

**BRITAIN'S WITHDRAWAL
FROM
THE PERSIAN GULF**

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PREFACE

The Persian Gulf (which is known to Arabs as the Arabian Gulf) has been and continues to be an important region on the chess board of international politics. In the past its importance has been as an international waterway and as a linkage between the East and the West. As an imperial power Britain's interest in the Gulf goes back to the days when the East India Company got the Charter from Her Majesty's Government in 1600. The emergence of the East India Company in the Indian sub-continent as a force to be reckoned with, and the interest of other European Imperial Powers in the Gulf, ultimately brought the Gulf to the notice of the East India Company, which, within a short period of time, brought the region under its domination. Up to the First World War, the Gulf served as a forward post for the defence of the British Indian Empire. At the end of the First World War, the British Indian Government was the supreme authority in the area, and the Royal Navy was the mistress of the Gulf Waters.

Britain's interests and its presence in the area, changed in substance and character from time to time. Since the First World War, the Gulf assumed a strategic importance due to the discovery of oil. Although the aftermath of the Second World War was, among other things, a considerable decline in Britain's international power and prestige following the decolonization of the British Empire, Britain retained the Gulf for the preservation of its economic interests in the area.

Up to 1950s, it seems that the Gulf was comparatively quiet. However since 1950s, the changing political scene in the Middle East and British policies therein, gave birth to a new political situation, which gradually led to the weakening of the British stronghold in the region. Britain's first withdrawal from the British controlled Gulf took place in 1961, when Kuwait, an important Gulf Sheikhdome for the British economy, assumed an independent status.

Slowly and gradually a new outlook began to evolve in Britain towards the Gulf. This outlook reached its culmination in January 1968 when Prime Minister Harold Wilson declared Britain's decision to withdraw from the Gulf by the end of 1971.

Although the Gulf region as a whole consists of Iran, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman, Bahrain, Qatar and the seven Trucial States (the present U.A.E.), the present study is confined only to Britain's withdrawal from Kuwait in 1961, and the Labour Government's decision of 1968 to withdraw British forces from Bahrain, Qatar and the seven Trucial States.

As Britain's presence in the British controlled Sheikhdoms, cannot be studied in isolation references have been made, wherever it was necessary, to the policies of Saudi Arabia, Iran and Iraq which they adopted towards Britain's presence in the Gulf Sheikhdoms. The first chapter, dealing with the evolution of the British interests in the region, provides a brief,

but an overall background to Britain's interests in the area.

British troops were also present in the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman, but the Sultanate of Oman and Muscat has been excluded from this dissertation because there was no British military withdrawal from the Sultanate.

This study has been made on the basis of the primary and secondary sources available in New Delhi. Particular mention may be made in this connection of the libraries of the British High Commission, Indian Council of World Affairs (Sapru House) and Jawaharlal Nehru University. Besides the relevant books and articles, the author has used primary sources like the House of Commons Debates, Command Papers, the memoirs of the prominent British statesmen like Anthony Eden, Harold Macmillan and Harold Wilson, and the British national newspapers like The Times, Daily Telegraph and The Guardian.

In pursuing this study I am deeply indebted to my brother Sofi Ghulam Mohammad whose support and guidance was a constant source of inspiration for me.

This work would have been incomplete without the able guidance and supervision of Dr B. Vivekanandan. Being greatly indebted to him, I offer my profound thanks for the pains he has taken in going through my drafts. I am also thankful to Dr H. S. Chopra who has been very sympathetic and helpful towards me during the course of the present study. In this context, this acknowledgment will be incomplete unless mention be made of

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Finally, I wish to record my gratitude to the Librarians and staff of the libraries of British High Commission, Jawaharlal Nehru University, and the Indian Council of World Affairs for the co-operation they extended to me during the course of this study. In this connection, I wish to make a special mention of the assistance I received from Mr. Rahat Hassan of the British High Commission Library and Mr. Tandon and other staff members of the JNU Library.

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Chapter I

EVOLUTION OF THE BRITISH INTERESTS IN
THE GULF

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Evolution of the British Interests in the Gulf

The Persian Gulf, which, in the nineteenth century, was turned into a British Lake had been a theatre of colonial rivalries ever since the European colonial powers - Portugal, Dutch, and the Great Britain - set their eyes on the continents of Africa and Asia. The importance of the Gulf was that it was an international waterway in an era in which imperial rivalries were at their pinnacle.

Geographically, the Persian Gulf region "stretches north west from the Gulf of Oman to the Shatt-al-Arab ¹ [the name of the river, which constitutes also the boundary line between Iran and Iraq] and the adjacent regions on the north, is more than 500 miles long and has an area of about 75,000 sq.miles." The region is divided into the following nine political units: Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, seven Trucial States, the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman and the Neutral Zone. "Iran occupies the entire northeastern shore and the head east of the Shatta-al-Arab. Iraq has a 40-mile (64 km.) wide frontage west of that river. The Arabian side is divided into Kuwait (al-Kuwait), the Neutral Zone, the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Sheikdom of Bahrain, the Sheikdom of Qatar, the

1 Gustave E. von Grunebaum, "Persian Gulf", Encyclopaedia Americana (New York, 1969), vol. 20, p. 618.

seven Sheikhdoms of Trucial Oman and the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman." This geographical location of the Gulf made it strategically an important and sensitive area in the Middle East.

Britain's connection with the Gulf dates back to the seventeenth century, when they, in collaboration with the Shah of Persia, defeated and expelled the Portuguese from Hormuz - the Portuguese headquarters in the Gulf.³ The Anglo-Persian military alliance of 1622, which had resulted in the expulsion of the Portuguese from the Gulf, had resulted in gaining new commercial privileges for the East India Company in the Gulf.⁴ Since then, up to the beginning of the nineteenth century, the British activities in the Gulf were limited to trade and commerce. As the Gulf acquired strategic importance as a key area to Indian defence, and as the prestige and power of the East India Company increased the Company began to make vigorous political activity in the Gulf with a view to gaining political influence. This was necessitated also by various contemporary developments like Napoleon's invasion of Egypt, his contacts with the Ruler of Muscat, and his designs on India.⁵

After the expulsion of the Portuguese in 1622, the East

2 Encyclopaedia Britannica (London), vol. 17, 1969, p. 649.

3 For early British connections with the Gulf see Abdul Amir Amin, British Interests in the Persian Gulf (Leiden, Netherlands, 1967).

4 Ibid., p. 6.

5 Ibid., p. 116.

India Company made further moves to liquidate the French influence in the area. Gradually, in the process the Company became enmeshed in the domestic politics of the Gulf also and faced many challenges like 'piracy', rise of Wahabi⁶ power, the Turkish and French challenges for supremacy, etc. First, the East India Company's ships faced resistance from the local tribes. The refusal of Arab sailors to accept the Company's intervention had resulted in the Company's use of force.⁷ It took measures to suppress them after branding them as "pirates".⁸ The Company sent a

6 The Wahabi Movement was started by a jurist Muhammad Ibn Abdal Wahab (1703-1792) in Central Arabia, in order to revive the original teachings of Islam. The movement rejected all the superstitions, and all un-Islamic practices and customs which had crept into the Muslim society. During the nineteenth century, for a long time, the Movement had enormously affected the socio-political scene of the Gulf. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, the holy cities of the Islamic world, Mecca and Medina, were under their sway. According to A. T. Wilson by 1803 Wahabis "had established their supremacy over the whole Arabian Coast of the "inner Gulf" including the so-called pirate coast." For the impact of the Wahabi Movement on the British position in the Gulf, see J. B. Kelly, Britain and the Persian Gulf 1795-1880, pp. 99-138. See also A. T. Wilson, The Persian Gulf: An Historical Sketch from the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century (London, 1959), 3rd edn., pp. 196-212.

7 Fred Halliday, Arabia Without Sultans (London, 1973), p. 428.

8 Ibid., p. 428.

9
 naval contingent from Bombay to the Gulf to deal with the problem of "piracy" and the rising Wahabi power in 1808. Apart from this, the Company began to take active part in the local politics, and extended enthusiastic support to those local chiefs who were resisting the Wahabi movement. The ships of the Royal Navy bombarded the coastal areas of the Gulf several times in order to bring tribal chiefs under control. However, by 1819-1820, the British were in a position to force the Arab Sheikhs to sign a "General treaty of peace between the British Government and the Arab tribes," whereby Sheikhs renounced attacks on British protected ships.¹⁰ Shortly afterwards, the Company enforced two more treaties with the local Sheikhs. They were: (1) 1835 Truce Agreement and (2) 1853 Treaty of Maritime Peace in Perpetuity. The 1835 Truce Agreement provided for a suspension of hostilities among the Sheikhs. The Agreement also provided for the payment of compensation by the Sheikhs for any maritime aggression, committed by their subjects upon one another during that time. According to the Treaty, the Sheikhs had to notify any breach of the truce to the British Resident or the Commodore of the Gulf Squadron. This truce was

9 For the details of the various naval expeditions sent to the Gulf by the Company, see J. B. Kelly, Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1795-1880 (London, 1968), pp. 99-192.

10 Ibid., p. 155.

renewed in 1853, whereby five Sheikhs of five coastal Sheikhdoms of Ras-al-Khaimah, Ummal-Qaiwain, Ajman, Dubai and Abu Dhabi signed a treaty of Maritime peace in perpetuity, binding themselves, their heirs and their successors to observe a "lasting and inviolable peace from this time forth in perpetuity." They had to refer all of their disputes regarding the truce, to the British Commodore of the Gulf Squadron, who was the final arbiter.¹¹

This was followed by the conclusion of a series of treaties with the local Rulers whereby the British Indian Government safeguarded its trade interests in the region besides securing bases in the Gulf, like a coal depot in Oman. In order to further strengthen and enhance the British political influence in the region, a new type of treaties was concluded between Britain and the Gulf Rulers. The treaties of 1835 and 1853 had provided for peaceful navigation in the Gulf and had almost established East India Company's supremacy on the sea. The new treaties which followed 1835 and 1853 treaties gave Britain actual control over the Gulf. In 1862, the Sheikh of Bahrain accepted the British 'protection'. In 1880 and 1892, under two "exclusive agreements" the British Government received full jurisdiction over Bahrain's foreign and defence affairs. These treaties provided that "on no account, the Bahrain Sheikh would enter into any agreement or correspondence with any power other than the British Government"

11 For details see *ibid.*, pp. 354-409.

without the consent of the British Government. The Bahrain Sheikh, on his part, agreed "not to consent to the residence, within my territory, of the Agent of any other Government." He also agreed "not to cede, sell, or mortg^{age} or otherwise give for occupation any part" of his territory save to the British Government.¹²

A similar treaty was concluded with the Ruler of Muscat and Oman in 1891.¹³ These treaty arrangements provided a model for other treaty arrangements which followed in quick succession. The other coastal states, Ras al-Khaimah, Sharjah and other smaller Sheikhdoms who were defeated in 1820 by a naval fleet sent from Bombay, were forced to enter into treaty arrangements with the British Indian Government. In 1899, the British Indian authorities, exploiting the pro-British leanings of the new Ruler of Kuwait, Sheikh Mubarak concluded a bond in return for Rs.15,000, similar to the treaty with Bahrain.¹⁴ However, in the years just before the outbreak of the First World War, Kuwait became a bone of contention between Great Britain and the Ottoman Empire on the one hand and between Great Britain and Germany on the other. The Kuwait Sheikh had concluded this

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- 12 For the text of this treaty see C. U. Aitchison, A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads relating to India and Neighbouring Countries (Calcutta, 1909), vol. XII, pp. 180-1.
- 13 For details see Briton Cooper Busch, Britain and the Persian Gulf 1894-1914 (Los Angeles, 1967), pp. 10-21.
- 14 For details of the Kuwait issue see *ibid.*, pp.94-113, 187-234, 304-47.

treaty secretly because Kuwait was under the Turkish suzerainty when it was concluded. The Kuwait treaty issue has been a very delicate one in the history of Britain's dealings with the Gulf. On the one hand Britain recognized the Turkish suzerainty over Kuwait and on the other, it entered into treaty relations with the Kuwait Sheikh. When the Turkish Government knew about this treaty, it challenged Sheikh Mubarak's authority to enter into treaty relations with the British Indian Government. Kuwait assumed added importance when the German plan for constructing a Railway Terminus, from Berlin to Baghdad, was known. During this period Germany had secured considerable influence in Turkey. Germany supported Turkey on the Kuwait issue and did not accept Britain's treaty relations with Kuwait, because, legally, the Kuwait Ruler was a vassal of the Turkish Sultan.

The claim of Turkish suzerainty over Kuwait, as accepted by Britain, the question of the validity of the 1899 secret treaty between British Indian Government and Kuwait and the German plan for the construction of a Railway line led to protracted negotiations between Britain and Turkey on the one hand, and between Britain and Germany on the other. Although the British Indian Government and the Foreign Office in London were perturbed over the German plan which had certain economic and strategic implications, the negotiations among Britain, Germany and Turkey continued. But with the increasing apprehensions of an impending war Britain's negotiations with Germany became intricate. But, the negotiations with Turkey bore fruit in 1913 when a convention was signed which

recognized Turkish suzerainty over Kuwait. The convention made the Kuwait Ruler a Qaimaqam, a Turkish administrative officer, and it made a provision for the appointment of a Turkish Agent in Kuwait. But the convention debarred Turkey from posting its garrisons in Kuwait.

Prior to the First World War, besides, German and Turkish interests in the Gulf, Britain was concerned over the Russian designs on the Gulf. Since Russia was a neighbour of Persia, an important objective of the British Indian authorities was to check the Russian influence in the area. Like Germany, Russia in 1898, reportedly had plans of building a Railway line from the Mediterranean coast to the Gulf at Kuwait. According to Cooper Busch, "the very idea of a Russian railway to the Gulf was enough to raise British hackles."¹⁵ To counteract the Russian designs, the British Indian authorities offered £5,000 to the Kuwait Sheikh, but later on he was paid only £1,000.¹⁶ This became the basis of the 1899 Anglo-Kuwait secret treaty. Moreover, Russia reportedly desired to have a port in the Gulf.¹⁷ How much Russia had figured in the British policy towards the Gulf, could be illustrated by Lord Curzon's observations. He wrote:

I should regard the concession of a port upon the Persian Gulf to Russia by any power as a deliberate insult to Great Britain, as a wanton

15 Ibid., p. 105.

16 Ibid., pp. 108-9.

17 Ibid., p. 128.

rupture of the status quo, and as an international provocation of war; and I should impeach the British Minister, who was guilty of acquiescing in such a surrender, as a traitor to his country. (18)

Meanwhile, when European powers were heading towards a war, the Anglo-Russo relations took a new turn. The growing German power, the expansion of the German Navy and its increasing relations with Turkey, which ultimately led to the Turkish collaboration with the German sponsored central alliance during the First World War, changed the situation in the Gulf. The formation of the Triple Entente of Britain, France and Russia against Germany in 1907 had resulted in the elimination of the triangular rivalry of these three powers in the Gulf. The war had its impact on Britain's position in the Gulf. Soon after war had broken out the status of Kuwait also changed. Britain asked the Sheikh of Kuwait to aid the war effort and aid the liquidation of the Turkish power in Mesopotamia. In return, Britain had assured in November 1914, the Ruler of Kuwait protection. Thus Britain brought Kuwait under its control. In this way by the time the First World War broke out in 1914, the British predominance in the Gulf was more or less supreme. The dominant British position in the Gulf played a decisive role in the liquidation of the Ottoman Empire. Britain's dominant position in Kuwait had undoubtedly facilitated the capture of the

18 Lord Curzon, Persia, quoted in Busch, n. 13, pp. 115-16.

Turkish province of Mesopotamia in 1917. In 1918, when British suspected that the supplies were reaching the Turks in Damascus through the desert route from Kuwait, it imposed a naval blockade on Kuwait. The Kuwait Sheikhs was warned in July 1918, that the friendship and protection of Britain was conditional upon his preventing, in Kuwait, any action prejudicial to the British interests.¹⁹

Another Gulf Sheikhdum, Qatar which was under the nominal suzerainty of Turkey, was also brought under the British control by a treaty of 1916. Thus within a short period of time the Turkish influence in the Gulf was reduced to marginal. The liquidation of the Turkish influence in the area was partly motivated by the British desire to check the exploration of oil by Turkey, which had already started exploring the oil in the area.

Till the First World War, the most important strategic interest of Britain in the Gulf centred round the preservation of the Indian Empire. Meanwhile, when the oil prospects in the Gulf became known, Winston Churchill, First Lord of Admiralty, focussed the value of the Gulf oil to Britain. A Royal Commission visited the Persian fields in 1903 and recommended financial support to the Anglo-Persian Oil Company by the Government.²⁰

19 Zahra Freeth and Victor Winstone, Kuwait: Prospect and Reality (London, 1972), p. 81.

20 Elizabeth Monroe, Britain's Moment in the Middle East 1914-1956 (London, 1963), p. 98.

Before the outbreak of war, the British Indian Government had launched a successful diplomatic move and secured concessions from the Local Rulers to exploit the possible oil reserves. In 1911, the Bahrain Sheikh promised not to grant any other party concessions without British consent. As far as oil deposits were concerned, the Sheikh undertook, in a letter of 14 May 1914, not to "exploit any possible deposits himself" or to "entertain overtures from any quarter regarding that [oil deposits] without consulting the Political Agent in Bahrain and without [the] approval of the High Government."²¹ Similarly concessions were extracted²² from the Sheikhs of Kuwait and the other Trucial Sheikhdoms. In Iraq, the Iraq Petroleum Company secured concessions in 1925²³ which were followed by other concessions in 1932 and 1938. The concession agreements defined the grant to be made by the concessionaire and obligations of the parties. In Most cases, the agreements were described as concessions though sometimes they were called conventions, contracts or leases.²⁴ The grant made to the concessionaire was usually that of an exclusive right to search for, obtain, exploit, develop, render suitable for trade, carry away, exploit and sell petroleum and related substances. The

21 Herbert F. Liebesny, "International Relations of Arabia: The Depended Areas", Middle East Journal (Washington, D.C.), vol. 1, 1947, p. 158.

22 Ibid.

23 For details see Henry Cattan, The Evolution of Oil Concessions in the Middle East and North Africa (New York, 1967), p. 1.

24 Ibid., p. 2.

concessions were of long durations ranging between 60 and 75
²⁵
 years.

The importance of the Gulf oil deposits for Britain was that there were no such oil deposits either in Britain or in any other part of the British Empire. A particular consideration was that oil was to be used, instead of coal, for the Royal fleet. Therefore, just six days before the outbreak of the First World War, the "Royal Assent was given to an Act of Parliament providing for an increase in the capital of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company from £2 million to £4 million, and for the acquisition by H.M.G. of a shareholding of £2.2 million, giving them a controlling
²⁶
 interest."

During the war, the British Indian authorities had two objectives to accomplish: (1) to safeguard and maintain British naval supremacy in the Gulf, in the event of German penetration to the headquarters of the Gulf and to check any possible German-Turkish advance towards India, Afghanistan and Central Asia; and (2) to protect the British oil interests against any possible German sabotage.

During the course of the war, Britain made a good capital out of the Arab-Turkish struggle for power. In December 1915, a treaty was concluded with Ibin Saud, which provided for:

25 Ibid., p. 3.

26 See for reference John Marlowe, The Persian Gulf in the Twentieth Century (London, 1962), p. 81.

"(a) British recognition of Ibn Saud and his descendants as independent rulers of Nejd and al-Hasa; (b) British assistance to Ibn Saud in the event of external aggression; (c) British control of the Amir's foreign relations; (d) a promise by the Amir not to cede any of his territory to any foreign power without British consent; and (e) a promise by the Amir to refrain from any interference with or aggression on the territories of the Sheikhs of Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and the Trucial sheikhdoms." ²⁷ The Treaty was a clear acceptance, by Ibn Saud, of the British supremacy in the Gulf. Similarly Iraq was brought under the British Mandate. In 1922, after the formation of an Iraqi Government, under King Feisal, a treaty was signed between Britain and Iraq for a duration of twenty years (this was later reduced to four years). The treaty provided for the maintenance of the British forces in Iraq and also for the appointment of British advisers to the Iraqi ²⁸ Government.

Thus by 1922, Britain was in complete control of the Gulf region which was transformed virtually into a "British Lake".

