubarak ibn Sabah, found his position threatened by the Turks following his outright murder of his two half-brothers, Muhammad and Jarrah. He applied to the British Resident in the Gulf and asked to be included under the protection of the British government. The British Resident informed him that Britain had no intention of becoming more involved in Gulf affairs than was necessary to protect maritime peace. However, in the following year when the Germans and the Russians began

¹⁹J. B. Kelly, "The British Position in the Persian Gulf," World Today (June, 1964), pp. 238-249, 495-496.

to seek a port on the Gulf to be the terminus of their proposed railway, the British changed their minds about Kuwait.²⁰

In 1899, Shaikh Mubarak entered into a secret treaty with Britain in order to gain protection from any hostile action by the Ottoman Empire. According to this treaty, Shaikh Mubarak agreed not to transfer any portion of his territory to another power without the prior consent of the British government. He also agreed not to receive any agent or representative of any other government.²¹

In 1900, the German technical mission, planning the railway, visited Kuwait in an attempt to persuade the Shaikh to accept the proposed establishment of a German terminus and port on his territory. However, the agreement with Britain held, and he rejected the Germans' offer.²² In response, the Germans induced the Ottoman Empire to send an expedition to assert that empire's authority over the Shaikh of Kuwait. But the presence of a British gunboat at the head of the Gulf played a great role in protecting Kuwait from any further action by either Turks or Germans.²³

²⁰Kelly, St. Antony's Papers, pp. 135-136.

²¹Kelly, World Today, pp. 241-242.

²²John Marlowe, The Persian Gulf in the Twentieth Century (New York, 1972), p. 38; see also Kirk, p. 93.

²³Kirk, p. 93.

As oil was discovered in the Middle East, the Shaikh of Kuwait in 1913 entered into an oil concessionary agreement with Britain. According to the compact, the Shaikh agreed not to give a concession to anyone except a person appointed by the British government.²⁴

At the outbreak of World War I, Britain declared Kuwait a protectorate, but, in 1918, the British-Kuwaitain relations were weakened because Shaikh Salim al-Sabah allowed the Turks to use his port for smuggling arms to Syria. Also, during this period, Kuwait's relations with Saudi Arabia were less than friendly because of boundary disputes. By 1921, these relations were somewhat improved; however, the frontier disputes between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia and Kuwait and Iraq were not settled until the British, utilizing their good offices, brought all three states to an agreement in the Ugair Treaty.²⁵

Oil was discovered in Kuwait by British companies in 1936, but it was not exported until 1946 because of the outbreak of World War II. The discovery of oil was a great turning point in Kuwait's economy.

Kuwait became an independent state when the Treaty of 1899 with Britain was replaced by the Ten Year Defence Treaty in 1961, whereby Britain continued the responsibility of defending Kuwait against any aggression. In the summer

²⁴Kelly, World Today, p. 242.

²⁵Marlowe, pp. 75-77.

of 1961, Iraq suddenly renewed its territorial claims against Kuwait; however, the British landed a substantial force in case Iraq should attempt to annex the territory by force. By October of 1963, Iraq recognized the independence of Kuwait.²⁶ Nonetheless, Iraq did not forego its territorial claim against Kuwait.

The State of Bahrain

Bahrain's independence had been threatened many times during the years since 1783 by the Wahhabis, the Sultan of Musqat, the Egyptians, and the Persians, but by the 1840s, the only serious contenders for dominion over the islands were the Persians and the Wahhabis. When Bahrain voluntarily signed the General Treaty of 1820, the British authorities in India had no definite position regarding Bahrain's status. In 1839, the British authorities in India sent an army into the Gulf to break the power of the Saudis, who, for the second time, had arrived on the Gulf Coast opposite Bahrain and threatened the islands. The British government then indicated readiness to protect Bahrain's independence.

Three years later Bahrain's integrity was again threatened, this time by a renewal of a Persian claim to the islands. The British strongly opposed that claim because they believed that such moves would disturb the political balance in the Gulf's waters.

²⁶Cleveland, p. 51.

In May of 1871, the British government signed a convention with the ruler of Bahrain, Al Khalifah, in which the latter agreed to abstain from all maritime aggressions. In return, he received the support of the British in maintaining the security of Bahrain from any external aggression.²⁷

Bahrain signed another treaty with the British in 1914; according to the treaty's provisions, the British were given the right to conduct the foreign affairs of Bahrain and to develop its natural resources. In return, Britain promised protection to the rulers of Bahrain. Iran protested once again, as it had protested all previous treaties, since Iran felt that it had a strong claim against the Bahraini-British relations. Nonetheless, the Iranian protest did not prevent the British Resident in the Arabian Gulf, who was also responsible for the foreign relations of Qatar and the Trucial Shaikhdoms, from establishing a base in Bahrain.

Nationalist political activity developed in Bahrain during the 1950s with demands for a more independent government and an end to foreign rule. These political activities increased after the attack on Suez in 1956, but the leaders of the movement were arrested, and the British held several of them prisoner on St. Helena.²⁸

²⁷Kelly, St. Antony's Papers, pp. 124-127.

²⁸Cleveland, p. 182.

As a consequence of the Defence White Paper of 1966, which announced that the British government would abandon the Aden base, other British forces which were stationed in the Gulf area were to be increased in order to maintain the stability of the area. In May of that year, the British reached an agreement with the Shaikh of Bahrain to increase their forces at both naval and air bases in Bahrain. As recompense, the British increased the annual subsidies to the Shaikh.²⁹

The State of Qatar

During the first half of the Nineteenth Century, because Qatar was regarded by the British as a dependency of Bahrain, the country was not asked to join in signing the General Treaty of 1820 or the treaties of peace signed by Bahrain and the other Shaikhdoms. However, in 1868, Qatar signed an agreement of peace with Britain, which established for the first time that Qatar was an independent entity owing no allegiance to Bahrain.³⁰

Until the outbreak of World War I, Qatar was theoretically a part of the Ottoman Empire. However, in 1916, Qatar signed a treaty with Britain in which the British promised to protect Qatar's territorial integrity. Additionally, Britain gained control of Qatar's external relations. The

²⁹Donald Maclean, British Foreign Policy, the Years Since Suez, 1956-1968 (New York, 1970), p. 183.

³⁰Thoman, p. 41.

agreement, furthermore, constrained Qatar from assigning or selling any of its land to another power.³¹ The relations between the two countries was guided by this treaty until 1971.

The United Arab Emirates

Before 1968, the emirates were called the Seven Trucian Shaikhdoms; then they became known as the Federation of the United Arab Emirates, composed of the seven shaikhdoms, Bahrain, and Qatar. In 1971, the seven shaikhdoms became known as the United Arab Emirates; those shaikhdoms are Abu Dhabi, Dubai Al Sharjah, Ajman, Umm al-Qaywayn, Ras al-Khayma, and Fyjayra. Six of the shaikhdoms face the southern shore of the Arabian Gulf, and one faces the Gulf of Oman. Their total population is currently about 120,000 people living in 32,000 square miles of territory.³²

The rulers of these shaikhdoms established their independence at various times long before they had any contact with British authorities. The formal relations between the shaikhdoms and Britain began in 1819 when the East India Company used a military expedition in the area in order to stop the piracy along Oman's Coast (referred to as the Pirate Coast), piracies which were very often committed against the East India Company's ships in the Gulf. The

³¹Cleveland, p. 86; Sadik and Snavelly, p. 6.

³²Cleveland, p. 86; Sadik and Snavelly, pp. 7, 45.

previously mentioned General Treaty of 1821 between Britain and the shaikhdoms, intended to end piracy, did not do so, for the tribes themselves continued their raids against one another. Later, the British Resident in the Gulf area effected an agreement between Al-Sharjah and Abu Dhabi, establishing a truce at sea among the shaikhdoms; from that time until 1968, the shaikhdoms were known as the Trucial Shaikhdoms or States.³³

In 1853, the Perpetual Treaty of Peace was signed between the shaikhdoms and Britain; in 1892, a more definitive understanding was cemented by the Exclusive Agreements. These agreements constituted the basis of British special treaty relations with the shaikhdoms from that time until the British decision to withdraw in 1968.³⁴ According to the provisions of these treaties, Britain gained full control of the economic and political affairs of the shaikhdoms; in return, the shaikhdoms gained complete British protection against any aggression.

The British government dealt with the shaikhdoms collectively following the establishing of treaty relations. Sharjah served as headquarters for British political officers, and a British navy and air force base was established there. In 1951, the British authorities created the

³³Kelly, St. Antony's Papers, pp. 124-125.

³⁴Donald Hawley, The Trucial States, 2nd edition (New York, 1971), pp. 137-138.

so-called "Trucial Oman Scouts," a military force officered by British personnel. These scouts played a major role in the Buraimi crisis in 1955 when Saudi troops invaded the Buraimi oasis. According to the treaties, Britain not only conducted the shaikhdoms' foreign affairs but also was responsible for any foreigners there.

The relationship between Britain and the Trucial States was guided by the previous special treaties until 1968. At that time these states along with Qatar and Bahrain announced their federation. In 1971, the Federation developed out of the seven Trucial States.³⁵

The Sultanate of Oman

Previously known as the Sultanate of Musqat and Oman, this entity had first come to the political notice of the British government in 1798 when France occupied Egypt. The East India Company signed an agreement with the ruler of Musqat and Oman on October 12, 1798 in which the British agreed to defend the Sultanate against any aggression. But when the Sultanate was threatened by the Wahhabis, the British authorities in India indicated that they had no intention of defending the Sultan. He was informed by the British government that the Qaulnamah, the Treaty of 1798, had no reference to any situation other than that created by

³⁵Sadik and Snavelly, pp. 12, 190.

war with France.³⁶ The incident reveals that the British government had no explicit policy in the Gulf at that time. The government's main interest was in protecting the passages to India from any great power such as France; it was not concerned about any development in the relations among the Gulf's tribes and shaikhdoms as long as they did not disturb the peace in those passages.

During the Nineteenth Century, however, Musqat and Oman played a very important part in the British policy in the Gulf, for it was a link in India's trade relations with Arabia, Persia, and Africa. Therefore, the British government recognized the independence of the Sultanate because of the strategic usefulness it served in India.³⁷

Because of the paramount British influence in the Indian Ocean, Musqat and Oman maintained friendly relations with that strong power. In 1891, 1939, and 1951, treaties of friendship and commerce were signed. These agreements allowed Britain to supervise and conduct the foreign affairs of the Sultanate.

In 1952, the first external crisis to face the Sultanate was a dispute over Buraimi's Oasis which Musqat and Oman shared with Abu Dhabi. A unit of Saudi Arabian soldiers occupied this collection of villages. But the Sultan of

³⁶Ibid., pp. 119-120.

³⁷Ibid., p. 120.

Musqat and Oman, with the support of troops from the Trucial Shaikhdoms under British officers, retook the villages.

The second crisis faced the Sultanate in 1959, when a strong internal rebellion against the Sultan took place.³⁸ The British intervened to put an end to the rebellion, but they did not fully succeed in eradicating widespread guerilla organization activities. These activities, which took place in Dhofar, gained international significance because of the involvement of the Republic of China on the rebels' side and of Iran on the Sultan's side.

In 1970, Sultan Qapoos became ruler of the Sultanate, and he changed its name to Sultanate Oman after the palace coup which deposed his father, Sultan Said, who went into retirement in Europe. But Saudi Arabia did not accept this more progressive monarchy in the Sultanate; rather, Saudi Arabia reasserted its claims to the Buraimi Oasis. Its government refused to recognize Qapoos as ruler of Oman and called for the Iman's right to govern Oman.³⁹ Saudi Arabia did not assert seriously these claims though it did not forego them.

The foregoing outline traces the political and economic background of the British position in the Gulf states as the

³⁸This rebellion was led by Dhofar Liberation Front, of which the current movement, the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arab Gulf (PFLOAG) is an extension; David Holden, "The Persian Gulf: After the British RAJ," Foreign Affairs, 49 (July, 1971), 727.

