



# American Ascendance and British Retreat in the Persian Gulf Region

W. TAYLOR FAIN



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# Introduction

On January 16, 1968, British prime minister Harold Wilson made a dramatic, though not unexpected, announcement before the House of Commons. Faced with a declining treasury, fractious public opinion, and division in his party and foreign policy-making bureaucracy, the Labour prime minister stated that his government had “decided to accelerate the withdrawal of our forces from their stations in the Far East . . . by the end of 1971. We have also decided to withdraw our forces from the Persian Gulf by the same date. The broad effect is that, apart from our remaining Dependencies and certain other necessary exceptions, we shall by that date not be maintaining military bases outside Europe and the Mediterranean.”<sup>1</sup> Thereby, Britain relinquished, much sooner than it had anticipated, its most important permanent military and, by extension, political roles “East of Suez.”

This study explores the United States’ response to the precipitous decline of British power in the Persian Gulf region between Iran’s 1951 nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company and U.S. president Richard Nixon’s efforts to establish Iran and Saudi Arabia as the “twin pillars” of pro-Western stability in the Gulf following Britain’s departure in December 1971. It treats not only the states bordering the Gulf, but also the areas of the Arabian Peninsula and western Indian Ocean that U.S. and British policymakers considered vital to the Gulf’s security. In so doing, it places the Persian Gulf into its regional political context. This volume explains the ways successive British and American governments, from the 1950s to the early 1970s, perceived the strategic and economic value of the Persian Gulf to their nations, to the economies of the other industrial democracies, to the political stability of the Middle East in general, and to the larger Western policy of containing Soviet, communist, and radical nationalist influences in the developing world. It explores the ways the United States and Britain apportioned between themselves responsibility for defending the Gulf region from foreign military attack, and for mediating tensions between regional governments and political factions. Further, it examines the contrasting attitudes of the United States and Britain to the challenges posed by imperial retrenchment, Arab nationalism, and pan-Arab sentiment in the Gulf. It shows that traditional rivalries and animosities among the peoples of the Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula greatly

complicated U.S. and British Cold War-era policies there. It plumbs the intricacies and contradictions of the Anglo-American “special relationship” in the formulation of policy in the region. Finally, it explains the origins of America’s “imperial” endeavor in the Persian Gulf region today, which many observers have identified as a continuation of Britain’s role in the area.

In short, this book examines the tortuous and politically difficult process by which Britain relinquished its position as the preeminent Western power in the Persian Gulf region and the means by which the United States attempted to fill the steadily growing political vacuum left by British retrenchment there. By early 1968 a combination of financial weakness, bruising political debate over the priorities and values of British foreign policy, and increasingly intractable and violent nationalist sentiment in the Middle East led Wilson’s Labour government to conclude that Britain could no longer maintain its hegemony in the Gulf. American policymakers were both unable and unwilling to take Britain’s place there. The political and economic responsibilities of waging a global Cold War against the Soviet Union and the increasing unpopularity, by the late 1960s, of direct military intervention abroad precluded the United States’ doing so. Rather than sanction a British withdrawal from the Gulf, or assume the mantle of political and military responsibility for the Gulf themselves, officials in Washington opted to subsidize Britain’s military and political involvement east of Suez. By supporting the British pound and by offering diplomatic and political assistance to the British government in its efforts to preserve the political stability and economic pliability of the Persian Gulf states, the United States worked, during the 1950s and 1960s, to avoid becoming directly and permanently embroiled in the turbulent affairs of the Gulf. When this strategy failed, President Lyndon Johnson and his national-security team attempted to find regional proxies to assume Britain’s strategic responsibilities in the region. Ultimately, President Nixon and his special assistant for national security affairs, Henry Kissinger, attempted, with little success, to establish Iran and Saudi Arabia as the twin pillars of a stable, pro-Western political order in the Gulf. The roots of America’s direct, large-scale military involvement in the Gulf, which began in the late 1970s, lay in its inability to establish viable proxies for British power in the area.

The British government had been militarily involved in the Persian Gulf since the Napoleonic wars and had established itself as the arbiter of the Gulf’s political affairs by the middle of the nineteenth century. Between the early nineteenth century and the 1960s, the Gulf’s value to the security of Britain’s global strategic and economic interests evolved continually. Initially, the Gulf’s position athwart the principal lines of communication and supply between Britain and British India determined its importance. The Royal Navy worked assiduously during the nineteenth century to end pirate depredations against

commercial shipping in the Gulf and to ensure that no seaborne invasion of India could be launched from its ports.

The discovery of Persian oil in the first decade of the twentieth century, and the 1912 decision to convert the Royal Navy to one powered by oil, rather than coal, renewed the strategic value of the Gulf to London. The further discovery of Iraq's and Kuwait's enormous petroleum resources in the 1920s and 1930s made the area a crucial economic concern to Britain by the mid-twentieth century as the British government, in cooperation with private firms, invested in the region's mineral wealth. The Anglo-Persian Oil Company's refinery at Abadan, in Iran, became Britain's single largest overseas investment.

The Gulf's oil-producing capacity was central to British and Allied military planning during the Second World War, and the region's location at the junction between the European and Asian theaters of the conflict made military facilities there a key asset in the Allied war effort. After the war ended in 1945, and after Indian independence in 1947, the Gulf continued to be of crucial economic importance to Britain. Gulf oil literally fueled and lubricated the British economic recovery effort and propelled the British military during the Cold War. In 1938, the year before the Second World War began, Britain had imported less than a quarter of its foreign oil from the Middle East. By 1950 more than half of its foreign petroleum came from the Persian Gulf, and in the early 1960s, that portion had risen to two-thirds. British oil firms owned investments in the Middle East worth more than £600 million by the mid-1950s. More importantly, the sale of Gulf oil was critical to Britain's economy, contributing £400 million to Britain's balance of payments in the early 1960s. The Gulf oil sheikhdoms conducted their business transactions in British sterling and invested their profits through the City of London. Kuwaiti investment alone accounted for between 7 and 10 percent of new capital investments in the British stock market in 1961, and in 1967, Kuwait was the single largest foreign holder of sterling. In short, Gulf oil revenues were critically important to Britain's balance of payments and to the stability of British financial institutions.<sup>2</sup>

The Persian Gulf also held great strategic significance for British policymakers after the Second World War. British strategic planners held that after the security of Europe, the security of the Middle East was the most important priority of British foreign policy. The British position in the area was a link in a chain of strategic and political commitments that stretched from the Middle East across the Indian Ocean to South and Southeast Asia and that ensured London's communication and supply lines to Hong Kong, Singapore, and Australia, as well as to East and Central Africa. Thus, in the 1950s and 1960s, British policymakers depended on their position in the Gulf region to help sustain Britain's role as a nation with global interests and influence.

The United States was a relative latecomer as an actor on the Persian Gulf's economic and political stage. Standard Oil of California took an interest in the region in the 1920s and obtained concessions in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia in 1933. During the Second World War, however, the United States became a major player in the region. It usurped Britain's role as Saudi Arabia's principal patron and contested British economic and political influence in the Kingdom. The United States' close relationship with Saudi Arabia soon became the cornerstone of its policies in the Persian Gulf region. The U.S. government and the Arabian American Oil Company often worked in tandem to identify and secure American interests in the kingdom, often at the expense of British economic and political commitments in the Persian Gulf region.

After the advent of the Cold War, America's policy in the Persian Gulf was grounded in its desire to ensure the economic and political stability of the Middle East generally. To U.S. officials, stability in the Middle East meant that the region was at peace, amenable to American political influence and economic investments, and proceeding along a course of political development and economic and social evolution that would produce stable governments and preclude Soviet or communist penetration of the region. The states of the Persian Gulf region were among the most politically influential and affluent nations of the Arab world. The cultivation of friendly relations with these nations became an important priority of American policy in the Middle East. The wealth created by the oil of the Gulf states, if invested and administered wisely, could play an important role in promoting Middle Eastern stability.

American policymakers appreciated the key role that Persian Gulf oil and military facilities would play in the Cold War. Most importantly, U.S. officials recognized the critical value of the Gulf's oil to the economic reconstruction and development of Western Europe and Japan. Such reconstruction was vital if these areas were to be rebuilt and their industrial and military resources put at the disposal of the West. The United States' own liberal-capitalist values and institutions depended on the successful recreation of these countries as stable, liberal-capitalist nations, tied politically to the noncommunist world. Both the Truman and Eisenhower administrations in Washington thus worked diligently to harness the petroleum resources of the Middle Eastern "periphery" to the industrial "core" of Western Europe and Japan. By the late 1940s, the United States had formulated a hemispheric oil policy in which Persian Gulf oil would fuel the industry and militaries of the Western allies while the United States conserved the petroleum resources of the Western Hemisphere as a strategic reserve for times of global emergency.

Persian Gulf air facilities were important to American peacetime military and economic strategy. The airfield at Dhahran in Saudi Arabia, for example,

was a link in the chain of U.S. bases that stretched around the world and that allowed the United States to project military power in peacetime while contributing to a “defense in depth” of the American mainland. Further, American postwar planners believed it could serve as a key facility in the growing web of commercial aviation routes that permitted the United States to project its political presence and economic influence abroad.

American policymakers were also concerned with the Persian Gulf region’s geopolitical and economic value to their global strategy of containing Soviet power, whether in peace or in war. Recognizing that it would be critical to the prosecution of war against the Soviet Union, they strove to keep the Persian Gulf’s oil out of Soviet hands. Further, they sought to inhibit the spread of communist and radical nationalist influence in the region. Such influence might open the door to Soviet political penetration of the Middle East. American officials also recognized the importance of the region’s military facilities to their war-fighting strategies. American diplomacy aimed to preserve Western access to the U.S. air base at Dhahran and the British airfields at Shaiba and Habbaniya in Iraq, which were important to the allies’ ability to launch air attacks against targets in the Soviet Union and to defend the oil fields of the Gulf.

British policymakers were ambivalent about the growing American political and military role in the Middle East and Gulf region. They recognized the need to bring American financial and military resources to bear in the area, yet they resented U.S. encroachments in a region of the world that they had long regarded as a British preserve. Still, the Foreign Office strove to define common British and American interests in the Gulf region and, by the late 1950s, sought (with limited success) to engage the United States in joint military planning for the Gulf.

For their part, American officials attempted to keep Britain fully engaged in the Gulf, both militarily and politically. They did so in order to relieve the United States of some of the economic and material burden for the region’s defense. This became increasingly important during the 1960s, as U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia grew and absorbed an increasingly large share of American financial and military resources. Further, U.S. officials encouraged Britain’s continued presence in the Persian Gulf region as a politically stabilizing influence there. Britain was to play the role it had invented for itself in the Gulf during the nineteenth century—keeper of the peace between the region’s perpetually warring peoples.

At the same time that American policymakers encouraged the British to play a leading role in preserving Gulf security, they often attempted to distance themselves politically from Britain in the eyes of the local Arabs and Persians. This U.S. effort to avoid being tarred with the brush of imperialism continually frustrated British officials, who often questioned the reliability of

the Americans as allies in the region. Anglo-American diplomacy concerning the Persian Gulf from the 1950s to the early 1970s was thus complex and often difficult.

The history of American and British statecraft in the Middle East and Persian Gulf is, in many ways, well-trodden ground. Most importantly, Wm. Roger Louis's magisterial *The British Empire in the Middle East, 1945–1951: Arab Nationalism, the United States, and Postwar Imperialism*, a model of scholarship in Anglo-American diplomacy, treats the Gulf, but only within the larger context of U.S. and British policies in the Middle East during the years of Clement Attlee's Labour government. In the early 1980s, Aaron David Miller, Irvine Anderson, and David Painter published important studies that explicated the critical economic and political value of Gulf oil to the West during the early Cold War. More recently, Michael Palmer has traced the broad sweep of U.S. diplomacy in the Gulf from Washington's perspective and has especially emphasized the importance of naval diplomacy in the region. His work does not, however, delve deeply into the growing importance of Gulf oil to the United States and the West, the decline of British power, and the growth of indigenous nationalisms. Meanwhile, Nathan J. Citino's *From Arab Nationalism to OPEC: Eisenhower, King Saud, and the Making of U.S.-Saudi Relations* provides a sophisticated examination of American relations with its most important Arab ally in the Gulf, which illuminates the larger contours of U.S., Arab, and British diplomacy in the region at the Cold War's nadir.<sup>3</sup> This work owes a debt to all of these scholars, but it attempts to go beyond their work to explore more fully, over a critically important span of years, the course of Anglo-American diplomacy in the region that constituted the "hard kernel" of Western interests in the Middle East.

As this study examines the course of Washington's and London's efforts to preserve their own and larger Western interests in the Gulf during the height of the Cold War, it will illuminate several key themes. First, it will make clear that the Persian Gulf must be considered as part of a larger geographic unit that encompassed the Gulf states, the territories of the southern Arabian Peninsula, and the western Indian Ocean, as well as portions of East Africa. The strategic and political importance of all these areas to the United States and Britain were intertwined in important ways, and American and British policymakers considered these areas to be linked in their foreign policy calculations. Britain justified its continued military and economic presence in southern Arabia and in the western Indian Ocean as necessary to preserving its more important Persian Gulf interests. Specifically, the British military facilities in the Aden Colony on the southwestern tip of the Arabian Peninsula were vital to Britain's efforts to establish secure "oil communications" around the southern Arabian periphery and to defend its petroleum interests in the Gulf, especially in Kuwait. Therefore, the Persian Gulf region, rather than

merely the Persian Gulf, must be examined as a vital interest of both the United States and Britain.

A second theme to be explored in these pages concerns the relative priorities placed by the United States and Britain upon different clients and interests within the Gulf region. During the early Cold War period, the United States made Saudi Arabia the centerpiece of its diplomacy in the Persian Gulf area and, indeed, its most important ally in the Arab world. During the 1940s and 1950s, as it lost influence first in Saudi Arabia, then in Egypt, and eventually in Iraq, the British government's sphere of direct political and military influence diminished to encompass only the small states along the Gulf littoral and southern Arabia. London's efforts to preserve its influence in the Middle East came to be based on its ability to preserve the sovereignty and interests of these tiny emirates along the Arabian periphery. Often, U.S. and British client states clashed politically; occasionally, they clashed militarily. Saudi Arabia's attempts to expand its interests and territory at the expense of its smaller neighbors (as in the Buraimi oasis dispute and during the Oman rebellions of the 1950s) antagonized London, which felt that its own increasingly tenuous position in the Gulf region was threatened by Saudi depredations against its clients. Increasingly sensitive British official and popular opinion held the U.S. government and American oil companies responsible in some fashion for Saudi adventurism, and the resulting tensions complicated efforts to coordinate U.S. and British policies in the area.

Third, this volume will address the relative scope and scale of U.S. and British foreign policies and interests from the 1950s to the early 1970s and the place of the Persian Gulf region within their larger diplomacies. American foreign policy interests grew more expansive during the 1940s and 1950s, and U.S. officials emphasized the value of Gulf oil and military bases to their global Cold War strategy. Britain's interests, meanwhile, narrowed and became somewhat more parochial. During the 1950s and 1960s, policymakers in London turned their attention to preserving the flow of Gulf oil to Britain, protecting private British investments in the region, and keeping the door open in the Gulf to British trade. Frequently, historians have asserted that British policy in the Gulf was reduced to a purely regional one rather than one grounded in a larger, global calculus.

In fact, the Persian Gulf region occupied an important position in official British thinking concerning the larger world. British interests and commitments in the Gulf were part of a matrix of interests reaching beyond the Middle East. They bore directly on Britain's ability to project military power to ensure political stability in East and Central Africa, protect the sea and air lines of communication across the Indian Ocean to Australia, and defend Britain's possessions in Hong Kong and Singapore. Thus, until the late 1960s Britain could still be said to have global interests, though not on the same

scale as the United States'. Officials in London believed that Britain's presence in the Gulf region was central to preserving these interests.

A fourth theme of this study concerns American and British perceptions of internal and external threats to the Persian Gulf region. The United States' greatest fear for the Gulf area was that it would come under communist influence or fall into the Soviet Union's political orbit, thus depriving the West of critical petroleum and key military facilities. British officials shared this concern and were not reluctant to prey upon U.S. fears of communist gains in the Gulf region to win American support for British policies there. To London, however, the greatest threat to British and Western interests in the area came not from the Soviets but from volatile local nationalisms and irredentist fervor, which posed dangers directly to British clients, investments, and military facilities, and which could destabilize the area politically.

The emergence after the Second World War of revolutionary nationalist movements in European colonial areas and in the developing world presented challenges to both American and British foreign policy-makers. In the Middle East, radical Arab nationalism and Pan-Arabism posed serious obstacles to Western policies in the Gulf region. British policymakers were haunted by the specter of Gamal Abdel Nasser when confronting Arab nationalism. Nasser had effectively vanquished Britain from Egypt in the years following his 1952 revolution, and London saw his hand in every subsequent nationalist uprising against its client regimes in the region. Frequently, they had reason, but perceptive British diplomats in the field understood that radical Arab nationalism was a potent and multifaceted phenomenon whose origins could most often be identified in legitimate grievances against local elites and their British patrons. Radical nationalism could easily be exploited by Cairo and Moscow, and it could do irreparable harm to Western interests in the Gulf region unless London took steps to redefine its relationships with its traditional Arab allies and conciliate local nationalists. The potential costs of a failed new policy in terms of lost access to Persian Gulf oil, however, seemed to paralyze the Foreign Office, which did nothing to alter the course of British diplomacy in the region.

The United States appreciated the complex nature of Arab nationalist movements and sympathized with their aims. But the anti-Western, specifically anti-British, nature of radical Arab nationalism worried American policymakers, who feared Soviet or communist exploitation of this volatile movement. During the 1950s and 1960s, U.S. officials attempted at various times to conciliate and co-opt revolutionary Arab nationalist sentiment in order to promote stability in the region and to further America's goals of containing Soviet and communist influence there. This strategy often put the United States at odds with British policy in the Middle East. Officials in London more often saw radical Arab nationalism as an immediate threat to

Britain's client regimes, economic investments, and military facilities than as a bulwark against communist penetration of the Gulf region. Thus, the responses of American and British policymakers to revolutionary Arab nationalism in the Gulf area and the efforts of U.S. officials to balance their commitments to their British allies with their efforts to conciliate local nationalist sentiment will provide another theme to be explored throughout this study.

A fifth theme here is the degree to which U.S. and British diplomacy in the Gulf region during these years was hostage, in many ways, to local rivalries and animosities that long antedated the Cold War. Iraq's designs on Kuwait, Yemeni claims to Aden and the Aden Protectorate, the rivalry of the sultan of Muscat and the imams for control of interior Oman, the efforts of the al-Saud to extend their influence throughout the Arabian Peninsula, and Iran's interest in dominating the Gulf created a very difficult context in which London and Washington worked to preserve regional stability, thwart Soviet designs in the area, and keep inexpensive Gulf oil flowing to the West. Local rulers often attempted to enlist the power of either the United States or Britain in the service of their own interests. Such efforts often caused friction between London and Washington. This study will closely examine the efforts of local peoples to manipulate U.S. and British power for their own ends.

The constraints placed upon U.S. and British policy in the Gulf region by domestic political and economic factors provide another theme. In the United States, public, congressional, and editorial indifference to events in the Gulf complicated the policymaking process. American domestic interest in the Middle East most often concerned the security of Israel and left the more arcane issues of petroleum diplomacy, Arab nationalism, and Gulf defense to the experts in Foggy Bottom and the Pentagon. In Washington, the Department of State, the Department of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the White House strove to form a consensus on policy toward British retrenchment in the Persian Gulf area. Tensions between the various elements of the foreign policy bureaucracy shaped American policy with Britain in the region.

During the late 1950s, American economic resources at the disposal of foreign policy planners were limited, and in the early 1960s, John F. Kennedy's avowal to "pay any price" or "bear any burden" to meet his administration's foreign policy obligations belied the young president's awareness of America's growing balance-of-payments difficulties. Later in the decade, "Great Society" programs at home diverted a great portion of U.S. economic resources away from American foreign policy projects other than Vietnam and reinforced the Johnson administration's determination to keep Britain deeply engaged in the Far East and the Persian Gulf. At the beginning of the 1970s, the Nixon administration understood that the United States was overextended economically in Southeast Asia and that this was preventing it from pursuing policies

it wished to elsewhere. For this reason, it was anxious that Iran and Saudi Arabia bear the financial burden of Gulf defense.

On the other side of the Atlantic, domestic political constraints were critical in determining the British government's political and military commitments in the Gulf region. The issue of Britain's role in the Gulf was an emotional one in Parliament, in the foreign policy bureaucracy, and among the British people. Deep ideological cleavages and political conflicts between the Conservative and Labour parties colored Britain's parliamentary debate over its role east of Suez during the 1950s and 1960s. Brutal fights between factions within each party and between individual politicians shaped the domestic struggle for influence over Britain's Gulf policy. The Foreign Office, Colonial Office, Defence Ministry, Ministry of Power, and Treasury clashed repeatedly over British priorities and strategy in the Gulf region. Differences of opinion between British diplomats and administrators in the field and in London further characterized the formulation of British policy in the Gulf. Political debate thus combined with economic constraints to shape British policy in the Gulf.

The story of Britain in the postwar era is largely a story of relative economic decline. By the late 1960s, the £17 million annual expense of maintaining British military forces in the Gulf seemed to many Britons prohibitive, even if it could be interpreted as an insurance premium on the uninterrupted flow of Gulf oil worth £2 billion per year. Critics in Parliament and the media charged that expenditures on Gulf defense distracted Britain from its European military and economic priorities. In November 1967 a run on the pound and concurrent dwindling of Britain's foreign-currency reserves brought the matter to a head. British policymakers were compelled to design a program of government spending cuts, which led Prime Minister Wilson to announce, two months later, Britain's expedited withdrawal from the Gulf.

U.S. and British policies in the Persian Gulf region must be considered in their proper international context. Events around the world influenced Anglo-American diplomacy in the Gulf. Regionally, London's loss of influence in Saudi Arabia and Iran, its withdrawal from Egypt, the rise of anti-British "Nasserism" in the Middle East, and the radical nationalist revolution in Iraq in 1958 shaped the contours of British policy toward the Gulf states and southern Arabia. Indian independence, political unrest in East and Central Africa during the 1950s and early 1960s, and the difficult process of imperial retrenchment in southeast Asia during the mid-1960s all shaped Britain's Gulf policy and underscore the Gulf's relation to London's interests beyond Suez. Moreover, London's role as a key member of the North Atlantic alliance during the Cold War ensured that British policies in the Gulf would be pursued in the shadow of the global East-West struggle and of its interests in Europe.

American interests and commitments elsewhere in the world dictated the shape of U.S. policies in the Persian Gulf region. Gulf security was tightly tied

to larger American policy priorities in the Middle East. As part of its policy of preserving political stability in the area, American officials hoped to ensure the independence and security of Israel and worked to placate the forces of Arab nationalism by cultivating friendly ties with Nasser's Egypt when possible. Such efforts had important ramifications for U.S. Gulf policy. U.S. policy was closely tied to the energy and security requirements of Western Europe and Japan. It was further related to America's overarching Cold War strategy of containing Soviet power and preventing Soviet political encroachments on the developing world. U.S. commitments elsewhere prevented officials in Washington from devoting their full attention and resources to the Gulf region. Most importantly, U.S. commitments in Southeast Asia during the 1960s made it impossible for the United States to take a more active and direct role in preserving the stable pro-Western orientation of the states in the Gulf region. For this reason, it sought first to subsidize Britain's presence in the region and then to establish proxies for British power after 1968.

This book underscores the fragility of the vaunted Anglo-American "special relationship" during the Cold War period. In the Persian Gulf, as elsewhere, economic competition, disagreement over strategic priorities, differences over political and diplomatic tactics, and suspicion of each other's motives marked Anglo-American relations as often as cooperation and coordination. While both the United States and Britain shared an interest in preserving Gulf security and maintaining the flow of oil to the West, this goal rested on different foreign policy premises and strategies. The United States viewed the Gulf region as a component in the larger architecture of a Cold War policy designed to contain Soviet communism globally and ensure the liberal-capitalist order of the Western allies. Britain was more concerned with preserving its important economic stakes in the Gulf area and with using the region as a base from which to secure its strategic commitments east of Suez. The extent of these commitments defined Britain's role as a world power. American and British interests can be said to have been parallel, for the most part, but not identical. Thus, the bases upon which American and British policies in the Persian Gulf region rested were quite different, and the tactics each nation employed in the pursuit of its interests often clashed, causing friction between the two allies.

Finally, these pages will explore the continuities between British policies in the Gulf and the subsequent efforts by the United States to preserve Western access to Middle Eastern oil and to prevent the region from falling into the Soviet Union's political orbit. Since the 1970s, critics in the Middle East and in the West have charged that U.S. diplomacy in the Gulf merely continued Western imperial policies designed to subjugate the region. This volume places in historical context allegations that contemporary U.S. policies in Iraq and the Gulf are imperial and are designed primarily to secure the Middle Eastern tollgates of a new, American empire.

# “Toll-Gates of Empire”: Britain, the United States, and the Persian Gulf Region before 1951

On December 11, 1907, George Nathaniel Curzon, the former viceroy of India, addressed the Midland Institute at the Town Hall in Birmingham, England. A fervent believer in Britain’s imperial “mission,” and one of the most important proconsuls of the British Empire in Asia, Curzon declaimed to his audience upon the “true imperialism”—the morally driven, economically enriching, and politically adventurous enterprise he believed indispensable to British greatness at the beginning of the twentieth century. In the course of his address, he evoked for his audience an unimaginable future when India, the principal wellspring of imperial wealth and prestige in the British popular imagination, would achieve its independence. “When India has gone and the great Colonies have gone,” he asked, “do you suppose we can stop there? Your ports and coaling stations, your fortresses and dockyards, your Crown Colonies and protectorates will go too. For either they will be unnecessary as the toll-gates and barbicans of an empire that has vanished, or they will be taken by an enemy more powerful than yourselves.”<sup>1</sup>

What were these “toll-gates and barbicans of empire” about which Curzon spoke? He had in mind, most importantly, the motley assortment of ports, strategic waterways, client states, and military installations that extended between the Mediterranean and the Arabian Seas, and that sat astride Britain’s route to South Asia. From Suez to the colony of Aden at the southwestern tip of the Arabian Peninsula, to Muscat and the Strait of Hormuz at the entrance of the Persian Gulf, and on to the protected emirate of Kuwait at the Gulf’s northern end, the British governments in London and Bombay had, through cajolery, intimidation, force, and subtle statesmanship, built a surprisingly stable diplomatic and military edifice from which to defend their Asian possessions. Curzon was intimately acquainted with the greater Persian Gulf region. As a young man

he had written extensively about the area's importance to British strategy in the East and, as viceroy between 1899 and 1905, he had worked assiduously to consolidate British power and influence there. He, better than most, understood the gradual process by which Britain became the defender and guarantor of the peace in the Persian Gulf and southern Arabia.

### **Britain, the Persian Gulf, and Arabia**

Britain first became involved commercially in the Persian Gulf in 1723, when the British East India Company established a trading factory in Basra in Ottoman Iraq.<sup>2</sup> In the decades that followed, the company built other factories at Bandar Abbas and Bushire in Persia. The posts were not profitable, but served as useful conduits for Indian trade with the northern Gulf. In the first decade of the nineteenth century, a rash of piracy by the tiny emirates of the lower Gulf against Indian and British shipping attracted the attention of British officials in Bombay. Recognizing that the security of Indian commerce in the area depended on maritime tranquility in the lower Gulf, the Bombay government sent a naval expedition to the Gulf in 1809 to punish the pirates and to occupy a suitable base there from which to mount further expeditions in the region. The mission was a success, and the Bombay Marine engaged in no further naval action in the area for another ten years. In 1820, however, the Indian government was obligated to broker a truce among the Arab sheikhs of the lower Gulf who had resumed their attacks against British shipping and one another. The General Treaty of 1820 brought tranquility back to the Gulf, but further unrest among the emirates in 1834 and 1835 forced the Indian government to mediate yet another peace in the region. This time the truce lasted until 1853, at which time British authorities negotiated the Treaty of Maritime Peace in Perpetuity among the sheikhdoms, which proscribed piracy and which gave the Trucial Coast its name. Thus, the trucial system, which undergirded the Pax Britannica in the Persian Gulf region, was born. The system, designed solely to protect British and Indian maritime rights in the Gulf, was not intended to guarantee the independence and territorial integrity of the Gulf sheikhdoms.

In 1839 the Royal Navy occupied Aden at the western tip of Arabia after the sultan of Lahej, ruler of Aden, seized an Indian trading vessel that had called at his harbor. The incident gave the British a pretext to take a prize much coveted for its excellent port facilities, its proximity to the Arabian coffee country, and its location along the recently proposed Suez-to-Bombay steamship route. Most importantly, though, Aden provided a base from which the British could exercise influence in the Arabian Peninsula and counter Egyptian threats to their interests on the Persian Gulf coast.<sup>3</sup>

British officials continued to shore up their position in the Gulf and southern Arabia in the following decades. The Sultanate of Muscat and Oman, located

at the entrance of the Persian Gulf and extending westward along the southern Arabian coast, played a prominent part in British policy toward the Persian Gulf region in the nineteenth century. In 1840 the sultan concluded a treaty of friendship and commerce with the British, who, though not admitting him to the trucial system of the Gulf emirates, made his country a key element in British strategy to secure the approaches to the Gulf. Vulnerable to political and military pressures from the Arabian interior, the sultan eagerly sought the British connection as a counterweight to the power of his Egyptian and Saudi rivals for control of southeastern Arabia. Britain's patronage, he believed, might also help him secure his colony at Zanzibar, off the East African coast, and increase Oman's stature as an important political player in the western Indian Ocean.<sup>4</sup>

In the second half of the nineteenth century, British policymakers came to appreciate the value of Persian Gulf peace and stability not merely to the safety of their commerce in the region, but to the physical security of British India as well. As the Anglo-Russian "Great Game" for supremacy in Central Asia intensified, British strategists took note of the Persian Gulf's vulnerability and traditional role as a route for the seaborne invasion of India.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, they transformed the trucial system in the Gulf from a mechanism designed merely to preserve the maritime peace to a system that protected the independence and territorial integrity of its members, and insulated the Gulf from the designs of other foreign powers.

The bases of this new policy were the politically binding "exclusive agreements" British officials negotiated with the Gulf rulers. An 1891 agreement with Muscat served as a model for British pacts with the other Gulf rulers. The trucial sheikhs, the ruler of Bahrain, and the emir of Kuwait entered into identical arrangements during the 1890s and, in effect, ceded the conduct of their foreign affairs to the government of British India in exchange for political patronage and protection.<sup>6</sup>

In the meantime, British policymakers consolidated their position along the southern Arabian periphery. Aden had become a major coaling station on Britain's route to its possessions east of Suez. Strategists in British India also recognized that from Aden they could project power into the Arabian Peninsula and assist in the pacification and defense of the Persian Gulf and eastern Arabia. But the remote, lonely colony at the tip of the peninsula was vulnerable, and the Indian authorities responsible for Aden decided they must take control of the tribal hinterlands to the east and north of the colony in order to form a buffer around the lonely British outpost. Beginning in the early 1880s, Indian authorities concluded "advisory treaties" with the clans and tribes of the desert lands ringing the colony, the first steps in creating the Aden Protectorate that, by 1954, extended as far as the western border of Muscat and Oman. The advisory treaties were almost identical to the exclusive agreements

British officials concluded with the Gulf rulers, and bound the signatories to “abide by the advice and conform to the wishes of the British Government in all matters relating to [their] dealings with the neighbouring chiefs and with all foreign powers” and to “refrain from entering into any correspondence, agreement, or treaty with any foreign nation or power except with the knowledge and sanction of the British government.”<sup>7</sup>

By the turn of the twentieth century, Britain had established itself firmly as the dominant power in the Persian Gulf and in southern Arabia. British officials were able to defend British and Indian commerce in the Gulf, secure the most vulnerable approaches to British India, and act to shape events on the Arabian Peninsula that directly affected Persian Gulf security and tranquility. British policymakers accepted responsibility both for ensuring peace among the disputatious peoples of the Gulf, and for defending from foreign attack that “inland sea that marked the eastern boundary of the Arab world and was part of the maritime frontier of India.”<sup>8</sup>

During its first century of “triumphant enterprise” in the Gulf, British officials constructed a loosely administered network of institutions through which to exercise their influence in the region. Staffed by Foreign Service officers, Colonial Office functionaries, and members of the Indian Political Service, these institutions proved remarkably durable and operated almost unchanged through the 1930s. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the British political resident for the Persian Gulf, based in Bushire on the Persian side of the water, acted as the senior-most British official in the region. He administered British and Indian interests in the Gulf and coordinated the activities of his subordinate political agents in each of the emirates. The political agents acted as the eyes and ears of the British Empire in the Gulf. They advised the local rulers on financial and diplomatic matters, promoted British commerce with the emirates, and exercised criminal and civil jurisdiction over all non-Arab foreigners in the region. Each of the emirates was considered an “independent state in special treaty relations with His Majesty’s Government” and, so, exercised considerable autonomy over its internal affairs. But the political agent always had the ear of the ruler and frequently advised him on domestic as well as foreign matters. The position of the political resident and his agents was a delicate one, and required finesse and tact when dealing with the Gulf Arabs. Where colonial officials enjoyed the luxuries and bore the burdens of direct rule, officials of British India in the Gulf worked to cajole, soothe, and, when necessary, intimidate the local rulers to move them into line with British policy.<sup>9</sup>

After the First World War, officials in London became much more interested in the conduct of British administration in the Persian Gulf region, and the Foreign Office pressed for a larger role in Gulf affairs. Foreign Office officials urged that the headquarters of the British political resident in the Gulf be

moved from Bushire to Bahrain on the Arabian side of the Gulf, where British interests were expanding. In 1946 the resident moved his headquarters to Manama, by then the center of British naval and commercial activity in the Gulf, and in 1947 the Foreign Office took full control of Britain's relations with the Gulf sheikhdoms. From 1948 until Britain dissolved its exclusive relationships with the Gulf states in the 1960s, the Foreign Office's Eastern Department administered British diplomacy in the Gulf.<sup>10</sup>

British government in Aden and London's relationship with the sheikhdoms of the Protectorate changed continually over the course of Britain's involvement in south Arabia. The reorganization of the Indian government in 1935 resulted in Aden's separation from India and its reclassification as a British Crown Colony administered by the Colonial Office in London. The Colonial Office also took responsibility for the Protectorate.<sup>11</sup>

Meanwhile, the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman, never part of the Gulf's crucial system and not administered directly by the British government, retained many more of the outward trappings of external sovereignty than its neighbors in the Gulf region did. A British consul, rather than a political agent, advised the Omani government, which nevertheless faced the same limits to its political and diplomatic autonomy as the Gulf emirates.<sup>12</sup>

### **The United States' Interests in the Gulf Region Before the Second World War**

By the time Britain established its dominance in the Persian Gulf early in the twentieth century, American merchants, missionaries, and naval vessels had been visiting the region for more than a hundred years.<sup>13</sup> The United States' interests in the Gulf and Arabia, though, were limited and pursued intermittently until the early twentieth century. By the last decade of the eighteenth century, American trading vessels were engaged in the coffee trade centered at the port of Mocha on the southwest tip of the Arabian Peninsula, and they touched at Muscat en route to Asian destinations. American trade in the Indian Ocean grew to such an extent in the first quarter of the nineteenth century that the administration of President Andrew Jackson established formal commercial relations with the Sultan of Muscat and Oman in 1833. The sultan, seeing in the United States a possible counterweight to British influence in his country, was eager to conclude the agreement, despite the fact that, as he readily admitted, he knew little about America.<sup>14</sup>

By the early 1850s, American ships traded regularly at Gulf ports, and in 1851 the United States signed a commercial treaty with the Persian government. Ratified in Washington, the treaty ran aground in Tehran, where British diplomats convinced the shah's court to let it die. The agreement posed a threat to British dominance in the region at a time when London was becoming keenly

aware of Persia's value as an asset in its competition with Russia for supremacy in central Asia.<sup>15</sup> Again, in the mid-1850s, the Persian government attempted to establish a commercial and political relationship with the United States, and the two nations concluded a treaty in December of 1856, which became effective the following year.<sup>16</sup>

### **The Importance of Persian Gulf Oil**

As the twentieth century dawned, the Persian Gulf's natural wealth transformed the region into an area of intense British and American economic and political interest. The Gulf, it emerged, sat atop one of the world's largest reservoirs of petroleum at a time when the industrial economies and modern militaries of the Western world required a steadily increasing supply of oil to fuel and lubricate their growth. British businessmen, in tandem with officials in the British Foreign Office, Royal Navy, and Defense Ministry, led the way in exploiting Persian Gulf oil.<sup>17</sup> In May 1901 British entrepreneur William Knox D'Arcy received an oil concession from the shah of Persia and in 1908 established the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC). Five years later, the new APOC oil refinery at Abadan at the northern end of the Gulf began production. In the meantime, British officials in India extracted from their client states in the Gulf new agreements not to relinquish oil or mineral rights in their territories to companies other than those owned by British interests.<sup>18</sup> This "nationality clause" effectively monopolized concession rights along much of the Persian Gulf coast.

As the First World War approached, British strategists concluded that petroleum was a strategically vital commodity and crucial to the modernization of the Royal Navy. Together with his young protégé Winston Churchill, soon to be first lord of the Admiralty, First Sea Lord Admiral Sir John Fisher worked to convert the navy from one powered by coal to one fueled by oil. This necessitated a secure supply of Persian petroleum. Accordingly, in 1914 Churchill convinced the British government to purchase a controlling interest in APOC. Churchill and Fisher proved to be visionaries as the First World War evolved into the first large-scale mechanized conflict.

The war only whetted the appetites of the Western nations for Gulf oil. The Turkish Petroleum Company (TPC), a British-sponsored consortium and competitor of APOC founded in 1912 to explore the petroleum reserves of Ottoman Mesopotamia, emerged as a powerful force in the early 1920s. In 1920, shortly before making major oil discoveries in 1923 and 1927, it admitted the French *Compagnie des Pétroles* to the consortium in exchange for permission to construct an oil pipeline across the French mandates of Syria and Lebanon to the Mediterranean. In 1928 TPC concluded six years of negotiations with APOC and a group of American oil companies to enlarge the consortium and regulate

Western oil interests in Iraq. The resulting agreement of July 31 admitted the American Standard Oil Company of New Jersey, the Gulf Oil Company, and the Socony-Vacuum Oil Company, and transformed the TPC into the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC).<sup>19</sup>

The Americans came relatively late to the search for Arabian and Persian Gulf oil.<sup>20</sup> The U.S. government recognized Britain's political predominance in the region and preferred that American oil interests not seek concessions in the area until the political disposition of the former Ottoman territories was resolved after the First World War. Despite the membership of the three U.S. oil companies in IPC, it was not until the early 1930s that Americans became important players in the scramble for oil in the Persian Gulf. In 1932 the Standard Oil Company of California obtained a concession from the government of Bahrain. It circumvented the British government's proscription on doing business in the protected states of the Persian Gulf by establishing a wholly owned subsidiary company, the Bahrain Oil Company (Bapco), in Canada. Shortly thereafter, in 1934, Gulf Oil, with support from the U.S. government, sought concessionary rights in Kuwait. British officials reluctantly set aside the nationality clause in the emirate's case in order to avoid political conflict with the United States, but insisted that APOC share concessionary rights with Gulf Oil. Thus, the Kuwait Oil Company, a joint Gulf Oil-APOC venture, began operations in the tiny sheikhdom that year.

By far the most important American oil concession in the Persian Gulf region was that granted by the Saudi king, Abdul Aziz ibn Saud, to Standard Oil of California (Socal) in 1933. The concession covered the eastern half of Saudi Arabia, approximately 440,000 square miles, and was to be managed by a newly created subsidiary of Socal, the California Arabian Standard Oil Company (Casoc).<sup>21</sup> Systematic exploration of the region revealed an enormous oil deposit at Dammam, on the Persian Gulf coast, just west of Bahrain. Saudi Arabia would be the new oil colossus in the Persian Gulf, and American companies enjoyed exclusive privileges there.<sup>22</sup>

As American firms consolidated their interests in the Persian Gulf during the 1930s, new patterns of communication and cooperation emerged between oil-company executives and U.S.-government officials. As historian Aaron Miller has written, "these lines of communication, strengthened by the increasing importance of petroleum, set patterns of accessibility and familiarity that would characterize the mutual cooperation" of later years.<sup>23</sup>

If the American oil companies solicited special favors from the State Department in the Persian Gulf, they also worked assiduously to court their host governments. In Saudi Arabia, particularly, Casoc officials used their economic leverage in the kingdom to install themselves as close and trusted advisers to Ibn Saud. Their privileged position in the Saudi court made them potentially valuable assets to U.S. policy, but their close identification with

Saudi interests and their dogged pursuit of profits also made them a possible burden to U.S. diplomacy in the Gulf region. In the 1940s both the promise and diplomatic liability of the Arabian American Oil Company's (Aramco) position in Saudi Arabia became apparent.

### **The Second World War and Anglo-American Relations in the Gulf Region**

On the eve of the Second World War, the United States established itself as an important commercial, if not political, actor in the affairs of the Persian Gulf region. American oil-company executives and a few mid-level State Department officials appreciated the enormous economic and strategic potential of Persian Gulf oil, but at the highest levels in Washington the Gulf remained, at most, a peripheral concern. The war transformed American interests in the Persian Gulf and made the U.S. government an active participant in the politics and diplomacy of the region, with a new and complicated set of relationships to Britain and the American oil companies.<sup>24</sup>

The first two years of the war caused great financial hardship in Saudi Arabia, and the nation's economic dislocation also threatened the stability of the Saudi government. Casoc executives realized that the security of their investments in Saudi Arabia depended upon the continued survival of Ibn Saud's government. The time had come, Casoc's management believed, to approach the Roosevelt administration for assistance in subsidizing the Saudi government. The president was initially unreceptive to Casoc's overtures, and the company's initial efforts to convince the administration that its interests and American strategic interests in the Gulf coincided failed. But the exigencies of war and the imperatives of planning for peace soon convinced U.S. government officials otherwise.

By late 1943 and early 1944, it became apparent to American military and political strategists that Persian Gulf oil must play a crucial role in prosecuting the war against the Axis, fulfilling Allied civilian needs, satisfying postwar Allied military requirements, and conserving Western Hemisphere oil for U.S. domestic and emergency use. But how could the United States best secure a supply of foreign oil adequate to meet its wartime and postwar requirements? The solution certain key Roosevelt administration figures favored was for the U.S. government to play a direct and immediate role in controlling American petroleum interests in Saudi Arabia. Through a newly created Petroleum Reserves Corporation (PRC), directed by the departments of state, war, navy, and interior, the U.S. government would buy out Casoc's Saudi concession.

The PRC was anathema to American oilmen in Saudi Arabia, and deeply worried the State Department's Division of Near Eastern Affairs (NEA). Having invested ten years and more than \$30 million exploring for oil along

Saudi Arabia's Persian Gulf coast, and after carefully cultivating the friendship and political patronage of the Saudi court, Casoc was now poised to reap enormous profits as Saudi oil came on line in increasing volume. For its part, NEA saw U.S. government control over American oil investments in Saudi Arabia as politically wrongheaded and economically inefficient. Government ownership would render American oil interests suspect in Saudi eyes. Ibn Saud and members of his court had told the American minister in Jidda that the "primary consideration in awarding concessions to Casoc was reliance on the absence of ulterior American political motives in respect of Saudi Arabia specifically and Near East generally."<sup>25</sup>

The PRC plan for U.S. government ownership of the American oil interests in Saudi Arabia never bore fruit, but the PRC episode points out the increasingly complicated relationship between the U.S. government and private American oil interests in the Persian Gulf during the 1940s. The Casoc-PRC conflict of 1943 makes clear that the interests of the oil companies, based on profits, and those of the White House, based on the imperatives of national security, did not always coincide. At the same time, the position taken by NEA toward the PRC debacle underscores the significant disagreements within the American foreign policy establishment concerning U.S. oil diplomacy and Persian Gulf affairs. Mid-level analysts and diplomats in the field frequently disagreed with their superiors in Washington.

By 1944, despite their disagreements over how best to secure Persian Gulf oil, every member of the American foreign policy and military establishments appreciated its critical importance. As the war against Hitler concluded, petroleum from the Gulf was seen as crucial to concluding the war against Japan and rebuilding a devastated Europe.<sup>26</sup> U.S. planners recognized that Saudi Arabian oil, under concession to American firms, constituted "a stupendous source of strategic power and one of the greatest material prizes in world history."<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, Persian Gulf oil constituted an important element of the new hemispheric oil policy contemplated by American planners to conserve the petroleum assets of the Western Hemisphere for domestic and emergency use.<sup>28</sup>

How best to secure Persian Gulf petroleum and their oil concessions in the Gulf emerged as a sticky diplomatic issue between the United States and Britain in 1943 and 1944. Surely an Anglo-American *modus vivendi* concerning oil would have to be established if the region's petroleum riches were to be exploited in an efficient and mutually profitable fashion. Americans and Britons both perceived efforts by the other to subvert their oil interests in the region. Prime Minister Churchill complained to President Roosevelt that "there is an apprehension in some quarters here that the United States has a desire to deprive us of our oil assets in the Middle East" and that "we are being hustled." The president retorted that he was disturbed by rumors that "the British wish to horn in on Saudi Arabian oil reserves."<sup>29</sup> Consequently, in August 1944 U.S.

and British negotiators concluded the Anglo-American Petroleum Agreement, an intergovernmental commodity arrangement. It created an International Petroleum Commission charged with preparing estimates of global demand for oil, allocating production quotas to various countries, and advising the two governments on the development of the global petroleum industry.<sup>30</sup>

Saudi Arabia's oil was not the only strategic value the United States saw in the Persian Gulf area. The region sat at the geographic crossroads of Africa, Asia, and Europe. American and British planners appreciated the role Persian Gulf countries played in securing Russia's southern flank and the value of the "Persian Corridor" as a channel through which to ship war matériel to the Soviet Union. In August 1942 the U.S. Army created the Persian Gulf Service Command to support the joint British-Soviet occupation of Iran and maintain the Allied supply routes into Russia. Between 1942 and 1945, 30,000 American troops built harbors, docking facilities, warehouses, roads, and railroads between the Gulf ports and the Soviet border, and transported 5.5 million tons of supplies to the Soviet allies. The U.S. military presence in Iran further helped to secure British-controlled oil fields in the country as well as the refinery at Abadan.<sup>31</sup>

Saudi Arabia became the cockpit of American diplomatic activity in the Persian Gulf by 1944. Situated at the intersection of the European and Asian theaters of the war, the kingdom was ideally suited to be a transportation and transshipment hub for the Allied war effort. J. Rives Childs, the U.S. minister in Jidda just after the war, likened the kingdom to "a gigantic aircraft carrier, astride the Middle East, and close to one of the world's richest oil fields, in which we had a controlling interest."<sup>32</sup> The U.S. Military Air Transport Service desired to build an airfield at Dhahran near the Aramco oil facilities at Dammam to serve the United States' military and civilian interests, both in wartime and in peace.<sup>33</sup> Militarily, the facility would first aid in the war against Japan and then act as a link in the chain of air bases providing a defense in depth of the American mainland. From Dhahran, the United States would be able to project military power, defend Western access to Persian Gulf oil, act militarily in Africa or South Asia, if necessary, and launch attacks against potential enemies in wartime.<sup>34</sup>

Dhahran also held a prominent place in American plans to promote U.S. civil aviation in the postwar world, and could be used to challenge the British aviation monopoly in the Persian Gulf region.<sup>35</sup> U.S. strategic planners realized that civil and military aviation would be closely tied in the postwar world and that a "strong United States air transport system, international in scope and readily adapted to military use, is vital to our air power and future national security."<sup>36</sup> Accordingly, American construction crews began work on the Dhahran airbase in September 1945, after the war in both Europe and Asia had ended, and completed the facility the following year. The U.S. government

signed a three-year renewable lease with the Saudi government giving command of the base to an American military officer and permitting U.S. "transit rights" there.

