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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Concerns over the security and military defense of the Arabian or Persian Gulf and, in particular, the Arabian Peninsula have steadily intensified over the course of the twentieth century. At the same time, the actors assuming (or proclaiming) their responsibility for the security of the Peninsula have also changed. Additionally, as perceived threats to the security of this area have changed, so have the means – and thus, necessarily, the strategies – to defend the Peninsula. Consequently, any contemporary strategy concerned with Peninsula and/or Gulf security (including and especially that of the United States), to be viable, must: (1) not only be concerned with external threats to Gulf security; but also (2) be intimate with the immediate environment and nature of social, economic, and political conditions in the Gulf itself, both past and present.

The three actors or groups concerned with Peninsula security in this century have been Britain, the United States, and the six states now comprising the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC): Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Oman. Britain exercised primary responsibility for the security of this region because of its predominant position in the Gulf from the turn of the century through World War II, and it continued to be directly concerned with the area until final withdrawal in 1971. While American military and security interests originated around the time of World War II, it was not until after 1971 that the US became increasingly and directly concerned with the defense of the region and Western interests there. The expression of security concerns by the Arab littoral states was also late in emerging, principally due to the nature of British legal responsibility for defense and external affairs in most of these states, as well as predominant British influence over international relations in the Gulf generally.

The year 1971 also marked a watershed in the way many of the littoral states viewed the security of the Gulf. The centuries-old British shield had been removed and new responsibilities for self-defense and regional policing fell by default to newly emerging nation-states. While the roots of the contemporary state of Saudi Arabia are several centuries old, the establishment of the kingdom in its present territory dates back only one-half century and concern with affairs beyond the Peninsula has been present only in the last several decades. Oman, while always legally independent, spent the twentieth century within a British sphere of influence until emerging from its isolation with an intra-family *coup d'État* in 1970. The smaller amirates of the Gulf became independent only in 1971, with the exception of Kuwait (1961).

Their increasing concern over external affairs and growing profile in international relations can be traced to a number of factors, including the impact of nationalism, tighter integration into Arab politics, politicization and nationalization of oil resources, identification with the Third World

on political and North/South issues, emerging suspicions of superpower rivalry in the Gulf and Middle East, and a recent climate of fears of burgeoning threats to these self-perceived fragile and vulnerable states and societies.

Despite their many obvious differences, the two external powers and the Arab Gulf littoral states concerned with Gulf security have exhibited similar strategic interests in the Arabian Peninsula. Essentially, these have been: (1) preservation of global and particularly Western access to Gulf oil; and (2) denial of penetration or intrusion by hostile or rival forces. While the strategic interests have been similar, the means or methods of protecting those interests – i.e. the tactical objectives – differ considerably. This is not only due to differing national interests and perceptions, but also to dramatically changing circumstances and situations over the last three-quarters of a century, both in the Gulf itself and on a much broader level. Consequently, comparison of the perceptions and experience of each of these three actors or groups is not only a useful historical exercise, but provides insight into the constraints, limitations, and necessary direction of contemporary US and GCC policy in that region.

## **THE EMERGENCE AND EVOLUTION OF SECURITY CONCERNS IN ARABIA**

The British connection with the Gulf originated in the early seventeenth century. Over the next three hundred years, British interests multiplied and intensified to the point that British supremacy in the Gulf was clearly recognizable by the early decades of the present century. By the end of World War I, the Gulf had for all intents and purposes become a British "lake." All the external challenges to British supremacy there had been beaten back, and, at the same time, Britain became more closely involved in local politics in order to protect what were increasingly seen as important interests in the Gulf.

During the 1920s and 1930s, it became apparent that several British strategic interests – certainly strategic if not yet "vital" – were to be found along the shores of the Gulf. The first of these and, in the end, the more permanent and important one, was the growing dependence on Gulf oil. The first oil finds in the region occurred in Persia (later Iran) in 1904 and oil was discovered in Iraq shortly after World War I. Subsequently, fields were brought into production down the Arab side of the Gulf, including Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the UAE, and Oman. Within a relatively short period of time, the presence of this oil was seen as a strategic resource for the British empire, since the Royal Navy heavily depended on Gulf oil for fuel, British commercial interests held the great majority of concessions in the region, and Gulf oil played a major part in enabling the steady expansion of oil consumption throughout the empire.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>For more information on the development of British oil interests, see Stephen Longrigg, *Oil in the Middle East: Its Discovery and Development* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.; London: Oxford University Press, for the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1968); and Benjamin Shwadran, *The Middle East, Oil, and the Great Powers* (New York: John Wiley, 1973). A recent overview of the development of international oil is Steven A. Schneider, *The Oil Price Revolution* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983).