³⁹Cleveland, p. 61.

relations between Britain and those states developed over a century and a half. Britain defended the minor Gulf states in order to defend its own interests in that part of the world. Appropriately, Foreign Secretary of Britain Lord Lansdowne said in 1892 of the British goal,

Her aim was to promote and protect British trade without excluding the legitimate trade of other powers; the establishment of a naval base or a fortified port in the Gulf by any other power would be a very grave menace, and we should certainly resist it with all the means at our disposal. I say that in no minatory spirit because, as far as I am aware, there are no proposals on foot for the establishment of a foreign naval base in the Gulf.⁴⁰

The main concern of Britain in all of its relations with the Gulf states was to arrogate to itself the right of conducting the foreign policies of those states, a fact evidenced by all of the treaties negotiated between the British and the states. In recent decades, British policy has also been shaped by the discovery and development of oil production and the growth of large-scale oil investments, not only by Britain but also by the United States and European countries as well; thus, Britain's concern has been to assure the maintenance of its vital interests and those of its allies.

Britain's military presence in the Gulf states area, secured by permanent army, naval, and air force bases in Aden until November of 1967 and in Bahrain and Al Sharjah until the withdrawal of British forces, maintained and guaranteed control and stability in the Gulf area. British

⁴⁰Kirk, p. 93.

forces in the area had prevented internal territorial conflicts for over a century and a half. During that period of time, the Gulf states neither dramatically asserted historic, conflicting claims nor forfeited such claims. The small British military presence was sufficient to attain the political objectives in the Gulf.

CHAPTER II

THE BRITISH DECISION TO WITHDRAW FROM THE GULF

The circumstances which led the Labour government to make its important decision to withdraw from the Gulf region was rooted in the British domestic situation. The decision produced mixed reactions in Britain, in the Gulf states, and in the super powers of the world.

As late as 1964, the British Prime Minister of the Labour government, Harold Wilson, suggested that one British soldier east of Suez was more valuable than one thousand British soldiers on the Rhine. Yet Wilson's view seemed to have changed to almost the opposite one when he announced to the world on January 15, 1968, that Britain would withdraw all its forces from east of Suez by the end of 1971.¹

Although some critics of the government were led by that reversal of opinion to accuse Wilson of being self-contradictory, Wilson justified his government's decision as a realistic one, indicating that his government had been pushed into taking the important step in foreign policy by the deteriorating British economic situation.² As McKie and Cook explain in The Decade of Disillusion: British Politics

¹Alvin J. Cottrell, "British Withdrawal from the Persian Gulf," Military Review, 50 (June, 1970), pp. 14-15.

²Ibid., p. 15.

in the Sixties, from the beginning of the sixties, Britain faced major economic difficulties; for instance, during the first four years (1959-1963), British economic growth had risen very slightly over preceding years. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) had risen in real terms at an annual average rate of 3.3 per cent; the per capita, 2.5 per cent; and the per person employed, 2.4 per cent. Between the years 1963-1970, the three rates were, respectively, 2.6 per cent, 2.15 per cent, and 2.6 per cent. This rise in the growth of productivity over the decade was far from impressive. Most of the rise had occurred during 1964 and suffered under the devaluation of 1968; the change had taken place against a background of a reduced rate of increase in the working population during the years of 1963 and 1966 combined with a protracted fall of a half a million in the years of 1966-1970.

Moreover, the British share in the total exports of manufacturers in the industrial world fell from two-ninths in 1952 to less than one-eighth in 1967. All of these economic difficulties forced the Labour government to seek a way to arrest this decline; one remedy was to cut public expenditures, especially military spending overseas.³ In 1966, the government found itself obliged to abandon the position that key overseas bases would be kept in all

³Davis McKie and Chris Cook, The Decade of Disillusion: British Politics in the Sixties (London, 1972), pp. 53, 95-96.

circumstances. The Defense White Paper of that year declared that in the future British bases would be maintained only in those locations where their presence was welcome, such as Hong Kong and Diego Garcia. Thus the British decided to evacuate the base at Aden by 1968, but the date was advanced to November 30, 1967 because of the strength of the National Liberation Front in the country.⁴

In 1967, British economy faced the shock of the devaluation of the British pound, a factor which gave the Labour government a pretext to speed up the pullout from east of Suez. But the devaluation also led to a sharp rise in the sterling price of all goods traded internationally, resulting in a deficit in the balance of payments.

That economic decline resulting from the increasing over-valuation of the sterling in the international monetary market forced the government to take some drastic measures.⁵ In his book A Personal Record--the Labour Government 1964-1970, Harold Wilson mentioned that the Labour Government made the Chancellor Proposal to reduce public expenditure in overseas defense expenditure and in the planned growth of social expenditure. The proposal included the cancellation of the order for the American F111A; speedier withdrawal from southeast Asia and immediate withdrawal from the

⁴Donald Maclean, British Foreign Policy--the Years Since Suez, 1956-1968 (New York, 1970), pp. 171, 182.

⁵McKie and Cook, pp. 119, 128.

Arabian Gulf; and the restoration of prescription charges and the postponement of the raising of the school-leaving age. These provisions were designed to cut expenditures and to reduce the number of persons in the labor market.

On January 15, 1968, the British cabinet approved the whole package. The total amount for education for 1968-1969 was £ 325 millions and for 1969-1970 was £ 441 millions. In regard to the defense expenditures, it was agreed that the withdrawal of forces from stations in the Far East, due to take place by the mid-1970s, according to the Defense White Paper would be completed by the end of 1971 excepting the British dependencies in Hong Kong and Diego Garcia. The British forces in the Arabian Gulf were to be evacuated by the end of 1971 except their forces in Sultanate Oman. That meant that Britain, after 1971, would not maintain military bases outside Europe and the Mediterranean and some bases in the Indian Ocean such as Diego Garcia, and its air base and navy base in Sultanate Oman.

The order for fifty F111A aircraft from the United States was to be cancelled. This cancellation saved Britain about £ 400 millions.⁶

Comparing the British withdrawal from the bases in Far East Asia with their withdrawal from the bases in the Arabian Gulf and Aden, Harold Wilson said that the main

⁶Harold Wilson, A Personal Record--The Labour Government 1964-1970 (London, 1971), pp. 479-483.

reason for the pace of withdrawal was not a desire to maintain an inflated establishment in Far East Asia but was the alleviation of economic problems at home. In regard to withdrawal from the Arabian Gulf and Aden, the limitation was not the British desire to maintain a military establishment, but the speed with which it could negotiate a viable constitutional settlement in Aden and the Federation of the Arab Emirates among Bahrain, Qatar, and the Trucial States.⁷

The British withdrawal from the Gulf had two aspects. The first was military, involving the recall of about 6,000 British ground troops⁸ stationed at the British bases in Bahrain and Sharjah, one of the states that forms the United Arab Emirates. The second aspect was the termination of the old special treaties of protection, replacing them with simple friendship treaties that carried no significant obligations for either side. It was proposed, however, that the British presence shall continue in the Gulf by the use of existing airfields as staging ports for the Royal Air Force by occasional naval visits, especially desert training for small British Army units, and the provision of British officers and equipment for the local armed forces. In addition, Britain would continue its previous arrangements with the Sultanate of Oman, where de facto British protection had

⁷Ibid., p. 376.

⁸According to other sources, the British ground troops in the Gulf were 8,400. Alvin J. Cottrell, p. 15.

existed since 1798. However, these arrangements had been regulated in a more formal treaty in 1955; that treaty provided that Britain take the responsibility of training and equipping the Sultan's forces in exchange for staging rights on the airfield of Masirah, an island off the southern coast of the Sultanate.

With all these qualifications, however, the purpose of the British withdrawal was the British willingness to disengage, as far as possible, from military and political commitments which became untenable.⁹

The British Domestic Response

British domestic reaction to the Labour government's proposals was mixed. Those who favored the decision justified their point of view by referring to the economic conditions and the necessity of cutting down the public expenditures in order to improve the economic situation. This group was mainly composed of the Labour Party (left wing) who believed that Britain should evacuate its forces from the Gulf as well as from other parts of overseas because the continuation of their presence would increase Britain's economic difficulties.¹⁰

⁹David Holden, "The Persian Gulf After the British RAJ," Foreign Affairs, 49 (July, 1971), pp. 723-725.

¹⁰McKie and Cook, p. 128.

Those who opposed the decision claimed that Britain could afford the cost of maintaining its presence in the Gulf area and that its scope could be reduced substantially and still be adequate to provide continued stability in the area--that stability which would be threatened by the British withdrawal.

The British Conservative Party pamphlet, "East of Suez," held that Britain had been paying a very low cost to insure the return from its investments in the region, for the British spent 25 million dollars while gaining 450 million dollars annually at the time of the decision.

Opposition to the government's decision to withdraw was supported mostly by the Conservative Party, but some Labour Party members also joined in.¹¹ The giant British oil companies, whose interests were mainly in oil exploration and production in the Gulf area, led the opposition using their influence in an attempt to reverse the decision because it jeopardized their interests.

In the election of 1970, the Conservative Party came into power and assumed the opposition's side on the question of withdrawal of the British forces from bases East of Suez. The Conservative government tried to reverse, as much as possible, the Labour government's commitment to withdraw from the Gulf area. In June 1970, Sir Alec Douglas Home, the British Foreign Minister of the Conservative government,

¹¹Cottrell, p. 16.

started his consultations with the Gulf rulers to see whether the reversal of the Labour decision was either practicable or desirable.¹² The Conservative government also started reviewing with leaders in the Gulf area the purpose of any future British presence and showed these leaders the possibilities of retaining a force in the area, understanding that it would be necessary first to encourage the creation of the proposed United Arab Emirates and insuring viability.¹³ None of the Gulf powers accepted the proposals and attempts for British presence in the area beyond 1971 except Bahrain, Qatar, and the Trucial States. The reason will be clarified in another part of this study.

In July of 1970, Britain started to implement its plans to evacuate its troops, though it still retained responsibility for the foreign policy and defense of the Seven Trucial States, Qatar, Bahrain,¹⁴ and Kuwait because the defense treaties between Britain and these states would not be terminated until the end of 1971.

In March of 1971, the British government offered a treaty of friendship to replace the special treaties with the Trucial States, Qatar and Bahrain, hoping that such a move would lead to the creation of the United Arab Emirates

¹²Holden, pp. 724-725; The Times (London, June 27, 1970), p. 1 g.

¹³The Times (London, June 23, 1970), p. 1 a.

¹⁴The Times (London, July 10, 1970), p. 4 h.

through the establishment of a strong political and economic entity able to contend with the surrounding powers such as Iran and Saudi Arabia; the British also encouraged the Union in order to protect the traditional type of rule in the nine states. The government proposed that some elements of British forces would continue to be stationed in the area for liaison and training roles if the Union wished. Britain wanted to also keep the Trucial Oman Scouts in the Union to form a nucleus for its army with the assistance of British officers and equipment.

In spite of their opposition to the Labour decision, Conservative leaders did implement the withdrawal. In doing so, according to Chubin and Zabih they were not responding to any change in personal conviction but, as will be shown in the detailed analyses of the Gulf powers' responses which follow, to pressures from some of the Gulf leaders exerted through threats to terminate both diplomatic and oil relations with Britain and to refer the question to the United Nations.¹⁵

The Responses of the Arabian States

The attitudes of the Gulf states toward the British decision to withdraw varied. Some states opposed the withdrawal; others favored the decision. Moreover, the rationale

¹⁵Shahran Chubin and Sepideh Zabih, The Foreign Relations of Iran: A Developing State in a Zone of Great Power and Conflict (Los Angeles, California, 1974), p. 237.

for their attitudes and positions toward the British decision differed as widely as did their initial reactions.

The Iraqi Response to the Decision

The Republic of Iraq had terminated British influence over it in the revolution of 1958, which brought to power a nationalistic, anti-colonial leadership. Subsequently, the revolution of 1963 brought the Baath Party into power. Since that time, Soviet influence has increased substantially in Iraq while the western presence there has diminished.