27 Ibid., p. 48. This treaty was replaced in 1927 by a new Treaty of Jidda which recognized the full sovereign status of Ibn Saud and also provided for exchange of diplomatic representatives between the two countries. This was caused by the proclamation of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1926 by Ibn Saud.

28 Ibid., p. 65.

The era of aircraft gave a new importance to the Gulf as staging posts for civil and military flights between Britain and India, the Far East and Australia.

The Gulf played an important role in Britain's war effort during the Second World War. The German attack on Crete, and then on Greece in 1941, brought the war near to the Gulf. Besides, Hitler's campaign against the Soviet Union also raised the problems for the defence of the Middle East. If Russian defence collapsed, it would have exposed the entire Middle East to German advance. Though Balfour Declaration of November 1917 promising a homeland for the Jews in Palestine, had aroused the Arab passions against Britain, the Arab Governments of the Middle East supported Britain during the Second World War. Iraq was under a pro-British monarchy with Nuri-al-Said, the staunch supporter of Britain, as the Prime Minister. He broke off diplomatic relations with Germany. The Saudi Arabian Ruler, though he remained officially neutral, used his influence in the Arab world in favour of the Allied Powers.

Meanwhile, as an expression of resentment against Britain's role over the Palestinian question, there was widespread sympathy in the Arab world for Germany. In 1941, Nuri-al-Said was replaced in Iraq by an anti-British Government supported by the army. This was a serious situation for the British Indian authorities. Subsequently, an Indian division was despatched from Karachi to Basra which landed there in April 1941. After capturing Basra, the pro-British regime of Nuri-al-Said was again reinstated

in Iraq. It may be noted that with the collapse of France, Syria, which was under the French Mandate, had passed to the Vichy France. Iraq was a route wherefrom the Allied Forces proceeded towards Syria.

Iraq was strategically important from other considerations also. The Soviet Union, which was resisting German aggression needed supply of arms. Iraq was to form a base for the supply-line across Iran to Russia. Secondly, it was apprehended that in the event of Russian collapse, Iraq would perhaps be the line of German advance towards the Gulf and the Suez Canal. Thus, the entire Iraq was very important for the Allied military efforts. Since Britain had maintained its naval supremacy, and was in a commanding position in the Gulf, in August 1941, Britain and the Soviet Union, in violation of Iran's neutrality, occupied Iran.

The strategic importance of the Gulf, increased after the War due to the Soviet designs on Iran and the subsequent American interest in the preservation of Iran. However, in the post-war era, the Gulf emerged as an important region for western Europe, with its vast sources of oil. In 1938, total oil production in the countries of the Gulf amounted to about 16.5 million tons. In 1954 the production had risen to about 137 million tons. Apart from this, in the post-war period, Western Europe was heavily dependent on the Gulf oil. In this, Britain's dependence was far greater than that of the United States. In 1949-50 Britain's imports of crude petroleum from Kuwait and Bahrain were valued at £22.2 million and from Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Iran at £25.4

million, while the imports from the rest of the world amounted to only £8.4 million.²⁹

The importance of the Gulf to the British economy was not confined only as a source of cheap oil supply. The oil business in the Gulf was monopolized by European (particularly the British and American companies) subject only to royalty agreements with the Local Rulers. In 1947, it was estimated that the gross fixed assets of British oil companies in the Middle East were about \$400 million and in 1959 they were risen to \$680 million.³⁰ The British oil companies had investments in Iran, Iraq and later on Abu Dhabi and Qatar. Kuwait oil industry was jointly controlled by the British and U.S. companies. According to The Times Britain's share of the oil companies operating in the Gulf, in 1967 was 30 per cent, which brought Britain an advantage of at least £200 million a year³¹ in foreign exchange.

According to Fred Halliday, Shell and BP were estimated in the 1950s and early 1960s to produce a third of Britain's income when nearly all their crude came from the Gulf.³² He has

29 Philip Darby, British Defence Policy East of Suez, 1947-1968 (London, 1973), p. 25.

30 Charles Issawi and Mohammad Yeganeh, The Economics of Middle Eastern Oil (London, 1962), p. 59.

31 The Times (London), 14 November 1967.

32 Fred Halliday, Arabia Without Sultans (London, 1973), p. 412.

also quoted a British Government White Paper estimating that 40 per cent of the import costs of oil were offset by British oil company earnings.³³ The activities of BP in increasing the oil production in Kuwait, helped Britain to defeat Prime Minister Massadeq's drive for the nationalization of Iranian oil in 1951.

The following table provides a picture of the British oil interests in the British controlled Gulf Sheikhdoms in 1970:

	Unit: 000 Metric tons British-Dutch	USA	Total including others
Abu Dhabi	17,135	4,075	28,761
Qatar	12,270	2,735	17,341
Oman	13,880	--	16,069
Bahrain	--	3,795	3,795
Dubai	--	220	523 ³⁴

Source: The Times, 16 December 1970.

Britain had got other more important benefits than the mere supply of oil from the oil boom in the Gulf. These were the sterling investments which the Gulf Sheikhs had in London. In

³³ Ibid., p. 412.

³⁴ This was the position just before Britain withdrew from the region in 1971.

1950s and 1960s, the Gulf Sheikhdoms were encouraged to deposit their unspent revenues in Britain as 'sterling balances' in the Sterling Area, which in effect was a powerful support to British financial strength. Although the exact figures of such investments are not available, because they were never disclosed, it was estimated in 1967, that Kuwait's investment in Britain was about £979 million.³⁵

Apart from large sums of money which Britain was getting from the oil industry of the Gulf, the region provided a stable market for British exports. In 1947, the British exports to the British controlled Gulf (excluding Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran and Muscat and Oman) were of a total value of £3,309,166 which had risen in 1950, up to £6,910,986.³⁶ In 1954 it had risen further upto £10,155,451.³⁷

The following table provides the figures for the value of the British exports to the British controlled Gulf, from 1964-1966:

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- 35 The Times, 7 June 1967. According to New York Times, the Kuwait Sheikh had probably \$1,000,000,000 in stocks and bonds, see New York Times, 19 July 1961.
- 36 Source: UK, HMSO, Annual Statement of The Trade of The United Kingdom with Commonwealth Countries and Foreign Countries (London, 1952), vol. 1, 1950, pp. 346-7.
- 37 Ibid., vol. I, 1954 (London, 1956), p. 241. The figures include the trade figures of Sharjah, Ras-al-Khaimah, Ummal Qaiwain, Ajman and Fujairah.

British trade with the Gulf (the British Controlled
Sheikhdoms) Exports of Produce (unit £ 000,000)

	<u>1964</u>	<u>1965</u>	<u>1966</u>
Abu Dhabi	2.3	1.5	3.3
Bahrain	7.6	8.7	7.6
Dubai	3.3	2.7	2.8
Oman	1.6	2.2	3.1
Qatar	2.7	3.7	3.7 ³⁸

It may be seen that the British interests in the Gulf varied from time to time. Till the First World War, although the Gulf was a market for the British trade, it was considered a forward post of Indian defence. But after the First World War, strategic interest was intertwined with economic interest, with trade and oil. After the Indian independence in 1947, the British interest in the Gulf was by and large economic. Therefore no one in Britain, after the independence of the Indian sub-continent, questioned the relevance of the continued British presence in the Gulf as a measure to safeguard these

38 The Times, 16 December 1970. This table gives the figures only of exports of goods manufactured in Britain.

The total British exports to the area in 1967 which include exports of Imported Merchandise were valued at £24,324,715.

See n. 36, vol. I, 1967 (London, 1968), p. 207.

The total imports from the British controlled Gulf to Britain in 1967 were valued at £19,626,209. Ibid.

important British interests.

In the post-war period, the Gulf assumed an important strategic role in world politics. It was a key to the British economy and, as is evident, western Europe was dependent on the oil supply from the Gulf. Being situated on the north-western flank of the Indian Ocean, the Gulf was very important for British trade and commercial links with its colonies in the Far East. Besides being a part of the Middle East, which became the theatre of the Cold War, Britain thought it necessary to retain its control over the Gulf. But to keep the region under perpetual British domination was becoming increasingly complicated. The weakening of the British power and prestige after the war had given rise to several developments, which, with the passage of time, did affect the British domination in the Gulf.

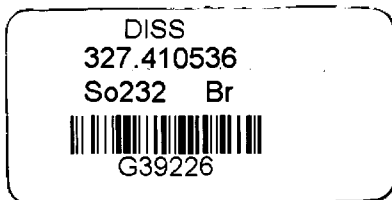
Though the British supremacy in the Gulf after the war apparently remained more or less intact, it had to face new challenges from within and without. Its ally, the United States of America, made significant inroads in the Gulf. The two Gulf States around the British controlled Gulf - Saudi Arabia and Iran - had come under the American influence. The American Oil Company (ARAMCO) monopolized the Saudi oil industry. Besides this, the era of Cold War had led to a protracted struggle between the two blocs for spheres of influence all over the world. Soviet Union, being geographically nearer to the Gulf than Britain and having a long standing desire to get a foothold in

the Arab world, also began to take an interest in the Gulf. The captured documents on German foreign policy during the Second World War give clear evidence of the fact that the Soviet Union wanted the Persian Gulf to be recognized as a centre of the Soviet aspirations.

Anthony Eden in his account of the negotiations between German and Soviet foreign ministers in Berlin in 1940, wrote that "Ribbentrop, Hitler's Foreign Minister spoke discursively of the great changes which will take place throughout the world after the war and the new ordering of affairs in the British Empire finally reaching the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea".... Molotov [the Soviet Foreign Minister] after reaching Moscow agreed with the proposals regarding the four-power pact, "subject to the condition that the territory south of Batum and Baku in the general direction of the Persian Gulf was recognized as a focal point of Soviet aims". Perhaps this awareness of future Soviet interests in the Gulf made Britain maintain its dominant position in the Gulf after the First World War. This was considered necessary as Harold Macmillan states, not only because it was "a question of upholding our

39 See German-Soviet Negotiations regarding the Middle East: Documents from the German Foreign Office Archives, November 1940, in Ralph Magnus, ed., Documents on the Middle East (Washington, D.C., 1969), p. 56.

40 Anthony Eden, ^{DSS} Full Circle (London, 1960), p. 358.



authority, but of denying these strategic areas to the new imperialism masquerading under the cloak of communism".⁴¹

However, what seems to have been more perturbing for Britain, was not the Soviet threat, but the internal developments in the Gulf and the surrounding areas. Britain's influence and prestige was reduced considerably in the Arab world after 1950s and it was fighting a losing battle in the Middle East. In the Gulf, the first challenge came from Iran which nationalized its oil industry in 1951. Another challenge to the British position in the Gulf came from Saudi Arabia which laid a territorial claim in the British 'protectorate' of Muscat and Oman. The Saudi claim perturbed Britain because the Saudi monarch was an ally of America. It was alleged in Britain that the American oil companies were providing money to the Saudi Ruler. The British Prime Minister, Anthony Eden, was so much resentful of the American role in the Anglo-Saudi dispute that he even alleged that "widespread and lavish bribery was directed against the British position in the Middle East".⁴²

It is interesting to see the comparison Anthony Eden made between King Saud, the staunch anti-communist and pro-West Ruler, and the Soviet role. Eden wrote: "an absolute monarch of a medieval state was playing the Soviet game. The fact that

41 Harold Macmillan, Pointing The Way 1959-1961 (London, 1972), p. 382.

42 Eden, n. 40, p. 332.

he was doing so with money paid him by American oil companies
43
did not ease the situation".

In spite of the pressure from Washington,⁴⁴ Britain went ahead and occupied Buraimi oasis in 1955. A well-informed former editor in chief of the International edition of the Newsweek Harry F. Kern observed in a speech on 9 March 1956 that

...the essential objectives [of the British policy for the Middle East] was to fortify their position in the Persian Gulf. Those changes took three forms. The first and by far the most important were certain measures, they took in the Persian Gulf to reinforce their hold there. The British say and probably believe, that these measures were directed against a possibility of Saudi Arabian expansion. 45

The American journalist was clearly soft towards the Saudi monarch and indicated that the British case was not a "good one". While quoting Prince Faisal, who later on became the Saudi King, the American journalist ridiculed the British allegation that King Saud was bribed by the American Oil
46
Companies. The US role in the Anglo-Saudi clash of interests in the Gulf makes it clear that though America was in favour of the continued British military presence in the Gulf, it was

43 Ibid., p. 332.

44 Ibid., p. 334

45 William Sands, ed., Tensions in the Middle East (The Middle East Institute Washington, March 1956), p. 3.

46 Ibid., p. 3.

also competing with Britain to exploit the oil wealth in the
 47
 Gulf.

To defend its interests in the Gulf, the Aden Colony and the British bases in Iraq formed a defence cordon around the British controlled Gulf. In the post-war years in Bahrain, there was base of the Royal Navy and the Sheikhdom of Sharjah provided the needed space for the Royal Air Force base.

Being a close ally of Britain in the area, Iraq had allowed Britain to maintain its military bases at Habbaniyah and Shaiba. The active British participation in the Baghdad Pact of 1955 among other reasons, was motivated by the British desire to safeguard its oil interests in the Gulf.

Anthony Nutting, Britain's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, admitted this fact on 4 April 1955. While participating in the debate on the formation of the pact, he said: "Lately, the development of the oil resources of this area [the Gulf] has added yet another compelling factor to the need for adequate and effective Middle East defence".⁴⁸ The Iraqi coup d'etat of 1958 not only sounded the death knell to the British sponsored Baghdad Pact, but also weakened the British defence structure around the British controlled Gulf. It also brought

47 According to Anthony Eden, America accused Britain of aggression for occupying Buraimi oasis. See Anthony Eden, n. 40, p. 334.

48 UK, House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 539, Session 1954-55, col. 834.

a government in Iraq under General Qasim, who had been a problem to Britain's Gulf policy-makers.

Despite these irritating developments in the adjacent states of the British controlled Gulf Sheikhdoms, the Gulf Sheikhs considered Britain as the sole protector of their dynastic rule under the treaty arrangements, Britain was in control of their foreign and defence affairs. Moreover, the Sheikhs were under the strong influence of the British Political Resident and the Politican Agents subordinate to him.

The Political Resident was the most powerful British representative in the Gulf whose main job was to look after the overall British interests in the area. With the change in the economic condition, the role and functions of the British Political Agents also changed. Up to the First World War, they were mainly concerned with 'keeping the peace', limiting the slave trade and keeping out rival foreign powers - Russia, France, Germany and Turkey. The post-World War II period was important because of the exploration of oil. With it, the role of the Political Agents also increased. According to Donald Hawley, after 1947 the Gulf Rulers were ordered by Britain to accept the advice of the Political Agents. Similarly, as part of the new policy, the Trucial States Council was set up in 1952 in order to bring the Rulers closer together with the possibility of their forming some political or economic association in the future.

49 Donald Hawley, The Trucial States (London, 1970), p. 173. Hawley was a Political Agent in Dubai from 1958 to 1961.

But the main aim in the establishment of the Council was the British desire "to give the British political authorities an effective right arm and a decision was taken that a force called the Trucial Oman Levies should be raised"⁵⁰. Subsequently, this force was established in order to defend the Trucial States from "internal disorder and external aggression"⁵¹.

Thus it may be seen that the British position in the Gulf was fortified by various treaties and agreements concluded between the Local Gulf Sheikhs and Britain. Though they were pleased with the status quo, the changing political scene in the Middle East in late fifties had its impact, though less significant, on them. A tendency had grown in them "to deal with some aspects of their foreign relations on their own initiative"⁵².

The emergence of anti-imperialist leaders in the Arab world, like Gamal Abdul Nasser and Abdul Karim Qasim, had its repercussions in the Gulf. These leaders wanted that the imperial domination in the Arab world, the Gulf included, should be brought to an end. Obviously one of their major targets was the dominant British position in the Gulf. In this context oil wealth became the controlling factor. This situation also

50 Ibid., pp. 173-4.

51 Ibid., p. 174.

52 Ibid., p. 182.

brought a change in the British outlook towards the Gulf. It had to use considerable "tact and discretion particularly in the matters affecting Arab States, with which the Gulf rulers, despite their limited ability to enter into international commitments sometimes made direct contacts".⁵³ Thus, by the beginning of 1960 the British position in the Gulf was on the threshold of a change.

53 Ibid., pp. 182-3.

Chapter II

DEPARTURE FROM KUWAIT

On 19 June 1961, Edward Heath, the Lord Privy Seal, presented to the House of Commons 'The Exchange of Notes', between the Ruler of Kuwait and the British Political Resident in the Persian Gulf. This 'Exchange of Notes' had terminated the sixty-year old 'Exclusive Agreement', concluded on 23 January 1899, between Great Britain and the Sheikh of Kuwait which bound the latter "not to cede, sell, lease, or mortgage, or give for occupation, or for any other purpose any portion of his territory to the Government or subjects of any other power without the previous consent of Great Britain". As a result, the 'Exchange of Notes' had formally accorded the independent and sovereign status to Kuwait. But, while doing so, a new framework for future friendly relationship between the two countries was drawn up. The new framework found its expression in a letter from the British Government to the Ruler of Kuwait on 19 June 1961 (Friendship Treaty). The most significant provisions in the Friendship Treaty were related to consultation and assistance. They said: (c) "When appropriate the two Governments shall consult together on matters which concern them both. (d) Nothing in these conclusions shall affect the readiness of Her Majesty's Government to assist the Government of Kuwait if the latter requests such assistance".¹ These provisions were

1 UK, HMSO, Treaty Series, No. 93, Cmnds. 1409 and 1518 (1961), p. 2. The Kuwait Ruler had conveyed his agreement to these provisions in a separate letter to the British Government. On the initiative of Kuwait Government the treaty has been abrogated.

invoked soon after when General Qasim, the Iraqi Prime Minister, claimed his country's sovereignty over Kuwait in June 1961, on certain legal and historical grounds.

Little is known about the secret negotiations that took place between the Ruler of Kuwait and the British Political Resident in the Gulf prior to the 'Exchange of Notes'. Therefore, it is not possible to explain conclusively what led the Ruler and Britain to move for a new basis for their future relationship. But a close scrutiny of the 'Exchange of Notes' reveals that the new framework of future friendly relationship was drawn out at the British initiative. It may be noted that, although the 1899 Anglo-Kuwaiti Agreement was considered "inconsistent" with the new status of Kuwait, the new Agreement had not brought any change to the title of the British Political Agent in Kuwait. George Brown, a Labour member of Parliament, pleaded for a change in the title of the British Political Agent in Kuwait on the ground that such a change "would be an advantage if it were seen by the whole of Arabia that we were not exercising any kind of surveillance in their territories".² But, Edward Heath, the Lord Privy Seal, did not accept this plea on the ground that "it is ... to a certain extent tied up, with ... the progress of the foreign service for Kuwait".³ Despite the

2 UK, House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 642, Session 1960-61, col. 957.

3 Ibid., col. 958.

change in the political status of Kuwait, the Sheikhdom continued to be an area of vital concern for Britain. During the time of Britain's intervention in Kuwait in 1961, British Defence Minister Harold Watkinson had stated that Kuwait was more important than Berlin.⁴ Moreover, there was increasing realization in Britain that the Middle East and Africa would be future trouble spots. Viscount Montgomery, for example, said in the House of Lords in March 1962: "The Atlantic is safe; Europe is safe; the Mediterranean is safe; the potential danger spots lie elsewhere, in the Near East, the Middle East and the Far East and in Africa. It is to those areas that we should direct our gaze...."⁵

Although Britain was fully aware of the importance of this area, it decided to withdraw from Kuwait partly due to the new Arab nationalism that was emerging in Kuwait. Harold Macmillan, British Prime Minister, has given an indication to this effect. In his memoirs he wrote: "Since the coming of the oil age these areas [the Gulf] like many others in the Middle East sprang into an unexpected prosperity with all its benefits and its dangers. Naturally they [the Gulf areas] became the target⁶ for every form of pressure from the 'progressive elements'".