The second factor reviving the strategic importance of the Gulf to Britain resulted from the development of imperial air routes and the emerging doctrine of air power. The Gulf provided one of the earliest links in the London/India route, despite the false start caused by political problems in establishing a route through Persia (Iran) and the subsequent necessity of rerouting along the Arab littoral. The coming of the air age gave the Gulf – and in particular the Arabian Peninsula – a renewed importance as a link in transcontinental transportation and communication networks. At the same time, the newly emergent key role of the Royal Air Force in the region, particularly in Iraq and Aden, provided another spur to the establishment of air facilities along the Gulf and Arabian Sea periphery of the Peninsula, in order to link RAF commands.

A third reason for the Gulf's emerging importance to London at this time was actually a continuing manifestation of its geopolitical significance. For centuries, Britain had sought to prevent rivals from penetrating its cocoon around the Gulf, and the emphasis on this enduring policy was further confirmed by the emergence of the factors of air and oil. Consequently, by approximately the mid-1930s, the Gulf's peripheral place in the imperial scheme of things had been transformed to an area of increasing strategic importance. In many ways, World War II marked a significant turning point and the beginning of the end of British imperial standing. One lasting effect of even the relatively minor impact of the war on the Peninsula was the first stripping away of the isolation which the British had imposed.

While the era of *pax Britannica* in the Gulf can be said to have existed for a century or more, complete and effective British control over external access to the Gulf and internal politics in most of the littoral states was more ephemeral, lasting only a few short decades. The apogee of British concern over Gulf security and its ability to guarantee that security was reached during the decade of the 1930s. From then on, the notion of the Gulf as a British "lake" became increasingly dated, and the next quarter-century exhibited a steady British retreat from its predominant position.

In many ways, World War II marked a significant turning point and the beginning of the end of British imperial standing. While the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula were not at the center of attention during the war, they did play a role in the conflict. Bombing raids were conducted from Aden during the Italian East African campaign early in the war, Aden and other airfields along the southern perimeter of the Peninsula were useful for convoy escorts and anti-submarine patrols, the Gulf and Iranian corridor was used as a key Allied supply route to the Soviet Union, and air routes through the Gulf and along the southern Arabian rim served as important links in the ferrying of men and materiel to the Pacific theater in the latter stages of the war. One lasting effect of even the relatively minor impact of the war on the Peninsula was the first stripping away of the isolation which the British had imposed.

American penetration of this British domain, bitterly resented by the British, had begun in the decade before the war but benefitted heavily from the need for cooperation in war efforts and became more pronounced in subsequent years. The process had begun with American minority interest in British oil concessions and then became pronounced with the establishment of the Arabian-American Oil Company (ARAMCO) concession in Saudi Arabia. American armed forces utilized Gulf air facilities during World War II. Subsequently, the US built an airfield at Dhahran (Saudi Arabia), established a small naval presence in the Gulf, and initiated a long and close relationship with Iran under the rule of Muhammad Reza Shah. Thus, by the early 1950s, the

predominance of British influence in the two of the most important countries of the Gulf had been replaced by American influence.

The slowly emerging American penetration of the Peninsula occurred simultaneously with a gradual British retrenchment from the existing position in the Gulf and Middle East. This phenomenon was only the local manifestation of a broader process involving the dismemberment of the British empire and the cumulative abandonment of longheld East-of-Suez responsibilities. The Peninsula and Gulf constituted the tail end of a retreat punctuated by exits from India (1947), Egypt (1954), Iraq (1958), and finally Aden (1967) and the Gulf (1971).