When the British Labour Government announced its decision to withdraw from the Gulf, Iraq did not spare efforts to show its concern about the Gulf. The Iraqi government called for immediate withdrawal of British forces from the Gulf area. The Iraqi attitude was made clear in a speech delivered on June 22, 1970, by the Iraqi President, Ahmad Hassan al-Baker: "There must be complete withdrawal from the Gulf."¹⁶ On July 17, 1970, President Ahmad Hassan al-Baker called for the creation of a defense alliance in the Gulf combining Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the nine Gulf states. However, Kuwait did not accept the Iraqi position because its foreign relations policy excluded participation in any political or military party or bloc in order to maintain peaceful relations with all countries within the area. Thereafter, Iraq invited all willing powers and organizations

¹⁶The Times (London, June 23, 1970), p. 7 a.

in the Arab countries to be prepared to meet their responsibilities in defending the Gulf after the British withdrawal.¹⁷

It is clear that Iraq was calling for an Arabian alliance in the Gulf which excluded Iran. The position on Iran was not rooted in the Iraqis' strong Arabic nationalistic feeling but in the boundary dispute between the two countries over Shatt al-Arab bases.

The Kuwaitian Response

In spite of the fact that the British-Kuwaiti defense treaty would be ended in 1971, the Kuwaiti government was opposed to Britain's staying in the Gulf and requested that the Conservative government should honor the Labour governments' commitments on withdrawal from the Gulf by the end of 1971.¹⁸ Kuwait did not believe that there would be a so-called "power vacuum" in the area after the British withdrawal because the people of the region had the ability to defend their independence and safeguard their sovereignty. Iran, Saudi Arabia, and probably Iraq were earnest in deciding to refer the Arabian Gulf case to the International Court if Britain decided to stay in the Gulf area after the end of 1971; they threatened Britain, declaring that they would cease oil and diplomatic relations unless the United

¹⁷Sadik and Snively, p. 198.

¹⁸The Times (London, July 13, 1970), p. 4 f.

Nations Security Council made a decisive ruling on the issue. The Kuwaitian government also opposed any British attempt to remain in the Gulf area after 1971; but that position did not prevent Kuwait from rejecting the Iraqi proposal for an Arabic defense alliance in the Gulf.¹⁹ Kuwait also refused the Iranian proposal to create the Gulf Defense Pact because of its policy of non-alignment.

The Kuwaitian government had actively, more than any other power in the Gulf, encouraged the creation of the United Arab Emirates as the best means for the nine small states to protect their security after the British withdrawal from the area.²⁰ That attitude resulted from the Kuwaitian conviction that the countries in the region were able to maintain stability in the area and to defend themselves without the British presence.

The Saudi Arabian Response

Saudi Arabia, considered one of the most powerful of the Gulf Coast countries, derives its power from several sources. Perhaps most significant is the fact that the Muslims' holy places are located in that country. Saudi Arabia, therefore, has a unique and important status throughout the Islamic world.

¹⁹Chubin and Zaidi, p. 237.

²⁰The Times (London, July 8, 1970), p. 6 a.

A second contributing factor to Saudi Arabia's tremendous power is an economic one. Oil revenues in the Arabian Gulf countries (see Table I in the Appendix) increased in Saudi Arabia from 350,000,000 in 1960 to five-and-a-half billion by 1973. Iran, whose oil revenues parallel Saudi Arabia's, increased during that same period from 290,000,000 to four-and-a-half billion. Projected revenues for 1974 indicate, however, that Saudi Arabia's income from oil should reach twenty-three billions of dollars while Iran, its nearest economic rival, is expected to receive about eighteen billions of dollars. Other countries in the Gulf area have received much less revenue from oil production than either Saudi Arabia or Iran.²¹ In other economic measurements such as foreign exchange assets, Saudi Arabia is also dominant (see Table II in the Appendix for details). Saudi Arabia's foreign exchange assets have increased rapidly during the past fifteen years, especially during the years of 1973 and 1974. That enabled Saudi Arabia to participate in a wide range of external investments.²²

The third source of the Saudi Arabians' power is their military strength. In 1971, for instance, Saudi Arabia spent 383,000,000 dollars on building its military strength

²¹Hearings before the Subcommittee on the Near East and Southeast Asia of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, The Persian Gulf, 1974: Money, Politics, Arms, and Power (Washington, 1975), p. 78.

²²*Ibid.*, p. vi.

alone, an amount which was exceeded by no other Gulf state except Iran (see Table III in the Appendix for details).²³

When the British government announced its decision to withdraw, the Saudi government was pleased; it rejected the argument that the withdrawal would create a power vacuum, believing that the countries of the region could defend themselves and were able to maintain the stability. The Saudi officials established diplomatic contacts with the Iranian government in order to strengthen their friendly relations in light of the new circumstances. The outcome of these contacts was an agreement between the two governments to build pressure for a British withdrawal.²⁴ However, Saudi Arabia refused the Iranian proposal to establish a defense pact in the Gulf and opposed the British Conservative Government's attempt to reverse the Labour Government's attempt to stay in the Gulf beyond the end of 1971. The Saudi government was ready to refer the Gulf case to the International Court if Britain did not evacuate its forces by the deadline.²⁵ Furthermore, the Saudi government also refused to recognize the United Arab Emirates' proposal

²³Ann T. Schulz, "A Leadership Role for Iran in the Persian Gulf," Current History, 62 (January, 1972), p. 27.

²⁴Sadik and Snavely, p. 198.

²⁵Ibid., p. 198.

unless Saudi Arabia's own claim against Abu Dhabi and the Sultanate of Oman over the Buraimi Oasis were settled.²⁶

The Trucial States, Qatar, and
Bahrain Responses

The British decision of 1968 was a great shock to the Gulf rulers because the Labour government, two months before the announcement of its historic decision, had assured all of the Gulf rulers that Britain had no intention of leaving the area in the near future.²⁷ Therefore, the rulers of these states welcomed the election of June 18, 1970, hoping that success for the Conservative Party would bring about a serious attempt to reverse the 1968 policy announcement.²⁸ But that hope faded when the Conservative Government decided to implement the Labour Government's decision as a result of pressure from Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, and Kuwait. The rulers of the nine states did not like the British decision. As The Times (London) described the effect of the Conservative Government's decision on the Trucial States rulers, it was "the bitter pill" which they had to accept. Shaikh Rashid of Dubai, one of the most influential of the rulers of the Trucial States, said that he was very disappointed by the British decision, and tried to express his view to British officials. He was told, however, that the decision

²⁶The Times (London, December 9, 1970), p. 79.

²⁷Cottrell, p. 14.

²⁸Sadik and Snavelly, p. 197.

had been theirs and that he would not be given an opportunity to express his view. Shaikh Rashid believed that the withdrawal of British forces would lead the area into an uncertain future; he urged the Trucial States and Qatar to speed up the creation of the United Arab Emirates. However, he did not consider Bahrain's becoming a member of that union to be a good idea since it would create problems with Iran due to Iran's unsettled dispute with Bahrain. The Shaikh also observed that the Bahrainian government did not want to become a member of the United Arab Emirates.²⁹

These calculations were guided by a strong belief that the stable relations among these states and in the Gulf area as a whole was due to the presence of the British, therefore, the rulers of these states assumed that as soon as the British were evacuated from the area, a power vacuum would be created into which an unfriendly power might step. In order for these states to maintain their political stability, the logical option was the formation of the union.

Bahrain's status was threatened by the Iranian claim; the British decision increased the fears that Iran would reassert its old claim to the islands. Therefore, the Bahrainians were anxious to have the British stay in the Gulf area beyond 1971 because Britain's presence was viewed as a guardian of the island's sovereignty against the Iranian claim.

²⁹The Times (London, March 3, 1971), p. 6 c.

The United Arab Republic's Response

Although it is not one of the Gulf states, the United Arab Republic was the strongest Arab country both politically and militarily, and its response to the British withdrawal from the Gulf was significant throughout the region. The government of the United Arab Republic called for complete British withdrawal from the area on the scheduled date at the end of 1971,³⁰ because the country's policy opposed any colonial presence in any part of the world. The British presence in the Gulf area was regarded as that type of colonial presence. The Egyptian government was pleased with the British announcement and called for complete and immediate implementation of the withdrawal.

President Sadat had discussed the Gulf situation with King Faisal, and he tackled the subject of the United Arab Emirates with a number of the Gulf rulers and shaikhs. He encouraged them to go forward in the creation of this union because it would lead to their stability and security after British withdrawal and thereby serve the Egyptian interests--financially and politically.³¹

The Iranian Response

The Iranian government welcomed the British decision to withdraw from the Gulf. The Shah of Iran expressed his

³⁰Sadik and Snavely, p. 197.

³¹The Times (London, June 21, 1971), p. 5 f.

belief that the stable conditions may best be insured without the continued stationing of British forces in the Gulf itself.³² The Shah urged that the regional countries had the ability to maintain the Gulf stability even without the British, and he was being urged by the United States to act as a new stabilizing factor in the area. For all of that he refused the idea that the British withdrawal would create a power vacuum which had to be filled by another power. The Shah believed that the large littoral powers in the area--Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait (excluding Iraq because of the serious dispute over Shatt al-Arab bases)--would be able to cooperate and assume the responsibility of defending the Gulf against any threat.³³

Iran favored a formal defense pact in the Gulf and some type of regional cooperative treaty or pact among the Gulf states. But Kuwait and Saudi Arabia rebuffed the suggestion, refusing to participate in military and political pacts or blocs. After the failure of the defense pact project, Iran moved toward a massive allocation of funds for defense in preparation for the British withdrawal by the end of 1971. In justifying the need to increase the country's defense capacity (see Table III in the Appendix for a tabulation of the growth of expenditures for defense),³⁴ Prime Minister

³²Ibid. (July 10, 1970), p. 4 h.

³³Chubin and Zabih, p. 235.

³⁴Schulz, p. 27.

Hoveyda of Iran referred to both the security in the Gulf after the British withdrawal and Iran's confrontation with Iraq.³⁵

On April 13, 1970, the Shah of Iran told The Times (London) that he had no objection to British forces being stationed near, but not in, the Gulf in order to protect the British airfield on Masirah Island in the Gulf and the British airport at Salah in the territory of Musqat. Summarizing the Iranian position, Iranian Foreign Minister Zahedi maintained that the British withdrawal from the Gulf area and any other matters concerning the Gulf should remain the sole responsibility of the Gulf regional states.³⁶

In many ways, the British decision to withdraw from the Gulf provided Iran with a unique opportunity. Professor Ramazani of the University of Virginia observes that the withdrawal of British troops gave Iran the unprecedented opportunity to move toward its ancient dream of spreading its influence and power in the Gulf area. That dream had been frustrated for a century-and-a-half by British supremacy and by the Gulf's as well as Iran's own traditional lack of power. Ramazani notes that the British decision was a propitious opportunity for Iran.³⁷

³⁵The Times (London, February 9, 1970), p. 4 f.

³⁶Ibid. (May 1, 1971), p. 4 b.

³⁷Rouhallah K. Ramazani, "Iran's Changing Foreign Policy: A Preliminary Discussion," Middle East Journal, XXIV (1970), pp. 435-437.

The United States' Response

When British Prime Minister Harold Wilson announced the government's decision to recall all the British troops and end all British commitments east of Suez, the American Presidents Johnson and Nixon, successively, warned of the danger of the policy. However, the advice of the Americans did not alter the British decision. Secretary of State William Rogers reiterated in 1970 the United States' desire that British forces remain in the Gulf because their withdrawal would constitute an open invitation for the Communist powers, especially the Soviet Union, to fill the resulting vacuum. Rogers believed that the stability in the area was maintained by the few British troops and Britain's long political experience in that part of the world. Characterizing the Labour government as being less than honest with itself and with the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization allies, he noted that this government reversed her assurance to help these allies in times of need; such help would hardly be available when there are no troops on the ground.³⁸ He also believed that the abrogation of the special British treaties in the Gulf would change the regional security pattern and encouraged a close cooperation between Iran and its Arab neighbors to settle their territorial disputes.³⁹

³⁸The Times (June 26, 1970), p. 7 a.