4 Quoted in Ralph Hewins, A Golden Dream: The Miracle of Kuwait (London, 1963), p. 304.

5 UK, House of Lords, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 238, Session 1961-62, col. 579.

6 Harold Macmillan, Pointing the Way, 1959-1961 (London, 1972), p. 382.

The other factor was the change in Britain's power position in the Gulf. Though, at the end of the Second World War, Britain continued to be the 'protector of the Gulf', its ally, the United States, had also made new inroads into the region and emerged as a strong competitor to the British oil interests there. At the same time, the Gulf Rulers were becoming increasingly conscious of the growing oil wealth. A conversation between Sheikh Fahad, a member of the ruling Kuwaiti dynasty and a British officer illustrates the point. Reportedly, Sheikh Fahad told the British official in 1955: "Sir, you know you British are not as mighty as you used to be. Now you need us, just as we need you. All we ask is that you deal with us as you want us to deal with you".⁷

The oil boom in Kuwait in the fifties had attracted a large number of immigrants from the adjoining areas of the Middle East. They included Egyptian teachers and the Palestinian skilled workers. They carried with them not only new ideas of Arab nationalism but also hatred for the British whom they held responsible for the creation of Israel. This was also a period in which British presence in the Gulf and the help the Sheikhs were extending for such a presence were strongly criticized by the publicity media of prominent Arab capitals like Cairo, Baghdad and Damascus. Press comments, articles and other

7 Edwin E. Calverley, "Kuwait, Today, Yesterday and Tomorrow", Muslim World (Seminary Foundation Hartford 5, Conn., USA), vol. 11, January 1962, p. 45. (Emphasis added)

propaganda material published from these Arab capitals were filled with "the indications of unrest", throughout "the length and the [Sic] breadth of the Gulf" against the British presence. According to a Cairo journal: "The new generation of literates" was "emerging everywhere" and presented "in British eyes, a class hopelessly won over to the Nasser type of Arab nationalism".⁹

The introduction of mass media, like the radio, in the Gulf and the rapid outflow of people from the Gulf to other Arab capitals also had contributed in bringing about a new outlook among the more educated sections of the Gulf population. The ideas propagated by the centres of the Arab unity movement had "penetrated deeply into the consciousness of the remotest tribes, and the immense latent attachment to unity, natural to a common Arab or Moslem heritage has played its undoubted part in rallying the undecided to the path of national union and to Arab not British methods of political reform".¹⁰ They criticized the discriminatory nature of the legal system introduced by Britain in Kuwait and some other Gulf States under its control. A state of dual legislation was established "whose effect inevitably tend to favour those elements in the community who profess

8 "Restless Peninsula", Egyptian Economic and Political Review (Cairo), May-June 1960, p. 19.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid., pp. 19-20.

either for business or for political reasons an often suspect anglophilia". This discrimination was considered:

... almost inevitably the vehicle through which the less honest beneficiaries are able to extract a maximum profit, to the determination of the local inhabitants, through the sublime ignorance or indifference of the local British administrators, whose processes of thinking are usually conditioned to regard the Arab differently to the Levantine, or the European. 11

The Arab nationalist circles not only resented the British presence in the Gulf, but questioned the very basis of such a presence in the region. They were challenging the legality and the nature of treaties which justified the British presence in the Gulf. Besides, they put forward forceful arguments to stir up the religious sentiments of the inhabitants of the Gulf. These treaties according to this Cairo journal could "under no circumstances be considered binding", because they "ignore a number of fundamental points". According to the journal they were: Firstly, the British Government followed the British Law while as the people of the Gulf, being Muslim, followed the fundamental principles of Sharia (the Islamic Law), accepted universally by all the Muslim communities. Secondly, according to the Islamic Law, no legislation was possible without a mandate given by the people, and no mandate could in anyway, permit

11 Ibid., p. 20. It may be noted in this connection that before the formal abrogation of the 1899 treaty, Britain had accepted the Kuwaiti demand to have full legal jurisdiction over all residents of Kuwait.

cession of territories under Muslim sovereignty to non-Muslim sovereignty. Finally the permanent agreements and contracts, which Britain had concluded with these Gulf Rulers, were not valid, as stipulated under the Islamic Law.¹² The alleged illegality of the treaties and agreements which Britain had concluded with the local chiefs was "a sword of Damocles constantly over their [British] heads".¹³

This kind of vehement propaganda against the British presence in the Gulf, yielded dividends to Egypt when it was subjected to a joint Anglo-French-Israeli aggression in 1956 on the question of the nationalization of the Suez Canal. The British action against Egypt led to strong anti-British feelings throughout the Arab world; and the Gulf was no exception to it. Bahrain and Kuwait witnessed anti-British demonstrations expressing sympathy for and solidarity with Egypt. Kuwait, where there was a large number of settlers from Egypt, Palestine and other parts of the Arab world, took the lead.

The public reaction, in Kuwait was so strong that the "British goods were boycotted in the bazaars and crowds gathered outside the British political agency carrying placards which read: "Down with the traitors". British residents in Kuwait were advised by the British Political Agent "to keep away from shops with pro-Nasser slogans".¹⁴ Besides, these peaceful anti-

12 Ibid., p. 22.

13 Ibid., p. 20.

14 See Ralph Hewins, n. 4, p. 273.

British demonstrations, reported attempts were also made to sabotage oil wells.¹⁵ These developments in Kuwait raised a lot of eye-brows in Britain. According to a well-informed writer: "Kuwait was the one part of the Persian Gulf in which a really serious reaction to the Suez incident might have represented a catastrophe for Great Britain and a decisive triumph for Abdul Nasr" [sic].¹⁶ All these local developments in Kuwait indicated that Britain was not comfortably placed in Kuwait in late fifties.

The failure of British action against Egypt in 1956 and the lead taken by the United Nations created doubts in the Gulf about "the viability of the British 'protection'", it convinced many in Kuwait in saying: "the British protection anywhere in the Middle East had become superfluous".¹⁷

The reaction in Kuwait against the British action on the Suez issue had set the stage for political demonstrations. Macmillan in his memoirs has acknowledged this fact and has talked about the "serious disorders in Kuwait" in 1959.¹⁸

To what extent the British position was weakened in Kuwait prior to and after the British withdrawal, has been explained by

15 Ibid., p. 273.

16 John Marlowe, The Persian Gulf in the Twentieth Century (London, 1962), p. 219.

17 See Ralph Hewins, n. 4, p. 273.

18 Macmillan, n. 6, p. 382.

Ralph Hewins, who had several times visited Kuwait. He observed that "If anybody in England still harbours an illusion, based on the good old days, he had better visit Kuwait and find out the truth we are not loved".¹⁹

It may be seen that prior to the 19 June 1961 declaration, British Government was making statements to the effect that Kuwait had already attained independent status, and that "with the full support of Her Majesty's Government" the state got membership in a number of international organizations.²⁰ It is true that prior to the formal declaration of independence, Kuwait was allowed to be a member of some international organizations like Telecommunication Union, Universal Postal Union and World Health Organization. At the same time it is also true that Kuwait was not allowed to have formal relationship with Arab states, although some of them, notably United Arab Republic very much wished to have such a formal connection with Kuwait. According to Egyptian Gazette the UAR was pressing Britain for a long time to allow it to open at least a Consulate in Kuwait.²¹ Similar

19 Ralph Hewins, n. 4, p. 245.

In the midst of the Kuwaiti incident of 1961, the influential Egyptian Paper Al-Gamhouria had disclosed that the British had tried several times to put troops in Kuwait during the 1956 Suez crisis and again in 1958 following the Iraqi revolution and Kuwait adamantly refused this in both cases, see Pakistan Times (Lahore), 19 July 1961.

20 See the statement of Edward Heath, the Lord Privy Seal in the House of Commons on 19 June 1961.

21 Egyptian Gazette (Cairo), 19 June 1961.

was the British reaction to repeated requests from Iraq to allow it to open a Consulate in Kuwait. These factors show that the British official version of Kuwait independence prior to the Exchange of Notes of 19 June 1961, was not substantially correct.²²

British Response to Iraq's
Claim on Kuwait

Ever since the formation of the State of Iraq, its successive governments have claimed Iraqi sovereignty over Kuwait on certain historical and legal grounds. The Iraqi Representative in the United Nations disclosed in the Security Council, that since the end of the First World War, the question of Kuwait had been the subject of negotiations between Iraq and the United Kingdom.²³ Even a pro-British Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri-el-Said had also demanded adjustments in Kuwaiti border. He had extended an invitation to Kuwait to join the Baghdad Pact of 1954 with the expectation that it would provide Iraq with an opportunity to influence Kuwait. But Britain did not attach much importance to these Iraqi claims. However, it might have received the attention of the British Government when

22 For an understanding of the legal status of Kuwait under British 'protection' see Pillai and Mahendra Kumar, "The Legal and Political Status of Kuwait", International and Comparative Law Quarterly (London), vol. 11, 1962, pp. 108-30.

23 See the Iraqi Representative's statement, UN, SCOR, Yr, 16th, mtg. 958, p. 6.

it accorded independence to Kuwait. Although the independence of Kuwait was enthusiastically hailed by prominent Arab leaders, like Nasser, the King Saud of Saudi Arabia and King Hussain of Jordan; it was not well received by General Qasim of Iraq. Within a week after Kuwait's independence, General Qasim declared, at a press conference on 25 June 1961, that Kuwait formed a part of Basra province of the erstwhile Ottoman Empire. He alleged that the Treaty of 1899 was "forged" and "obtained by Britain for a payment of 15,000 rupees", and declared that Iraq would extend its frontier to the South of Kuwait.²⁴ But the General's statement did not contain either any ultimatum or threat to use force to achieve his objectives.

There was, initially no significant reaction either from the British Government or from the Ruler of Kuwait. A spokesman of the British Foreign Office had refrained from making any comment on it.²⁵ However, consultations between the British representatives and the Ruler of Kuwait started. It appears that the Ruler himself was a little reluctant to invoke the provisions of the newly concluded agreement of Friendship with Britain. In an interview to the Daily Telegraph's correspondent on 29 June 1961, just a day before the British troops landed in Kuwait, the Ruler had said: "We have not at this

24 For details see, Mideast Mirror (The Arab News Agency, Beirut), vol. 13, no. 26, 1961, p. 2.

25 See Ralph Hewins, n. 4, p. 286.

moment requested assistance but Her Majesty's Government has notified us that it is ready to give assistance, if necessary with all means". He had further said: "Kuwait was ready to defend its independence with the full support of Arab countries²⁶ and all friendly countries that want peace".

On 30 June 1961, Britain made a significant move when Harold Macmillan, British Premier, addressed a letter to "the heads of the leading Commonwealth countries" informing them that "Kassim is preparing to send a substantial force from Baghdad to Basra".²⁷ The French President, General de Gaule, was also informed. It may be noted that while Macmillan wrote to the Commonwealth leaders regarding the situation in Kuwait, there was no formal request for British help from the Ruler of Kuwait. But Macmillan had anticipated such a request from the Ruler. In his words: "It is more than likely that the Ruler will make an appeal to us for help".²⁸ Among the Commonwealth leaders President Ayub Khan of Pakistan had doubts whether Qasim really meant force.²⁹ On 30 June 1961 the Ruler of Kuwait made a request through the British Political Agent in Kuwait, for British military help.³⁰ Following this, the British Foreign Office issued

26 Daily Telegraph (London), 29 June 1961.

27 Harold Macmillan, n. 6, pp. 383-4.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid., p. 384.

30 Ralph Hewins has quoted Colonel Peirce, the Military adviser to the Kuwaiti Ruler, that "the Ruler was proded

a statement which said:

The [British] Government has certain obligations [under the Friendship Treaty] to the Government of Kuwait. In the face of a declared threat to this small independent state by a more powerful neighbour, the Government have had to take some nominal precautionary measures. 31

In response to the Ruler's request, Britain sent to the tiny Sheikhdom of Kuwait, a huge contingent of British Royal Marines of 42 Commando Battalion, Marines of 45 Commando Battalion from Aden and also troops from Bahrain, Cyprus, Germany and the United Kingdom. British war ships were now again showing the flag, though the Iraqi "troop concentration" was still invisible. The deployment of the British troops to Kuwait was so prompt that the Middle East correspondent of The Economist observed: "helicopters are as busy as bees".³² Simultaneously Britain stepped up diplomatic activities. The Secretary General of the United Nations was informed about the British action, and a Security Council meeting was called. At the same time the outside world particularly the Arab world was assured that "it is intended that the force [British] should be withdrawn as

into accepting the proffered British aid", n. 4, p. 289. Unless something concrete is produced to disprove Hewins that the Kuwaiti Ruler acquiesced to British military advice, his argument cannot be contradicted. This view gets support from other finding as well.

31 The Times (London), 1 July 1961.

32 The Economist (London), 8 July 1961, p. 128.

soon as the Ruler [of Kuwait] considers that the threat to the independence of his country is over".³³ The enthusiastic British response to the Kuwaiti Ruler's request was criticized even in Britain itself. Speaking in the House of Commons, Denis Healey, the Opposition spokesman on foreign affairs said that the Kuwait issue was "essentially an Arab problem, that there is every reason to believe that the Iraqi Government have isolated themselves from the whole of the rest of the Arab world by their present claim to Kuwait".³⁴

It appears that the British moves in Kuwait had the US support. The State Department in Washington viewed the British action as quite "appropriate".³⁵ Moreover Washington had deployed to the region a group of US destroyers in order to "evacuate Americans from Kuwait if Iraq moved against the Sheikdom".³⁶ But despite this US support, the British resolution moved in the Security Council, calling upon all states to respect the independence and integrity of Kuwait, could not get through because of the veto exercised by the Soviet Union, on the ground that the resolution had not provided for the "vital element in the crisis" - the withdrawal of the British troops

33 See British Representative's statement in the UN Security Council, UN, SCOR, Yr, 16th, mtg.957, p. 7.

34 UK, House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 643, Session 1960-61, col. 448.

35 The Hindu (Madras), 2 July 1961.

36 Pakistan Times, 5 July 1961.

from Kuwait. This was a moment when the Soviet Union found itself isolated from the Arab world except Iraq. This took place mainly because Moscow vetoed Kuwait's application for UN membership which was supported by all the Arab countries except Iraq.

The Arab Reaction

Initially the reaction in the Arab world over the Kuwait issue varied. The United Arab Republic was very much critical of Qasim's claim over Kuwait. In a policy declaration, the UAR Government declared that it "cannot accept the logic of annexation but is prepared to accept the logic of total unity in the Arab homeland"³⁷. It rejected the Iraqi claim over Kuwait and supported its independence. Cairo also did not create any hurdle in the way of the ships of the Royal Navy, passing through the Suez Canal, heading for Kuwait. When Iraq criticized this attitude of the UAR, as supporting "British imperialism", Cairo took the position that under international law, the UAR could not prevent the British ships from passing through the Suez Canal.

Initially, UAR's opposition to the British military involvement in Kuwait was mild. It held that the responsibility for it lay with General Qasim. A leading Cairo newspaper

37 See the statement of UAR Minister of State for Presidential Affairs, Times of India (Bombay), 29 June 1961.

Al-Akhbar, wrote in an editorial, on 5 July 1961, that "Let us go back to Major-General Abdal Karim Qasim and ask him if he sleeps in peace. Does he feel that he has served Iraq, Kuwait or any other Arab country"³⁸? The paper criticized General Qasim's speeches as "stupid", and "irresponsible". However, the UAR was not silent on the arrival of the British troops in Kuwait. Its representative, in the UN Security Council, expressed regret and dissatisfaction over the British "military movements and the operations of the British fleet"³⁹ in Kuwait. With the arrival of the British troops in Kuwait, the UAR mounted its criticism of Britain's military involvement in Kuwait. Quoting reliable Arab diplomatic sources Times of India's Cairo correspondent reported that the UAR had postponed its application for Kuwait's membership of the United Nations, because Kuwait was no longer "fully independent since its territory has again been defied by the foreign occupation"⁴⁰. The Middle East News Agency described the arrival of the troops in Kuwait as an "imperialist landings"⁴¹. The UAR held the view that as the problem was an Arab one, therefore, it "would like to see this problem resolved in accordance with Arab principles and traditions"⁴². The British action, according to the UAR

38 Quoted in Benjamin Shwadran, "The Kuwait Incident", Middle Eastern Affairs (New York), vol. 13, 1962, p. 12.

39 UN, SCOR, Yr, 16th, mtg. 957, p. 8.

40 Times of India, 7 July 1961.

41 Quoted in Pakistan Times, 6 July 1961.

42 UN, SCOR, Yr, 16th, mtg. 957, p. 8.

Representative in the UN Security Council, could in no way contribute towards a peaceful settlement, because entry into the Arab world of foreign troops, especially those of a big power, could only lead to grave repercussions.⁴³

The UAR's resistance to British landings in Kuwait, did a great deal in influencing the British policy; obviously it was not to the liking of the British Government. The Conservative paper, Daily Telegraph, in an editorial, criticized President Nasser for inventing "some interpretation of Iraq's claim to possession of Kuwait which will show all Arabs to be saints and all Britons to be sinners".⁴⁴ But General Qasim was constantly being criticized in Cairo because, to quote a Cairo daily Al-Gomhouria, he had "completely frustrated the hopes of Arab public opinion by reiterated declarations of Iraq's determination to have Kuwait annexed".⁴⁵

Role of Arab League

In order to get Kuwait cleared of the British troops, the Arab League came into action. The influential Cairo daily Al-Ahram advocated "concerted Arab action", in order to restore the Kuwait people's sense of security which was shattered by

43 Ibid., Yr, 16th, mtg. 960, p. 3.

44 "Nasser's Uphill Work", Daily Telegraph, 7 July 1961.

45 Quoted in Pakistan Times, 19 July 1961.

⁴⁶
 Qasim. The Arab League began to exert pressure on the Kuwaiti Ruler to demand the British withdrawal from Kuwait. As a result Kuwait agreed to ask Britain to withdraw its troops from Kuwait, provided Iraq also withdrew its claim over Kuwait and suggesting that the forces from the member states of the Arab League be posted in Kuwait. Slowly the Ruler of Kuwait was moving close to the line of the Arab League which favoured an early departure of the British troops. According to the Economist's Middle East correspondent: "the question that is being asked with the greatest insistence in Kuwait is not whether General Qasim means business, but when the British will leave".⁴⁷

However, the moves of the Arab League raised suspicion in London because Britain was not contemplating a troop withdrawal from Kuwait so soon. Prominent and responsible British newspapers were sceptical of the role of the Arab League and tried to influence the Ruler of Kuwait. The Guardian wrote that the Ruler of Kuwait should not accept Arab League proposals because "the Arab League has disappointed hopes so regularly that perhaps one is asking too much to expect it to unite sufficiently to save Kuwait's integrity". The paper assumed that "the ruler of Kuwait might not be entirely happy to see British

46 Ibid., 18 July 1961.

47 "Secure Behind the Shield", The Economist, 8 July 1961, p. 128.

troops replaced by his brother Arab rulers for few of them are entirely disinterested".⁴⁸ The Daily Telegraph warned the Kuwaiti Ruler of the "news of tension on Kuwait's frontier [Saudi-Kuwait border]"⁴⁹ that another neighbour has also eyes on the little emirate". A year after the British troops were replaced by the Arab League contingents The Times correspondent wrote that Kuwait found "the presence of Arab troops politically more embarrassing". The paper reiterated that Britain was, in⁵⁰ the last resort, Kuwait's defender.