British officials viewed the United States' new position in Saudi Arabia with trepidation. Arabia and the Persian Gulf were traditionally British spheres of influence, and many mid-level Foreign Office officials and British diplomats in Saudi Arabia saw U.S. diplomacy in the region as part of a larger American effort to subvert Britain's long-established political dominance in the Middle East. Consequently, Anglo-American relations in Saudi Arabia were strained during the Second World War.<sup>37</sup> At the same time, U.S. State Department officials, both in Washington and in the Middle East, believed British diplomats in the Gulf worked actively during the war to weaken American economic power in Saudi Arabia, eliminate U.S. political influence in the kingdom, and bolster their postwar position in the Middle East.

Exacerbating this belief were "personal frictions, a feeling that Britain exploited the region for imperialist ends, [U.S.] support for the nationalist sentiments of local peoples, [and] a concern that British oppression [in Arabia] furnished a useful theme for Axis propaganda."<sup>38</sup> American diplomats further resented British presumptions of political supremacy in the region. Parker Hart, a U.S. Foreign Service officer who opened the American consulate in Dhahran in 1944, remembered that "British officials, and especially political agents in the Persian Gulf, carried with them into the war years a deep indoctrination in the defense of traditional privilege."<sup>39</sup> For their part, British officials in the Middle East often disliked their American counterparts. "British Foreign Service Officers had a definite view of the American character . . . and it was not generally flattering despite the assumption of a fundamental sharing of common interests. Consequently, problems arose on the ground."<sup>40</sup>

At the highest levels of the Foreign Office and in Downing Street, though, attitudes toward America's presence in Saudi Arabia were more generous. Prime Minister Winston Churchill and his top foreign policy advisers were beginning to recognize the need for American military and political power in the Persian Gulf region at a time when Britain's financial resources were strained. The real issue before them, they believed, was how best to construct their relationship with the Saudi king in a manner consistent with British political and imperial requirements in the Gulf while acknowledging U.S. strategic and economic interests in Saudi Arabia.<sup>41</sup>

Ibn Saud and senior members of the Saudi court actively encouraged Anglo-American political competition in Saudi Arabia. Seeking to secure his throne and expand his influence throughout Arabia, the king did not wish to see his country dominated by a single Western power. Leery of Britain's dominant position in the Persian Gulf and the southern Arabian periphery, and

angry at London's friendship with his Hashemite political rivals in Transjordan and Iraq, he solicited American political patronage, often through the good offices of Aramco. He hedged his bets by courting the British government at the same time.<sup>42</sup>

The most important conflict in the Persian Gulf region during the early 1940s had not been between the Allied and Axis powers, but rather between Britain and the United States for political dominance in Saudi Arabia. As it unfolded, this conflict illuminated the potential gulf between the interests and motivations of the American oil firms and senior government policy-makers in the Gulf region, and anticipated the problems that would emerge between Aramco and U.S. officials in later years. It also underscored important disagreements between British diplomats in the field and their superiors in London on how best to confront the American challenge in Saudi Arabia.

The majority of British foreign policy makers, however, came to the conclusion by 1944 and 1945 that American power was to be welcomed in the Middle East as in Europe to support Britain's traditional position and interests. A new "special relationship" with the United States must, therefore, be cultivated in which British influence could be brought to bear on American policy. Britain had expended a quarter of its national wealth to fight the war, and senior officials in London recognized that the economic costs of the conflict were potentially fatal to Britain's status as a great power with global interests and influence. In 1945 Indian independence was recognized as inevitable, and Britain's relationship to its other client states and dependencies in the Middle East, Asia, and Africa must be shored up if the British Empire and Commonwealth were to survive. The United States' abrupt cancellation of Lend-Lease assistance to Britain in August 1945 frightened and angered officials in London. After hard negotiations, British negotiators obtained a \$3.75 billion loan from the United States that winter. Further American political assistance was desperately needed to save the British Empire.

A piece of doggerel penned by one of the British loan negotiators in 1945 read

In Washington Lord Halifax  
Once whispered to Lord Keynes  
"It's true they have the moneybags  
But we have all the brains."<sup>43</sup>

The verse suggests the central dilemma of Britain's American policy at the end of the war: How could British policymakers best use their experience and knowledge to enlist American financial and political support in the service of their imperial interests, including those in the Persian Gulf region?<sup>44</sup>

## The Political Economy of Persian Gulf Oil in the Early Cold War

While the Second World War established the United States as a political power in the Persian Gulf and secured the region's petroleum for the Allies, it also drove up demand for oil both in the United States and in Europe. The need for petroleum products continued to skyrocket in the late 1940s to meet civilian demand pent up by the war and to fulfill the requirements of European reconstruction. During this period, U.S. policymakers came to view the oil of the Persian Gulf region as a vital political, as well as economic, resource. They recognized its crucial importance to the reconstruction and rearmament of the Western European allies and as a key element in their policy of containing Soviet communism.

Oil production in the United States grew tremendously during the war years in order to meet American and Allied demands, but the supplies available from domestic producers could not satisfy the booming postwar American economy. Consequently, the United States became a net oil importer by 1947.<sup>45</sup> European demand for oil also exploded after the war. In 1938 petroleum satisfied only 8 percent of the continent's energy needs, but by 1951 it accounted for 15 percent. The Western Hemisphere provided 80 percent of the petroleum consumed by Europe in the 1930s, and in 1946 American and Caribbean sources still supplied 75 percent of the oil required by Europeans. However, the postwar oil shortage in the United States meant that European demand had to be met from Middle Eastern sources. Consistent with the United States' recently articulated hemispheric oil policy, American policymakers encouraged Europeans to consume Persian Gulf oil. The Europeans needed no encouragement—whereas Middle Eastern oil accounted for only 24 percent of European imports in the year before the war, it accounted for 54 percent by 1950.<sup>46</sup>

The destruction and dislocation of the Second World War left the international economic order a shambles and deprived Western Europe of many of its traditional markets and sources of food in Eastern Europe. Germany's coal mines, seriously damaged during the war, could not contribute fully to the energy requirements of the post-war allies. At the same time, the mines of Polish Silesia slipped behind the Iron Curtain and were lost to the West. The severe winters that followed the war drained European energy supplies, increased the general misery in Western Europe, and contributed to a climate of social unrest that worried American officials. Social unrest, they feared, could lead to political turmoil in Europe that, in turn, could be exploited by the Soviets to make political inroads in the West.

By mid-1947, U.S. officials recognized the value of petroleum to Western European economic recovery and political stability, and the vital role supplies from the Persian Gulf region would play in meeting European needs. In the late

1940s, American policymakers determined that the natural resources and raw materials of the lands on the Cold War's periphery must be harnessed to the needs of the recovering Western European industrial democracies. The European Recovery Plan (or Marshall Plan), announced in June 1947, provided the United States' European allies with the dollars they required to purchase American-produced oil. In accordance with the United States' policy of conserving Western Hemisphere oil for its own and for emergency use, section 112 of the U.S. Economic Cooperation Act of 1948 stipulated that in order not to deprive Americans of the oil they required from domestic production, "procurement of petroleum and petroleum products under this title shall to the maximum extent practicable be made from petroleum sources outside the United States."<sup>47</sup> For this reason, U.S. officials urged American firms to increase their production of oil from their concessions in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Kuwait. Eventually, 72 percent of the oil financed by the Marshall Plan came from American producers doing business in the Persian Gulf.<sup>48</sup>

The security of oil supplies for Western European reconstruction and rearmament required stability in the Middle East and Persian Gulf, a condition American diplomats and strategic planners defined at the time as the region being at peace, free from Soviet and communist influence, and open to U.S. private investment and trade. In brief, Middle Eastern stability depended on the United States' ability to craft policies that would "prevent great power ambitions and rivalries and local discontents and jealousies from developing into open conflict which might eventually lead to a third world war."<sup>49</sup> To promote regional stability, U.S. policymakers formulated policies designed to promote the economic development of the Arab states, cement commercial and political ties to Saudi Arabia, and establish a pattern of strategic cooperation with the British government in the Middle East and Gulf region. Additionally, American strategists thought carefully about the military defense of the Middle East in the event of a Soviet attack on the region.

U.S. policymakers believed that important political and commercial benefits would accrue to the United States and the West by encouraging Middle Eastern and Gulf economic development. They believed that the British government attempted to preserve its political hold on the states of the Arabian Peninsula and Persian Gulf by keeping the area "in a state of primitive economy." The United States, on the other hand was "anxious to develop the agriculture, industry, and trade of an area like the Arabian Peninsula. This is based on the theory that the more developed an area becomes the more it can produce, the more it will buy from the United States and other countries of the world, thereby increasing the sum total of world trade, and prosperity."<sup>50</sup> Arabian and Gulf prosperity would create conditions hospitable to political stability, which would secure U.S. oil interests and anchor the region firmly in the Western political camp.

In order to foster regional development and prosperity, the U.S. government actively supported the endeavors of American oil companies in the Persian Gulf and Arabia, most importantly Aramco. Profits from Aramco fueled Saudi economic development, oil-company executives gave American diplomats entrée into the Saudi court, and the U.S. government endorsed and protected Aramco's interests. Thus, commercial and strategic interests drove Aramco and the U.S. government into each other's arms and produced an effective, if wary, partnership in the late 1940s.

The U.S. government worked assiduously to consolidate its political and commercial position in Saudi Arabia during the early Cold War and made the kingdom the centerpiece of its Persian Gulf and Arabian diplomacy. Ibn Saud and his counselors comprehended the value the United States placed on its relationship with their country and extracted a price for it. As the Cold War deepened in the late 1940s, U.S. economic and military investments in Saudi Arabia gained importance in American strategy and foreign policy. At the same time, the American lease on the Dhahran airfield was set to expire in 1949, and the Saudi government was eager to renegotiate the terms of its original 1933 concession to Aramco. Following a series of protracted negotiations in 1949 and 1950, the U.S. government renewed its lease on Dhahran, and Aramco arrived at a new settlement with the Saudi government. In exchange for a new lease on their key airfield in the Persian Gulf, American policymakers agreed to send a military survey mission to the kingdom, sign a mutual defense assistance agreement with the Saudis, and establish a U.S. military training mission in the country. On October 31, 1950, President Harry S. Truman offered the king assurances of the "U.S. interest in the preservation of the independence and territorial integrity of Saudi Arabia" and reiterated that "no threat to your Kingdom could occur which would not be a matter of immediate concern to the United States."<sup>51</sup> Thus, the United States extended to Ibn Saud a guarantee of Saudi security. Meanwhile, the Department of State brokered a new concession for Aramco in Saudi Arabia that divided profits evenly between the company and the Saudi government. The so-called 50-50 agreement greatly increased Saudi oil revenues but did not harm Aramco financially. The U.S. foreign tax credit allowed the company to write off much of what it now paid to the Saudi government.<sup>52</sup>

### **Planning the Defense of Arabia and the Gulf**

While the United States attempted to foster Persian Gulf and Arabian political stability through economic development and closer ties to Saudi Arabia, it also worked to establish a cooperative relationship with the British in the region. American policymakers may have disapproved of British imperial pretensions in the Gulf and resented their ally's unsuccessful attempts to forestall the

American political ascendancy in Saudi Arabia during the war, but they realized that Britain could play an important stabilizing role in the Persian Gulf region in the Cold War. Without conceding it a privileged economic or political status, U.S. planners attempted to “cooperate harmoniously with Great Britain and British officials in the Gulf area.”<sup>53</sup>

Most importantly, U.S. planners felt Britain should play the leading role in directing the military defense of the Middle East. The U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) asserted that the British military should bear the primary responsibility for protecting the Gulf oil fields and that “the defense of these areas, together with the overall area of the Middle East, should be accepted by the British as a British responsibility and that they should develop, organize, and as necessary provide forces for an effective defense thereof.”<sup>54</sup>

At the same time, American officials drew up their own plans to defend the region in time of war. In the immediate postwar period, the JCS recognized the vital role Persian Gulf oil would play in the event of a conflict with the Soviet Union. Writing to the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee in October 1946, the Joint Chiefs concluded that the “loss of the Iraq and Saudi Arabia sources to the United States and her allies would mean that in case of war they would fight an oil-starved war. Conversely, denial of these sources to the USSR would force her to fight an oil-starved war. . . . It is therefore to the strategic interest of the United States to keep Soviet influence and Soviet armed forces removed as far as possible from oil resources in Iran, Iraq, and the Near and Middle East.”<sup>55</sup>

Even before the Joint Chiefs fully comprehended the importance of Gulf oil to American Cold War military strategy, U.S. Navy planners and Navy Secretary James Forrestal recognized its value in the postwar world. American-produced oil from the Persian Gulf served U.S. naval needs in important ways in the late 1940s, fueling U.S. men-of-war in the Mediterranean, the Indian Ocean, and the western Pacific. Between 1946 and 1950, 30 to 42 percent of the oil transported by the U.S. Navy came from the Persian Gulf.<sup>56</sup> Forrestal carried the navy’s concern for Persian Gulf oil with him when he became Secretary of Defense in September 1947. He worried that “the Marshall Plan for Europe could not succeed without access to the Middle East oil, that we could not fight a war without access to it and that even in peacetime our economy would be unable to maintain its present tempo without it.”<sup>57</sup> In January 1948 he told Congress that an oil shortage would be a matter of national security for the United States and that if a third world war broke out, the United States would find itself short 2 million barrels of oil per day.<sup>58</sup>

Despite the economic and political imperatives of Western European reconstruction, the anxieties of the Secretary of Defense, and the requirements of the U.S. Navy, American contingency plans for the defense of the Middle East in the late 1940s did not place a particularly high priority on safeguarding the oil

fields of the Persian Gulf. The Middle East was, indeed, a strategically vital region of the world in the eyes of American military planners, but its value consisted of more than just its considerable petroleum reserves.

In late 1945 the JCS began planning for the possibility of war with the Soviet Union, and the following spring produced a series of studies, codenamed *Pincher*, that explored various issues relating to the defense of specific geographic areas. Joint War Plans Committee (JWPC) study 485/1, completed late in 1946, looked at the issue of Persian Gulf defense. Concluding that U.S. domestic oil supplies might be insufficient to fuel a protracted war against the Soviets, the plan called for the defense of the Gulf's oil fields. Navy planners on the JWPC urged, "if petroleum products from the Persian Gulf area will be required in a reasonable time, Bahrein Island should be held to secure as a base for the recapture of adjacent areas."<sup>59</sup> The suggestion failed to impress the members of the JCS, who doubted their ability to hold the Persian Gulf in the face of a determined Soviet onslaught. The U.S. Army, in particular, felt that it was impossible to guarantee the flow of Persian Gulf petroleum and that, therefore, "Middle East oil would be of negligible if not negative strategic value to the United States" in time of war.<sup>60</sup> Besides, they argued, the Persian Gulf was an area of British military responsibility. In the meantime, the U.S. Army and the Army Air Forces were engaged in designing a joint war plan that relied heavily on the atomic bomb and that would defeat the Soviet Union within six months. Access to Persian Gulf oil would be unnecessary in such a war.

Between late 1946 and 1949, the JWPC formulated a number of strategies to incorporate Western assets in the Middle East into the larger plans of the United States to defeat the Soviet Union. The most important of these assets were the key air facilities at Abu Sueir, in the British-controlled Suez Canal Zone, and, secondarily, the American airfield at Dhahran, in Saudi Arabia. A strategic study, codenamed *Caldron* and completed in November 1946, posited that the Middle East constituted the Soviet Union's most vulnerable flank and that the Soviet industrial heartland and the center of Soviet oil production were susceptible to attack from Western allied air facilities in the Middle East. The following year, the joint war plan *Broiler* confirmed the importance of the Middle Eastern air fields and envisioned a coordinated nuclear air attack against Soviet Russia launched by American B-29 bombers from bases in Britain, Okinawa, and the Suez Canal Zone. In 1948 *Halfmoon* replaced *Broiler* and again affirmed the critical importance of the airbase in Egypt to the Western Allies' strategy.<sup>61</sup> Defense of the approaches to Egypt thus became the most important priority in Middle East defense for both the Americans and the British.

American war plans did not completely ignore the defense of the Persian Gulf, however. Navy strategists remained convinced that access to Persian Gulf petroleum was an essential strategic requirement in time of war. Determined

to make at least a gesture toward Gulf defense, the chief of naval operations, Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz, issued a "Tentative Assignment of Forces for Emergency Operations" in May 1947 that divided responsibility for Gulf military action between the Pacific and Mediterranean fleets. The plan stipulated that a Pacific-based U.S. Marine battalion landing team be assigned to cooperate with British forces to occupy and defend Bahrain in the event of war. Later in the year Nimitz ordered a reinforced marine battalion assigned to American naval forces in the Mediterranean to be used in Gulf operations. In 1948 joint war plans Halfmoon and Frolic provided for the airlift of the battalion to Bahrain at the outbreak of hostilities to aid in the evacuation of American citizens from the region and to help destroy American oil properties in advance of a Soviet seizure of the Gulf. Navy protestations to the contrary, the majority view within the U.S. military held that a massive atomic air campaign against the Soviet Union held the key to allied victory. Plans to save the Persian Gulf oilfields remained a secondary concern. Consequently, plan Offtackle, adopted in early 1950, eliminated war plans to airlift the marine battalion to Bahrain and envisioned recapturing the Gulf and its oil reserves sometime during the second year of a general war.<sup>62</sup>

At the same time the U.S. Navy argued vehemently to commit American resources to Persian Gulf defense it made its most meaningful and lasting gesture in the region by establishing a permanent naval presence in the Gulf, in 1948. On January 20, 1948, Task Force 126, U.S. Naval Force Persian Gulf, began operations from the British naval facility in Bahrain, where it supervised the activities of U.S. Navy oil tankers calling at Gulf ports. By the middle of 1948, the navy had established satellite stations in Ethiopia and at Dhahran, and leased oil-storage facilities at Aden and in Ceylon. The following year, Task Force 126 received a new designation, U.S. Middle East Force. While MIDEASTFOR was far too small to play a meaningful role in defending the oil fields of the Persian Gulf, its command history recounts that it "supplied much needed intelligence, maintained liaison with all allied military and diplomatic forces present, conducted both informal and official calls on civilian and military dignitaries of all countries and pursued an active type people-to-people program." In short, the small task force symbolized the high value placed by the U.S. Navy on Persian Gulf oil and its determination to play an important role in the region.<sup>63</sup>

While the United States valued the Middle East's military facilities and oil fields as elements in the larger architecture of its containment policy, British officials emphasized the region's importance to imperial and commonwealth defense, to the security of British oil supplies and investments, and as a theater in which Britain could demonstrate its power and influence as a great power. Anthony Eden, then foreign secretary, summarized the value of the Middle East to Britain in an April 1945 memorandum. The region was, he declared,

"one of the most important strategic areas of the world, and it is an area the defence of which is a matter of life and death to the British Empire since . . . it is there that the Empire can be cut in half."<sup>64</sup> Five months later, Lord Altrincham, the British resident minister in the Middle East, concurred that the Middle East was a vital "funnel of communication between the western, eastern, and southern peoples of the Commonwealth."<sup>65</sup> His concern with imperial communications is echoed throughout British documents on the Middle East. As Altrincham explained, "The British Empire, in contrast to the self-contained land-masses of the American and Soviet Union's, is a co-operative commonwealth of widely separated peoples; and the resources necessary to its existence are as widely scattered as the peoples themselves. Its life and strength therefore depend upon the freedom of its communications."<sup>66</sup> The Middle East, the British government argued, was crucial in this regard. "The area has proved as vital for air and radio communications as for camel caravans and steamships," the Foreign Office said in late 1947.<sup>67</sup>

Further, the Middle East provided a network of military facilities from which London could defend its imperial possessions and military reserves in sub-Saharan Africa. Following the loss of India in 1947, Africa assumed a key role in Britain's imperial policies. Africa, it was widely believed in London, might replace India as an important source of raw materials and military manpower.<sup>68</sup> Because of its central location, British planners recognized the Middle East as "the easiest route for a European-Asiatic power into the African continent" and as "the first step in a direct threat of our main support area of Southern Africa."

The safety of Britain's oil supplies and its investment in Persian Gulf petroleum facilities provided another reason for London's interest in Middle Eastern security. Little oil existed elsewhere in the empire, and British assets in the Persian Gulf provided a source from which imperial requirements could be met with sterling oil rather than dollar oil. In 1945 Foreign Office officials concluded that Persian Gulf oil would be vital to Britain in wartime, and the British military's Chiefs of Staff Committee wrote a year later, "We are forced to the inescapable conclusion that if there were no other reasons for maintaining our position in the Middle East the problem of our oil supplies would demand that we should do so."<sup>69</sup>

Britain's traditional role as the most important Western power in the Middle East and Persian Gulf provided London with a great deal of political capital in the postwar world. British officials guarded this capital zealously. They believed it helped preserve Britain's stature as a great power with global interests and responsibilities. It gave them clout in the capitals of the Arab world and Iran, made them important participants in the Cold War councils of the West, and, they believed, provided them with political leverage in Washington. The British Chiefs of Staff Committee concluded in 1949, "If we

surrendered this hold and the responsibilities which it entails, we would automatically surrender our position as a world power, with the inevitable strategic and economic consequences. We should join the ranks of the other European powers and be treated as such by the United States.”<sup>70</sup> For these reasons, British policymakers clung doggedly to their “informal empire” in the Middle East, since its loss “translated directly into a loss of global prestige and influence.”<sup>71</sup>

British policymakers pursued several strategies simultaneously to protect their interests and status in the Middle East and Persian Gulf. Foreign Office officials worked diligently to involve the most powerful members of the British Commonwealth in Middle Eastern defense. Meanwhile, the Labor government of Clement Attlee attempted to transform the nature of British imperialism in the Middle East into a cooperative, rather than an exploitative, venture that would pacify the peoples of the region and secure British political hegemony there.

With Indian independence in 1947, Britain lost its largest reserve of military manpower for operations in the Middle East. For generations, Indian and Middle Eastern security had been inextricably bound together in British imperial policy, but now that bond had been severed. British planners looked to their partners in the commonwealth to provide the resources and manpower for Middle Eastern defense that had once come from the subcontinent. London had always encouraged the so-called white dominions of Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa to bear a substantial part of the material burden for imperial defense, and now they viewed their support in the Middle East and Persian Gulf as indispensable.

Through the consultative machinery of the commonwealth, British officials pressed New Zealand and Australia to create expeditionary forces for action in the Middle East. Both were reluctant and were much more concerned with the problems of communist insurgency in Malaya and Indochina than with the oil fields and air facilities of the Middle East. South Africa, too, proved reluctant to commit resources to the region. The Afrikaner government in Pretoria was moving away from a cooperative relationship with the British and instead chose to emphasize its military role of “keeping order” in sub-Saharan Africa. In short, the diverging security interests of Britain, New Zealand, Australia, and South Africa, coupled with the growing political independence of the commonwealth members, made it impossible for London to find support for its Middle Eastern defense plans among its closest overseas partners.

At the same time it attempted to rally commonwealth support for Middle Eastern defense, the Labour government planned to remake its relationship with the countries of the region. Prime Minister Attlee and Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin envisioned a multiracial commonwealth in place of the authoritarian and exploitative empire in the Middle East. Their motives were strategic as well as humanitarian. By establishing a political partnership with the peoples

of the region and sponsoring sweeping economic and social-development programs, Attlee and Bevin hoped to curtail anti-British nationalist sentiment, secure Britain's economic and political position in the Middle East and Persian Gulf, and curb American political and economic incursions into a traditional British preserve.<sup>72</sup>

British officials worked to enlist American resources in their efforts to shore up Britain's position as the dominant Western power in the Middle East. Growing U.S. involvement in the Persian Gulf region presented British policy-makers with a difficult political predicament during the early Cold War period. While they resented and tried to discourage American economic and political penetration in the region, officials in London recognized that American military and material aid had become indispensable to Gulf and Arabian security. From the end of the Second World War, British officials hoped to enlist American power in the service of their Middle Eastern and Persian Gulf interests. They felt they could do so without compromising Britain's political predominance in the area.<sup>73</sup>

British officials, therefore, engaged the United States in political and military consultations on the Middle East and Persian Gulf. Their efforts met with mixed success. Politically, the British government "felt it essential to discuss, secretly and confidentially with the American Government, the situation in the Middle East so as to avoid the risk of the Americans and ourselves pursuing opposed policies."<sup>74</sup> By autumn 1947 British officials had succeeded in convincing the Americans to accept a political and military role in the region, and in October and November 1947 American and British planners convened in Washington to assess the situation in the Middle East and to explore avenues of cooperation in the region. The so-called Pentagon Talks were held largely at British insistence and seemed to London a great success.<sup>75</sup>

But the United States refused to concede Britain's special position in the Persian Gulf. American representatives to the talks argued that Britain's special treaty relationships with the Gulf rulers were outmoded and needed to be reformulated in light of the political and economic changes wrought by the discovery of oil in the region. Surely, they concluded, "it is right for us to inquire of the steps the British are planning to take to recognize the new situation in the Persian Gulf, as well as in south Arabia."<sup>76</sup> Further, the Americans had no intention of playing second fiddle politically to the British in the Middle East, and would actively avoid being manipulated into propping up Britain's privileged position there. They would not recognize the region as a "British sphere of influence" and "it would not follow that we should become a sort of Middle Eastern junior partner of the British, nor that we should be placed in the position of more or less blindly following the British lead." The Americans argued that Britain and the United States needed to coordinate their policies to preserve Middle Eastern security against the Soviet threat and

that London should exercise the primary military responsibility for defending the Middle East.<sup>77</sup>

British strategists joined their American counterparts in planning the defense of the Persian Gulf and Middle East from Soviet attack. Like the Americans, British policymakers understood that the region's oil reserves did not constitute its most important military assets. The air bases of the region, they agreed, were crucial to waging an offensive air campaign against the Soviet Union. British military strategy, therefore, concentrated upon defending their enormous military facility in the Suez Canal Zone from Soviet forces invading the Middle East, but strategists in London did not neglect the Gulf. In a staff study titled "Intermezzo," produced in May 1948, British military thinkers in the Middle East aimed "to study strategy in the Middle East, with the direct view to ensuring the supply of oil from the Persian Gulf area in the event of a war against Russia." The study acknowledged that "the successful defence of the Persian Gulf is not in itself vital to the defence of the Middle East," but that the oilfields of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain would be critical to the West's ability to wage war for more than twelve months and, once seized by the Soviets, would be very difficult to recapture. Therefore, steps must be taken to deploy air, sea, and land forces in the Gulf region before the outbreak of war, and advanced bases to support Persian Gulf operations must be established in western Pakistan and East Africa.<sup>78</sup>

The British war plan Sandown, circulated in July 1948, again contemplated the matter of Egyptian and Persian Gulf defense. The plan assumed that American military assistance would be forthcoming and gave precedence to defending Egypt and its key air facilities, but envisioned a series of concentric rings of defense that protected the entire Middle East. The so-called Outer Ring of British defense ran along the "mountain passes leading into southern Turkey and western and southern Persia as far as Bandar Abbas" near the Strait of Hormuz, thus defending the Gulf oil fields. British strategists, however, felt they did not have the resources available to hold the Outer Ring and instead planned to defend Egypt from the so-called Ramallah Line, which ran through Palestine from Tel Aviv to Jericho and then south to Aqaba.<sup>79</sup>

American officials urged Britain to defend the Outer Ring and not to abandon Gulf defense. British strategists, they charged, ignored the role American air interdiction against Soviet ground forces would play in aiding their efforts in the region. Further, winter snows in the Taurus and Zagros mountain ranges and spring flooding in the Tigris-Euphrates river valley would slow the Soviet advance through Iran and Iraq toward the Gulf. The British military remained dubious. Could they expect American military help on the ground? Did the United States still intend to airlift a marine battalion to the Gulf?<sup>80</sup>

At the end of 1949, the United States decided not to commit ground forces to the defense of the Middle East. Joint war plan Offtackle, approved by the Joint Chiefs in December 1949 but contested by the British, abandoned plans

to launch the air offensive against the Soviet Union from Egyptian bases and held that the Persian Gulf oil fields would be defended "only if militarily possible." Offtackle abolished the plan, provided for in *Halfmoon*, to dispatch a marine battalion to the Bahrain-Dhahran area. Instead, American strategists decided to concentrate their resources in the Iberian Peninsula and northwest Africa, where Western Allied armies would mass for the reconquest of Soviet-occupied Europe.

### **The Challenge of Arab and Persian Nationalism**

While the United States and Britain grappled with the difficult problems of Middle Eastern defense and the character of their own political relationship in the region, the peoples of the Middle East and Persian Gulf pursued their own agendas with one another and with the Anglo-American allies. Local rulers often sought to consolidate or extend their power in the region, frequently with London's or Washington's help. Most importantly, Ibn Saud sought to strengthen his position in the Arabian Peninsula by securing his Saudi throne against his political rivals in the region. He saw the British-allied Hashemite kingdoms of Transjordan and Iraq as particular dangers to him. The king became convinced that Britain was waging its own cold war, so to speak, against him in Arabia, encircling his country with its puppet states, Jordan and Iraq in the north, and the Gulf emirates and Aden to the east and south.<sup>81</sup> He appealed to the Americans to intercede on his behalf with London, and the Department of State reluctantly complied. The Foreign Office told their American allies only that their attitude on the question of Saudi-Hashemite competition was one of strict neutrality. London regarded Saudi Arabia's relations with its neighbors as "essentially and exclusively of concern to [the] peoples and states of the area."<sup>82</sup>

Still, British officials remained leery of Arab attempts to play the United States and Britain against one another in the region. One British diplomat concluded in 1952 that "if one day Egyptians, Arabs, Persians, realised that they cannot down us by playing the American card, the whole situation in the Middle East would become much easier."<sup>83</sup> Sir Roger Makins, deputy under-secretary at the Foreign Office, concurred. During a tour of the Persian Gulf sheikhdoms in February and March 1952, he noted the frequent efforts of the Arabs to enlist both the United States and Britain in their own projects. He wrote, "Both governments should realise that the Arab is adept at polite cunning and cupboard love, and should therefore shed any illusion that one is more popular than the other in the long run, even in Saudi Arabia."<sup>84</sup>

Throughout the Middle East, the rumblings of revolutionary nationalism and Pan-Arabism were beginning to stir the political ferment in the 1940s. British officials were among the first to take note and the first to appreciate the

need to treat the phenomena seriously. Although British military observers often dismissed nationalism as mere “xenophobia,” and reassured London that “the craze will pass,” the Labour government and the Foreign Office recognized the necessity of cultivating good relations with moderate nationalist leaders.<sup>85</sup> Through the years, the Foreign Office often reiterated the need to accommodate Middle Eastern nationalism in order to channel it in safe directions.

The United States had yet to consider nationalism systematically or to assess its ramifications for American diplomacy in the Middle East. American policymakers were naturally sympathetic to the desires of native peoples to decide their own futures, and a kind of instinctive anticolonialism informed American policy in the region. Though committed British imperialists often dismissed American anticolonialism as naïve or fatuous, or as a disingenuous cover for U.S. efforts to penetrate imperial commercial monopolies, it was a genuinely held conviction.<sup>86</sup>

Moral and pragmatic considerations combined to tie American anticolonialism to American anticommunism in the early Cold War. Policymakers in America worried that European exploitation of their colonial dependencies would feed virulently anti-Western nationalism in lands whose markets, natural resources, and military facilities were crucial to the United States and its allies. The Soviet Union might easily exploit this form of nationalism to make political inroads in the Middle East.<sup>87</sup>

But U.S. officials were ambivalent in their anticolonialism and frequently subordinated their anti-imperial values to the demands of alliance politics. Imperial assets often proved valuable to American policy on the Cold War’s periphery, and U.S. policymakers tolerated and abetted the imperial policies of their allies in order to assure their cooperation in Europe. In many ways, American strategists valued Britain’s role in Asia. A JCS study concluded in 1946 that the demise of the British Empire “would eliminate from Eurasia the last bulwark of resistance between the United States and Soviet expansion.”<sup>88</sup> Britain’s presence in the Middle East seemed particularly important in this regard.

### **Crisis in Iran**

The complicated dynamic between American anticolonialism and anticommunism played a key role in shaping the United States’ response to British imperialism and local nationalism in the Middle East and Persian Gulf, first in Iran during the oil nationalization crisis of 1951–1954. A mountain of scholarly literature on this subject has been published since U.S. and British records from the period began to be declassified in the early 1990s.<sup>89</sup> While it is outside the scope of this chapter to examine the Iran crisis in detail, the events of the early 1950s illuminate many of its key themes.

Iran had been both an irritant and an important theater of the Cold War since 1945. The Soviet Union's equivocation that autumn over whether it would withdraw its troops from the northern part of the country at the Second World War's conclusion precipitated one of the first crises of the East-West conflict. The Soviets, it appears, hoped to use northern Iran as a buffer to secure their oil facilities in Baku, on the Caspian Sea. They also sought an Iranian oil concession to challenge that held by Britain in other parts of the country, and wished to promote the growth of local Communist parties, which were emerging in the country. The United States was reluctant to confront the Soviets militarily in Iran, but the carefully calibrated threat of American military action, stern British admonitions to the Soviets about the consequences of their actions, and adroit diplomacy by Iranian prime minister Ahmad Qavam convinced the Soviets to withdraw their forces from Iran at the beginning of May 1946.<sup>90</sup>

By 1951 the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC), as William Knox D'Arcy's Anglo-Persian Oil Company was renamed in 1935, had been operating in Iran for more than four decades. Its massive oil-refinery complex at Abadan, at the Persian Gulf's northern end, had become vitally important to Britain economically, militarily, and politically.<sup>91</sup> Most importantly, the refinery stood as a symbol of British power in the Middle East. As Francis Pelly, the British political agent in Kuwait explained, Abadan "stood for something . . . huge, a symbol which not even the most skeptical Arab could deny of British energy, British wealth, British efficiency, and British industrial might."<sup>92</sup> Were Britain to lose its refinery at Abadan, its prestige throughout the Gulf region would suffer, with disastrous political consequences.

AIOC's operations in Iran and its refinery at Abadan had always been an irritant in Anglo-Iranian relations. By the late 1940s, officials in Tehran were dissatisfied with the financial terms of the British concession in their country, resented the dearth of Iranians in high-level positions in AIOC, and were suspicious of the secretive and exclusive nature of British economic operations in their country. Failed negotiations to restructure the British concession caused long-simmering resentments of British economic activities to boil over during early 1951.<sup>93</sup> In April that year, the newly appointed prime minister, Muhammad Mussadiq, a nationalist firebrand, nationalized AIOC and placed his country on a dangerous collision course with British imperialism in the Persian Gulf. The crisis inevitably impinged on the interests of the United States in the region and had repercussions for Anglo-American diplomacy throughout the Middle East.

U.S. interests in Iran, though related to British interests in the country, were distinctly different. British policymakers were preoccupied by the effects of Mussadiq's nationalization policy on Britain's balance of payments, the flow of oil to British industry and to the Royal Navy, and on London's political capital

in the Middle East. Officials in the Truman administration, the Department of State, and the Pentagon thought primarily in terms of Iran's value to their policy of containing Soviet power. Since 1945 American strategists had recognized Iran's military and political vulnerability but had emphasized its importance to securing Western interests in the Middle East and in defending the region from Russian military attack. American planners believed that the loss of Iran to communism would render all the Middle East vulnerable to Soviet aggression, deprive the allies of Persian Gulf petroleum vital to Western European reconstruction and rearmament, endanger allied lines of communication, and damage American prestige. Further, U.S. officials feared that Mussadiq's appropriation of AIOC would set a dangerous precedent in the region. The security of American oil investments in the Gulf might be put in jeopardy if host governments believed they could be seized with impunity.<sup>94</sup>

For these reasons, U.S. officials worked throughout the Iran crisis—first, to prevent the British from driving Mussadiq into the arms of the Tudeh, Iran's Communist party; second, to prevent a situation that would lead the Soviet Union to intervene militarily in Iran on Mussadiq's behalf; and third, to keep Iranian oil accessible to the West. In order to do this, they counseled the British government to negotiate with the nationalist Mussadiq government and to compromise with it where necessary. They also continued their program of financial aid to Iran, begun in the late 1940s, in an effort to bolster Mussadiq's position against the Tudeh.

Although British Foreign Office officials had written eloquently and at length about the wisdom of conciliating and co-opting Middle Eastern nationalism, the Attlee government remained intransigent in its determination to thwart Mussadiq's nationalization efforts. Encouraged vociferously by AIOC's chairman, William M. Fraser, the British government pursued a three-pronged strategy of engaging the Iranians through the International Court of Justice and in a series of protracted negotiations; undermining Mussadiq's base of support by imposing costly sanctions on the sale of Iranian oil and conducting threatening naval exercises in the Persian Gulf; and by planning, clandestinely, Mussadiq's removal from office.<sup>95</sup>

Why did the Attlee government ignore the thoughtful advice of its career diplomats on the subject of Middle Eastern nationalism and pursue a policy that could further radicalize the Iranians and provoke Soviet action in the Persian Gulf? The answer lies in the distinction drawn by British diplomats between the full-fledged nationalism of the Arabs and the inchoate Iranian nationalism of the early 1950s, and, also, in the perception in London that, at the moment, Mussadiq posed a more immediate threat to British interests in the Middle East than did the Soviets.

Sir Francis Shepherd, the British ambassador in Tehran in 1951, believed that no genuine nationalist movement yet existed in Iran. "It is a preliminary flicker,"

he wrote to London, "but not yet the authentic flame." Shepherd's replacement in Tehran, Sir George Middleton, expressed a slightly more nuanced view of the issue and deplored the divergence of British and American policies in Iran. He wrote, "The American view is that Persian nationalism is a potent and spontaneous force which will be an overriding factor on its own account regardless of the wishes and actions of any future [British] government. Our view is that Iranian nationalism certainly exists but its effectiveness as a political force is largely a matter of manipulation" by Mussadiq and his followers.<sup>96</sup>

British policymakers deeply resented the United States' entreaties to compromise with the Mussadiq government during the oil nationalization crisis. At the same time, they recognized that breaking openly with the United States over the matter could damage their position in the Middle East and diminish their influence in Washington. Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden wrote in August 1952 that "Mr. Acheson and the State Department, in their anxiety to ward off Communism in Persia, have long desired to assist Mussadiq at the expense of the rights and interests of the AIOC and Her Majesty's Government." Yet, Eden continued, "a parting of ways between the Americans and ourselves in Persia might well mean the end of our influence in that country for a long period and have serious repercussions elsewhere."<sup>97</sup> Clearly, British officials felt the Iranian nationalist government presented a much more immediate danger to their interests in the Persian Gulf region than did Soviet communism. Yet, they recognized that they must not antagonize the Americans over Iran and, thus, jeopardize their ability to exert what influence they could over American foreign policy.

In early 1953 U.S. and British policies in Iran began to converge for a number of reasons. American analysts mistakenly concluded that Mussadiq was beginning to rely heavily on the political support of the Tudeh, causing fears in Washington that he was subjecting Iran to Soviet influence.<sup>98</sup> The new presidential administration of Dwight D. Eisenhower initiated a less conciliatory and more confrontational policy toward the Iranian nationalists, as it began a shift from liberal to conservative Cold War policies. Further, the United States' military build-up during the Korean War era emboldened American policymakers to take greater political risks in the Middle East. Finally, the Anglo-American failure to persuade Gamal Abdel Nasser's revolutionary Egyptian government to participate in a Middle East Defense Organization in 1952 and 1953 convinced U.S. policymakers that a "northern tier" defense of the region was critically important. A stable, pro-Western regime in Tehran was indispensable to this strategy. Events conspired to move U.S. and British officials alike to conclude that the Iran crisis must end and that Mussadiq must go. Consequently, the U.S. and British intelligence services cooperated to plan and implement Operation Ajax, a covert operation that removed Mussadiq from power on August 19, 1953.<sup>99</sup>

Following the coup, U.S. and British officials cooperated to reintroduce Iranian oil to the global market following three years of British sanctions against the sale of petroleum refined at Abadan. The Eisenhower administration had no intention of restoring Britain's monopoly on Iranian oil, however, and insisted that Iran be opened to foreign competition. A year of difficult negotiations produced a new Iranian oil consortium that returned 40 percent of its former interest in Iranian oil to AIOC, while the Standard Oil companies of New Jersey and California, Mobil, Texaco, and Gulf Oil all received 7 percent shareholdings in the new operation. Thus, the U.S. government supported the extension of American oil-company interests into a country that was once a preserve of the British petroleum industry. In so doing, Washington continued the policy it began in Saudi Arabia of cooperating with private firms to secure American commercial and strategic interests in the Persian Gulf region.<sup>100</sup>

Britain emerged from the Iran crisis chastened and weakened in the Persian Gulf. While it had cooperated successfully with the United States to remove Mussadiq from power and regained access to its refinery facility at Abadan, it was unable to recover its former exclusive Iranian oil concession. Further, it had shown itself vulnerable to nationalist agitation in the Gulf at the same time it was attempting to meet the nationalist challenge to British power in Egypt. Britain's star was clearly in decline throughout the Middle East. British officials felt compelled by their U.S. allies to negotiate and compromise with the Mussadiq government throughout 1951 and 1952. They resented American generosity with their Persian Gulf investments but felt they must appease the United States or risk losing influence in the diplomatic councils of Washington.

The Iran crisis underscores a number of themes that characterized Anglo-American relations in the Persian Gulf region during the 1950s. First, U.S. and British priorities in the Gulf differed markedly. While British policymakers worked to protect their economic investments in the region, emphasized the value of Gulf petroleum products for British domestic and military use, and attempted to consolidate their position and prestige in the region, U.S. officials placed greater emphasis on the strategic value of the Gulf and its resources to its policy of containing Soviet power.

American and British views of Middle Eastern nationalism diverged sharply during the Iran crisis. An instinctive anticolonialism predisposed American policymakers to sympathize with Iran's efforts to exercise sovereignty over its natural resources and to view British imperialism in the region as both morally wrong and politically destabilizing. At the same time, U.S. strategists recognized Britain's critical role to the defense of the Middle East and did not wish to weaken its closest European ally in the Persian Gulf. Thus, they urged political compromise in order to preserve the interests of both parties. British policymakers saw little to admire in Iranian nationalism, which they viewed as

hysterical and destructive, and resented American efforts to force compromise on them.

Officials of the Attlee and Churchill governments felt that radical nationalism in Iran presented a more immediate threat to their interests in the Persian Gulf than the possibility of Soviet aggression. The Truman administration and the U.S. State Department, on the other hand, believed Britain's refusal to remake its relationship with the Iranian government would force the Mussadiq regime into the hands of local Communists, and that British military action to retake the Abadan refinery would invite open Soviet intervention in Iranian affairs. British officials determined that they must work more diligently to convince the United States that Britain's position in the Persian Gulf region did not merely protect selfish interests but was an asset to the West in the Cold War.

Neither Britain nor the United States truly understood Iranian nationalism in the early 1950s. The demographic, social, and economic upheaval in Iran that led Mussadiq to power and the factionalized and personalized nature of the movement made Iranian nationalism a volatile phenomenon. Mussadiq's ramshackle coalition of urban middle- and lower-middle-class organizations, clerics, and left-wing and anti-Soviet intellectuals was as much a product of Iranian economic modernization and disaffection with the imperial government as a reaction to British imperialism. Like other nationalist movements emerging in the Middle East and Persian Gulf, it frustrated Western efforts to comprehend or conciliate it.

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The value of the Persian Gulf and its resources to Britain and the United States evolved continually over the century and a half prior to the Iran crisis of the early 1950s. From the early nineteenth century onward, Britain recognized the importance of peace, stability, and British dominance in the region to its interests, first in protecting British and Indian shipping in Gulf waters, and later in securing the military approaches to British India, ensuring the supply of Gulf petroleum to itself and to the West, and preserving its lines of communication to its dependencies and commonwealth partners in South and Southeast Asia. The constant transformation of British interests in the Gulf was reflected in the number of government entities that exercised responsibility for British policy in the region. At different times, the government of British India, the Commonwealth Relations Office, the Foreign Office, and the Colonial Office all exercised responsibility for British interests in the Gulf and in Arabia.

The United States came late to the Persian Gulf but, like Britain, established itself as a key player in Gulf affairs. After more than a century of limited commercial, missionary, and philanthropic contacts, Americans entered the region as important economic actors when they discovered petroleum in large quantities under the sands of Bahrain, Kuwait, and, especially, Saudi Arabia.

During the Second World War, U.S. policymakers recognized that the Gulf's oil resources were critically important to prosecuting the war against the Axis powers. In the late 1940s American officials valued Gulf petroleum as important to the reconstruction and rearmament of Western Europe. Further, Western military facilities in the Gulf supported American efforts to contain Soviet and communist power.

British and American policymakers appreciated the Persian Gulf's larger regional context. They recognized that the Gulf was part of a geographic unit that included the Arabian Peninsula and had a direct impact on parts of East Africa and the western Indian Ocean. American and British officials thought about Gulf affairs in the context of their interests in the rest of the Middle East. During the early Cold War, despite their shared framework of analysis, they were forced to make tough choices about regional defense priorities and often disagreed about the relative importance of Gulf petroleum and Middle Eastern military facilities.

Differences over regional policy underscore the ways British and American priorities in the Middle East and Persian Gulf diverged in the years after the Second World War. British officials sought to protect investments in the region, to secure their own and Europe's supply of oil, and to preserve imperial and commonwealth cohesion. Meanwhile, U.S. officials saw the Gulf region almost exclusively in the context of its larger Cold War strategy and diplomacy.

British and American officials responded differently to the challenges posed to their regional diplomacies by the emergence of revolutionary nationalism in the Middle East. The United States sympathized with the aspirations of the nationalists; genuine anti-imperialism informed American policy. American officials believed Britain's imperial presence in the Middle East was to blame for the economic underdevelopment of the Gulf and a possible source of political instability in the region. At the same time, they deplored the anti-Western nature of Middle Eastern nationalism and feared it would be manipulated by the Soviet Union to undermine U.S. and British interests in the region. The best course for Western policy, officials in Washington believed, was to cultivate the nationalist movement and move it into channels consistent with Western interests. Career diplomats in the British Foreign Office frequently advocated this course as well, but were ignored by senior officials in London. Middle Eastern nationalism appeared to the Attlee and Churchill governments as an immediate threat to British interests that must be strenuously opposed.

British and American diplomacy in the Persian Gulf region unfolded against a backdrop of traditional rivalries and animosities completely unrelated to the commercial, imperial, and Cold War concerns of London and Washington. Frequently, local rulers attempted to enlist the aid and influence of their great-power patrons in Britain and the United States as they strove to gain advantage over one another and to assert age-old interests.

Anglo-American relations in the Persian Gulf region reflected the larger contours of the U.S.-British diplomatic relationship. While Britain and the United States remained firm allies and cooperated closely in Europe, where they agreed fully on the danger of Soviet communism to Western interests, their relationship became more complicated in other parts of the world. American officials appreciated the importance of the Anglo-American partnership to their postwar diplomacy and strategy for waging the Cold War. They supported their British allies wherever possible, but worked to avoid being tarred with the brush of British imperialism in the Gulf region. British officials were acutely aware of their diminished economic strength after the war and recognized the need to win American support for their policies overseas. In the Persian Gulf, as elsewhere, they struggled to enlist American economic and political resources in the service of their interests and to persuade their American counterparts that U.S. and British interests in the region were identical. Their aim was to convince skeptics in Washington that the tollgates and barbicans of the shrinking British Empire could be made the toll-gates and barbicans of a new Anglo-American cooperative endeavor in the Middle East.