³⁹Ibid (May 1, 1971), p. 4 b.

United States Under-Secretary of State Elliot Richardson, when asked about the Arabian Gulf after the British withdrawal, stated that

The objectives of the Nixon doctrine that the United States took to the countries in the area and to the leadership of Iran in particular, to carry out the objectives of maintaining the framework of peace and stability within which the independent evolution and national integrity of countries of the area can go forward.⁴⁰

In spite of the United States' objection to the British decision, American officials were well aware that should the United States leave the area following the British withdrawal in 1971, the Soviet interests would also be served. In fact, Soviet vessels showed their flags in the Gulf in 1968, easing the United States' concern about the Soviet presence in the area.

The increasing Soviet interests in the Gulf area depended on effective relations with Iraq and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (the former Aden, a British protectorate). The Soviet Union had also established diplomatic relations with Iran and Kuwait.⁴¹ Therefore, the United States chose to take the place in part of British forces in Bahrain. In December of 1971, the United States and the State of Bahrain completed an agreement which

⁴⁰The Times (London, April 23, 1970), p. 8 g.

⁴¹Hearings, Subcommittee on the Near East, Committee on Foreign Affairs, House, Ninety-Second Congress, Second Session, February 2, June 7, August 8, and 15, 1972, U. S. Interests in and Policy Toward the Persian Gulf (Washington, D. C., 1972), p. 144.

permitted the United States to establish a naval base consisting of about ten per cent of the area of the former British base.⁴² In January of 1972, the United States set up a permanent naval base in Bahrain only weeks after the withdrawal of British forces.⁴³

The United States' policy in the Gulf area was guided by America's interest in the Gulf, interests which were shaped by a number of forces. Among those forces were the large-scale investments in oil production in the area and also America's increasing need for the Gulf's oil. Oil is vital to the economics of the NATO allies and of America's friends east of Suez. There is also the question of markets for American industry. The Gulf area has a great need for technological expertise and possesses surplus capital for investments in other countries, including the United States.⁴⁴ Thus, the Gulf states and the United States and its allies can participate in an exchange of goods, services, and capital with mutual benefit for all.⁴⁵

Although a small American naval base was established in Bahrain in 1972, Joseph Sisco stated that the United States had no intention of making new military commitments in the

⁴²Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, XXX (February 26, 1972), p. 427.

⁴³The Times (London, January 7, 1972), p. 1 a.

⁴⁴U. S. Interests in and Policy Toward the Persian Gulf, p. 81.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 140; The Persian Gulf, 1974: Money, Politics, Arms, and Power, p. 55.

Gulf region. Sisco added that the United States would support the endeavors of the new states to consolidate their independence through economic and social support and through the improvement of defense and internal security.⁴⁶ American officials realized that the best way to insure United States' interests in the Gulf area is to foster stronger economic and commercial as well as cultural and political ties with the countries in the region.⁴⁷

The Soviet Union's Response to the British Decision

The main objective of Soviet foreign policies in underdeveloped countries is to gain influence. To this end, therefore, the Soviet Union has often adopted any suitable opportunity provided by uprisings or revolutionary movements, seeking to direct those movements against western influence. Such a policy was employed in Iraq, Aden, Syria, and in the national liberation movements in Africa and Latin America through Cuba.

The Soviets had historical ambitions in the Arabian Gulf area, and these ambitions derived from the need to spread their influence on that part of the world rich in raw materials--i.e., oil and to the markets--this area is

⁴⁶Joseph J. Sisco, "United States' Policy Toward the Persian Gulf Region," Department of State Bulletin (September 4, 1972), p. 243.

⁴⁷Rodger P. Davies, "U. S. Commercial Interests and Policy in the Persian Gulf," U. S. Department of State Bulletin, 69 (January 10, 1974), p. 725.

of vital importance to their military security.

The Soviet Union was in favor of Britain's decision because it served the Soviets' ambitions, and it also would lead to undermining the Western influence in the area. The Soviet officials argued that the British presence in the Gulf created a threat not only to the Arab national movements, but also to the southern frontier of the Soviet Union.⁴⁸

By opposing the British presence in the Gulf, the Soviets gained the approbation of both Arabs and Iranians. Soviet officials rejected the western argument that British withdrawal would create a power vacuum, a potential threat to the area; they labelled the argument as propaganda against them. The Soviets claimed that they did not seek to disturb the area but wanted friendly, mutual relations. Despite that claim, during the period from September of 1968 until February of 1970, the Soviet navy three times visited the Iraqi port at the mouth of the Shatt al-Arab, Um Qasre, very close to the Kuwait-Iraq frontier.

Moreover, Moscow denounced United States Under Secretary of State Eugene Rostow's suggestion of 1968 that the United States should rely on the security groupings of Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia in order to fill the vacuum left by Britain's withdrawal from the Gulf. The

⁴⁸O. M. Smoknasky, "Moscow and the Persian Gulf," Orbis, 14 (Spring, 1970), 92-102-107.

Soviet Union's grounds for denouncing the United States suggestion were that such a defense system would be directed ultimately against the security of its southern frontier.⁴⁹

The Gulf states and the major powers of the world responded to Britain's announcement and withdrawal from the Arabian Gulf with mixed reactions. Even Britain attempted in 1970 to reverse the Labour Government's decision because the new Conservative Government realized that by implementing the decision, Britain would relinquish its special position in the Gulf, a position that it had enforced for more than a century-and-a-half. The Conservative Government also realized that withdrawal would threaten the British as well as the Western interest in the Arabian Gulf area.

It is now clear that the main concern of the British government either in making the decision or in trying to reverse it was not the regional interest, the Gulf states interest; it could be said that Britain, in a gesture of self-abnegation, wanted the Gulf countries to maintain their stability and to safeguard their own wealth. Britain was concerned mainly with its overall economic and strategic interests. Fearing that these interests might be disturbed by their withdrawal, the Conservatives tried to reverse the Labour Government's decision, but the costs of delay or alteration were adjudged as too high.

⁴⁹Chubin and Zabih, p. 237.

The states of the Gulf were also divided in their responses to the British decision to withdraw. Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait favored British withdrawal, while the remaining countries in the region opposed it. Although the former agreed on the necessity of the action and on the ability of the regional powers to maintain the stability of the area, the motivations which shaped their positions differed. For instance, Kuwait's attitude was shaped by its belief in the possibility of peaceful coexistence among the Gulf states while the responses of Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq grew out of their territorial ambitions. Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia, the three big powers in the area,⁵⁰ had no defense treaties which tied them to Britain. They adhered to the belief that each one was able to defend itself against any threat although the source of that threat was not clearly specified; obviously, they did not possess the capability, either separately or collectively, to defend themselves from the major world powers such as the Soviet Union or the United States. The perceived threat was, therefore, that which existed among the states themselves such as the intense dispute between Iran and Iraq over the Shatt al-Arab bases. Other potentially explosive disputes already existed: within the boundary dispute between Iraq and Kuwait, the Iranian claim against Bahrain, and the Saudi Arabian conflict with Abu Dhabi and the Sultanate of

⁵⁰Tables I, II, and III in the Appendix show the economic and military strengths of these countries.

Oman over the Buraimi Oasis. Iraq, Iran, and Saudi Arabia agreed with one another regarding the advantages to be gained by British withdrawal; all three called for withdrawal because it would serve their own interests. None of the above disputent countries seem to have considered the regional implications. Kuwait's response was based on still other reasons. It might be logical for an outsider to expect Kuwait to favor Britain's stay in the Gulf area; however, Kuwait, although not a major military power, gained a major economic status which enhanced its capabilities in international policy. Its opposition to the British remaining in the area was furthermore based upon its belief that the countries could and should solve their problems through diplomatic means as exemplified by Kuwait's policy in its disputes with Iraq.

The countries favoring the continued British presence in the area held that the Gulf stability and security, maintained by the British presence for more than a century-and-a-half, would be disturbed by the withdrawal. This group consisted of the seven Trucial States, Bahrain, and Qatar. They were dependent states, tied with special treaties with Britain, and they had the feeling of the immature creation, uncertain without support from its sponsor. Calling and nearly begging the British to retain their forces in the area, they were themselves threatened by the regional big powers. Bahrain was threatened by the Iranian claims, and

the Trucial States by the Saudi Arabian claim which refused to recognize the United Arab Emirates' proposal (between these states, Qatar, and Bahrain) unless her claim against Abu Dhabi and the Sultanate Oman over the Buraimi Oasis was settled.

Regarding the two world powers' attitudes toward the British decision, it is clear that their main concern was to protect their own interests vis-a-vis each other. The United States felt that the British withdrawal would create new opportunities for the Soviets, constituting a great threat to the United States and its allies. In 1972, the United States' requirements of oil from the Gulf had risen to about ten per cent of the United States' total imports of oil or three per cent of its total consumption.⁵¹ Most of the Americans these days realize that the Gulf oil funds must be circulated and used in ways that do not destabilize the United States or its economy and the world economy. Moreover, the Gulf area is a lucrative market for American arms sales. Therefore, the United States wanted Britain to keep its forces in the Gulf; and when Britain could not reverse its decision, America started to replace the British forces at the American naval base in Bahrain to ensure that their interests would not be disturbed by any power.

⁵¹Joseph J. Sisco, "Department Discusses the Arab-Israeli Conflict and the Arabian Peninsula, Persian Gulf Area," Department of State Bulletin, 69 (July 22, 1973), pp. 30-31.

The Soviet's opposition to the British presence in the Gulf area beyond 1971 was not derived from sympathy for the Gulf countries but from the fact that it would tend to undermine the Western influence in that part of the world. Therefore, Soviets officials announced that the British existence in the Gulf created a threat to the southern frontiers of the Soviet Union.⁵² The Soviet Union in 1973 signed a fifteen-years treaty with Iraq, according to which the number of the Soviet military advisors were increased in that country. The Soviets want to attain similar status in other Gulf countries.

It is not surprising that the world powers did not act with respect to the Gulf's own interests in their support of either side (those who opposed the decision and those who were calling for it); but mainly and primarily, they were calculating their own benefits against their larger struggle in the Indian Ocean and in the Middle East.

⁵²Smokansky, p. 107.

CHAPTER III

THE REGIONAL POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE BRITISH WITHDRAWAL FROM THE ARABIAN GULF

Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait, the powerful Gulf states, assumed that the regional political consequences of the British decision to withdraw would not impair the stability of the Gulf area. But the others--smaller, weaker, surrounded by strong, ambitious neighbors--feared the possible consequences; they did not consider the British withdrawal to be to their advantage. Which of the two estimates was warranted? Was it the optimistic view of the first group of states or the more pessimistic view of the second, weaker group?

The British decision, although it was not implemented until the end of 1971, immediately brought about a changed situation in the Arabian Gulf area. For more than a century and a half, British forces had prevented internal conflict among the Gulf states primarily by keeping disputes and conflicting claims in abeyance, but disputes and claims erupted almost immediately after Britain announced its historic decision. As a result, the political consequences of the British announcement included an ending of Iran's claim against Bahrain and Bahrain became independent; Iran's occupation of three of the Arabian islands in the Gulf--Abu

Mousa and the Greater and Lesser Tumbs; a fresh outbreak of the Kuwaiti-Iraqi dispute; the onset of the Iraqi-Iranian dispute; the improvement of Iranian-Omani relations; and changes in the relations of the three strongest powers of the Gulf region.