Apart from the British press, British Government itself was not enthusiastic over the replacement of the British troops by the Arab League forces in Kuwait. Although Prime Minister Harold Macmillan was satisfied that "in the short run we have achieved our immediate purpose", he had the apprehension of⁵¹ "dangers in the long run". However, in the UN Security Council Britain welcomed "any constructive steps which the Arab League might take". But the refusal of a British Foreign Office Spokesman to state if Britain agreed with the proposal to replace⁵² the British troops in Kuwait, with contingents from the Arab countries, indicated the reservations Britain had over the

48 The Guardian (Manchester), 3 July 1961.

49 Daily Telegraph, 7 July 1961.

50 The Times, 5 December 1962.

51 Macmillan, n. 6, p. 386.

52 See Pakistan Times, 13 July 1961.

proposal. In this context, The Guardian remarked: "Neither the Ruler [of Kuwait] nor the British Government is going to be very happy to see the replacement of British by Arab League or United Nations troops".⁵³ The Daily Telegraph doubted the effectiveness of the Arab League contingents to safeguard independence and integrity of Kuwait. It asked:

Against this continuing menace [the alleged Iraqi threat] and in the absence of international recognition of Kuwait's sovereignty, an Arab force (if it comes into being) could only be a token protection. Would the token be honoured if General Kassem attacked? 54

The British Government did not encourage even the suggestion, put forward by the leader of Opposition, Hugh Gait-skill, of stationing the UN observers on the Iraq-Kuwait border.⁵⁵ Prime Minister Macmillan said that he "would like to consider a little more whether it would be a good thing to station observers [UN] on the frontier in the desert".⁵⁶

In the last week of July 1961, the Arab League adopted a resolution which urged the government of Kuwait to ask for the withdrawal of the British troops, as soon as possible, and in return Kuwait would be admitted to the League as an independent

53 The Guardian, 5 July 1961.

54 Daily Telegraph, 9 August 1961.

55 Times of India, 2 July 1961.

56 UK, House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 643, Session 1960-61, col. 1012.

state. Further, the League promised "effective help for the preservation of Kuwait's independence upon that country's request".⁵⁷ The Arab League Secretary-General requested the UN Secretary-General to remove the Kuwait issue from the Security Council agenda and accept the independent state of Kuwait as a candidate for membership in all international organizations.⁵⁸ In the first week of August 1961, Kuwait and the Arab League agreed to replace the British troops with Arab League contingents. It may be seen that British troop withdrawal had already started towards the end of July 1961 onwards, and on 10 October 1961, Kuwait announced the complete withdrawal of the British troops from Kuwait.

Undoubtedly, the withdrawal of the British troops from Kuwait so soon was caused by the Arab League decision. It may be recalled that British line was that it would not withdraw the troops unless Qasim withdrew his claim over Kuwait. But Qasim did not withdraw his claims until his assassination in February 1963. Under such circumstances, it appears that a decisive factor which precipitated the British withdrawal from Kuwait was the strong Arab resentment against the British presence there. In fact, the unanimous, though delayed, decision of the Arab League, left no alternative for Britain but to

57 Mideast Mirror, vol. 13, no. 29, p. 2.

58 Times of India, 21 July 1961.

withdraw. Moreover, the public opinion in Kuwait was also growing against the continued foreign military presence on the Kuwaiti soil.⁵⁹ It was felt in Kuwait that the Arab League's concerted efforts would be more effective in controlling Qasim than a foreign military presence. This view was shared in Britain also. The Guardian which had earlier expressed doubts on the efficacy of the Arab League, said that politically Arab protection for Kuwait would be more welcomed than imperialist protection.⁶⁰

Britain had sent its troops to Kuwait on the fear that Iraq might annex Kuwait through use of force. Harold Macmillan in a statement, on 3 July 1961, to justify the British troop delivery to Kuwait, said: "On 29th and 30th June evidence accumulated from a number of sources that reinforcements of armour, were moving towards Basra" which is only 30 miles away from Kuwaiti border. The Iraqi forces were, according to Macmillan, "clearly quite sufficient to occupy Kuwait by a rapid movement against the modest Kuwait Army".⁶¹ British Representative in the UN Security Council also reiterated the same

59 See The Economist, 8 July 1961, p. 110.

60 The Guardian, 8 August 1961.

61 UK, House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 643, Session 1960-61, col. 1006.

Macmillan himself has contradicted this statement subsequently. Writing about the landing of British troops in Kuwait, he observed: "As yet there was no visible enemy save the torrid heat of the blazing sands". This he wrote about the situation on Iraq-Kuwait border on 1 and 2 July 1961.

See Macmillan, n. 6, p. 385.

statement which was vigorously denied by his Iraqi counter-
⁶²part. There are different assessments in Britain over the
 alleged Iraqi threat to Kuwait. Till 29 June 1961, it was
 reported in London that "responsible ministers did not believe
⁶³Qasim would attack". On 5 July 1961, the Middle East corres-
 pondent of The Times reported:

with the visibility slightly better today,
 air and land reconnaissance could be
 sharpened. Armour cars are patrolling
 the frontier, but immediately on the
 other side [Iraqi side] at present,
 there seems to be void and silence. ⁶⁴

Same day the British ground force Commander in Kuwait said:

... that the intelligence reports indicated
 that the build-up of Iraqi forces had in-
 creased since yesterday.... I cannot see
 anything from the military point of view to
 indicate that the Iraqis will not attack.
 As far as I can see the build up on the
other side of the front is continuing.... ⁶⁵

The British claim that there was an Iraqi troops concentration
 on Kuwait border was not confirmed. Similar was the position
 of the British apprehensions that General Qasim might use force
 against Kuwait. In the circumstances, even some British

62 UN, SCOR, Yr, 16th, mtg. 957, pp. 5-8.

63 See Benjamin Shwadran, n. 38, p. 11.

64 The Times, 5 July 1961.

65 Times of India, 6 July 1961. (Emphasis added)
 His statement was contradicted by Air Marshal Sir
 Charles Elworthy Middle East Commander-in-Chief, on
 8 July 1961, he was reported to have said that there
 was "nothing to suggest that an Iraqi attack is imminent".
Times of India, 8 July 1961.

newspapers expressed doubts whether Qasim was serious about his threat. The Middle East correspondent of The Times, quoting a neutral diplomat in Baghdad, reported that "there had been no sign of military or psychological preparation in Iraq for seizing Kuwait and the British were jittery because of their stake in Kuwait"⁶⁶. Similarly, the New York Times correspondent quoted the Arab diplomatic circles in Beirut to the effect that they could not see any Iraqi move against Kuwait. In their opinion, General Qasim's announcement was only a "manoeuvre to prevent the United Arab Republic from gaining control of the Sheikhdom"⁶⁷.

There was lively debate, both in Britain and the Arab world, on the intentions and motivations behind the quick British military involvement in Kuwait. First, the very contention of the British Government that the Iraqi troops were concentrating at Basra to invade Kuwait, was subjected to criticism. In the UN Security Council British allegation that Iraq was preparing to launch an attack on Kuwait, was rejected by the Ecuadorian representative. He said that "an allegation by a State [as Iraq had done] regarding its rights to a territory ... cannot in itself be considered a threat to peace and security, so long as it is not accompanied by military measures or clearly aggressive

66 The Times, 17 July 1961.

67 New York Times, 27 June 1961.

intentions..."⁶⁸ Taking into account the dispute over the real intentions of General Qasim towards Kuwait, when he made his statement on 25 June 1961, it is necessary to examine why Britain had so enthusiastically sent its troops to Kuwait. It is true that Britain was under treaty obligations to send troops on the request of the Kuwaiti Ruler. But that was not the only factor which weighed heavily on the British decision. Another important factor was the dependence of Britain on the Kuwaiti oil sources. According to the Sunday Express:

If Kuwait was annexed by Iraq ... two out of three cars travelling to the seaside would remain at a standstill, factories would be idle, aircraft grounded, and ships of war and commerce tied up at quayside, and if the oil had to be replaced with dollar oil from the United States and Venezuela Britain would be subjected to a disastrous drain on her balance of payments and would cease to be independent. 69

This perhaps gives an impression that if Iraq annexed Kuwait, it would have stopped oil supply to Britain. It appears that it was a far-fetched prompting since even at the time of anti-British Iraqi coup d'etat in 1958, the possibility of Iraqi nationalization, or 'seize', of British oil interests was ruled out.⁷⁰

68 UN, SCOR, Yr, 16th, mtg. 960, p. 2.

69 Sunday Express (London), 2 July 1961.

70 See Harold Macmillan, Riding the Storm, 1956-1959 (London, 1971), p. 535.

As the Iraqi troop concentration near Basra was not confirmed, it is doubtful whether the British intelligence reports of the alleged Iraqi troops concentration were correct. According to Ralph Hewins these reports were based on rumours, which "are the daily features of every Middle East capital". He quoted Colonel Peirce, military adviser to the Kuwaiti Ruler, who said that Qasim could have taken Kuwait without a struggle. In his view the British objective in Kuwait was to restore the British prestige in the Middle East, which was shattered after the Suez crisis. "War Office, Foreign Office, Cabinet, Prime Minister and the country were all anxious for an opportunity to wipe out the Suez smear and restore the British prestige", and that the Kuwaiti issue was intensified by the War Office in London to test its new military arrangements in the Middle East. This view was supported by other sources also. According to a report in the Daily Telegraph, the British ships started moving towards Kuwait, and all leave was cancelled for the 24th Infantry Brigade in Kenya, even before the actual call for help came from the Kuwaiti Ruler. An Indian newspaper also reported that the "defence of Kuwait must have been a set-piece operation in the files of the war office for a long time". A prominent Labour M.P., George Wigg, accused the British War Office of

71 Hewins, n. 4, pp. 288-90.

72 Daily Telegraph, 13 July 1961.

73 The Statesman (New Delhi), 12 July 1961.

designing the Kuwaiti military episode. He wrote:

A squadron of 3rd Carabiniers, with Centurian tanks, arrived in Kuwait on Saturday 1 July / 1961/. Normally, this unit is stationed at Aden; and as the Centurians are much too heavy to be lifted by air, they must have been taken by sea, presumably on the tank-landing ship, HMS Striker. It is certain that if the Centurian had been at their usual stations in Aden, they would have needed to move several days before the Friday if they were to arrive in Kuwait by 1 July. Luck, again? Accident? Or Design. It is all very reminiscent of Suez. 74

The interpretation that the Kuwait operation was, among other things, motivated by the British desire to wipe out the Suez smear gets support from the observations of another well informed writer, Philip Darby. According to him:

... the British reaction to the operation was one of profound satisfaction.... It was regarded as finally burying the Suez episode and to some extent it gave rise to a new feeling of confidence, not only in the strategic apparatus constructed since 1957, but also in Britain's ability to play a major role in shaping events outside Europe. In succeeding months the operation was held up in official circles as an example of the speed and efficiency with which British forces could counter limited threats to the peace east of Suez.... 75

The statement of Harold Watkinson, Defence Minister, in the

74 George Wigg, "Truth About Kuwait", New Statesman (London), 14 July 1961, p. 44.

75 Philip Darby, British Defence Policy East of Suez 1947-1968 (London, 1973), p. 220; also see his detailed assessment of the "Kuwait Operation", pp. 224-55.

House of Commons, also indicated similar approach. He said that the Kuwait operation was the basis of "much of our future planning"⁷⁶ of the British forces east of Suez.

The other motives behind the British intervention in Kuwait could be to extract more concessions from General Qasim in the negotiations between Iraqi Government and the British-Iraqi Petroleum Company. Qasim had already deprived the British Petroleum Company and its subsidiaries of concessions where no oil had as yet been extracted. This had considerably reduced the area of concessions of the British-Iraqi Petroleum Company.⁷⁷ Moreover, there was also a lurking apprehension that Qasim might nationalize the Iraqi petroleum although the Iraqi Prime Minister was repeatedly denying it. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that one of the intentions behind the rapidity and the thoroughness of the British action in Kuwait could be to exert pressure on General Qasim.

In the last week of December 1961, when the Arab troops were guarding Kuwait, Britain again alerted its troops to meet a new 'emergency', in Kuwait⁷⁸ arisen due to Qasim's alleged threat. Notably, Britain took this measure unilaterally when there was no formal request from the Kuwaiti Ruler for such an alert. Britain did so on the assumption of a surprise entry by

76 UK, House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 655, Session 1961-62, col. 44.

77 International Affairs (Moscow), February 1964, p. 94.

78 See Macmillan, n. 6, p. 387.

Iraq in Kuwait. The Communist-controlled newspaper Daily Worker reported that these moves "were believed to foreshadow new British gunboat diplomacy", and also "designed to bring new pressure on Iraq over the negotiations with the partly British-owned Iraqi-Petroleum Company".⁷⁹

Britain's departure from Kuwait in 1961, was caused by the growing pressures of Arab nationalism. Keeping in view the impact of Arab nationalism on the British presence in Kuwait, it can hardly be denied that it was not simply "the richness of oil", which convinced the British Government and the Kuwaiti Ruler of the "inconsistency" of the secret treaty of 1899. The political activities in Kuwait in 1950s were definitely being influenced by President Nasser's ideas. Harold Macmillan has tried to portray these activities as an Egyptian-led agitation, which according to him, was "on the usual Jacobian lines, pro-Nasser, pan-Arab and in general subversive".⁸⁰ The 1959 agitation in Kuwait about which Macmillan has talked was directed not only against the Ruler of Kuwait, as Macmillan has shown us, but also against the British "imperialism". Macmillan could easily dismiss the pro-Arab feeling in Kuwait as "subversive" and the people cherishing it as trouble makers. On the contrary this growing consciousness was a characteristic not only of the

79 See a despatch from Statesman's London Correspondent. The Statesman, (1961), 28 December 1961.

80 Macmillan, n. 6, p. 382.

young Kuwaiti generation, inspired by the Arab unity movement, but also of the members of the Ruling Sabah family of Kuwait. Even before the formal independence of Kuwait, they considered the Egyptian-Syrian United Arab Republic as an "answer to Kuwait's national aspirations".⁸¹

Britain's departure from Kuwait in 1961, was not a withdrawal in the true sense. As Kuwait was considered important to the British economy, Britain could hardly welcome an idea of seeing Kuwait out of the British control. It was the Ruler of Kuwait who took the initiative, obviously, under the pressure of new political realities. As Britain itself could not resist the Ruler, an appropriate arrangement was the offer of friendly relations. The exchange of notes, itself was a clear indication that the change in the relationship between Britain and Kuwait was only de jure rather than de facto. Therefore, it seems, that Britain had two objectives in mind when it replaced the 1899 Agreement by the new Agreement of friendship and assistance in June 1961. These were: (1) to silence the Arab resentment against the British presence in Kuwait; and (2) to fill the gap caused by the termination of the 1899 Agreement.

However, the Arab League action in Kuwait changed this situation. As the Arab League had not taken prompt action in the past to settle the inter-Arab feuds and to minimize the

81 See the statement of Sheikh Salem Elsabah, Chief of Police of Kuwait, New York Times, 5 March 1958.

foreign intervention in the Arab States, Britain could not foresee Arab League initiative in Kuwait. But when the Arab League took the initiative Britain was hesitant to accept the Arab League's presence in Kuwait partly due to its apprehensions that Kuwait, under the Arab pressure, might ask for the abrogation of the 1961 'Friendship Treaty' with Britain. The apprehensions were quite genuine since Kuwait was, internally and externally, under pressure to abrogate the 19 June 1961 Treaty.⁸²

The Kuwait-Iraq issue, no doubt, was an Arab one, as Arab countries considered. But it was illogical to assume that Britain would not intervene in Kuwait to safeguard its interests in the area. This was so not only because Britain had largest investment compared to other Sheikdoms in the Kuwait Oil Company, but also that Kuwait was an important member of the sterling area. The Kuwaiti Ruler had invested huge sums of petro-dollars in London. It was estimated that in 1967 Kuwait had about £979 million investments in London.⁸³ The provisions of the 19 June 1961 'Friendship Treaty', provided sufficient justification for the British military intervention. The prompt and over-dramatized British action in Kuwait was a notice to others that

82 In April 1963, 12 out of the 50 members of the Kuwaiti Assembly demanded the cancellation of the 19 June Treaty with Britain.

83 The Times, 7 June 1967. The actual figures of Kuwait Ruler's investment in UK remained a guarded secret.

Britain would not tolerate any interference in the Gulf which would jeopardize its interests there. It was also intended to assure the Rulers of other Sheikhdoms in the Gulf that they could also rely on British strength.⁸⁴ The Friendship Treaty between Kuwait and Britain contained provisions not only to meet external dangers to Kuwait, but also internal subversion.⁸⁵ This had clearly enhanced the British prestige among the Rulers of the tiny Sheikhdoms, because they considered British presence as a sufficient guarantee for the preservation of their dynastic rule in the Gulf. The quick British action in Kuwait had a reassuring effect on the Gulf Rulers that any onslaught [internal subversion or external aggression] on their dynastic rule could be quelled with the British military assistance. But the decision of the Arab League to send its contingents to replace British forces in Kuwait, was an early note of warning that the Arab countries, in spite of differences in their approaches, could not reconcile to the British presence in the Gulf.

84 In this connection, it may be noted that in July 1961, when Britain was engaged in Kuwait, Rulers of some of the Gulf States were on an official visit to London. For details see, The Times, 5 July 1961.

85 See Edward Heath, The Lord Privy Seal's statement in the House of Commons on 19 June 1961. See UK, House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 642, Session 1960-61, col. 958.

Chapter III

FACTORS LEADING TO WITHDRAWAL

Britain's prompt and swift military intervention in Kuwait was a clear assurance to the Rulers of the British controlled Gulf States that they could rely upon Britain's strength and ability to protect them from external and internal dangers. Therefore, they continued to have confidence in Britain and its presence in the region. This is evident from the fact that during the period that followed, the Gulf Rulers did not make any demand for the British withdrawal.

However, as the situation in the Gulf and the Middle East began to change even the pro-British Rulers of the Gulf also showed signs of acquiring greater independence. In 1966, when Britain decided to shift Aden base to Bahrain, the Bahrain Ruler sent his Financial Administrator Sheikh, Khalifa Sulman-al-Khalifa to London to persuade Britain to increase its rent on the base, Britain had in Bahrain.¹ The Bahrain Ruler made this demand on the plea that the British presence in Bahrain would be embarrassing for him and that, to a certain extent, he would be relieved of the embarrassment if Britain paid a more significant sum for the areas it occupied.² The Ruler of

1 Daily Star (Beirut), 4 May 1966.

2 This was revealed by a British M.P., Edmund Dell in the House of Commons on 7 March 1966. He had returned from a tour of the British controlled Gulf States. See UK, House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 725, Session 1965-66, col. 1826. Further indications of Bahrain acquiring greater independence were the adoption of Bahraini as opposed to British legal jurisdiction over a wide range of nationalities in 1957, the issue of Bahrain's own stamps in 1960 and introduction of a separate currency in 1965.

Sharjah had gone to the extent of applying for Arab League membership without British consent, although he was bound to take Britain's permission under the treaty obligations.³ He also refused to prolong the lease of Britain's military base in Sharjah.⁴ The Gulf Rulers were also getting closer to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait to have a common policy.⁵

These changes in the attitude of the Rulers of the British controlled Gulf Sheikhdoms took place partly due to the changing political milieu of the Gulf. Since the Suez crisis of 1956, the impact of Arab nationalism in the Gulf was increasingly felt. It appears that there had been a steady growth of Arab influence in the Gulf States in the early sixties. Of this, the Egyptian influence in Bahrain was most conspicuous. According to a well-informed writer, John Marlowe, after 1950, there was popular discontentment in Bahrain against the Ruler and his British political adviser, Charles Belgrave.⁶ The suppression of this resentment by the Ruler, with active British support, was seen in the "eyes of a great many unfriendly witnesses, the identification between British imperialism and local despotism".⁷

3 For details see The Times (London), 8 August 1966. The Ruler subsequently deposed in 1965 at Britain's instigation.

4 See for details International Affairs (Moscow), June 1968, p. 39.

5 The Guardian (Manchester), 6 May 1967.

6 John Marlowe, The Persian Gulf in the Twentieth Century (London, 1962), p. 199.

7 Ibid.

In 1956 Bahrain witnessed political disturbances. Selwyn Lloyd, British Foreign Secretary, had to face a "rioting mob during a brief stop-over in Bahrain, and his car was reportedly stoned on the way from the airport to the British Residency".⁸ According to Anthony Nutting, a former Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, a group of Bahrain merchants, who had formed a society called the Committee of National Union,⁹ were being suspected as taking orders from Nasser. Anthony Eden, British Prime Minister was so much upset by the riots in Bahrain, that he had even suggested sending the "strategic reserve troops from Aden to Bahrain to quell the riots" and, if troops were not available, he proposed to "invite Nuri-es-Said to help with the despatch of an Iraqi police detachment".¹⁰ Eden blamed President Nasser of Egypt for the riots in Bahrain, because he was "our Enemy No. 1 in the Middle East and he would not rest until he had destroyed all four friends and destroyed the last vestiges of our influence".¹¹ According to Nutting, Eden took these events as a challenge to the British position

8 Anthony Nutting, No End of A Lesson (London, 1967). Anthony Nutting has written that Selwyn Lloyd later told him that his car was untouched, and another in the cortege containing members of his staff was spat on by a few handfuls of mud thrown by some anti-British rioters, p. 28.