Withdrawal from Aden – also signifying abandonment of Britain's last major military installation in the Middle East – turned out to be a long, involved and bloody process. In contrast, withdrawal from the Gulf seemed far less painful. The military implications were negligible, and at the time the political impact as seen from London and Washington seemed relatively minimal. The impact on the Gulf was more substantial, especially the smaller amirates of the Gulf. Britain had served as judge, arbiter, administrator, and, of course, protector of this littoral for well over a century. Departure in 1971 was tantamount to removal of the safety net. Obviously, the currents of nationalist and modernist sentiments and ideas had begun to circulate along the shores of the Gulf even before the influx of oil revenues. Apart from Iraq and perhaps Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, few people in the Arab littoral seemed really prepared for the burden of complete political and international responsibilities.

Nevertheless, the newly independent states of Bahrain, Qatar, and the UAE – along with the not-so-much-older nations of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia – adjusted quickly enough. As an indication of the durability of arrangements made at this time, the 16 years between the momentous announcement and 1984 passed without any serious adverse developments occurring in any of the former British-protected areas of the Gulf. More than one doomsayer in the West has been proved wrong in this regard.

The "changing of the guard" in the Gulf, from Britain to the US, took place during a long process stretching over several decades and US interests in the Gulf were considerable when Britain withdrew in 1971. Still, even with three years or more advance notice, the US was not fully prepared to accept direct responsibility for the security of the Gulf and Peninsula, let alone take up Britain's shield. Close working relations existed only with Iran and Saudi Arabia, American diplomats had yet to take up residence in the newly independent states, US military capabilities in the Gulf were miniscule, and – apart from the oil companies – there was virtually no cadre of officials who were familiar with the region.

The seeming American inaction concerning the Gulf at this time would not seem to be due to indifference, although the Gulf's role in the looming global oil crisis was not generally appreciated at the outset of the 1970s. Rather, the explanation lay elsewhere. Except for the ties to Iran and, to a lesser extent, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf had always been unfamiliar territory. Even later, Washington's perceptions of events and situations in the region in large part were filtered through Pahlavi Tehran and Riyadh. In addition, the simultaneous American dilemma in Vietnam made direct involvement along the lines of the British experience impossible. The consequence was the "twin pillar" system.

In addition to a different approach and outlook, the US also faced a radically changed situation from the pre-war era of British predominance. While Gulf oil had been important to Britain

then, in the 1970s that oil was at the heart of global dependence on an increasingly "vital" resource. The political environment had changed also: no longer was the Gulf ringed by minor possessions and quasi-dependencies of an empire but independent states, fully integrated into the international system, had appeared.

Even though the American strategic interest of denying entry to the Gulf to its superpower rival echoed earlier British attempts at quarantine, there were differences even here. The East-West rivalry and the supremacy of the US and the USSR in a bipolar system represented a far more direct challenge than those of previous years, as illustrated in the stubborn Soviet presence in northern Iran after World War II and emerging Soviet influence in Iraq after 1958.

Finally, the US came cold to its role as guardian of the Gulf. Britain had had 3½ centuries of experience in that region and had worked up to its position of predominance and security responsibility gradually over the course of at least a century. In 1971, the US found itself thrust into a role not of its choosing. For most of the ensuing decade, Washington looked benignly on the Gulf from a distance, blithely assuming that the status quo would remain undisturbed and that the amount of regulation required could be provided by its two principal clients, Iran and Saudi Arabia. Neither the oil crisis of 1973-1974 nor the spillover from continued Arab-Israeli strife shook this complacency, but only the events of 1979. The laissez-faire attitude of the 1970s was replaced by a skittish, hawkish attitude in the 1980s. In many ways, the formulation of an effective yet subtle, permanent, and proper policy for the Gulf has yet to emerge out of the first years of the American era in the Gulf.

American policy in the Gulf since 1971 falls into two distinctive, almost schismatic, periods: 1971-1979 and 1979-present. While the first was characterized by benign inaction, the second has tended toward overreaction. American policy toward the Gulf during the first period was predicated on the Nixon Doctrine, which provided the foundations of the so-called "twin pillars" policy, by which the US relied upon Iran and, to a lesser extent, Saudi Arabia, as its surrogates in the Gulf. The extension of Iranian assistance in putting down the Marxist-led rebellion in Oman's province of Dhufar in the early 1970s seemed to justify this surrogate policy.