The End of the Iranian Claim Against Bahrain and the Independence of Bahrain

Iran had long claimed ownership of the Bahrainian islands. That claim created a number of problems in Iran's foreign relations, for it fueled anti-Iranian feelings among the Arabs so greatly that, by 1968, the continuation of the claim became a serious obstacle to any Iranian-Arabian cooperation in Gulf affairs.¹ In addition, Iran's position affected any prospect for Bahrain's membership in a union among the Gulf states. And the Bahrainian problem became a matter of contention between Iran and the British government due to the British-Bahrain defense treaty, in which Bahrain was considered an independent state. In an effort to improve Iran's relations with Saudi Arabia, especially after the British announcement, the Shah of Iran declared in January of 1969 in New Delhi that Iran had accepted a plebiscite to determine Bahrain's status. The Shah's

¹Shahram Chubin and Sepideh Zabin, The Foreign Relations of Iran, a Developing State in a Zone of Great Power and Conflict (Los Angeles, 1974), pp. 74, 110.

declaration represented the so-called "liquidation" of Iran's claim to Bahrainian territory.²

However, the Bahrainian question was not resolved by the Shah's action, and informal contacts between the permanent representatives of the Iranian and British governments at the United Nations followed with Britain, at that time, representing Bahrainian interests. As a result of those meetings, Iran accepted the suggestion that a plebiscite take place in Bahrain but insisted that the polling be supervised by the United Nations. On May 28, 1970, United Nations Secretary General U Thant appointed the Director General of the United Nations office in Geneva, Cuicciardi, on a special mission to ascertain the wishes of the people of Bahrain concerning the future status of their country.³ Secretary General U Thant believed that the dispute threatened the future tranquility and stability of the Gulf area and that a failure to resolve the issue peaceably could have serious effects on a wide spectrum of international relationships as well.⁴

²Ibid., p. 166.

³Muhammad T. Sadik and William P. Snavely, Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates, Colonial Past, Present Problems, and Future Prospects (Lexington, Massachusetts, 1972), pp. 121-132.

⁴U Thant, Secretary General of the United Nations, "A Quiet United Nations Road to Accord," Annual Review of United Nations Affairs (1969-1970), p. 125.

On March 30, 1970, following Cuicciardi's arrival in Bahrain, care was taken to insure his meeting the people of the capital and other towns. As a result of his investigation, Cuicciardi reported, "The overwhelming majority of the people of Bahrain wish to gain recognition of their identity in a fully independent and sovereign state, free to decide for itself its relations with other states."⁵ And he added, "The Bahrainis I met were virtually unanimous in wanting a fully independent sovereign state. The great majority added that this should be an Arab state."⁶

On May 11, 1970, at 3:00 p.m., the delegates of fifteen countries in the Security Council, representing the principal regional and national entities of the world, voted unanimously in favor of a resolution based on Cuicciardi's report.⁷ That decision by the Security Council was important in at least two ways: it indeed ended the longstanding dispute between Iran and Bahrain, and it represented the first successful effort of the United Nations to solve a political conflict diplomatically.⁸ Speaking of that success, U Thant said,

The Bahrain problem was a difficult and delicate one for all the parties concerned, and it is immensely to their credit that they were prepared to settle it

⁵Ibid., p. 126.

⁶Sadik and Snavely, p. 132.

⁷U Thant, p. 126.

⁸Sadik and Snavely, p. 132.

in this civilized way in accordance with the precepts of the United Nations Charter. In so doing, they have set an example of enlightened international behavior which is a ray of hope in a world where governments and people still seem all too inclined to try to settle their problems by intimidation, threat, and even by force.⁹

The Iranian Majlis (Parliament) also approved the resolution, voting 184 in favor and four against. The negative votes were cast by representatives of the Untrationalist Pan Iranian Party, still maintaining that Bahrain was a part of Iran.¹⁰

Bahrain declared its independence on August 14, 1971, then becoming a member of the United Nations and the Arab League. Bahrain's independence seems to have been, in many ways, a direct result of the British announcement of withdrawal. No longer constrained by Britain's military protection of Bahrain's sovereignty, Iran felt free to reiterate its ancient claim. However, the Iranian government also wished to establish friendlier relations with its Arabian neighbors, especially Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, whose anti-Iranian feelings were intensified by Iran's claim against Bahrain. Iran concluded that those anti-Iranian sentiments should be diminished; thus the Iranian government yielded to the pressure of its neighbors and submitted the dispute to the United Nations for resolution. Had the British never

⁹U Thant, p. 125.

¹⁰Ray E. Thoman, "The Persian Gulf Region," Current History, 60 (January, 1971), 43.43.

withdrawn (or proposed to do so), had the Iranians never seriously reasserted their claim to Bahrain, then Bahrain would never have had an opportunity to seek its independence. Thus the proposed British withdrawal benefitted the Bahrainians greatly.

The Creation of the United Arab Emirates

A second consequence deriving from the British decision to withdraw was the creation of the United Arab Emirates. This union passed through three phases. The first one came immediately after the British announcement in a burst of political activity by the Gulf small shaikhdoms. Their rulers started to calculate their future after the British withdrawal from the area and the termination of the defense treaties between them and Britain.¹¹ In February of 1968, the Trucial States of Abu Dhabi and Dubai announced an agreement to establish a tightly knit federation. That announcement aroused interest in the rulers of the other Trucial States, for they also anticipated a power-vacuum following the British withdrawal. They responded by meeting to consider possible approaches to thwart potential threats; on February 25, 1968, the rulers of the nine states--the seven Trucial States, Bahrain, and Qatar--met in Dubai. Shaikh Ahmad of Qatar submitted a draft plan which proposed a federation among the nine states to safeguard their entities,

¹¹Sadik and Snavelly, p. 187.

independence and security, to unify their foreign policies, and to organize their collective defense. On March 30, 1968, the nine states announced the Federation of Arab Emirates (F.A.A.) and established the "Supreme Council," the Federal Council, and a supreme court to settle disputes among them.¹²

The creation of this federation was supervised by Britain, who wanted to insure that these tiny states would be strongly unified by the time of withdrawal because of the potential disagreement among various rulers over the terms of federal constitution, the degree of centralism, common finance, and so on. The federation remained pretty much a paper organization except for the Common Development Office, which was financed from the local oil revenues under British supervision.¹³

In 1968, Iranian claims against Bahrain put an obstacle in the way of the progress of the Federation, for the Iranian government opposed the creation of any kind of federation which included Bahrain. In June of 1969, the Shah of Iran declared that the settlement of Bahrain's status would end Iran's opposition to the federation: "Once the question of Bahrain, to which Iran lays claim, is settled, there . . . [will] be no objection to a federation

¹²Ibid., p. 190.

¹³William D. Brewer, "Yesterday and Tomorrow in the Persian Gulf," The Middle East Journal, 23 (Spring, 1969), 154-158.

of the shaikhdoms."¹⁴ When on May 11, 1970, the Security Council of the United Nations reached a resolution of Bahrain's status, a major obstacle in the Federation's progress was removed. Until then, the rulers of the nine states were unwilling to decide the final membership and the constitution of their Federation while the Iranian claim remained in force.¹⁵

Three other events delayed the structuring of the Federation. Ras al-Khaimah, one of the seven Trucial States, declared its independence following Iranian claims to ownership of two of Ras al-Khaimah's islands, the Greater and Lesser Tumbs. After the United Nations Security Council resolution, Bahrain also decided to abstain from membership in the Federation and to claim independent status.¹⁶ Finally, following the termination of the protection agreement of 1916 at the end of 1971, Qatar, too, claimed independence.¹⁷

The remaining six Trucial States--Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Al-Fujyrah, Ajman, and Umm al Qaywayn--on July 18, 1971, signed the Union Constitution, the tangible result of almost three years of Britain's efforts to erect a workable political structure in the area for the post-1971 era.

¹⁴Chubin and Zabih, p. 218.

¹⁵The Times (London, May 5, 1970), p. 6 a.

¹⁶The Times (London, August 14, 1971), p. 13 a.

¹⁷The Times (London, July 19, 1971), p. 4 c.

Two of the most pressing problems which the Federation had to overcome originated in the distrust and hostility of Iran and Saudi Arabia against these states. Iranian Foreign Minister Zahedi had made it clear in June of 1971 that Iran would oppose any federation which included Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah; these two states possessed the islands of Abu Mousa and the Greater and Lesser Tumbs over which Iran claimed sovereignty. In fact, Sharjah was able to sign the constitution only because its shaikh had reached an agreement with the Iranian government to lease it the island of Abu Mousa.

The second issue besetting the Federation was King Faisal's claim to parts of Abu Dhabi territory, the Buraimi Oasis. Both issues reflect the convictions of the Shah of Iran and King Faisal of Saudi Arabia that their best interests would be served only if they could continue to deal with the states separately rather than having to negotiate with a federation much stronger than any state alone. According to a Times (London) report, that self-interest provided the rationale for their opposition to the federation until they could realize their own ambitions.¹⁸

Although claims against some of the states prevented their membership in the Federation, rulers of six Trucial States continued their efforts to form the Union. On

¹⁸The Times (London, July 21, 1971), p. 6 g; and Chubin and Zafar, pp. 222-223.

December 1, 1971, the defense treaties between these states and the British government were abrogated; on December 2, the six Trucial states announced the creation of the United Arab Emirates. The ruler of Abu Dhabi was sworn in as the first president of the union.¹⁹ On February 13, 1972, Ras al-Khaimah, the seventh Trucial state, became a member of the United Arab Emirates.²⁰

The period of time from the British announcement in 1968 to its withdrawal at the end of 1971 provided the small Gulf states a grace period in which to develop themselves. The Trucial States formed a union; Bahrain and Qatar announced their independent status. It may be said that the grace period permitted the small Gulf states to gain confidence in their own abilities to defend and maintain themselves after the long-standing British protectorate system ended.

The Iranian Occupation of Three of the Arabian Islands in the Gulf

Located at the mouth of the Gulf in the Strait of Hormuz, the three islands which Iran claimed were Abu Mousa, belonging to Sharjah, and the Greater and Lesser Tumbs, belonging to Ras al-Khaimah. Because of their location, these islands are important strategic points. In addition, they are, according to geological survey, very rich in oil.

¹⁹The Times (London, December 3, 1971), p. 8 e; and The Times (London, December 7, 1971), pp. 15 c, 7 f.

²⁰The Times (London, December 2, 1971), p. 16 f.

Iranian government felt it was, Iran came to be viewed as a threat by others in the Gulf. Due to the prominence of its own interests, Iran seems to have overlooked the fact that the Gulf waters were vital to the trade of the other Gulf states as well.

The British regarded the three islands as being possessions of Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah. During the 1920s and again in the 1930s, Britain and Iran had had exchanges concerning the status of the islands, though without any changes. Recently, Iran's claim to sovereignty of the islands was again the subject for long conversations between Iran and Britain from 1968 to 1970. After the resolution of the Bahrain case, the Iranian government sought possession of the islands as a part of a package-deal, an exchange of the islands for relinquishing its claims against Bahrain, but no formal agreement was reached with Britain on such a quid pro quo.²⁴

In April of 1970, the Iranian claim to the islands was made public with Iran claiming that the question was a colonial one, concerning only Britain and Iran. Therefore, in order to avoid or to minimize any Iran-Arab polarization in the Gulf, Britain accepted Iran's position. William Luce, the British special envoy in the Gulf, became the principal figure in the negotiations between Iran on the one hand and Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah on the other. In October of

²⁴Chubin and Zafar, p. 222.

1970, the Iranian government informed Britain and the Trucial States that it would neither recognize nor support a federation between the Gulf states until the island question was settled.²⁵ In February of 1971, the Shah declared that if necessary Iran would resort to force to take the islands, invoking the specter of the South Yemenis, who had issued a call to revolution throughout the Gulf.²⁶ The Shah referred to the Liberation movement in Dhofar, represented by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Occupied Arabian Gulf, and he declared the Iranian intent to end such activities by force if necessary. In May of 1971, Iran's armed forces were ordered to open fire upon British aircraft which were accused by harassing Iranian naval forces near the three islands.