9 Ibid., p. 36.

10 Ibid., p. 37.

11 Ibid., p. 27.

in the Gulf.¹² He quoted the Foreign Office Sources telling him that "a conservative government was not going to allow Nasser and his agents to undermine us with impunity".¹³ The joint Anglo-French and Israeli aggression against Egypt in 1956 over the Suez issue was bitterly resented in Bahrain. Demonstrations were held against Britain and, as a result, the leaders of the National Union in Bahrain were arrested and "sentenced to long-terms of imprisonment in St. Helena".¹⁴

Bahrain was also influenced by the propaganda from the Arab capitals like Baghdad and Cairo. It may be recalled that the Iraqi newspapers, in the midst of Kuwaiti incident of 1961, had published an appeal for the "liberation of the oil-rich Persian Gulf State of Bahrain from British imperialism and its agents".¹⁵ The appeal was issued by the National Liberation Party of Bahrain and was addressed to the Arab peoples and all free peoples. An Iraqi newspaper Saout-Al-Ahrar wrote:

12 Ibid., p. 36.

13 Ibid., p. 37. Here, it is interesting to note that an Egyptian government publication has accused, that the dismissal of Glubb and the resentment of Eden over the situation in the Gulf were linked with "Suez aggression". See Secrets of the Suez War (Ministry of Guidance, Information Administration, Cairo, n.d.), p. 7. Anthony Nutting has written that Eden "wanted a demonstration of strength, an assertion of Britain's power and influence, to raise her battered prestige. Frustrated in the Persian Gulf, he [Eden] decided to show the mailed fist in Cyprus". Anthony, n. 8, p. 37.

14 Europa Publications, The Middle East and North Africa, 1969-70 (London, 1969), p. 566.

15 Quoted in Times of India (Delhi), 27 September 1961.

... all the Emirates of the Persian Gulf are in an extremely grave situation since after the defeat inflicted on them [Britain] by Iraq, the British imperialist forces are tightening their hold on Bahrain and every part of the Arabian peninsula.... 16

Besides, slogans could be heard in Bahrain, as early as 1960, against British "imperialism",¹⁷ and also leaflets were freely being distributed attacking American controlled petroleum company and linking it with British "imperialism".

The political unrest in Bahrain, politically the most advanced British controlled state in the Gulf, continued in one form or another till Britain withdrew from the area in 1971. Although Britain could simply dismiss these developments as an internal matter of the Bahrain Ruler, the very fact that political unrest in Bahrain had figured in the House of Commons¹⁸ indicated the concern in London over developments in the Gulf.

Similarly, opposition to the British presence was discernible in the Trucial States as well. After visiting these states, David Holden, the Sunday Times Correspondent, reported

16 Ibid.

17 Daily Telegraph (London), 29 March 1960.

18 On 8 March 1965 riots broke in Bahrain arising out of "industrial troubles" and consequently dislocated the normal life on the island. This continued up to 28 March and demonstration again took place on 13 April 1965. See George Thomson, the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs' statement in the House of Commons, UK, House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 711, Session 1964-65, col. 108.

that: "In Ras-al-Khaimah children have learned to shout anti-British slogans. And in a new Dubai girls school, the other day, I found pictures of President Nasser in every class room"¹⁹. Similarly, the Arab unity movements were received in the Gulf with enthusiasm. On 9 April 1963, demonstrations were held in Qatar to celebrate the abortive union agreement between Egypt, Syria and Iraq, which resulted in the riotings.²⁰ These demonstrations also led to the formation of a "National Unity Front"²¹ in Qatar.

The resentment against British presence found expression not only in slogans, but also in acts of sabotage. In 1962, British Indian Steam Navigation's passenger vessel Dara, "a symbol of the raj in the Gulf"²² was blown up and sunk off Sharjah, resulting in 236 deaths. The act of sabotage which was attributed to the Oman Revolutionary Movement was an indication of the "increasing fragile basis of the pax Britannica in the Gulf".²³ In Bahrain also there were acts of sabotage against

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- 19 David Holden, "From Rags to Riches in Seven Sheikdoms", Sunday Times (London), 20 November 1966.
- 20 See Derek Hopwood, ed., The Arabian Peninsula (London, 1972), p. 197.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Joseph J. Malone, The Arab Lands of Western Asia (New Jersey, 1973), p. 236.
- 23 Ibid. For further details see Hindustan Times (New Delhi), 18 July 1961.

the British installations. In 1961, twice in a fortnight, two R.A.F. planes were blown up as a result of sabotage which was attributed to an Arab worker working on Maharaq Airport in

Bahrain.²⁴ These acts of sabotage could not be effectively checked and they continued till the declaration of the withdrawal. In a statement on 16 March 1964, John Hay, the Civil Lord of Admiralty, told the Commons that two ships with arms on board were apprehended in the Gulf and twelve more inter-

cepted.²⁵ The source of this supply of arms to the British controlled Gulf region could not be established. However, these developments perturbed Britain and there was concern in the House of Commons over "the increase of subversion from outside into the area".²⁶ As a result, George Thompson, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs acknowledged that "it was dangerous to prophesy about developments in that part of the world...."²⁷

These facts showed that the Gulf was no longer a quiet place and that external influence in the Gulf had become quite uncontrollable. It may be noted that during this period, two areas of the Arab world, Yeman and Muscat and Oman were almost under the control of extremist and anti-imperialist elements.

24 Daily Telegraph, 9 October 1961.

25 UK, House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 691, Session 1963-64, col. 126.

26 Ibid., vol. 714, Session 1964-65, col. 1181.

27 Ibid.

Though these two areas were far away from the Gulf, they were the only possible sources wherefrom arms could have been supplied to the nationalist forces in the British controlled Gulf. After the fifties a great number of Egyptian teachers and skilled Palestians thronged the Gulf Sheikhdoms. It was a new development in the Gulf. The Egyptians and Palestinians being resentful of the British role in the creation of Israel, vitiated the British presence in the Gulf. The strong western support to Israel and the resultant resentment among the Palestinians settled in the Gulf, was another impediment to the British presence in the Gulf. Though opinions were divided on the role of these Palestinians in the Gulf, their presence was significant since, as some western strategists thought, the Palestinians might "play an important part in political change in that [the Gulf] region, either in association with the 'traditional revolutionaries' or as an independent, radical alternative".²⁸ Egyptian propaganda and the presence of a large number of Egyptian teachers and advisers in the Gulf had given President Nasser, to quote D.C. Watt, "a metaphysical if not a physical presence in the Gulf".²⁹

The growing impact of the Arab nationalism in the Gulf

28 The Centre for Strategic and International Studies, The Gulf: Implications of British Withdrawal (Washington, D.C., 1969), p. 39.

29 D.C. Watt, "Britain and the Future of the Persian Gulf", World Today (London), 1964, p. 489.

received serious attention in Britain. Its impact grew along with the growth of the educated sections in the Gulf States, particularly in Bahrain. The increase in the educational facilities in the Gulf States, had, in fact, "widened the mental horizons and loosened the ties of Tribal loyalties" of the Gulf population.³⁰

The dramatic increase in the literate and semi-literate professional and artisan elements in some of the Gulf States constituted the vanguard of unrest in the region.³¹

Therefore, it was feared that, eventually, this might lead to serious upheavals in the Gulf, involving Britain. Though there were some British scholars who were sceptical of the seriousness and capability of the newly emerging educated class in the Gulf,³² it was agreed that this new class was looking for "rapid changes in the system of Sheikhly rule to give it a proper share in the administration and economic development...."³³ It was anticipated that if this class got disappointed, it would "easily become revolutionary".³⁴

In Britain, there was apprehension, as it was the case in Kuwait and Bahrain, that the new emerging intelligentsia of

30 William Luce, "Britain in the Persian Gulf: Mistaken Timing Over Aden", Round Table (London), vol. 57, 1967, p. 278.

31 The Centre for Strategic and International Studies, n. 28, p. 7.

32 See D.C. Watt, n. 29, pp. 488-96.

33 William Luce, n. 30, p. 278.

34 Ibid.

the Trucial States might look to Egypt for leadership and
³⁵ advice. According to William Luce, any kind of dissent or
 revolutionary element in any Arab Tribal Society could easily
 be exploited by Egyptian propaganda and intelligence machinery.³⁶
 Though the extremist elements in the Trucial States were not
 much powerful, experience had shown that these elements could
 "exert an influence and make trouble out of all proportion
³⁷ to their numbers".

In 1964 Chatham House appointed a study group, consisting
 of prominent British scholars like D.C. Watt and J.B. Kelly to
 examine the future British role in the Gulf in the light of
 changing political conditions in the area. The main thrust of
 these British scholars was on the speculations regarding future
 shape of things in the Gulf. After the study, D.C. Watt obser-
 ved that:

In the domestic politics, each of the
 Arab state is either actually or po-
 tentially vulnerable to the strains
 brought about by the impact of modern
 commercial method and organization upon
 its internal political order, and to
 the attempt to substitute the political
 claims of Arab nationalism for the loyal-
 ties of tribe, clan and family. 38

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 D.C. Watt, n. 29, p. 489.

According to the other member of the study group, Kelly, the changes in the 'status quo' were thought "to result from internal developments in the protected states than from external causes".³⁹ Another popular speculation according to Kelly, was that in case, there was some "political upheaval" in any 'protected state', Britain might be compelled to support the Ruler against his own people.⁴⁰ Such an upheaval was possible if there was some political instability in Saudi Arabia resulting in the overthrow of the moderate regime.⁴¹ Though both Kelly and Watt were sceptical of these speculations, the changing political situation in the Gulf was causing concern in London.

The British press began to focus the question of continued British presence in the Gulf as early as 1961. In May 1961 The Times asked a pertinent question: "Could Britain step forward a little \angle in the Gulf \angle or should she in time withdraw \angle from the Gulf \angle -abandon altogether her former role of adviser and protector?"⁴² Similarly, a prominent British journalist, David Holden, compared the British position in the Gulf with a man "trapped on the sixth floor of a blazing building" who was in a dilemma whether to jump out or remain trapped inside the building.⁴³

39 J.B. Kelly, "The British Position in the Persian Gulf", World Today, vol. 20, 1964, p. 246.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 The Times, 19 May 1961.

43 David Holden, Farewell to Arabia (London, 1967), p. 151.

Since then, time and again doubts have been expressed in Britain over the value and viability of the British military presence overseas, including the Gulf. It was argued that military presence in the Gulf was not necessary to ensure the continued supply of oil from the region to Britain. The defence correspondent of The Times argued that, as most of the oil supplies of Britain came from the four big local powers in the Gulf - Iran, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Kuwait, British military presence in the Gulf could do little if the big local powers refused the supply of oil.⁴⁴ Moreover, there was another opinion also that the presence of the British military bases on the Arabian soil would be considered as an affront to the nationalist elements in the region. A well informed writer, Alastair Buchan, wrote in 1966:

To regard the Gulf as a permanent British protectorate risks a steady increase in the strength of Egyptian brand of Arab nationalism in Bahrain, Qatar and the Trucial Sheikhdoms, and a repetition of the present trouble in Aden up to the length of the Gulf. 45

Apart from these views, the strong plea for winding up the British military presence in the Gulf came from prominent members of the Labour Party also. The leftist element in the Labour Party was quite critical of the continued British military

44 Charles Douglas-Home, "Keeping the Peace to Protect the Supply of Oil", The Times, 14 November 1967.

45 Alastair Buchan, "Britain in the Indian Ocean", International Affairs (London), vol. 42, 1966, p. 187.

presence in the Gulf, unmindful of the nationalist feelings in the Arab world. For them, it was nothing but imperialism⁴⁶ "to shore up the medieval feudalism of Sheikhly government". This line of approach was supported not only by the Labour backbenches in the Parliament but also by Senior leaders like Denis Healey. Notably, Healey was one of those who criticized, in 1962, the conservative government's decision to build a base in Aden. He said: "a military base is worthless, whether in Aden, Cyprus or Suez, without the support of the local population".⁴⁷ He criticized Britain's treaty relationship with the Gulf Rulers as "dangerously out of date" and asked whether the government was reviewing those relations.⁴⁸

In the sixties, when the process of decolonization was under way in Africa, prominent Labour MPs urged the conservative government to give a new look to the British position in the Gulf, as the wind of change was blowing more vigorously in the Middle East than in Africa. Therefore, Denis Healey urged the conservative Government that Britain should at least recognize the existence of the nationalist wind in the Middle East.⁴⁹

46 Robert R. Sullivan, "The Architecture of Western Security in the Gulf", Orbis (Philadelphia), vol. 14, 1970-71, p. 83.

47 UK, House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 667, Session 1962-63, col. 265.

48 Ibid., vol. 633, Session 1960-61, cols. 592-3.

49 Ibid., vol. 667, Session 1962-63, cols. 263-6.

He regretted that Britain was supporting "the most backward and feudal regimes in the whole area", and compared the British policy in the Gulf with "the death agony of the Suez spirit", and with a type of "colonialism for which there has been no precedent in British policy at any time since 1945".⁵⁰ Another prominent Labour MP Christopher Mayhew, expressed a similar opinion in March 1963.⁵¹ Mayhew advocated the change in the British judicial system in the Gulf and demanded its replacement by other "judicial processes", that were available in the Gulf.⁵² The Labour arguments were put forward also in a Fabian Society pamphlet published in 1961. While examining Britain's military and political commitments in the Gulf, the pamphlet suggested that, as the Gulf area was immune from the "liberating modernizing tides of the Arab world", it provided Britain "with a heaven-sent breathing space to start the process of decolonization in the Gulf".⁵³ In 1967, when the debate on Britain's role East of Suez got momentum and when Aden was showing a picture of a bloody guerrilla warfare, some MPs urged Britain to learn a lesson from the tragedy in Aden, saying it would be better for Britain to withdraw troops from an "indefensible

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid., vol. 674, Session 1962-63, cols. 948-9.

52 Ibid., vol. 681, Session 1962-63, cols. 29-30.

53 See The Times, 3 February 1961. The authors of the Pamphlet included prominent Labour leaders like Denis Healey and Philip Noel-Baker.

position in support of an undemocratic government"⁵⁴ [in the Gulf] before there was bloodshed.

Another important impediment to the continued British presence in the Gulf was the nature of treaty relationship between Britain and the Gulf States, the only plausible justification for Britain to remain there. The anachronistic nature of these nineteenth century styled treaties with the Gulf Rulers made Britain a target of Arab criticism. Under the treaty arrangements the Gulf Rulers were free only to administer their day-to-day domestic affairs. On other matters they required Britain's prior permission. At times, the Rulers were deposed with the active support of the British Political Agents and other advisers.⁵⁵ Edmund Dell, while giving his assessment of the situation in the Gulf after visiting the areas told the House of Commons that no one in the Middle East and the Gulf believed that Britain was not responsible for the internal affairs of the Gulf Sheikhdom. He said that Britain was being held responsible for all sorts of bad government in the Gulf.

54 UK, House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 753, Session 1967-68, col. 998.

55 For instance, the Ruler of Sharjah was deposed at Britain's instigation for developing too close relations with the Arab League. See The Times, 8 August 1966. The deposition of the Sharjah Ruler figured also in the House of Commons. See UK, House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 725, Session 1965-66, cols. 1826-7. Edmund Dell, an MP also revealed that there was an earlier incident some years ago in which through the assistance of a British battleship outside Doha, the Ruler of Qatar abdicated. Ibid., cols. 1826-7.

Therefore, he supported the demand of Britain's withdrawal from the Gulf.⁵⁶

Meanwhile, Britain decided to give up its base in Aden. With Britain's departure from Aden in 1967, doubts were expressed about the efficacy of the continued British military presence in the Gulf. It may be noted that in 1960s Aden was considered a bastion to protect not only the British interests in the Gulf, but also the western interests in general. Therefore, Britain's withdrawal from Aden was a prelude to the British withdrawal from the entire Gulf because "the well equipped military base in Aden was a forward military post to guard Bahrain, Abu Dhabi, and other Sheikhdoms of the Gulf".⁵⁷ From the communication and strategic points of view, Aden was the only suitable base which enabled Britain to maintain its strong hold on the Gulf Sheikhdoms. Therefore, after the British withdrawal from Aden, British military activities in the region centered round Bahrain. This created difficulties not only militarily but also politically and socially. Bahrain, being a more politically advanced Sheikhdom than other Trucial States in the Gulf, was "no substitute for Aden"⁵⁸ mainly because there were growing nationalist

56 UK, House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 725, Session 1965-66, cols. 1826-7.

57 Donald Maclean, British Foreign Policy Since Suez, 1956-1968 (London, 1970), p. 180.

58 Monroe Elizabeth, "British Bases in the Middle East - Assets or Liabilities", International Affairs, vol. 42, 1966, p. 33.

and anti-imperialist feelings in the Sheikhdom. There was a lurking apprehension in Britain that instead of filling the vacuum created by its departure from Aden, the British military presence in Bahrain might complicate the situation since the state was "vulnerable to hostile propaganda from the major Arab capitals".⁵⁹ Besides, it was apprehended that any increase in the British military strength in the Gulf might expose the Rulers of the Gulf to the nationalist regimes of the Arab world. In the opinion of Christopher Mayhew, political difficulties⁶⁰ obstructed Britain's military build-up in Bahrain.

In 1964, when the Labour Party came to power in Britain, the debate on Britain's role East of Suez was a live issue at least in the Labour Party circles. Added to this was the new government's drive for economy in public expenditure. In the process it wanted to review the British role outside Europe. In this context, cuts in the defence expenditure were regarded necessary to bring about substantial savings. The defence white paper of 1967, which indicated the withdrawal of the British troops from Singapore and Malaysia, did not make any mention of the winding up the British military presence in the Gulf. The silence of the government in the matter prompted The Times to

59 Daily Telegraph, 29 March 1960.

60 Christopher Mayhew, Britain's Role Tomorrow (London, 1967), p. 29.

observe that the question of continued military presence in the Gulf "was an unanswered problem".⁶¹ Although the decision to withdraw from the Gulf was conveyed to the Gulf Rulers, prior to 16 January 1968, Prime Minister Harold Wilson's 16 January 1968 announcement that Britain would withdraw simultaneously from the Far East and the Gulf by the end of 1971, was quite surprising. The Defence Estimates of 1968-69, declared that "reduction in capability, whether in terms of manpower or equipment, must be accompanied by reductions in the tasks imposed by the commitments...."⁶²

The most important reason the government gave in scaling down Britain's overseas commitments and withdrawal of the forces from the Far East and the Gulf was economic. It was estimated that the decision would bring about a reduction of £110 million "in the forecast estimates for 1969-70 and that, by 1972-73, the defence budget was to be reduced by a further £210m-260m".⁶³ Denis Healey, Defence Secretary, stated that it was not practicable, after 1971, to give a continuing military presence in the Gulf, "without overstraining" Britain's national resources.⁶⁴ However, if examined critically, it would be clear that the Labour decision to leave the Gulf was not based on economic

61 "Unanswered Problem", The Times, 19 July 1967.

62 UK, Cmnd. 3540 (1968), p. 2.

63 Ibid.

64 UK, House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 758, Session 1967-68, col. 1346.

considerations alone. According to the Conservative sources Britain had an investment of about £900 million in the Gulf. These investments provide Britain with an advantage of about £200 million to its balance of payments in terms of foreign exchange. At the same time, the expenditure on the British military presence was just £12½ million.⁶⁵ According to a report published by Georgetown University's Centre for Strategic and International Studies, the value of the Gulf oil to Britain was about \$500 million a year and the cost of maintaining the British troops in the area was about \$35 million to \$40 million a year.⁶⁶ This sum included their costs of "maintenance, food and equipment, rent of barracks, wages which in fact was all payable in foreign exchange".⁶⁷

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- 65 See Edward Heath's speech in the House of Commons on 5 March 1968. UK, House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 760, Session 1967-68, col. 246. Later on Sir Elec Douglas-Home, Conservative Party's spokesman on Foreign Affairs, had estimated in a booklet that Britain would lose £300 million a year by withdrawing from South-east Asia and the Gulf. The Times, 25 August 1969.
- 66 The Centre for Strategic and International Studies, n. 28. The report was prepared by the prominent British and American scholars and strategists, like Prof. Bernard Lewis of the University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies (Chairman of the panel), Dr. Albert Hourani of St. Anthony's College, Oxford, Dr. Walter Laquer, Director of the Institute of Contemporary History and the Wiener Library Sir William Luce, former Political Resident, Persian Gulf, Major-General Marines, former Chief of Amphibious Warfare, Brig. W.F.K. Thomson, military correspondent of Daily Telegraph and Prof. P.J. Vatikiotis of the University of London and others.
- 67 D.C. Watt, "The Decision to Withdraw from the Gulf", Political Quarterly (London), vol. 39, 1968, p. 318.

