

The British Withdrawal from the Arabian Gulf and Saudi Arabia's Attempts to Establish a Gulf Deterrent Force, 1971-1991

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Abstract:

After occupying the region since around 1616, the British decided in 1968 to completely withdraw from the Arabian Gulf before the end of 1971. It was a move that created many regional and international crises and increasingly continued to threaten the security of the Middle East. Since then, there has been an outbreak of confrontations and armed conflicts over the last 50-plus years that have deprived the region of stability, including the first Gulf War between Iraq and Iran in 1980 and the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and attempted ouster of its princely regime in August 1990. Indeed, the heavy burdens left by the invasion are still present today.

Because the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is the largest among the Arab Gulf states and has economic and human potential, it was natural for the Kingdom to take the lead in working and striving to preserve the security of the Arab Gulf and its states.

This study comes from the security concerns and fears that pervaded the Arabian Gulf and the attempts to fill the emerging void that the British withdrawal from the region left behind. As a result, it will examine the reasons behind the

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withdrawal and clarify the role of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in trying to ensure the security of the Arab Gulf. Along with the British withdrawal, the study focuses on why Saudi Arabia believes it has the qualifications to protect the Gulf region and its surrounding countries, how its role as protector ensures better relations with those countries, along with the benefits gained from its deepening of the security and stability of the Arab Gulf.

Keywords: British Withdrawal, Arabian Gulf, Void, Gulf Deterrent Force.

Etymology

The Gulf region constitutes one of the most important regions of the ancient world and has historically been called by a number of names, including “the Land of God” and “the Land of the Sea”. These names were mentioned in ancient Assyrian texts, and “the Land of the Sea” came about as the result of the image of the sea (or mirage) that appeared on the desert sands. The area was also known as “the Lower Sea” and as “*tarmrtow*” meaning “the Bitter Sea”. Texts from the year 64 BC call it “*strabon*” or “the Red Sea”. Later, the Ottomans called it the “Gulf of Basra”. In contrast, the locals called it different names, including special and broad names like “the Gulf of Aden”, “the Gulf of Oman”, and “the Gulf of Bahrain”. Starting in 324 BC, Iranian Persians referred to it as the Persian Gulf, which is what it was known as when it was first discovered by Alexander the Great. (Al-Feel, 1988, 47). However, the British commissioner in Bahrain, Sir Charles Belgrave changed its name to “the Arabian Gulf” in the 1930s after a disagreement between Britain and Iran over the ownership of the islands known as the Greater and the Lesser Tunbs, Abu Musa Island, and modern-day Bahrain. (Al-Hiti, 2004, 3).

Location

The center of the Arabian Gulf region lies geographically at 26° north latitude and 52° east longitude and extends 500 miles from Ras Musandam on the Gulf of Oman to Shatt al-Arab in the Iraqi city of Basra. The Arabian Gulf itself is about two hundred miles long, and it is described as a semi-closed sea because of its geological formation and the large number of islands that are spread over it. There is only one exit for it. Today, Iran is called the country that controls the traffic from it. (Al-Ajmi, 2011, 45-48).

The Importance of the Arab Gulf Region

The importance of the Arab Gulf region lies in its location in the southwest of the continent of Asia. Moreover, the countries that make up the region possess large amounts of oil and gas. Perhaps even more related to this study, however, is the fact that the Arab Gulf states of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain, the Emirates, and Qatar form strategic locations that connect the East to the West. Indeed, the area is made up of five major geographic locations in the world—the Arabian Peninsula, the Arab Mashreq, and the Arab world—and connects Asia and Africa, the Middle East, and the Indian Ocean, thus allowing control of the sea and air transportation routes between Europe, the Middle East, Western Asia, and South East Asia, as well as its proximity to the Russian border, the heir of the former Soviet Union, and the second greatest power in the world (Al-Hiti, 2000, 9).

Still, the strategic importance of the Arab Gulf region does not depend on its geographical location or its oil quantities, but rather on its civilizational characteristics that, historically, made it the focus of attention and greed of countries that have had global sovereignty in it. That is, it is the heart of the Middle East from which countries can cross the Euphrates River to reach the Mediterranean Sea, travel the Tigris River to Turkey and further to the Black Sea, and through Iran to the Caspian Sea, Afghanistan, and Russia.(Tanireh,1986,82).