But a series of troubling events in the region around 1979, particularly Soviet inroads in several countries and the fall of the Pahlavi regime in Iran, forced a reevaluation of this policy. The indirect, even inattentive, American approach of the past decade was reversed in a spasm of concern and rhetorical reaction. The broader Gulf region was characterized as an "arc of crisis," the Carter Doctrine threatened the Soviet Union with retaliation, simmering plans for a more direct and stronger American role in the region were put on the front burner, and eventually the US Central Command was created to provide the military wherewithal to intervene in the Gulf if deemed necessary. While the immediate reversal of policy occurred during the Carter administration, this policy shift has been made permanent by the actions of the subsequent Reagan administration.

Despite the continuing soft world oil market and declining international oil prices, the Gulf remains a key area of US strategic interest. As Secretary of State George Shultz proclaimed in early 1985,

Another major U.S. interest in the Middle East is to maintain free world access to the vital oil supplies of the Persian Gulf now and in the future. The Persian Gulf countries produce over 25% of the free world's supply. Through our assistance, we help to improve the security of our friends in this area. Oman is cooperating closely with the United States toward our common goal of

maintaining security and stability in that vital area and freedom of navigation through the Strait of Hormuz; Oman's agreement to permit access to its facilities represents a key asset for the U.S. Central Command. Although not recipients of U.S. financial assistance, the other Gulf states and Saudi Arabia, as members with Oman in the Gulf Cooperation Council, have shown the will and the ability to defend themselves against encroachment of the Iran-Iraq war. The Administration is embarking on a comprehensive review of our security interests and strategy in the area, focusing on how our various programs in the security field complement our efforts in the peace process and contribute to the general stability of the region.<sup>2</sup>

American resolve and military preparation constitutes only one aspect of the Gulf security question, and it is vitally dependent on cooperation with and from its friends within the GCC. The principal responsibility or burden of maintaining security in the Gulf necessarily must rest on the shoulders of the littoral states. Furthermore, as long as ultimately there will be divergent perceptions between the US and the Gulf states of potential threats or challenges to Gulf security, policy differences are inevitable. It is undeniable that important – and even vital – national interests of the United States reside in the Gulf. At the same time, however, American preoccupation with access to a single natural resource is only "temporary" in the broader scheme of things. To Saudi Arabia and its smaller allies, the security of the Gulf will always be of paramount importance, the risks higher, and a misstep catastrophic.

The Arab states of the Gulf have taken a variety of steps to enhance their security. First, they have banded together in the Gulf Cooperation Council, a sensible move that not only provides a little more bulk or manpower or financial resources for defense purposes, but also makes sense in economic and cultural terms. These six states are remarkably similar many ways and the GCC undoubtedly represents the best chance of any for eventually successful integration within the Arab world.

Led by Saudi Arabia's predominant size and financial resources, the GCC states have embarked on ambitious military modernization programs, which cannot overcome obvious constraints of small size and manpower problems but nevertheless will help these countries to meet a myriad of lesser security threats. They have worked toward accommodation with more powerful and radical neighbors, in the Gulf, elsewhere in the Arabian Peninsula, and in the Levant. They have also sought friendship and economic and political cooperation with the United States and the West. But, mindful of the lessons of the past, they have insisted that military cooperation remain limited to an "over-the-horizon" role. Admittedly, such a compromise is less than militarily ideal but it is a political necessity.

Any examination of the proper relationship between the United States and the GCC in the question of Gulf security must begin with a look at how this responsibility was first handled. And

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<sup>2</sup>Extract from statement by the Secretary of State before the Committee on Foreign Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives, 19 Feb. 1985. US Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, *Current Policy*, No. 656. The perceived importance of Saudi Arabia was echoed in a 1983 public opinion poll, in which 77% of the respondents indicated that the US had vital interests in Saudi Arabia, a figure topped only by Japan, Canada, and Great Britain. Some 25% supported the dispatch of US troops if Iran invaded Saudi Arabia while 39% supported sending troops if Arab oil producers cut off supplies to the US. John E. Reilly, ed., *American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy 1983* (Chicago: Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, 1983), pp. 16 and 31.

this requires a brief overview of the preeminent British role in shaping much of the present complexion of Gulf politics.