The foregoing demonstrates the seriousness of Iranian intentions. Iran advanced its claims effectively as a means of opposing the creation of the federation, which included Ras al-Khaimah and Sharjah, the two states that possessed the three islands. However, Sharjah did sign the Constitution in July of 1971, the result of a secret agreement between the Shah and the Shaikh of Sharjah concerning the island of Abu Mousa.²⁷ Made public on November 29, 1971, the agreement specified that Iranian troops would be

²⁵Ibid., pp. 223-225.

²⁶The Times (London, June 29, 1971), p. 7 a.

²⁷The Times (London, July 21, 1971), p. 6 g.

stationed on a carefully demarcated part of the island. Iran would assume full jurisdiction over that limited area, and the rest of the island would be under the jurisdiction of Sharjah. In addition, the two parties agreed to share equally the island's oil revenue, and Iran would pay Sharjah £ 1.5 million yearly until Sharjah's annual oil revenue reached a value of £ 3 million,²⁸ when the island would become the possession of Iran.

The dispute over Greater and Lesser Tumbs Islands (possessed by Ras al-Khaimah) could not be settled by negotiation; therefore, Ras al-Khaimah did not sign the Constitution of the Federation in July of 1971.²⁹ In November of 1971, Iranian forces invaded the islands,³⁰ an action which was denounced by the Arabian countries as well as the Soviets.³¹

The Arabian Responses Toward the Occupation of the Islands

Arabian reactions toward the Iranian hostility against the three Arabian islands differed. Saudi Arabia refused to support measures such as severing diplomatic relations which were designed by Arabian states such as Iraq, Kuwait, and

²⁸Burrell and Cottrell, p. 17.

²⁹The Times (London, July 19, 1971), p. 4 c.

³⁰Ann T. Schulz, "The Leadership Role for Iran in the Persian Gulf," Current History, 62 (January, 1972), p. 30.

³¹G. Dymov, "Persian Gulf Countries as the Crossroads," International Affairs, (Moscow, (March, 1973), p. 57.

the United Arab Emirates to isolate Iran. The Saudi government maintained public silence on the Iranian action³² in an apparent desire to maintain friendly relations with Iran. Saudi Arabia was reasserting its claim against Abu Dhabi in the Buraimi Oasis and hoped to gain Iranian support or at least non-interference on the Buraimi dispute.

The Egyptian government, in an attempt to improve relations with Iran, urged moderation in the Arab world, pointing out that the islands were not significant enough for the Arabs to be exercised about because the paramount issue of the Arab world was the confrontation with Israel. Egypt did not support the Iraqi position in the Arab League, calling for the termination of relations with Iran, nor did the Egyptians participate in the discussions and attacks upon the Iranian action in the Security Council of the United Nations on December 19, 1971.³³

On the other hand, the Iraqi Foreign Minister on June 29, 1971, called for a unified Arab challenge to the Iranian claim to the islands, thus responding to the Shah's declaration that Iran would use force to take the islands. The Iraqi Foreign Minister described the Iranian claim and the Shah's statement as a grave threat to the peace and international navigation in the whole area.³⁴

³²Chubin and Zabih, p. 229.

³³Ibid., p. 167.

³⁴The Times (London, June 20, 1971), p. 8 a.

Libya reacted to the Iranian occupation by nationalizing the British Petroleum Company in retaliation to the alleged British "conspiracy" with Iran on the matter of the islands. Iraq and Libya were joined by the government of Algeria and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. These countries requested an urgent meeting of the Security Council of the United Nations to discuss the Iranian aggression.³⁵ Kuwait, too, urged action against Britain³⁶ and along with the government of the United Arab Emirates requested permission to attend the Security Council meeting.³⁷

On December 9, 1971, the Security Council discussed the occupation. The delegates of Iraq, Kuwait, and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen all condemned the Iranian action, calling for immediate withdrawal from the Arabian islands. They condemned the British government for not defending the territorial integrity of the Emirates according to the protection treaties,³⁸ which were not yet abrogated in the case of Sharjah when Iran invaded its island. In Ras al-Khaimah's case, Britain abrogated its treaty on the same day that Iran invaded the islands of Greater and Lesser Tumbs, indicating to some British

³⁵Chubin and Zapih, p. 299.

³⁶The Times (London, December 13, 1971), p. 4 c.

³⁷Chubin and Zapih, p. 229.

³⁸"Complaint Against Iranian Occupation of Gulf Islands," U. N. Monthly Chronicle, 9 (January, 1972), pp. 46-49.

stretch of water opposite the port of Abadan (ceded to Iran in 1937). The Iranian government responded to the Iraqi reaction by asserting its claim to half of the Shatt al-Arab according to the 1937 treaty.

In the period of 1961-1968, there was no serious claim involving Shatt al-Arab; on the contrary, there was an improvement in the Iranian-Iraqi relations. But the British announcement of withdrawal prompted those two countries to strengthen their influence in the Gulf area; it triggered hostile relations between them, and, in consequence, both reasserted their claims to Shatt al-Arab.

On April 15, 1969, Iraq demanded that Iranian ships strike the Iranian flag while passing in the Shatt al-Arab.³⁹ The two countries started massing troops along the frontiers. High level diplomatic talks followed in Baghdad, designed to work out all differences, basically those concerning navigation in the Shatt al-Arab. But the talks collapsed, and the controversy deepened after an Iranian fisherman was shot and others were arrested by the Iraqis for using the waterway. Stepping up its previous demand, the Iraqi government threatened that any Iranian ships flying the Iranian flag would be ordered to strike the flag and discharge Iranian personnel; the offending vessel would be fired upon should it fail to comply.⁴⁰ Iran responded to the threat by

³⁹Chubin and Zafar, p. 186.

⁴⁰Thoman, p. 44.

withdrawal and affirming that regional states could maintain the stability of the area.

The hostility between Iraq and Iran exploded in a boundary clash on February 10, 1974. The Iraqi government requested an emergency meeting of the United Nations Security Council. At the meeting of the Security Council on February 15, 1974, both Iraqi and Iranian representatives expressed the wish to settle the border disagreement peacefully through direct negotiations. On February 28, 1974, United Nations General Secretary Waldheim appointed a special representative to investigate the events which led to the border clash.⁴⁴

In spite of the intentions of the two governments and of the efforts of the United Nations, the clash continued until the beginning of 1976. At that time, the two governments began a new phase of their relations with each other, entering into serious negotiations to resolve the Shatt al-Arab passes dispute and the unsolved Kurdish problem dating back to World War II when Iran had supported and encouraged the Kurdish revolt against the Iraqi regime.

The Outbreak of the Kuwaiti-Iraqi Dispute

The boundary dispute between Kuwait and Iraq, dating to 1932, has never been formally settled by the two parties although Iraq did not assert its claim during the British protection of Kuwait established by the Treaty of 1899. Nor

⁴⁴Keessing's Contemporary Archives, 20 (March, 1974), p. 26464.

Iran based its claim to these three islands upon two grounds, the first of which was historical. Iran claimed that the islands had been under its sovereignty until, eighty years earlier, the British had interfered and declared that the islands belonged to Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah.²¹ Burrell and Cottrell, however, state that the history of the islands was not carefully recorded; they have determined that the islands were used by both Persians and Arabs for fishing and pearling.²²

The second basis for the Iranian claim was economic in nature. Iran declared that the geographic position of the islands touched the vital concern of Iran, which was to safeguard the transportation routes by which Iran exported oil and other commodities. The government explained that the idea of a hostile power blocking the Strait of Hormuz, choking Iran to economic death was understandably alarming to its interests.²³ Iran's claim indicated its assumption that it was the only power which could maintain security in the Gulf area although it had at one time pronounced the opinion that Gulf security and stability should be a matter of a collective effort on the part of all of the Gulf states. However, instead of being the protector of the area as the

²¹Chubin and Zareh, p. 223.

²²R. M. Burrell and Alvin J. Cottrell, Iran, The Arabian Peninsula, and the Indian Ocean (National Strategic Information Center, Inc., 1972), p. 17.

²³Ibid., p. 16.

collusion with Iran. The Security Council decided to defer further consideration of the matter. The Arabs did not take further action, and Iran continued the occupation of the three islands. As a conciliatory gesture to the Arab Emirates, Iran came to support and recognize their union.

It is clear that the resolution of the problem as well as the claims themselves were unjust and, perhaps, unjustifiable. Power considerations prevailed.

The Outbreak of the Iraqi-Iranian Dispute

The Iraqi-Iranian relations between 1958 and 1971 can be separated into two periods: July, 1958-December, 1968, and then to December, 1971; from Qasim's revolution in Iraq to the British announcement of withdrawal, then to their actual departure. In the first period, many changes and problems beset the relations between Iraq's revolutionary regime and the Iranian monarchy. Their main dispute centered on the waterway of Shatt al-Arab, which was controlled by the Treaty of 1937. In that treaty, both parties agreed to establish joint commissions for delimitation and demarcation of their joint frontier and the joint administration of the waterway. But, in fact, the two governments did not reach agreement on the waterway.

When in 1959, the Shah of Iran expressed his dissatisfaction with the new Iraqi revolutionary regime, the Iraqi government reacted to that expression by asserting its claims to the entire waterway including the three-mile

denouncing and abrogating the Treaty of 1937 on April 19, 1969.⁴¹ The Iranians claimed that the treaty gave Iraq sovereign power over shipping rights in a navigable frontier and that Shatt al-Arab was a vestige of imperialism, contrary to contemporary international rules and practices.⁴²

The Iraqi government described Iran's abrogation of the Treaty of 1937 as a "unilateral action contravening the principle of international law" and claimed that the entire Shatt al-Arab was part of the Iraqi territory. In abrogating the treaty, the Iranian government asserted that the treaty had been concluded for the convenience of British naval vessels using the waterway, a consideration which no longer had relevance.⁴³

The two countries did not reach a settlement to their dispute; the hostility between them escalated between December, 1970 and July, 1971. Iraq opposed Iranian direct involvement policy in the Gulf countries' affairs and urged the Arab states in the area to establish a so-called all-Arab defense organization, while Iran urged these states to join the Iranian effort to establish the Gulf Defense pact. Both countries were struggling to replace Britain in the Gulf, while denying that a vacuum would be created by the British

⁴¹Chubin and Zafar, p. 186.

⁴²Thoman, p. 44.

⁴³Keessing's Contemporary Archives, 17 (August 30-September 6, 1969), p. 23544A.

did Iraq forego the claim. When the Treaty of 1899 was abrogated and Kuwait became an independent state in 1961, Iraq found the situation propitious to reassert its claim to the whole Kuwait territory. At that time, Britain, watching the development of the claim against the new state, landed its troops in Kuwait to protect its sovereignty against any Iraqi encroachment, in accordance with the new defense treaty between Kuwait and Britain. In 1963, the Kuwaiti and Iraqi governments negotiated their boundaries, and Iraq recognized the independence of Kuwait, starting a new era of friendly relations.⁴⁵

When the British government announced its withdrawal decision and the termination of all the defense treaties with the Gulf states, Iraq reasserted its claim to Kuwait's territory without any fear of British interference as had been the case in 1961. On March 20, 1973, Iraq attacked the Kuwaiti police post at Samta, close to the Iraqi post Um Qasr, and occupied it.⁴⁶ Through this action, Iraq tried to acquire the border area from Kuwait in addition to two nearby Kuwaiti islands, Babujan and Warba, which commanded the channel to Um Qasr, the Iraqi naval post on Shatt al-Arab, itself an important factor in Iraq's dispute with Iran.

⁴⁵Ray L. Cleveland, The Middle East and South Asia 1971, 5th edition (Washington D. C., 1971), p. 51.

⁴⁶The Times (London, March 2, 1973), p. 1 e.