Commercial Importance

By virtue of the climatic conditions that prevail in the Arabian Peninsula, trade in the Arabian Gulf region has historically been centered on the trade of pearls, frankincense, slaves, and primitive agriculture. These economic activities were distributed over each region. However, over time, it began to change after the discovery of oil, which increased the region's strategic importance and made its ports crowded with giant ships and steamers for carrying oil to global markets that the world needed to sustain its factories and maintain its industrial production(Al-Saeed,2000,73).

International Ambitions in the Arab Gulf

The Arab Gulf region was exposed to European ambitions in the late 15th and early 16th centuries that accompanied the geographical discoveries initiated by the Portuguese. Aspiring to put the Arab Gulf region under their control, the Arab Gulf was of great strategic importance to the Portuguese, enabling them to gain an advantage over their Spanish competitors.

The beginnings of the Portuguese presence in the Arabian Gulf region were concentrated thanks to the military activity of Portuguese General Alfonso de Albuquerque around the Strait of Hormuz, the Yemeni island of Sumatra located on the Red Sea, and the Omani island of Socotra to tighten control over the movement of ships that were passing through these waterways at the time(Al-Akkad,1974,67).

During their presence in the Arabian Gulf, the Portuguese succeeded by rejecting a strict security system that closely monitored trade movement, a system known as (Cartaz), meaning the marine license, which was the entry and exit to the Arabian Gulf only after obtaining it. With the continued Portuguese presence in the Gulf, the Portuguese developed a navigation system, and sailing in the Gulf shifted to a new method represented in the system that was called (The convoy system Cafilas), which means that ships were prohibited from sailing except collectively with the escort of Portuguese warships; To prevent Arab merchant ships from sailing to ports not under Portuguese control(Al Khalifa,1990,519).

As Portugal was the first global country to realize the impact of economic power on building military power, it built many fortresses on the Gulf Islands and shores in order to build its strength and control over the Arabian Gulf and to defend its interests without having to enter the heart of the desert and manage the whole Middle East with thousands of men(Al-Ajmi,2011,66).

Despite the Portuguese's power in the Persian Gulf, however, they often paid a heavy price for it. For example, when they thought of penetrating the Persian Gulf in 1513, they attacked and occupied the Yemeni city of Aden. Afterwards, they tried to approach the shores of Qumran. However, this time the Arabs were alerted to the plans of the Portuguese and lay in wait. Arab tribes in Harfad, Qalhath, Muscat, Sohar, and Bahrain attacked and subjugated the Portuguese. Following successive battles that began in 1522, the Arabs took back control of the Arab Gulf and thus Arab trade, finally expelling them and ending Portuguese control of the region once and for all in 1529(Al-Tikriti,1965,47).

Still, the Portuguese threat was not the only global European threat. The end of the sixteenth century witnessed the arrival of the Dutch who had come to the area in 1625, also with occupation and control in mind. This coincided not only with the wars with the Portuguese but also with the arrival of some English adventurers to the Bahraini port of Bandar Abbas. By 1645, the Dutch had managed to seize the Persian port of Qeshm. By 1680, able to concentrate and strengthen their presence, the Dutch began building bases in Basra, Iraq, and the port of Bandar Abbas in Bahrain, thus imposing their will over the Persian silk trade. When the Persians showed their inaction and inability to resist the Dutch, the Arabs took it upon themselves to protect the Persian Gulf from the Dutch presence. The same situation was true for the British when they took control of the Persian Gulf. Nevertheless, control over the Persian Gulf made the Gulf region a scene of Western international conflict.

By the late nineteenth century, even Germany tried to gain some control of the Persian Gulf, though, albeit through a different method than their European counterparts before. Germany attempted to obtain the Persian Gulf through an Ottoman concession that would enable it to extend a railway, linking Berlin to Baghdad and eventually Kuwait through the Balkans and Anatolia region(Sharif,1972,1,79).

To proceed with its project, which also just happened to facilitate the transfer of its military forces from Europe to the Arabian Gulf (considered by the Germans to be the main gateway to India), Germany was finally granted the concession by the Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid in 1902 who gave them an area estimated at 40 thousand km² in which to explore for oil. However, to prevent Germany from reaching the Persian Gulf, the British signed an agreement with the Sheikhs of Kuwait in 1899 to

build a military base in Kuwait, thus preventing Kuwait from being the last station of the German-planned railway(Sharif,2019,81-85).

As for France, its strategy was to prevent Britain from controlling India, but this strategy failed after Britain took possession of the Mauritius Islands in 1811 as a result of France's weak navy(Sinno,1989,43).

Britain and the Arab Gulf Security

Britain had headed to the Arabian Gulf to expand its trade with the East, starting around the start of the 17th century when it licensed the East India Company to help it exchange wool with the Persians for their silk and open the ports of Shiraz, Isfahan, and Bandar Abbas to English traders.(Al-Najjar,1978,102).