## ORIGINS OF BRITISH INVOLVEMENT IN ARABIA

The paramountcy of British authority in the Gulf during the first half of the twentieth century was the end result of a steady accumulation of British interests there over the course of the past three centuries and the empire's gradual entanglement in the web of this imperial eddy. Eventually, Britain found itself not only maintaining security for what had come to be regarded as a "British lake" but also exercising heavy responsibility for the internal affairs of the emerging states of the Arabian littoral as well. The progress of this deepening entanglement can be traced through the development of at least eight significant interests during the period between first British entrance in the region and final achievement, in the post-World-War-II era, of unchallenged supremacy there.

British involvement in the beginning was predicated exclusively upon commercial interests.<sup>3</sup> Trade with the Gulf commenced in 1617 and quickly supplanted declining Portuguese commerce while competing favorably with the Dutch and the French. A century later, though, the importance of Gulf trade had diminished considerably and by the end of the eighteenth century it had virtually disappeared. Continued British representation in the Gulf and the occasional patrols there by the Bombay Marine could be reasonably justified only in terms of protection of the minor "country" trade from India. Nevertheless, new factors appeared to prevent complete British withdrawal from the area.

In 1798, Napoleon Bonaparte landed an army in Egypt and easily overpowered that country's Mamluk rulers. In British eyes, however, the real goal was India and this suspicion was given additional credence with the interception of Napoleon's letters to the rulers of Muscat and Mysore. The destruction of the French fleet at the Battle of Aboukir in 1798 and then Napoleon's ignominious flight to Europe after the unsuccessful siege of Acre in 1799 proved to be only temporary setbacks to French designs.

Instead, France changed tactics and a small fleet was dispatched to the Indian Ocean in 1803, and was followed by the posting of a commercial agent to Muscat in 1807. The treaty of Finkenstein, signed in the same year, would have obligated Napoleon to restrain Russian expansionism in the direction of Persia in return for the Qajar Shah's declaration of war upon India. This agreement came to naught, however, as France soon reconciled with Russia and Britain

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<sup>3</sup>The following discussion of British involvement in the Gulf is largely derived from J.G. Lorimer, comp., *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, 'Oman, and Central Arabia* (Calcutta: Superintendent, Government Printing, 1908-1915; reprinted Farnborough, Hants.: Gregg International Publishers, 1970); J.B. Kelly, *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1795-1880* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968); Briton Cooper Busch, *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1894-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967); and Malcolm Yapp, "British Policy in the Persian Gulf," in Alvin G. Cottrell, gen. ed., *The Persian Gulf States: A General Survey* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), pp. 70-100. On the maritime role, see R. St. P. Parry, "The Navy in the Persian Gulf," *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, Vol. 75 (May 1930), pp. 314-331; and J.F. Standish, "British Maritime Policy in the Persian Gulf," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (1967), pp. 324-354.

subsequently imposed a new treaty on Persia in 1809. The final blow to Napoleonic ambitions came with the British capture of Ile de France (thereafter named Mauritius) in 1810, depriving France of its last major base in the Indian Ocean.

The third cause of British involvement provided the spark for a permanent presence in the region and partial supervision of Gulf affairs. Despite the decline in trade, British and British-protected vessels continued to ply Gulf waters and were attacked with increasing frequency in the early years of the nineteenth century. There are various reasons for the emergence of what the British termed "piracy," including depressed economic conditions along Gulf shores and the decline of existing political authority in the region.

The Portuguese had first applied the term "pirates" in the seventeenth century to the Ya'ariba rulers of Oman, who were then busily engaged in expelling the Portuguese from their strongholds in the Gulf and East Africa. A century-and-a-half later, the British tended to regard the activities of the Qawasim (sing., Qasimi), who were based along the southern shore of the Arabian littoral, in the same light. The strength of Muscat's rulers was quickly fading at the time and local opposition to their dominance was enflamed by the alliance with the British. In short order, Muscat's possessions on both shores of the Gulf fell to Qasimi control. The anti-Muscat and anti-European inclinations of the Qawasim were further exacerbated by their conversion to Wahhabism, the puritanical strain of Sunni Islam prevailing in central Arabia and being spread by the efforts of the Al Sa'ud. As a consequence, Qasimi attacks on the shipping of various flags were lumped together with the activities of the Gulf's freebooters and labelled piracy.