## **Anticolonialism, Revolutionary Nationalism, and Cold War: Anglo-American Relations in the Persian Gulf Region, 1950–1956**

On January 25, 1954, the British ambassador to Washington, Sir Roger Makins, wrote to the foreign secretary, Selwyn Lloyd: “There is on our side a very understandable impression,” he noted, “that the Americans are out to take our place in the Middle East. Their influence has greatly expanded there since the end of the Second World War, and they are firmly established as the paramount foreign influence in Turkey and Saudi Arabia. . . . Are the Americans consciously trying to substitute their influence for ours in the Middle East? And, even if this is not their conscious policy now, is it nevertheless the inevitable conclusion of the present trend of events?”<sup>1</sup> In a few deftly penned sentences, Makins, formerly a deputy undersecretary in the Foreign Office with special responsibility for Middle Eastern questions, succinctly captured the anxiety within the British foreign policy-making establishment, as it struggled to secure Britain’s interests in the Persian Gulf and in Arabia and to define its diplomatic relationship with Washington during the early 1950s.

Makins’s questions required his colleagues in Whitehall to think carefully about British policies in the Middle East and to place their relationship with the Gulf emirates and client states in southwest Arabia into the larger framework of London’s transatlantic relationship with the United States. Subtle observers of British foreign policy recognized the need, also, to reflect on Britain’s bonds to both Europe and its far-flung commonwealth as they examined Britain’s policies in the Gulf region. Winston Churchill himself, returning to 10 Downing Street in October 1951, urged Britons to think of their nation as occupying the intersection of three adjoining circles from which they could exercise influence with their American cousins, their Western European allies, and their

commonwealth and imperial partners.<sup>2</sup> British policy in the Persian Gulf and Arabian Peninsula is best understood within these interlocking contexts.

### **Anglo-American Tensions in the Middle East and Elsewhere**

During the early 1950s, British policymakers felt extremely insecure about the strength of their position in the Middle East and Persian Gulf. The United States had replaced Britain as the principal patron and most important Western ally of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia during 1944 and 1945, while the Iranian crisis of 1951–1953 deprived Britain of its monopoly over the petroleum resources of that nation. Just as importantly, since 1945, British officials had been engaged in tortuous negotiations with Egypt over the disposition of the British military complex within the Suez Canal Zone. These negotiations, which impaired Britain's efforts to assert its political interests in the Middle East and threatened Western access to the strategically vital air facilities within the Canal Zone, were further complicated by the 1952 nationalist revolution that brought Mohammed Naguib and, eventually, Gamal Abdel Nasser to power in Cairo.<sup>3</sup> Nasser's uncompromising opposition to Britain's military presence in the Canal Zone and his determination to rid the Middle East of British political influence, coupled with his defiantly neutralist posture on Cold War issues, created challenges to British and American diplomacy in the Middle East, which frequently set the two transatlantic allies at odds.

Nasser was not the only factor complicating Anglo-American relations in the early 1950s, however. It was a time of political and economic flux for both nations domestically, and the new Conservative and Republican governments elected to office within 13 months of each other in London and Washington espoused very different philosophies of the Anglo-American diplomatic relationship.

When the Conservative Party returned to power in October 1951, Prime Minister Winston Churchill envisioned an important and active role for Britain on the world stage. Critical to Britain's ability to play this role was its ability to enlist the economic and political support of the United States. Consequently, Churchill struggled to reestablish the close, personal relationship he had enjoyed during wartime with Franklin Roosevelt, but which had eroded somewhat in the postwar years. He was unsuccessful. Presidents Truman and Eisenhower politely—but firmly—rebuffed Churchill's overtures. Eisenhower recounted, after seeing the aging prime minister in January 1953, that "Winston is trying to relive the days of World War II," and that "he talks very animatedly about certain . . . international problems, especially Egypt and its future. But so far as I can see, he has developed an almost childlike faith that all of the answers are to be found merely in British-American partnership."<sup>4</sup>

Eisenhower did appreciate that Britain was a vitally important ally of the United States and by far the most powerful nation in Western Europe. Britain's

industrial production was vastly greater than France's or West Germany's in the early 1950s, and its military production exceeded that of the other nations of Western Europe combined.<sup>5</sup> However, Eisenhower disagreed with Churchill's suggestions that "Britain and the British Commonwealth are not to be treated just as other nations would be treated by the United States." Britain was now to be regarded as just one among a number of allies of the U.S. government.<sup>6</sup>

Further, the inextricably bound issues of imperialism, anticolonialism, anti-communism, and revolutionary nationalism created divisions between Washington and London and played an especially important role in defining the Anglo-American relationship in the Middle East and Persian Gulf region. Important disagreements within the U.S. and British foreign policy establishments on these issues, already apparent in the late 1940s, further complicated the course of U.S.-British diplomacy in the 1950s.

### **The Continuing Challenge of Middle Eastern Nationalisms**

Since the end of the Second World War, U.S. officials had been grappling with the phenomenon of nationalism in the European colonial areas. For both moral and pragmatic political reasons, they were inclined to sympathize with the desires of colonial peoples to govern their own affairs.<sup>7</sup> The U.S. ambassador to Syria, Cavendish Cannon, observed in August 1951 that "United States policy has always been that nationalism is a force to be reckoned with and even to be welcomed so long as it leads to genuine self-determination along lines that are reasonable and therefore not inimical to the interests of the larger world community." Officials had to differentiate carefully between "responsible" nationalism, open to Western political influence and economic investment, and "irresponsible" nationalism, anti-Western and vulnerable to manipulation by the Soviet Union and indigenous communism.<sup>8</sup>

American sympathy for nationalism in the Middle East was, therefore, closely tied to its own Cold War policies. American policymakers believed that nationalism could be harnessed and channeled in directions consistent with American containment policies. President Eisenhower wrote to Prime Minister Churchill in July 1954:

Should we try to dam [nationalism] up, it would like a mighty river, burst through the barriers and could, create havoc. But again, like a river, if we are intelligent enough to make constructive use of this force, then the result, far from being disastrous, could redound greatly to our advantage, particularly in our support against the Kremlin's power.<sup>9</sup>

National Security Council documents NSC 155/1 and NSC 5428, which defined U.S. objectives and policies in the Middle East during 1953 and 1954,

reflected Eisenhower's sentiments. Each stipulated that the United States should "seek to guide the revolutionary and nationalistic pressures throughout the area into orderly channels not antagonistic toward the West, rather than attempt merely to preserve the *status quo*."<sup>10</sup> Underlying this statement of U.S. policy, according to the NSC staff, was that it was now clear "beyond the shadow of a doubt that the U.K. or the U.S. or both together, cannot maintain and defend Western interests in the Middle East in the 19th Century fashion. It is clear that the West must work toward the establishment of a new kind of relationship with the Middle Eastern states involving the increased recognition of the aspirations of these countries as to their status within the community of nations."<sup>11</sup>

Implicit in this critique was the widely held belief in U.S. policymaking circles that the conciliation of local nationalism must be accompanied by a condemnation of European "colonialism." Informal British imperialism in the Middle East received particularly harsh censure from American officials. Although the Eisenhower administration and the State Department believed that Britain should play a prominent political and military role in the region and were loathe to weaken their ally in a strategically important part of the world, they were concerned that heavy-handed British imperial policies in the Middle East and Persian Gulf would provoke an anti-Western backlash among local nationalists that would jeopardize U.S. and allied economic and strategic interests there.

Officials in the Foreign Office and in the Prime Minister's Office doubted the Americans truly understood the motivations and subtleties of British imperial policies, and were angered by the criticism leveled against them by their allies in Washington. In their correspondence, they frequently deplored what they considered U.S. naïveté concerning colonial issues and the American tendency to idealize indigenous nationalism.

Particularly irksome to the British government were U.S. attempts between 1952 and 1955 to cultivate friendly relations with the revolutionary government of Egypt. As early as 1951, U.S. diplomats had made contact with the members of the Egyptian Free Officers' Movement. Throughout the early 1950s, the State Department and the U.S. ambassador in Cairo, Jefferson Caffrey, urged London to reach an accommodation with the movement's leaders, Naguib and Nasser, over the terms of a new agreement governing British control of the military base complex in the Suez Canal Zone. Only through such an accommodation, U.S. officials believed, could the Western allies preserve access to the critically important air facilities in Egypt. As in Iran, British policymakers bitterly resented American counsel to compromise with revolutionary nationalists in the Middle East.<sup>12</sup>

If British officials were defensive about American attacks on British colonial and imperial policies, they disagreed among themselves on how to address the issue of revolutionary nationalism, particularly in the Middle East and Persian

Gulf region. Some, like General Sir John Glubb, the British commander of the Jordanian military, judged the postwar era in the Middle East to be “an age of small nationalisms” in which anti-Western nationalist leaders, “carried away by passion,” would hold only temporary sway. “The craze will pass,” he predicted.<sup>13</sup> Others saw Arab nationalism as an irresponsible and potentially destabilizing challenge to the political order fostered in the Middle East by Britain. Still others, even in the highest ranks of the Foreign Office, recognized the need to reach an accommodation with the forces of nationalism in the Middle East and to examine traditional British methods of preserving peace and stability in the region.

### **The Importance of the Middle East**

Disagreements over matters of Arab nationalism and anticolonialism in the Middle East were more than academic to U.S. and British officials. The region’s petroleum and military resources were growing in importance to both Washington and London. In 1952 British strategists recognized the Middle East as “the focal point of Commonwealth land, sea, and air communications between Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Far East,” as an essential land bridge between three continents, and as the key to North African defense and the security of Turkey’s southern flank. Its control was “necessary to frustrate the traditional Imperialist Russian aim of expanding her influence Southwards towards the Dardanelles, the Persian Gulf, and beyond.”<sup>14</sup> As such, the Middle East was pivotal to London’s strategy of preserving its late imperial and commonwealth interests while meeting its Cold War responsibilities of helping to contain Soviet power on the European periphery.

The United States also viewed the Middle East as strategically vital for political, economic, and military reasons. It contained the Suez Canal and natural defensive barriers to Soviet encroachment on Africa and southwest Asia. Like their British counterparts, American strategists valued the region’s military facilities for use “in any world conflict against Communism.” The NSC concluded that “the security interests of the United States would be critically endangered if the Near East should fall under Soviet influence or control.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, the United States, as it had during the late 1940s, prized the Middle East most highly for the role it played in its Cold War strategy of containing Soviet and communist power.

Officials in both Washington and London appreciated the need to establish a practicable Anglo-American diplomatic and strategic relationship in the Middle East during the early 1950s, but both nations were deeply ambivalent about the other’s intentions and policies in the region. British diplomats in the Arab world frequently complained that the United States worked actively to undermine British interests, diminish London’s prestige, and usurp its

influence in the Middle East as Britain's economic power eroded. At the highest levels in London and at the embassy in Washington, however, British officials recognized the need to harness American power and influence in the service of Britain's interests in the region. Britain's global strategy paper of June 1952 asserted that "an urgent need in the Middle East is a common Anglo-American policy. The Americans must be made to realise that what is at stake is not only British prestige and commercial interests, but the whole position of the Free World in Western Asia and Africa—including Arabian oil, which they value so highly."<sup>16</sup>

Following Churchill's retirement and the accession to power of Anthony Eden, a new, less accommodating tone characterized London's policy toward the United States in the Middle East. Britain, as its position was challenged on many fronts in the region (frequently by its American allies), would continue to cooperate with American officials where possible, but it would assert its vital interests in the Middle East more vigorously and would not hesitate to part company with the United States when it felt those interests were jeopardized.<sup>17</sup>

American policymakers were also ambivalent about their relationship with Britain in the Middle East during the early Eisenhower period. They believed that London should play the primary role in directing the defense of the region from Soviet attack, and that it was well placed to foster stability in an area riven by ancient conflicts and modern political rivalries. At the same time, they believed that Britain's imperial legacy in the Middle East and military presence there antagonized local nationalists. Moreover, American officials continued in their reluctance to concede Britain the privileged position in the region that London demanded. But, like the Churchill government, the Eisenhower administration recognized the need to establish an amicable Anglo-American division of labor in the Middle East.<sup>18</sup> Scarcely more than a year later a much less charitable tone characterized State Department's assessment of U.S.-British relations in the Middle East.<sup>19</sup> Like their counterparts in London, U.S. officials concluded that Anglo-American cooperation in the Middle East might be sacrificed when it could not be reconciled with their own interests.

### **The Persian Gulf Region as Middle Eastern Focal Point**

In the Persian Gulf and Arabian Peninsula, the challenges that faced U.S. and British policymakers throughout the Middle East appeared in microcosm. In many ways they were intensified as the British government placed a new emphasis on securing its position in the Gulf region. As their fortunes waned elsewhere in the region, British policymakers determined to use their position in the Gulf to protect their oil investments and secure the flow of petroleum to Europe, preserve Britain's lines of communication across the Indian Ocean to

Australia and Southeast Asia, and maintain London's prestige as an important Middle Eastern actor. Quickly, British strategists appreciated that the port and military air facilities at the British colony of Aden in southwest Arabia could be yoked to the security needs of the Gulf states.

In March 1952, Makins, at this time the deputy permanent undersecretary at the Foreign Office, made an extended tour of the Persian Gulf in order to assess British administrative structures there, examine the effect of the region's growing oil wealth on the emirates, and determine the degree of Anglo-American cooperation in the area. He returned to London, dismayed by what he had seen, and wrote Foreign Secretary Eden a lengthy report on his visit.<sup>20</sup> The governments of the Gulf states, he judged, were administratively backward and weak, and must be strengthened with British expertise and money if the stability and independence of these bulwarks of British order in the Gulf were to be preserved. Further, the growing oil wealth of the Gulf states presented new challenges as the emirates struggled to find responsible ways to spend and invest their money. Finally, he determined that U.S.-British relations in the Gulf, though amicable, were far from close. There was inadequate consultation on major questions of policy. "Continuous efforts should be made to obtain real agreement on policy and aims" in the region, he wrote.

By 1955 British foreign policymakers and parliamentarians alike recognized the growing value of the Gulf region to Britain for reasons of strategy, economics, and prestige. In a letter to Foreign Secretary Eden in March, Conservative MP Sir Hugh Fraser wrote that "geographically, by our old sanction of military power, we still control the Gulf, the Trucial Coast, and Aden—all are vital holds. We cannot afford to quit an area where our power, prestige, and pocket are so heavily involved."<sup>21</sup> Policymakers believed that Britain's continued stature as a player in the Middle East depended on London's ability to secure the interests of its client states in the Gulf region. Should these emirates perish, so would British credibility in the area.

At the same time that British officials were concluding that a new Persian Gulf-centered strategy could arrest their political decline in the Middle East, the United States continued to act diplomatically in the region, where it worked to consolidate its political and economic ties to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Between 1951 and 1956, the Truman and Eisenhower administrations negotiated two agreements extending American use of the Dhahran air base, concluded a mutual defense assistance agreement with the kingdom, established a U.S. military training mission in Saudi Arabia, and assisted the royal government in establishing new budgetary, administrative, and monetary structures.<sup>22</sup>

Meanwhile, Aramco continued to function as an informal tool of U.S. policy in Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf. Its executives enjoyed access to the Saudi royal councils, and the company placed its financial resources and

political expertise at the service of the Saudi court. At the same time, Aramco officials regularly consulted and lobbied the U.S. State Department, for which it frequently provided entrée in Riyadh. Aramco greatly expanded its production and refinement of Saudi oil after admitting Standard Oil of New Jersey and Socony-Vacuum to its consortium in 1947, and between 1950 and 1956 the company nearly doubled its output of petroleum from 550,000 barrels per day to 1 million barrels per day.<sup>23</sup>

For both the United States and Britain, Persian Gulf petroleum was vitally important in the early and mid-1950s.<sup>24</sup> The growth in demand for petroleum among the industrial democracies of continental Western Europe and in the Eastern Hemisphere was increasing twice as fast as in the United States. The allied nations were utterly dependent on an uninterrupted supply of inexpensive foreign petroleum to fuel their economic recovery after the Second World War and to pay for their rearmament during the Cold War. The cheapest and most reliable source for that petroleum remained the Persian Gulf, whose resources U.S. policymakers had worked to tie to the industrial requirements of the Western allies during the era of the Marshall Plan. The oil resources of the Persian Gulf were becoming increasingly vital to the economic and, therefore, the political health of the United States' allies.<sup>25</sup>

Persian Gulf oil was crucial to U.S. and British military strategy, as well as domestic policy, in the early 1950s. In both Washington and London, strategists appreciated the critical role Persian Gulf oil would play in the ability of the Western allies to wage war with the Soviet bloc should the need arise. In 1950 British officials believed that without Middle East oil it would be extremely difficult, and perhaps even impossible, to implement the allies' overall strategic plans, including those for the defense of Western Europe.<sup>26</sup> Three years later the NSC affirmed that the increasing dependence of the allied militaries on oil-powered equipment, particularly the use of heavier oil-consuming equipment such as jet aircraft, meant that a secure supply of foreign petroleum was essential to Western military capabilities in wartime.<sup>27</sup>

Economists and foreign policy makers appreciated that Persian Gulf oil, at the same time it fueled and lubricated the Western military machine, constituted an increasingly important industrial and economic asset for Britain. Gulf oil was an important British overseas investment and its sale by British firms had become essential to the good health of London's balance of payments. By 1955 the British Cabinet's Middle East Oil (Official) Committee estimated that British firms owned investments in the Gulf region valued at £600 million and asserted that "At present our oil companies play a considerable part in the international trade in oil, with corresponding advantage to our balance of payments. Very much more oil is sold in this way than is supplied to the United Kingdom, and . . . sales abroad by British companies earn enough foreign exchange to cover the total cost of all our oil transactions, including imports."<sup>28</sup>

Moreover, oil profits funded further exploration in the Gulf region, which produced more oil for a petroleum-thirsty Britain and, in turn, greater net earnings and foreign exchange.<sup>29</sup> American officials believed that the economic strength and balance of payments position of Britain was “vital” to U.S. security.<sup>30</sup>

### **Indigenous Challenges to U.S. and British Policies**

London and Washington confronted difficult challenges to their diplomacy in the Persian Gulf from within the region. As in the larger countries of the Middle East, anti-Western Arab nationalism emerged to challenge British and American influence in the region. The British resident in the Gulf, Sir Rupert Hay, concluded in June 1952 that the Gulf Arabs seemed to prefer London’s “mild tutelage” to the blandishments of the revolutionary nationalist movement.<sup>31</sup> As late as May 1956, the Eden government felt that Britain had little to fear from Arab nationalism in the Gulf.

However, following the Egyptian revolution in July 1952, the seeds of discontent with British “tutelage” were planted. The radio service Voice of the Arabs, broadcasting from Cairo, spread its anti-Western message throughout the Gulf, and Egyptian teachers and technicians began to appear in each of the emirates, especially Kuwait, to espouse the tenets of “Nasserism” and Pan-Arabism. Still, anti-Western nationalist sentiment found relatively little support in the Gulf, where wealth created by oil dampened revolutionary fervor. British officials remained sanguine about their ability to contain Nasser’s influence in the emirates.

Anglo-American cooperation in the Persian Gulf was also fraught with difficulties. The Foreign Office continually tried to “educate” American officials about the political and social climate in the Gulf and to affirm the importance of Britain’s role in the region to the security of Western interests in the Middle East. Still, American policymakers expressed skepticism about the security of Britain’s position in the Gulf, the wisdom of London’s late imperial policies in the region, and the political stability of the area. This skepticism frequently created tensions between the allies. Typically, British Embassy Counselor Willie Morris reported that David Newsom, the State Department’s Officer in Charge of Arabian Peninsula-Iraq Affairs, told him in February 1956 that “they [the Americans] for their part thought that we talked much too optimistically about the strength of our position in the Persian Gulf. Their information was that currents were already beginning to flow—dissatisfaction with old forms of administration, rising nationalism, and so on—all of which had developed, or could develop, an anti-British slant and which were going to create trouble for us.” Morris shot back that “there might be some tendency on our part to slur over the difficulties in talking to the Americans; the reason was perhaps

a fear that once we began to talk about the difficulties of the position, instead of getting down to a discussion of what we should do about them, the Americans were liable to ask ‘How soon do you think you can leave?’” Newsom replied that “it would be a great pity if we got the idea that the Americans wanted to see us go.”<sup>32</sup> Such exchanges fueled British determination, already evident throughout the Middle East during Eden’s premiership, to assert vigorously Britain’s interests and to act independently in the Persian Gulf if the Americans appeared to be unsupportive allies.

### **Anglo-American Planning for Gulf Region Defense**

As Washington and London struggled to define a political *modus vivendi* in the Persian Gulf region, they also worked to establish a cooperative military relationship there. In the late 1940s, the U.S. Navy had advocated a vigorous allied defense of the Gulf and its oil fields, believing they would be necessary for the prosecution of a lengthy war against the Soviet Union. The JCS, influenced by the U.S. Army, remained skeptical of the allies’ ability to preserve the flow of Persian Gulf oil to the West in wartime.

British strategists were unconvinced of their ability to defend the Gulf emirates without U.S. ground and naval support, and lobbied their American allies, unsuccessfully, for assistance in the region. But Britain’s increasingly tenuous position in the region convinced London that a reassessment of its military assets and obligations in the Middle East was in order. In the late summer of 1952, the Chiefs of Staff Committee proposed an “Iraq-Levant” strategy for Middle Eastern defense that entailed meeting a Soviet advance on the region as far to the north and east as possible by holding the Zagros Mountain passes connecting Iran and northern Iraq.<sup>33</sup> Such a strategy would protect the oil-producing regions of the Persian Gulf if mounted successfully, but would require extensive U.S. support. British entreaties to Washington for joint Anglo-American planning on Gulf defense fell on deaf ears, however, and by late autumn, London was pessimistic that its new forward-defense strategy for the Middle East could succeed.<sup>34</sup>

In Washington, though, events conspired to move the United States along a path toward cooperation with Britain. In May 1952, Paul Nitze, the chairman of the State Department’s Policy Planning Staff, asked the Joint Chiefs to study the feasibility of shoring up Britain’s position in the Middle East with U.S. forces. The chiefs were unenthusiastic, but after much pressure from Deputy Undersecretary of State Freeman Matthews, they decided to commission a study of a “forward defense of the Near East, designed to protect at least a portion of the oil and give greater protection to our strategic bases.” The study, conducted by the Pentagon’s Joint Strategic Plans Committee (JSPC), required a full year to complete.<sup>35</sup>

In the meantime, the incoming secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, toured the Middle East extensively during May 1953. He returned to Washington convinced that a “northern tier” defense of the region, based on cooperation between Pakistan, Iran, Syria, and Turkey, offered the best hope for the security of Western interests.<sup>36</sup>

Dulles’s northern tier concept complemented the thinking emerging from the JSPC. In October 1953 the committee completed the study commissioned the previous year by the Joint Chiefs. The report examined the feasibility of mounting a defense of the Middle East as far to the north and east as practicable while defending at least one oil-producing complex in time of war. It recommended that an allied defense be made “along the line of the Zagros Mountains, extending from a point near the junction of Turkey, Iraq, and Iran to the head of the Persian Gulf.” The study further explored the possibility of holding each of the four major oil complexes of the Persian Gulf region capable of alleviating the allied wartime deficit of petroleum, estimated to be approximately 677,000 barrels per day. The JSPC examined Mosul-Kirkuk (Iraq), Abadan (Iran, at the head of the Gulf), Kuwait, and Dhahran-Bahrain-Qatar, and concluded that Kuwait, which could produce 800,000 barrels of oil per day, could be most easily defended.<sup>37</sup>

Predictably, the U.S. Army bridled at the study’s conclusions, while the navy endorsed the findings of the JSPC and advocated joint discussions with Britain and Turkey on regional defense. The Chiefs demurred and commissioned still another JSPC study of U.S. military objectives in the Middle East and of specific areas in the region critical to the United States. The report, completed in March 1954, urged that the United States develop plans to defend, among other assets, the Cairo-Suez-Aden region and the Persian Gulf oil-producing areas. These could be safeguarded, the report concluded, by holding the Zagros Mountain line. Overriding the army’s objections, the JCS elected to accept the findings of the JSPC and to initiate tripartite discussions with Britain and Turkey concerning the Zagros Mountains strategy. London and Ankara responded enthusiastically to American overtures, and the first round of talks was scheduled for January 1955 in London.<sup>38</sup>

Foreign policy makers in London had their own reasons to accept the American initiative and to embrace the emerging northern tier strategy. Most importantly, they seemed to promise an increased American commitment to Middle East defense. The Zagros Mountain line would help secure British interests in the Persian Gulf that London had no hope of defending without American assistance. Further, the northern tier concept offered London the opportunity to help create a new defense structure in the Middle East in which it could play a leading role. Thus, it could preserve its influence in the Middle East as Britain’s position eroded in Egypt. This became especially important after the Churchill government concluded an agreement with Nasser in October 1954 to withdraw from the Suez Canal Zone in 20 months.<sup>39</sup>

A northern tier defense organization would allow Britain to establish Iraq as the centerpiece of its regional diplomacy. British strategists decided in 1952 that Iraq should replace Egypt as the principal bulwark of pro-British stability in the Middle East. By participating in an organization that guaranteed Iraqi security, Britain could win leverage in Baghdad as it negotiated a new defense agreement with Iraq that would preserve access to the military airfields at Habbaniya and Shaiba, keys to defending the Gulf sheikhdoms and oil fields.

Further, participation in a northern tier defense organization afforded London opportunities to burnish its image internationally. As British power in the Middle East eroded during the 1950s, officials in London became more preoccupied with Britain's status and prestige as in the area. They understood that prestige could be translated into political influence, both regionally and in Washington. As the British Joint Planning Staff noted in 1954, "Above all we must strengthen our position as a major power and thus maintain our influence in the councils of the world."<sup>40</sup>

In February 1955, one month after U.S., Turkish, and British planners convened in London to endorse the northern tier concept for Middle Eastern defense, Turkey and Iraq signed a mutual defense agreement that became the foundation of the Baghdad Pact. Britain welcomed the new agreement and became a part of the nascent defense organization in April. Pakistan and Iran joined the organization later in the year. Until the Iraqi revolution brought down the pro-British Hashemite monarchy more than three years later, British officials regarded Iraq and the Pact as the keys to Gulf and Middle Eastern security. Ironically, while Britain embraced the Baghdad Pact, the United States, which did so much to encourage the establishment of a regional defense organization dedicated to a northern tier defense of the Middle East, cooled toward the organization. Despite the urging of the JCS, it never acceded to the Pact. Its inability to offer a similar guarantee of security to Israel prevented it from doing so.<sup>41</sup>

The creation of the Baghdad Pact and the establishment of a northern tier Middle Eastern defense strategy served very different U.S. and British interests. American officials saw the Pact as a shield against Soviet incursion into the Middle East that offered some protection to the oil fields of the Persian Gulf during wartime. British policymakers, however, viewed it as an instrument that extended their influence in the region after the Iranian and Egyptian reverses, allowed them to move the locus of British power in the Middle East eastward to Iraq, and permitted them to defend Britain's political and economic investments in the Persian Gulf region.

The Pact deeply divided the Arab world, and the furor surrounding its creation illuminates the deep-seated rivalries between Middle Eastern states that complicated Anglo-American diplomacy in the Persian Gulf region. Iraq, led by the pro-Western Nuri al-Said, saw the Pact as a vehicle for the extension

of Baghdad's influence within the Arab world and Middle East. In Egypt, Nasser feared the organization was a Trojan horse for continued Western influence in the region. By giving new stature to Iraq, Egypt's traditional rival for influence within the Arab world, it challenged Nasser's efforts to establish himself as the leader and spokesman for Arab nationalism and to make Cairo the capital of a new pan-Arab movement. Should Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon join the Pact, Nasser believed, Egypt would be politically isolated and left to face Israel alone.

Meanwhile, the Saudi Arabian government saw the Pact as a mechanism for renewed British-Hashemite collusion against Saudi interests in the Arabian Peninsula. In November 1953, the old king, Abdul Aziz ibn Saud, had died leaving his son Saud to rule. As Nasser's influence grew in the Arab world and the energies of the pan-Arab movement waxed, U.S. and British officials worried that Saud, who quickly proved to be profligate, unstable, and politically inept, would be susceptible to Egyptian blandishments and would throw Western interests in the Gulf region into chaos. Their fears were exaggerated, but Saudi and Egyptian anger at Iraq's ascendance in the region pushed them together diplomatically.<sup>42</sup> On March 6, 1955, just two weeks after the Turco-Iraqi Treaty was signed, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Syria concluded an agreement to establish a rival defense grouping to the Baghdad Pact.<sup>43</sup>

### **The Importance of Kuwait**

During the early and mid-1950s, Kuwait became the centerpiece of London's diplomacy and strategy in the Persian Gulf. It grew to be the largest single exporter of oil to Western Europe and served as the anchor of Britain's political presence in the region. Quickly, strategists in London concluded that Kuwait and the other Gulf emirates could not be protected without incorporating the military facilities of Aden and southwest Arabia into Britain's regional defense plans. By 1956 the unity of British strategic interests in the Gulf and the southern Arabian periphery was evident to London.

In January 1954, J. E. Cunningham, the U.S. consul in Kuwait, reported that Kuwait had become something of a boomtown:

The physical face of Kuwait has changed tremendously in the past two years. Everywhere there is activity of the most feverish kind. Buildings are being demolished all over the town and new modern structures are appearing over the debris. Road work is so much in evidence that it is almost impossible to choose a route from one section to another that does not entail a diversion. The town appears to be a large continuous traffic jam from morning to late afternoon. Foreigners of every description, Western and Middle Eastern, outnumber the Kuwaitis on the streets.<sup>44</sup>

Cunningham was describing the enormous growth the emirate experienced in the wake of the Iranian crisis. The British boycott of Iranian oil following the nationalization of the AIOC complex at Abadan transformed Kuwait's nascent oil industry into a major producer of petroleum for Britain and Europe, made the ruling al-Sabah family extravagantly wealthy, and rendered the dusty former capital of the Gulf's pearling industry unrecognizable to anyone who had visited it before 1951.<sup>45</sup>

The Kuwait Oil Company (KOC), a firm in which AIOC and the American Gulf Oil Company owned equal shares, began exploration for oil in the emirate in 1934. KOC discovered the Burgan oil field, near the border with Iraq, in 1938, but the Second World War delayed exploitation of the field until May 1946. By December 1950, however, Kuwait was producing 500,000 barrels per day of petroleum. Following the Iranian crisis of 1951 and the interruption of AIOC production in Abadan, KOC began to ratchet up Kuwaiti oil output to levels that made the emirate a key to British oil interests in the Gulf. In the spring of 1952, KOC production was 900,000 barrels per day, and in January 1954 it rose to 1.28 million barrels per day. Britain became, by far, the largest consumer of Kuwaiti oil.<sup>46</sup>

The explosive growth of KOC's profits, and the al-Sabah's royalties from those profits, fueled the economic juggernaut in Kuwait that Cunningham described in early 1954. The Kuwaiti boom, however, produced economic and political repercussions that posed difficult new challenges to British and U.S. policymakers. Most importantly, the manner in which the Kuwaiti government would spend and invest the huge sums of money it acquired in royalties concerned officials in London. While British officials were gratified that the Ruler accepted payment for his oil in British sterling, it was critical for the health of the British economy and the stability of the sterling area that his profits be "sterilized" through investment in British financial institutions. The Foreign Office determined that it must be the "immediate aim" of British policy toward Kuwait's Ruler to "sterilize his money or direct it into channels which will place as little strain as possible on sterling and the U.K.'s resources."<sup>47</sup>

Convincing the Ruler of Kuwait to spend his money wisely (by British standards) and in ways consistent with British economic interests proved no easy task. While the terms of the Anglo-Kuwaiti special treaty relationship allowed the Indian, and later the British, government to direct the emirate's foreign policy, the Ruler's finances were his own to manage. The inability of the British agent in Kuwait to compel the Ruler to manage his fortune wisely points out the difficulties faced by London in managing its informal empire in the Persian Gulf.

London faced other challenges to its exclusive relationship with the Kuwaiti government from the United States. The State Department was unimpressed with the quality of British diplomacy in Kuwait and unconvinced that London's position in the sheikhdom was secure.<sup>48</sup> In 1948 the State Department began to

lobby the Foreign Office for permission to open a U.S. consulate in Kuwait. The growth of KOC production in the sheikhdom brought hundreds of Americans to the emirate, whose representation was left to the U.S. consulate in Basra, Iraq. But the road from Basra to Kuwait was long and treacherous, and the State Department did not believe that the American community in the sheikhdom could be served effectively from Iraq.<sup>49</sup>

The Foreign Office was extremely reluctant to permit any foreign diplomatic representation in Kuwait, believing it would compromise Britain's exclusive position in the sheikhdom. If a U.S. consulate were opened, other nations, most likely Iraq and Egypt, would demand a diplomatic presence in the emirate. After three years of difficult negotiations, the Foreign Office grudgingly allowed the United States to establish a consulate, but with the stipulation that the exequatur, or authorization, to open the mission be granted by the British government rather than by the Ruler of Kuwait. Accordingly, the U.S. consul in the emirate could treat with the Ruler only with the permission of the British agent in Kuwait. Thus, Britain affirmed its political dominance in the sheikhdom.<sup>50</sup>

Revolutionary nationalism, which plagued British policy throughout the Middle East, also caused concern among U.S. and British officials in Kuwait. Many Kuwaitis, particularly young men, applauded the Egyptian revolution in 1952 and identified with Nasser's aspirations for an Arab Middle East free from Western political influence. Still, the Foreign Office remained confident of the loyalty of the Ruler and of the Kuwaiti government.

Meanwhile, U.S. policymakers perceived a much different threat in Kuwait: they worried about the possibility of communist infiltration and subversion in the sheikhdom. The Foreign Office responded coolly to the Americans' concerns, which it deemed "a bit alarmist." Willie Morris, the British Embassy counselor in Washington, reiterated to David Newsom in April 1956 that while he and his colleagues were not "overly sanguine" about their position in the Gulf, they did not think communism represented an immediate threat, particularly in Kuwait.<sup>51</sup>

### **Aden and the Persian Gulf**

At the same time that Kuwait emerged as the key to British economic and interests in the Persian Gulf, oil-company executives and military strategists in London identified the colony of Aden, at the southwestern tip of the Arabian Peninsula, as critical to the security of the Gulf emirates and the refining and distribution of Gulf oil. Aden's splendid deep-water port, large British military base complex, location astride the oil transit route through the Suez Canal, and relative political stability as a British Crown Colony revived the fortunes of the declining Arabian city during the period of British political retrenchment elsewhere in the Middle East.

Once a thriving port and coaling station for British steamship travel between Suez and Asia, the colony had languished in recent years. With the loss of British India in 1947, the *raison d'être* of Britain's presence in Aden became questionable. By the early 1950s, recalled journalist David Holden, Aden "was looking decidedly threadbare: smart but impoverished, like a country gentleman keeping up appearances after his estate had gone under the hammer."<sup>52</sup> Despite what one observer called the spectacular and "savage force of its setting," Aden had never been beautiful. Its furnace-like climate and forbidding moonscape of sand and jagged rock framed a decidedly ugly colonial city. James Morris, an acute observer of the late imperial scene in the Middle East, wrote that after more than a century of prosperous British rule, Aden remained "incomparably the least attractive big city of the Arab world. . . . A hang-dog shabbily mercantile feeling permeates the geometrical streets of the place, and only the great ships off-shore, endlessly steaming in and out of the harbour, give it any sense of grace and beauty."<sup>53</sup>

The twin crises facing Britain in Iran and Egypt transformed Aden economically and militarily, if not aesthetically. The Iranian seizure of AIOC's complex at Abadan drastically curtailed the supply of refined oil the company could provide Britain and the Eastern Hemisphere, and its refinery throughput dropped from 632,000 barrels per day in 1950 to 280,000 barrels per day in 1952. While Kuwait began to take up the slack in production left by the British boycott of Iranian oil, new facilities to process and distribute Kuwaiti petroleum were needed. Executives of AIOC concluded that Aden was well situated to ship oil to both Europe and Asia, while its petroleum bunkering facilities offered an established outlet for AIOC fuel. The security provided by the British military base complex in the colony convinced company officials that an investment made in Aden would be well protected. Consequently, the firm began construction of a new 100,000-barrel-a-day refinery at Little Aden in 1952. The new British Petroleum facility went online in July 1954 and became a vital part of the economic life of the colony, providing 2,500 jobs to Adeni workers.<sup>54</sup>

Just as Kuwait's abundance of oil rescued Aden from the brink of economic oblivion, the colony's military facilities soon became indispensable to the security of Kuwait and its Gulf neighbors. Strategists in London concluded that Aden's military facilities would be crucial to the defense of British interests in the Gulf, Arabian Peninsula, and East Africa during the 1950s. The departure of British troops from the Suez Canal Zone after October 1954 left a void in Britain's military capabilities in the region. The enormous facility in Egypt had been used not only to defend British interests in North Africa and the eastern Mediterranean, but also in the Persian Gulf, Kenya, and British Somaliland. It was now imperative that Aden, with its Royal Air Force facilities at Khormaksar, take up the role vacated by Britain in Egypt. Conversely, British

military assets in East Africa would be used to reinforce and supply Aden in its mission of Persian Gulf defense. Thus, the outlines began to emerge of a strategic and political framework that encompassed the emirates of the Persian Gulf, joined them to the colony at Aden, and connected them to British military assets in East Africa.<sup>55</sup>

During the summer and autumn of 1956, as an Arab “air barrier” descended across the Middle East and obstructed British military traffic between the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean regions, the Conservative government in London recognized the vital importance Aden was coming to play—not only in its Middle Eastern strategy, but also in securing its interests further east of Suez. Foreign Secretary Lloyd declared in May that “we have far-flung lines of communication, and it is essential that we should retain certain positions of strength at whatever cost. . . . There are three such places very much in the news at the moment—Cyprus, Aden, and Singapore.”<sup>56</sup> Thus, Lloyd affirmed Aden’s stature as one of the “toll-gates and barbicans” of the postwar British Empire.

Aden’s role as a new fulcrum of British power in Arabia and the Persian Gulf region depended on the security of its port, refinery, and military bases. To ensure the safety of these assets, the Colonial Office pursued two interrelated political strategies in southwest Arabia. In the first, they attempted to organize the tribal hinterlands surrounding the colony, already loosely assembled into the Eastern and Western Aden Protectorates, into a federal political structure. If the tiny emirates and sheikhdoms of southwest Arabia were so organized, Britain could assert its authority more efficiently in them, and their Rulers, in turn, could speak with one voice to London. More importantly, the new federation could serve more effectively as a political and military buffer for Aden and its military facilities.<sup>57</sup> But plans for this federation had powerful critics, including the then foreign secretary, Harold Macmillan, who feared that the newly organized Protectorates would seek greater autonomy from London and make access to Aden’s bases more difficult. The federation scheme was put on the political back burner by 1956.

Closely related to the scheme was the “forward strategy” adopted by British policymakers in southwest Arabia after 1954. In a protracted campaign designed largely by officials in Aden, Britain intervened vigorously in the internal affairs of the protectorate states, both politically and militarily, in an effort to “combat incipient Arab nationalism and Yemeni irredentism.”<sup>58</sup> The forward strategy often put Britain into direct conflict with Imam Ahmad of Yemen, who asserted territorial claims in the Western Protectorate and who received financial support from Egypt, the Soviet Union, and China.<sup>59</sup> Occasionally, the strategy demanded that British troops intervene to depose Protectorate rulers whose loyalty to the colonial government was suspect. The so-called forward strategy and the movement toward federation in the Protectorates illustrate the determination of the

British government to strengthen its ties to the traditional rulers of southwestern Arabia and to secure their loyalty to the colonial regime in Aden.

But direct British rule could not protect southwestern Arabia from the virus of anti-Western nationalism. Aden suffered labor and political unrest in the mid-1950s, which drew inspiration from Nasser's Egypt. James Morris marked the sense of uncertainty that hung in the air. "Inevitably," he wrote in *The Economist*, "all the phenomena of frustration now make their appearance in Aden—nationalism, genuine and mercenary; trade unionism, cynical and constructive; seditious activities fostered from abroad; wild demands and accusations; political chicanery and jostling for position; and a general sense of impending change, of eras ending and vistas opening."<sup>60</sup> Britain's future in southwest Arabia, he felt, was limited. In Aden the British Empire seemed to be fighting a rearguard action.

The United States' interests in Aden and southwest Arabia were extremely limited in the mid-1950s. The U.S. consul in the colony, William C. Lakeland, spent much of his time monitoring Soviet and Chinese overtures to neighboring Yemen. Still, Lakeland agreed with Morris that Britain's position in Aden appeared increasingly tenuous. He noted to Washington in April 1956 that "whereas a year ago an observer could not help but feel that Aden was a relic of the imperial past, a quiet backwater only beginning to be stirred by the winds blowing in the Arab East, it is today drawing headlines in the British press as a potential new trouble spot for the already beleaguered British in the Middle East."<sup>61</sup>

### The Buraimi Oasis Dispute

But it was neither Kuwait nor Aden that proved to be the most volatile trouble spot for Britain in the Persian Gulf region. That distinction belonged to the lonely cluster of mud-walled villages in the southeastern Arabian Peninsula known as the Buraimi oasis. Saudi Arabia's efforts to assert its sovereignty over the oasis against the claims of the Trucial Emirate of Abu Dhabi and the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman provoked one of the most dangerous diplomatic confrontations in the Arab world prior to the Suez invasion of 1956. The crisis ultimately drew in the United States and Britain. As Nathan J. Citino argues, the Buraimi dispute "helps to illustrate the different strategies in oil diplomacy—indeed the contrasting imperial styles—that Britain and the U.S. employed in the Middle East after World War II."<sup>62</sup> But it also illustrates much more about Washington's and London's differing priorities and perceptions of threat in the Persian Gulf. London, seeking to preserve its prestige and influence in the region, backed the claims of its client states, Trucial Oman and Muscat, to the oasis. Washington, as it worked to establish Saudi Arabia as a bulwark of conservative stability in the Middle East, attempted to remain impartial and to promote a peaceful resolution of the dispute. The involvement

of Aramco in supporting Saudi efforts to control Buraimi complicated the dispute, and the emerging diplomatic relationship between the Egyptian and Saudi governments ultimately determined U.S. policy in the matter.

Aramco's role in the Buraimi drama caused particular difficulties for American policymakers. While the State Department continued to rely on the company to open political doors in the kingdom and to help secure U.S. interests in the Gulf region, it realized that the interests of the U.S. government and the privately owned oil firm were not identical and, indeed, that these interests clashed frequently. Certainly, the company had begun to act in ways antithetical to U.S. government interests. The American minister in Jidda, J. Rives Childs, noted apprehensively to Washington in March 1947 the company's "scarcely veiled indifference" to embassy-directed policies. He argued:

We can, of course, make a fetish of the free enterprise system, and in its name avoid any attempt to exercise a control over the octopus represented by ARAMCO. The longer we delay [to impose regulation], however the deeper its tentacles will be spread, and in the end the policy of the Government of the United States in Saudi Arabia and in the Middle East may be dominated, and perhaps even dictated, by that private commercial company.<sup>63</sup>

Aramco played a critical role in the Persian Gulf and Arabia as the demarcation of the region's southeastern boundaries emerged as a contentious political issue in the late 1940s.<sup>64</sup> The disposition of the Buraimi oasis provided a key to the boundary issue and was critical to the political control of southeastern Arabia. The oasis supplied water to much of the region and was a crossroads for traffic and commerce between the western desert, the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman, and the Trucial Sheikdoms. In order to control the southeastern desert, as well as to ensure western access to interior Oman and to the maritime emirates, control of Buraimi was essential.<sup>65</sup>

Political authority over Buraimi was unclear. The emirate of Abu Dhabi claimed jurisdiction over seven of the oasis's villages; the Sultan of Muscat and Oman claimed authority over the other two. Neither exercised much governmental responsibility in the region. Saudi Arabia, too, periodically asserted its sovereignty over Buraimi based on a series of short-lived military occupations of the oasis during the nineteenth century.

Buraimi's modern strategic value became clear in the late 1940s when the boundaries issue reignited. In 1947 and 1948, Petroleum Concessions, Ltd., a subsidiary of the British-controlled Iraq Petroleum Company, began successful oil exploration activities in the Trucial sheikdoms, Oman, and the Buraimi area. This attracted the attention of the Saudi deputy foreign minister, Yusuf Yassin, who smelled profit in the undemarcated border regions and convinced Ibn Saud of the value of opening the border question with his neighbors.<sup>66</sup>

Aramco also played a critical role in inspiring Ibn Saud's renewed interest in the boundary issue. For reasons of their own, Aramco officials sought a generous permanent settlement of Saudi Arabia's eastern frontiers. Besides seeking oil-rich territories, Aramco officials recognized the need to sustain the goodwill of the king and the Saudi government. The preservation of its oil concession required Aramco to be as amenable as possible to Saudi demands. For this reason, the company attempted to serve Ibn Saud as "guide, confidante, tutor, counselor, emissary, advocate, steward, and factotum" whenever possible.<sup>67</sup>

Perhaps Aramco's greatest service to the Saudi king was to put at his disposal the services of its legal department and its Arabian Affairs Division. Aramco's chief legal counsel, George W. Ray, assembled a top-flight team of lawyers to pursue Saudi territorial claims, while the Arabian Affairs Division, led by the accomplished American Arabist George S. Rentz, provided invaluable service to the Saudi cause.<sup>68</sup> One company observer noted: "ARAMCO at this time was more Saudi than the Saudis."<sup>69</sup>

Shortly after Saudi and British negotiators convened to discuss southeastern-Arabian frontier issues in August 1949, the Saudi government shocked London by issuing a "unilateral declaration of frontier" that embraced four-fifths of what had commonly been considered the territory of Abu Dhabi and encompassed all of the Buraimi oasis. The Saudi declaration seems to have been driven primarily by the desire to acquire potentially oil-rich land. It was reinforced, however, by the royal government's more traditional goal of extending its sovereignty throughout southeastern Arabia. This potent mixture of modern and traditional motives in Saudi policy would prove troublesome to U.S. and British officials trying to resolve the boundaries issue.

The U.S. State Department first took notice of the Arabian boundaries issue in November 1949, but was determined to remain aloof from the Anglo-Saudi confrontation. Aramco officials, though, had no intention of allowing the U.S. government to remain uninvolved in the dispute. Company officers lobbied the State Department to support the Saudi government's position on almost every aspect of the frontiers issue. Aramco officials regularly criticized British policy in Arabia and accused London of attempting to use its political dominance in the Persian Gulf to "maintain a 19th century imperialist system" in the region.<sup>70</sup>

Aramco's lobbying efforts on behalf of Ibn Saud's government did not go unnoticed by the U.S. embassy in Jidda. Ambassador Childs, who had been so critical earlier of Aramco's influence in the kingdom, cabled Washington anxiously in June 1950 to register his apprehension about the "dangerous tendency" of Aramco to act as a representative of Saudi government interests in its dealings with the State Department. He counseled that "an early settlement of the vexing boundary question in the Persian Gulf is urgently required" and cautioned that any settlement must balance Britain's position in the

Persian Gulf with Saudi sensitivities to its own special position in the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>71</sup>

The State Department came to realize that the United States could not remain aloof from the boundaries issue. It was a “party at interest” because of Aramco’s position in Saudi Arabia and because it could not allow a strategically vital oil-producing region of the world to be destabilized by a quarrel between two of its most important allies. During 1951 and 1952, U.S. officials encouraged the Saudi and British governments to negotiate directly with each other to resolve the boundary question.

The Arabian boundaries question became the Buraimi oasis crisis in August 1952. Frustrated by the lack of progress in resolving the issue diplomatically, the Saudi government decided to settle the matter militarily. Turki ibn Utaishan, the former Saudi governor of Ras Tanura, entered the village of Hamasa in Buraimi with 40 armed soldiers, proclaimed himself amir of Buraimi, and claimed the oasis for Saudi Arabia. The Churchill government was livid, and some British officials charged that Aramco vehicles had helped transport Turki and his men to Hamasa. The Trucial Oman Levies, a British-organized and British-officered military unit operating in the Trucial States, were dispatched to the adjacent village of al-Buraimi to keep an eye on the Saudis, but both the Saudi and British governments decided to abide by a U.S.-sponsored standstill agreement until a new political course could be determined.