In the Arabian Gulf region, Britain imposed a violent strategy on the Arabs of the Gulf that was based on subjugating them by force and signing treaties to secure their existence among them. Among the two methods, the former is best exemplified in 1805 when Britain sent a military campaign to subjugate the Arabs of Al-Qawasim (Al-Qasimi) living in Qeshm on the Persian coast. Another military campaign in 1809 targeted Ras al-Khaimah to subjugate the local Arab forces there.

Though it had signed an agreement with the Imam of Qeshm in 1798 that regulated the relationship between them, just over a century later it would devote itself to possessing the rest of the Arabian Gulf regions after the First World War and the retreat of the Ottoman Empire. It would occupy the region through agreements it signed with Arab royalty, starting in 1913 with Sheikh Mubarak Al-Kabeer, the Sheikh of Kuwait; in 1914 with the Sheikh of Bahrain; in 1915 with the Darin agreement signed with the Saudis; in 1916 with Qatar and with the sheiks of the Trucial Coast (though none of these sheiks knew the boundaries of their regions).(Al-Ajmi,2011,82).

After the defeat of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I, the British control of the Arabian Gulf required the supervision of twelve entities that were in the Arabian Gulf and the expulsion of all other European powers competing with them for the Arabian Gulf. Thus, the Arabian Gulf became a clear lake for the British to rule over and secure from every aspirant with complete comfort and calm.

The calm continued in the Persian Gulf until the outbreak of World War II in 1939, when the Persian Gulf had no military bases, warships, or non-English airfields scattered on the lands or coasts of Dubai Creek, Kuwait, Bahrain, Bandar Abbas, and Qeshm on its lands or coasts.(Al-Naqeeb,1997,3,41).

The British Withdrawal from the Arab Gulf

Starting with the signing of the first agreement in the Gulf with the Imam of Muscat in 1798, Britain had controlled the Persian Gulf for more than 160 years. It ruled with such strong control that enabled it to obtain concessions for its companies to search for oil and benefit from the financial return behind it. However, this power began to collapse after the military operations of the Second World War. Additionally, the rise to global power of new countries such as the United States of America and its capitalist system, and the Soviet Union and its socialist system signaled the beginning of the end of Britain's rule over the Arabian Gulf. India, its largest colony, gained its independence in 1947. Then came Egypt's independence in 1954, and the failure of Britain's aggression along with France and Israel against Egypt in 1956. Next, there was the loss of Jordan and the exit of British forces from there in 1957. Finally, due to the costly financial obligations to its treasury including its debt owed to the United States after World War II, there came the erosion of British military bases not only in the Arab Gulf but in the entire Middle East (Al-Attar, 2007, 300).

In the aftermath of the Second World War and the consequences of things in Britain, British politicians and the military thought to reduce the costs of their presence in the Middle East by limiting the number of their troops and military bases there and asked the United States of America to use those bases instead. They include army and airbases located in Muharraq Bahrain; Oman's island of Masirah in the Arabian Sea; and military bases in Sharjah in what is now the United Arab Emirates; Juffair in Bahrain; and Dukhan in Qatar. (Halliday, 1975, 21).

Under these circumstances, Britain began to face a revolutionary movement in the Gulf that demanded the liberation of its countries and was supported by Egypt, Syria, Aden, and Iraq. This was in addition to the violence it faced in Bahrain in 1956, which actually prompted it to hastily rethink its presence in the Arabian Gulf (Halliday, 1975, 21).

In October 1964, the British government informed U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson of its inability to fulfill its security and financial obligations in the areas of the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Suez and that it was considering withdrawing from both the Aden Protectorate as well as the other Gulf Protectorates no later than the end of 1967.

In 1966, the British government issued a white paper in which it announced that it would stop foreign military operations without the participation of its allies, that it would not sign any defense treaty without a partner that possesses a real military capacity, and that it would fulfill the desire of any friendly country that asked it to close its military bases.

However, this statement, contained in the Al-Abyad book, faced local English opposition that coincided with America's opposition to the British plans. As a result, British Defense Minister Dennis Healey rushed to announce again, in contrast to previous statements, that the British government would increase the size of its forces in the Gulf to protect oil sources, justifying his new statement by saying that British withdrawal might lead to a threat to the security of the Gulf and result in risks that could lead to a long struggle with oil-greedy powers-that-be in the Arabian Gulf(Salameh,1980,1,582).