The stationing of the British troops in the Gulf was, according to the Labour Government's point of view, a drain on Britain's fragile balance of payments. This was also an overstatement. Most of the expenditure on the maintenance of the British troops in the Gulf was incurred on the export of several articles of daily consumption for the troops and these exports were coming from Britain. These items included British beer, British cigarettes, books and magazines, British films, so on and so forth. All these goods were supplied by NAAFI canteen on the bases. Therefore, it was argued "that the only foreign exchange element in their purchase will be the cost of transport⁶⁸ or those parts of the cost of transport" that were themselves payable in terms of foreign exchange. It seems that expenditure on troops and canteens in the Gulf was not operating in local currency. However, as D.C. Watt writes: "one has to recognize that there was an unavoidable foreign exchange element in their⁶⁹ [British forces in the Gulf] costs wherever they are". In case the British forces were withdrawn from the Gulf, Britain's balance of payments position would continue, because in everything the British troops consumed, there was a "balance-of-payments element"⁷⁰. The presence of the British troops was also a stimulus for the local traders to import goods from Britain.

68 Ibid., p. 318.

69 Ibid.

70 Ibid.

The Labour Government's decision to withdraw from the Gulf was opposed by others as well. William Luce wrote that the Labour Government's decision to withdraw from the Gulf was taken without "prior consultation with the rulers of these states, or with our friends in that area"⁷¹. The Times was strongly critical of the decision because "in terms of money", the British stake in the Gulf "was great indeed - oil investments of perhaps £1000 million"⁷².

Criticism of the Labour decision in Britain from the opposition, the press and prominent individuals was based on economic considerations. The critics were perturbed about the future events in the Gulf, whereby British interests might be exposed to dangers if the Sheikhly rule in the Gulf was replaced by nationalist forces. In the United States, the British decision was seen as a measure in haste. American security planners for the Middle East were reportedly uneasy; since for them, it was a warning that "the central structure of the Western security system east of Suez would be dismantled at a time when the United States could not replace it adequately"⁷³.

Therefore, in wider perspective, the Labour Government's argument that the decision to withdraw from the Gulf was taken

71 William Luce, "A Naval Force for the Gulf: Balancing Inevitable Russian Penetration", Round Table, no. 236, October 1969, p. 348.

72 "Risk in the Gulf", The Times, 18 January 1968.

73 J.C. Hurewitz, "The Persian Gulf: British Withdrawal and Western Security", The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science (Philadelphia), vol. 401, May 1972, p. 106.

on economic ground was an understatement. In the presence of the vast British investments in the oil industry of the Gulf, the small amount which Britain was spending on the maintenance of British troops in the Gulf, was a reason not adequate enough to necessitate the withdrawal from the Gulf. Apart from the large sums of profits which the British oil companies were earning for Britain the oil supply to Britain from the Gulf was on very cheap rates. It was generally believed that Britain's military presence in the Gulf was to ensure the continued flow of oil to the West. Therefore, there were doubts that if Britain left the Gulf in the presence of several complicated and delicate political problems which the region was facing, it would adversely affect the continued and the cheap flow of oil to the western market from the Gulf. This would compel the West to turn for oil towards the Caribbean or the Soviet Union. Obviously, the terms for this oil would be tough and more costly. Therefore, the expected financial savings from the troop withdrawal from the Gulf was, as The Times wrote, small and insignificant as the "cash was not the only consideration".⁷⁴

From another angle also the economic arguments in favour of Britain's troops withdrawal from the Gulf appear unconvincing. According to the British Press reports some Rulers of the Trucial States and also Bahrain had offered to meet the expenditure of

74 "Risk in the Gulf", The Times, 18 January 1968.

the continued British military presence in the Gulf.

The Conservative Party had utilized these reports to the extent it could to strengthen its arguments against withdrawal from the Gulf. Others, who wanted a reversal of the Labour Government's Gulf policy, used them to bring pressure on the Labour Government to have a new look on its Gulf policy. A Conservative MP Fisher questioned the refusal of the Labour Government to accept the offer of Sheikhs to meet the expenditure of the British presence in the Gulf, while it was demanding, from West Germany, payment for the maintenance of the British forces in Germany.⁷⁶ These arguments could not bring any change in the government's decision to withdraw from the Gulf. Denis Healey, who said earlier that the offer of the Gulf Rulers was receiving "careful consideration"⁷⁷ of the government, rejected the offer, saying that he would not like the "idea of being a

75 The reported offer was made when the British Minister of State for Foreign Affairs visited the Gulf. See The Times, 23 January 1968. Though no confirmation of these reports came from the Gulf Rulers, a statement of this effect was attributed to the Ruler of Dubai Sheikh Rashid. See The Times, 26 January 1968. However, it is significant to note that the Ruler of the influential oil rich Trucial State and the present U.A.E. President Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan, had in an interview to Hindustan Times (New Delhi), said that the people of the Gulf were now capable of protecting themselves internally and externally and they did need no outside help or protection. See Hindustan Times, 9 March 1968. Even Sheikh Rashid of Dubai later on refused to comment whether he would like any British forces to remain in the Gulf after the end of 1971. The Times, 30 July 1969.

76 UK, House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 759, Session 1967-68, cols. 935-36.

77 The Times, 26 January 1968.

sort of white slaver for Arab Sheikhs".⁷⁸ The rejection of this reported offer of the Sheikhs, in itself is an adequate proof of the hollowness of the government's economic argument in support of the military withdrawal from the Gulf. Perhaps, by linking the British withdrawal from the Gulf with its withdrawal from Singapore and Malaysia the government wanted to provide a broad framework for its East-of-Suez outlook. But a distinction is to be made between these two different regions. Obviously, in terms of economy the position in the Far East was quite different from that in the Gulf. While in Singapore and Malaysia Britain had stationed about 80,000 troops,⁷⁹ in the Gulf the British presence was of not more than 7,000 troops. Similarly the economic and strategic importance of the Gulf was more vital for Britain than that of the Far East. Therefore, the Labour Government's contention that the decision to withdraw the British forces from the Gulf was based on economic compulsions was not entirely correct.

An important or more important factor was the changing political scene of West Asia and the political make-up of the Labour Party. It may be noted that, early in the sixties, some Labour back-benchers, in opposition, supported by some prominent Labour leaders, were advocating a new British policy towards the

78 Daily Telegraph, 16 February 1968. Healey's remarks were bitterly resented by the Gulf Rulers. Consequently Healey had to apologize for his remarks. See The Times, 26 February 1968.

79 The Times, 20 July 1967.

Gulf. But when the Party came to power in 1964, the enthusiastic advocacy for a new policy towards the Gulf had turned into a strong plea for the maintenance of the British military presence in the Gulf, in view of the strategic importance of the Indian Ocean for British trade and commerce. In the Cabinet it was argued that the control of the Gulf was necessary to check Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and, perhaps, the Soviet Union, from posing a danger to the British interests in the Gulf.⁸⁰

As late as 1966, the Labour Government's line was not only to retain the bases but also to strengthen them. The Defence White Paper of that year declared that with the British departure from Aden, forces stationed in the Gulf would not only remain the Gulf, but would also be strengthened.⁸¹ An agreement was concluded in that year between Britain and the Sheikh of Bahrain, increasing the rent of the British base in Bahrain "in consideration of the continued and increased use by British forces" of the existing naval and air base in Bahrain.⁸² Similarly, a new agreement was concluded between Britain and the Ruler of Sharjah to construct a military base in Sharjah.⁸³ Apart

80 Patrick Gordonwalker, The Cabinet (London, 1970), p. 123.

81 See Denis Healey's Statement in the House of Commons, UK, House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 725, Session 1965-66, col. 1782.

82 Europa Publications Limited, The Middle East and North Africa 1969-70 (London, 1969), p. 566.

83 The Age (Melbourne), 18 July 1966.

from this, just before Harold Wilson's statement in January 1968, Goronwy Roberts, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, visited the Gulf in November 1967 and assured the Sheikhs of the Gulf States that Britain would not withdraw from the region. But soon after, he had to visit the Gulf again to tell the local Rulers that Britain's withdrawal from the Gulf would follow in the wake of withdrawal from the Far East.⁸⁴

Therefore, the Labour Government's decision to withdraw British forces from the Gulf should be seen in the background of the growing apprehensions in Britain that with the changing political situation in West Asia, the continued British military presence in the Gulf Sheikhdoms would be full of problems for Britain in future. Moreover, there was also an apprehension that the growing anti-British feelings in Bahrain and other Trucial States, might take a violent turn. Though Aden and Oman were far away from the Gulf, the violent anti-imperialist struggles there were casting their shadows on the Gulf. The evidence of these apprehensions is clear in what Britain's Foreign Secretary, George Brown, said in January 1968. He said:

There comes a time when an alien military presence is a divisive and not a cohesive force. I have long thought that this time has come. I would have taken longer over the transition period

84 For details see, The Times, 14 November 1967; also see UK, House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 757, Session 1967-68, col. 431.

if I could but, I have no doubt about
the need to go [from the Gulf]. 85

A few days earlier, he told Dean Rusk, American Secretary of State, who urged Britain to delay the withdrawal, that "the Gulf was now quiet, and in the British view no better time for a withdrawal could be expected".⁸⁶

Perhaps the growing realization of these impending troubles, if Britain prolonged its military presence in the region was the major reason why the Labour ministers rejected the Conservative arguments that the British military withdrawal from the Gulf would jeopardize British interests in the area. When Reginald Maudling, Deputy leader of the Conservative Party, demanded an assurance from the government that the sea routes through which British oil would travel, would be protected since this responsibility could not be left to the local powers, Denis Healey, Defence Secretary rejected the demand and criticized the Conservatives saying that the use of force over Suez in 1956 by the Conservatives had "delivered a blow to oil supplies", and to the British influence in the Arab world as well, from which Britain had not yet recovered.⁸⁷

The other factor which had influenced the Britain decision was the new situation in the Middle East following the 1967

85 The Times, 23 January 1968.

86 Ibid., 13 January 1968.

87 UK, House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 773, Session 1968-69, col. 398.

Arab-Israeli war. This war, among other things, revealed Britain's inability to influence West Asian politics. It is true that there was scepticism about the effectiveness of Britain's role in West Asia earlier also; but with the 1967 West Asian war it became more open. In this connection it may be noted that Wilson had proposed an intervention "with an international fleet" in the six-day Arab-Israel war of 1967 in order to keep the Gulf of Aqaba open.⁸⁸ But the refusal of its allies to implement the proposal was an eye-opener and reinforced the Labour Government's belief that Britain's future role East of Suez needed review. Moreover, the pro-Israeli attitude of the Wilson Government during the 1967 West Asia War, had seriously damaged British prestige and position in the Arab world.⁸⁹ Notably, during the war, besides other Arab countries, Kuwait also had cut off oil supplies to Britain,⁹⁰ although this important Gulf State had a special relationship with Britain under the 19 June 1961 Friendship Treaty. This showed the vulnerability of Britain's position in the Gulf.

To sum up, it is clear that since 1961, the strong British

88 For details see Geoffrey Williams and Bruce Reed, Denis Healey and the Policies of Power (London, 1971), p. 224; also see Patrick Gordonwalker, The Cabinet, n. 80, p. 317. The author was Education Minister in Wilson's Cabinet.

89 Harold Wilson has given a detailed account of the situation in his memoirs; see Harold Wilson, The Labour Government, 1964-1970: A Personal Record (London, 1971).

90 Ibid., p. 399.

hold over the Gulf began to decline partly due to the impact of the Arab nationalism in the region. The growing resentment of the Arabs against foreign military bases, the new situation in West Asia after the 1967 War, the pressure from the Labour back-benchers to wind up military bases in the Middle East, were important factors which led to the Labour Government's decision to wind up the British military presence in the Gulf. While the economic argument and Britain's new European outlook were not sufficient justification for withdrawing from the Gulf, the Labour Government made good use of these factors as face saving devices. In this, the economic factor was the least important consideration, because, as already examined, the Labour Government's decision to leave the Gulf was primarily a political one which became necessary due to the new realities in the Gulf itself, and in West Asia as a whole.

Chapter IV

PRE-WITHDRAWAL ARRANGEMENTS

In his statement in the House of Commons on 16 January 1968, Prime Minister Harold Wilson, stated the reasons which called for a new British outlook towards the Far East and the Gulf. The foremost among them, he mentioned, was Britain's precarious economic position. He said that there could be no military strength "whether for Britain or for our alliances except on the basis of economic strength". His contention was that Britain's economic position did not allow it to play any major role in distant areas single-handed. Therefore, in future, it must concentrate on Europe and the North Atlantic Alliance. Further, he said, although defence was related to foreign policy, Britain could not undertake commitments beyond its capacity to fulfil them. In the light of Britain's economic position, Wilson said that all the major decisions of foreign policy must be subjected to "a prior requirement of economies in defence expenditure". While taking decisions of foreign policy, Wilson argued that Britain had to review its future role in the world.¹ The credibility of this argument has been examined in the last chapter. After making a detailed review of Britain's economic position and outlining the features of Britain's new defence policy under the Labour Government, Harold Wilson declared Britain's military withdrawal from the Far East

1 For details see Harold Wilson's Speech in the House of Commons on 16 January 1968. UK, House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 756, Session 1967-68, col. 1580.

and the Gulf by the end of 1971.²

It may be noted that Wilson, in his statement on 16 January 1968, expressed Britain's continued "basic interest in the prosperity and security of the Gulf". Therefore, the Labour Government, subsequently, made certain moves to make the withdrawal from the area an orderly one. The intention was to work out a viable political arrangement in the Gulf to ensure status quo in the region. Michael Stewart, Foreign Secretary, lost no time in paying attention to the problems related to the proposed British withdrawal from the Gulf. He called in senior British advisers from the Gulf for a week's top level consultation. Britain's ambassadors in Iran, Saudi Arabia and the British Political Resident in the Gulf were con-³sulted. Later on, Michael Stewart visited Iran in May 1969⁴ and held discussions with the Shah and other Iranian leaders. Though no details of his talks with the Shah are available, it is evident that he might have discussed the Bahrain problem and other issues relating to Britain's withdrawal from the Gulf.

Michael Stewart was also interested in the foundation of

2 Ibid.

3 The Times (London), 27 March 1968.

4 Ibid., 28 March 1969. Prior to Michael Stewart's visit to Iran, Goronwy Roberts, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, visited the Gulf in January 1969. His visit was followed by Evan Luard, the Under Secretary for State, Foreign and Commonwealth. The Times, 21 January 1969 and 5 May 1970.

a federation of the Gulf Sheikhdoms. Asked about a choice between "mini federation" of the Gulf Sheikhdoms excluding Bahrain⁵ and no federation at all, Stewart said that he wished to see a "maxi-federation" with Bahrain in it, but he nevertheless preferred a "mini-federation" to none at all.⁶

Similarly, Britain made certain other moves in the direction of the formation of a federation of the British controlled Sheikhdoms of the Gulf. Rulers of the British controlled Gulf Sheikhdoms who were not consulted when the Labour Government took the decision, and who did not anticipate a British withdrawal from the Gulf so soon, were confronted with the problem of preserving the status quo after Britain's withdrawal. The only alternative left before them was to co-operate and to form a viable political structure to assure the future stability and security of the Gulf. Therefore, in February 1968 Abu Dhabi and Dubai made certain moves for unity, which culminated in the conclusion of an agreement between them on 18 February 1968, to federate and to have a common foreign and defence policy and also a common citizenship.⁷ This "agreement was to go into effect" at the end of March 1968 for the creation of a federation

5 The Iranian claim over Bahrain was a hurdle in the formation of a Union of 9 Sheikhdoms.

6 The Times, 30 May 1969.

7 For details see Muhammad T. Sadik and William P. Snavely, Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (London, 1972), p. 190.

of nine states.⁸ Subsequently, the supreme council of the proposed federation met several times to iron out the differences over the questions of representation in the supreme council, selection of capital for the proposed federation and other related matters.⁹

However at the fourth meeting of the Supreme Council, held in Abu Dhabi on 21 October 1969, certain decisions were taken regarding the selection of the President and Prime Minister of the proposed federation and also regarding the question of representation in the Supreme Council.¹⁰

Goronwy Roberts, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, told the House of Commons on 8 July 1968 that "discussions were continuing to put into effect the agreement signed at Dubai on 27 February to set up the Union of Arab Emirates, which the [Labour] Government welcomed".¹¹ These moves towards unity of the nine Sheikhdoms had the full support of Britain and other local Arab Gulf powers like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, who also wanted to see the political stability of the area preserved.

But, despite the support extended by Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Britain, from the very beginning, the formation of the proposed federation ran into serious difficulties partly due

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid., p. 195.

11 UK, House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 768, Session 1967-68, col. 23.

to conflicting interests of the Rulers of the respective Sheikhdoms, and partly due to the serious objections raised by Iran over Bahrain's inclusion in it. The Iranian Foreign Ministry issued a statement, on 1 April 1968, declaring that Iran would not accept "this historical injustice"¹² [the inclusion of Bahrain in the proposed federation].

Iranian opposition to the scheme was due to its historical claim on Bahrain. The Iranian claim affected not only the process of federation, but it made the relations between the Arab states of the Gulf and Iran tense also. This caused concern in Britain also. Efforts were made to reach an amicable settlement, acceptable to the Shah of Iran, who figured prominently in the Arab and the British plans for the future set up of the Gulf. It was obvious that a solution to the problem required a prior understanding between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Therefore, until that was achieved it would be quite meaningless for Britain to have a useful dialogue with the Shah. It was reported that President Ayub Khan of Pakistan had been conducting a "useful mediation task between Britain and Iran".¹³ The reconciliation between the Shah and King Faisal was achieved when the Shah visited Saudi Arabia in November 1968. His talks with King Faisal led Iran to modify its stand on Bahrain.¹⁴ On

12 The Times, 2 April 1968.

13 Colin Jackson, "How to Quit the Persian Gulf", Venture (London), vol. 20 September 1968, p. 14.

14 The Economist (London), 23 November 1968, p. 30.

4 January 1969 the Shah of Iran said in New Delhi that Iran would accept the wishes of the Bahrain people.¹⁵ This was an encouraging statement and a move towards the settlement of the dispute. As Britain was responsible for Bahrain's foreign affairs, therefore, in March 1970, both Britain and Iran agreed to ask the UN Secretary-General to exercise his good offices in the solution of Bahrain issue.¹⁶ Subsequently, the UN Secretary-General appointed his Under Secretary to ascertain the wishes of the Bahrain people. In the first week of May 1970 he submitted his report to the Secretary-General confirming that the Bahrain people wanted independence.¹⁷ The report later on, was approved by the UN Security Council,¹⁸ and the Iranian Majlis [Parliament] ratified it on 14 May 1970.

The amicable settlement of the Bahrain issue was an important achievement which not only facilitated Britain's work for evolving the pre-withdrawal arrangements in the Gulf, but also helped Iran and Saudi Arabia to co-ordinate their policies vis-a-vis the British position in the Gulf. The settlement of

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- 15 For details see The Statesman (New Delhi), 5 January 1969.
- 16 For details see the text of Lord Caradon's (the British representative in the UN), letter to the UN Secretary-General on 20 March 1970 in D.C. Watt and James Mayall, eds., Current British Foreign Policy: Documents, Statements, Speeches 1970 (London, 1971), p. 220.
- 17 Daily Star (Beirut), 2 May 1970; also see The Times, 5 May 1970.
- 18 UN Monthly Chronicle (New York), vol. VII, no. 6, June 1970, p. 37.

the issue was a success of Saudi-Iranian efforts on one hand and Anglo-Iranian diplomacy on the other. It is important to note that Britain achieved this diplomatic victory when the Labour Government was still in office.