Meanwhile, the British and Saudi governments continued to press their cases in Washington and to express their frustration with the U.S. government’s refusal to endorse their claims to Buraimi. In December 1952 the Saudi foreign minister, Prince Saud al-Faisal, hinted ominously to U.S. diplomat Edwin Plitt that his government might look elsewhere for support. He told Plitt:

Don’t place too much faith in what Arab leaders may tell you that Communism is incompatible with Islam. We are in desperate straits. A drowning man will grasp at a snake—even a poisonous one—if it is the only chance he has to prevent his going under for the last time.<sup>72</sup>

Shortly thereafter, the permanent undersecretary of the British Foreign Office, Sir William Strang, reiterated to U.S. ambassador to London Winthrop Aldrich that the British position in the Persian Gulf was of great value to both British and Western interests. His government would not be deprived of it by Saudi territorial ambitions. “This was not an issue of British imperialism and Arab nationalism but rather an issue of Saudi imperialism versus the rights of other Arab rulers under British protection.”<sup>73</sup> Saudi-British negotiations on Buraimi stagnated until July 1954, when London and Riyadh agreed to accept an arbitrated settlement to their dispute. The arbitration panel was to convene in Geneva in September 1955.

Meanwhile, official U.S. attitudes and policies toward Saudi Arabia were undergoing a profound transformation that would have a dramatic effect on American participation in the Buraimi dispute. In early 1955, U.S.-Saudi relations became strained over a number of issues. Most importantly, the Saudi government resented U.S. and British support for the northern tier defense of the Middle East embodied in the Baghdad Pact. King Saud believed this new alliance bolstered Iraq and renewed the Hashemite "threat" to his north.<sup>74</sup> U.S. officials' concern over Saudi Arabia's political orientation deepened when, in the summer of 1955, the Soviet government approached the kingdom to discuss the establishment of diplomatic relations and the sale of arms to the Saudi military.

Saudi Arabia's fears of Hashemite encirclement and continuing opposition to British political influence in the Arabian Peninsula also pushed King Saud into a close relationship with Nasser and Egypt. In March 1955 the Saudi and Egyptian governments took preliminary steps to establish a unified military command. Saud contributed generous amounts of money to Nasser's propaganda efforts and helped subsidize pro-Nasser political figures throughout the region. To the British, Saudi behavior merely confirmed their opinion that the kingdom was working to destroy British interests in the Middle East.

The United States, too, was alarmed by Saudi Arabia's new relationship with Egypt. After years of attempting to accommodate and moderate Nasser's brand of Arab nationalism, U.S. officials were concluding that they must actively oppose the Egyptian strongman in order to preserve political stability in the Middle East and contain anti-Western and Soviet influence there. Nasser's May 1955 agreement to purchase Czechoslovakian arms, especially, helped convince U.S. policymakers that he could not be co-opted successfully by the West.<sup>75</sup> The United States had always relied on the royal government of Saudi Arabia as a bulwark of conservative stability in the Middle East. Now it worked to remove it from an Egyptian political orbit.

In order to reanchor the kingdom firmly in the West, U.S. policymakers began to conclude, they must accommodate Saudi political interests and soothe Saudi nationalist sensibilities. Attempting to convince the British to give ground on Buraimi could be an important element in this strategy. Britain's efforts to maintain its political position in the Persian Gulf region by protecting the interests of its local client states started to appear to State Department officials needlessly provocative to the Saudis and inconsistent with their own desire to preserve regional political stability.

The divergence of U.S. and British policy in southeastern Arabia became clear after the failure of the Buraimi arbitration process in September 1955. Hearings commenced on September 11, but the proceedings collapsed five days later amid British allegations of Saudi political bribery and gunrunning in the oasis.<sup>76</sup> Convinced that Saudi Arabia had abrogated the 1954 arbitration

agreement, British government officials decided to do likewise. Britain would restore its prestige in the Gulf region by retaking Buraimi militarily. On October 18, 1955, the British cabinet approved such a plan, and six days later, elements of the Trucial Oman Levies forcibly reoccupied the oasis.<sup>77</sup>

Britain's use of military force to resolve the Buraimi dispute reinforced the State Department's conviction that U.S. and British interests in the Arabian Peninsula were diverging. The British action would no doubt provoke charges of imperialist aggression from Arab nationalists and could incite an emotional anti-Western backlash. This, in turn, could destabilize the region politically and leave the door open to communist or Soviet influence in the Gulf region.

In the weeks that followed, the United States encouraged the British to return to arbitration or to reopen bilateral talks with the Saudis on Buraimi. At a December 15 luncheon in Paris with Foreign Secretary Macmillan, Secretary of State Dulles noted the difficulties of reconciling U.S. and British policies in the Arabian Peninsula. Macmillan asserted that if Britain had not acted in Buraimi, it would have lost its influence in the entire Gulf area. "Dulles replied that the 'assets' of the West in the Middle East included the U.S. position in Saudi Arabia. These assets, the Secretary concluded, must be 'balanced' against those of the United Kingdom."<sup>78</sup>

But the British government had no intention of according greater importance to the U.S. position in Saudi Arabia than to its own position in the Gulf sheikhdoms. British intransigence continued to frustrate the Americans. Assistant Secretary of State George Allen reported to Undersecretary of State Herbert Hoover Jr. that the British "were unable to see that their position in the Gulf has elements of imperialism," and that

Arab nationalists *do* regard the British position in the Gulf as imperialistic . . . we had to face the facts that the 19th century was no more. I did not wish to imply that we wanted the British to leave the Gulf today or tomorrow, but there was no use pretending that the Arab sheikhs who welcomed British support were angels and that all who opposed it were devils.<sup>79</sup>

The real danger to political stability in the Arabian Peninsula was aggressive British behavior that could be regarded as imperialistic by Arabs and which could push local nationalists into the arms of the Soviets.

The British government was clearly frustrated by its inability to convince the United States of its case on Buraimi. Foreign Secretary Lloyd, in a message to Dulles on January 23, conceded the U.S. interests on the Arabian Peninsula, but asserted that "the stakes for us are even more vital and we cannot afford to lose. Our position in the Persian Gulf states depends upon the confidence of the Rulers in our ability to protect their interests. Any sign that we are going to let the Saudis back into Buraimi would be fatal to that position."<sup>80</sup>

On board the *Queen Elizabeth*, en route from London to the United States, Prime Minister Eden discussed Arabian Peninsula issues with U.S. Ambassador Aldrich. When Aldrich raised the oasis dispute and reiterated the points made in Hoover's January 19 memorandum, he reported, "The Prime Minister lost his temper and flared up bitterly about the United States wanting always to have Britain abandon its interests and give away its rights."<sup>81</sup>

In Washington himself on January 30, Eden spoke with Dulles at the White House before meeting with President Eisenhower. When Eisenhower joined the two, Dulles introduced the Buraimi issue to the discussion by noting that "the Saudi Arabian question and the Buraimi dispute were matters which brought forth the greatest differences between the British and Americans." Eisenhower remarked caustically that "surely Britain would not maintain that every mile in every border in that vast area would be a matter of British prestige." Eden replied that "the impression had been created that if the British were pushed hard enough they would 'be off.' If the British should yield here they would soon be completely out of the Middle East."<sup>82</sup>

The United States' most important goal in resolving the Buraimi dispute was to keep Saudi Arabia out of the arms of Nasser's Egypt. Dulles explained to Ambassador Makins that "the key to any constructive program in the area [the Middle East] involved the winning away of the Saudi Arabians from their alignment with Egypt. . . . Winning the Saudis from Egypt depended on the U.K. reaching an accommodation with the Saudis on Buraimi. A settlement of the Buraimi issue was of vital importance."<sup>83</sup> Yet the British were skeptical of the U.S. effort to move Saudi Arabia out of Nasser's camp and establish it as a political counterweight in the Middle East to Egypt, and as the U.S. strategy became more explicit, the British became more incensed.

On July 10, Dulles described the Buraimi dispute to Foreign Secretary Lloyd as a diplomatic Gordian knot that "exposes Saudi Arabia to the temptation of accepting Trojan Horse offers of support from Cairo and Moscow and jeopardizes other programs of much wider import to our common interests in the Middle East." The secretary of state urged Lloyd to renew British efforts to reach a diplomatic solution to the Buraimi issue, perhaps as part of a larger package that would include other boundary issues in southeastern Arabia.<sup>84</sup> The British made the approach to the Saudis shortly thereafter but were rebuffed. The Buraimi dispute was deadlocked once again. It would not be resolved for another 15 years.

### **The Suez Crisis and the Persian Gulf**

As Britain, Saudi Arabia, and the United States tangled over Buraimi, they were overtaken by a much more dangerous Middle Eastern crisis when Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal Company, on July 26, 1956. The Suez crisis, which preoccupied British and American foreign policy makers for the

next five months, has been ably examined by other scholars.<sup>85</sup> Less well known is the story of how the crisis played out in the Persian Gulf region and widened the fissures in the Anglo-American relationship exposed during the Buraimi dispute.

In many ways, Western interests in the Persian Gulf and its petroleum formed the crux of the Suez crisis. Officials in the Eden government and at the Foreign Office recognized the vital role the canal played in transporting Persian Gulf oil to Britain and Western Europe. They feared that the Suez crisis marked the beginning of a concerted Egyptian campaign to dislodge Britain from its position in the Gulf and to control the region's oil, and they believed that a failure to meet the challenge posed to them by Nasser at Suez would cost them prestige and the political capital it brought. This would render Britain weak in the eyes of its Gulf region client states and seriously erode its influence in the Middle East. Meanwhile, U.S. policymakers debated how to confront the dangers of Egyptian-led Arab nationalism, meet their obligations to their British allies, and secure Western strategic interests in the Middle East and Persian Gulf. American military planners were especially concerned about the security of the Gulf's oil fields.

In the 1950s the Suez Canal acted as a principal tollgate of the British Empire. It had become a gateway between Europe and the client states and dependencies Britain had accumulated in South Asia and the Far East. As an MP in 1929, Eden had told the House of Commons, "If the Suez Canal is our back door to the East, it is the front door to Europe of Australia, New Zealand, and India. If you like to mix your metaphors, it is, in fact, the swing-door of the British Empire, which has got to keep continually revolving if our communications are to be what they should."<sup>86</sup> Just as importantly, the canal served as a commercial artery between East and West. Herman Finer wrote that "no less than a quarter of all British exports and imports moved through the Canal. In all, forty or fifty ships passed through it every day, carrying one-sixth of the cargoes of the whole world."<sup>87</sup>

Oil from the Persian Gulf region was perhaps the most important commodity transported through its waters. In 1955, 67 million tons of oil passed through the canal, accounting for 63 percent of the commercial tonnage shipped through Suez. The figure was expected to rise by 7 percent annually. At the time, 65 percent of Europe's petroleum needs were met by Persian Gulf oil, and 60 percent of the Gulf's oil was transported through the Suez Canal; Kuwait, the largest supplier of oil to Britain, and Qatar were particularly dependent on tanker shipments through the canal to get their oil to market. Fifty-eight percent of British Petroleum's oil offtake traveled through Suez, making up 39 percent of the oil sent via the waterway.<sup>88</sup>

Gulf oil shipped through the Suez Canal was vital to London's balance of payments, the solvency of British Petroleum, and the economic well-being of Western Europe. Officials in London understood this well and affirmed it

vociferously. Prime Minister Eden firmly believed that if the Egyptian leader controlled the canal, he would be able to cow the oil emirates of the Persian Gulf and direct the flow of Gulf petroleum. He wrote President Eisenhower in September, "If Nasser says to [the Gulf rulers] 'I have nationalized the Suez Canal. I have successfully defied eighteen powerful nations, including the United States . . . Trust me and withhold oil from Western Europe. Within six months or a year the continent of Europe will be on its knees before you.' Will the Arabs not be prepared to follow his lead." When that moment comes, Eden continued, "Nasser can deny oil to Western Europe and we here shall be at his mercy." Nasser, he concluded, must not be allowed "to have his thumb on our windpipe."<sup>89</sup> Macmillan, now chancellor of the Exchequer, assessed the situation even more bluntly. As the Suez crisis deepened, he confided to his diary, "We must, by one means or another win this struggle . . . without oil and without the profit from oil, neither the U.K. nor Western Europe can survive."<sup>90</sup>

Eden and officials at the Foreign Office believed that success at Suez would embolden Nasser to pursue his campaign against the British into the Persian Gulf and to drive Britain from the region. They forecast for their American allies Soviet gains in the area if this occurred. "By this assertion of his [Nasser's] power, he seeks to further his ambitions from Morocco to the Persian Gulf," Eden warned Eisenhower in August.<sup>91</sup> Foreign Secretary Lloyd told U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations Henry Cabot Lodge that Egyptian success at Suez would lead to a gradual process of shutting Britain out of the Middle East, first from Jordan, then from Libya and Iraq, and, finally, from Kuwait.<sup>92</sup> An Egyptian victory over Suez could damage British prestige and harm Britain politically throughout the world. The Eden government was not prepared to accept this.

U.S. officials also recognized that a crisis over Suez could have profound effects in the Persian Gulf region. Only five days after Egypt nationalized the Canal Company, Director of Central Intelligence Allen Welsh Dulles warned Eisenhower that the United States "should consider what might have to be done to protect Persian Gulf oil—sources in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, etc."<sup>93</sup> The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), however, anticipated little unrest in the Persian Gulf sheikhdoms, except perhaps in Bahrain, and warned only that younger Arab nationalists in the Gulf would sympathize with Nasser's actions. Additionally, some damage might be done to oil installations in Saudi Arabia, the Persian Gulf, and Aden if Britain and France acted militarily in Egypt.<sup>94</sup>

The Eisenhower administration interpreted the Suez crisis as a clash between revolutionary Arab nationalism and lingering British imperialism. The violently contentious British-Egyptian dynamic was destabilizing to the Middle East and the Persian Gulf. It threatened Western economic and strategic investments in the region, jeopardized the flow of Gulf oil to Western Europe, and opened the door for communist and Soviet political penetration

of the area. While American foreign policy makers had concluded in 1955 that they could not successfully conciliate or co-opt Nasser's nationalist government, they found in the summer and autumn of 1956 that British intransigence over the canal issue was potentially more dangerous to Western interests in the Middle East than the Egyptian government's appropriation of the waterway.<sup>95</sup>

Two days after Nasser's nationalization of the Canal Company, the Foreign Office instructed the Washington embassy to "impress on the State Department the need for effective, joint petroleum planning both government and industry." It recommended that the oil-consultation machinery established during the Iranian crisis of 1951–1953 be reactivated and put to use by Washington and London.<sup>96</sup> Planning in both Washington and London centered on obtaining new supplies of oil from Venezuela and Texas and moving them swiftly to Europe. Further, they worked to obtain the services of additional oil tankers to transport Persian Gulf oil from the Western Hemisphere and around the Cape of Good Hope to Europe.<sup>97</sup>

At the same time that U.S. and British oil executives and government officials planned to overcome the disruption of oil supplies from the Persian Gulf, diplomats and military planners struggled to safeguard the governments of the Persian Gulf emirates and the security of Western assets in the Gulf region. In Washington, the JCS planned for military contingencies in the Gulf. Chaired by Admiral Arthur W. Radford, with Admiral Arleigh Burke serving as chief of naval operations, the Chiefs reflected the U.S. Navy's traditional concern for the security of Persian Gulf oil.

Nasser's move to nationalize the Suez Canal Company, the JCS argued, might portend a new campaign to destabilize the Gulf region and to encourage nationalist governments to expropriate U.S.- and Western-owned oil fields and refineries in Saudi Arabia, the Persian Gulf, and the Trucial States.<sup>98</sup> Admiral Burke told the NSC on July 30 that the navy had four destroyers stationed in the Gulf and in the immediate vicinity.<sup>99</sup> In mid-August, the JCS speculated that it might be necessary to deploy a regimental combat team to Dhahran to protect American oil fields and installations there. At the end of the month, Admiral Radford told a joint State Department–JCS meeting that in the event of hostilities, the JCS had made provisions to airlift a number of troops directly from Wiesbaden in West Germany to Dhahran. He reminded the meeting's participants that the oil for the navy's Far Eastern activities came largely from the Gulf.<sup>100</sup> After Britain, France, and Israel began their coordinated military attack on Egypt in early November, the Joint Chiefs recommended to President Eisenhower that he send a marine battalion landing team, two attack aircraft carriers, one cruiser, and one destroyer squadron from Yokosuka, Japan, to the Persian Gulf. Eisenhower approved the recommendation the same day.<sup>101</sup>

Meanwhile, the British political resident in the Persian Gulf, Sir Bernard Burrows, worked feverishly from his office in Bahrain to secure British property and interests in the Gulf and to ensure the loyalty of the Gulf sheikhs. In his memoir, *Footnotes in the Sand*, Burrows captures the frenzied atmosphere in the Gulf following the attack on Egypt. Like most British diplomats serving abroad, he was caught completely unawares by his country's military venture against Nasser and was deeply angered. How, he wondered, could he justify his government's military action against an Arab state in collusion with Israel? Nothing could be more calculated to arouse the ire of the Gulf Arabs.<sup>102</sup>

Burrows convened the Local Defense Committee-Persian Gulf (LDC) immediately. Consisting of the resident and the heads of the three British military forces present in the Gulf, the LDC met almost continuously during the crisis. The committee was aided by the fortuitous presence in the Gulf of the commander in chief, East Indies, a Royal Navy admiral, and by the regular visits of the commander of the Royal Air Forces, Arabian Peninsula, based at Aden. In times of peace, Burrows recounts, a British army company was stationed at Bahrain and at Sharjah in the Trucial States. While the emirates of the lower Gulf were thus accustomed to the presence of British troops, Kuwait, the most important of the Gulf's sheikhdoms, was not. How could the LDC ensure Kuwait's security without provoking nationalist unrest at the presence of British soldiers? Burrows's answer was to put 400 troops aboard the cruiser HMS *Superb* and station the ship off the coast of Kuwait, beyond the horizon and out of sight.<sup>103</sup>

Fortunately for Burrows, few British troops were needed to quell unrest in the Gulf during the crisis. Kuwaitis boycotted British goods, disrupted electrical service to British businesses, and briefly cut one of the KOC's oil pipelines, but the Kuwait Ruler stood firmly behind his allies in London. In Bahrain, however, the Committee of National Union, which had formed to oppose the presence of Sir Charles Belgrave as adviser to the Ruler, staged demonstrations, which turned destructive. Burrows was obliged to request troops from Aden to pacify the area around Manama, the capital, and he banned the organization.<sup>104</sup>

The Suez crisis served to bind British interests in the Persian Gulf emirates more closely than before to the military assets London was reinforcing in Aden. For the first time, Aden served as the principal British base for projecting military force into the Gulf. A British army battalion permanently committed to the colony the previous March was instrumental in reinforcing the company stationed at Sharjah and played an important role in quelling the civil unrest in Bahrain. Further, the colony served both as a transit point for additional troops sent from Kenya to the Gulf and as an air transport hub for supplies going to both Egypt and the Gulf emirates. Southwest Arabia and the Persian Gulf were now closely associated in the minds of British strategists and policymakers.<sup>105</sup>

How did the Suez crisis affect Britain's stature in the Middle East and the security of its position in the Persian Gulf region? Clearly, it was a dramatic episode in the history of Britain's involvement with the Arab world and a watershed in its postwar relationship with the United States. It did not, as some scholars assert, mark the end of British power in the Middle East.<sup>106</sup> Instead, it set the British government on a determined course to consolidate its core interests in Iraq and the Persian Gulf and to secure the military facilities in Aden crucial to the safety of those interests.

In the Gulf, and particularly in Kuwait, British and U.S. officials were shaken after the Suez crisis. As one Foreign Office official noted, "The whole Middle East will be a scene of more open confrontation than hitherto. We, having shown the sword, may not so easily return it to store. Nor may our unaided efforts be sufficient to ensure the balance that we would wish. No doubt the United States Government is anxiously considering the future."<sup>107</sup> At the same time, the U.S. consul in Kuwait, William Brewer, believed that Britain's position in the sheikhdom had been undermined, perhaps seriously. He speculated in late November 1956 that "while the basic British position remains, reliance for its preservation must now increasingly be placed, at least temporarily, on a few senior shaykhs [sheiks] and on force."<sup>108</sup>

In fact, the Suez crisis had surprisingly little impact on the security of Britain's position in the Gulf emirates, and the flow of Persian Gulf oil to the West returned to precrisis levels by April 1957. As Sir Bernard Burrows concluded, "On the whole it might be said that given the immorality of the Suez action and the errors of judgment as regards its likely success, we got away with it fairly lightly."<sup>109</sup>

What is striking about the attitudes and positions held by British and U.S. policymakers during the Suez crisis is how they were prefigured during the Buraimi dispute. In Buraimi, as at Suez, the United States took the side of an emerging Arab nation against the traditional regional interests of its closest ally, Britain, after British military action threatened to draw charges of imperialist aggression and to prejudice America's Middle Eastern interests. In Buraimi, as at Suez, the British intentionally kept the United States uninformed about a military action they knew U.S. officials would attempt to discourage. Thus, at Buraimi, Macmillan's official biographer, Alistair Horne, concludes, the British established a "minor but important precedent of non-consultation."<sup>110</sup> According to biographer Victor Rothwell, Anthony Eden too "was eventually to conclude that the starting point for U.S. policy at Suez lay . . . in the dispute over the Buraimi oasis."<sup>111</sup>

American policymakers also remarked on the connections between the Suez crisis and the Buraimi dispute. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles told a journalist not long after the Suez crisis had abated that "the recent chain of events in the Middle East had very largely stemmed from the British actions in

the Buraimi oasis.”<sup>112</sup> During the crisis itself, Undersecretary of State Hoover asserted to the Australian minister of external affairs, Richard G. Casey, that U.S.-British differences in the Middle East “had gone a great deal deeper than people imagined. It had started a long time ago even before Suez as far back as the Buraimi incident.”<sup>113</sup> In the minds of both U.S. and British policymakers, then, Buraimi and Suez were of a piece. Both pointed out the fissures in the Anglo-American diplomatic relationship in the Middle East and illuminated the different interests each nation was defining for itself in the region.

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During the early and mid-1950s, the United States and Britain struggled to establish a serviceable diplomatic relationship in the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula. Their task was complicated by the deep ambivalence each nation felt for the other’s presence and policies in the region. While the Anglo-American diplomatic partnership served as the cornerstone of the Western alliance in Europe, Washington and London disagreed frequently and vigorously over questions of how to secure the economic and strategic resources of the Gulf and Arabia for their nations. American officials valued Britain’s role in the Middle East. They hoped Britain would lead Western efforts to defend the area from Soviet attack and would keep peace among the fractious peoples of the Arab world. At the same time, they feared Britain’s colonial legacy in the region would act as a lightning rod for anti-Western sentiment. They carefully distanced themselves from the trappings of British imperialism in the Middle East, refused to acknowledge Britain’s traditional privileges in the region, and courted favor with local nationalists.

In London, British officials were equally ambivalent about U.S. policies in the Middle East. Clearly, American cooperation and material assistance were required if Britain were to maintain its status as a Middle Eastern power. At the highest levels in the Foreign Office, and in Downing Street, this appreciation guided policy during the early 1950s. “Getting the Americans in” became one of the highest priorities of London’s Middle East diplomacy. But deep resentments among many British diplomats hindered Anglo-American cooperation. British officials viewed the Americans as political interlopers in a traditional British sphere of influence and as economic competitors in the oil fields of the Persian Gulf. The U.S. government, they believed, was insensitive to British interests and prerogatives in the region. Washington cavalierly asked London to compromise its stature in the Middle East and Gulf when it counseled it to make concessions to local nationalists. By 1955 and 1956, the Eden government decided that the goodwill of the United States was too little reward to sacrifice Britain’s freedom of diplomatic action. London would now act unilaterally in the Gulf and in Arabia if the situation required. This new, less compromising attitude was evident during the Buraimi and Suez crises.

While Britain suffered reverses in Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Egypt during the 1940s and early 1950s and withdrew from many of its most important political, economic, and strategic commitments in the Middle East, it consolidated its position and expanded its interests and obligations in both the Persian Gulf and southern Arabian Peninsula. From the Gulf, British policymakers could defend their core interests in Middle East oil and act militarily to defend the lines of communication to the Far East and Australia. The Foreign Office and Colonial Office cooperated to tie the military assets Britain maintained in Aden to the security requirements of the Gulf emirates. In the process, they rejuvenated the fortunes of an economically depressed and politically fragile British colony and forged an important link between their interests in the Gulf and Arabian periphery.

British and U.S. policymakers often disagreed heatedly on how to respond to the phenomenon of Arab nationalism. During the early and mid-1950s, Washington and London discovered how volatile and multifaceted Arab nationalism could be. The secular, radical, and neutralist strain of nationalism espoused by Nasser's Egypt presented clear threats to the Britain's late imperial position in the Middle East and challenged U.S. efforts to exclude Soviet influence from the region. But the conservative, monarchical, and expansive form of nationalism inherent in Saudi Arabia's policies proved equally disruptive in the Persian Gulf area. As the al-Saud attempted to extend their borders throughout the Arabian Peninsula, they challenged the interests of Britain's client states in the Gulf region and thus, indirectly, Britain's position in the Gulf. Saudi requests for the political intercession of their American patrons, in turn, created Anglo-American tensions. Such was the case during the Buraimi dispute.

Saudi expansionism during the early 1950s underscores the fact that while the United States and Britain pursued their Cold War and late imperial interests in the Persian Gulf and in Arabia, the native peoples of the region pursued their own interests and agendas. Egypt and Iraq continued their struggle for dominance in the Arab world through the vehicles of the pan-Arab nationalist movement and the Baghdad Pact. The Saudi-Hashemite struggle persisted, and Kings Ibn Saud and Saud attempted to establish Saudi hegemony throughout the Arabian Peninsula. Meanwhile, the Rulers of the Gulf emirates struggled to secure their thrones, fortunes, and territories through their relationships with Britain.

## **“A Delicate Structure”: Consolidation and Crisis in the Persian Gulf Region, 1957–1960**

**H**arold Macmillan, like Winston Churchill, was born to an American mother and a British father. He believed firmly in the importance of transatlantic political cooperation as the cornerstone of British security, but, unlike Churchill, he refused to sentimentalize or mythologize the Anglo-American alliance. Churchill's paeans to the “special relationship” between the “English-speaking peoples” seemed manifestly inappropriate in the political aftermath of the Suez crisis. As foreign secretary, Macmillan had seen Anthony Eden's health and political reputation ruined by the debacle in Egypt. Eden's decision to deceive the United States about British intentions during the Middle East crisis of 1956 and President Eisenhower's furious refusal to support British actions effectively ended Eden's prime ministry. When Macmillan entered office in January 1957, he recognized that Britain's role in the world and its relationship to the United States must be thoroughly reappraised and set on a new foundation. An unsentimental reassessment of the U.S.-British alliance was the first step in developing a new policy that would allow strategists and diplomats in London to bring American power more effectively to bear on British interests in the Persian Gulf region.

Between 1957 and 1960, British policymakers carefully reconsidered the character of the international system in the post-Suez era, reassessed Britain's interests in the world, and attempted to craft new policies that tied British resources and capabilities to those interests. Britain's status as a great power and an imperial hegemon, they realized, was suspect in the era of superpower rivalry. New foreign policy tactics must be devised to preserve Britain's relevance to the Cold War world. “We shall not maintain our influence if we appear to be clinging obstinately to the shadow of our old Imperial power after its substance has gone,” concluded a cabinet paper written in 1958.<sup>1</sup> Two documents

from the period, a defense white paper from April 1957 and the cabinet's "Future Policy Study, 1960–1970," clearly reflect the efforts of the Macmillan government to come to terms with Britain's new role in the world. Both were the products of lengthy reflection and grueling debate within London's foreign policy and defense establishments.

### Britain Reassesses Its Global Role and the "Special Relationship"

The Suez crisis provoked great criticism of Britain's military leadership by the Conservative government's Labour Party opponents. Britain's aims and interests in the Middle East, they argued, had been served badly by a bloated and ineffective military. Consequently, Macmillan directed his new defense secretary, Duncan Sandys, to undertake a thorough study of Britain's military strategy and to propose sweeping changes that would achieve substantial economies on defense spending. Sandys issued the resulting white paper *Defence: Outline of Future Policy*, in April 1957, to much acclaim, but also to much criticism.<sup>2</sup> The white paper called for the government to end conscription and cut the size of the armed forces almost in half, from 690,000 to 375,000, by 1962. Britain would instead base its military strategy on professional armed forces and a highly mobile strategic reserve of soldiers that could be quickly transported to trouble spots in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Southeast Asia. Further, British strategists placed greater emphasis on the acquisition of nuclear weapons as a deterrent to aggression against British interests. The white paper specifically upheld British commitments to the Persian Gulf states and affirmed the importance of Aden to British capabilities in the area.

The "Sandys Doctrine" provoked an uproar among the British service chiefs and particularly from the army, whose budget and resources suffered the most from the resultant spending cuts. The doctrine's dependence on nuclear arms also caused discomfort among Labour Party stalwarts. Further, the Eisenhower administration grew nervous over the white paper's call to reduce British troop levels in Germany. Still, the Sandys Doctrine ultimately won favor in Parliament, in the British press, and with the public; it stands as a key document in the history of British postwar defense policy and clearly illuminates the efforts of the Macmillan government to realign British military strategy and resources in the post-Suez era.<sup>3</sup>

Macmillan and his advisers thought carefully about Britain's political, as well as military, position in the world after Suez. The cabinet paper "Future Policy Study, 1960–1970" captured the scope and seriousness of this difficult reappraisal of British political interests and obligations.<sup>4</sup> The document formally reversed the defiant unilateralism of the Eden years and concluded that the preservation of the Atlantic alliance was the keystone of British foreign policy and, "in the last resort, the most basic of our interests."

The study reflected an important shift in the British government's official attitude toward the United States. After coming to office, Macmillan abandoned the misty-eyed invocation of the so-called special relationship with America based on blood, class, and nostalgia espoused by Churchill. Likewise, he rejected the petulance and resentments toward Washington adopted by Eden. Rather, Macmillan, his advisers in the Foreign Office, and top officials in Britain's Washington embassy recognized the need for a clear-eyed reexamination of Britain's American policy that would pay clear dividends for British interests. How, they asked, could London make the American alliance work for it?

The first step in recasting the Anglo-American relationship and channeling it in productive directions was to recognize its fragility. That disagreement during a single major crisis in the Middle East could jeopardize the solidarity of the special relationship was sobering to officials in London who, by the end of the 1950s, could only conclude that the "Anglo-American partnership is not a law of nature, and our present situation is one we could lose. Unless we are careful to shore it up, it may run into danger over the next few years."<sup>5</sup>

Britain's position in the world, Macmillan and his advisers believed, was inextricably bound up with that of the United States. Although they believed it was now impossible to act militarily or politically, in most cases, without U.S. cooperation, they realized that by serving as a valuable and loyal junior partner in the Anglo-American alliance, Britain could safeguard its own interests. As the cabinet study asserted, "We shall become increasingly dependent on their support, as perhaps they will on ours, and our status in the world will largely depend on their readiness to treat us as their closest ally." The Macmillan government was confident of its ability to ingratiate itself with the United States. As Harold Caccia noted from Washington in late 1956, "There is no other country with world interests which could take our place as a 'chosen ally'; and most countries, like individuals, feel the need of a confidante."<sup>6</sup>

But how, specifically, could the Macmillan government profit from its close relationship with Washington? By the autumn of 1957, Foreign Office officials had formulated a policy of "interdependence" to govern Britain's relations with the American allies. Nigel J. Ashton has argued that interdependence was an expansive strategy that "was to be founded on a much closer Anglo-American *partnership*, involving a greater pooling of effort, particularly in the fields of defense research, development and procurement."<sup>7</sup> In fact, interdependence was more ambitious than this. In order to win influence in Washington and to bring U.S. power and influence to bear on issues of importance to Britain, the Macmillan government concluded it must make itself indispensable to its more powerful transatlantic cousins. One way to do this was to share with the Americans Britain's detailed expertise in arcane areas and hard-won knowledge of far-flung regions of the globe—in the Middle East and the

Persian Gulf, for example. Through a web of consultative arrangements, British officials could educate American policymakers on the obscurities of local dynastic politics, geography, and culture while gaining detailed knowledge of American intentions and plans. Within the same councils, they hoped to move American opinion and power behind British policies.

A cabinet paper drafted in April 1958 defined the policy of interdependence most succinctly. "The United States," it concluded, "is so much the most powerful nation in the Western camp that our ability to have our way in the world depends more on anything else upon our influence upon her to act in conformity with our interests." Noting the establishment since Suez of Anglo-American working groups of experts on defense, political, economic, and information issues, the Foreign Office urged the Macmillan government to "extend the machinery so as to make consultation a habitual reaction to any problem in the widest possible circle within both governmental machines." This process of "interlocking" the U.S. and British policymaking machinery would ensure that "we have a chance of influencing American policy at its formative stages."<sup>8</sup>

Interdependence had immense promise but posed enormous potential risks for British diplomacy. There was always the possibility that the United States might abandon its close relationship with Britain. Alternately, London ran the risk of appearing too exclusively Atlanticist in its diplomacy or servile to the United States. This would prove self-defeating, as the success of interdependence was measured by the extent of British influence among its other allies and clients. Therefore, judicious displays of independence from the United States on carefully chosen issues should be made.

Interdependence was not a dramatic departure from previous British efforts to win Washington's support for Britain's own interests. Since the Second World War, British policymakers had attempted to use their reputation as savvy and experienced actors on the world stage to influence their American counterparts. Interdependence was merely a more formal expression of this strategy. In practice, it proved to be a complex policy that demanded extraordinary political dexterity and sound judgment by British officials. Macmillan's famous dictum that Britain must play Greece to America's Rome, that it must "aspire to civilize and occasionally to influence" the United States, anticipated and illuminates the newly articulated policy of interdependence.

The Macmillan government remained acutely aware of the many areas of disagreement with the United States that strained the Anglo-American relationship. Most importantly, British officials realized that the issue of British imperialism and colonialism continued to sour the Anglo-American relationship. Yet Foreign Office and Colonial Office policymakers remained unrepentant in their support for most British policies in the developing

world. Lord Perth of the Colonial Office minuted to the prime minister in February 1957 that he was

convinced that the persistent misinterpretation by the Americans of our colonial policy and record is one of the most serious obstacles to a proper understanding between our two governments. . . . I am sure, therefore, that we must seize every opportunity, both in the interests of our colonial policy itself and in the interests of Anglo-American co-operation over a much wider field, of pointing out to the Americans that what we are doing in our colonial territories has no relation to their outdated conception of "Colonialism" but is, on the contrary, a constructive job of *nation-building* which is of the utmost importance to the free world and which they have a duty as well as an interest to support.<sup>9</sup>

American officials also recognized the fragile state of the Anglo-American alliance in the wake of the Suez crisis. They believed conservative and moderate members of the Tory party, long champions of the Anglo-American relationship, were wavering in their support of the United States, and blamed U.S. policy for weakening Britain's position in the Middle East. In addition, members of the traditional aristocracy, portions of the British business community, large segments of the middle class, and many members of Parliament were displaying varying degrees of anti-Americanism in the early months of 1957.

Despite the many differences over policy between the United States and Britain, U.S. officials appreciated the political and strategic importance of the Anglo-American alliance. State Department planners concluded:

We rely on British help, both material and psychological, to implement our policies toward the Commonwealth, Eastern Europe, South Asia, and some areas of the Far East. We recognize that the two acting in concert, with the aid of the Commonwealth, form a more persuasive combination than the U.S. acting alone.<sup>10</sup>

### **The Bermuda Conference and Its Aftermath**

In early March 1957, the U.S. embassy in London reported that "the general state of Anglo-American relations is still centered very much on Suez and Near East developments."<sup>11</sup> The embassy's conclusion was borne out during the next three months as U.S. and British heads of state and senior officials met to compose the damage done to the transatlantic alliance during 1956 and to establish a new working relationship in the Middle East and Persian Gulf region.

In the immediate aftermath of Suez, British planners recognized that London's position in the Middle East rested on its ties to the Hashemite Kingdom of Iraq, its membership in the Baghdad Pact, and its patronage of the emirates of the Persian Gulf and southern Arabia.<sup>12</sup> They believed, further, that because of the turmoil caused by the Suez crisis, the political situation in the Persian Gulf was

“still grave and unsettled.”<sup>13</sup> Consequently, the Macmillan government determined to enlist the support of the United States where possible to secure British interests in the region. They realized it would be no easy task.

British officials understood that Washington’s and London’s interests in the Middle East and Persian Gulf were not identical, but that in key areas they coincided closely. The security of Persian Gulf oil was of particular concern to both nations. But how could the Macmillan government elicit U.S. assistance in the Middle East and the Gulf? Derek Riches and A. D. M. Ross of the Foreign Office’s Eastern Department urged, “In the immediate future we must deploy what efforts we can to encourage the United States to accept responsibilities in the Middle East and seek irrevocably to commit them to a major role in the defence of positions which we have hitherto sustained. We must work loyally with them, and they, for their part, must recognise our special interests in particular areas.”<sup>14</sup> It was a tall order and was complicated by important disagreements and differences in regional priorities between the Anglo-American allies.

Britain and the United States continued to perceive differently the most immediate threats to their interests in the Middle East and Persian Gulf. The British Future Policy Study Group summarized the discrepancy neatly in 1959. “American interest,” it noted, “is overwhelmingly absorbed in the Communist threat and . . . the Americans tend to regard everything else as of subordinate importance, where two other problems figure largely and assume coordinate importance in our thinking: radical nationalism, and the security of our oil supplies which is threatened both by Communism and by radical nationalism.”<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, the Eisenhower administration remained troubled by the legacy of British imperialism in the region, which it blamed squarely for the Suez debacle. Further nationalist resentment of Britain could erode the security of Western interests in the Middle East and Gulf. Still, British policymakers remained convinced they could manage the Americans’ anti-imperial tendencies, because they believed the United States relied on Britain’s cooperation in the region.

Both Eisenhower and Macmillan recognized that the mutual resentments engendered by the Suez crisis must be addressed at the highest levels if the Anglo-American relationship were to be fully restored. In January 1957 Eisenhower called for a summit meeting with Macmillan, to be held on British soil, for the purpose of restoring amity and cooperation between London and Washington. Consequently, the two leaders met at the Mid Ocean Club in Bermuda between March 20 and 23 to discuss the full panoply of issues facing their nations.

Nationalism, colonialism, and Anglo-American relations in the Middle East and Persian Gulf region were central to the Bermuda conference’s agenda. Suez and the specter of Nasser were never far from the minds of the president and the prime minister and deeply influenced their discussions. Notably, Macmillan told Eisenhower that his government felt that revolutionary nationalism “could be controlled and directed by a combination of power, propaganda, assistance, and services, and that unless Britain and the United

States were associated in this effort the game might be lost."<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, the prime minister was unmovable in his opposition to Nasser in the Middle East. The president recalled later in his memoirs the "blinding bitterness" Macmillan and Foreign Secretary Lloyd expressed toward the Egyptian leader.<sup>17</sup> Eisenhower recorded the "tirade" Macmillan delivered against Nasser on the second day of the conference, in which he asserted that the Egyptian president "in pursuing his ambitions . . . would probably, just as Mussolini became the stooge of Hitler, become the stooge of the Kremlin."<sup>18</sup> He was obsessed with the possibilities of getting rid of Nasser to the detriment of other Western interests in the Middle East, believed Eisenhower.<sup>19</sup> In reply, the president cautioned that the spirit of nationalism was "stronger than Communism" and that care must be taken in distinguishing between implacably anti-Western nationalism and those forms that could be usefully cultivated and accommodated.

Eisenhower assured the prime minister that he desired close U.S.-British cooperation in the Middle East. Despite the anxieties of some Conservative backbenchers and of the British oil companies, the United States had "no intention of trying to push the British out" of the region.

Eisenhower took particular care to stress that London should work strenuously to repair its relations with Saudi Arabia. The Buraimi confrontation had poisoned Anglo-Saudi diplomacy, and Riyadh had severed its diplomatic ties with London during the Suez crisis. Still, the Eisenhower administration made clear that it valued Saudi Arabia highly as a bulwark of pro-Western stability in the region and worked to bolster the government of King Saud as a counterweight to Nasser in the Arabian Peninsula.

Macmillan stressed repeatedly to the president the great value Britain placed on Persian Gulf oil, and Eisenhower recalled that their discussion on the topic "brought out some very plain talk, and I think much was done to clarify our thinking" on the issue. The prime minister pointed out that Kuwait was the key to British and Western oil interests in the Gulf and could "produce oil enough for Western Europe for years to come."<sup>20</sup>

In order to secure the Gulf, Macmillan stressed the need for close Anglo-American cooperation in the region. He urged that U.S. and British officials "work out common objectives" and develop "joint plans" for the area in the same way they had done during the Second World War.<sup>21</sup> This would be the first of many times that Macmillan encouraged close U.S.-British efforts to formulate joint military and political strategies in the Gulf region, and marked the first real effort to engage United States power and resources through the mechanism of the interdependence strategy.

Eisenhower agreed that further Anglo-American study of Middle Eastern and Persian Gulf regional issues should be launched, and that the project "should be tackled just like a 'plan of battle.'<sup>22</sup> Consequently, he and Macmillan authorized two follow-up conferences to their Bermuda meeting to be conducted by midlevel experts in London and Washington. The so-called Stage II and Stage III talks, held

in April and June 1957, were charged specifically with discussing “the problems bearing upon the supply of oil to the free world,” but in fact were wide-ranging explorations of Anglo-American interests and policies throughout the Middle East.<sup>23</sup> Both the United States and Britain used the stage II and III discussions as opportunities to articulate their views on the Persian Gulf region to each other.

British diplomats understood the Americans’ unease with London’s imperial legacy in the Persian Gulf but used the stage II and III meetings to reiterate the great value they placed on their position there. They stressed to the Americans that their strength in the Gulf states was a valuable Western, as opposed to a purely British, asset; without it, Western European oil supplies from the Gulf states would be jeopardized. Yet officials in London were pessimistic that they could win the United States’ wholehearted support in the Gulf. The Macmillan government regretfully concluded that it could expect from the United States no more than “a general understanding of, and moral support for, [the British] position in the Gulf.” Concrete assistance and unqualified endorsement of British policy in the Gulf was unlikely.<sup>24</sup>

For their part, U.S. officials expressed their usual ambivalence about Britain’s policies in the Gulf. They conceded that “a substantial British position” in the region was necessary to safeguard Western interests, but they noted that the British position contained troubling “elements of weakness.” They urged London to accommodate “responsible” nationalism in the region, and they again advocated reconciliation between Britain and Saudi Arabia as a means to stabilize the Persian Gulf and Arabian Peninsula, advance Western interests, and repel Soviet and Egyptian encroachment in the area.<sup>25</sup>

The Bermuda conference and the Stage II and III talks marked an important departure for U.S.-British relations during the 1950s and the beginning of a new period of relative harmony in Anglo-American diplomacy in the Persian Gulf and Arabia. The acrimony that had characterized the transatlantic relationship during Eden’s prime ministry, and that had become most pronounced during the Buraimi oasis dispute and the Suez crisis, gave way to an atmosphere of cooperation and consultation. Eisenhower and Macmillan did not establish the kind of special relationship sought by Churchill earlier in the decade, but they did create a diplomatic climate in which the United States and Britain could air their differences cordially and work to formulate policies that benefited the respective interests of both nations. London conceded its status as junior partner to the United States in world affairs and set the stage for the era of carefully managed interdependence in U.S.-British diplomacy.

### **Britain’s Reappraisal of Its Persian Gulf Strategy**

During the same period that officials in Washington and London struggled to define the contours of the Anglo-American relationship after Suez and imbue

U.S.-British relations in the Middle East with a spirit of cooperation, influential voices within the British Foreign Office called for a fundamental reassessment of Britain's position in the Persian Gulf. In December 1956 and January 1957, Sir Roger Stevens, Britain's ambassador to Iran, and Sir Michael Wright, the British ambassador to Iraq, urged Foreign Secretary Lloyd to reconsider Britain's relationship to its conservative client regimes in the Gulf and to the forces of Arab nationalism in the region. They asked, further, that the relationship of the Gulf states to the larger countries of the Middle East be reappraised and that the role of the United States in the Persian Gulf be examined anew. Stevens's and Wright's views were excoriated by the British political resident in the Persian Gulf, Sir Bernard Burrows, and provoked an extended and impassioned debate within the British foreign policy-making establishment that extended all the way to 10 Downing Street.

The Suez debacle demanded that the underpinnings of British policy in the Middle East and Persian Gulf be questioned. Writing from Tehran on December 8, 1956, Ambassador Stevens did just that. The liquidation of the British Indian Empire and the loss of British influence in Saudi Arabia, Palestine, and Egypt, he argued, made the Persian Gulf a "double-ended cul de sac" and Britain's positions there "stations on the road to nowhere." Britain's political presence was an irritant to the growing powers of Iran and Saudi Arabia, he continued, "and there is the further point that whatever policy we pursue we must face the fact that there is a strong tide running of Arab nationalism and xenophobia. The 'British presence' in the Gulf is widely regarded as 'imperialistic' and anachronistic. If we take no new line we shall be accused of clinging to the past"—and to an outmoded, nineteenth-century conception of prestige in the region. Finally, he asserted, British policy in the Persian Gulf took too little notice of American views and ambitions. "The Gulf," he wrote,

certainly plays an increasing part in U.S. thinking: protection of oil supplies, lines of communication for defence purposes. It will not surprise me to learn that other departments of the United States Government viewed our outposts in the Gulf with a somewhat jaundiced eye—partly because they have a colonial air, and partly because they may be thought to be crumbling. At any rate, it must be taken as read that we shall get no assistance from the United States Government in maintaining or advancing our position in the Gulf on its present ill-defined basis.<sup>26</sup>

Four weeks later Wright wrote from Baghdad to second Stevens's views and to advocate that political federation among the Gulf emirates be explored. A new federation, he argued, should be tied closely to the Baghdad Pact as the primary vehicle for advancing British interests in the region.<sup>27</sup>

The Stevens-Wright dispatches provoked a firestorm of controversy in the Gulf and London. Burrows, responding as the British political resident in the Persian Gulf, wrote heatedly that there was no pressing reason for a radical

change in the system of relationships between London and the Gulf states nor between the Gulf states and the larger nations of the region. Making a back-handed swipe at the United States, he argued:

I do not know what is the justification for the assumption that the Gulf states and our relationship with them cannot continue more or less as they are. It is surely a principle borrowed from the Americans and alien to our system of political thought that anything which has existed for a hundred years, such as our relations with the Gulf States, must necessarily be wrong or must necessarily change.