The efforts of the Government of Bombay to eradicate this piracy eventually culminated in the crucial system operating under British aegis. The idea of a base in the Gulf to protect commercial interests had been broached a century earlier but the scheme advanced in 1808 derived from political and strategic considerations. A military presence on, say, Kharg Island or Qishm Island, it was argued, would not only offer protection against pirates but also serve to counter Persian and French designs in the area. While the scheme enjoyed the support of officialdom in India, it was rejected by London, which preferred instead to rely upon diplomacy to advance its strategic interests in the Gulf. Actual occupation of Qishm Island in 1820 proved shortlived as the garrison quickly fell prey to disease and entanglement in local politics and warfare. It was withdrawn in 1823 and the idea of a military base languished, with a few limited exceptions, for nearly another century.

The principal British response to "piracy" came in the form of punitive expeditions launched against Qasimi ports along the so-called "Pirate Coast" and elsewhere. The first of these was prompted by the growing seriousness of the situation in 1808, when many of those aboard an East India Company cruiser were massacred and Qasimi vessels began to appear for the first time in Indian waters. Consequently, an eleven-ship armada laid siege in 1809 to the Qasimi capital at Ra's al-Khayma and burned it. Another Qasimi stronghold at Lingeh (on the Persian coast) was stormed next and finally a joint British-Muscati fleet captured Shinas (on Oman's Batina coast) following a fierce battle. Despite these successes, the power of the Qawasim was broken only temporarily.

By 1812, the Qasimi fleet had been restored and soon their dhows reappeared off the coast of India. British resolve to act forcefully against the renewed threat was stiffened by the success of Egypt's Muhammad 'Ali in defeating the Al Sa'ud, presumed to be backing their fellow Wahhabis. After extensive planning and a suitable respite in internal Indian troubles, a second expedition, again relying on Muscat's help, stormed Ra's al-Khayma in 1819-1820. The town was captured after



considerable loss of Arab life while smaller parties were sent out to gain the surrender of neighboring ports and towns. The small garrison left behind when the fleet withdrew and then transferred to Qishm Island, was responsible for triggering a third expedition.

Ordered to investigate reports of piracy by the Bani Bu 'Ali tribe (residing at the southeastern corner of the Omani coast), a ship from the Qishm garrison was attacked by the tribe. The attempt of the garrison's commander, Captain T. Perronet Thompson, to punish the Bani Bu 'Ali ended in catastrophe when the tribe counter-attacked and nearly massacred Thompson's forces. A new punitive expedition was sent out from India. In early 1821, in combination with Muscati troops, the Bani Bu 'Ali were defeated in a fierce battle, their main settlements razed and their leaders imprisoned in Muscat. Subsequently, Thompson was court-martialed for unnecessarily involving Britain in a campaign in the interior of Arabia and publicly reprimanded.

The inconclusive result of these expeditions eventually led the Government of Bombay to the realization that a *modus vivendi* with the "pirates" was necessary. The first step in the erection of a productive and durable trucial system appeared in the aftermath of the 1820 siege of Ra's al-Khayma.<sup>4</sup> The "General Treaty of Peace with the Arab Tribes," which the area's *shaykhs* were forced to sign, prohibited piracy and plunder by sea and required their vessels to fly a recognized flag and be registered. In British eyes, the "Pirate Coast" thereupon became the "Trucial Coast" (or "Trucial Oman"), a sobriquet it was to retain until independence in 1971. Enforcement was provided at first by the shortlived base on Qishm Island. Regular Bombay Marine patrols in the Gulf, introduced shortly thereafter, were able to deal effectively with the occasional attacks perpetrated over the next few decades.

One limitation of the 1820 treaty was its failure to regulate the conduct of warfare on sea amongst the Arab tribes, which tended to disrupt the fishing and pearling seasons with some regularity. The British were able finally to arrange a maritime truce in 1835 which forbade all hostilities by sea for a period of six months, with the understanding that Britain would not interfere with wars on land. This proved so successful that it was renewed regularly until 1843 when a ten-years' truce was signed. Upon its expiry, Britain induced the *shaykhs* to accept a "Treaty of Perpetual Maritime Peace." By its terms, the British government assumed responsibility for enforcing the treaty; aggression by any signatory upon another was to be met not with retaliation but instead referred to the British authorities.