Still, under pressure from the financial difficulties that his country was then facing, the Minister of Defense issued another white paper in 1967 once again saying that Britain would be withdrawing from the Persian Gulf, starting with the reduction of their military forces in Suez. Moreover, the Prime Minister announced before the House of Commons his country's intention to withdraw its military and military bases from all parts of the Middle East, setting a new date of no later than the end of 1971, leaving the British Labor government confused(Saudi,1979,27).

The British decision to withdraw from the Arab Gulf region had both local and global reasons. Globalization, in addition to its financial conditions, were some of the reasons for these new trends of Britain which, at that stage, sought to promote developments that would allow its citizens to live in peace and grant the people of the countries that they colonized for long periods of time to live without the fear of external forces occupying them once again. The other reason was Britain's desire to change its traditional strategy which had always been based on direct military colonialism and turn it into a new pattern in line with the new norms that were based on winning the love of Arabs and allowing them to establish friendly political systems that preserved Britain's economic interests without the need to occupy their countries or even set up expensive military bases in them.(Bin Salman,2003,37).

In addition to the new British strategies, the aspirations of the Arab Gulf emirates for independence helped prevent Britain from declaring its intentions and cooperating with it in preserving its interests, especially since their influence was not in the best interest of the sheiks and princes of the Gulf, nor was even in the best interest of the British. The people of the Emirates were now looking toward their Kuwaiti brethren, who won their independence in 1961, an alternative goal of all the inhabitants of the Gulf. Therefore, the Emiratis pushed their intellectuals towards the struggle for reform which led to the emergence of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman in the Arabian Peninsula – a group that published its first statements on November 10, 1968. In these statements, they called for the people of the Gulf to revolt against imperialism and the Gulf reactionary forces, inciting people to get rid of colonialism and establish their own regimes.

Alongside this revolutionary organization, the Gulf witnessed a remarkable activity by the Arab Nationalist Movement which issued its first statement on March 18, 1968. In their speeches, they stated that they were on the path toward liberation and their battle call was clear and frank: strike colonialism, threaten its reactionary bases, and gain freedom(Al-Zaidi,2003,310).

In August 1970, Sir William Luce arrived in the Arabian Gulf as a British envoy to meet with the princes of the Gulf sheikdoms to ask their opinion on the future of the Arabian Gulf after the British withdrawal. The British government believed that the security and safety of the Gulf were mutually agreeable. Upon his return to Britain, he informed the British government that the Persian Gulf was an empty and unstable force. Furthermore, he encouraged withdrawal from the area because he felt that the residents of the region demanded it. He added that he saw no reason for Britain to stay, whether permanently or temporarily, past 1971(Hamdan,1989,77).

His advice to the British government was based on his fear of the strong opposition of inhabitants of the Persian Gulf to the British remaining and the consequences of staying would be harmful to British interests and might even prevent it from engaging with the Persian Gulf in diplomatic relations that would preserve its interests there. Therefore, the British government sent Luce back to the Gulf again in November 1970, and upon his return, he confirmed what he had presented in the report of his first visit. Moreover, during his visit, he received explicit advice on the necessity of speeding up the implementation of the British withdrawal without conditions.(Al-Attar,2007,306-308).

When the British government saw that withdrawal had become an inevitable fact, it began to adopt its own viewpoint based on preserving the security of the Gulf, especially for Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Iraq; however, this view soon began to fade after Iraq embrace of the anti-Western axis became clear. Now it seemed as if the two allies of the West – Iran and Saudi Arabia – were the ones upon which responsibilities for the security of the Gulf were placed after the expected British withdrawal. However, this viewpoint also found opposition from some British politicians who feared the escalation of various conflicts ranging from tribalism, sectarianism, and ethnicity to chaos that might have lead to a halt in the flow of oil and thus, the financial income of the Gulf emirates. This, in turn, would expose its residents to poverty and misery, and thus become a target for other national organizations and Marxism while also paving the way for the Soviet Union to enter the region(Sirriyeh,1984,17) to prevent conflicts that would lead to an arms race between Iran and the sheiks of the Arab Gulf (Delcord,1985,56).

Finally, if we want to analyze the reasons for the British withdrawal from the Arabian Gulf, in addition to the reasons we mentioned, there are political and military circumstances related to the surrounding Arab regions that imposed this approach on Britain, replacing its direct military presence with new treaties that it signed with the sheikhs of the region before the withdrawal, which guarantee its interests. But most of all, Britain has become concerned about the safety of its forces and interests, and realizes that its method of military presence is useless, especially after its failure to retain Egypt and then the failure of the tripartite aggression against Egypt in 1956. In addition to the Arab revolutions that overthrew some of its allies, as happened in Iraq in 1958, and the violent armed clashes in Oman, Yemen, and Syria, as well as the deterioration of Britain's financial conditions after the war. Finally, Britain's desire to enter the European Common Market was called for during the reconstruction phase and after World War II.