Furthermore, pressure for “progressive” democratic change did not originate in the Gulf states themselves, as Stevens and Wright contended, but in the propaganda organs of radical Arab states, specifically Egypt. “The experience of democracy in other Middle Eastern countries,” he concluded, “should surely make us hesitate to introduce it here. There is quite a lot to be said for a reasonably efficient feudalism.”<sup>28</sup>

Meanwhile, opinion in the Foreign Office divided over the Stevens-Wright correspondence, particularly where the U.S. role in the Gulf was concerned. Some policymakers favored increasingly close contacts with the American allies over Gulf issues and advocated regular consultations between London and Washington and between the British political agent and the American consul in Kuwait.<sup>29</sup> Others were persuaded by the “very strong arguments . . . against allowing the Americans to share our bread-and-butter responsibilities in the Gulf, even if they would consent to do so.” They doubted whether the United States could be brought to buttress Britain’s, or the West’s, position as a whole in the Gulf, without at the same time interfering with London’s position in the different Gulf states individually.<sup>30</sup>

Macmillan kept abreast of the arguments between his senior diplomats in the Gulf and weighed in on the debate cautiously. “This is a very large and vital issue,” he minuted to the foreign secretary. “*Quieta non movere* [Do not disturb that which is quiet] is a good motto. But how quiet are things? We ought to have a full discussion on this.”<sup>31</sup>

The prime minister and his senior advisers did, in fact, discuss the Persian Gulf issue fully in June 1957. Foreign Secretary Lloyd attempted to explicate for his cabinet colleagues the arguments made by Stevens and Wright in favor of fundamentally reordering the British-sponsored system of Gulf security and Burrows’s case for continuity in London’s policy in the region. In so doing he attempted to mediate between the sides and occupy the rhetorical middle ground. He concluded that “it is unrealistic not to recognise that the world is changing and that we must be prepared to make adjustments in our relations with the Gulf states to meet these fundamental changes.” Yet, he argued that Britain should eschew any “grand design” for the Persian Gulf and retain the

maximum flexibility needed to deal effectively with the wide variety of problems in the different emirates. "At the same time," he wrote, "we should continue to regard our position in the Persian Gulf as an integral whole, no part of which can be weakened or resigned without affecting the rest." Meanwhile, London should seek American understanding of its position in the Gulf as the best guarantee of Western interests there, including those of United States oil companies.<sup>32</sup>

The foreign secretary's caution in the matter effectively upheld the political resident's position against fundamental change in British policy toward the Gulf. Prime Minister Macmillan, unimpressed with the quality of the debate on the issue, rather listlessly supported Lloyd's weak attempt to find a compromise between the Stevens-Wright and Burrows positions and washed his hands of the matter.<sup>33</sup> Thus, British policymakers squandered the opportunity after Suez to explore imaginative new diplomatic formulations in the Persian Gulf, seek accommodation with the forces of progressive nationalism in the region, and, perhaps, put Britain's interests in the Gulf on a more secure footing in an age of political flux in the Middle East.

### **Rebellion in Oman**

Anglo-American cooperation in the Persian Gulf region faced new challenges in the late 1950s as the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman descended into civil conflict. Local dynastic politics and tribal rivalries, exacerbated by Saudi expansionist ambitions and modern petroleum interests, created an explosive political environment as the British-supported sultan of Muscat attempted to quell the secessionist uprising of the imam of Oman. The Macmillan government, as it worked to secure the southern Arabian periphery and its oil communications with the Persian Gulf, aided the sultan militarily. Failure to do so, it believed, would call into question Britain's credibility as a regional power able to defend the interests of its client states. Meanwhile, the Eisenhower administration feared that British military action in southeastern Arabia would incite a nationalist backlash against Western interests in the region, complicate American efforts to wean the Saudi government away from its political relationship with Nasser's Egypt, and hinder U.S. efforts to promote a reconciliation between London and Riyadh. Lingering resentments from the Buraimi and Suez crises complicated Anglo-American efforts to reach agreement on this potentially divisive political issue.<sup>34</sup>

Situated at the Strait of Hormuz and positioned at the junction of the Persian Gulf and southern Arabia, the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman played a key role in Britain's Middle East strategy during the late 1950s. As the Persian Gulf became central to London's regional diplomacy after Suez, British planners redoubled their efforts to secure the oil communications around the

Arabian periphery and tie their military assets in Aden and Kenya to the defense of Kuwait and the Gulf oil fields. Muscat and Oman was critical to these efforts.

The sultanate was deeply divided along tribal lines, and the clans of interior Oman frequently challenged the sultan's authority as temporal leader of the country. Spiritual and secular leadership of the country, and of the Ibadi sect of Islam, had, until the late eighteenth century, been vested in an elected imam. In 1954 Imam Muhammad died and was succeeded by Imam Ghalib, who immediately set out to assert Oman's independence from the sultan. With Saudi Arabian and Egyptian sponsorship, Ghalib applied for membership in the Arab League and, thus, raised the flag of rebellion once again against Sultan Said ibn Taimur and the government in Muscat.<sup>35</sup>

Ghalib's rebellion must be seen in the light of the Saudi-Muscati-British dispute over control of the Buraimi oasis, the efforts of Nasser's Egypt to subvert British interests in the Middle East, and the activities of British and American oil companies in southeastern Arabia. Ghalib received political support, money, and—the Macmillan government believed—U.S.-made arms from Turki bin Utaishan, the Saudi governor of the occupied Buraimi oasis. Turki's support for Ghalib was consistent with Saudi policy designed to extend Riyadh's influence into southeastern Arabia and enjoyed the support of Nasser's government, which hoped to weaken British influence in the Arabian Peninsula. Further complicating the situation in Oman were the activities of Petroleum Development (Oman), Ltd., a British-owned subsidiary of the Iraq Petroleum Company. The firm began prospecting for oil in lands controlled by Ghalib in 1954, and, although as yet unsuccessful, its activities had attracted the attention of the Saudi government and Aramco.<sup>36</sup>

When British-led forces expelled Turki from Buraimi in September 1955, Ghalib lost his most important political patron and source of funds. The sultan's government, with British encouragement, moved in December to retake control of interior Oman. According to the British political resident in Bahrain, "the expectation of the discovery of oil" in the Omani interior motivated London's support for the sultan's operation.<sup>37</sup> More importantly, it was a way to support a key client state and to reverse Saudi gains in the area.

The United States, already angered by the British-engineered military action in Buraimi, harshly criticized the sultan's campaign against Ghalib and Britain's support of the short operation. Such action would no doubt provoke an anti-Western backlash in the region and further weaken Saudi Arabia, the cornerstone of American policy in the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula.

The Eden government was in no mood to be scolded. U.S. Deputy Chief of Mission Walworth Barbour was summoned to the Foreign Office, where Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick, the permanent undersecretary, "vigourously and somewhat emotionally" castigated him for his government's position. Ghalib, Kirkpatrick

protested, was a tool of Saudi and Egyptian anti-British subversion in the region. American criticism, he argued, would only benefit the forces of anti-Westernism and indirectly further Soviet advances in the Middle East. In conclusion, "Kirkpatrick reiterated British in dark as to where United States policy is headed in Arabian Peninsula in light vast resources available Saudis for subversion, etc."<sup>38</sup> Thus, British frustration and bitterness lingering from the Buraimi dispute poisoned U.S.-British efforts to reach agreement on the problems in Muscat and Oman.

The sultan successfully quelled Ghalib's rebellion in 1955 and the imam abdicated his office. However, his brother Talib, a key actor in the insurrection, escaped to Saudi Arabia, where the royal government embraced him and permitted him to establish a military training facility in Dammam. From Saudi Arabia he planned his return to Oman and future rebellion against the sultan's government. In June 1957 Talib and a group of 70 followers stole back into Oman and proclaimed the reestablishment of the imamate. Talib quickly captured Nizwa and several other key towns in the Omani interior with little resistance. Desperate, the sultan in Muscat appealed to London for help.

The Macmillan government, in considering its reply to the sultan, faced a different set of international and regional circumstances than the Eden government had during the 1955 rebellion. The Suez crisis had weakened British prestige gravely, and, in the aftermath of the Bermuda conference, the government was eager not to antagonize the Eisenhower administration by acting militarily in Arabia without U.S. support. On the other hand, Britain was now determined to restructure its Middle East policy around its interests in the Persian Gulf area. Its ability to defend the interests of its client states there would, in large part, determine Britain's standing as a regional power. Macmillan felt he had no other choice but to help the sultan put down Talib's rebellion. A cabinet paper from July expressed the dilemma succinctly:

In view of our previous support for the claim of the Sultan of Muscat to Central Oman, a failure on our part to respond to his present appeal for help would have serious repercussions throughout the Arabian Peninsula, particularly in the Eastern Aden Protectorate and also in East Africa. A number of the Rulers were already concerned about our ability to retain our influence and provide them with effective support.<sup>39</sup>

The paper reflected traditional British concerns with Britain's regional credibility but also a renewed appreciation by strategic planners in London that Britain's military and political assets in the Persian Gulf and along the Arabian periphery were inextricably intertwined. They must be safeguarded together if Britain's status as a Middle Eastern actor were to be preserved. In short, the Foreign Office noted, "A decision on our future policy towards the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman cannot be taken in terms of Muscat and Oman alone.

The present British system in the Gulf and Southern Arabia form a delicate structure of which the parts are mutually supporting. The removal of any one prop may result in the collapse of the whole system."<sup>40</sup> It was in this context that Macmillan assured Sultan Sayid ibn Taimur that the Royal Air Force would support his campaign to put down Talib's rebellion.

But how could Macmillan launch a new military venture in the Arabian Peninsula, however limited, without antagonizing the United States? He chose to notify the U.S. government immediately of his decision, emphasize the role of Saudi Arabia and Egypt in the rebellion, and minimize the scope of British action. On July 18 the cabinet decided that it must stress to the United States that the insurrection in Oman was "a minor outbreak of local trouble with which we were dealing on routine precautionary lines."<sup>41</sup>

Nevertheless, the Eisenhower administration was concerned about developments in Oman. The president was anxious that British military intervention in the country not jeopardize the possibility of British-Saudi reconciliation after the Buraimi and Suez crises or drive King Saud closer to Nasser. U.S. officials were also alarmed by the sudden explosion of British newspaper editorials highly critical of American policy in Oman and Arabia. The outburst of emotional anti-Americanism, they feared, could damage the spirit of U.S.-British cooperation reestablished at Bermuda.

President Eisenhower replied to Macmillan on July 24 concerning the imam's rebellion. He ventured, mistakenly, "I assume that this is just the latest incident of the old Buraimi trouble" and continued that he hoped "however the matter is settled, you will achieve a better and firmer relationship with King Saud himself. I cannot help but believe that if we handle things correctly, he will be our best counterbalance to Nasser's influence in the region."<sup>42</sup> The note underscores a key element of U.S. policy in the Arabian Peninsula during the late 1950s: the determination to promote reconciliation between London and Riyadh after years of bitterness. Such reconciliation, U.S. officials believed, would strengthen Saudi Arabia's ability to buttress U.S. and Western interests in the Gulf and to resist the diplomatic blandishments of Nasser's Egypt. The Oman rebellion jeopardized the prospects for Saudi-British reconciliation and could destabilize the region.

U.S. policymakers worried, further, that Anglo-American disagreement over the Oman rebellion put at risk the new climate of reconciliation and cooperation that Washington and London were attempting to foster after the Bermuda conference. Foreign Office officials expressed anger that the rebels in Oman had launched their insurrection from Dammam and were receiving encouragement and aid from Saudi Arabia, the United States' most important ally in the Persian Gulf region. The Omani rebels were widely believed to be armed with American-made weapons, provided by the Saudis and paid for with Aramco oil royalties. As a result, many British newspapers, fueled by resentment over

the United States' refusal to support Britain at Buraimi and Suez, began publishing stridently anti-American editorials that expressed much pent-up anger and mistrust of American motives in Arabia.<sup>43</sup>

Clearly surprised by the sharpness of the attacks in the British press, the Eisenhower administration moved quickly to reassure London. American oil companies were not conspiring with Saudi Arabia to undermine British interests in southeastern Arabia, it asserted. Secretary of State Dulles personally told Ambassador Harold Caccia in Washington that he "deplored" the thought and "was confident that there was no factual basis for it whatsoever."<sup>44</sup> The same day, a State Department press officer "called reports hogwash that American arms [were being] funneled to rebels" in Oman.<sup>45</sup>

In fact, Aramco had involved itself deeply in the Oman question in late 1955 and 1956. In November 1955, members of the company's Arabian Affairs Division met repeatedly with senior officials of the Saudi Foreign Ministry and army, as well as with "Ali Khashabi, an Egyptian believed to hold the rank of major in the Egyptian army and to have visited the imam of Oman in the spring of 1955. . . . It was clear in the discussions that the major interest of Ali Khashabi was with regard to Oman and effecting contact with leaders in this area unsympathetic to the Sultan of Muscat and the British." Subsequently, Aramco officials arranged for a dozen company vehicles, their corporate logos carefully painted out, to be lent to the Saudi military along with a number of drivers and guides. Between December 16 and January 5, 1956, a Saudi military party in civilian garb and at least one member believed to have been "a liaison officer from the Egyptian army" embarked on an extended reconnaissance of the Saudi frontier with Oman. They had been briefed and furnished with maps and studies of the region prepared by Aramco's Arabian Affairs Division. Upon their return, the division carefully analyzed the party's findings and presented them to Saudi foreign minister Yusuf Yassin. Clearly, American oil-company executives had knowingly cooperated with the Saudi government and Egyptian intelligence to lay the groundwork for further anti-British subversion in the region. They had also undoubtedly helped prepare the way for Talib's 1957 campaign in interior Oman.<sup>46</sup>

The Eisenhower administration was woefully ignorant of the complexities of Omani politics, the nature of Saudi involvement in the rebellion, and the extent of Aramco's collusion with Saudi and Egyptian military intelligence. Its clumsy diplomatic maneuvering in the United Nations Security Council further alienated the Macmillan government. U.S. officials appeared uninformed about the Oman question. They readily admitted that they had never formed an opinion on the question of Oman's status as an independent state or as a constituent part of the sultan's domain. Further, they clung to the naïve belief that Saudi Arabia's material support for the Omani rebels could not be determined with certainty. While it conceded that the rebels had strong Egyptian

support, it said that “there is no information available on large-scale Saudi arms deliveries to Omani forces.”<sup>47</sup>

The Eisenhower administration’s decision to abstain from voting, rather than veto, the inscription of the Oman question on the Security Council’s agenda further exasperated British policymakers. By abstaining, the United States believed it could avoid censure from the moderate Arab states. It was an astonishingly self-serving position that British policymakers found deeply insulting.

The Macmillan government was furious at the American stand on inscription. It believed it was a cowardly and disloyal position that weakened Britain’s legitimacy as an actor in Persian Gulf regional affairs. It further betrayed a lack of respect by Washington for London’s security interests in the Middle East and threatened the newly restored Anglo-American diplomatic relationship. Ambassador Caccia told Secretary of State Dulles that “it would be a tragedy to Anglo-American relations if we did not stand together on this item and in that connection he referred to the improvement in Anglo-American relations which was developed at the Bermuda meeting.”<sup>48</sup> In short, British officials felt that failure to agree publicly on the Oman issue would jeopardize the new spirit of U.S.-British cooperation in the Middle East and endanger the nascent strategy of interdependence around which they were building their American policy.

On August 20, 1957, the Security Council held two meetings to decide to decide the disposition of the Oman issue. By a vote of five to four, the council voted against inscription. With the Oman issue removed from UN consideration, British military forces continued their assistance to the sultan, who soon captured the rebel capital of Nizwa. While desultory fighting continued in the mountains of Oman for more than a year, the rebellion disappeared from the agenda of Anglo-American diplomacy in the Persian Gulf region. Macmillan noted wearily in his memoir, “Once again we had to operate without full American assistance,” but he felt confident that British interests had been secured in southeastern Arabia. He concluded, “The successful operation in Oman helped to restore confidence in that part of the Arab world, especially throughout the Gulf. For it proved that the British Government remained unshaken by the misrepresentations of its policies, at home and abroad, or alarmed by the parrot-like accusations of ‘colonialism’ and ‘imperialism’. As a result, we were able in subsequent years to operate in Jordan and Kuwait both to protect our friends and to defend our own national interests.”<sup>49</sup>

### **Aden Becomes the Linchpin of Britain’s Persian Gulf Strategy**

Following the 1956 Suez crisis, Arab governments hostile to Britain erected an “air barrier” between the Mediterranean and the Arabian Peninsula. The barrier obstructed the military resupply and reinforcement of Britain’s client states and

outposts in the Persian Gulf region from Europe and effectively cut the lines of air communication between the Gulf and Britain's Middle East Command, headquartered in Cyprus.<sup>50</sup> Stretching from the Turkish-Syrian border to the Western frontier of Egypt, it permitted British air access to the Gulf only by overflying Turkey and Iraq. Britain thus depended on the continued friendship of Ankara and Baghdad to maintain air access to its resources and friends between Kuwait and Oman. Clearly, an alternate route to the Gulf needed to be identified.

Aden provided the solution to London's dilemma. Quickly, strategists in London transformed the colony into "a vital centre of the air routes to the oil fields of the Persian Gulf and . . . to sea communications in that area."<sup>51</sup> Aden became an important link in the chain of air bases that stretched between Gibraltar, Kano (in Nigeria), Entebbe (in Uganda), Nairobi, and Arabia, and which came to be called the "trans-Africa air reinforcement route."<sup>52</sup> It was essential to London's ability to circumvent the air barrier, and its status as one of Britain's principal "barbicans of empire" in the late 1950s was irrefutably established.

By the end of the 1950s, Aden was a thriving colony humming with British military activity. It became the pivot point of London's strategic policy in the Middle East and tied the military resources Britain had accumulated in southwest Arabia and East Africa to its defense requirements in the Persian Gulf. In so doing, it bound together the lands of the greater Persian Gulf region. British forces participating in the Oman campaign in 1957 and 1958 came either directly from Aden or transited the colony on their way from Kenya to southeast Arabia.<sup>53</sup> In March 1958 the Ministry of Defence established the headquarters of its new Arabian Peninsula Command at Aden, and in 1960 Middle East Command moved to the colony from Cyprus.<sup>54</sup>

Political and journalistic observers no longer described Aden as a dying outpost of empire in which Britain was fighting a futile rearguard action as its interests east of Suez eroded. Rather, they noted its vitality and renewed value to London. A Cabinet Office document detailed Aden's importance:

The Colony of Aden is a British territory. Strategically (and economically) its importance transcends its value as a base and a link in the chain of communications to the Persian Gulf. It is a staging post in our world wide air communications, both military and civil. It is a naval fuelling base under British control and contains an oil refinery, oil storage and minor repair facilities. Commercially, it is an oil bunkering station, a transit port, and a centre of a large entrepot trade. It guards the southern end of the Red Sea and faces the broad Indian Ocean. . . . Its potential strategic importance has recently been increased by the difficulty of air reinforcement of the Persian Gulf across the hostile states of the Middle East.<sup>55</sup>

Just as they had in the Persian Gulf, British officials worked diligently to convince the United States of Aden's value to Western, rather than merely

British, interests in the Middle East. They believed they needed U.S. cooperation in securing the colony and its military facilities from the depredations of the imam of Yemen and, especially, the royal government of Saudi Arabia.

In the period following the Bermuda conference, as the Anglo-American Stage II and Stage III talks on the Middle East convened, Foreign Office and Colonial Office policymakers spoke frequently of the need “to get a more positive line” with the Americans on Britain’s position in Aden. Echoing the words of other policymakers concerning southeastern Arabia, Sir Bernard Reilly of the Colonial Office minuted that “the system of protection on which our Middle East communications and supplies depends stands or falls as a whole. We intend to try to convince the Americans that our position in the Persian Gulf states is a valuable Western as opposed to a purely British asset. Our position in Southern Arabia is linked with our position in the Persian Gulf; if it crumbles in one of these areas it will soon do so in the other.”<sup>56</sup> Thus, British officials reaffirmed the unity of their interests throughout Arabia and the Gulf as well as the importance of U.S. support for London’s role in the region.

Many in London were pessimistic that they could win U.S. support in Aden. Aden’s status as a British Crown Colony made it particularly vulnerable to charges that it was a relic of Victorian imperialism and a potential embarrassment to the West. Foreign Office officials believed they would receive only tepid support from Washington for their interests in the colony and that the Eisenhower administration would refuse to jeopardize the goodwill of the neighboring Arab nations by condoning London’s overtly colonial role there.

British policymakers wanted nothing more than for the United States to rein in their Saudi allies in southwestern Arabia. Just as they had at Buraimi and in Oman, the al-Saud were attempting to extend their dominions at the expense of Britain’s client states in the region, this time in the Aden Protectorates.

In the end, the Macmillan government judged it best not to pressure the United States to acknowledge explicitly the value of its position in Aden. The “Agreed Paper” produced by the Stage III talks did not even mention Aden directly. Sir Humphrey Trevelyan explained in his covering minute to the paper that it, instead, laid stress on the importance of “the sea route through the Persian Gulf (the Americans admit Aden to be an important link in this route) on Soviet activity in the Yemen, and on the desirability of a settlement, with public American support, of the boundary between Saudi Arabia and the Aden Protectorate.”<sup>57</sup> So, British officials finessed the issue of Aden and garnered what implicit American assistance they could for their position in the colony.

While the Macmillan government sought U.S. support for its policies in southwestern Arabia, Colonial Office policymakers carefully considered new measures to consolidate their position in the region and to safeguard Aden and its military facilities. The political turmoil that endangered British interests in the Persian Gulf in the late 1950s also threatened to dislodge London from its

foothold in southern Arabia and demanded imaginative new approaches to regional security. It had impelled Sir Roger Stevens and Sir Michael Wright to recommend that Britain drastically rethink its relationship to the Gulf emirates. Similarly, it prompted the governor of Aden, Sir William Luce, to propose a serious reassessment of Britain's administration of its south Arabian dependencies.

Sir William had become governor of Aden in 1956. He had gained long experience of colonial government as a member of the Sudan Political Service and was known as an original thinker, unafraid to provoke controversy. In late March 1958 he penned a series of letters to his superiors in London outlining his iconoclastic views on the future of southern Arabia. He argued that the "bewildering series of changes which have taken place in the political structure of the Middle East during the last two or three years . . . have inevitably had an unsettling effect on Aden and its Protectorate. . . . The threat occasioned by these changes seems to me to make a reappraisal of our position urgently necessary in order that we may consider the shaping of our policy to meet this new situation." He concluded that Britain should "embark on a policy of gradual disengagement from our position in south-west Arabia with the object of strengthening our friends in both Colony and Protectorate during the period of disengagement and of replacing thereafter our political power by a new relationship more in keeping with modern trends and with the realities of the situation." British disengagement should be completed in the span of a decade, and a federal structure that embraced both the colony and Protectorate should be established as the basis for an independent state in south Arabia. Luce recognized that his proposal would meet with stiff opposition. He concluded, "I realise that the proposals I am putting forth are drastic, but in my view this is a time for bold measures."<sup>58</sup>

Luce's drastic proposals touched off a debate in British policymaking circles that rivaled in intensity the one prompted by the Stevens-Wright correspondence a year earlier. Macmillan was skeptical of the governor's conclusions, and senior Colonial Office officials were openly hostile. From Bahrain, Political Resident Sir Bernard Burrows weighed in on the issue and expressed his customary aversion to fundamental change in London's regional policy. Meanwhile, in London, the senior government official responsible for Aden, Secretary of State for the Colonies Alan Lennox-Boyd, remained indecisive. "The wisest course," he wrote as late as August 1959, "will be to play for time and to avoid defining our policy too clearly."<sup>59</sup>

And so, cautious superiors in London and skeptics in the Persian Gulf largely rejected Luce's prescient analysis of the political situation in Aden and the options open to British policymakers in southern Arabia. His advocacy of federation for the Aden Protectorates, however, was received favorably by the Macmillan government and embraced by the local Rulers. On February 11, 1959, Luce and Lennox-Boyd presided over the formal inauguration of the

Federation of Arab Emirates of the South. The new federation immediately signed a Treaty of Friendship and Protection with London that guaranteed Britain's control over its foreign policy, defense, and internal security. Thus, the Macmillan government established a political structure it believed would help safeguard the Colony of Aden and secure British access to its key military facilities into the 1960s.<sup>60</sup>

The Eisenhower administration remained largely indifferent to developments in Aden and southern Arabia. Aden and its affairs, the U.S. government believed, were best left to the British and local Arabs. As a State Department telegram to the ambassador in Saudi Arabia noted cursorily, the "U.S. regards future of this region as a matter for peoples and governments concerned in area and has not played role in such matters."<sup>61</sup> Only a major crisis in the Persian Gulf region would induce the Eisenhower administration to act there. Just such a crisis was brewing in Iraq in the summer of 1958.

### **Revolution in Iraq**

On July 14, 1958, General Abdul Karim Qassim, an obscure army brigade commander, and a group of radical Free Officers deposed Iraq's king, Faisal II, and the nation's pro-Western government, led by Prime Minister Nuri al-Said. The coup leaders executed the king, the prime minister, the crown prince, and several members of the Hashemite royal family before declaring themselves firmly in control of the country. After announcing the creation of a three-man "sovereignty council" and a cabinet, and after naming himself prime minister, Qassim articulated his government's new policy of eradicating the "slavery and humiliation" of Western influence in Iraq. Iraq, Qassim explained, would devote itself to the cause of Arab unity and opposition to Western imperialism in the Middle East.<sup>62</sup>

The Iraqi revolution marked an important turning point in the history of Anglo-American involvement in the Middle East. It jeopardized the efforts of the Macmillan government to fashion a regional policy based on its patronage of the Persian Gulf sheikhdoms and southern Arabia, its close relations with Iraq, and its membership in the Baghdad Pact. It further complicated Britain's efforts to cooperate closely with the United States to secure its Middle Eastern interests. In the short term, the revolution in Baghdad was the catalyst that led the United States to introduce troops into Lebanon on July 15 and to support British military intervention in Jordan two days later. By threatening the security of Kuwait, Britain's key client state among the Persian Gulf emirates, it brought U.S. and British policymakers into conflict over the most expeditious way to safeguard Western interests in the Gulf and challenged London's strategy of interdependence with Washington. Just as importantly, the revolution once again brought Washington and London face-to-face with the complexities

and contradictions of pan-Arab nationalism and underscored Washington's and London's disagreement over the threat posed to their regional interests by Nasser's Egypt.

Iraq was central to Britain's Iraq-Levant strategy for Middle Eastern defense between 1952 and 1958 and had been a valuable ally in the region for decades.<sup>63</sup> The leading historian of the British Middle East, Wm. Roger Louis, describes Britain's interest in Iraq's contribution to an

air defence system, the purpose of which would be to secure lines of communication and air transit from Transjordan to the Persian Gulf as well as to protect the oil fields. Habbaniya fulfilled the requirement for northern Iraq while Shaiba protected the southern oil fields and the head of the Persian Gulf. Both bases were within striking distance of southern Russia.<sup>64</sup>

Further, Iraq might serve Britain as a regional "police station" from which it would be able to intervene against internal disturbances or outside aggression.<sup>65</sup>

Economically, Britain maintained extensive oil interests in Iraq. British Petroleum, in which the British government owned a controlling interest, was an important partner in IPC and was closely associated with the Mosul Petroleum Company, the Basra Petroleum Company, and the Khanaqin Oil Company, all of which operated throughout Iraq. In 1958, Iraq produced 34 million metric tons of petroleum. In the same year, the value of its exports to Britain was £50.5 million.<sup>66</sup>

In Iraq, U.S. and British foreign policy objectives were in agreement: the nation must be preserved as a Western ally. American policymakers respected Britain's special status in Iraq and usually deferred to British policy there. Like the British Foreign Office, the U.S. Department of State appreciated Iraq's strategic and economic value to the West. A November 1950 department Policy Statement noted:

Iraq is important to the United States and the Western democracies because of its strategic location, its vast petroleum reserves, its control of the potentially fertile Tigris-Euphrates valley, and its control of Basra, the largest seaport on the Persian Gulf. The United States also has an important, if indirect, interest in the special treaty position and strategic military facilities which the UK currently maintains in Iraq.<sup>67</sup>

A September 1955 report by the Joint Strategic Plans Committee of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff concurred and asserted:

By virtue of its geographical location and topography, Iraq includes the most practicable land routes from the USSR to the Mediterranean via Iran. It possesses an estimated seven per cent of the world's known petroleum reserves . . . Iraq is

strategically located in the “backstop” area of the Zagros Mountain line and contains the most practicable land routes, between not only the Zagros passes and the Mediterranean, but other important inland routes to both Turkey on the north and Kuwait on the south as well.<sup>68</sup>

Economically, the United States possessed only small capital investments in Iraq, worth about \$60 million in 1957. Of this amount, \$48 million was in petroleum operations. Standard Oil of New Jersey and Socony-Vacuum were members of the IPC consortium.<sup>69</sup>

The United States began to take an active interest in Iraq as the Cold War underscored the country’s value to Middle Eastern defense and European economic security.<sup>70</sup> Both Britain and the United States, noted President Eisenhower, valued Iraq as a “bulwark of stability and progress” in the turbulent Middle East.<sup>71</sup> A July 1956 CIA National Intelligence Estimate noted that “Iraq is unique in the Arab world in its political stability, its effective management of a substantial economic potential, and its collaboration with the West.”<sup>72</sup> Credit for Iraq’s stability rested largely with the nation’s premier politician, Nuri al-Said. Sixty-nine years old in 1958, Nuri had been a vital force in Iraqi government since 1930. Serving in various capacities in Baghdad, often as prime minister, he was closely associated with the conservative ruling oligarchy but worked assiduously for moderate nationalist reform. Nuri was steadfastly pro-British and attempted to keep Iraq solidly aligned with the West.<sup>73</sup>

The Iraqi revolution caused shock and concern in London and in Washington. Britain had suddenly lost its most important remaining ally among the major states of the Arab Middle East. Prime Minister Macmillan wrote later that it was “devastating news, destroying at a blow a whole system of security which successive British Governments had built up, greatly to the interests of the Iraqi people and supported with generous aid in money, skill, and experience.”<sup>74</sup> American policymakers expressed immediate concern for the revolution’s effects on the Middle Eastern defense structure and on the security of its other conservative allies in the region.<sup>75</sup>

The revolution in Iraq ignited against the backdrop of the Lebanese civil war and unrest in Jordan and seemed to confirm to U.S. officials that the forces of revolutionary nationalism and, by association, communism were conspiring to deprive the Western allies of key strategic and economic assets in the Arabian Peninsula. President Eisenhower later wrote, “This somber turn of events could, without vigorous response on our part, result in a complete elimination of Western influence in the Middle East.”<sup>76</sup> After a full day of meetings with key national security and congressional figures, Eisenhower determined to intervene militarily in the Lebanese civil war and to support similar British intervention in Jordan. It is clear that the Iraqi revolution was the catalyst that drove the administration to this decision.<sup>77</sup>

British and American policymakers consulted continuously and closely during the 1958 crisis in the Middle East. Macmillan telephoned Eisenhower in the evening of July 14 to establish lines of communication at the highest levels with Washington. To Macmillan, it seemed obvious that the revolution had been instigated by Egypt and was part of Nasser's larger effort to subvert British interests and client regimes in the region. It demanded an immediate and drastic response and should be reversed, if possible. Macmillan told Eisenhower that revolution in the Middle East jeopardized the flow of petroleum to Western Europe. It would "destroy the oil fields and pipelines and all the rest of it, and will blaze right through." Consequently, the United States and Britain should contemplate "a much larger operation" than that planned for Lebanon and Jordan. They must be ready to launch a "big operation running all the way through Syria and Iraq" and to "carry this thing on to the Persian Gulf."<sup>78</sup>

The president was skeptical. Given that Qassim had promised to respect Western property rights and petroleum concessions, and considering the enormous logistical problems such an operation presented, not to mention the resentments it would foster in the Arab world, Eisenhower insisted that U.S. and British action be limited to Lebanon and Jordan. He noted to Macmillan that even this limited intervention might be opening a Middle Eastern "Pandora's box" when neither Washington nor London understood "what's at the bottom of it."<sup>79</sup>

Realizing that he would not receive U.S. support for an attempt to reverse the Iraqi revolution, Macmillan switched his attention to preserving British interests among the Gulf states. Would Qassim vigorously pursue longstanding Iraqi claims to Kuwait? Should Britain act preemptively to secure the sheikhdom and its oil riches? The prime minister confided to his diary:

The Gulf is very uncertain—but we have plans for Bahrain and Kuwait, in case of need. But there is the usual dilemma. Shall we go in now? If so, it is "aggression." Shall we wait? If so, it may be too late. Kuwait with its massive oil production is the key to the economic life of Britain—and of Europe. The Ruler is an enigmatic figure. He is in Damascus on "holiday." He has seen Nasser. Has he sold out to Nasser? No one knows. We have no troops at all in Kuwait. So we might lose the airfield, which means fighting our way in. Can we get the Ruler to ask for a battalion or ship now? All these questions are asked, but not resolved.<sup>80</sup>

To Macmillan, the Middle Eastern crisis appeared to present the perfect opportunity to erase the memory of Suez and to test the new British strategy of interdependence with the United States. In October 1957, Washington and London had established a U.S.-U.K. Working Group on Middle Eastern Affairs, which had drafted the blueprint for the current Anglo-American operations in Lebanon and Jordan.<sup>81</sup> By continuing to engage the Eisenhower administration in consultations

over the revolution in Iraq, Macmillan and Lloyd hoped to move American power and influence behind British policies in the Persian Gulf region.

Two days after the coup in Baghdad, Lloyd and Air Marshal Sir William Dickson, chairman of the British Chiefs of Staff Committee, flew to Washington to meet with senior American officials. In three days of meetings with the president, secretary of state, and the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Lloyd and Dickson expressed their government's concern that the Iraqi revolution posed a serious military and ideological threat to London's client states in the Persian Gulf, particularly Kuwait. What cooperative measures, they asked, could Britain expect from the United States to secure Western interests in the region? The Eisenhower administration, keenly aware of the larger role it would need to play in the Middle East following Britain's retrenchment after Suez, and eager to bolster the cooperative relationship it was attempting to establish with Britain following the Bermuda conference, extended assurances that it viewed the revolutionary threat to the Gulf seriously.

Secretary of State Dulles and President Eisenhower, particularly, expressed a willingness to act in the Persian Gulf to defend the oilfields of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia from revolutionary turmoil. Dulles told Lloyd as much on July 17, that

he had always assumed Kuwait to be an area that could and would be held and that this was one of the solid facts of the Middle East situation. If the supplies of oil in Kuwait, Iran, and Dhahran could be assured to the West the supply situation for Europe was safeguarded. . . . If Nasser and his friends could lay their hands on the Saudi and Kuwaiti fields they might still continue to sell oil but on terms so stiff as to have the most profound effect on the economy of the United Kingdom and of Europe. It was essential for the bargaining position of the West that these alternatives remained available. . . . It would be absurd for us to take the risks we had in Lebanon and Jordan, which were of no value, and not be prepared to take risks in order to preserve those areas which were vital to the United Kingdom and Europe. We must agree in principle that we should hold both Kuwait and Dhahran.<sup>82</sup>

In a letter to Macmillan the following day, Eisenhower affirmed the importance of Kuwait and the Gulf to the United States and his determination to secure them. Consequently, he ordered a battalion landing team of U.S. Marines sent to the Gulf from their base in Okinawa in the event they were needed to help defend the oil fields in Saudi Arabia.<sup>83</sup> He also agreed to establish a joint U.S.-British working group consisting of both military and civilian members to study the threat to Kuwait and the Gulf.

Eisenhower and his advisers were extremely concerned that their efforts to safeguard U.S. and British interests in the Persian Gulf and Kuwait must not antagonize Arab nationalist opinion, but Secretary Dulles stressed what he felt to be the critical situation in the Gulf. The entire region, he asserted, could fall

to the forces of radical nationalism. Only prompt action in coordination with the British to occupy Kuwait could prevent such a calamity. Allen Dulles, the CIA director, concurred.

The prevailing opinion within the national security policy-making community, however, was not with the Dulles brothers. President Eisenhower, U.S. Information Agency Director George Allen, and Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Richard Rountree all expressed the view that U.S. military action in the Gulf would alienate Arab nationalist opinion and be detrimental to American interests. Eisenhower "was sure we would not want to use military force as a medium for trying to settle this problem." Accordingly, he agreed with Rountree that the dispatch of U.S. Marines to the Gulf be kept quiet in order to avoid inflaming local nationalist opinion.<sup>84</sup>

Analysts at CIA continued to assert that Kuwait was in grave danger from the "revolutionary infection" emanating from Iraq, but senior administration officials concluded that American military action in the Persian Gulf would be ineffective and needlessly antagonistic to local nationalist sentiment. Assistant Secretary Rountree counseled Secretary Dulles that such action "would be likely to provoke the most adverse political reactions not only on the part of the local populations but also from the ruling families concerned. Strikes and sabotage might well threaten petroleum production which currently is proceeding normally." The secretary was convinced. At the NSC meeting of July 24, he retreated from his previous position in favor of intervention and asserted that "if the West could keep two or three of the main petroleum sources open, it could maintain a strong position" in the Gulf without the use of military force.<sup>85</sup> A week later, the NSC met to consider the situation in Kuwait in the larger context of U.S. policy toward local nationalism. Both the dangers of alienating Arab nationalist opinion and the practical difficulties of launching a military venture in the Gulf convinced the president and his advisers that large-scale support for Britain in Kuwait was out of the question.<sup>86</sup>

Thus, the efforts of the Macmillan government to engage the United States in consultations on the ramifications of the Iraqi revolution and to win American political and material support for its interests in Kuwait and the Persian Gulf met with mixed results. The new strategy of interdependence, through which British officials attempted to enlist U.S. assistance for its Gulf policies, foundered on American concerns that Anglo-American military action in the Gulf would antagonize Arab nationalist sentiment.

### **The American Reassessment of Revolutionary Arab Nationalism**

Within five weeks of the coup in Baghdad, official U.S. attitudes underwent a profound transformation that altered American policy in the Middle East for the next five years. American officials watched anxiously as Qassim secured his

political position with the aid of the Iraqi Communist Party. His reliance on communist support and efforts to undermine Nasser as leader of the revolutionary Arab world created a rift between Iraq and Egypt, the Middle East's two most important radical regimes. This rift led U.S. policymakers to conclude that they could exploit the differences between radical nationalist and "communist" governments to achieve their policy goals in the region. However, American officials based their new policy on a mistaken premise: Iraq never became a communist country, because the Iraqi Communist Party never achieved effective control of the Qassim regime. Rather, the party was one of many disparate political groups seeking to exert influence within Iraq's revolutionary nationalist government.<sup>87</sup> The Eisenhower administration never understood the complexity of the Arab nationalist movement within Iraq.

Immediately after the July 14 revolution, Eisenhower administration officials began to grapple with the issue of whether pro-Nasser radical nationalist sentiment or communist and Soviet subversion was principally responsible for the fall of Nuri's government. Opinion differed between agencies, individuals, and branches of the federal government. On the morning of the fourteenth, CIA Director Dulles told Eisenhower that he believed the coup to have been led by pro-Nasser elements of the Iraqi army.<sup>88</sup> Two days later, Undersecretary of State Christian Herter told an executive session of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that he, too, believed that pro-Egyptian nationalists had precipitated the revolution. He did not know for certain, he asserted, whether the Soviet Union had played a role in fomenting the rebellion, but he had a "good suspicion of it."<sup>89</sup> On July 25, Special Assistant to the Secretary of State William Macomber testified before the same body that "without any question" pan-Arab nationalism, rather than communism, was the driving force behind the Middle East crisis that summer.<sup>90</sup> Allen Dulles, however, noted to the committee on July 29 that "Pan-Arabism is getting a good deal of support and encouragement from Russia and is being used for Russia's ends."<sup>91</sup> Administration officials, in other words, initially had difficulty clarifying and articulating the long-held American view that Arab nationalism and communism were discrete phenomena. In the crisis atmosphere of July 1958, the line between the two seems to have been obscured in their minds.

At the same time, key congressional leaders were urging the foreign policy community to reconsider the relative importance of communism and radical nationalism in the Middle East. Senator William Fulbright, during the July 16 executive hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, told Undersecretary Herter, "I think it is one of the faults why we have stumbled around, that we have never made up our minds what is going on in the Middle East, whether it is a Russian move with puppets or whether there is an indigenous vigorous revolutionary movement based upon Arab nationalism and a desire for Arab unity."<sup>92</sup> Fulbright further encouraged the State Department to

reach an accommodation with Arab nationalism. He continued to Herter, "We have to find some way to accommodate ourselves to Pan-Arabism. I cannot see that Pan-Arabism is particularly against our interests . . . I think to me it is of prime importance to decide if this is Pan-Arabism primarily, and we ought to find some way to get along with it."<sup>93</sup>

A CIA Special National Intelligence Estimate, distributed on July 22, eight days after the Iraqi revolution, outlined the deterioration of the United States' reputation in the Arab world. It began, "The landing of US and UK troops in Lebanon and Jordan, following the dramatic *coup d'état* in Iraq, has been interpreted as further identifying the US as the opponent of Pan-Arab nationalism."<sup>94</sup> Clearly, as Senator Fulbright had suggested, the United States needed to reexamine its policies toward the Arabs. President Eisenhower made the same point twice during a July 24 meeting of the NSC. He mused that unless U.S. policymakers found a way to address the political aspirations of the Arab peoples, "our policies would stand on a foundation of sand."<sup>95</sup>

At the 374th meeting of the NSC, on July 31, the United States' top national security figures began contemplating a reformulation of U.S. policy toward radical Arab nationalism. For the first time, they attempted to define adequately the differences, if any, between radical and pan-Arab nationalism. They tentatively discussed whether Nasser spoke for the entire Arab nationalist movement, whether he could be accommodated or isolated (or both), and if the differences between radical Arab nationalism and communism could be effectively exploited by U.S. policy.<sup>96</sup>

The national security community's reexamination of radical Arab nationalism bore fruit in the form of a new and controversial study by the NSC Planning Board, dated August 19, 1958. The study concluded that the broad outline of U.S. policy in the Near East "should be to accept the fact of radical Arab nationalism, while seeking to contain and influence the outward thrust of this movement." It further noted that "a posture interpreted as one of opposition to the radical Arab regimes would in all likelihood force these regimes closer together against the West, and lead them to seek greater Soviet support." The study recommended a policy of accommodating and conciliating radical Arab nationalism in order to co-opt its energies for the U.S. effort to exclude communist and Soviet influence from the Near East. It also contemplated the role of Nasser in the nationalist movement and whether or not to "deal with" him. By co-opting him, the study continued, the United States could greatly proscribe the aspects of Nasser's political influence dangerous to Western interests.<sup>97</sup>

National Security Council "Statement of U.S. Policy Toward the Near East," NSC-5820, approved by President Eisenhower on November 4, 1958, incorporated all of the major themes of the planning board's report. It further directed that the United States seek to normalize its relations with the United Arab Republic (U.A.R.), "recognize the essentially neutralist character of radical

Pan-Arab nationalism,” and “accept neutralist policies of states in the area when necessary, even though such states maintain diplomatic, trade, and cultural relations with the Soviet Bloc.”<sup>98</sup>

NSC-6011 eventually superseded NSC-5820 in July 1960. The new document reiterated the directives formulated in the summer of 1958 and emphasized the desirability of both accommodating Nasser and actively cooperating with him in limited ways in order to promote Middle Eastern political stability and to proscribe communist and Soviet influence in the region.<sup>99</sup> Together, NSC-5820 and NSC-6011 embodied a fundamental shift in U.S. Middle Eastern policy that would be influential for the next four years.

While the Eisenhower administration decided to cultivate Nasser and his revolutionary Arab nationalist followers as counterweights to communist infiltration in the Middle East, Prime Minister Macmillan and the British Foreign Office chose to pursue another course. They opted to establish a policy of “limited accommodation” with Nasser. At the same time, they would support Qassim and the new revolutionary government in Baghdad in order to counter Egypt’s regional influence.<sup>100</sup> The decision hampered U.S. and British attempts to identify common objectives in the Persian Gulf region and illuminates Washington’s and London’s very different perceptions of threat to their regional interests.

Like their counterparts in Washington, British officials recognized that Arab nationalism was not monolithic but highly factionalized. They believed they could exploit differences within the movement to serve British interests by containing Nasser and his efforts to subvert British interests in the Middle East. Scarcely a week after the coup in Iraq, the cabinet concluded:

Arab nationalism should not necessarily be looked upon as an indivisible movement. History has shown that Damascus and Baghdad and Cairo provided different focal points for the growth of national feeling. In the long-term, it might be possible to exploit the natural differences of outlook between the Iraqis and the Egyptians. There was much to be said for establishing good relations with the new Iraqi Government and building it up as a counterpart to the power of the UAR.<sup>101</sup>

Disregarding U.S. concerns that Qassim and his revolutionary junta were heavily influenced by Iraqi Communists, and therefore vulnerable to Soviet influence, Foreign Secretary Lloyd explained to Lord Hood, the British minister in Washington:

It seems to us that our basic interest is to ensure that Iraq remains independent of both the United Arab Republic and of Communism. While it is true that [Qassim] has had to lean on the Iraqi Communist Party for support . . . his government, backed by moderate elements and with a considerable hold on the Army still seems to present the only hope of a moderate government dedicated to the principle of preserving Iraq’s independence.<sup>102</sup>

Thus, Britain embarked on a course of diplomacy toward Iraq directly at odds with Washington's. The Eisenhower administration believed that communist and Soviet influence, channeled through Qassim's revolutionary government in Baghdad, jeopardized Western interests in the Persian Gulf, and opted to cultivate Nasser's Egypt as a counterbalance to Iraq. Britain, more concerned with the dangers to its immediate interests in the Gulf region and convinced that those dangers emanated most strongly from Egypt, chose to back Qassim's republican government in Iraq, even though it feared the revolutionary government's designs on Kuwait.

### **Kuwait Moves Toward Independence**

Kuwait's value to Britain as a supplier of oil and an investor in London's financial markets continued to grow in the late 1950s, but the emirate's dynamic economic growth produced new political problems for the Macmillan government. As the Kuwaiti Ruler's financial influence increased, so did his desire to assert his political autonomy from Britain. Foreign policy makers in London recognized that Britain's special treaty relationship with Kuwait required amendment and worked to secure British oil interests in the sheikhdom as it became more independent. At the same time, British planners realized that Kuwait remained vulnerable to Iraqi subversion or military attack. They worked relentlessly to engage their powerful American allies in combined military planning for Kuwaiti and Persian Gulf defense. While State Department officials were receptive to these British overtures, U.S. military strategists had no interest in close cooperation with London in the Gulf.

In June 1956 the British broadcast journalist Woodrow Wyatt explained to a BBC radio audience Kuwait's importance to Britain. "Kuwait," he intoned seriously, "you depend on it. All Britain's increased output of the last few years has been based on Kuwait's oil. If we lost it, we'd be knocked sideways. For a time you'd either be unemployed or much poorer. Our chances of prosperity would be gone. The place on which your future hangs is a waterless desert, the size of Wales; nothing grows there except tufts of grass, just enough for a few goats and sheep."<sup>103</sup>

Two years later Wyatt's appraisal of Kuwait's value to Britain remained accurate, but the arid landscape he described had largely been paved over. The economic transformation wrought in the sheikhdom by the Abadan crisis in the early 1950s continued apace in the latter half of the decade and forever changed the face of the dusty emirate. In 1957 British travel writer and observer of the late imperial scene James Morris captured the frantic pace of life in the new Kuwait. He wrote, "Huge, noisy, and thoughtless are the cars that speed through the rickety streets of Kuwait, themselves a turmoil of demolition and reconstruction. The old, flowery courtesies are dying fast, and of all

the cities of the Middle East Kuwait is now perhaps the rudest. There is an air of get-rich-quick to every corner of the place.”<sup>104</sup>

Kuwait was indeed rich, and the volume and value of its oil exports continued to increase rapidly. The Kuwait Oil Company exported 405 million U.S. barrels of oil during 1957, up 15 million barrels from the previous year. That total rose to 503 million barrels in 1958. As usual, Britain was the largest importer of Kuwaiti oil, receiving almost 30 percent of KOC’s 1958 production. In 1959 Britain imported 60 percent of its foreign petroleum from the emirate. That year Kuwait earned between \$350 million and \$400 million in oil royalties and invested between \$50 million and \$80 million of it through British financial institutions. By the end of the 1950s, total Kuwait investments in the United Kingdom totaled £288 million. The U.S. embassy in London estimated that if Kuwait were “lost to the British . . . the income ledger of the British balance of payments would probably be decreased by . . . a total of £90 million.”<sup>105</sup> Thus, it was no exaggeration when Stevens informed an American diplomat in August 1959 that for British policy in the Persian Gulf region, “everything turned on Kuwait; nothing else was of really vital importance, and indeed our other positions in the Gulf and even Aden itself were maintained ultimately to secure Kuwait.”<sup>106</sup>

Kuwait’s growing economic muscle posed new problems for British policy in the sheikhdom. It encouraged the Kuwaiti Ruler to assert his political and diplomatic autonomy from London and to challenge Britain’s exclusive treaty relationship with his country. By early 1958 the Ruler was encouraging London to reach an accommodation with Nasser’s Egypt, and during the Iraqi revolution he actively opposed the stationing of British troops on Kuwaiti soil. At the end of July he sought permission from London to apply for Kuwaiti membership in the Arab League.<sup>107</sup> That autumn, the Foreign Office conceded that “even before the Iraqi revolution of 14th July 1958, the Ruler of Kuwait showed signs of restiveness in his position of apparent tutelage” by Britain. London, it noted, must be open to change in its relationship to Kuwait. “If the essentials of the [Kuwaiti] relationship with Her Majesty’s Government are to be preserved the British Government must be prepared to allow Kuwait the greatest possible appearance of independence.”<sup>108</sup>

By early 1959, British officials concluded that the “Exclusive Agreement” of 1899 must be fundamentally altered to acknowledge greater Kuwaiti sovereignty. Only in this way could Britain preserve its access to Kuwait’s oil resources. Lloyd wrote to his cabinet colleagues that “the object of Her Majesty’s Government, given that some change is inevitable, should be to try to make it as little disadvantageous to our position as possible.”<sup>109</sup> Informal empire, rather than direct rule, in the Persian Gulf thus proved a troublesome tool for managing British interests there. However, uncharacteristic flexibility on the part of the Foreign Office did allow London to continue to safeguard its interests in the sheikhdom while preserving its cordial relationship with the Ruler.