The foundation had been laid for Britain's legal and formal predominance in the Gulf. But permanent responsibility entailed permanent *in situ* supervision and so official representatives gradually were stationed around the Gulf. In final form, British administration there formed one part of the Government of India's farflung residency system, with a Political Resident in the Persian Gulf (PRPG) headquartered at Bushire (on the Persian coast) until 1947 and thereafter at Manama, Bahrain. The Resident's subordinates at one time or another included Political Agents, Political

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<sup>4</sup>The texts of the relevant treaties and discussion of their background are to be found in C.U. Aitchison, comp., *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries* (5th ed.; Delhi: Manager of Publications, Government of India, 1933), Vol. 11.

Officers, and Native Agents, stationed at Muscat, Bandar ‘Abbas, Sharjah, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Doha, Manama, Kuwait, and Basra (known until 1914 as Turkish Arabia).<sup>5</sup>

In addition to establishing maritime peace, the British pursued two other ancillary interests during the mid-nineteenth century. One involved the restriction and then the elimination of the slave trade. By 1848, Britain had succeeded in pressuring most of the Gulf's rulers to declare illegal the carriage of African slaves in Gulf vessels and later in the century British legations routinely manumitted slaves upon request. Communications constituted the other major interest during this period. The Gulf had served as a principal mail route between London and India until superseded in 1833 by a Red Sea alternative. Direct and reliable postal connections with the Gulf were restored only in 1862 with the introduction of a Bombay-to-Basra steamer mail service, but the connection to Europe was never renewed. More important for imperial purposes was the laying of a submarine-and-coastal telegraph cable along the Gulf in 1864. This link enabled the Indo-European Telegraph Department (later Cable & Wireless) to provide an essential and profitable service until undercut by wireless competition in the 1920s.<sup>6</sup>

British supervision of Gulf maritime activities and the development of communications lines through the area served to strengthen the British stake in what was seen increasingly as a region of some geopolitical importance. Lord Curzon, the Viceroy of India, categorized British interests in the Gulf as being commercial, political, strategical, and telegraphic.<sup>7</sup> As one scholar has put it, the Gulf was not a "British lake" at this time but "an international waterway of steadily increasing importance in an age of imperial rivalries, diplomatic flux, and sizable dangers to international peace of mind in the cycles of decay and revolutionary activity in the Ottoman and Persian states."<sup>8</sup> Between the middle of the nineteenth century and World War I, Britain consistently worked to consolidate its position in the Gulf and to deny access to other non-regional powers. Principal threats were seen as emanating from France, Russia, Germany, and the Ottoman Empire.

There is a long history of French intrigue in Oman, lapsing through much of the nineteenth century but revived with the 1894 appointment of a French consul in Muscat. On various occasions

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<sup>5</sup>J.B. Kelly discusses the evolution of this administrative network in "The Legal and Historical Basis of the British Position in the Persian Gulf," in *St. Antony's Papers*, No. 4 (London: Chatto & Windus; New York: Praeger, 1959; Middle Eastern Affairs, No. 1), pp. 119-140.

<sup>6</sup>On the slave trade see Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, Appendix L, "The Slave Trade in the Persian Gulf Region," pp. 2475-2516. On communications, see Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, Appendices J, "The Telegraphs of the Persian Gulf in Their Relation to the Telegraph Systems of Persia and Turkey," pp. 2400-2438, and K, "Mail Communications and the Indian Post Office in the Persian Gulf," pp. 2439-2474; and Christina Phelps Harris, "The Persian Gulf Submarine Telegraph of 1864," *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 135, Pt. 2 (June 1969), pp. 169-190.

<sup>7</sup>Standish, "British Maritime Policy," p. 345.