The Security of the Arabian Gulf between Iran and Saudi Arabia

As we previously mentioned, Britain had paved the way for Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq to assume responsibility for the security of the Gulf region after its withdrawal. However, because Iraq had taken an anti-Western stance, only the West's two allies – Iran and Saudi Arabia – became qualified to maintain the security of the region.

When talking about the role of Iran and Saudi Arabia, we must point out first that the Arabian Gulf is the focus of our attention because it forms a water barrier between the Arabian Peninsula and Iran. It is a natural extension of the Indian Ocean, which is connected to it through the Strait of Hormuz, one of the eleven most important water straits in the world (Delcord, 1985, 56).

The other thing that must be re-emphasized is that the Persian Gulf has historically been subject to five successive powers since the sixteenth century. First, it belonged to the Persian Empire and its heir, Iran, which remained in control of it for a whole century and whose control ended in the seventh century when Muslims finished off the Persian Sassanid state during the Islamic conquests. The Gulf was then later subjected to the Portuguese and the English in competition with the Dutch and the French before the Ottomans took control of it. Today, however, it is America and its English and French allies that control the Gulf. (Al-Ramadani, 1988, 38).

At the end of British colonialism, the British, led by Lord Curzon, considered that the security of the Gulf was a moving issue and not a fixed issue. He posited that the Gulf was like a chess board and that one of the players had to take the initiative to make an appropriate move to respond to the opponent's movement; therefore, Britain took control of the Gulf ports that were open at the time on the Indian Ocean and kept them for the longest period. When the importance of the Gulf increased as a

waterway for trade with India, Britain confronted all local and foreign forces and fought the slave and arms trades based on the role that the political agents played with the local leaders at times. At other times the British used force and brutality to quell any movement against it; however, even they eventually saw this brutality as futile. After all, other powers that were looking to control the Gulf such as America, for example, considered Gulf security as providing protection for oil companies; ensuring the arrival of oil revenues by securing oil sources, transporting pipelines, and ships; and preventing the Soviet Union from obtaining any oil sources in and around the Persian Gulf(Al-sayed,2008,29).

As for the competing Soviet view of the United States of America and Europe after World War II, they felt that military bases should be given to the countries in which they were built and not be controlled by the US or any European country(Al-sayed,2008,29).

At the same time, when the world was preoccupied with the issue of filling the vacuum that Britain would leave among the great powers, Iran took on the responsibility of overseeing the Gulf and took control of the most important strait for entering and exiting the Arabian Gulf region. Moreover, Iran's ideas about the security of the Gulf differ from Western concepts, evidenced by Iran declaring that interference in the Gulf is a security threat itself to the entire region; therefore, during the reign of Shah Muhammad Farah Reza Pahlavi, Iran established itself as the region's judge and policeman. They called on the Arab and Gulf countries and others to get closer to them; however, there was a condition that Arabism would be excluded and the assertion that the Gulf is Persian. As a result, they began describing the Gulf countries as the countries bordering the Persian Gulf. Moreover, Iran also began to market the idea that the security of the Gulf is also linked to the countries of Central Asia with which it had historical relations. Eventually, they would market to the whole world the idea that the Gulf is Persian, and its name is linked to its size as a country(Al-Ramadani,1988,42).

Based on this strategic security concept of rejecting foreign interference and emphasizing that it was, indeed, the *Persian* Gulf, Iran suggested that the Gulf countries establish some kind of security protocol that would free the Gulf region from any arrangements with external powers. It believed that it was possible to work on creating an organization under the name of the Regional Defense Organization, the Gulf Alliance, or the Gulf Security Belt to ensure the sovereignty of the Gulf states over their territories(Al-Ramadani,1988,44).

However, this Iranian perception, which did not hide its goals of controlling the Arab Gulf, was met by another perception from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia which responded to the Iranian project by linking its security with the security of the Arab Gulf countries, Indeed, Saudi Arabia was keen on

arranging its priorities and interests/ It worked to strengthen its regional role in the Arab Gulf in which it saw that collective Arab security cannot be achieved unless internal security and stability is achieved first. Saudi also sought the assistance of friends when necessary until some Gulf states asserted themselves by working on internal societies, developing their own way of life and changing the rates of their scientific progress with the idea that collective security for the six Arab Gulf states was better than a single national security for each state. However, Prince Nayef bin Abdulaziz announced that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was ready to maintain the security of the Arab Gulf and provide all assistance in any way for the Arab Gulf states to maintain the security and stability of each of the Arab Gulf states(Bin Sultan,1989,139).