## Planning the Defense of Kuwait and the Persian Gulf

The increasing political assertiveness of the Ruler was not the only challenge to Britain's interests in Kuwait. In the years following the Iraqi revolution, British policymakers remained alert to the emirate's vulnerability to Iraqi military attack and political subversion. Accordingly, they planned continually to safeguard Kuwait and its oil fields. They worked diligently to engage the United States in combined planning for Kuwaiti and Persian Gulf defense in the event of a republican coup in the sheikhdom or an Iraqi incursion. They had little success. Once again, London's strategy of interdependence and intensive consultation with Washington paid few dividends.

At the Bermuda conference in 1957, Macmillan had promoted the idea of developing joint U.S.-British plans for defending common interests in the Middle East. Later that year an Anglo-American working group had convened to draft coordinated plans for military action in Lebanon and Jordan, and following the Iraqi revolution, Foreign Secretary Lloyd and Secretary of State Dulles approved the creation of a U.S.-U.K. Military Contingency Planning Group in London to study threats to Western interests in the Persian Gulf, Libya, Sudan, and Jordan.<sup>110</sup>

Following the revolution in Baghdad, the British Chiefs of Staff Committee feared that their position in the Persian Gulf region "may be irretrievably lost, with all that that entails, unless a long-term Anglo/American policy for the Middle East can be formulated and actively pursued without delay."<sup>111</sup> Joint military planning for the defense of Kuwait, Britain's most important economic asset in the region, was central to this policy. Yet U.S. military officials appeared reluctant to join their British counterparts in joint planning. While Admiral James L. Holloway, commander in chief of U.S. Navy forces in the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean and cochairman of the U.S.-U.K. Military Contingency Planning Group in London, offered "unlimited liaison" with his British colleagues on Gulf defense issues, he opposed joint operational planning. The Joint Chiefs instructed him that "in general, U.S. military planning and operations with the U.K. should be on the basis of coordination as distinguished from combined or joint plans and operations."<sup>112</sup>

As late as February 1959, the United States had not agreed to discuss issues directly related to Kuwaiti defense or the possibility of Anglo-American military intervention against Iraq. Such was U.S. military resistance to discussions that the Cabinet Defence Committee believed it was "doubtful whether it would be appropriate at this point to suggest to the United States Government that a joint Anglo-American study of this question should be put in hand. The United States military authorities would be reluctant to cooperate in such a study except under strong pressure from the State Department."<sup>113</sup> It was not until Prime Minister Macmillan broached the topic to President Eisenhower

personally the following month that the two nations agreed to “arrange for joint study by their appropriate agencies action to meet various contingencies which may arise in Iraq, Kuwait, and Iran.”<sup>114</sup>

Still, U.S. military planners dragged their heels where planning with the British for Persian Gulf defense was at issue. State Department officials were much more receptive to British entreaties on the subject, and presumably for this reason, Lloyd buttonholed the acting secretary of state, Christian Herter, in Geneva to discuss the matter. He argued to Herter that it was “vital” that the United States and Britain act together on Gulf defense matters. At the very least, “British action should be given immediate American support and there should be American forces available for action elsewhere in the Gulf should it be necessary, e.g., Saudi Arabia. We must work together exactly as we had done over Lebanon and Jordan. . . . I said I understood that there was a proposal for joint military planning to deal with these various contingencies, and I asked him to give it a kick.” Herter, the foreign secretary reported, “warmly agreed” and promised to act.<sup>115</sup>

The Macmillan government continued to deplore the quality of U.S. participation in the Military Contingency Planning Group. British defense secretary John Profumo told his cabinet colleagues that the joint studies conducted so far with the United States military authorities in London were only “of a preliminary nature and limited in scope. They did not cover combined military action by the two countries since the United States planners had not been authorised to go that far. The paramount need now was to develop these studies into valid military plans which . . . would enable rapid military operations to be mounted.” Macmillan concurred, and declared that his government must work harder to “lead the United States authorities by stages to be prepared if necessary for joint operations in the Middle East, particularly in Kuwait and Iraq.”<sup>116</sup>

Lord Mountbatten, the chief of the defense staff, traveled to Washington the following month hoping to convince the members of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff to be more forthcoming with British planners. He had only limited success but did come to a more formal understanding with the Americans on the terms for future planning. He cabled London that final agreement was reached “that both sides should prepare independent national plans in the first place, then sit together and compare plans and modify them as necessary. Finally, they would produce in an annex facilities which each side had that they could offer to the other.” He reported later to the Cabinet Defence Committee that “it was agreed that such military plans be without commitment and that their implementation would depend on the resources which would be available at the time the situation arose.”<sup>117</sup> The formula, though anemic, was never improved during the Macmillan-Eisenhower-Kennedy years.

Thus, despite the best efforts of the prime minister, the foreign secretary, and the chief of the defense staff over more than a year, U.S. military officials could not be convinced to engage in extensive combined military planning

with Britain in the Persian Gulf. Why were U.S. military and defense officials so resistant to the idea of detailed joint planning with London? The answer appears to be threefold. First, American officials did not want to antagonize Arab nationalist opinion in the Gulf by working closely with the British and agreeing to intervene militarily to support Britain's conservative client regimes in the region. Second, they did not wish to assume another expensive military obligation during the height of the Cold War. Finally, U.S. military planners may well have believed that their forces, though organized to wage war in Europe and the Far East, were not structured appropriately to conduct operations effectively in the Persian Gulf and the Middle East. Years of resistance by the Joint Chiefs to defend the region had left the United States incapable of cooperating with their British allies there. Thus, the Macmillan government's efforts to engage the United States in joint plans to defend Kuwait and the Persian Gulf through the consultative machinery of interdependence were largely unsuccessful and left Britain disappointed once more with their U.S. allies.

\* \* \* \*

Between 1957 and 1960, Britain retrenched in the Middle East and consolidated its position in the greater Persian Gulf region. The emirate of Kuwait remained the keystone of Britain's interests in the area, and London formulated its policies in the Gulf and Arabia with Kuwait's safety first on its agenda. The Macmillan government worked diligently to secure the regime of its ally the sultan of Muscat and to preserve the unity of his country in order to control the entrance to the Persian Gulf and the southern approach to Kuwait. At the same time, it built the colony of Aden, in southwestern Arabia, into a vital military hub south of the Arab air barrier from which Britain could defend its oil interests in the northern Gulf as well as its client states in East Africa and the Indian Ocean. Oman and Aden thus became the two most important "toll-gates and barbicans" of the late British Empire in the Middle East. Policymakers in London concluded that Britain's interests in the Gulf and southern Arabia composed a "delicate structure," the parts of which existed in a fragile equilibrium. Damage to any one interest had potentially disastrous consequences for the structure as a whole. In this way they affirmed the unity of their interests in the Persian Gulf region.

Anglo-American diplomacy in the Middle East continued to be difficult and was fraught with ambivalence and frustration on both sides. Attempts by both the Macmillan government and the Eisenhower administration to restore the spirit of amity and cooperation to the U.S.-British alliance were successful where European and nuclear issues were concerned, but paid limited dividends in the Persian Gulf region. Lingering American suspicions of British imperial aims and institutions in the Middle East explain this in part.

More importantly, U.S. policy in the Gulf revolved around its relationship with the government of Saudi Arabia, while Britain's position in the area depended on its relationship to the tiny Gulf emirates and the tribal lands of southern Arabia.

Frequently, this difference in regional strategy caused serious friction between the transatlantic allies. In both southeastern and southwestern Arabia, the Saudi government worked to extend its influence and frontier at the expense of London's client states. Such was the case during the Oman rebellion of 1955–1958, as it had been earlier during the Buraimi oasis dispute. The Saudis further attempted to make territorial gains at the expense of the British-protected states of the Eastern Aden Protectorate, which led to emotional appeals from London for Washington to rein in their allies in Riyadh. Once again, local animosities, dynastic and tribal politics, and territorial disputes that long predated British and American involvement in the Persian Gulf region greatly complicated Anglo-American attempts to pursue their late imperial and Cold War interests in the area.

The Eisenhower administration struggled to promote reconciliation between Britain and Saudi Arabia in the late 1950s. It believed a relaxation of tensions between London and Riyadh would allow closer cooperation between the United States and Britain in the Persian Gulf and Arabian Peninsula. The Macmillan government and the Foreign Office rebuffed these American attempts at mediation.

The Iraqi revolution of July 1958 marked a watershed in the history of the Persian Gulf region and presented both opportunities and problems for U.S. and British diplomacy. First, it offered Washington and London the chance to cooperate with each other during a time of crisis in the Middle East and to erase the memory of their bitter clash over Suez. Both the Eisenhower administration and the Macmillan government availed themselves of the opportunity and consulted closely and continually in the weeks following the coup in Baghdad. They agreed fully on the need to safeguard British and Western European access to Kuwaiti and Persian Gulf oil.

Eisenhower and Macmillan disagreed fundamentally, however, on the nature of Qassim's revolution and the dangers it posed to their larger interests in Middle Eastern security. While the revolution inspired Washington to reconsider the phenomenon of radical Arab nationalism and to take new steps to bolster Nasser as a bulwark against communist infiltration of the Near East, London moved to support Qassim as a counterweight to Nasser in the Arab world. The divergence of U.S. and British policy illustrates how divisive an issue radical nationalism came to be in Anglo-American diplomacy. It underscores, further, that Washington and London perceived threats to their interests in the Middle East very differently. While the United States saw communist subversion and Soviet penetration of the region as the greatest danger to Western interests there, British policymakers viewed Nasser and the infection of Egyptian-inspired nationalism as more immediately threatening to their policies in the region and worked accordingly to contain them.

## **“What a World It Is!”: Kennedy, Macmillan, and the Persian Gulf Region, 1961–1963**

In December 1962, former U.S. secretary of state Dean Acheson addressed an audience at West Point, New York. In the course of his speech, ostensibly about Western European political integration, Acheson asserted famously that “Great Britain has lost an empire and has not yet found a role.”<sup>1</sup> The statement struck a raw nerve in Britain, which was, indeed, struggling to define its place in the post-imperial world. In the Persian Gulf region, the challenges of managing its residual imperial responsibilities while attempting to cooperate politically with the United States preoccupied the Macmillan government during the early 1960s. At the same time, assisting in the management of Britain’s imperial decline while pursuing its Cold War interests in the Middle East posed serious challenges for the Kennedy administration.

Two months after Acheson delivered his speech, Prime Minister Harold Macmillan wrote to President John F. Kennedy concerning Yemen. The small, impoverished nation at the southwestern tip of the Arabian Peninsula was torn by revolution and civil war that threatened the stability of the Arab world and jeopardized British and American interests in the Persian Gulf region. Officials in Washington and London disagreed vigorously over the nature of these interests and the best way to secure them. In his letter, the prime minister expressed to the young president his confidence that these disagreements were “due more to differences in our circumstances than to divergence in objectives” in the region.<sup>2</sup> He was only partly correct. British and American circumstances and objectives *both* differed in Arabia and in the Persian Gulf. Documents from the British and American archives reveal the tensions and inconsistencies that often marked U.S. and British policies in the Gulf and neighboring areas.

### Kennedy, Macmillan, and the Middle East

When Kennedy entered the White House, in January 1961, Harold Macmillan had already been Britain's prime minister for four years. He was more than two decades older than the American president and was anxious that he might not be able to establish the same rapport with Kennedy that he had enjoyed with President Dwight D. Eisenhower. That relationship had been based on two decades of friendship begun when both men were serving in North Africa during the Second World War, and had continued as each man reached the pinnacle of political power in his country. In December 1960 Macmillan had written to Eisenhower, "I cannot of course hope to have anything to replace the sort of relations that we have had."<sup>3</sup> Presidential aide Arthur Schlesinger Jr. wrote later that "the languid Edwardian, who looked back to the sunlit years before the First World War as a lost paradise, feared that the brisk young American, nearly a quarter a century his junior, would consider him a museum piece."<sup>4</sup> He need not have worried, as Kennedy took an instant liking to the prime minister. As one scholar has written, "He saw Macmillan first, liked him best, and indeed their meetings were more frequent than Kennedy's meetings with any other partner . . . Kennedy and Macmillan established a close personal rapport, and a genuine fondness for each other, which went far beyond the necessities of alliance."<sup>5</sup>

The appointment of Kennedy's old friend Sir David Ormsby-Gore as British ambassador to Washington further facilitated Anglo-American diplomacy. The web of friendships and family relationships that connected the White House and Whitehall ensured that communications between the Kennedy administration and the Macmillan government were excellent, and that diplomacy at the highest levels between Britain and the United States was conducted on the warmest of terms. But the Anglo-American alliance could not be managed on the basis of "blood, class, and nostalgia"; rather, it depended on identity of interests and agreement on policy.

In the realm of policy, the United States and Britain often disagreed. Macmillan was very critical of Kennedy's handling of the Bay of Pigs fiasco and often disagreed with the new administration's positions on Laos, Berlin, and the negotiation of a nuclear test-ban treaty with the Soviet Union. Would the Middle East and Persian Gulf region offer new sources of friction or of accord between Macmillan and Kennedy?

As foreign secretary and chancellor of the Exchequer under Anthony Eden in the mid-1950s, Macmillan accrued much experience in Middle Eastern affairs but showed little talent for managing British diplomacy in the region.<sup>6</sup> He was heir to a long heritage of British relations with the Persian Gulf and its rulers, and it fell to him as prime minister to construct a Middle East policy that relied on Britain's relations with these tiny emirates to support Britain's position regionally.

In comparison with Macmillan, Kennedy inherited a Middle Eastern diplomacy of much more recent vintage, and it was clear that U.S. and British interests in the Gulf region, though frequently complementary, were not identical. The United States aimed to incorporate the area into the larger architecture of its Cold War diplomacy and military strategy, preserve regional stability, and protect its economic investments there. Britain's highest priorities in the region were to secure the flow of Gulf oil to Britain, protect its economic investments in the area, preserve its Gulf region lifelines across the Indian Ocean, and protect the interests of its regional client states.

Because the foundations of U.S. and British interests in the Gulf region differed, their priorities differed as well. So, too, did the tactics each nation used in pursuing those interests. Nowhere is this more evident than in the very different ways officials in Washington and London interpreted the threat of radical Arab nationalism to their regional policies and the ways in which each nation attempted to manipulate it for its own ends. The Kennedy administration continued and expanded upon the Eisenhower administration's policy of conciliating Arab nationalism, believing that it would increase U.S. influence not only in the Arab world but also among the newly independent states of Africa and Asia. As a senator, Kennedy had openly criticized French colonialism in Algeria and, in 1959, had proclaimed the need to "recognize the force of Arab nationalism" and "channel it along constructive lines."<sup>7</sup> As president, he hoped such a policy would "lay the groundwork for a lasting Arab-Israeli peace, help keep the Kremlin away from Mideast oil, and show neutralists from Delhi to Djakarta that the United States could live with political and economic diversity."<sup>8</sup>

For most of his presidency, Kennedy continued to build a working relationship with Nasser. Senior NSC staffer Robert Komer, the White House's top Middle East expert, urged the president to reach a "limited accommodation" with Nasser after reading a CIA National Intelligence Estimate that pointed out the basic incompatibility between Soviet ambitions in the Middle East and Arab nationalist aspirations.<sup>9</sup> He wrote in a memorandum later in the year, "I am convinced that recent events may present us with the best opportunity since 1954 for a limited marriage of convenience with the guy who I think is still, and will remain, the Mister Big of the Arab World. If we can turn Nasser inward, and get back on a friendly basis with him, it may not buy us much but it will certainly save us from a peck of trouble that he can otherwise stir up for us."<sup>10</sup> Better relations with Nasser, Komer believed, would help curb Egyptian anti-Westernism, limit Nasser's dependence on Soviet aid, and might help the United States solve a host of regional problems in the Middle East, including the problem of Iraqi designs on Kuwait and nationalist unrest elsewhere in the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula. Komer's logic persuaded National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy, who, in turn, convinced the president of its

soundness. Soon thereafter, Kennedy began a lengthy correspondence with Nasser. In early 1962 the president sent special emissary Chester Bowles to sound out Nasser on improved relations with the United States, and that summer the State Department extended a three-year, \$500 million PL 480 food-aid package to Cairo.

The administration's opening to Egypt was not without its critics. Officials of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), for example, believed that the extension of economic assistance to Nasser would not moderate his behavior. Representatives of the major U.S. oil companies in the Middle East charged that attempting to conciliate Nasser was a futile endeavor as Egyptian nationalist aims and American interests in Arabia were incompatible. Komer assured all doubters that the Kennedy administration was not following a "pro-Nasser" policy, but one based on a hard-headed calculus of Western interests in the Middle East and Persian Gulf region. It would be "folly not to cultivate decent relations with [Nasser], since the alternative was to leave him an exclusive client of the [Soviet] Bloc." The U.S. opening to Nasser was clearly an effort to preclude Soviet influence in a strategically critical region of the world.<sup>11</sup>

As the 1960s opened, the Macmillan government was struggling to establish a working relationship with Arab nationalism as well, but in quite a different manner than the United States.<sup>12</sup> Career Foreign Office figures with long experience in the Middle East appreciated the complexity and volatility of the Arab nationalist movement and encouraged an accommodation with it. They comprehended, further, the dangers to British interests of clinging to unpopular and discredited conservative client regimes in the region.<sup>13</sup> But the long history of antagonism between Nasser and Britain and the enormous economic stakes involved in the Middle East for Britain ensured that London made little effort to reach an understanding with Nasser's radical Arab nationalist movement or to reconsider its traditional relationships with its conservative client states and dependencies in the region.<sup>14</sup> In the senior-most circles of the Macmillan government, revolutionary Arab nationalism inspired by Nasser appeared to be a much more immediate threat to British interests in the Middle East than the possibility of communist or Soviet subversion—the phenomena feared most by the Kennedy administration.

If the Kennedy administration saw accommodation with Nasser and radical Arab nationalism as central to its Middle Eastern diplomacy, the Macmillan government believed that the Anglo-American relationship held the key to preserving its interests and sustaining its special position in the Persian Gulf and southern Arabia. But how could they most effectively win American support for British policies abroad and co-opt American power for their own purposes? Interdependence, the policy articulated in the late 1950s, continued to guide British policy during the early 1960s and is central to an understanding

of U.S.-British relations in the Persian Gulf region during the Kennedy-Macmillan era. Its potential and its limitations became manifest during the Kuwait crisis of 1961, the Yemen revolution of 1962, and throughout the course of Anglo-American consultations on Gulf affairs.

### The Kuwait Crisis of 1961

The oil boom of the 1950s made Kuwait extremely wealthy, and its economic and strategic value to Britain increased enormously, primarily because the sheikhdom became the single most important source of imported petroleum for Britain.<sup>15</sup> Analysts in London concluded that if British companies were no longer able to do business in Kuwait and the Persian Gulf, the cost to Britain's balance of payments would be at least £200 million per year.<sup>16</sup>

The Rulers of Kuwait had always been independent minded and difficult as clients, and their surging oil wealth allowed them to assert their autonomy from Britain. By 1959 the Kuwaiti government regained control of the emirate's foreign policy, and it became clear that the 1899 agreement with London required renegotiation.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, on June 19, 1961, a formal exchange of notes redefined the Anglo-Kuwaiti relationship. The Ruler was now free to conduct the foreign and domestic affairs of the sheikhdom as he saw fit, with the stipulation that "nothing in these conclusions shall affect the readiness of Her Majesty's Government to assist the Government of Kuwait if the latter request assistance."<sup>18</sup> The stipulation clearly implied Britain's intention to intervene to defend the Ruler's government should it be threatened by internal subversion or, as was more likely, from an attack by Iraq.

Since the July 1958 Iraqi revolution, in fact, Britain had feared that Baghdad would assert forcefully its long-held and periodically expressed claims to Kuwait.<sup>19</sup> The Macmillan government had feverishly engaged in military contingency planning for the Gulf and in November 1960 produced a plan for Kuwait's defense, Operation Vantage. Vantage depended on exploiting Britain's resources throughout the entire region to defend the flow of reasonably priced oil from the tiny Gulf sheikhdom. It relied primarily on the British Middle East Command's rapidly expanding facilities at Aden, but also on the part of the military's strategic reserve based in Kenya, on the airfield at Masirah off the coast of Oman, and on the small garrisons in Bahrain and Sharjah on the Trucial Coast. The entire structure of British assets established so carefully over the years throughout the Persian Gulf region was to be brought to bear on the defense of Kuwaiti oil.<sup>20</sup>

The British government also used the apparatus of its interdependence policy to engage the United States in preparing for Kuwait's defense. British military officials had failed in the time since the Iraqi revolution to convince their American counterparts that joint U.S.-U.K planning for Persian Gulf defense was

desirable. Yet, in the spring of 1961, they remained convinced it was necessary.<sup>21</sup> A Foreign Office minute of May 1961 related the state of current U.S.-British planning for Kuwait's defense: "[A]lthough some coordinated Anglo-U.S. military planning discussions, without any governmental commitment, have taken place in London, no actual lines for coordinated action, let alone joint action, exist."<sup>22</sup> A frustrated official lamented further, "The present situation is sadly not at all satisfactory and I should have thought might easily have serious consequences in the event of a sudden emergency in the area."<sup>23</sup> Interdependence was not paying dividends in the area of joint military planning.

American interests in Kuwait were much more limited than Britain's. The Gulf Oil Company owned a 50 percent share of the Kuwait Oil Company and earned profits in the sheikhdom of about \$100 million per year in the early 1960s. The United States imported relatively little Kuwaiti oil, and its policy toward the country derived primarily from its interest in general Gulf stability and in the value of Kuwait's oil to its Western European allies. The American consul in Kuwait, James Akins, concluded in May 1961 that "United States interests in Kuwait closely parallel those of Great Britain but we are less intimately involved."<sup>24</sup>

Although U.S. and British interests were similar, they were certainly not identical, and this determined the very different responses of each nation when the Iraqi prime minister, Qassim, precipitated a crisis over Kuwait in the last week of June 1961. When the Iraqi government proclaimed on June 25 that Kuwait was part of Iraq, and appeared to move troops and tanks toward the border, the initial response of the U.S. government was to keep a low profile in the matter. After the Kuwaiti government solicited an American statement in support of Kuwaiti independence, U.S. ambassador to Baghdad John Jernegan cabled the State Department on July 27: "I believe both Kuwait and U.S. interests would best be served by avoiding public statement by USG at this time. Public U.S. statement at this juncture would be played up by Qassim as further evidence 'imperialist plot' towards Kuwait."<sup>25</sup> The department concurred that it was basically an "inter-Arab controversy," but that the British were "clearly willing and able advise Kuwaitis re handling problem and USG advice neither necessary nor desirable."<sup>26</sup>

The Macmillan government immediately and energetically responded to the Iraqi threat and assured the Kuwaiti Ruler that it would lend military assistance to his country if asked, but it desired American assistance in the effort, preferably military. Former foreign secretary Lloyd told his successor, Lord Home, that although the Americans had been reluctant to join the British in contingency planning for action in the Gulf, they could be relied upon to join the Macmillan government "in the moment of truth."<sup>27</sup> On June 28 Home wrote to U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk, "We have an absolute obligation to help the Ruler if Kuwait is attacked, and as this is an area the security of which is of immense importance to both of us I hope we could act with the closest cooperation. What a world it is!"<sup>28</sup>

Over the next two days, consultations between the British embassy in Washington and the State Department were continuous as the crisis in the Gulf unfolded. Home wrote to Rusk twice more, asking again for the "full political support" of the United States and requesting the Americans to intercede with their Saudi allies on Kuwait's behalf. Rusk replied on June 30 that "your thinking coincides with ours. We understand the depth of your obligation, we agree that the independence of Kuwait must not be destroyed by force, and we are prepared to render the full political support you request. . . . We shall be very happy to keep in close touch with you on this."<sup>29</sup> In the meantime, the NSC, meeting on June 29, noted the "great interest of the West in Kuwait." President Kennedy agreed to "give full political and logistic support, if required, to the United Kingdom in connection with certain actions it is taking to forestall any Iraq attempt to take over Kuwait by force."<sup>30</sup> Later, the president authorized the diversion of a small U.S. Navy task force, *Solant Amity*, toward the Gulf in a gesture of support for Britain.<sup>31</sup>

On June 30 the Ruler of Kuwait formally requested British assistance in forestalling what he and British analysts believed to be an imminent Iraqi invasion of his country, and the following morning the first of 5,000 British troops began landing from ships in Kuwait City's harbor. The U.S. consul in Kuwait cabled Washington that afternoon that "Kuwait is being treated to [an] impressive display of British military might."<sup>32</sup> Operation *Vantage* made use of every resource at Britain's disposal in the Gulf region, and its smooth execution seemed to validate all of London's careful planning since 1958. Skillfully integrating its military assets in East Africa and southwest Arabia, and securing its lines of communication around the Arabian periphery through Oman, London effectively deployed military force to defend its client state in the northern Persian Gulf from what it believed was a certain attack. The Iraqi threat itself proved largely illusory, and the anticipated invasion of Kuwait never materialized. Still, the successful completion of Operation *Vantage* confirmed to British policymakers that their interests and resources in the Persian Gulf and Arabian Peninsula were inextricably intertwined.

But the Kuwait crisis of 1961 was not merely a challenge to Western interests in the Gulf region; it was also a crisis within the Arab world. As it unfolded, it underscored long-standing ambitions, grievances, and rivalries in the region. Specifically, it culminated Kuwait's long pursuit of complete political independence, first from Ottoman rule, then from British tutelage. The invasion scare of 1961 enabled Kuwait to garner additional international support for its independence as most of the world condemned Iraqi designs on the emirate.<sup>33</sup>

Iraqi claims to Kuwait were not new in 1961 and had been made periodically since the early days of Iraqi independence in the 1930s. They were an established feature of Middle Eastern politics by the era of Kennedy and Macmillan but were given new significance in the age of postwar oil dependency,

British imperial retrenchment, and the Cold War. Further, the Kuwait crisis had important repercussions for the political contest for supremacy within the radical Arab nationalist movement. Rivalry between Cairo and Baghdad for dominance within the Arab world had long been a factor in the Middle East, but the revolutionary ferment of the postwar years exacerbated the contest. Abdul Karim Qassim saw a renewed claim to Kuwait as a means to assert Arab unity by force and, with luck, to add the enormous oil wealth of the tiny emirate to his own. The episode created serious political discomfort for Nasser in Cairo. The Egyptian leader was loathe to see the oil wealth of Kuwait added to that of his rival for leadership in the revolutionary Arab world. He was, therefore, compelled to support Kuwaiti independence and, reluctantly, British military intervention on Kuwait's behalf.

The United States attempted throughout the June crisis to remain aloof politically. Its behavior highlights the differences between American and British interests in Kuwait and the Gulf during the early 1960s and the different tactics they employed to defend them. The Macmillan government believed military force offered the most effective means to protect its immediate interest in securing the flow of Kuwaiti oil to Britain and defending its economic investments in the Gulf. Decisive and immediate action would secure its relationship with its most important Gulf client state and thus bolster its regional position and status as a Middle Eastern power. On this status rested its claim to be an important global actor.

The United States, on the other hand, was torn as it worked to promote long-term stability in the Persian Gulf region. American officials believed the British presence in the Persian Gulf was important to regional stability; yet British military intervention in Kuwait risked the possibility of an Arab nationalist backlash against the West that might threaten that stability. Close identification with British action in Kuwait could jeopardize the image the United States tried to present to the Arab world, that of a progressive anticolonial power trying to work productively with Arab nationalism. As it struggled to balance its commitment to British interests in the Gulf region with its recognition of Arab nationalist sensitivities, the Kennedy administration often frustrated its allies in London, who believed that their increasingly tenuous position in the region demanded unqualified U.S. support. Despite its best efforts, Britain's attempts to enlist enthusiastic American backing for Operation Vantage through the consultative machinery of interdependence failed.

If British and American tactics differed during the Kuwait crisis itself, they differed further as each nation considered how best to ensure Kuwaiti and Gulf security as the crisis receded. By the end of the first week of July 1961, the Kennedy administration concluded that the Macmillan government had overstated the Iraqi threat to Kuwait. Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Phillips Talbot wrote to Secretary Rusk, "We believe that the British have placed more forces in and off Kuwait than was justified by the magnitude or even

the seriousness of the Iraqi threat.<sup>34</sup> The Kennedy administration worried further that a strongly asserted British military guarantee to Kuwait's future security would fan the flames of Arab nationalism in the Gulf region.

To the Kennedy administration and its experts, Kuwait's safety and, thus, the Gulf's stability might be secured best through other means. First, it advocated that a UN-sponsored solution to the Kuwait problem be examined. Within a multilateral framework, U.S. officials believed, the Arab nations of the region would not feel they were being coerced by the Western powers as they pursued a solution to the Kuwait issue. In fact, the Security Council did consider the Kuwait problem on July 2, 5, and 6, and a British-sponsored resolution calling for recognition of Kuwaiti independence failed when the Soviet Union vetoed it.

Rusk also expressed to Lord Home hope that "political sources among the Arabs will dissuade Qassim from committing himself to an unfortunate course of action with unpredictable consequences."<sup>35</sup> Throughout the summer the administration encouraged the other Arab states to help resolve the Gulf crisis. It supported the formation of an Arab League military force to relieve departing British troops in Kuwait and attempted to find a solution to the Kuwait problem within a regional framework. An Arab contribution to the resolution of the Kuwait crisis seemed to U.S. policymakers conducive to creating long-term stability in the Gulf region.

Finally, Kennedy administration officials saw Kuwait's enormous oil wealth as a possible ingredient in a Gulf political settlement. Western diplomats had long noted the Arab world's great disparity in wealth and the emirate's reluctance to invest its petroleum revenues among its underdeveloped neighbors. By the end of 1961, U.S. officials concluded that "Kuwait, if it wishes to insure continued Arab support for its independence, must immediately . . . devote a substantial portion of its annual income—perhaps half or two thirds—to making grants and loans to other Arab countries . . . The alternative is clear. If Kuwait is unwilling to use its money for the benefit of other Arab countries, it must reconcile itself to a rapid loss of Arab backing for its independence and it must be prepared to face existence as a British-protected enclave."<sup>36</sup> Thus, through an enlightened program of aid to its neighbors, Kuwait could help foster regional economic political stability and diminish the need for a British military guarantee. In January 1962 the Kuwaiti government established the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development as a step in this direction.

### **The Debate over British Policy in the Gulf Region**

In London, the Kuwait crisis spurred not only new consideration of Britain's guarantee of Kuwait's security but also of the larger structure of British interests in the Persian Gulf and of its long-term strategy in the region. In the short term, the Macmillan government determined to reaffirm its commitment to

Kuwait's security and resolved to strengthen the Kuwaiti military.<sup>37</sup> The British political resident in the Gulf, Sir William Luce, told the foreign secretary in August that "if we were unable to protect Kuwait the other Gulf States would rapidly see the red light and we could not count on holding our position in the Gulf indefinitely. . . . Apart from the moral obligations, he [Luce] wondered how much it would be worth defending our interests in the rest of the Gulf if we lost our interests in Kuwait."<sup>38</sup> In other words, the security of one British interest in the Gulf directly impinged upon the other elements of Britain's complex of interests in the region.

As summer turned into autumn, it became clear that the British government must reexamine its long-term interests in the Persian Gulf region. As the U.S. embassy in London noted to the State Department in September, "The effect of the Kuwait crisis in the United Kingdom itself has been chiefly to bring to public notice again certain doubts in the British mind concerning their position in the Gulf and particularly to raise the question of the need for the continued British military presence."<sup>39</sup> The Foreign Office began a serious reappraisal of Britain's position in the Gulf that summer. A highly influential dispatch penned by Sir William Luce gave it greater momentum in November.

In a lengthy and carefully reasoned letter to the foreign secretary, Sir William concluded that Britain, in the aftermath of the Kuwait operation, "stands more deeply committed in the Persian Gulf, both politically and militarily, than at any time since the last war, a situation which is in marked contrast with the great contraction of our political and military commitments elsewhere in the world over the past 15 years." He continued, "The Persian Gulf, thanks to our presence, is an island of comparative stability surrounded by a sea of uncertainty," and that if Britain reduced the level of its commitment to the Gulf it would likely "turn that area into a jungle of power politics and smash and grab. . . . By retaining our foothold in the Gulf we not only give stability to a highly sensitive area but we can also hold the door open for our allies should Russia make a determined probe toward the sea."

He conceded that Britain's ties to conservative client regimes in the region could be a liability. "It is true that we have some embarrassing friends in the Gulf and that we are associated with some shaikhly regimes which do us or themselves little credit." Still, he concluded, "there is at present no policy within Her Majesty's Government's grasp which would enable us to withdraw from the Gulf at some point in an orderly manner, leaving behind us political stability and security for our interests; the corollary is that so long as we need these things we must continue to provide them ourselves. . . . I firmly believe that it is in both British and Western interests generally that we should maintain our political influence in the Gulf and continue to support it with military power."

Luce finished his missive with an appeal for greater cooperation with the United States in the Gulf region. "The United States Government appear

generally to understand and support our position in the Gulf, and, in particular to have approved of our recent action in Kuwait. At the same time, they seem content, and perhaps anxious, to leave to us the burden of maintaining stability in the area . . . I think we should do all we can to make them aware of the sensitivity of the area in the context of the Cold War . . . It follows from this that there should be joint planning now in regard to the military problems which may arise in the area."<sup>40</sup>

Luce's dispatch reveals the dilemmas for British policy in the Gulf region during the early 1960s. Throughout the winter of 1961–1962 it became a lightning rod for criticism and praise and established the terms of debate over British policy in the Gulf that quickly enveloped the Foreign Office. The debate was one that extended back to the winter of 1956–1957 when, in the wake of the Suez Crisis, the Foreign Office had launched another effort to define a more progressive policy in the region that recognized the unpopularity of Britain's established client regimes and the ascendancy of anti-Western nationalist sentiment in the Gulf. A memorandum summarizing the debate of 1961–1962 stated that the earlier debate had concluded, as Luce had, that "there was no alternative method of safeguarding our interests. This conclusion has moreover rested on convincing arguments and has commanded general (though sometimes reluctant) assent."<sup>41</sup> Still, the British political agent in Kuwait, John Richmond; the ambassador in Baghdad, Sir Humphrey Trevelyan; and the ambassador in Cairo, Sir Harold Beeley, continued to explore the merits of a British diplomacy for the Gulf that rested on a new accord with Arab nationalism rather than on British military might.

In the end, the Macmillan government rededicated itself to a policy of military strength in the Gulf. A Defence Ministry white paper of February 1962 reiterated that "peace and stability in the oil producing states of Arabia and the Persian Gulf are vital for the Western world. We are, and shall remain, responsible for military assistance to these states in the area to which we are bound by treaty or which are otherwise under our protection." The security of the Gulf and its oil would rest on a matrix of British military assets in the Gulf itself, Aden, and Kenya. Thus, the white paper reconfirmed the unity of British security interests in a greater Persian Gulf region.<sup>42</sup>

Meanwhile, British diplomats took up Luce's advocacy of renewed Anglo-American consultation on Gulf issues. In January, the British ambassador in Washington, Ormsby-Gore, suggested an approach to the Kennedy administration. In the correspondence between the British embassy in Washington and the Foreign Office's Arabian Department that winter, British policymakers discussed American interests in the Gulf and debated how best to maneuver the Kennedy administration behind British policy there. Dennis Greenhill, of the Washington embassy staff, for example, wrote acidly to the chief of the Arabian Department, A. R. Walmsley, that the Americans "regard Kuwait and

the Gulf States primarily as a British responsibility. They assume that our aims in this area are extremely close to their own and they seem quite prepared to let us take the lead in action in pursuit of those aims, and indeed also to cooperate with us as fully as possible unless such cooperation embarrasses them elsewhere.”<sup>43</sup>

British officials thought carefully about how to make their own interests and knowledge of the Gulf region useful in convincing the Americans to support their policies. Walmsley wrote to a Washington embassy colleague, “Our ultimate aim should be to persuade the State Department that British policy in the Persian Gulf serves American interests as well as our own, better than any other within reach.”<sup>44</sup> Meanwhile, a Foreign Office briefing paper suggested that “it would be undesirable to explain to the Americans what we think their own policy is. Our aim could be attained by describing British interests in such a way that they appear to coincide as far as possible with what we believe U.S. interests to be, and then showing that our present policy is the only effective means of ensuring our interests.”<sup>45</sup>

The Foreign Office failed to engage the State Department in substantive conversation on the Persian Gulf region early in 1962. The paper trail on such talks grew cold as winter turned into spring. Still, the Kennedy administration appreciated the great value Britain placed on its Gulf interests and the vehemence with which it would react if those interests were challenged. David Newsom, now serving in the U.S. embassy in London, cabled to Washington in May that “the Persian Gulf is the last sensitive nerve of the British Empire. It is both a vital resource to Britain and a focal point for vestiges of imperial sentiment. These two elements cause a tendency in Britain to act quickly and in traditional ways to defend what is left of the British position.”<sup>46</sup>

A Kennedy NSC official recognized in the summer of 1962 that “winds of change are blowing across the Arabian Peninsula coming mainly from the direction of Cairo.”<sup>47</sup> The following autumn and winter revolution in the tiny Arabian nation of Yemen would bring London again into conflict with Nasser and radical Arab nationalism. War in southwest Arabia would jeopardize British interests throughout the Gulf region and challenge Anglo-American cooperation in the Middle East. It had been brewing for years.

### **Revolution and Civil War in Yemen**

To the Romans, the lands of southwestern Arabia known today as Yemen were Arabia Felix (Fortunate Arabia) and were fabled for their natural beauty and wealth. There, the wastes of the Arabian desert gave way to lushly terraced fields planted in coffee and fruit trees. Myrrh and frankincense, produced from the resins of local shrubs and valued throughout the ancient world for their medicinal, cosmetic, and ritual religious uses, made the region a prominent

stop on the caravan routes that crisscrossed the Middle East. A British journalist traveling in Yemen during the 1950s was particularly struck by the country's natural bounty. He noted that in the spring of the year, in the hills above the ancient city of Taiz, "there were peach trees in tiny pink bloom, papaya, bananas, pomegranates and fig trees throwing out bare silvery boughs from the hillsides like a Greek landscape."<sup>48</sup> William Lakeland, the U.S. consul in Aden during the mid-1950s, felt moved to write, "To a man emerging from the searing desert wastes to the north and east, or struggling up from the sweltering southern littoral of Aden or the westerly Red Sea coast, the highlands of southwestern Arabia which are the heart of present day Yemen seem indeed a land blessed by nature."<sup>49</sup>

Yet this wildly beautiful corner of Arabia was wracked by terrible political instability and violence during the middle decades of the twentieth century. As it emerged from a long self-imposed diplomatic isolation after 1955 and then plunged into revolution and civil war in 1962, Yemen confronted its Arab neighbors, the United States, and Great Britain with difficult political challenges. After years of torturous diplomacy failed to bring peace to Yemen and created new tensions between the United States and its British allies, American officials no longer seemed so captivated by the region's natural gifts and wished merely to end their involvement in this "desolate, disease-ridden, primitive tribal enclave on the southwest tip of the steamy Arabian peninsula."<sup>50</sup>

Easily dismissed as a conflict that was "dull, worthy, complicated, [and] obscure," the crisis in Yemen was, in fact, an extremely important, though underappreciated, chapter in the history of U.S. policy in the Arab Middle East.<sup>51</sup> As they sought to promote political stability, inhibit Soviet and communist influence, and protect U.S. economic investments in the Arabian Peninsula and Persian Gulf region, American policymakers came face-to-face in Yemen with the forces of Arab nationalism in all their complexity and volatility. At the same time, instability and war in Yemen confronted British officials with difficult new challenges as they attempted to protect their colony at Aden and to ensure their precarious political and military position in Arabia. American and British interests and policies in Yemen frequently clashed.<sup>52</sup>

In December 1955, Derek Riches of the British Foreign Office's Eastern Division neatly summarized the official British view of Yemen's monarch. He wrote that London's policy toward Yemen "should be based on the following appreciation: The Imam is an ignorant, suspicious, tyrannical, bigotted savage."<sup>53</sup> Riches was assessing the attributes of Ahmad ibn Yahya Hamid al-Din, the Zeidi Shiite ruler of Yemen since 1948. Through his "cunning and deceitfulness" as well as his personal courage and "native shrewdness," Ahmad had survived numerous assassination attempts and exercised a tenuous temporal and religious authority over his tiny kingdom.<sup>54</sup> His attempts to secure his rule were often brutal. Prime Minister Harold Macmillan described the "combination

of medieval squalor and obedience” in which he held Yemen through a policy of “cruelty and despotism on a truly oriental scale.”<sup>55</sup>

Ahmad’s brutality was necessary if he were to defend his own position and the stature of the minority Zeidi sect against the depredations of his domestic political rivals, the expansionist young Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to his north and east, and the pretensions of the British, who controlled the port of Aden and its surrounding tribal lands to his south. Tiny, poor, and geographically remote, Yemen remained a world apart from the more economically developed and socially cosmopolitan lands of the Arab Middle East. While in Cairo, Damascus, and Baghdad the spark of radical Pan-Arabism burst into flame in the 1950s, Ahmad’s Yemen was characterized by byzantine dynastic politics, the efforts of the imam alternately to placate or coerce the allegiance of the recalcitrant hill tribes of the interior, and extreme xenophobia. The troubles of a thousand years dictated how the Yemeni monarchy treated with the outside world and, at the same time, shaped the diplomatic options of the outside world when treating with Yemen.

Within his own country, Ahmad’s brother, Saif al-Islam Abdallah, and son, Mohammad al-Badr, at times plotted against him. A nascent Free Yemeni Movement, meanwhile, was beginning to take its political cues from the larger Arab world and advocated revolution and reform for the kingdom according to the Egyptian model. Further, King ibn Saud pursued a vigorous Saudi policy of expansion throughout the Arabian Peninsula. He had waged war against Yemen in 1934 over disputed borderlands, and Ahmad’s territorial disputes with Saudi Arabia were aggravated by the Sunni-Shia religious cleavage between the Saudi and Yemeni monarchies. Finally, Britain’s control of Aden and the lands of the surrounding Aden Protectorate called into question the legitimacy and vitality of Ahmad’s Yemen. Yemen had always claimed Aden and Aden’s environs as its constituent parts under illegal occupation by Britain. London’s 1954 decision to pursue a forward policy in southwest Arabia, to take steps to create a federal union of the tribal fiefdoms within the Aden Protectorate, enraged Ahmad. The union would strengthen the ties between the British and the local chieftains and secure Britain’s control over Aden.<sup>56</sup> In retaliation, Ahmad undertook an intensified campaign of bribery, infiltration, and propaganda in the Protectorate designed to undermine British authority. It was this campaign that prompted Riches’s outburst in December 1955.<sup>57</sup>

In his attempts to secure his throne, counter the influence of domestic and foreign political rivals, and reassert Yemen’s irredentist nationalist claims to Aden, Ahmad cast off Yemen’s long-standing diplomatic isolation and ambitiously enlisted the aid and support of foreign nations in his cause. In the mid- and late 1950s, Ahmad approached his Arab neighbors, the nations of the communist bloc, and the United States for economic assistance, political support, and military aid.

Despite their increasing involvement in the Middle East and the Arabian Peninsula after the Second World War, U.S. officials paid scant attention to Yemen before 1955. But Ahmad's opening to the communist bloc got the immediate attention of American policymakers, who quickly reevaluated Yemen's strategic importance in the context of recent Soviet initiatives in the Arab world. Suddenly, Yemen was a valuable piece of real estate to American foreign policy planners. "Yemen is strategically located in the southwestern corner of the Arabian Peninsula at the mouth of the Red Sea," noted a memorandum from the State Department's Office of Near East Affairs in May 1956.<sup>58</sup> "There is the ultimate danger that Yemen's relations with the bloc, if left unchecked, might expand to the point where the Soviet Union would possess in Yemen a potential or actual support area strategically situated at the entrance to the Red Sea and Suez Canal," the CIA warned the NSC's Operations Coordinating Board in 1957.<sup>59</sup> In 1960, as the number of Eastern-bloc technicians in Yemen reached its peak, the State Department's special assistant for communist economic affairs worried that "a client regime in Yemen would be useful to the Bloc for mounting strong political and subversive pressures against both Aden and Saudi Arabia. In the event of war the Bloc could use Yemen as a forward base to neutralize Aden and command the Red Sea area."<sup>60</sup>

This analysis prompted the U.S. government to join those nations seeking to provide assistance to and win influence in Yemen. American officials realized, however, that Ahmad's opening to foreign governments was motivated largely by the prospect of getting what he could while rival powers vied for his allegiance.<sup>61</sup> Ahmad hoped to receive American military aid and political support in its struggle against the British in southwest Arabia, but the United States viewed the British presence in Aden as important to the West's strategy of promoting regional stability. Washington was willing to provide Ahmad only with economic and technical assistance. British officials, conscious of the imam's designs on Aden, discouraged the United States from giving any form of aid to his government.

Britain had a long-standing interest in Yemen and southwest Arabia that was quite distinct from the interest of the United States. Britain's interest emanated from the renewed strategic and economic importance of Aden. British officials believed, in sum, that Aden played a key role in preserving Britain's status as Middle Eastern power, a role which won London influence in Washington and defined Britain's status as an important diplomatic player with global interests and responsibilities. The British government was determined to oppose any effort by the Yemeni government to subvert its authority in Aden and worked tirelessly to win American support for its position in southwest Arabia.<sup>62</sup>

On September 19, 1962, Imam Ahmad died, and his son, the Crown Prince Mohammed al-Badr, assumed the throne. A week later the commander of the

imam's bodyguard, Abdullah al-Sallal, launched a coup against the new imam's government, established a Council of the Revolutionary Command, and proclaimed the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR). He looked to Nasser's Egypt for ideological inspiration as well as material support for his revolution.

The Saudi Arabian and Jordanian governments, greatly alarmed by the establishment of a radical pro-Egyptian government on the Arabian Peninsula, began immediately to support the Yemeni royalist forces, led by the escaped imam and his uncle, the Crown Prince Hassan. The Saudi and Jordanian monarchs had both been the targets of Egyptian-inspired subversion in the past. They had no desire to see the conservative Arab order they and the Yemeni imam represented overturned and a pro-Egyptian beachhead established in southwest Arabia.