<sup>8</sup>Busch, *Britain and the Persian Gulf*, pp. 1-2. Busch quotes Bismarck to similar effect: "In international affairs, there are three wasps' nests besides the Balkans: Morocco and the Mediterranean, the Persian Gulf, and the American Monroe Doctrine; God grant that we may never fall into one of them." *Ibid.*, p. 1. The growing importance of the Gulf, especially as a backup to the all-water Suez route, was noted by the geopolitical theorist, Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan, in his "The Persian Gulf and International Relations," *National and English Review*, Vol. 40 (Sept. 1902), pp. 27-45. Incidentally, Mahan is given credit for coining the term "Middle East" on p. 39 of this article.

in the next twenty years, France used Oman and its agent there as a springboard for mischief against British interests in Oman, the Gulf, and even the North West Frontier of India. Russia too had been a longtime foe in the region, particularly in the competition for influence over Persia. British suspicions were heightened towards the end of the century by tsarist expansionism in Asia and fears that Russia, in competition with Germany, would seek a port in the Gulf to connect with a railway. Both of these rivalries, however, were settled by diplomatic action in the years before World War I. This was not the case with Britain's other two rivals.

The spearhead of the German assault lay with the establishment of various commercial interests in the Gulf, but the real threat was posed by the squabbling over the location of the eastern terminus of the German-built Ottoman railway. The issue was complicated by questions over the status of Kuwait, the site for the terminus favored by Berlin and Istanbul. Britain adamantly opposed the unambiguous incorporation of Kuwait into Ottoman territory as well as the construction of a railhead and port that would threaten British strategic interests. Following years of negotiation, an Anglo-Ottoman understanding to terminate the line in Basra was finally reached in 1913 but the Anglo-German agreement had not been ratified by the time the two European powers found themselves at war.

The railway formed only one aspect of the protracted Anglo-Turkish rivalry. The Ottoman Empire, long sovereign in Mesopotamia, had become increasingly expansionist in the mid-nineteenth century. As early as the 1860s, claim was laid to Kuwait, Bahrain, central Arabia, Qatar, and even the Trucial Coast. Al-Hasa (now part of Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province) was occupied in 1871 and became a permanent, if unruly, possession until its recapture by the Al Sa'ud in 1911. An attack on Qatar in 1892 ended in disaster and the effort a decade later to introduce Ottoman officials there was aborted by British representations in Istanbul. Ottoman claims to Qatar and parts of Abu Dhabi were eliminated only by the "Blue Line" Agreement of 1913. The status of Kuwait was considerably more ambiguous and was complicated by the railway question. Tentative agreement on recognition of nominal Turkish sovereignty over the shaykhdom in return for its autonomy was mooted by the outbreak of World War I and Kuwait was subsequently regarded as an independent state under British protection.

The war enabled Britain to take control finally of Mesopotamia. This region long had been a center of British interests for such reasons as several centuries of British commerce in Mesopotamia, a tradition of political representation there since 1728, the establishment of postal service in 1862 through the (British) Euphrates and Tigris Steam Navigation Company, the increasing desire to protect the northern reaches of the Gulf from European ambitions and Ottoman expansionism, the perceived need for control over any eventual railhead on the Gulf, and lastly the desire to participate in and control oil exploration. An expeditionary force of the Indian Army landed in Ottoman territory almost immediately upon declaration of war and Marched into Basra a few weeks later. But Baghdad was not captured until 1917, after the catastrophic defeat at Kut, and Mosul was not entered until after the armistice had been signed. In the end, though, France, Britain's

remaining European rival in the Middle East, bowed to Britain's claims in Mesopotamia and existing control was ratified through the granting of the League of Nations mandate for Iraq to Britain.<sup>9</sup>

By the time hostilities were terminated in 1918, the Gulf had very nearly become a "British lake" in truth. Through a series of formal arrangements in the 1890s, prompted by the "forward policy" of Lord Curzon (Viceroy of India), Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and the Trucial Shaykhs had legally accepted British protection and advice. Similar terms had brought the nominally independent sultanate in Muscat within the British sphere of influence. Iraq had become a British mandate. Only Persia and the Al Sa'ud retained any degree of real independence, yet Britain exercised considerable leverage in Tehran and Sa'udi authority was confined largely to its Najdi base. With British supremacy in the Gulf finally and unquestionably assured, the thrust of British policy increasingly turned toward involvement in local politics to protect the growing list of accrued interests.

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<sup>9</sup>On the establishment of British control over Iraq, see A.J. Barker, *The Neglected War: Mesopotamia, 1914-1918* (London: Faber & Faber, 1967); Edith and E.F. Penrose, *Iraq: International Relations and National Development* (London: Ernest Benn; Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1978); and V.H. Rothwell, "Mesopotamia in British War Aims, 1914-1918," *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (1970), pp. 273-294.