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's awareness of the role that Iran was trying to impose on the Gulf had placed it in a difficult circumstance given its size and the strength of its economy, so it did not delay in declaring its readiness to lead the Arabian Gulf and highlighted the dangers of the internal regional security threat from regional powers close to it. The Saudis believed these dangers came specifically from the Iranians who were demanding that the Gulf be considered a regional water. Furthermore, the Iranians were trying to send a message to the West that it could rely on Iran to protect their strategic interests in the region, however, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia prevented this by taking several steps to deprive Iran of playing this role. As a result, the Saudis made an agreement to share their revenues and invest in joint oil fields with Bahrain, the Emirates, and Kuwait(Al-Hazmi,2005,30).

In view of the importance of keeping Iran away from the Gulf, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia employed its strong economy to build strong positions in support of its policies that served its goals related to Gulf security and keeping Iraq out of its security project. Moreover, Saudi Arabia was active in each of the conflicts that the Gulf witnessed, whether they were Western conflicts or local forces in the Arab Gulf. Additionally, it was also a previous presence and a representative of other Gulf powers on the world stage as it participated in the establishment of the United Nations in San Francisco in the United States of America in 1945. It was also among the first countries to sign the Charter of the League of Arab States in 1945. Since 1972, it has also hosted the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the Islamic Organization for Cooperation and Development based in the city of Jeddah. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia has provided support and financial backing to all organizations and bodies that support Arab and Islamic culture and provided generous support for the Palestinian cause, and the poor Arab and Islamic countries like Algeria. All this has made it a fundamental and pivotal country not only in the region but also in the international community. In addition to all that, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was an honest mediator who helped reconcile the differences between the

supporters of the Sultanate and the supporters of the establishment of the Imamate in Oman. It has also been a mediator of global political issues such as the conflicts between the Philippine Moro Liberation Front and the Philippine government and between the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the Palestine Liberation Organization during the 1970s. Saudi Arabia was even responsible for hosting the Lebanese parties until they reached an agreement between them known as the Taif Agreement that still governs and preserves their stability to this day(Al-Suwaidi, 1999,22-23).

The consolidation of the Saudi role in the Gulf region, preservation of its regional position, and fear for the security of the Gulf constitute the permanent motive for the Saudis to shoulder the responsibility of securing the Gulf. As a result, since the early eighties, it has taken the initiative to put forward a new initiative that has preserved the security of the Gulf, secured permanent advice among its leaders, and opened its borders to its residents with the establishment of a body that brings together the Gulf states. The announcement for this project took place at the Saudi Arab Summit on May 26, 1981, when the Gulf Cooperation Council was also established, and whose secretariat was hosted by the Saudi capital, Riyadh(Bin Sultan,1991.78).

For the success and continuity of its role, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has strengthened the military defense components, and made great efforts to raise the level of its defense capabilities by increasing spending on armaments to the extent that its spending increased to 207 times than it was during the sixties of the last century, which decided in the middle of Britain to withdraw from the Arabian Gulf, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has provided its forces with the latest equipment, strategic weapons and early warning devices to push back the risks and threats facing the security of the Gulf since the outbreak of the first Gulf War between Iraq and Iran, because the war was raging between two regimes of different faith in the event of the victory of one of its parties, and both of them aspired to expand at the expense of the Arab Gulf states, it formed a concern for the Saudis and other Gulf states, as Iran and its Islamic sectarian Twelver system was seeking to export the revolution to the Arab environment, as well as the Arab nationalist system whose curriculum is based on the Arab unity aspired to expand at their expense, which is why the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has stored in its territory a large arsenal of weapons, missiles and modern aircraft to remain the backbone of the security of the Arab Gulf(Al-Hazmi,2005,83).

One of the most prominent motives for the establishment of the Saudi-led Gulf Cooperation Council was the need to achieve Gulf security by depending on the self-defense capabilities of the Council to both respond to Iranian threats and confront the Soviet threat. The repercussions of the Iran-

Iraq war, the Statute of the Cooperation Council, which was approved during the period from 25-26 June 1981 in Abu Dhabi, was built based on cooperation, development of relations, achieving consistency, integration, and interdependence among the GCC states, and emphasizing their security which hoped to expel foreign war fleets and military bases from the Arabian Gulf (Al-Suwaidi, 1999, 23).