In Cairo, Nasser had his own reasons for coming to the aid of the Yemeni revolution. In September 1961 the United Arab Republic had collapsed after much acrimony between Damascus and Cairo. A year later, the UAR's dissolution still caused Nasser to feel vulnerable, and he believed he needed a decisive political or diplomatic victory in order to reestablish his leadership in the Arab world. Fawaz Gerges writes, "The breakup of the U.A.R. struck at the very basis of Nasser's political legitimacy—his claim to the leadership of the Arab nationalist movement. It also threatened to reverse Cairo's hard won achievements on the international stage and the internal stability of his regime."<sup>63</sup> Support for the Yemeni republic would punish the conservative regimes in Riyadh and Amman, Jordan, which Nasser believed had conspired to bring down the UAR, renew his revolutionary credentials, strengthen his hand at home, and make Egypt an active participant in Arabian Peninsula affairs. Eight days after Sallal proclaimed the republic, Egyptian arms and military advisers began arriving in Yemen. By the end of October, an Egyptian military expeditionary force of 20,000 men was engaged in combat against royalist tribesmen, and Egyptian pilots were flying military missions over southwest Arabia.

American officials recognized immediately that the revolution in Yemen posed a serious challenge to stability in the Middle East, to U.S. and Western interests in the region, and to the Kennedy administration's efforts to gain a Cold War advantage over the Soviet Union in the developing world.<sup>64</sup> In late 1962 the Kennedy White House feared the repercussions that revolution in southwest Arabia would have for more important American interests in regional peace, in the security of Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and British Aden, and in cultivating friendly relations with Egypt. Policymakers in Washington worried, also, that the Soviet Union might exploit the revolution in Yemen to extend its influence into the Arabian Peninsula through its association with Nasser's government.

Saudi Arabia was the United States' most important ally on the Arabian Peninsula, and U.S. firms owned investments worth \$500 million there, mostly

in the oil fields near the Persian Gulf coast. American policymakers feared that Egyptian involvement in the revolution might lead to direct clashes between Saudi and Egyptian troops, touching off a war in the peninsula. Alternately, revolutionary republican fervor in Yemen might prove contagious and undermine the royal Saudi government in Jidda. The United States' greatest fear was that Saudi Arabia's intervention on behalf of the Yemeni royalists would antagonize the Saudi regime's most dangerous domestic critics and distract it from the reform programs American officials believed were necessary for the kingdom's long-term stability.

Similarly, officials in Washington worried that the assistance of King Hussein of Jordan to the Yemeni royalists would render him vulnerable to pro-Egyptian radicals in his own country. Should Hussein be replaced by a republican regime eager to ally itself with Egypt, Israel might feel compelled to act militarily against it, and the region could be consumed by war.<sup>65</sup>

The Macmillan government in London was also greatly concerned by the Yemeni revolution. A republican government closely allied to Nasser's Egypt would pose great danger to British interests in the Arabian Peninsula and Aden might prove a tempting target for radical Arab nationalists. The recent efforts of the Colonial Office and Aden's British governor, Sir Charles Johnston, to better secure the Aden base by merging the Aden Colony with the federation of tribal states composing the Aden Protectorate might also be disrupted.

British officials believed that any threat to Aden posed an additional danger to British interests in the Persian Gulf. In 1962, Gulf oil continued to fuel and lubricate Britain's economy. Moreover, the sale of Gulf petroleum by British firms contributed £400 million annually to Britain's balance of payments.<sup>66</sup> Aden's military facilities were crucial to British plans to defend London's client states in the Persian Gulf and to ensure the flow of oil to the West. In July 1961, Aden had played a key role in Operation Vantage, Britain's military intervention in Kuwait to forestall a threatened Iraqi invasion. The loss of Aden, and with it Britain's ability to play a role in the Persian Gulf, would be an enormous political and psychological blow to London.

The Foreign Office warned the prime minister in the week following the revolution that the situation was "critical" for Britain's position in Aden and for its whole policy in the Persian Gulf, and might have important repercussions on its relations with most of the Arab states. The republican regime would certainly present a greater threat to Aden than the late imamate.<sup>67</sup>

Macmillan himself was fully attuned to the dangers that the revolution in Yemen held for both Aden and the British position in the Persian Gulf. On October 7, 1962, he wrote the queen that "we are very much worried about the situation in the Yemen . . . We have so far been able to maintain our position in the Gulf better than we had dared to hope. Our operation in Kuwait, for instance, was very successful. But so much depends on Aden, and if we were to

be driven out of Aden or faced with serious revolutionary troubles in Aden which might make the base useless, our whole authority over the Gulf would disappear.”<sup>68</sup> He told his cabinet that the revolutionary government in Yemen would be bound to work actively against the merger of the Aden Colony and the federation of Aden, which was then in process, and if, as a result, the control of Aden Colony were to pass out of Britain’s hands, London’s position in the Persian Gulf would be endangered.<sup>69</sup>

The Kennedy administration came to believe fully in the importance of Aden to regional stability and assured London immediately after the Yemeni revolution that Britain’s position there was a “principal interest” of the United States.<sup>70</sup> The American ambassador to Cairo, John S. Badeau, informed Egyptian vice president Anwar Sadat that the tranquility of the Persian Gulf, including the maintenance of Kuwait’s independence against an Iraqi military threat, necessitated, in Washington’s opinion, support for Britain’s position in the region. The Kennedy administration, Badeau said, would be deeply concerned if the new Yemeni government undertook a campaign against the Aden Protectorate and the British flank. Sadat, in turn, expressed great concern, lest the United States fail to develop its own position on the matter but be misled into acting as a tool for “aggressive British interests.”<sup>71</sup> In fact, despite its anti-British bluster, the Egyptian government was reluctant to see Britain’s position in Aden and the Persian Gulf undermined. As he had during the Kuwait crisis a year earlier, Nasser depended on British military strength in the Gulf to contain the territorial ambitions of his principal rival in the Arab nationalist movement, Iraqi prime minister Qassim.<sup>72</sup>

For two weeks after the YAR was established, American officials adopted a wait-and-see attitude toward events in the Arabian Peninsula, but quickly they began to consider the appropriate U.S. response to the revolution. The issue of granting diplomatic recognition to the new republic occupied U.S. and British policymakers for much of the autumn and winter, and it is in the recognition debate that the increasing divergence of American and British priorities and interests in Arabia becomes most clear.

The Kennedy administration proposed a disengagement plan for Yemen on November 17 that called for an immediate cessation of Saudi and Jordanian aid to the Yemeni royalists in exchange for an Egyptian promise to begin a “phased and expeditious” removal of its troops from the Arabian Peninsula. The revolutionary Yemeni government, in turn, was expected to honor its international obligations and seek “normal and friendly relations with its neighbors and to concentrate on domestic affairs.” In the meantime, Saudi and Egyptian forces would withdraw from the area near the Yemeni frontier.<sup>73</sup>

To achieve this agreement, Kennedy administration officials had two means at their disposal: leverage in Cairo, which they believed they held by virtue of the economic assistance they dispensed to Nasser’s government, and the offer

of diplomatic recognition for the revolutionary Yemeni government. Diplomatic recognition, to be extended as part of the disengagement agreement, would forestall growing Soviet influence in Yemen, enable the United States to keep open both its diplomatic mission and the USAID office in Taiz, and would thus allow Washington to exercise some political influence inside the country. At the same time, it would make clear to the Yemeni royalists and the Saudi and Jordanian governments that the United States believed the revolution in Yemen to be a *fait accompli*. The conservative Arab regimes could then return to their own domestic reform programs, which U.S. officials believed critical to long-term regional stability. Nasser would bask in the glow of having supported a successful revolution in Yemen, and he could continue his mutually profitable diplomatic relationship with the United States at the expense of Soviet influence in Egypt.<sup>74</sup> The Kennedy administration made immediately clear to the British government the value it placed on diplomatic recognition as a means to help bring peace to southwest Arabia. Throughout the autumn and winter, it urged the British to pledge their own recognition of the republican government in support of the disengagement agreement.

The Macmillan government and the British foreign policy establishment were deeply split over the American disengagement plan and the issue of recognition for Yemen. Colonial and Commonwealth Relations Secretary Duncan Sandys believed that British and American interests were diverging in southwest Arabia, and that the Kennedy administration's view of radical nationalist regimes in the region and the desirability of coming to terms with them was out of step with that of the Macmillan government. Foreign Secretary Lord Home, unlike many of his Foreign Office subordinates, embraced the Colonial Office and Defence Ministry views expressed most forcefully by Sandys and Sir Charles Johnston. Sir Charles cabled London in January 1963 that it was "a mistake to underestimate the strength of the conservative elements in the Arab world . . . The Americans have thrown in their lot with Nasser and Sallal; all the more reason for our keeping our money on the other horse so that whatever happens the Western cause as a whole does not lose."<sup>75</sup> British interests in Arabia might best be served, he believed, by keeping Egyptian troops pinned down in a bloody and protracted war in Yemen. Such a conflict might even topple Nasser from power.<sup>76</sup>

Macmillan wavered on the recognition question. He appreciated that American and British interests in southwest Arabia were not identical. He noted in a personal minute, "The Americans are primarily concerned to keep their aid mission in the country and to stop the Russians getting a foothold. . . . We, however, have to consider Aden for which we are responsible and which is *limitrophe*."<sup>77</sup> In pondering the arguments against recognition, he mused further that it might appear to have been forced on Britain by the Americans and might discourage rulers and sheikhs in the Protectorates, Saudi Arabia,

Jordan, and the Gulf, who could be tempted to join the stronger side. Recognition could make it more difficult for Britain to lend political or material support to royalists attempting to overthrow Sallal and might make diplomatic relations with the Saudis impossible.<sup>78</sup> Finally, Britain would “risk losing our identity in their [the Arabs’] eyes and they would feel that the independent United Kingdom role in Arabia had been swallowed up in the Pax Americana. We can in fact be more use to the Americans themselves if we pursue an independent policy in Arabia than if the Arabs conclude that we are their satellites.”<sup>79</sup>

In November 1962, President Kennedy and Prime Minister Macmillan exchanged a series of letters and telephone calls that illuminate clearly the emerging differences between the United States and Britain over policy in southwest Arabia. Macmillan wrote to Kennedy on November 14:

We have not got many cards; recognition is one, and a very important one, and your financial aid to Egypt is a second . . . But if we play these cards we must get the very maximum for them. In particular recognition by you is a very important card . . . [but] would spread consternation among our friends throughout Arabia, and particularly in the Aden Protectorate where it would be assumed that Britain was not resolute enough to be dependable and that the United States was pursuing a separate policy. The firm impression of Anglo-American unity in the Middle East which we have preserved since the Lebanon and Jordan operations of 1958 would be destroyed and the disunity which did us much harm in the past would seem to have reappeared.<sup>80</sup>

The same day, Macmillan again wrote to Kennedy concerning the American disengagement plan that was taking shape in Washington. The prime minister told the president, “It seems to us your plan is good. The danger seems to be that if you play your cards, above all recognition, too soon in exchange for mere words, you may lose all power to influence events.”<sup>81</sup> In a telephone call to the prime minister that night, Kennedy admitted sheepishly that he knew comparatively little about Yemen, even where it was on the map. He continued, “I know you say our plan is only words, but we have a substantial aid program which gives us considerable leverage on Nasser.”<sup>82</sup>

On November 18 Kennedy reassured the prime minister that “we shall further remind Sallal that Aden and the Persian Gulf are not just U.K. but joint U.S./U.K. concerns.” Macmillan responded that his government would “do everything we can to stop anyone from supposing that there is or has been any U.S./U.K. difference of policy in this matter.”<sup>83</sup> The assurances rang hollow.

It is apparent that British and American priorities in southwest Arabia were very different. While the Kennedy administration was greatly concerned with the possible influx of Soviet influence in Arabia and the security of its Saudi allies, the Macmillan government feared for the safety of its colony at Aden

and, consequently, determined to preserve the confidence of its conservative client regimes in the Aden Protectorate. Moreover, the tactics each nation advocated in furthering its interests in the region, particularly regarding the extension of diplomatic recognition to the YAR, were irreconcilable. London's determination to cling to its relationships with the rulers in the Protectorate made it impossible for the Macmillan government to grant recognition.

On December 19 the U.S. government officially recognized Sallal's government. It did so without Saudi support for the November disengagement plan and after repeated British entreaties not to do so. The Kennedy administration, however, felt it could wait no longer after it had extracted a statement from Sallal on December 18 that his government was willing to coexist peacefully with its neighbors and would not encourage violence within British territory. American fears of growing Soviet influence in Yemen, of loss of influence in Cairo, and the conviction that it must act decisively to end self-defeating Saudi support for the royalists helped spur the announcement. American policymakers continued to implore Macmillan to recognize the republican government of Yemen.

The merger of the Aden Colony and Protectorate was completed in January, and Britain reestablished long-severed diplomatic ties with Saudi Arabia the same month. Anglo-Saudi relations had been poisonous since the early 1950s when the Saudi-Omani dispute over the Buraimi oasis resulted in violence as well as legal and diplomatic recriminations between London and Jidda. In 1956 Saudi Arabia broke off diplomatic relations with Britain following the Suez crisis, and the next year Saudi assistance to the rebels battling the sultan of Oman's forces in that nation's forbidding interior further soured British relations with the kingdom.

By early 1962, however, Britain began to reconsider its "cold war" with the Saudis. A common interest in Kuwaiti independence and Saudi Arabia's worsening relations with Egypt moved Anglo-Saudi policies more closely into alignment. An April 1962 Foreign Office memorandum noted approvingly that the Saudi government was "interested in the maintenance of a stable and ordered regime in the Arabian Peninsula, responsive to reasonable pressure for political, administrative, and economic reform, but immune against the extreme manifestations of Arab nationalism on one hand or the assaults of communism on the other."<sup>84</sup> Weighing the potential benefits of restored relations with the kingdom, it concluded that British interests in the Gulf "might suffer more severely from a Saudi Arabia who was moved by implacable resentment rather than only by the normal selfishness of a nation state . . . In the context of Middle Eastern politics it would be better for us to have diplomatic relations than not."<sup>85</sup>

The revolution in Yemen put the restoration of Anglo-Saudi relations on a fast track as both nations recognized the benefits of working together against

Nasser in southwest Arabia. In early November 1962, British and Saudi diplomats agreed to remove the Buraimi question from their regional agendas and began drafting an exchange of letters between their foreign ministers, which led to a resumption of diplomatic ties. On January 16, 1963, officials in London and Jidda announced that their governments would resume relations shortly.<sup>86</sup>

Thus, at the beginning of 1963, Britain's position in southwest Arabia was more secure than it had been in several months. Surely, it could now recognize the Sallal government as a means to bring peace to Yemen. The Macmillan government, however, continued to demur.

On February 17, 1963, the YAR expelled the British chargé d'affaires from Taiz and made the issue of British recognition moot. Macmillan confided to his diary:

The Yemen problem (like so many) has settled itself! The Republicans have got tired of waiting for recognition and have closed the embassy. The Foreign Office and Foreign Secretary are rather upset. The Colonial Secretary is triumphant—so is the Minister of Defence. I think it's the best thing 'in the short term', for we would have lost the confidence of all our friends in the new Aden Federation. In the long run, it may bring us trouble. But Arab politics change with startling rapidity and one can never be sure.<sup>87</sup>

In fact, the Yemen problem was far from solved. Macmillan's flip assessment aside, Britain's problems in southwest Arabia were only just beginning. Later the same year Aden would begin its slide into anarchy and political violence, which would culminate in Britain's ignominious departure from its colony in 1967. The Kennedy administration's recognition of the YAR failed to end the violence in Yemen. The Saudi government had no intention of ending its assistance to the Yemeni royalists, and Nasser could not withdraw his troops from the Arabian Peninsula while the Yemeni revolution remained in jeopardy of failing. Indeed, Egypt increased its military commitment to the Sallal government and began bombing Saudi border towns along the frontier with Yemen.<sup>88</sup>

American efforts to end the fighting in southwest Arabia continued without British participation throughout 1963. The U.S. special envoy to Yemen, Ellsworth Bunker, managed to secure a Yemen disengagement agreement in April. As part of the plan, a number of American fighter aircraft were sent to Saudi Arabia, where they remained until January 1964. A short-lived UN Yemen Observer Mission arrived in Arabia in June but was disbanded the following year. Meanwhile, the fighting in Yemen continued. Nasser became ensnared in a war that was increasingly costly to him militarily and politically, but from which he could not withdraw. Robert Komer of the NSC staff, writing to McGeorge Bundy shortly after President Kennedy's death in November 1963, noted that "Nasser hasn't lived up to [his] commitment for a phased withdrawal [from southwest Arabia]—not because he doesn't want to but

because he has the bear by the tail and can't let go."<sup>89</sup> Yemen had become "Nasser's Vietnam."<sup>90</sup> At its height, in 1965, Egyptian troop strength in Yemen reached 70,000, and Nasser did not withdraw all his forces from the Arabian Peninsula until after Egypt's military defeat in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War.<sup>91</sup>

The Yemen crisis again illustrates the degree to which U.S. and British interests and priorities in Arabia rested on different premises and dictated different regional priorities. Contradictory U.S. and British policies in southwest Arabia derived from differing perceptions of threat to their interests there. Both London and Washington attempted to preserve stability and peace in the region, but for quite different reasons. Britain's colony and military base in Aden were critically important to its interests in controlling the southern periphery of the Arabian Peninsula and projecting power into the Persian Gulf, East Africa, and the Indian Ocean. London's policies with respect to Yemen were uniformly crafted to protect its colonial enclave in Aden from the depredations of, first, the imamate and, later, the revolutionary republic and its Egyptian allies. British policymakers believed that defending these immediate interests allowed them to exert a greater influence east of Suez and, consequently, with their American allies. Britain could thus guarantee its position as a world power.

Officials in Washington were much more concerned than their British counterparts with the repercussions of the East-West political struggle for the region, and with preventing the Soviet Union and communism from making inroads in southwest Arabia. American diplomacy in Yemen was designed to prevent a nation it saw as vulnerable to communist influence and revolutionary nationalist violence from threatening important U.S. allies in the area and endangering the Middle East's fragile stability.

Events in Yemen during the early 1960s reveal the fiction of the Anglo-American special relationship and underscore the shortcomings of interdependence, the keystone of U.S.-British diplomacy during the Macmillan-Eisenhower-Kennedy years. London's commitments to its political clients in southwest Arabia rendered its diplomacy too inflexible for Britain to be of much help to the United States during the Yemen crisis. By clinging doggedly to its relationships with its client states in the Aden Protectorate and refusing to recognize the revolutionary Yemeni government, the Macmillan government moved out of step diplomatically with the United States in Arabia. Interdependence was, thus, a policy fraught with difficulties and an imperfect tool for managing the Anglo-American relationship.

Furthermore, the revolution in Yemen underscores how rivalries and animosities endemic to the Middle East greatly complicated British and American efforts to secure their colonial and Cold War interests in the Arabian Peninsula. Century-old Yemeni claims to Aden, and Nasser's efforts to assert his leadership within the Arab nationalist movement, hindered U.S. policies

intended to foster regional stability and Britain's endeavors to defend its military and political influence east of Suez. Further, local actors attempted continually to enlist the assistance of larger powers in pursuit of their own interests. During the late 1950s, Yemen solicited the aid of its Arab neighbors, the Soviet-bloc countries, communist China, and the United States to give it leverage against the British position in Aden. After the coup of September 1962, Yemeni republicans continued to rely on Egyptian power to defend their revolution. In turn, the British government worked tenaciously, if unsuccessfully, to win the support of the United States for its own policies in southwest Arabia.

### **Anglo-American Efforts to Secure the Gulf Region**

The revolution and civil war in Yemen catalyzed Anglo-American efforts to secure Western interests in the Persian Gulf region, and officials in both Washington and London reaffirmed the need to cooperate to find solutions to Gulf region security issues. In the autumn of 1962, the State Department's Policy Planning Staff drafted a "Basic National Security Policy" paper, "Oil and Interdependence in the Middle East," which explored "the current and future position of the Persian Gulf in the context of Middle Eastern politics and developmental needs." Drafted primarily by William R. Polk, a young "New Frontiersman" who headed the Policy Planning Staff's Middle East section, the document built upon the work of the State Department's ad hoc Persian Gulf Oil Planning Group. In attempting to address the emerging "frustration gap" between the oil-rich nations of the Gulf and the economically stagnant or impoverished lands of the remaining Arab world, Polk and his colleagues sought to "promote the integration of the Persian Gulf into the Middle Eastern state system in an orderly fashion and in a way phased with British plans" and to identify alternatives to U.S. and Soviet aid to the region.<sup>92</sup> The State Department's Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs shared its work with the British embassy in Washington as a gesture of cooperation, and this work served as the basis of much discussion in British policymaking circles throughout the winter and following spring. In essence, the Policy Planning Staff concluded that the key to stability in the Persian Gulf region was for the oil-wealthy states of the Gulf, such as Kuwait, to share their wealth with their Arab neighbors. This expanded version of the Kuwait Arab Development Fund could "not only help to solve the problem of future security in the Gulf, but could also contribute usefully to the achievement of U.S. goals in other areas of the Middle East."<sup>93</sup> As they had in the wake of the earlier Kuwait crisis, State Department officials looked for an inter-Arab solution to Gulf security as an alternative, or at least a supplement, to the British military guarantee.

In Whitehall, the Yemeni revolution and its aftermath underscored Britain's need to win renewed American support for its Gulf policies. The Macmillan

government had been heartened by U.S. expressions to Egypt and the revolutionary Yemeni government of its support for Britain's position in Aden and in the Gulf. Now was the time to firm up those commitments. By March 1963 the Foreign Office was calling for renewed talks with the Americans on Gulf issues. "Our objectives in talking to them," noted a memorandum on the subject, "would be to bring out the importance of the interests we are concerned with in the Middle East—for them and for us—and the magnitude of the military effort we are making in an area where they are doing very little. We should make it clear that we expect their full political support in seeking to maintain the political conditions in which we can exert our military effort."<sup>94</sup> British officials thus returned to the mechanism of interdependence to address Anglo-American interests in the Persian Gulf.

The Kennedy administration welcomed British calls for consultation. On April 23 and 24, 1963, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Phillips Talbot met in London with Sir Roger Stevens to discuss the full panoply of Gulf political and military issues. In a series of carefully scripted presentations, Stevens outlined for his American guest the complete range of British interests and policies in the region. He reiterated that British diplomacy in the Gulf aimed to secure the region's oil resources for the West and to contain Soviet penetration of the area. Britain's political and military presence in the region created stability that contributed to these larger goals, although Sir Roger conceded that Britain's presence did attract anticolonial criticism throughout the world. Still, he concluded, Britain's policies represented a "reasonable insurance premium" on Western, not just British, interests in the Gulf area. He informed Talbot that the Macmillan government had considered a number of new approaches to ensure Gulf region stability, including negotiation of a great-power guarantee, UN protection, and creation of a regional federation between the Gulf states. None had proven workable. A British military guarantee remained the sole feasible alternative to safeguard the Gulf region from the "indecent behavior" of its radical neighbors.

Talbot spent much of the two-day conference patiently listening to his British hosts as they attempted to persuade him of the identity of Anglo-American interests in the Gulf. He conceded that U.S. and British objectives in the region were "thoroughly similar" (a carefully worded characterization), but hoped that the Macmillan government would do more to reach accord with Nasser, finally recognize the republican government of Yemen, and acknowledge that the "mutuality of interests between oil producing and oil consuming countries" could sufficiently safeguard the flow of Persian Gulf oil to the West. All in all, he concluded upon his return to Washington, his talks with Stevens produced nothing "startlingly new or different" but were useful insofar as they reassured British policymakers of U.S. interest in the region. "The British," he wrote, "may be expected to cite these talks for some time to come in support of coordinated U.S. and U.K. policy decisions pertaining to the Gulf."<sup>95</sup>

But Stevens had been unable to win any tangible new support from the Kennedy administration for Britain's policies in the Gulf. American diplomacy in the region continued to recognize Britain's position there but worked to distance the United States from British policies that might antagonize Arab nationalist sentiment. A State Department telegram, sent that summer to the embassy in Kuwait, summarized the cautiously formulated and carefully qualified American position on the British presence in the Gulf. American policy objectives in the region, it stated, included "maintenance, for time being, of paramount UK position along periphery Persian Gulf and preservation of existing special UK ties. View preponderant British influence and responsibility in area, we recognize that western interests must be preserved primarily by UK actions and programs and that US role should remain essentially one of consultation, encouragement, and support with regard to such British policy as we believe will deal successfully with problems of region."<sup>96</sup>

British anxieties concerning U.S. attitudes toward Gulf security were mirrored in early 1963 by those of the imperial Iranian government. The shah and his advisers had watched apprehensively as the Kennedy administration courted Nasser and sought to placate revolutionary nationalist sentiment in the Middle East. The crises in Kuwait and Yemen sounded alarm bells in Tehran and appeared to raise the possibility of Arab nationalist unrest among Iran's Gulf neighbors. Driven by his customary blend of insecurity and ambition, the shah was determined that his efforts to assert Iran's "historic and natural" position of dominance in the Gulf would not be jeopardized by radical Arab aspirations in the region. He sought reassurances from both Washington and London that Iranian security interests would not be compromised in the Gulf.

American policymakers continued to value Iran as a key element in their Persian Gulf diplomacy, but believed the shah's reluctance to reform and liberalize his government posed a greater danger to Iranian security than revolutionary Arab nationalism. Soon after Kennedy took office, the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff reported to Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara that Iran, a member of the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), as the Baghdad Pact was renamed in 1959, "represents a vital connecting link in the U.S. sponsored and supported collective security system stretching generally around the periphery of the Communist Bloc." However, its chronic domestic instability made it the "soft spot in the CENTO defense alliance."<sup>97</sup>

The president and his advisers concluded that economic development, modernization, and political reform were the keys to a secure Iraq, just as they were central to pro-Western stability elsewhere in the developing world. The shah remained dubious. Kennedy's remarks to a White House audience in 1962 that "those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable" seemed to the shah directed at the imperial government in Tehran, and talk about revolution of any kind made him apprehensive.<sup>98</sup> Still,

the shah accepted generous American financial assistance and paid lip service to American calls for economic and political reform in his country before launching his own "White Revolution" in January 1963. The White Revolution was designed to blunt U.S. demands for change in Iran while allowing the shah to manage carefully the pace and direction of reform. This would permit him to return to what he believed were more pressing concerns, such as the danger posed to Iran by Nasser and the failure of the United States to recognize it.<sup>99</sup>

An anxious shah expressed his displeasure with American policy in the Gulf both to the U.S. and British ambassadors in Tehran that spring. Sir Denis Wright, the British ambassador to Iran, wrote to R. S. Crawford at the Foreign Office in April that the shah had complained that "we [the British], but more especially the Americans, were more inclined to help our enemies than our friends, whom we took too much for granted. He referred especially to American help for Egypt . . . He said he sometimes got the impression that we and the Americans seem ready to hand over the Persian Gulf to Nasser on a plate . . . [and] wondered what should be Iran's policy in the face of this growing menace."<sup>100</sup> Clearly, American efforts to pursue its own interests in the Gulf, while conciliating Arab nationalist fervor and reassuring its conservative allies in the region, were fraught with difficulties.

If the Kennedy administration's Gulf policy remained essentially the same through 1963, the consensus on Gulf issues within British policymaking circles began to crumble in the last months of the Macmillan government. Increasingly, British Treasury officials began to question the financial and political costs of the British military guarantee of Gulf security. In an evermore acrimonious debate with the Foreign Office and Ministry of Fuel and Power, Treasury officials charged that Britain's military presence in the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula had failed to keep the peace in the region and was incapable of deterring Soviet aggression. Further, market forces were sufficient to guarantee the continued flow of Persian Gulf oil to the West.<sup>101</sup>

At the same time, influential figures within the Foreign Office began to question British intransigence toward Nasser and Egypt. Sir Harold Beeley, at the embassy in Cairo, concluded that continued efforts to isolate Nasser would only reduce Britain's chances of establishing a working relationship with Arab nationalism generally. More dangerously for British interests, working against Nasser might alienate the United States. Beeley cabled London that "the chances of effective Anglo-American co-operation in the face of a direct threat to a major interest, e.g., in Aden or Kuwait, may in fact depend on the degree of responsibility which the Americans feel for the situation in which the threat arises. The more closely we can work with them meanwhile, the more likely they are to stand with us in a crisis. This, it seems to me, is the most compelling argument of all for continuing to seek a working relationship with President Nasser."<sup>102</sup>

Thus, in 1963, currents in official British thinking emerged that began to undermine the assumptions on which the Macmillan government's Persian Gulf policy rested. When combined with increasing economic distress, American reluctance to play a larger role in Gulf affairs, and the ascendance of the Labour Party to power in Britain in 1964, this new thinking on Gulf issues would have a dramatic effect on British foreign and colonial policy. Its impact on Anglo-American diplomacy during the Harold Wilson–Lyndon Johnson era would be profound.

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An examination of Anglo-American policies in the Persian Gulf region during the Kennedy-Macmillan years reveals the very different interests, priorities, and perceptions of threat each nation defined for itself in the area. While the United States worked to integrate the Persian Gulf and Arabian Peninsula into the larger structure of its Cold War architecture of containment, Britain struggled to secure its more immediate interests in the region. Often, their short-term interests were similar, but they were rooted in very different U.S. and British conceptions of the strategic and economic value of the Gulf. The Kennedy administration attempted to ensure the flow of reasonably priced Persian Gulf oil to the West in order to support the economies and governments of its European and Japanese allies during the Cold War. At the same time, officials in London attempted to safeguard the supply of Gulf oil produced by British companies and defend Britain's military assets in the Gulf region. Britain worked to secure the lines of communication through the Gulf region to its allies and Commonwealth partners in southeast Asia and Australia, and to defend the interests of its Gulf region client states.

The differences between U.S. and British interests and priorities in the Persian Gulf region reflected the two nations' differing priorities globally. The Macmillan government tried to be a model ally of the United States in Europe. While they did not always agree with the details of American policies in Berlin or at the nuclear test-ban talks in Geneva, or on the subject of a multilateral nuclear force within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), officials in Whitehall proved themselves pliant partners who worked closely with the United States to contain communism and Soviet influence on the continent. However, where Britain's vestigial imperial interests were at stake and where tangible economic and financial concerns were at issue—in the Persian Gulf region, for example—the Macmillan government often forcefully asserted interests different from those of the Kennedy administration. In these cases, it frequently demanded support and loyalty from the United States of the sort it rendered its transatlantic ally in Europe.

Anglo-American differences over the dangers of radical Arab nationalism always complicated Anglo-American diplomacy in the Gulf region. The Kennedy

administration worked to establish a cordial, cooperative relationship with Egypt, believing this to be a key to conciliation of the revolutionary nationalist movement in the Arab world. The Macmillan government, however, harbored deep resentments toward Nasser following the Suez crisis and believed Egypt and Egyptian-funded anti-Western nationalism posed the most immediate threats to its interests in the Persian Gulf and Arabia. It worked assiduously to contain Nasser and frequently cooperated with his enemies in the region.

At the same time, the Kennedy administration's diplomacy in the Middle East was complicated by its efforts both to conciliate radical Arab nationalism and to underwrite the security of its conservative clients in the Persian Gulf region. Saudi Arabia and Iran were critically important U.S. allies whose security, American officials believed, was undermined by governmental corruption and domestic economic and social inequities. Kennedy vigorously promoted political, social, and economic reform programs in these countries in an attempt to immunize them against political instability. These efforts enjoyed little success. Meanwhile, the governments in both Tehran and Jidda resented and feared the Kennedy administration's courtship of Nasser.

While the United States and Britain pursued their interests in the Persian Gulf region, the peoples of the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula worked just as hard to determine their own futures. Age-old conflicts and ambitions shaped the environment in which U.S. and British statesmen attempted to implement their policies. Iraqi designs on Kuwait, Yemeni claims to Aden, Saudi expansionism, Iranian ambitions, and political competition between Baghdad and Cairo unrelated to the Cold War-era concerns of Washington and London complicated the efforts of the Kennedy administration and the Macmillan government to fashion workable diplomacies in the region. Frequently, the smaller nations of the Persian Gulf and Arabia attempted to enlist the power and influence of the United States and Britain for their own ends.

It is clear that both U.S. and British officials appreciated the similarity, if not the identity, of their interests in the Persian Gulf and throughout the Arabian Peninsula. But the Macmillan government had only mixed success in winning American approval for its policies in the Gulf region. It frequently resorted to the strategy of interdependence, a policy constructed in the late 1950s, as a means to inform and influence U.S. policymakers. In so doing it attempted energetically to muster the power of the United States in its behalf.

In the interests of Anglo-American accord, the Kennedy administration publicly emphasized the similarity of U.S. and British interests in the Gulf and acknowledged Britain's historic role in the region. However, officials in Washington remained uneasy about the efficacy of Britain's military guarantee of Gulf security. It feared that heavy-handed British military action during a crisis could provoke a violent nationalist reaction against Western interests there. This unease prevented American policymakers from giving Britain the

unequivocal support it sought in the Gulf region. Frequently, British officials expressed their frustration and even anger over American reluctance to back their Gulf policies wholeheartedly. It is clear, then, that interdependence was an imperfect tool for managing Anglo-American diplomacy.

It is also evident from a study of Persian Gulf region affairs that the Anglo-American "special relationship" had very real limits. Sentiment alone was not enough to keep U.S. and British policies aligned in the Middle East during the early 1960s. The excellent personal rapport between the young president and the aging prime minister certainly elevated the tone of Anglo-American diplomacy, but the alliance functioned fully only where the interests of both members coincided fully. In the Persian Gulf region, Washington's and London's interests and policies ran parallel for the most part, but were never identical, despite the efforts of the Macmillan government to convince the Kennedy administration otherwise. Consequently, U.S. and British perceptions of threat to their interests in the region diverged, policymakers in Washington and London designed conflicting policies to serve different priorities in the Gulf, and Anglo-American cooperation in the area suffered.

## **“For God’s Sake, Act Like Britain!”: Johnson, Wilson, and Britain’s Decision to Withdraw from the Persian Gulf Region, 1964–1968**

“For God’s sake, act like Britain!” Secretary of State Dean Rusk demanded. He was speaking to Foreign Secretary George Brown on the morning of January 11, 1968, and their discussion had become very tense.<sup>1</sup> Brown had traveled to Washington with the unhappy task of informing the Johnson administration that Prime Minister Harold Wilson intended to withdraw British military forces from the Persian Gulf and Southeast Asia by the end of 1971, several years earlier than the Labour government and the Johnson administration had anticipated. Rusk was furious. His admonition spoke volumes about the United States’ expectations of its closest ally and betrayed the Johnson administration’s profound anxiety over the repercussions of Wilson’s decision.

Brown, who had contended vehemently with his cabinet colleagues that Britain must continue to play an important role in defending Western interests east of Suez, found himself repeating arguments to Rusk that he had refuted in London. In the Persian Gulf, he told the secretary, Britain’s “continuing presence was more divisive than unitary; withdrawal was important for its own sake, and this was the right moment for it.”<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, his government’s decision six months earlier to withdraw from Southeast Asia by the mid-1970s made Britain’s presence in the Gulf less relevant. The Gulf region had served as a tollgate on Britain’s imperial route from Europe to the Far East, and British naval forces in Asia had supported London’s military presence in the Gulf.

Rusk would have none of it. Dismissing Brown’s argument that the withdrawal from Asia and the Gulf would permit the Wilson government to devote more

resources to important domestic programs, the secretary fumed that “he could not believe that free aspirins and false teeth were more important than Britain’s role in the world.” The usually gracious Rusk thundered that he was “profoundly dismayed” that Britain appeared to be retreating to a “Little England” posture. “The British had set the example and had helped us make decisions of will in World War II and in the postwar period.” The secretary said “he was disturbed when the teacher abandoned the field.” He continued, “Authentic isolationism was growing in the US because of the growing feeling that Americans were carrying the [burden of free-world defense] alone. . . . If the UK went down the trail of deliberate withdrawal the effects would be profound.” The United States could not pick up Britain’s responsibilities. From Brown’s presentation, Rusk said, he detected “the acrid aroma a *fait accompli*” on the part of the Wilson government. The decision, he concluded dramatically, “represented a major withdrawal of the UK from world affairs, and it was a catastrophic loss to human society.”<sup>3</sup>

His ears still ringing, Brown found himself harried further by Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs John Leddy. “You’re not going to be in the Far East. You’re not going to be in the Middle East. You’re not even going to be in Europe in strength. Where are you going to be?” Leddy demanded.<sup>4</sup> Following his State Department ordeal, Brown sought out Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and National Security Adviser Walt Rostow, whom he told that “these were the saddest days of his life.” His government’s decision, he explained, represented an effort by Wilson to shore up his political base among the left wing of the Labour Party and to appease “the ‘Little England view’ of certain members of the Cabinet,” as well as to save money.<sup>5</sup>

Dejected, the foreign secretary retreated to the British embassy “thoroughly sick with myself,” convinced that his government was “doing irreparable damage which would probably never be put right.”<sup>6</sup> Anglo-American relations, he concluded, “were now critical.” Later, he composed a cable to London describing the day’s grueling events. Foregoing the temperate language that generally characterizes diplomatic correspondence, Brown began, “I had a bloody unpleasant meeting in Washington this morning with Rusk.”<sup>7</sup>

The foreign secretary’s difficult experience in Washington left him shaken, but it serves to illuminate many of the most important issues facing U.S.-British diplomacy in the middle and late 1960s. Most importantly, it makes clear that Britain’s engagement in the Persian Gulf and east of Suez played a large part in determining its value as an ally of the Johnson administration. Secretary Rusk’s stern lecture to Brown underscored the apprehension felt in Washington that the United States was being abandoned by its allies at a time when its military and financial resources were being consumed by the conflict in Vietnam. Their discussion highlights the degree to which events in Southeast Asia impinged on U.S. and British policy in the Middle East as well as growing doubts in London that Britain’s military presence in the Gulf served its political and economic

interests there. Further, the foreign secretary's words to Rostow and McNamara point out how important foreign policy decisions in Britain were determined by domestic political calculations and ideology as well as strategic and economic analysis. Successfully managing the Anglo-American alliance in such an atmosphere proved a difficult task.

### The Anglo-American Relationship in the 1960s

The sober reassessment of the Anglo-American relationship that commenced on both sides of the Atlantic following the Suez crisis continued through the 1960s. American and British policymakers eschewed phony sentiment and attempted to build their relationship on a hardheaded calculus of each nation's interests and expectations of the other. Through its policy of interdependence, London attempted to co-opt American power by offering counsel to Washington based on its knowledge of, and presence in, strategically important areas of the developing world. The warmth of Kennedy and Macmillan's personal relationship did not alter the pragmatism of British and American policymakers, and it did not survive the retirement of the prime minister and the death of the young president.

The relationship between President Lyndon B. Johnson and Harold Wilson, who became prime minister when the Labour Party assumed power in Britain in October 1964, was tense and adversely affected the tone, if not the vital substance, of the Anglo-American relationship. Both men were difficult in their ways. American analysts of the British political scene tried to explain the new prime minister to Johnson. A CIA biography noted that "Wilson has no close political friends, and shuns ordinary social life. It is said he trusts no one completely, and vice versa . . . Although he has 'flirted' with the left, Wilson is not a doctrinaire socialist. He is above all a pragmatist, well aware of the realities of power. His commitment to close Anglo-U.S. relations is not based solely on sentiment."<sup>8</sup>

Further, Wilson espoused a robust foreign policy and vigorous role for Britain in the Persian Gulf region and the Far East. In December 1964 he told the House of Commons, "Whatever we may do in the field of cost effectiveness, value for money and a stringent review of expenditure, we cannot afford to relinquish our world role—our role which for short-hand purposes, is sometimes called our 'East of Suez' role."<sup>9</sup>

Still, Wilson's owlsh demeanor and refusal to support unequivocally U.S. policies in Vietnam frustrated Johnson. The brash political dealmaker is said to have referred to Wilson privately as "the little creep who camps on my doorstep."<sup>10</sup> The president met with Wilson six times between 1964 and 1968, and although Johnson praised the prime minister warmly in public, he never established the close relationship his predecessor enjoyed with 10 Downing Street.

In December 1964 Wilson told the guests at a White House state dinner given in his honor, "Some of those who talk about the special relationship, I think, are looking backwards and not looking forward. . . . We regard our relationship with you not as a special relationship but as a close relationship, governed by the only things that matter, unity of purpose, and unity of our objectives."<sup>11</sup> The prime minister was echoing the sentiment of the Foreign Office, which, during the 1960s, was attempting to elucidate the terms of the Anglo-American alliance and expunge the term "special relationship" from its diplomatic lexicon. One deputy undersecretary, Sir John Nicholls, went so far as to assert in August 1964 that "the Anglo-American 'special relationship' is to my mind something which should be spoken of as little as possible—and never in public."<sup>12</sup> The term led to unrealistic expectations between the allies and was used carelessly by both its proponents and its detractors.<sup>13</sup>

Like the Foreign Office, the U.S. State Department during the mid-1960s was determined to put to rest the myth of the special relationship and to clarify the terms of the Anglo-American alliance. Ambassador Bruce, in London, wrote Secretary of State Rusk in 1966 that "the so-called Anglo-American special relationship is now little more than sentimental terminology, although the underground waters of it will flow with a deep current."<sup>14</sup> The same year, his embassy team drafted a lengthy cable that bluntly articulated the department's views of the United States' and Britain's places in the international system. It concluded:

[T]he American and British roles in the world are not interchangeable. They are not identical in form or always in aims. They are not necessarily permanently aligned. . . . We differ in historical background and experience, in assessments of national interests and requirements in some contemporary world situations, and in the appropriate values for working out shared problems. To ignore the force of these differences would be not to serve realistic policy adjustments on either side, but to substitute sentiment for fact. The rhetoric of a special Anglo-American relationship and of interdependence can become very empty.

Yet, the cable continued:

[W]e need the support and sympathy of the British. . . . We touch one another at too many points and are still affected by what the other does in too many situations to be able to dispense with mutual support of some kind.<sup>15</sup>

### **The U.S. Subsidy of Britain's Role East of Suez**

In particular, the Johnson administration and the Wilson government recognized their mutual interest in ensuring stability in the arc between the greater Persian Gulf region and Southeast Asia. These areas were closely linked in the

calculations of U.S. and British policymakers. For Britain, the Persian Gulf region served as a stepping stone between Europe and its late imperial commitments in the Far East, where the Wilson government was helping defend Malaysia from subversion by Sukarno's Indonesia. Most importantly for the United States, Persian Gulf oil powered the Japanese industrial economy and helped fuel its mounting military effort in Vietnam.<sup>16</sup> Britain's abdication of its traditional responsibilities in this extended theater would leave an enormous power vacuum that could be exploited by the Soviet Union or China and which the United States, deeply embroiled in Southeast Asia, did not have the resources to fill.<sup>17</sup>

As its involvement in Vietnam consumed more money and materiel, U.S. policymakers decided to subsidize Britain's role in the area between Aden and Hong Kong rather than assume new responsibilities of its own in the region. In June 1965 NSC staffer David Klein noted to National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy, "It is useful for us to have their flag, not ours, 'out front' in the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf—in areas where they have strong historical associations. For we might be very much better off to pay for part of their presence—if they really cannot afford it—than finance our own."<sup>18</sup>

Just as importantly, the Johnson administration believed that Britain's presence east of Suez was critical to preserving the domestic political consensus in the United States behind continued American strategic engagement abroad. In January 1966 Rusk told Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart and Defence Secretary Denis Healy that the United States attached "the greatest importance to Britain's retaining a world power role. It would be disastrous if the American people were to get the impression that the US is entirely alone; they simply will not accept it."<sup>19</sup>

Rusk's remarks confirmed to British policymakers that there was considerable concern in Washington "at the possibility of Britain withdrawing from her world role and leaving the U.S. to carry the load alone. This reflects the anxiety amongst thoughtful Americans lest the consequences of such a withdrawal should be a gradual return to isolationism within the United States."<sup>20</sup> Officials in Whitehall appreciated the importance of Britain's global role in giving them influence in Washington and providing them potential leverage over U.S. policy. "Even if the Americans are prepared to go it alone," a Foreign Office official mused, "a British withdrawal would inevitably change the whole nature of our relationship with the United States and drastically reduce our influence on them. . . . In this context, the current alarm felt in Washington lest Britain should disengage from her worldwide role is, we believe, salutary. Moreover, we think that it could and should be turned to profit when American support, financial or otherwise, will make the difference between maintaining or relinquishing the British commitment."<sup>21</sup>

American financial support was a topic of considerable importance in London during the Wilson-Johnson years. During Wilson's time in office,

Britain experienced three major runs on sterling, and, as historian Diane Kunz has written, "it is no exaggeration to describe the three years [*sic*] 1964 to 1967 as virtually one continuous [financial] crisis."<sup>22</sup> Britain's ability to remain a key actor east of Suez was continually threatened by its fragile economy, and this chronic instability led to rampant speculation against the pound.

Still, the Wilson government refused to devalue Britain's currency for political reasons. Wilson did not wish Labour to be seen as the party of devaluation (the McDonald and Attlee governments had already devalued the pound in 1931 and 1949, respectively). Further, Wilson was determined to protect sterling's value as an international reserve currency, which, he believed, would bolster British prestige and reaffirm the country's determination to play a global role. He depended, therefore, on U.S. assistance to boost the pound by purchasing large quantities with gold and dollars.<sup>23</sup>

American efforts to bolster the value of the pound were not driven merely by the United States' determination to give Britain the financial means to remain engaged in the Persian Gulf region and Asia. It was a defensive measure to protect the dollar, the American economy, and the Bretton Woods system. The pound was generally regarded as the dollar's first line of defense. In other words, if sterling foundered, the dollar, already weakened by creeping inflation driven by efforts to pay for both the Vietnam conflict and President Johnson's "Great Society" programs, faced hostile speculation.<sup>24</sup>

Both the Johnson administration and the Wilson government thought carefully about whether and how the United States could use its support for sterling as leverage to force London to support the American position in Vietnam and to continue its defense obligations in Europe and east of Suez. McGeorge Bundy made this "linkage" explicit in a memorandum he penned for the president in July 1965: "We want to make very sure that the British get it into their heads that it makes no sense for us to rescue the Pound in a situation in which there is no British flag in Vietnam, and a threatened British thin-out in both east of Suez and in Germany."<sup>25</sup>

Paradoxically, however, Britain's financial weakness during the 1960s gave the Wilson government a certain degree of leverage in Washington. While the Johnson administration hinted that it would make its support of the pound contingent upon British pledges to remain engaged in the Gulf region and Southeast Asia, the Wilson government was quite prepared to use American anxieties concerning regional power vacuums, creeping isolationist sentiment at home, and the stability of the dollar to extract financial assistance from the Johnson White House.<sup>26</sup> Thus, Britain added a new element to its strategy of interdependence, whose purpose was to establish British influence in U.S. policymaking circles. The strategy would continue to influence Anglo-American relations east of Suez throughout the 1960s.

### **The United States and the Middle East in the Vietnam Era**

During the Johnson years, the United States continued to value the Middle East and Persian Gulf region primarily for their roles in its policy of containing Soviet and communist power. At the same time, U.S. policymakers were divided about how critical the region was to U.S. and Western security and how deeply the United States should become engaged in the area's political affairs.