The British government reviewed its position after the first Iraqi attack on Kuwait, to see whether there were residual obligations which could warrant Britain to defend Kuwait. But there were none; Britain's treaty of defense with Kuwait was completely terminated in December of 1971. All that the English would do in regard to the incident was to sympathize with the Kuwaiti position.⁴⁷

On March 26, 1973, Iraq agreed to withdraw its troops from the post at Samta and to send a negotiation mission; however, Iraq continued its demand for border changes while Kuwait insisted upon implementing the borders which had been negotiated in 1963.⁴⁸ Iraq questioned the legality of those borders. Abdul Baki, the Iraqi Foreign Minister, was reported by The Times (London) to say, "The crux of the matter is that Iraq should insure that she become a Gulf state."⁴⁹ However, he denied that the Iraqis' latest incident against Kuwait was part of a larger strategic plan for Iraqi expansion in the Gulf.

In spite of the efforts of the mediators from Saudi Arabia and the Arab League, Iraqi troops did not withdraw from the post at Sarta. On March 30, 1973, between 15,000 and 20,000 Saudi soldiers cross the Kuwaiti borders to help Kuwait, and the Iraqi troops withdrew on April 4, 1973. The

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 15 a.

⁴⁸The Times (London, March 27, 1973), p. 8 d.

⁴⁹The Times (London, April 5, 1973), p. 6 c.

Iraqi conditions of withdrawal required the ceding of the islands of Babujan and Warba at the head of the Gulf to Iraq.⁵⁰ The Kuwaiti government refused to accept the conditions, and there seems little hope for resolving the conflict in the foreseeable future.

The Buraimi Oasis Dispute

The Saudi government has had a longstanding boundary dispute with Abu Dhabi, one of the states forming the United Arab Emirates. The dispute concerns the jurisdiction over the Buraimi Oasis, which consists of seven villages--five of them belonging to Abu Dhabi and two to the Sultanate of Oman. Although the dispute between Saudi Arabia and Abu Dhabi is an old one, the British presence in the area was able to deter Saudi attacks on Buraimi. The last attack occurred in 1952, when Saudi troops controlled the Buraimi Oasis. Their control did not last long, and in October of 1955, the British-officered forces of the Shaikhdom of Abu Dhabi re-entered the Buraimi Oasis.

After that time, the Saudis did not raise the Buraimi question until the British announcement of 1968. In May of 1970, Abu Dhabi's ruler was informed by the Saudi government that the Buraimi Oasis, which included the valuable oil fields of Zarrara, was still regarded as part of the Saudi territory. The Saudi King, Faisal, demanded a plebiscite

⁵⁰Ibid.

in the Buraimi Oasis to decide the question of sovereign rights, but he also demanded that, prior to the plebiscite, all former Saudi inhabitants of the area be allowed to return and be given three to four months to settle down.⁵¹

The renewal of the Saudi claim after the British decision to withdraw constituted a direct threat to Abu Dhabi, for the tiny state would be unable to block any Saudi attempt to retake the Buraimi Oasis. Anticipating the threat, Abu Dhabi's ruler, in February of 1968, invited Dubai's ruler to establish a tightly knit federation between the two states.⁵² Abu Dhabi also encouraged the federation of the nine Gulf states.

All of these political moves of Abu Dhabi were responses to the threat inherent in the Saudi claims. But Saudi Arabia refused to recognize the proposed federation between the nine states until the oasis dispute was settled. In spite of the Saudi opposition to the creation of the federation, the six Trucial States, including Abu Dhabi, announced on December 2, 1971, the establishment of their United Arab Emirates. The creation of the union, however, did not preclude Saudi Arabia's claims to the Buraimi Oasis. The historical ambitions of Saudi Arabia were checked for a long time by the British presence, but as soon as Britain decided

⁵¹Thoman, p. 40.

⁵²Sadik and Snavelly, p. 187.

to withdraw, the Saudi government renewed its claims against Abu Dhabi. The problem is still without a solution.

The Relations Between Iran and the Sultanate of Oman

The Sultanate of Oman is the only country in the Gulf area whose treaty with Britain was not abrogated because the British decision did not include it. However, the Sultanate faced two major problems. First, Saudi Arabia refused to recognize the Sultan of Oman and demanded that Oman be ruled by Imman instead of the Sultan because the first has the legal right in governing that part of the Sultanate. The Saudi Arabians also disputed Oman's possession of two villages in the Buraimi Oasis but the claim was without substance as long as the British treaty with Oman still existed.

The second problem for Oman is the internal revolutionary movements. One such movement of the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arab Gulf (PFLOAG), which is supported by the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, the People's Republic of China, and the Republic of Iraq.⁵³ PFLOAG stated in May of 1973 that it intended to "liberate" all of the Emirates on the Gulf and claimed that it controlled one-sixth of the territory of Oman.⁵⁴ In an effort to combat the activities of PFLOAG, Sultan Qaboos increased

⁵³David Holden, "The Persian Gulf After the British RAJ," Foreign Affairs, 49 (July, 1971), pp. 723.

⁵⁴Keessing's Contemporary Archives, 20 (June 17-23, 1974), p. 26579.

his country's armed forces from 3,000 men to 10,000 men, of whom about 300 were British. During 1972, defense expenditures for the Sultanate amounted to 60 per cent of the total revenue of the country. The Sultanate also received substantial aid from Iran, which sent in 1972 modern military equipment including helicopters as well as pilots and experts. Jordan participated also in supplying the Sultanate with officers and instructors, and Saudi Arabia offered financial aid worth £ 6,000,000 and arms.⁵⁵

The Iranian support to the Sultan's regime was regarded as the most significant. On December 30, 1973, a spokesman for PFLOAG claimed that 30,000 Iranian troops were stationed in Oman; 3,000 of those troops had started offensive activities in Dhofar. According to western diplomats, however, the number of Iranian troops in Oman were between 1,200 and 1,500 men of the Shah's special forces backed up by thirty helicopter troop carriers and artillery. In spite of those reports, Oman's government denied, on January 2, 1974, the presence of any Iranian forces in its territory. However, in February of 1974, the Shah of Iran announced that his government had lent whatever assistance had been asked for by the Sultan. He added that his country could not survive the presence of any forces of subversion, destruction, and murder which might seek the entrance to the Gulf.⁵⁶ In December of 1974, the Sultan of Oman admitted the Iranian

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ibid.

presence in Oman's territory as a result of the deaths of nine Iranian soldiers and the report that another Iranian soldier was missing.⁵⁷

In February of 1975, Iran established diplomatic relations with Cuba. However, those relations were not long-lived as a result of each country's position with regard to Oman. Castro intended to send Cuban troops to aid the PFLOAG, which would have set Cuban forces against those of Iran.⁵⁸

Iran's severing its newly made diplomatic relations with Cuba is an indication of the improved relation it had established with Oman. It is clear that the principal reason, and perhaps the only reason, for Iran's intense commitment to Oman's defense was its need to stop the revolutionary movement before the movement's activities and ideas extended to the other parts of the Gulf. The Shah of Iran condemned those governments which provided the PFLOAG with military and verbal support, referring to Iraqi's foreign policy as "neo-colonialist."⁵⁹

The Relations Among the Three Gulf Powers

The relations between the three powers in the Gulf area--Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia--might be described as

⁵⁷Ibid. (December 8-14), p. 27211.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Schulz, p. 26.

similar to the relations between the two super-powers of the world because while their objectives may overlap, they have other mutually exclusive objectives as well. All three Gulf powers opposed any British presence in the Gulf region after the end of 1971; they all denied the idea that a "power-vacuum" would occur following Britain's withdrawal; and all three claimed that the regional countries could maintain stability and peaceful relations in the Gulf area. It is doubtful, however, that any one of the three was moved by altruistic motives. The British withdrawal stimulated their quest for greater power to promote their ambition in the area.

After the British announcement of its intention to withdraw from the Gulf area, Iraq, Iran, and Saudi Arabia began to build up military forces, spending billions of dollars.⁶⁰ The principal suppliers in this arms race were the United States and the Soviet Union. Iran and Saudi Arabia, both of which began to modernize their armed forces, were supplied by the United States.⁶¹ Iraq, on the other hand, relied on the Soviet Union in strengthening and modernizing its forces.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 27; Table III in the Appendix shows the military expenditures of the major Gulf states.

⁶¹Chart 1 shows the Gulf states' purchases of American arms (principally by Saudi Arabia and Iran) and compares those figures with world-side purchases during the years of 1964 through 1974. Hearings, Subcommittee on the Near East, Committee on Foreign Affairs, House, Ninety-third Congress, Second Session, The Persian Gulf, 1974: Money, Politics, Arms, and Power (Washington, 1975), p. vi.

The arms race among these states was an indication that these three powers sought something more than the stability and protection of the peace for all of the Gulf regional states. Both Iran and Saudi Arabia had ambitions of wielding influence over or obtaining territory from neighboring countries; they had common interests in maintaining Gulf stability, in keeping radical governments in the area under their influence, and in destroying any revolutionary movements in the region such as the PFLOAG in the Sultanate of Oman. However, their oil interests hampered Iran's and Saudi Arabia's cooperation in the seller's market. Both countries saw the United States as a significant consumer for their oil; neither country seemed willing to accept the role of junior partner to the other, economically or politically. Moreover, Saudi Arabia could not align itself too closely with a country which had economic and diplomatic ties with Israel for fear of damaging its relations with other Arab states. Iraq was passing through a very critical period in its relation with Iran, and now both governments are trying to negotiate their differences; it seemed highly unlikely that either could cooperate in shaping Gulf policy due to the differences in their aims, especially in such matters as the liberation movements.

CONCLUSION

It is apparent from the foregoing that the British presence in the Gulf area had kept and guaranteed stability and peace among the Gulf states. Britain played an important role in preventing regional conflicts by signing special treaties with the small states to protect them from one another and from aggression from the three regional powers--Iraq, Iran, and Saudi Arabia--each of which had longstanding territorial ambitions. The British policy in the Gulf had the effect of holding local conflicts in check, a situation from which emerged the contention that British policy for the Arabian Gulf states had been one of maintaining the political status quo in the region.¹

British control of the area had to come to an end. The long British presence in the Arabian Gulf had not eliminated territorial claims and ambitions among the states. That these claims erupted after the British announcement is sufficient evidence of the importance of the British presence to that date. Some of the Gulf states--Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait--anticipated the changed situation would bring more stability and peace to the Gulf region. Other Gulf countries--Bahrain, Qatar, and the Trucial States--

¹John J. Ruszkiewicz, "The Power Vacuum in the Persian Gulf," Military Review, 53 (October, 1973), p. 84.

feared that any changes which might result from the British withdrawal would be detrimental to them.

The actual changes and the political consequences of the British withdrawal were, in fact, quite complex. Some resulted in peaceful solutions for all claims. The best example, perhaps the only example, of that type of change was the termination of Iranian claims against Bahrain, but the Iranian government did not permit that dispute to be settled without cost to other shaikhdoms; Iran negotiated a "package deal" with the British government which permitted Iran to spread its influence over the three islands and, ultimately, to take possession of them. Moreover, Iran employed its claims against Bahrain and the three islands to hamper the creation of a federation among the nine Gulf states. When, after both Bahrain and Qatar became independent political entities, the seven Trucial States did form a federation, Iran refused to recognize that union until Iran invaded three of those states one day before Britain's withdrawal of its military protection from the Gulf.² This action provoked the Arabians' anger against the British.

The federation formed by the Trucial States intended to stop any regional ambitions against member states;

²Muhammad T. Sadik and William P. Snively, Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates, Colonial Past, Present Problems, and Future Prospects (Lexington, Massachusetts, 1972), p. 200.

unfortunately, the federation was not able to fulfill that expectation. Saudi Arabia, after the creation of the federation, which was titled the United Arab Emirates, reasserted its claim against Abu Dhabi, one of the union's members, and the dispute is still unrevolved.

Other disputes also erupted in the aftermath of the British decision. Countries which had claims against others found it propitious to renew those claims after British forces withdrew from the area. Such was the case in the outbreak of the Kuwaiti-Iraqi disputation and in the renewal of the Iranian-Iraqi conflict.