After the establishment of the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia tried to stop the Iran-Iraq war but without going into any military security arrangements so that it would not be understood that the Gulf Cooperation Council was a military alliance directed to any of the two conflicting countries (Iraq and Iran). During the second summit of the leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council that was held in Riyadh on November 10 and 11, 1981, the Gulf leaders preferred to focus on building the Gulf economy. Therefore, they limited their meeting to choosing the city of Riyadh as the seat of the General Secretariat of the Council in appreciation of the role played by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for taking the initiative to build self-defense capabilities shared by the Gulf Cooperation Council countries. The GCC also left it to the defense ministers who met on January 26, 1982, the task of discussing military cooperation.

As for the most important step concerning the military, at the Third Gulf Summit held in Manama, Bahrain, November 9 to 11, 1983, the GCC approved the recommendations of the Gulf defense ministers. These recommendations included the directive to build a reliable Gulf force to protect the security of the Gulf; strengthen the independence of its countries; and maintain their stability. Most importantly, however, the third Gulf summit (Manama Summit) ordered the security cooperation agreement recommended by the interior ministers of the Arab Gulf states. (General Secretariat of the Cooperation Council, 1994).

Practically speaking, during the fourth session of the Gulf Summit, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia announced to the world that a Gulf military force had been formed and called it the Peninsula Shield Forces. The world then witnessed joint maneuvers held by the Arab Gulf states in Abu Dhabi and an aerial exercise that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia hosted from November 11 to 29, 1983. In October 1984 the Saudi desert hosted the second Peninsula Shield forces exercise. However, despite the progress of the Military Coordination Council at the level of the joint ground and air war operations of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, we note the absence of a strategy to protect the Gulf shores and territorial waters, even though all the GCC countries are maritime states. Indeed, there was a time in 1648 when Oman had fleets of ships that controlled not only the Gulf but also the whole Indian Ocean with naval power that even France and England feared (Al-Sayed, 2008, 250).

The meetings of the Gulf defense ministers and chiefs of staff continued, prompted by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Saudi was paying close attention to the military side of the Gulf because of its desire to preserve the security of the Arab Gulf and not leave it in Iran's hands. Their meetings resulted in the continuation of mobilization, training, and conducting joint military exercises, whether at the level of the entire Gulf Cooperation Council or even at the bilateral level, with the aim of raising the adequacy of defense capabilities and regional ambitions revealed by the Iran-Iraq war in the late eighties (Al-Sayed, 2008, 251).

The Iran-Iraq War ended in 1987 without leaving any profound or direct effects on the security of the Gulf, though it did provide Iraq with limited financial and military aid. However, this limited support allowed the Arab Gulf states to maintain a balance with Iran and not provoke them. However, after the sudden Iraqi invasion of Kuwait on August 2, 1990, revealed weaknesses in the Peninsula Shield forces, the leaders lost all faith in the belief of a secure Gulf region (Al-Astal, 1999, 33).

With the exposure of the inability of the Arab Gulf to defend even one country that is subject to aggression, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia took the initiative to hold a Gulf summit hosted by the Qatari capital, Doha, on December 25, 1990, in an atmosphere of real threat to the security of the Arab Gulf. It acknowledged the futility of the defense system (Gulf Shield), and that there was a need to develop a system to ensure support for Gulf security. Sultan Qaboos bin Said was enthusiastic about it. The Sultan supported the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia leading the Arab Gulf states and called the Gulf Chiefs of Staff to meet in Muscat on October 22, 1991, where he presented a detailed strategic vision that included the formation of a rapid deployment force for the joint Gulf forces, and suggested that it be called the "Unified Gulf Army" (Al-Sayed, 2008, 255).

The Omani initiative was based on the need to establish an effective army and not just symbolic forces, in which the GCC countries participate as they did in the Peninsula Shield. The initiative also stipulated that the chiefs of staff of the armies of the Arab Gulf states provide the necessary number of military personnel that this army needed to be effective on the battlefield. The initiative also supported this new military both technically and financially and established that the number of military personnel in the first phase of the Unified Gulf Army's establishment not be less than one hundred thousand soldiers. However, when some Gulf countries saw that the number of the army was not in line with the number of their population and that the majority would come from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Sultanate of Oman, Oman stipulated that this force be independent of the decisions of the countries of the GCC and strictly followed by the General Secretariat of the Gulf Cooperation Council, the

member states rejected the proposal despite the attempt of Oman and its Sultan Qaboos bin Said to convince the member states of the feasibility of the presence of this army its size that extends over the regions lands and coasts to the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea and overlooking the Strait of Hormuz, making it an important strategic dimension that alleviates their anxiety from this force. As a result, the GCC preferred to keep the Peninsula Shield forces, and they chose to use an international force led by the United States and its allies. Moreover, Saudi Arabia opened its lands, forcing an international coalition that took it upon to protect the Gulf and restore Kuwait, which is what has led to the current internationalization of the security of the Arab Gulf.