The Reorganization of the
Trucial Oman Scouts

An important British apprehension, prior to the withdrawal from the Gulf, was about the internal law and order situation and stability of the Gulf Sheikhdoms. It was apprehended that when Britain leaves the Gulf Sheikhdoms, it might "produce another Palestine-style chaos".¹⁹ Therefore to ensure peace and to maintain status quo in the region, and also to check any internal upheaval in the Gulf States, it was suggested that the Trucial Oman Scouts should be reorganized and also that Britain should train "local Arab officers with loyalty to the whole area".²⁰ It may be noted that the Trucial Oman Scouts and the Abu Dhabi Defence Force (ADDF) were already in existence in the area. The ADDF was under the direct supervision of the British Political Resident in the Gulf and its chief function was to patrol the newly created boundaries. Meanwhile, a British Major General, John Willoughby, put forward a plan for the defence of the proposed United Arab Emirates. He had prepared his report after he was asked to do so by the Supreme Council of the nine

19 Colin Jackson, n. 13, p. 14.

20 Ibid., p. 13.

21

Gulf States.

The Willoughby report recommended the formation of a mobile brigade group of about 5,000 men equipped with armoured cars and light armour. It was to be supported by two Squadrons of Hawker, Hunter jets and two Squadrons of BAC "Strikemaster"-light attack aircraft. Another recommendation was the creation of a force of British made tigercat guided anti-aircraft missiles, to protect the UAE ground forces and airfields against low level enemy attack.²² Further, he recommended the purchase of eight naval patrol craft, which, alongwith air units, could be integrated with the forces of individual states in the proposed union²³ to meet external threats. The Report made certain recommendations for the protection of the coastal lines of the Gulf Sheikhdoms. The sea defence of the proposed union was aimed at protecting the coast against "arms smuggling and illegal entry by undesirables, either aliens or rebels bent on subversion".²⁴ For this purpose, it suggested eight coastal patrol boats, in addition to the eight which Abu Dhabi and Qatar were acquiring.²⁵ Naval patrol was to be assisted by patrol aircraft²⁶ searching up to 40 miles offshore.

21 The Times, 23 October 1968.

22 See for details R.K. Beasley, "The Willoughby Report for Gulf Defence", New Middle East (London), no. 19, April 1970, p. 8; also see The Times, 17 and 21 July 1969.

23 See a despatch in The Times, 17 July 1969.

24 Ibid., 21 July 1969.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

It appears that the future defence set up envisaged by John Willoughby was aimed, primarily at checking any possible guerrilla movement, aimed at the overthrow of the existing regimes in the Gulf Sheikhdoms. This was quite relevant particularly in the context of the Dhofar guerrilla movement in Oman, helped and aided by China, which was extending its area of operation to the Lower Gulf.²⁷ It may be noted that the repercussions of the Dhofar guerrilla movement on the Lower Gulf area, were seriously being studied in the capitals of all the interested powers - Britain, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the British controlled Sheikhdoms. Therefore, it is obvious that Major General Willoughby, while preparing his report, had given a serious thought to the implications of the Dhofar guerrilla movement for the entire Gulf. Secondly, the Report also aimed at giving the proposed union the desired strength to constitute a credible deterrent and a prolonged resistance so that in the event of an external aggression, the resistance could continue till world opinion was mobilized in the United Nations and the "allies had time to help".²⁸

While all these steps towards the formation of a federation or union, the settlement of Bahrain issue, the submission

27 Dhofar is a province of the Sultanate of Oman and Muscat. The guerrilla movement in the area was started prior to Britain's decision to withdraw its troops from the Gulf.

28 The Times, 21 July 1969.

of the Willoughby report and its approval by the Labour Government and the concerned Gulf Sheikhdoms were in progress, the Labour Government was replaced by the Conservatives in 1970. The change of Government in Britain had resulted in another set of political and diplomatic moves in the Gulf. When the Conservatives came to power in June 1970, there were 18 months left to complete the process of withdrawal of British forces from the Gulf. This provided a chance to the Conservatives to make efforts to regain for Britain its traditional role in the Gulf.

It may be recalled that the Conservatives had attacked the Labour decision to pull out British forces from the Gulf. The Conservative Opposition which still believed that Britain had a world role to play and which still believed in the maintenance of British military bases to safeguard the British interests abroad, could not reconcile to the Labour proposition to retreat to the island. They refuted every argument the Labour Government advanced to support their decision to withdraw from the Gulf.

On the one hand they rejected the government's economic arguments in favour of military withdrawal, on the other they pointed out the implications of the government's decision for Britain. Edward Heath, the Leader of the Conservative Opposition said that economically and strategically the Gulf was not only important for Britain, but also for Western Europe as well.

All these interests would be exposed to local pressures. Since after withdrawal from the area, Britain would not be able to "influence the conduct of the Gulf Rulers Foreign Affairs"²⁹. Moreover, Britain's withdrawal from the Gulf would encourage the Soviet Union to involve deeply in the Gulf politics. He criticized the Government that it had ignored "the intense Soviet pressure - political and diplomatic - right through the Gulf today"³⁰. He had expressed apprehensions over the possible moves of the Soviet Union to purchase oil from the Gulf and jeopardize the British oil interests in the area.³¹ Moreover, Britain's world role had increased its leverage with the United States and its West European allies.³² He said that the government's decision not only affected that position, but also the decision was taken without consulting the local Rulers in the Gulf.³³ This had shattered the Rulers confidence in Britain. The outcome of the Labour decision, in the opinion of Conservative leader would result in the decrease of Britain's influence in the Middle East. Therefore the Conservatives wanted to stay in the Gulf if possible. Therefore, the Conservatives had

29 UK, House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 760, Session 1967-68, col. 246.

30 Ibid., cols. 244-5.

31 Ibid., col. 246.

32 Ibid., col. 237.

33 Ibid., cols. 238-41; also see Edward Heath, "Realism in British Foreign Policy", Foreign Affairs (New York), vol. 48, no. 11, October 1969, pp. 39-50.

given the impression that if they assumed power, they would make efforts to reverse the Labour Government's decision.

Edward Heath visited the Gulf States in April 1969 to explain his party's stand with respect to the Labour Government's decision to withdraw the British forces from the Gulf. After the visit, he said that his talks "with the Gulf Rulers strengthened his view that Britain's presence in the Gulf should continue beyond 1971".³⁴

Meanwhile, in an article, the Defence Correspondent of The Times strongly rejected Heath's claim that the local Rulers favoured the continuation of British presence in the Gulf. According to the correspondent, the situation in the Gulf had changed so much that even if the Rulers of the British controlled Sheikhdoms wanted a British presence beyond 1971, they could not state it publicly, because "the wind of the coming independence has been blowing down [the] Gulf for some time now".³⁵ In this context, he had pointed out the growing activities of the Arab National Movement and the Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf (FLOAG) and argued that if the British military presence was continued, Britain's intentions would be attributed to its imperial designs. Moreover, he wrote, no local power would welcome the British presence

34 The Times, 10 April 1969.

35 A.M. Rendel, "Reversal of British Policy not Wanted in Gulf", The Times, 8 April 1969.

in the Gulf.³⁶ When Heath was asked to comment on the article published in The Times he strongly disagreed with the views expressed in it.³⁷

The Conservative Party's election manifesto of 1970 had strongly criticized the Labour Policy towards the Gulf. It said: "By unilaterally deciding to withdraw our forces from these areas [the Gulf and the Far East], the Labour Government have broken their promise to the governments and exposed British interests and the future of Britain's friends to unacceptable risks".³⁸ Therefore, when the party came to power it tried to work out a new policy towards the Gulf. The new Foreign Secretary, Sir Alec Douglas-Home, criticized the Labour decision to leave the Gulf which, he said, was not based on any foreign policy considerations but was "forced upon the Government either by their [Labour] failure to stimulate the economy" or because of the lack of support from a large section of the Labour Party.³⁹ He said that as there were several disputes in the Gulf which needed a settlement, he was "setting in motion the diplomatic machinery which would facilitate the settlement of local disputes and which would also find out from the Gulf

36 Ibid.

37 The Times, 10 April 1969.

38 See F.W.S. Craig, British General Election Manifestoes 1900-1974 (London, 1975), revd., p. 343.

39 UK, House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 803, Session 1970-71, col. 347.

Rulers how Britain could help them to create stability in the Gulf".⁴⁰

Following this, Britain sent two experienced diplomats to Gulf. Sir William Luce was appointed as the personal envoy of Sir Alec Goughlas-Home for "coordinating British policy towards the Gulf".⁴¹ Geoffery Arthur, who was the British Political Agent in Kuwait in 1961, became the new British Political Resident of the Gulf. These moves of the new Conservative Government in the Gulf were closely watched by the local Gulf powers like Iran, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Iraq. From the statements of responsible Conservative leaders they found a strong possibility of Conservatives reversing the Labour decision to withdraw British forces from the Gulf. To forestall such a possibility these local powers stepped up their diplomatic activities to bring pressures on the Conservative Government to implement the Labour decision.

It may be noted that all these powers had earlier stated their points of view regarding the Labour decision. The Shah of Iran, in an interview to a Bombay Weekly, Blitz, published on 19 April 1969, described the Labour decision as the "right course and the only possible thing to do".⁴²

Similarly, King Faisal of Saudi Arabia did not agree to

40 Ibid., cols. 348-9.

41 The Times, 28 July 1970.

42 Harold Wilson, while defending his decision, had referred to the Shah's interview. See The Times, 22 May 1969.

the contention that the British withdrawal would create a vacuum in the Gulf.⁴³ All these important local powers not only reiterated their demand for the immediate British withdrawal from the Gulf, but also vigorously urged the Conservative Government to implement the Labour policy of disengagement from the Gulf. Prime Minister Hoveyda of Iran in an interview to an Iranian newspaper, Ayandegan,⁴⁴ warned against any extension of the 31 December 1971 deadline for the withdrawal of British forces from the Gulf. Likewise, Kuwait Prime Minister, Sheikh Jabar-al-Ahmad, rejected the idea of "any foreign presence in our region".⁴⁵ On 8 July 1970 at the end of Iranian Foreign Minister, Zahedi's visit to Kuwait, a joint Kuwait-Iran communique called for British pull-out from the Gulf.⁴⁶ The Iranian Foreign Minister expressed strong opposition to any delay in the withdrawal of British forces from the region after 1971. He said, "the British must go, no one has asked the British to come to the Gulf and no one wants them to stay now".⁴⁷ Besides, reports were current that at least Iran, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and possibly Iraq, may take

43 New York Times, 23 May 1968.

44 Quoted in Shahram Chubin and Sepehr Zabih, The Foreign Relations of Iran: A Developing State in a Zone of Great-Power Conflict (London, 1974), pp. 250-1.

45 Daily Telegraph, 17 July 1970.

46 Daily Star, 9 July 1970.

47 Ibid., 10 July 1970.

up the matter to the International Court if Britain maintained the presence of its forces in the Gulf beyond 1971. They threatened that if Britain did not listen to them they would take drastic measures against it, which would include cutting off oil supplies and breaking off diplomatic relations.⁴⁸

The main purpose of William Luce's first visit to the Gulf, immediately after his appointment as the special representative of the Foreign Secretary, was to assess the political situation therein and also to convince the local powers - Iran, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia, about the need of British presence in the Gulf. His three-week visit to the Gulf did not make much headway as Iran, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait were not "very receptive and did not change their stand".⁴⁹

Apart from these external pressures, there were local pressures also from the Gulf Sheikhdoms mounted by certain organizations representing the nationalist forces in the Gulf. At the end of June 1970, the merger of four liberation organizations in the region of Oman and "the Arabian Gulf" was announced with the aim of liberating the region from foreign domination.⁵⁰ The new organization was formed under the name of

48 Quoted in Muhammad T. Sadik and William P. Snavelly, n. 7, p. 198.

49 Al-Nahar (Beirut), 24 October 1970. Sir Alec himself flew to Brussels to meet the Shah of Iran who was on an unofficial visit to Belgium in July 1970. According to an independent Beirut daily Al-Nahar, Sir Alec was trying to collect reaction from Iran about the possibility of Britain's maintenance of a military presence in the Gulf beyond 1971. Al-Nahar, 12 October 1970.

50 Arab World Weekly (Beirut), June-December 1970 (11 July 1970), p. 18.

the National Democratic Front for the liberation of Oman and the Arab Gulf. Guerrilla operations were reportedly launched "against the British and the local authorities in the Arabian Gulf Emirate of Ras al-Khaimah".⁵¹ These operations, it was claimed, were launched by PFLOG (Popular Front for the Liberation of Occupied Gulf), an organization which had earlier limited its operations to Oman and Muscat. Whether PFLOG had really launched any major guerrilla operation in the Lower Gulf was not certain.

However, there was some truth in these statements. Some activity was noticed in the Trucial States. According to The Times, a group of eight rebels belonging to the National Democratic Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Gulf were arrested in Dubai and a large quantity of arms were also seized.⁵¹ Similarly, it was reported that the Sharjah Ruler, Khalifa bin Muhammad, had a narrow escape when a time bomb exploded under his chair.⁵² Notably, these incidents took place immediately after the Conservatives assumed power in Britain.

The tough line adopted by Saudi Arabia, Iran and Kuwait and the shadows of guerrilla activities, casting over the Gulf convinced the British authorities that there would be considerable difficulties in the reversal of the policy. After

51 Arab World Daily (Beirut), 20 January 1971 (18yr, No. 4351, p. 8).

52 The Times, 28 July 1970.

53 Ibid.

realizing that no reversal was possible, William Luce submitted his first report, in September 1970, favouring the withdrawal.⁵⁴ In the circumstances, the only alternative left for Britain was to concentrate on the pre-withdrawal arrangements for the Gulf, to ensure the preservation of British interests in the area in the post-withdrawal period and also to make the withdrawal in an orderly manner.

The Conservative Government's decision to adhere to the Labour plan was made public on 1 March 1971 by Sir Alec Douglas-Home. While accepting that most of the remaining British forces will be withdrawn at the end of 1971, he declared that the old treaties with the Gulf would lapse.⁵⁵ In return, he offered to forge a new type of relationship between Britain and the new sovereign State (UAE) if it would be formed.⁵⁶ Sir Alec's statement contained the following terms which would govern the future relations of Britain with the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain and Qatar: 1) A treaty of Friendship with the Union (UAE); undertaking to consult together in time of need. In return Britain would expect rights for overflying; 2) Handing over to the Union, the British commanded police force - the Trucial Oman Scouts which would form the nucleus

54 Ibid., 26 September 1970.

55 See Sir Alec's statement in the Commons, UK, House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 812, Session 1970-71, cols. 1229-31.

56 Ibid., col. 1228.

for the defence of the proposed UAE; 3) Stationing of British training teams and other military "elements to help in a training and liaison role with union forces if desired"; 4) Regular training exercise to be held jointly with British army and air forces units; and 5) Regular visits by the Ships of the Royal Navy.⁵⁷

With William Luce's first report and Sir Alec's subsequent statement, any possibility of the reversal of the Labour plan vanished. As a result, William Luce's efforts, in the remaining period, prior to withdrawal were concentrated on the ways and means to achieve three important objectives:

- (1) The settlement of the Island issue among Iran and the Gulf Sheikhdoms of Ras-al-Khaimah and Sharjah;
- (2) To help in the formation of the proposed union of the Arab Emirates; and
- (3) The conclusion of treaties with the new States.

The Settlement of Island Issue

Although Iran gave up its claim over Bahrain, it laid renewed claims over the strategic islands of Abu Musa, controlled by Sharjah, and the Greater and Lesser Tumbs islands, controlled by Ras-al-Khaimah. Iran claimed these islands earlier also, but every time Britain contested the claim and regarded the islands as parts of its two controlled Sheikhdoms - Sharjah

and Ras-al-Khaimah.⁵⁸ But following the declaration of British withdrawal, the position was changed. Britain was aware that the support of Iran was necessary for the smooth working of the new political arrangement, Britain was striving for in the Gulf. Moreover, Britain's diplomatic moves, prior to Britain's withdrawal from the area, were directed to create an atmosphere conducive for the preservation of the new political structure in the Gulf.

Iran used this opportunity to its advantage and took a tough line on the question of the ownership of the disputed islands. Firstly, Iran presented the problem an Anglo-Iranian one, stating that it was a colonial issue concerning Britain and Iran.⁵⁹ Secondly, Iran mounted heavy pressure on Britain in order to get its claim accepted. It threatened to open fire on R.A.F. aircraft if they continued to 'buzz'⁶⁰ Iranian warships in the Gulf. It was reported that the Shah of Iran made it clear to William Luce that Iran, being the paramount power in the Gulf, would go ahead to take measures which it thought necessary to "ensure the security of the Gulf".⁶¹ Iran also threatened that it would oppose any federation that would include Sharjah and Ras-al-Khaimah until these two Sheikdoms

58 Shahram Chubin and Sepehr Zabih, n. 44, p. 222.

59 Ibid.

60 The Times, 10 May 1971.

61 See A Despatch in The Times, 27 July 1971.

handed over the three islands claimed by Iran.⁶²

Therefore, it became necessary for Britain to pressurize the Rulers of Sharjah and Ras-al-Khaimah, to concede the Iranian claim. Britain succeeded in its efforts and Sir William Luce made an announcement in November 1971, that "Iran and Bri-⁶³tain have sorted out their differences" over these islands. A compromise formula was evolved whereby Sharjah Ruler agreed to the stationing of Iranian troops in certain areas of Abu Musa. Both Iran and Sharjah recognized a 12-mile limit of territorial waters round the island and both agreed to allow the Buttes, the American Gas and Oil Company, to conduct oil exploration in and around the island. Iran agreed to give £1.5 million annual aid to Sharjah until the Sheikdom's annual revenue, from any oil discovered, reached £3 million. In return, Iran would recog-⁶⁴nize the United Arab Emirates.

Although William Luce was able to settle the dispute between Sharjah and Iran, he did not succeed in persuading the Ruler of Ras-al-Khaimah, Shaikh-Sakar to reach an agreement with Iran, as he refused to listen to him.⁶⁵ As a result the Ruler was told that Britain would not defend his territory if attacked.

62 The Times, 20 May 1971.

63 Ibid., 18 November 1971.

64 Ibid., 30 November 1971.

65 Ibid., 1 December 1971.

In this context, it may be noted that under the treaty obligations, Britain was duty bound to defend the territory of Ras-al-Khaimah. But Britain did not honour its treaty obligations. The Ruler's refusal to listen to William Luce resulted in the Iranian military occupation of the Greater and Lesser Tumbs islands on 30 November 1971,⁶⁶ twenty-four hours before Britain formally withdrew from the area. Among the local Arab Gulf powers Iraq was the only country which broke off diplomatic relations with Britain as a protest against Britain's role in the Iranian occupation of the island. The British silence over the Iranian occupation of the islands was a clear breach of the 'protection' treaty, concluded with the Sheikhdom of Ras-al-Khaimah. The Conservative Government's silence over the Iranian occupation of the islands was condemned in the House of Commons also. The Liberal Party leader Jeremy Thorpe reminded Sir Alec, the Foreign Secretary, that Britain was under the treaty obligations to defend Ras-al-Khaimah.⁶⁷

To defend the British position, a Foreign Office spokesman said in London that Britain could hardly be expected to exercise their treaty responsibilities on their final day.⁶⁸ This explanation is clumsy, unplausible and unconvincing, when compared with Britain's role in the Kuwait incident. In Kuwait, Britain came back within a few days after its independence and

66 Ibid.

67 UK, House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 827, Session 1971-72, col. 948.

68 The Times, 1 December 1971.

made dramatic moves to thwart alleged Iraqi threat against Kuwait, on the basis of treaty obligations. Could it not defend Ras-al-Khaimah when Iran had long back publicly stated its claim over the islands? One explanation for Britain's failure to fulfil the treaty obligations towards Ras-al-Khaimah, could be that confrontation with Iran at that stage might jeopardize the British interests in the area. In fact, this fear was expressed much earlier in Britain. A conservative MP, Dennis Walter warned the government that it was not in the British interests to displease the Shah of Iran and suggested that if no settlement was reached on the question of islands, before the formal British withdrawal from the area, Britain should not accept any commitment to defend them.⁶⁹ The Times also had hinted, as early as 1968, that these islands should be given to Iran.⁷⁰

Prior to withdrawal of forces from the Gulf, Britain was keen to preserve the status quo in the Gulf Sheikhdoms. This was necessary not only to promote 'stability' in the Gulf but to safeguard British interests in the region also. It may be pointed out that soon after the Labour Government's declaration⁷¹ in January 1968, there was concern in Britain about the future

69 UK, House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 812, Session 1970-71, col. 1301.

70 "Dangerous Gulf", The Times, 17 August 1968.