It is clear, then, that the British withdrawal had a direct effect on the stability of the Gulf region. That stability was disturbed, not by outside powers such as the Soviet Union--as the United States had feared, but by internal activities and territorial ambitions. In addition to those changes which occurred at the expense of the minor Gulf states, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates, still other changes altered the balance of power in the Gulf area. Before the British withdrew from the area, which was almost completely dominated by Britain, there had been no single powerful country which took the responsibility for defending the area against internal or external aggression. But the British decision allowed a new leading power to rise in the Gulf area. That leader, Iran, fully intended to fill the power vacuum" with its own improved military and economic

capabilities. The Iranian government had two overriding objectives guiding its assertion of influence upon the region. First of all, the Gulf's oil installations and shipments had to be protected from what was called the possible disruption by indigenous Arabs; by "indigenous Arabs," the Iranian government meant the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arab Gulf (PFLOAG) in the Sultanate of Oman and the Marxist government of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen.³ The second Iranian objective was to secure the border areas along the Gulf against external support for armed insurrection.⁴ In order to insure its achieving these objectives, Iran established friendly relations with the regional countries and, recently, started negotiations with its powerful adversary, the Iraqi, in an attempt to resolve their mutual dispute over the Shatt al-Arab passes.

While Iran was establishing its military and economic supremacy in the Gulf region, the United States was expressing concern over a "power vacuum" and the Soviet's increasing influence. The American government strongly opposed the British decision, that opposition deriving from the American desire to protect various American interests in the Gulf. In order to deter what American officials believed to be a

³These two political entities are supported by the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China.

⁴Ann T. Schulz, "The Leadership Role for Iran in the Persian Gulf," Current History, 62 (January, 1972), pp. 25-26.

serious threat to those interests, in 1972 the United States established a small naval base in Bahrain. That act was never intended to serve as an excuse or a pretext for instigating a cold war with Russia, but, as Joseph Sisco commented, a manifestation of continuing American interest in the area. Sisco did speculate that, should America evacuate the naval base, the results would be diminished American interests and adverse political repercussions.⁵

On November 24, 1971, American Vice-President Agnew stated that the United States had no special policy toward the Gulf region after the British withdrawal; however, it was interested in increasing political influence in Bahrain. Agnew added that the United States believed that the people of the Gulf should manage their own affairs, but, at the same time, the American government would continue to watch the area because it could not allow the region's big oil tank to burst into flames due to domestic reasons or because of foreign complications.⁶

Agnew's statement clearly demonstrates that American concern for the Gulf area was a matter of protecting its own interests; those interests rest primarily in the large investments which had been made in the area and in an insured

⁵Hearings, Subcommittee on the Near East, Committee of Foreign Affairs, House, Ninety-Second Congress, Second Session, U. S. Interests in and Policy Toward the Persian Gulf (Washington, D. C., 1972), pp. 75, 92, 95.

⁶Ruszkiewicz, p. 90.

oil supply, for estimates suggested that, by 1980, the United States would have to import almost one-half of its domestic fuel needs, fifty per cent of which would have to come from the Gulf.⁷

The Soviet Union was also concerned about the consequence of the British withdrawal and about its own position in the Gulf area after troops had been evacuated, for the traditional Gulf states afforded the United States a military and political base from which to exercise its influence in the Gulf. However, Iraq, although its ideology is Baathist socialist not communist, did provide the Soviet Union with a military (political) base, which any outsider needs in order to exert influence in an area.⁸ In April of 1973, the Soviet Union signed a fifteen-year treaty of friendship with the Iraqi government. They also financed the Iraqi Remeila Oil Field.

The Soviets welcomed the British withdrawal, and they sought to relate it to the security of Soviet southern frontiers. Russia announced its belief that the Gulf states would be able to insure their regional stability without any western presence.

⁷United States Interest in and Policy Toward the Persian Gulf, p. v.

⁸The Changing Balance of Power in the Persian Gulf, the report of an international seminar at the Center of International Studies, Rome, June 6 to July 1, 1972, Sir Denis Wright, Chairman, 60: 255-2073.

It is obvious that the British withdrawal from the Gulf created a situation wherein the great powers of the world proclaimed their confidence that the people of the Gulf states had the capability as well as the right to conduct their own affairs; at the same time, those same world powers were taking real or verbal actions to insure that their own interests would not be jeopardized. The policy of the United States and of the Soviet Union might be called a policy of "wait and see, but be prepared--just in case."⁹

The British decision to, announcement of, and actual withdrawal from the Arabian Gulf region exerted, in many ways, as great a pressure on that area as Britain's continued almost complete domination of the area might have done. After more than one hundred and fifty years of being protected from internal and external aggression, the Gulf states were surprisingly abandoned by the British to survive or not in a complex military, economic, and political Twentieth Century. That they have survived in some fashion for almost five years suggests that they have always had the capability to direct their own destinies, defend their own homes, and make their way among larger, more powerful nations. But unfortunately they could not coexist peacefully with each other.

⁹Ruszkiewicz, p. 91.

APPENDIX

TABLE I

OIL REVENUES OF ARABIAN GULF PRODUCING
COUNTRIES (IN BILLIONS OF DOLLARS)

Country	1960	1965	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974*
Saudi Arabia	.35	.66	1.20	2.15	3.10	5.50	23.00
Iran	.29	.52	1.14	1.95	2.38	4.50	18.00
Kuwait	.47	.67	.90	1.40	1.60	1.94	7.30
UAE	----	.03	.29	.43	.55	1.10	4.50
Qatar	.05	.07	.12	.20	.26	.42	1.75
Oman	----	----	.10	.15	.16	.30	.80
Bahrain	.10	.10	.10	.10	.10	.20	.25
Iraq	.26	.37	.52	.84	.57	1.67	6.40
TOTAL	1.52	2.42	4.37	7.22	8.78	15.63	62.00

*Projected.

Source: Hearings, Subcommittee on the Near East, Committee on Foreign Affairs, House, Ninety-Third Congress, Second Session, The Persian Gulf, 1974: Money, Politics, Arms, and Power (Washington, D. C., 1975), p. 78.

TABLE II
FOREIGN EXCHANGE ASSETS OF PRINCIPAL
GULF COUNTRIES*

Country	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974**
Saudi Arabia	.0	1.7	2.9	4.5	22.0
Kuwait	1.9	2.5	3.5	4.5	10.0
Iran	.2	.6	1.0	1.3	9.0
Iraq	.5	.6	.8	1.6	7.0
UAE	---	---	.5	1.3	4.0
Qatar	---	---	.4	.4	2.0

*In Billions of Dollars.

**Projected.

Source: Hearings, Subcommittee on the Near East, Committee on Foreign Affairs, House, Ninety-Third Congress, Second Session, The Persian Gulf, 1974: Money, Politics, Arms, and Power (Washington, D. C., 1975), p. 78.

TABLE III

MILITARY EXPENDITURES OF MAJOR GULF STATES: 1971

Country	Military Expenditures (Millions of U.S. \$)	Military Expenditures per capita (U.S. \$)	Military Expenditures as % of GNP
Iran	1,023	34	9
Iraq	237	26	7
Saudi Arabia	383	52	9
Kuwait (1968)	63	126	2.8

Source: Ann T. Schulz, "A Leadership Role for Iran in the Persian Gulf," Current History, 62 (January, 1972), p. 27.

TABLE IV

THE UNITED STATES DIRECT INVESTMENT IN THE
GULF STATES AS OF DECEMBER 31, 1972

Country	Millions of Dollars
Iran	570.00
Iraq	Not Available
Saudi Arabia	2,001.00
Kuwait	362.00
Bahrain	Not Available
Qatar	-----
United Arab Emirates	173.00

Source: Hearings, Subcommittee on the Near East, Committee of Foreign Affairs, House, Ninety-Third Congress, Second Session, The Persian Gulf, 1974: Money, Politics, Arms, and Power (Washington, D. C., 1975), p. 122.

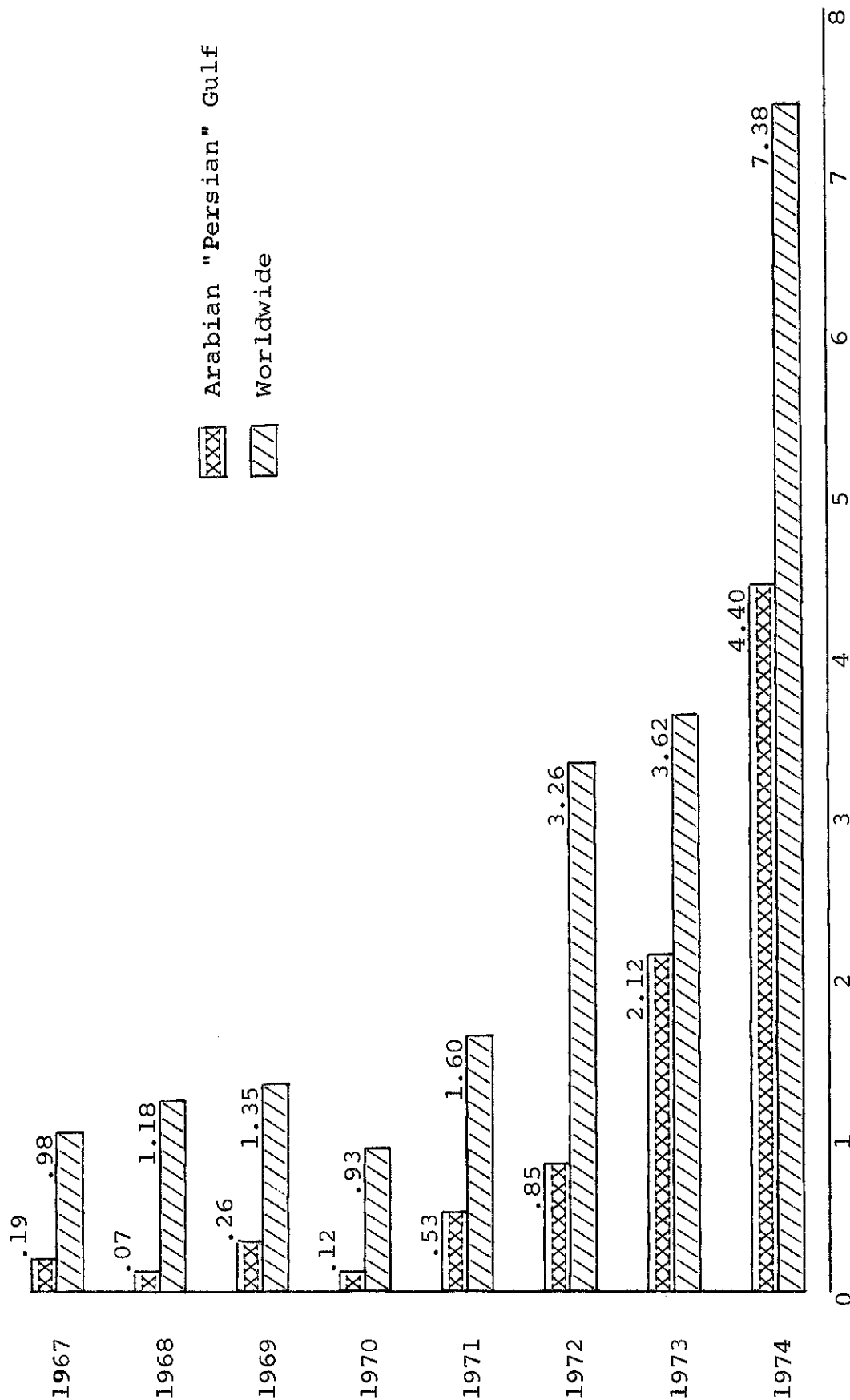


Chart 1--Foreign Military Sales (Cash and Credit), Worldwide vs. Arabian

Source: Hearings, Subcommittee on the Near East, Committee of Foreign Affairs, House, Ninety-Third Congress, Second Session, The Persian Gulf, 1974: Money, Politics, Arms, and Power (Washington, D. C., 1975), p. vi.

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1971--March 3, May 1, June 20, 21, July 19, 21, 29, August 14, December 2, 3, 7, 13.

1972--January 7, February 26.

1973--March 2, 21, 27, April 5.