Conclusion

During the British presence in the Persian Gulf, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia tried to reach an understanding with Britain, which it had been allied since the founding of the first Saudi state in 1744, to maintain the region's security and search for a political role for it in the region. Despite all of the attacks that the Kingdom has been subjected to that have targeted its survival since the request of the Ottoman Empire from Muhammad Ali Pasha exempted the Saudi state, it has persisted in its goals until it was able to remove all local entities and establish a strong state. When the Ottoman Empire succumbed and was defeated in the First World War, the Kingdom set out to rearrange the Arab Gulf and support its entities. When oil was discovered in its lands, which brought with it great economic potential, Saudi Arabia not only gave its support to the Arab Gulf states and the surrounding Arab countries, but it also improved relationships with the surrounding countries. All of these things gave Saudi Arabia a pioneering role, which also granted it the expansion of its area and economic power and facilitated it to become qualified politically and economically so that it could participate actively in shaping the security of the region, not in the Gulf as a unit, but throughout the Middle East. This also helped establish it as a regional power to be reckoned with. There is no doubt that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia tried to find other political and defensive organizations for securing the Arab Gulf, but through this study, it was found that Saudi Arabia overcame several obstacles to have a self-deterrent force in the Gulf. At the same time, Saudi Arabia also brought the Gulf from a state of despair to the ability to protect its security and sovereignty. The reasons behind this, as revealed by this research, are several and include:

1. The Arab Gulf states attempt to search for their security outside the Arab domain.
2. The leaders of the Arab Gulf failed to find a formula for a unified military body.
3. The weak view of the leaders of some Arab Gulf countries and their being unaware of the concept of collective security.

4. Some leaders of the Arab Gulf states and military elites retreated to focus on their national security.
5. The lack of confidence of Gulf leaders and chiefs of staff of some Gulf countries in other Gulf countries.
6. The association of some Arab Gulf states with major international security arrangements that prevent them from entering with the Arab Gulf states in a unified military alliance.
7. The actual presence of foreign powers in the Arab Gulf states.

المستخلص

الانسحاب البريطاني، الخليج العربي، الفراغ الساسي، قوة الردع الخليجية

اخلاص العيدي

شادية العدوان

طارق خريسات

هادي المحاسنة

عقب الانسحاب البريطاني من منطقة الخليج العربي، واجهت المنطقة جملة من التحديات والأزمات الأمنية المعقدة، في ظل تنامي التهديدات الإقليمية والدولية التي أسهمت في إشاعة حالة من عدم الاستقرار منذ اندلاع الحرب العراقية-الإيرانية عام 1980م، وصولاً إلى الغزو العراقي للكويت في آب/أغسطس 1990م، وما ترتب عليه من تداعيات أمنية وسياسية واقتصادية، كان من أبرزها الاستعانة بقوات أجنبية لا تزال حاضرة في المنطقة حتى يومنا هذا. ونظراً إلى أن المملكة العربية السعودية تُعد الدولة الأكبر في الخليج العربي من حيث المساحة والقدرات الاقتصادية والبشرية، فقد كان من الطبيعي أن تتصدر المشهد في الجهود الرامية إلى حفظ أمن الخليج واستقراره. وتهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تسليط الضوء على الأسباب والدوافع التي قادت إلى الانسحاب البريطاني من الخليج العربي، وما خلفه من فراغ أمني واضح، إلى جانب استعراض أبرز المخاوف الأمنية التي برزت في أعقاب ذلك الانسحاب. كما تركز الدراسة على تحليل الدور الذي اضطلعت به المملكة العربية السعودية في حماية أمن الخليج، من خلال استعراض الخطوات التي اتخذتها لتعزيز الاستقرار الإقليمي، وجهودها في دعم الدول الخليجية والعربية المجاورة، بما يعكس التزامها العميق بتحقيق الأمن الجماعي وترسيخ علاقات مستقرة ومتوازنة مع دول المنطقة.

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