71 These doubts were expressed not only by the prominent Conservative leaders, but also by the British press and other individuals. See for instance, Heath's statement in the Commons on 6 March 1968.

of the Gulf region and the British interests there. Therefore, moves were afoot right from January 1968 onwards to bring the small Sheikhdoms together to form a stable political system. The initial plan was for the formation of a federation of nine states. But the declaration of independence by Qatar and Bahrain made Britain give up the original plan and make efforts to bring the seven Trucial States together to form a union. William Luce's visit to the Gulf in May 1971 was mainly for this purpose.⁷² The plan was actively supported by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait which also played an important role in the formation of the United Arab Emirates.

On 18 July 1971 six Trucial States announced agreement on a federal constitution to join their Sheikhdoms into a political union before Britain's military withdrawal. The Rulers of Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Al-Fujarah, Ajman and Ummal Qaiwain, decided to send their delegations to the Arab world to get support.⁷³

The joint endeavours of King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, the Amir of Kuwait and William Luce, bore fruit on 2 December 1971, when the formation of the United Arab Emirates, was formally announced.⁷⁴

72 The Times, 20 May 1971.

73 Ibid., 19 July 1971.

74 Times of India (New Delhi), 3 December 1971. The seventh Sheikhdом Ras-al-Khaimah joined the union later on.

New Treaty Arrangements

As the Bahrain issue was already settled, there was no opposition from Iran for including Bahrain in the proposed union. But, due to the differences with the Trucial States over certain constitutional and administrative questions, it was clear that Bahrain and Qatar would not join the Union. Therefore, Geoffery Arthur, British Political Resident in the Gulf addressed a note to the Ruler of Bahrain, on 15 August 1971, terminating the "Exclusive Agreements of 22 December 1880 and of 13 March 1892, all other agreements, engagements, undertakings and arrangements"⁷⁵. A similar note was sent to the Ruler of Qatar, on 3 September 1971, terminating "the general treaty of 3 November 1916"⁷⁶. On 1 December 1971, the 1892 Agreements and treaties Britain had concluded with the seven Trucial States, were terminated.⁷⁷

With the termination of these treaties Britain's role as the 'protector and adviser' of the Rulers of the Gulf Sheikdoms came to an end. But, simultaneously, a new set of treaties was brought about with a view to get Britain a special position in the Gulf in future. As a result, prior to the withdrawal from the Gulf, Britain concluded separate, but identical treaties

75 Cmnd. 4827 (1971), p. 3.

76 Cmnd. 4849 (1972), p. 3.

77 Cmnd. 4941 (1972), pp. 3-16.

with the newly independent states of Bahrain, Qatar and the UAE. The Important articles of these treaties are:

Article 1 the contracting parties, conscious of their common interest in the peace of the region, shall: (a) consult together on matters of mutual concern in time of need;

Article 2 The contracting parties shall encourage educational, scientific and cultural cooperation between the two states in accordance with arrangements to be agreed. Such arrangements shall cover among other things; (b) the promotion of contacts among professional bodies, universities and cultural institutions in their countries.... 78

Article 3 of the treaties provides for close relations in the field of trade and commerce. ⁷⁹

Compared to the treaty concluded with Kuwait in 1961, ⁸⁰ the new treaties were free from provisions which Britain could use to stage a military comeback to the Gulf. Although pro-British Sheikh Rashid of Dubai had desired to conclude new ⁸¹ treaties similar to treaty with Kuwait, this was not possible due to the changing political situation in the area. However, despite the absence of the direct mention of any military co-operation between Britain and the Gulf States, the 'consultation

78 Cmnds. 4828 (1971), p. 3; 4850 (1972), p. 3; 4937 (1972), p. 3.

79 Ibid.

80 For details of Anglo-Kuwait Treaty of 1961 see Cmd. 1409 (1961), p. 2.

81 The Times, 30 July 1970.

clause' of the treaties may have certain implications as this clause may be invoked if the situation demands. Therefore, the military cooperation between Britain and the Gulf States in future cannot be ruled out. Similarly, the Clause dealing with close relations in trade and commerce between the States concerned, may ensure Britain's future position as the chief exporter to the Gulf States.

The settlement of Bahrain issue, the reorganization of the Trucial Oman Scouts, the formation of the United Arab Emirates and the settlement of the island issue to the satisfaction of Iran, were the arrangements which were made with active support and involvement of the Arab States of the Gulf - Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. But these arrangements did not constitute any substitute for a reversal of the Labour Government's decision, about which the Conservatives were seriously thinking. It is not correct to say that they were not thinking in terms of reversing the Labour Government's decision.

82 The opinion that the Conservatives were not thinking seriously in terms of reversing the Labour decision was expressed in The Economist which wrote that the Conservatives only said that they would consult the local parties before withdrawal. See "Sir Alec up the Gulf", The Economist, 8 July 1970, p. 14. But earlier it had written that Heath had come close to promising that if the Tories returned to Office by 1971, they would cancel Wilson's decision of withdrawal. "The Tories Go Back East", The Economist, 17 August 1968. This is a clear contradiction. How much Conservatives were interested in reversing Labour decision is explained by the reports that some of the Gulf Coastal States had financed the Conservative Election Campaigns

The Conservatives could not achieve what they wanted. It may be recalled that as soon as the Conservatives came to power in 1970, Sir Alec Douglas-Home, Foreign Secretary, said that where Britain's presence was needed, Britain ought to be there.⁸³ A few months later, he hinted that elements of British forces could be stationed in the Gulf on a regular basis to act on a "liaison and training role, if the U.A.E. wished to have them".⁸⁴ Ultimately, Britain could achieve neither, although some British military personnel continued to stay on in the Gulf even after the British withdrawal from the region.

However, this was asked by the United Arab Emirates which has also a good number of military personnel from Pakistan. Therefore, this was no achievement of the Conservative Government which had strongly criticized the Labour Government's decision. The failure of the Conservative Government's attempt to reverse the Labour Government's decision reduced its criticism of the Labour Government's plan into insignificance. Though the Conservative Government failed to reverse the decision, the arrangements which were made in the Gulf as a result of the Labour decision, were given a final shape by the Conservative

in the hope that if returned to power, they would reverse the Labour decision. See Muhammad T. Sadik and William P. Snively, n. 7, p. 221.

83 UK, House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates, vol. 803, Session 1970-71, col. 349.

84 Ibid.

Government. Though these arrangements were the logical consequences of the changed situation in the region, the Conservative Government took credit from them. Had the Labour Government continued in Office, perhaps they also might have entered into similar, if not the same arrangements.

The settlement of the island dispute between Iran and the two Gulf Sheikdoms, the formation of the United Arab Emirates, and the conclusion of new treaties with Bahrain, Qatar and the UAE, set the stage for an orderly withdrawal from the Gulf.

Chapter V

CONCLUSIONS

It seems reasonable to conclude that the withdrawal of British forces from the Gulf was necessitated by developments both in the Gulf and in Britain. After the First World War, particularly after the decolonization of the Indian sub-continent in 1947, the importance of the Gulf to Britain had changed from that of a forward post for Indian defence to that of an important source of cheap oil. But Britain's oil interest in the Gulf was not limited only to the supply of oil. The interest was also to get free access to the oil sources in the Gulf and also to protect the British oil companies operating in the Gulf. Besides, the British investments in Kuwait, Iraq, Iran, Qatar, Abu Dhabi and in the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman were also quite substantial. Moreover, there was the linkage between the Gulf Sheikhdoms and the British centred Sterling Area. The Rulers of the Gulf Sheikhdoms, like Kuwait, were depositing their oil income in London. This constituted a substantial support to the post-war British economy. This was more important than the mere supply of oil.

The apprehension was that in the absence of the British forces in the area some nationalist elements might overthrow the pro-British regimes and deprive the Western Petroleum Companies operating in the Gulf of the privileges they enjoyed in the region. Such a situation might jeopardize the possibility of getting oil at 'reasonable' rates also. To protect these important economic interests Britain wanted to maintain the

status quo in the region. In addition to that it thought necessary to insulate the Gulf Sheikhdoms from the Arab world on the one hand, and on the other to keep the neighbouring Gulf powers, like Saudi Arabia, Iraq and also the distant Egypt away from the Gulf oil fields. This was fully demonstrated in 1955, when Britain drove the Saudis out from the Bruaimi oasis, and in 1961 when British forces were sent to Kuwait, to forestall the presumed Iraqi threat to Kuwait.

All these factors provided strong reasons for the continued presence of the British forces in the Gulf. The presence was facilitated by various treaties concluded in the past between Britain and the Gulf Sheikhs. The Sheikhs also wholeheartedly welcomed that presence since it provided a powerful support to perpetuate their dynastic rule in the Gulf. Britain supported them at times, even against popular opinion. Added to it was the Arab schism which helped Britain considerably to maintain its hold over the Gulf. The Arab Gold War, dividing the Arab States into the so-called progressive and conservative groupings, had only helped Britain to prolong its presence in the Gulf. The region's political backwardness was another factor which went in Britain's favour. The political backwardness of the Gulf isolated it from the tremors of politics in the Middle East.

This situation remained more or less intact until the 1956 Suez crisis. Since then Arab nationalism, which was

coming into its own in the Middle East, began to make inroads into the Gulf. The new political outlook of the articulate section of the population in the Gulf, notably in Kuwait and Bahrain brought considerable changes in the political situation in the Gulf. The resurgent nationalist elements began to criticize not only the Sheikhs, but also Britain which supported them to perpetuate their dynastic rule. This provided a definite indication that Britain's continued presence would be increasingly resented in the Gulf in future by the local population.

It was also during this period that the oil boom in the Gulf Sheikhdoms, particularly in Kuwait became an attraction for outsiders opening up new horizons, both politically and economically. On the one hand it increased the area's importance to the British economy, and, on the other, it led to the weakening of the British hold over the Gulf. This took place mainly because a large number of people from different parts of the Arab world began to migrate into the Gulf. These immigrants included a good number of skilled Palestinians and Egyptians. The presence of these people in the British controlled Gulf Sheikhdoms was a new factor in the Gulf politics. As the mental make up of these people was extremely anti-British due to Britain's hand in the creation of Israel, their presence in the Gulf made Britain's position quite uneasy. They also influenced the outlook of the local population, who with the

passage of time also began to question Britain's presence in the Gulf.

The first jolt to the British fortress around the Gulf came from Baghdad, where the new military regime, which overthrew the pro-British monarchy in 1958, took an anti-British posture. The Iraqi coup of 1958, for the first time since the Second World War, posed new problems to Britain's position in the Gulf. Within three years, in 1961, Kuwait, the biggest state in the British controlled Gulf and an important element in the British economy went out of British control and the replacement of British troops in Kuwait by the Arab League contingents, in 1961 was a clear indication of the diminishing British influence in the Gulf. However, the British military action in Kuwait showed that despite the diminishing British hold over the Gulf, the area occupied an important position in the list of Britain's priorities.

An important factor that influenced the development of nationalist feelings in the Gulf was the wave of Arab nationalism which swept the Middle East. Egypt held the key to this spirit which was by and large anti-British also. The British action against Egypt in 1956, instead of yielding dividends to Britain, aroused anti-British feelings throughout the Middle East. As a result, the nationalist regimes in the Arab world, particularly in Egypt and Iraq made the British presence in the Gulf a target of their criticism from late 1950s onwards.

Propaganda machinery in Baghdad and Cairo was directed towards the Gulf where the radio and transistor had exposed the tribal population to new nationalist ideas emanating from the Arab capitals like Cairo and Baghdad. In this context Egyptian propaganda was quite effective in stirring up the anti-British feelings of the Gulf population.

Simultaneous to the changes in the political situation in the Gulf, a new outlook towards the Gulf was evolving in Britain itself. Since the Suez crisis, a good number of Labour leaders wanted that Britain should try to normalize relations with the progressive regimes of West Asia, particularly with Egypt. They thought that this was not possible so long as the British image in the Gulf remained as the Protector of the conservative regimes in the Middle East. Therefore, in view of the fast changing political spectacle in the Gulf, the Leftist elements in the Labour Party and some other prominent individuals, including some British experts for the Middle East, advanced the idea of winding up the British military presence in the area.

However, when the Labour Party came to power in 1964, it could not bring about any abrupt change in Britain's traditional role in the Gulf. The new Labour Government also followed, for some time, the same old policy of the Conservative Government. This was partly due to the uncertainty prevalent around the Gulf. President Nasser, who was an important factor in Britain's Gulf

policy, was still enjoying considerable respect and prestige in the Arab world. His tirade against the pro-West Arab regimes, his role in Yemen and Aden and his pro-Soviet approach, were factors which influenced the Labour Government in Britain to maintain the status quo in the Gulf. Otherwise, it is reasonable to assume that Britain's withdrawal from the Gulf might have taken place simultaneously with Britain's departure from Aden in 1967.

The West Asian War of 1967, brought significant changes in the political situation in the Middle East. The outcome of this war compelled President Nasser to reorient his policy. Egypt moved closer to Saudi Arabia and there was greater cooperation between them. Since then Nasser showed little interests in the Gulf politics. The war brought certain changes in British outlook also. The alleged collusion of Britain with Israel in 1967 war, had also seriously affected the British interests in the Middle East. The Arab oil embargo to Britain and the closure of the Suez Canal by Egypt brought serious damages to the British economy which culminated in the devaluation of Pound Sterling in 1967. Moreover, the failure of Harold Wilson's attempts, in June 1967, to keep the Gulf of Aqaba open for shipping, made the Labour Government realize that Britain could no longer play any major role in the Middle East. There was greater realization that the changing political atmosphere in the Middle East also was not conducive to the British military presence in the Gulf.

Another factor was the efforts by this time the Labour Government was making to take Britain into the European Economic Community. To enable this the inward looking group in the Labour Cabinet stressed the need for restructuring Britain's economy. Their main target was the defence expenditure. A reduction in defence expenditures entailed a reappraisal of Britain's defence commitments overseas and converging its role mainly to Europe and the North Atlantic Alliance. Although there was division in the Labour Cabinet over this issue, the inward looking group ultimately succeeded. According to Harold Wilson, he was the last to be converted to the idea of withdrawing the British forces stationed East of Suez.

Wilson's declaration of 16 January 1968 brought to surface the differences of opinion between the conservatives and the Labour. There was little difference over the necessity to safeguard Britain's interests in the Gulf. But the difference was mainly over the ways and means of how to protect these British interests in the Gulf. According to the Labour Government the British interests could be safeguarded through bilateral diplomacy rather than through the on spot British military presence. On the contrary, the conservatives were very much apprehensive regarding the future course of events in the Gulf if Britain withdrew its forces from the region. While voicing this apprehension, the conservatives had displayed little understanding of the changing situation in the Gulf and the mood of some

of the Local Powers in the Gulf. However, the Labour Government could not make much headway in the direction of making arrangements for an orderly withdrawal from the Gulf mainly because the Bahrain issue was settled only just before the Labour Government went out of office in June 1970.

When the conservatives came to power in 1970, their first effort was to find out the ways and means to retain the British military presence in the Gulf. Conservatives were justifying the continued British military presence in the Gulf on the basis of new changes which were taking place in the global strategic balance in the oceans from 1968 onwards. In this respect the most important factor was the stepping up of the Soviet naval activities in the Indian Ocean, a new factor Britain had to take into account in planning her strategy. Britain was concerned over the Soviet moves in the Indian Ocean because the Ocean furnished Britain with essential supplies like oil, wool and livestock products, rubber, tea etc. This development strengthened the Conservative argument that Britain should continue its military presence East of Suez beyond 1971. It was reported that the conservatives were interested in extending the date of Britain's withdrawal at least upto mid 1970s,¹ because by that time the strategic balance around the Indian Ocean would be more clear.

1 This was disclosed by The Economist (London) in its 17th August 1968 issue.

This attempt did not fruitify mainly because of the changes that took place in the attitude of the Local Gulf Powers towards the continued British military presence between Wilson's declaration in January 1968 and the Conservative Party's assumption of office in June 1970. Important countries of the region like Iran and Saudi Arabia which supported British presence in the past, expressed themselves against the continued British military presence in the Gulf. Moreover, by this time the Sheikhs also had reconciled to the situation of the withdrawal of British forces from the Gulf.

Therefore, when it was clear to Britain that the withdrawal of its forces from the Gulf was inevitable towards the end of 1971, the British attempts were directed towards making viable security arrangements in the area to ensure status quo in the region. Sir Alec Douglas-Home, Foreign Secretary, in a speech in Glasgow, said that "the lesson of history upto now is that the world does not run on reason. Political stability and collective security has to be organized and that is true of the area of the Gulf"². In doing so Britain had two objectives in mind. One was to seek the co-operation of the regional powers like Iran and Saudi Arabia in the moves to insulate the region from possible Soviet penetration; and the other was to

² See D.C. Watt and James Mayale, eds., Current British Foreign Policy: Documents, Statements, Speeches, 1970 (London, 1971), p. 461.

finalize an independent political framework for the Gulf Sheikhdoms. This explains why Britain had kept quiet when Iran occupied the Greater and Lesser Tumbs islands of the Sheikhdome of Ras-al-Khaimah, although Britain was treaty-bound to defend them. Although the moves for a collective security system for the Gulf did not materialize, a tacit alliance for the security of the region seems to have come into existence among the local Powers like Iran, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, with active British and American support.

If the Saudi-Iranian led tacit alliance was viewed as a deterrance against any possible Soviet expansion in the Gulf, the formation of the united Arab Emirates was a means to curb domestic forces, if any, favourable to the Soviet Union and against the status quo. Moreover, it was more advantageous and convenient for Britain to deal with these Sheikhdoms in future in order to safeguard its interests in the region. The formation of the united Arab Emirates had certainly facilitated an orderly withdrawal of the British forces from the Gulf. The withdrawal posed no such problems as was posed by Aden. This was largely due to the Saudi-Iranian understanding, and also due to the vigorous British diplomacy. The western sponsored, Kuwait-Saudi-Iranian tacit alliance, was so important that the centre of diplomatic activity had increasingly gravitated to Riyadh, Tehran and Kuwait. Most of the important decisions were taken in Riyadh, Kuwait and Tehran and not in Abu Dhabi or Dubai.

Although Britain's withdrawal from the Gulf meant recalling British troops from the area, a good number of British military officers are still there in the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Qatar, for providing training and other military facilities to the armed forces of the new States. Similarly ships of the Royal Navy pay regular visits also to the region. In view of these facts some commentators like R.M. Burrell have argued that there was no British military withdrawal from the Gulf Sheikhdoms. But this is only a distortion of facts. The continued stay of some British military personnel in the area became necessary since the area was under British control for a long time. The Gulf States could hardly ignore the necessity of the British military officers providing training to their armed forces which were mostly British oriented in their training and military experience. But the presence of these British military officers in the Gulf, and the regular visits of the ships of the Royal Navy to the area, are materially and substantially different from the earlier privileged position Britain enjoyed in the Gulf.

Though Britain has lost its earlier privileged position in the Gulf, the area is still important for it because it has considerable investments there and is still dependent upon the oil supply from the Gulf. Therefore, it is an overwhelming British interest that the area remains friendly to it. But that will depend to a greater extent, on the overall British outlook

towards the West Asian problems because the Gulf States are increasingly bringing their political moves into harmony with the neighbouring Arab world.

Today, the UAE, Bahrain and Qatar are sovereign and independent States. They have established connections with the Arab world, have joined the Arab League, and have become members of the United Nations and also joined the Non-aligned movement. They played their part in the Arab-Israel War of 1973 and were among the prominent Arab States which cut off oil supplies to the United States. They not only supported the OPEC decision of raising the oil prices, but took an active part in the decision-making therein. They established diplomatic relations with India and Pakistan, besides countries like Iran and the Arab States. The British withdrawal from the area also heralded a new phase of socio-economic development in an area which, just a few years ago was considered remote and politically and socially backward.

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