In July 1967 a special State/Defense interagency group chaired by former U.S. ambassador to Iran Julius C. Holmes attempted to articulate U.S. priorities in the region. First and foremost, the "Holmes Report" concluded that the United States must work to "prevent the Soviet Union or other hostile states from securing a predominant position" in the Middle East and adjacent areas. It must "maintain the means of strategic access" to the states of the northern tier that shielded the Middle East from Soviet military advance and protect "the use of U.S. military operational and strategic intelligence facilities" in the area "insofar as they are needed to fulfill area and global needs." Also, it must defend the sources of Persian Gulf oil, which, though not vital to the United States, were critical to the economies of Western Europe and Japan. Securing U.S. investments in the area and ensuring the independence of Israel were clearly of secondary importance to the authors of the report. The study called for vigorous U.S. political involvement in the Middle East and emphasized the need for increased military capabilities in the region, consistent with local political conditions.<sup>27</sup>

Policymakers in Washington paid close attention to Soviet and communist Chinese activities in the Middle East. They judged that Soviet influence in the region had grown significantly since 1955, "principally through the customary instruments of contemporary statecraft." Moscow had "exploited nationalist and anti-colonial resentments, encouraged neutralist sentiment, and taken sides in local disputes." The Soviets and Chinese could be expected to take advantage of Britain's weakening position in the region, to seek to establish diplomatic, military, and trade missions in the region, and to extend their influence through local surrogates among the radical Arab states whenever possible in the Persian Gulf and Arabia. Meanwhile, communist China attempted to compete with the Soviets for influence, principally in Yemen and Egypt.<sup>28</sup>

### **The Value of Persian Gulf Oil in the 1960s**

During the 1960s, officials in both Washington and London appreciated the continuing value of Persian Gulf petroleum to the industrial economies of Western Europe and Japan, as well as to Britain's balance of payments. In early 1967 the region contained two-thirds of the free world's proven oil reserves

and provided one-third of its production. Western Europe depended on the Gulf for over half of its petroleum, and Japan obtained more than 85 percent of its oil from the Middle East. British consumption of oil reached all-time highs in the mid-1960s, rising, on average, by 10 percent per year. Kuwait remained the largest exporter of oil to Britain. The British cabinet determined in the early summer of 1967 that British oil investment in the Gulf benefited the British balance of payments to the tune of over £200 million per year in foreign-exchange savings and overseas sales.<sup>29</sup>

Meanwhile, the United States consumed a negligible amount of Persian Gulf oil domestically but depended on Gulf petroleum to fuel its military efforts in Southeast Asia. In the summer of 1967, the U.S. government obtained 200,000 to 300,000 barrels of Gulf petroleum products per day for the war in Vietnam. Three-quarters of the production of Aramco's refinery in Ras Tanura, Saudi Arabian officials estimated, went ultimately to the U.S. Seventh Fleet in the Pacific. Further, Director of Central Intelligence John McCone told President Johnson that the oil companies "through the activities of their subsidiaries constitute the largest and most effective channel of contact in the relationship with the governments of the Middle East, with the exception of the State Department." Finally, 65 percent of oil production in the Gulf region came from U.S. investment there, and its sale contributed "substantially" to the U.S. balance of payments. Since the West's demand for petroleum was expected to grow steadily through 1980 and no other source of petroleum was expected to come on line that could supply the quantities necessary to satisfy that demand on reasonable terms, the Persian Gulf would remain a vitally important asset to the West.<sup>30</sup>

But, at the same time that British and American officials reaffirmed the importance of Persian Gulf oil in general terms, the structure of Gulf oil production changed with important ramifications for Britain's position in the region. British officials frequently explained to their U.S. allies that their policy in the Gulf was to see that the main producing oil fields in the Middle East remained under separate political control with each government having the opportunity to craft an independent oil policy. They explained that this policy helped "to maintain a situation in which oil continues to be available at reasonable terms. Our policy thus benefits ourselves and also the Americans and the consuming countries of Western Europe."<sup>31</sup> It also fostered oil exploration throughout the region. British petroleum analysts in the early 1960s believed that Libya held great promise as an oil power, and they predicted that Abu Dhabi would soon produce oil for Britain in the same quantities as did Kuwait. They were correct on both counts. Although few geologists in the early 1950s believed that Libya possessed oil reserves of sufficient volume to exploit commercially, by the late 1960s the country had become the fourth-largest producer of oil in the world and a major supplier of petroleum to Europe. Similarly, in Abu Dhabi, onshore and offshore discoveries by the British-owned Abu Dhabi

Petroleum Company made the tiny sheikhdom a major producer. In 1960 Abu Dhabi produced no oil; five years later, its output was 102.8 million barrels, and by 1970, 253.7 million barrels, one-quarter of Kuwait's output.<sup>32</sup>

As the paramount importance of Kuwaiti oil to Britain was called into question, so was the sanctity of Britain's defense guarantee to the emirate. The very foundation of London's political and military presence in the Gulf was becoming infirm. In July 1964 a young Foreign Office official, D. C. P. Gracie, composed a minute that expressed the doubt many in Whitehall were beginning to feel about the bases of British policy in the Gulf. His analysis, called "A Heresy," attempted a "sceptical reappraisal of the value to British interests of our commitment to defend Kuwait." Gracie posited the case of a successful Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, after which Baghdad attempted to extort better terms from Western oil companies operating in the emirate. The oil companies, he concluded, could handle this worst-case scenario with no great difficulty. "They could make good their supplies from Iran, Saudi Arabia, Abu Dhabi, and Libya, as they had from Kuwait in the Abadan crisis. Moreover, at that time there was a shortage of oil; now there is the reverse." British Petroleum, in which the government owned a majority share, might suffer a drop in profits and return on investment of about £100 million, about the same amount London spent on Persian Gulf defense. In any event, the increasingly independent Kuwaiti government was unlikely to request British military assistance, and the British defense guarantee was irrelevant in the event of a republican coup in Kuwait or a voluntary merger of Kuwait with an unfriendly Arab state. "In short," he concluded, "we are paying a premium of 100 per cent for indifferent cover against an improbable risk."<sup>33</sup>

British oil-company executives were also coming to doubt the efficacy of London's military guarantee of Kuwaiti oil production. They doubted, further, the wisdom of maintaining military facilities in Aden to support that guarantee. The same month Gracie penned "A Heresy," G. G. Stockwell, British Petroleum's regional coordinator for the Middle East, told the Foreign Office's M. S. Berthoud that

no oil company could extract oil at bayonet point. It was not the oil companies who wished us to retain the Aden base. In answer to a question, he said that he did indeed think that the presence of the Aden base might in the future become a positive liability to the oil producing countries in the Persian Gulf. The base would give rise to further hostile propaganda which would make the oil companies its whipping boy . . . He also made the point that it was only our presence in the area which enabled the local rulers to maintain thoroughly backward regimes.<sup>34</sup>

Stockwell's criticism stung. For two decades it had been an article of faith among senior British policymakers that Britain's military presence in the Gulf

guaranteed the production of reasonably priced oil. In response to Stockwell's assertion that oil could not be extracted in the Gulf "at bayonet point," an unidentified Foreign Office official scribbled in the margin of Berthoud's minute, "No one wants them to. The point is that our bayonets produce stability, which is essential to smooth oil production."<sup>35</sup>

### **The Continuing Challenge of Revolutionary Arab Nationalism**

It was not merely the changing pattern of oil production in the Persian Gulf and the emerging doubts in London concerning the military guarantee to Kuwait that posed challenges to British policies in the Persian Gulf region. Revolutionary Arab nationalism continued to jeopardize British interests in the Middle East. As it had over the previous decade, Britain struggled to reach accord with the United States over the best way to defuse the dangers posed to Western interests by Nasser's Egypt and its allies in the Gulf and Arabia.

British foreign policy makers realized that U.S. officials, particularly in the State Department, continued to believe that Western interests in the Middle East and Persian Gulf region were best served by placating the volatile forces of local nationalism. The United States and Britain, these officials believed, should work to temper local nationalism's radical tendencies, harness its energy, and channel it into directions compatible with Western interests in the region. Britain's imperial legacy in the Gulf and Arabia and its emphasis on a military guarantee of local security appeared to State Department officials needlessly provocative to local nationalists and, frequently, destabilizing to the region. While they supported London's traditional role as defender of the area from foreign encroachment and keeper of the peace between the Gulf's fractious peoples, they encouraged Britain to seek accommodation with local nationalists and their Egyptian patron, Nasser.

The Foreign Office recognized the United States' discomfort with British policy in the region. An "Anglo-American Balance Sheet," drafted by the Foreign Office in September 1964, noted that the Americans were "sceptical both about our present methods of securing our oil supplies on satisfactory terms to us and the argument that what we are doing is the best way of safeguarding the Western interest . . . They are not prepared to be too closely associated with our activities in the area and in particular our connexion with reactionary Arab regimes."<sup>36</sup>

The U.S. government believed conciliation was the most promising strategy when dealing with Arab nationalism and with Nasser. Secretary Rusk told Foreign Secretary R. A. Butler that the State Department was "concerned at this juncture that actions worsening our relations with Cairo and antagonizing Nasser would not help the situation but would actually hinder it by closing off our channel of communication and eliminating what influence we did have."<sup>37</sup>

Economic assistance played a key role in U.S. strategy for co-opting Nasser and radical Egyptian nationalism. Rusk explained to President Johnson in September 1965 that "aid is a two way street. It opens the recipient state to the products and investments of the donor. Its acceptance is a fractional surrender of sovereignty—an advantage which in the course of time can be built up into a position of commanding influence."<sup>38</sup>

State Department officials in the 1960s worked to establish good relations with both radical and moderate Arab governments and to bridge differences between the two groups. As Rostow wrote to the president in June 1966, "Our goal is to keep Moscow from splitting the Middle East into radical and moderate camps. Slamming the door on Nasser would help only the Soviets," who would attempt to establish new client states among the radical states.<sup>39</sup> The U.S. strategy was a world apart from the one adopted by the Eisenhower administration in the late 1950s, which attempted to establish Saudi Arabia as a moderate counterweight to the radicalism of Nasser's Egypt.

While the State Department was determined to carry on the Kennedy administration's efforts to conciliate Nasser's Egypt, President Johnson was dubious of the policy. Johnson was broadly sympathetic to Israel and listened carefully to the counsel of many high-ranking pro-Israeli officials in Washington, such as Vice President Hubert Humphrey, Supreme Court Justice Abe Fortas, and the U.S. representative to the UN, Arthur Goldberg. He recognized the political liabilities he faced in the 1964 presidential election campaign if he worked actively to court Nasser.<sup>40</sup>

Beyond his own sympathies for Israel and partisan political calculations, Johnson questioned his predecessor's policies toward Egypt for strategic and diplomatic reasons. The new leader viewed skeptically the efforts in Foggy Bottom to draw careful distinctions between communists and radical nationalists in the Middle East; both, he believed, were dangerous to Western interests. Johnson's growing preoccupation with Southeast Asia and the mounting conflict between the United States and revolutionary nationalism in that region most certainly influenced his determination not to mollify Arab nationalism or conciliate the Egyptian government.

Nasser was equally suspicious of the American president. Mohamed Heikal, a journalist and confidant of the Egyptian leader, later recalled that "President Nasser had an instinctive dislike for President Lyndon Baines Johnson."<sup>41</sup> He had been an admirer of Kennedy's and believed he could work well with the young president, who, in turn, had tried to work with Egypt. When the Johnson administration refused Nasser's request to renew PL 480 food aid to Egypt in November 1964 because of Egypt's behavior in the Middle East and Africa, Nasser was livid. Accompanied by members of a Soviet diplomatic delegation, he told a crowd at Port Said on November 23 that the United States could not use economic aid to coerce Egyptian behavior. "We will not accept pressure or

impertinence and will not trade our dignity. And if the Americans are not pleased with our behavior, they could drink from the sea.”<sup>42</sup>

Nasser’s Port Said speech and the cutting off of American PL 480 assistance to Cairo marked a low point in U.S.-Egyptian relations. President Johnson’s personal aversion to the Egyptian leader never abated, and his suspicions of radical Arab nationalism remained intact. However, the State Department retained its control over the direction and tone of U.S. policy in the Persian Gulf and Arabian Peninsula, a control the White House never seriously challenged. If officials in London hoped that Johnson’s contempt for Nasser would move U.S. diplomacy closer into alignment with Britain’s in the Middle East, they were only partly gratified. While many State Department officials remained convinced of the need to secure a working relationship with Egypt, their criticism of Britain’s policies in the region became muted.

### **“Modernisation” in the Persian Gulf Region**

As it grappled with a declining treasury and weakened currency, attempted to rationalize its role east of Suez, and establish a new role for itself in Europe, the British government worked feverishly in the middle and late 1960s to secure its position in the Persian Gulf and Arabia. It did so in a number of ways: first, British diplomats and politicians attempted to redefine and “modernise” their relationships with the Gulf emirates. They attempted, further, to establish an independent and friendly state of South Arabia, which could survive Britain’s departure from Aden and permit continued Western access to its military facilities. When this proved unfeasible, they planned to redeploy troops from Aden to new positions in the Persian Gulf itself, while readjusting Britain’s defense commitment to Kuwait. Finally, British and U.S. officials cooperated to explore the possibility of constructing new Gulf-region military bases on British-controlled islands in the Indian Ocean.

Sir William Luce, the dynamic and imaginative governor of Aden from 1956 to 1960, became British political resident in the Persian Gulf in 1961. In Bahrain, as in southwest Arabia, he proved to be a trenchant and original critic of British policy in the Middle East. Convinced of Britain’s important role in the Gulf, he found the growing skepticism in Whitehall and on Fleet Street concerning the region’s value to the West “dangerously facile and naïve.”<sup>43</sup> Yet he concluded that London’s strategy in the region was stale, unimaginative, and could not sustain Britain’s interests there in an era of increasingly restive nationalism.

In an extremely influential missive to London in November 1964, Luce spelled out his vision for British policy in the Gulf. The Gulf, he wrote, was inherently a political vacuum that must be filled by British, and perhaps U.S., power in order to remain stable. The only alternative to shaikhly rule in the

region was revolutionary, anti-Western government. Therefore, Britain must work to reform its Gulf client states and remake its own relations with them. Through a policy of "evolutionary modernisation," London should attempt to "shed those aspects of our special position which are not essential to our basic purpose but which detract, or appear to, from the sovereignty of the states." British policy should take "the opportunity to bring continued pressure and persuasion to bear on the Rulers to improve and adapt their governments" at the same time London retroceded to them administrative responsibilities for internal and external affairs. In this way, the British government could solidify its position in the Gulf while "reducing the scope for international criticism" of its policies there.<sup>44</sup>

Luce's dispatch found a receptive audience in the new Labour government. Like the previous Labour government, of 1945–1951, Harold Wilson's was looking for ways to reshape its associations with its imperial client states. Wilson and his foreign secretary, Sir Michael Stewart, both wanted to remove the trappings of Britain's exploitative colonial relationships in the Middle East and recast them as political partnerships that, nevertheless, secured traditional British strategic and economic interests in the region.<sup>45</sup> By the late winter of 1965, the Labour government formally adopted Luce's prescription for British-sponsored "modernisation" in the Gulf as official policy. Foreign Office officials further expanded upon Luce's interpretation of the Gulf as a potentially dangerous political vacuum in order to rationalize Britain's continued military presence in the region. On February 8, 1965, the Foreign Office explained its emerging Gulf policy to its overseas posts: "Our policy is to modernise our relationship with the States while retaining our military presence in the Gulf; the latter is essential to maintain continued stability in an inherently unstable area. Our departure would create a political vacuum which might well draw into conflict the more powerful States of the area."<sup>46</sup>

### **Britain's Departure from Aden**

At the same time the Labour government was attempting to modernize its relationships with the Persian Gulf emirates, it was struggling to secure access to its military facilities in Aden. It did so as Aden was rent apart by rival nationalist factions seeking to expel Britain from southwest Arabia.<sup>47</sup> Meanwhile, U.S. diplomats and militarily strategists monitored Britain's travails carefully and reassessed American and Western interests in the area.

In the mid-1960s, Aden served as the linchpin of Britain's military presence in the greater Persian Gulf region and was critical to preserving the unity and stability of the diplomatic structure London had fashioned in the Gulf and southern Arabian periphery.<sup>48</sup> As British diplomats explained to State Department officials in January 1964, "Aden is the base which gives the British

military commitment in the Gulf ‘substance.’ If British political and military influence were removed, anarchy would result.”<sup>49</sup>

During the Kennedy years, U.S. officials appreciated that the British regarded “their military defense commitment from Kuwait along the rimland of the Arabian Peninsula to Aden as ‘indivisible.’ Any disengagement from one point would adversely affect the others.” Yet, by the end of 1963 they believed that Aden was becoming “an Achilles’ heel in the indivisible Persian Gulf defense chain.”<sup>50</sup>

In many ways, Britain’s problems in Aden stemmed from the colony’s explosive growth in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Between 1962 and 1965, the size of the British military garrison in Aden more than trebled to 22,000 soldiers, sailors, and airmen, and military construction had transformed the teeming port city.<sup>51</sup> Indian, African, and, especially, Yemeni Arab workers swarmed into the colony in search of work at the British Petroleum refinery and the military bases. The Aden Trades Union Congress (ATUC) and its political wing, the People’s Socialist Party (PSP), strove to represent the interests of the growing urban working classes, and, as anti-British Egyptian propaganda and Yemeni irredentist resentments penetrated the colony, the colonial government found itself besieged by well-organized and frequently violent ATUC-inspired demonstrations against Britain’s presence in southwestern Arabia.<sup>52</sup>

Against this background, policymakers in London and Aden attempted to devise schemes that would mollify local nationalists, bolster the federal government, and give South Arabia its independence while preserving Britain’s influence in the region and securing its access to Aden’s military facilities. Building on the establishment of the Federation of Arab Emirates of the South in 1959, British policymakers renamed the Aden Colony in January 1963 and merged it with the earlier federation of the Protectorates to form the larger South Arabian Federation. By doing so they hoped to use the influence of the conservative rulers of the Protectorate states to temper the radicalism of the nationalists who dominated political life in Aden. At a June 1964 constitutional conference in London, the Wilson government announced that it would give South Arabia independence no later than 1968 and would negotiate with the new government the terms of access to its bases there.<sup>53</sup>

The political and military fallout of the civil war in Yemen, Egyptian-sponsored subversion, and the emergence of an increasingly violent, though deeply divided, nationalist movement rendered the Wilson government’s efforts to bring South Arabia peacefully to independence impossible. As it lurched from a policy of supporting the “traditionalist” rulers of the Protectorate against the “modernists” of Aden to one of attempting to base South Arabian independence on a unitary government dominated by the socialists of the ATUC-PSP, the British confronted a mounting campaign of guerilla violence and urban terror.

In June 1963, the National Liberation Front (NLF), funded by Egypt and based in Yemen, began to attack British military and civilian targets in the Federation. In order to compete for support, the ATUC-PSP turned from its campaign of political demonstrations to violence as well, evolving by 1966 into the Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen (FLOSY). Like the NLF, FLOSY also enjoyed Egyptian patronage and established its headquarters in Yemen. But where FLOSY espoused traditional Arab nationalist programs and looked to Nasser for inspiration and guidance, the NLF moved steadily leftward, becoming a Marxist-Leninist organization that wanted to establish a proletarian democracy in South Arabia, free from Egyptian and Yemeni influence. Soon, NLF and FLOSY violence was directed at each other as often as it was at British and federal interests, and the political and military situation in South Arabia became even more confused.<sup>54</sup>

As its control over South Arabia disintegrated, the British government looked to the United States for support. The Johnson administration gave it grudgingly. In April 1964 Foreign Secretary Butler asked Secretary of State Rusk to intercede with Nasser to stop Egyptian support for the violence that was beginning to consume Aden.<sup>55</sup> The secretary, anxious to preserve stability in the region, agreed. In fact, U.S. officials believed that British policy in southwestern Arabia was confused and poorly implemented, hopping from one stopgap political and military solution to the next. The State Department's executive secretary observed to McGeorge Bundy that London's strategy in the region seemed to be one of "temporizing and muddling through." By the autumn of 1965, the U.S. consul in Aden, Curtis F. Jones, concluded that British policy in South Arabia was in complete disarray.<sup>56</sup>

As Britain's control over Aden deteriorated, U.S. military planners and intelligence officials began to retreat from the Kennedy administration's position that Aden's military facilities were vitally important Western assets in the Middle East. Increasingly, they seemed to be liabilities. In any event, they probably could not be salvaged for the West in the wake of South Arabia's independence. Britain's departure from Aden might lead to increased Egyptian and Soviet influence in the region, they predicted, but this would not seriously jeopardize the flow of Persian Gulf oil to Western Europe.<sup>57</sup>

If the Johnson administration became fundamentally skeptical of Aden's value as a military asset to the West and was resigned to the fact that communist and radical anti-Western nationalist influence in the region would grow after South Arabian independence, it was determined that Britain's departure from the area should be orderly. More than anything, U.S. policymakers feared that a premature and disorderly British retreat from its commitments in Aden would create a destabilizing power vacuum in Arabia, which would endanger U.S. and British allies in the Persian Gulf region.<sup>58</sup> Time and again, State Department officials emphasized the importance of "an orderly evolution to

independence in South Arabia” and their belief that “any precipitate British withdrawal from the Aden area . . . would result in a chaotic situation in South Arabia harmful to general Western interests.”<sup>59</sup>

By the summer of 1965, the Wilson government recognized that Britain’s access to its military facilities in Aden could not survive South Arabian independence. Not only would local nationalist hostility prevent it, but London’s increasingly dire financial predicament and the debate it generated in Whitehall concerning Britain’s Middle East strategy militated against it. When his Labour government took power in October 1964, Wilson ordered Defence Secretary Denis Healey to conduct a major review of British military commitments and to reduce defense expenditures by 17 percent, or £400 million, a year, cutting it from 7 percent to 5 percent of Britain’s gross national product.<sup>60</sup> It soon became apparent to policymakers in London that substantial cuts in British commitments and expenditures in the Middle East must be made.<sup>61</sup>

By the following summer, the Foreign Office and Colonial Office were beginning to conclude reluctantly that the Aden facilities could not be maintained after South Arabian independence. An independent South Arabian state, no matter how stable or friendly to the West, would not be impervious to pressures from radical Arab and African states to curtail British access to the bases. Therefore, a Colonial Office official concluded, it was in Britain’s interest “to make a virtue of necessity and, in our own time, progressively shed or transfer the external strategic functions now served by the Aden Base.”<sup>62</sup> By August the Ministry of Defence was prepared to downgrade Aden to a “staging post” for British military operations in the region, and on November 24, the cabinet’s Defence and Oversea Policy Committee decided formally that “when South Arabia becomes independent in 1967 or 1968, Her Majesty’s Government should not maintain any defence obligations to, or defence facilities or forces in South Arabia.”<sup>63</sup>

The Wilson government realized that abandoning its military facilities in Aden would be very difficult politically and would need to be accomplished carefully. A hasty departure would create a political vacuum in the region and alarm Britain’s client states in the Persian Gulf. Britain must not be seen to be forced from its military position in southern Arabia. Rather, it should explain that the Aden base was of diminishing importance to its regional strategy.<sup>64</sup> The Wilson government must reassure the Rulers of the Gulf states that its departure from Aden in no way reduced London’s commitment to their security. To make this point, a portion of the British forces in Aden should be redeployed to other bases from which they could meet London’s obligations in the area. Further, the defense guarantee to Kuwait, the original *raison d’être* of the Aden base, must be reconsidered in light of shrinking British resources in the region and the Kuwaiti government’s increasing reluctance to be seen as a British client. Finally, Britain should attempt to win the support of the United

States for its plans. A program of financial assistance from Washington could help bolster the new South Arabian government and stabilize the region.

The Wilson government recognized the need to assure the Persian Gulf Rulers of Britain's continued interest in their security following its departure from Aden. Consequently, on the day the cabinet's Defence and Oversea Policy Committee approved the decision to vacate the Aden base, it approved the redeployment of British forces from Aden to new facilities in the Persian Gulf emirates of Bahrain and Sharjah.<sup>65</sup> The redeployment from Aden was slated to begin in October 1967 and would double the number of British troops in the Gulf to 7,000. This was to be a third the size of the combined British presence in the Gulf and Aden prior to South Arabian independence.<sup>66</sup>

Britain's abandonment of the Aden base and redeployment to the Gulf greatly complicated London's plans to defend Kuwait. Anglo-Kuwaiti relations had changed a great deal, however, since the June 1961 Exchange of Letters had granted the emirate its independence. Not only had Kuwaiti oil become less important to the British economy, but the government of Kuwait worked assiduously to win favor in the Arab world by distancing itself from Britain politically.<sup>67</sup> British plans to defend the Kuwaiti oil fields called for the deployment of 11,000 ground troops to the Gulf from the Aden base. The same defense was clearly impossible with Persian Gulf-based reserves less than two-thirds the size of the force that had been available from southern Arabia. The Wilson government therefore informed the Kuwaiti government in early 1966 that unless it was given two to three weeks advanced notice of an attack on the emirate, it would not be able to muster and transport enough troops from Britain to the Gulf for a ground defense. Kuwait would have to be satisfied with air assistance from Bahrain. Britain did not expect much resistance to the new strategy from the Ruler. One Foreign Office official noted to a State Department officer that "it might be that Kuwait would be moving away from the idea of British support and not altogether sorry to see the British commitment reduced."<sup>68</sup>

As it made its plans to abandon the Aden base and to redeploy some of its forces to the Gulf, the Wilson government kept Washington informed of its intentions. In early February 1966, just two weeks before it was to publish the results of its defense review, the Wilson government sent a high-level Foreign Office delegation to Washington to confer with the State Department. The delegation, led by Deputy Undersecretary Sir Roger Allen, informed Assistant Secretary of State Parker Hart of Britain's intention to vacate the Aden base and to redeploy British troops to the Persian Gulf. Allen hoped that U.S. influence and resources could smooth the course of British diplomacy in Arabia. He attempted to convince the U.S. government to support the new South Arabian State financially. He believed "an early intimation of this might well help to avert a breakup of the state before independence is reached. It would

also serve to establish American influence in South Arabia before Soviet and Chinese competition come into play.” Further, the British delegation hoped to enlist what little U.S. influence remained in Cairo to convince Nasser to stop supporting nationalist violence against British interests in Aden and to persuade his NLF and FLOSY clients to join the constitutional process in South Arabia.

Hart and his colleagues listened carefully to Allen’s presentation but were careful not to make any commitments to South Arabia. Instead, they praised the Labour government’s determination to build up their military forces in the Persian Gulf “to a strength sufficient to meet local security problems, to reassure Iran, and to play a long-term stabilizing role in the region.” Hart also ventured that new military facilities in the Indian Ocean might prove valuable to Britain’s capability for future action in the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf and play a significant part in securing Western interests there.<sup>69</sup> Anglo-American plans to construct Indian Ocean bases had been in the works for almost two years and represented an important new element in Washington’s and London’s diplomacy in the Persian Gulf region.

### **An Indian Ocean Strategy for the Persian Gulf Region**

Since the era of the Napoleonic wars, the Indian Ocean had been a British lake. Britain’s naval supremacy there had helped it to secure its interests in the Arabian Peninsula and Persian Gulf as well as in East Africa, India, and Southeast Asia. With the future of its military facilities in South Arabia in doubt, strategic planners in London and Washington began to explore the possibility of using the tiny British-controlled islands of the Indian Ocean as substitutes for the Aden base. By doing so they reaffirmed the importance of the Indian Ocean to Persian Gulf and Arabian security and confirmed the unity of the greater Persian Gulf region in Anglo-American strategy.<sup>70</sup>

As early as 1959, the U.S. Navy’s Long Range Objectives Group had noted the relative weakness of American naval forces in the Indian Ocean and the growing Soviet interest in extending its military presence there.<sup>71</sup> It was not until the early 1960s, however, when Britain’s influence in the Arabian Peninsula and Persian Gulf began to erode, that U.S. interest in the development of Indian Ocean bases accelerated. National Security Council staff member Robert Komer noted to President Kennedy in June 1963 that “it is a simple fact that our greatest lack of conventional deterrent power lies along the broad arc from Suez to Singapore . . . We have traditionally left the defense of this region to the British, yet their strength is waning at a time when we face a potential show of force or actual combat needs ranging from Saudi Arabia to the Persian Gulf and Iran through India and Burma to Malaysia.”

The most important reason U.S. strategists articulated to pursue a new Indian Ocean strategy related to Britain's weakening position in the Persian Gulf and Arabian Peninsula. By engaging London in talks on new Indian Ocean bases, the United States hoped to encourage the British to remain in strength east of Suez and to link them more securely to the Persian Gulf area. As Komer told Bundy, "[I]t would be far more expensive if we have to fill the vacuum in the Indian Ocean than to keep the UK there. . . . It would be far cheaper to subsidize HMG than to wake up a few years from now to find that we must substitute for the power vacuum its drawdown of forces creates."<sup>72</sup>

Meanwhile, in London, British strategists were beginning to explore alternatives in the Indian Ocean to its Aden base. Facilities in the Indian Ocean, they concluded, would help to "ensure that we can get about the world." They would provide new forward staging bases for naval activities in the Middle East. They might also serve as substitutes for the Admiralty's fuel oil depot in Aden and act as locations for strategic communications and relay facilities across the sea to Australia and Southeast Asia. Further, new island bases would be "an extremely valuable insurance policy against an uncertain future" in the Gulf and Arabia. Partnership with the United States in developing these facilities, they believed, would help to "spread the defence load" and to "persuade the Americans to associate themselves more closely with our defence arrangements in the area." Perhaps, more importantly, British policymakers came to believe that the United States "will regard the development of [Indian Ocean bases] as proof that Britain has not only the will, but the means, to play a continuing strategic role in Africa and the western Indian Ocean, and that we shall not leave a military vacuum in the areas after we withdraw from Aden."<sup>73</sup> British policymakers thus continued their strategy of interdependence by using their assets in the Indian Ocean to encourage U.S. political and financial support for Britain's regional interests in Persian Gulf and Arabian Sea.

In February 1964 a U.S. delegation led by Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Jeffrey C. Kitchen arrived in London to explore the possibility of Anglo-American cooperation in the Indian Ocean. His British hosts received him warmly. In the course of their discussions, the U.S. diplomats explained that they did not wish to assume Britain's responsibilities in the area but to supplement them. They "were trying to do some forward thinking concerning possible requirements for military resources in an area of mutual interests stretching from the Gulf of Oman eastward."<sup>74</sup>

Of particular interest to U.S. strategists were the islands administered by Britain's colonial protectorates Mauritius and the Seychelles, "those island locations which could be put to the military service of the West in an emergency without delay, negotiation, or political restraint" because they were sparsely inhabited and far from the centers of anti-Western nationalism on the Indian Ocean's peripheries. Diego Garcia, a V-shaped atoll in the Chagos

Archipelago controlled by Mauritius, seemed especially promising for military use, and the U.S. delegation asked that a joint Anglo-American team survey the island as soon as possible.<sup>75</sup>

Britain's ideas coincided largely with those of the United States. Strategists in London imagined a "strategic triangle" of island bases comprising Diego Garcia; the Aldabra, northwest of Madagascar; and the Cocos and Keeling Islands, in the eastern Indian Ocean, administered by Australia. They agreed, however, that Diego Garcia would receive priority in Anglo-American calculations. British and American engineers surveyed the island during July and August 1964.

Both U.S. and British planners recognized the political difficulties inherent in establishing new bases in the Indian Ocean. In order to avoid the nationalist unrest then making Britain's access to the Aden base untenable, they agreed the islands would have to be emptied, forcibly if necessary, of their small populations. Further, the islands under consideration in the central and western Indian Ocean would need to be detached from Mauritius and the Seychelles and "transferred to some more manipulable context."<sup>76</sup> In other words, they would have to be brought under direct British control. Opposition to the plan would undoubtedly be fierce. Mauritius was about to be granted its independence and would understandably regard the Anglo-American plans as an affront to its sovereignty. The nations of the Indian Ocean periphery would condemn U.S. and British actions, and the Afro-Asian bloc in the UN General Assembly would castigate Washington and London for their "neo-imperialism."<sup>77</sup> Still, U.S. and British officials pressed on with their plans.

In London, the foreign policy establishment was divided over the new Indian Ocean strategy. All agreed that the cabinet was within its legal rights to issue an Order in Council to detach the Chagos Archipelago from Mauritius and Aldabra from the Seychelles. Still, the Colonial Office believed the Mauritian government would need to be consulted in advance of the move. Was the Wilson government prepared to go ahead with detachment if Mauritius opposed it?<sup>78</sup>

In Washington, too, the Indian Ocean base strategy had its critics. Most importantly, Secretary of Defense McNamara never warmed to the idea. The Department of Defense's Systems Analysis Division believed the project was too expensive, and the role of Indian Ocean bases not sufficiently well defined. American military resources, they believed, were better spent on the war effort in Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, the State Department, and Paul Nitze, who served successively as assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs, secretary of the navy, and deputy defense secretary during the 1960s, continued to champion the "strategic islands" policy.<sup>79</sup>

Progress on the Indian Ocean base scheme was fitful between 1964 and 1967. British officials placated the government of Mauritius, which initially balked at the idea of detaching the Chagos Archipelago, by offering to pay it

\$28 million in compensation. Meanwhile, the United States agreed, secretly, to absorb half of that expense by reducing the research and development costs to Britain of the Polaris submarines it was selling to the Wilson government. Both governments agreed to keep the arrangement from the public.<sup>80</sup> In October 1965, the cabinet approved an Order in Council to detach Diego Garcia and its neighboring islands from Mauritius, and the following month the British government announced the creation of the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT), a dependent entity administered directly from London. In December 1966 the United States and Britain signed twin political and economic agreements governing issues of sovereignty and joint use of any facilities constructed in the new BIOT.<sup>81</sup>

At the same time South Arabia was plunging into anarchy and Britain was losing its grip on the Aden base, new Indian Ocean military facilities promised London and Washington new means to secure their interests and keep their commitments in the Persian Gulf region. However, the United States was fully consumed by the conflict in Vietnam, and Britain did not have the financial means to pursue its plans in the region alone. The year 1967, however, was a pivotal one for both U.S. and British policy in the Persian Gulf, Arabia, and the Indian Ocean. As 1968 opened, London and Washington would be compelled to make choices that would transform their relationship to the area.

### **Britain's Decision to Withdraw from East of Suez**

The year 1967 was one of crisis and decision for British and American policymakers struggling to shape their nations' diplomacy in the Persian Gulf region. A series of overlapping crises, domestic and foreign, confronted London and Washington that year. Britain's unsuccessful application to the European common market, the economic dislocation caused by the Arab-Israeli war, the Labour government's decision to withdraw militarily from the Far East, South Arabia's final descent into anarchy and violence before independence, and a last, unsuccessful effort to stave off devaluation of the pound created political cleavages within the Labour Party. The resultant struggles, between members of the cabinet and between the government and Labour's backbench, drove Wilson's January 1968 decision to withdraw from the Persian Gulf by the end of 1971.

On May 9, 1967, the Wilson government made formal application for British membership in the European Economic Community (EEC). It was the first time Britain had done so since French President Charles de Gaulle vetoed the Macmillan government's 1963 application, and it was the first time a Labour government had attempted to establish a new economic and political role for Britain in Europe through the mechanism of the common market. Wilson's application revealed his growing conviction that Britain's economic

and political interests were not being served well by its diminishing role as a power in the Persian Gulf region and in the Far East. In Europe, Britain could assume a leadership position and act as a bridge between the United States and its continental allies.<sup>82</sup>

Britain's application further underscored the growing influence within the Labour cabinet of such pro-Europeanists as George Brown, then chairman of the Department of Economic Affairs, Minister of Technology Tony Benn, and Lord President of the Council Richard Crossman. Benn explained that he and his allies in the cabinet wished to see "imperial Britain" replaced by an "industrial Britain" within the EEC.<sup>83</sup>

In Washington, the Johnson administration viewed Britain's application favorably. American policymakers believed Britain should play a key role in Western European security and defense. The British Army of the Rhine in Germany was a vital component of NATO defense strategy and should be maintained at full strength. At the same time, London should remain actively engaged east of Suez.

Wilson's application for EEC membership became a moot point on May 16, 1967. A week after Britain submitted its application, de Gaulle again vetoed it. However, the episode illuminates the changing opinion within the Labour government over British foreign policy priorities and the emerging conviction that Britain's role east of Suez should be replaced by a new, more active role in Europe.

As 1967 opened, the Wilson government's determination to remain engaged east of Suez remained intact. The government's defence white paper of January 1967 reconfirmed that the end of Britain's "Confrontation" with Indonesia would allow it to reduce the number of its troops in Southeast Asia substantially. Although Britain still intended to evacuate the Aden base in 1968 following South Arabia's independence, the white paper restated the Wilson government's intention to remain in the Gulf and to reinforce its garrisons at Bahrain and Sharjah.<sup>84</sup> Defence Secretary Denis Healy, however, was still tasked with reducing British defense expenditures to £2 billion per year in 1964 terms and realized that British commitments east of Suez must be cut substantially. In April 1967 Foreign Secretary George Brown explained to Rusk that Britain would have to abolish its military presence in Southeast Asia by the mid-1970s.<sup>85</sup>

The Johnson administration was deeply angered. As the conflict in Vietnam demanded greater amounts of U.S. military resources, political capital, and attention from policymakers in Washington, Britain's presence in Southeast Asia grew in importance to the United States. If the Wilson government refused to send troops to Vietnam, its presence in the region at least legitimized Western security interests there and validated the efforts of the Western powers to impose stability in the area. Britain's withdrawal, the

Johnson administration feared, would call into question U.S. commitments in Vietnam and elsewhere. On May 11 Rusk made the point in a letter to Brown. He wrote:

The decision your Cabinet is making to withdraw entirely from the area will have the most devastating repercussions in all kinds of directions, and, since it will set up chain reactions that will strike at the very basis of our whole post-war foreign policy, it is of transcending importance that the Cabinet fully understand the grave implications of such a decision . . . a decision to withdraw entirely in the mid-1970s would be a disaster to us, that American opinion would not stand for picking up the abandoned British position, and that if Europe is withdrawing from the world while the US is carrying a major burden in defending Europe, the pressures in the US might also lead to a US withdrawal from Europe.<sup>86</sup>

The stridency of the U.S. response to British plans in the Far East revealed a genuine sense of vulnerability and betrayal. The arguments Bruce and Rusk employed with Brown anticipated those the Johnson administration would use months later concerning Britain's decision to leave the Persian Gulf, and the blunt language and confrontational tone presaged the Rusk-Brown meeting of January 1968. Clearly, the Wilson government was taken aback by the anger of the U.S. response. Years later, Healy recorded caustically in his memoirs that "the United States, after trying for thirty years to get Britain out of Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, was now trying desperately to keep us in; during the Vietnam war it did not want to be the only country killing coloured people on their own soil."<sup>87</sup>

Britain's resolution to withdraw from Southeast Asia by the mid-1970s, formalized in a supplementary defense white paper of July 1967, removed an important reason for Britain to remain in the Persian Gulf.<sup>88</sup> Gulf oil remained vitally important to Britain, but Britain's client states, ports, and military air facilities in Gulf region had always been important weigh stations on its route to South and Southeast Asia. Now, they were toll-gates on the route to nowhere.

The Arab-Israeli War of June 1967 seemed further to undermine the reasons for Britain's lingering presence in the Persian Gulf and Arabia. On June 5, 1967, conflict erupted between Israel and the United Arab Republic, Syria, and Jordan. The next day, Iraq, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia announced that they were embargoing the shipment of oil produced by Western firms in their countries to the United States, Britain, and West Germany, whom they accused of colluding with Israel in its initial strike against the Arab states. American intelligence analysts believed that the Arab oil embargo posed serious potential economic difficulties for Western Europe and Japan. The CIA estimated on June 7 that the denial of Arab oil to those regions could cut their supplies of oil to 85 percent of normal during the embargo's first six months and to 60 percent of normal

after that as petroleum stockpiles were depleted. This could cause a sharp decline in industrial production and produce "severe economic depression." Britain, the agency concluded, would be particularly hard-hit because of its weak reserve and balance of payments position.<sup>89</sup>

On June 10 the Johnson administration declared an oil emergency and reformed the Foreign Petroleum Supply Committee that had been created during the 1951–1953 Iranian crisis and operated again during the Suez crisis three years later. The United States increased its production of petroleum to fill the deficit caused by the embargo, and the Western nations' fleets of oil tankers were diverted from their normal routes to deliver fuel to Europe and Japan.<sup>90</sup>

Meanwhile, although the Syrian oil pipelines were shut down and the Suez Canal was closed, the Gulf states of Abu Dhabi and Bahrain continued to ship oil to Britain and the West. The governments of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, however, maintained their embargo while working quietly behind the scenes to moderate the strident rhetoric of the radical Arab states and to secure their business relationships with U.S. and British oil firms.<sup>91</sup>

The 1967 oil embargo proved a failure as a coercive tool for the Arab states. Emergency procedures developed by the United States and its allies during the Middle East crises of the 1950s enabled them to supply petroleum to Western Europe and Japan in quantities necessary to stave off significant economic difficulty. The embargo ended with a whimper when the Arab heads-of-state conference in Khartoum called for the resumption of oil production and shipments to the West in September.

Still, the already fragile British economy suffered as a result of the war and embargo. The conflict put pressure on sterling. The closure of the Suez Canal disrupted Middle Eastern shipping, curtailed British invisible exports, and cost Britain some \$200 million in the first six months, a sum equal to 20 percent of its total reserves. The shipping cost of transporting oil to Britain quadrupled as oil had to be sent from the Gulf around the Cape of Good Hope. Consequently, London's trade account suffered by £90 million in 1967.<sup>92</sup> Just as importantly, to many in the left wing of the Labour Party, the June crisis called into question the value of Britain's military presence in the Persian Gulf states and Arabia to its regional interests. In July, Lord President of the Council Richard Crossman wrote to the prime minister that in the Middle East, "the case for cutting our military commitments as soon as possible has been greatly strengthened by recent events. In the Arab world a British military presence is an embarrassment to our friends and a provocation to our enemies and does not seem to strengthen our hands in negotiations. I believe that we should now decide to . . . cancel our treaty obligations in the Persian Gulf as soon as this can be done without repercussions."<sup>93</sup> Crossman's criticism resonated with a growing number of his cabinet colleagues who were becoming convinced that Britain's presence in the Persian Gulf region should be brought to an end.

The Arab-Israeli war also reshaped the political and military situation in South Arabia, which, in the second half of 1967, was "careening toward independence."<sup>94</sup> Following his military humiliation in June, Nasser decided to withdraw Egyptian forces from Yemen and to end his financial and logistical support to FLOSY. At the time, FLOSY was battling for control of the South Arabian nationalist movement with the ultra-leftist NLF. Egypt's hasty retreat from the South Arabian political scene, coupled with the simultaneous mutiny of the South Arabian Army, rendered Aden completely ungovernable and, in the words of Brian Lapping, "raised the NLF from the favourite to win the murderous race for the succession in to the unchallenged winner, cantering down the home straight."<sup>95</sup>

The Wilson government continued to try to enlist U.S. help in bringing South Arabia to independence in an orderly fashion. The Johnson administration continued to demur. Consumed by its war in Vietnam and convinced of Aden's diminishing strategic value to the West, the U.S. government had no desire to involve itself in an effort to thwart another Marxist-Leninist national liberation front in another corner of the developing world.<sup>96</sup>

By the beginning of November, Britain's continued presence in Aden had become completely untenable. The two rival groups for postindependence power were engaged in all-out war with each other, the remains of the federal government, and with the few British troops remaining in the city. Meanwhile, the British high commissioner in Aden, Sir Humphrey Trevelyan, attempted to bring the NLF and FLOSY together to discuss the terms of the final handover of power. It was not until November 22 that the British and the leaders of the NLF, triumphant in their struggle with FLOSY, met in Geneva to sign a proclamation of independence for South Arabia. One week later, the final British military contingent left the former colony of Aden by helicopter, and on December 4, 1967, the United States granted formal diplomatic recognition to the People's Republic of Southern Yemen.<sup>97</sup>

For the first time in 128 years, Britain no longer controlled the southwestern portion of the Arabian Peninsula. The cornerstone of the British political and diplomatic structure in the Persian Gulf region was no more. With Anglo-American bases in the Indian Ocean as yet unbuilt and British troops not yet redeployed to Bahrain and Sharjah, London's ability to discharge its military obligations to Kuwait and the other Gulf emirates was in serious jeopardy. Another sterling crisis proved fatal to Britain's long tenure in the Gulf.

### **The November 1967 Sterling Crisis**

In late October, State Department official Anthony Solomon reported to Rusk that "the British austerity program to end the balance of payments deficit by increasing productivity and holding down price and wage increases, has run

out of steam.”<sup>98</sup> The combination of its failed application to the EEC, the economic consequences of the Arab-Israeli war, and an eight-week dock-workers’ strike that began in September ruined foreign confidence in Britain’s finances and placed renewed downward pressure on sterling. In early November, the British embassy notified the U.S. treasury secretary, Henry Fowler, that its government was “near the end of the line. Without assurance of long-term credit they [the British government] may have to devalue—perhaps within a week.”<sup>99</sup> But the Johnson administration was in no position to intervene in the sterling market again. Balance-of-payments difficulties and an incipient U.S. gold crisis made it impossible for the United States to come once more to the rescue of the pound. Instead, Johnson bowed to the inevitable and tried to head off other European devaluations while protecting the position of the dollar.

On November 18 the Wilson government announced that it was devaluing sterling by 14.3 percent. Henceforth, the pound would be valued at \$2.40 rather than \$2.80. The State Department instructed U.S. foreign missions to make clear that the U.S. government viewed the British action as “both necessary and desirable,” and the president issued a statement saying that he realized the British decision “was made with great reluctance, and I understand the powerful reasons that made it necessary under the circumstances.” The United States, he reiterated, would continue to meet its international monetary responsibilities and to buy and sell gold at the existing price of \$35 per ounce.<sup>100</sup>

What would the repercussions of devaluation be for Britain’s commitments in the Persian Gulf? Throughout the difficulties of 1967, the Wilson government had reiterated its intention to remain committed to Gulf security. In April Wilson had told the House of Commons that “the Gulf is an area of such vital importance not only to the economy of Western Europe as a whole but also to world peace that it would be totally irresponsible of us to withdraw our forces from the area.” On November 29, 11 days after devaluation, Foreign Secretary Brown repeated his government’s pledge. “We will do our duty there [in the Gulf] as we are committed to do,” he declared.<sup>101</sup>

In November, Brown amplified his message by dispatching the Foreign Office’s minister of state, Goronwy Roberts, to the Gulf emirates as well as Tehran and Riyadh. As Roberts explained earnestly to the shah of Iran:

[T]he purpose of his visit to the Persian Gulf had been to assure the Rulers there that Her Majesty’s Government intended to maintain their military and political presence in the Gulf for as long as it was necessary and useful to do so, in order to preserve the peace and stability of the area. They had set no time limit to their intentions in this regard.<sup>102</sup>

State Department officials were skeptical.<sup>103</sup>

The Wilson government’s determination was short-lived. The devaluation crisis and the subsequent need for new spending cuts transformed a debate

over London's ability to pay for its foreign policy commitments into a political and ideological struggle between rival factions within the Labour Party and the cabinet. Ultimately, Wilson's decision to announce Britain's withdrawal from the Gulf stemmed more from this political clash than from his calculation of the financial costs of remaining in the Gulf, which were really rather small.<sup>104</sup>

Between November and January, both cabinet politics and a deeper ideological debate within the Labour Party concerning Britain's imperial role drove the Labour government's decision making on Persian Gulf issues. On one level, the prime minister worked to conciliate the left-wing members of his cabinet over the composition of new spending cuts. As a CIA analysis concluded in February 1968, Prime Minister Wilson, confronted with the necessity of bringing about drastic improvements in Britain's balance of payments, faced the political requirement of compensating Labour's left wing for an inevitable reduction of outlays on social services by speeding the withdrawal of its military forces east of Suez.<sup>105</sup> In this effort, Wilson was extremely successful. He held his cabinet together and maneuvered adroitly between Labour factions, the Foreign Office, and the Ministry of Defence as he worked to align British resources and commitments in the Gulf.

On another level, Wilson found himself at the center of an ideological debate within the Labour Party over the morality and propriety of Britain's late imperial role. The debate had been latent for years, but burst forth as Britain's economic situation eroded in 1967. For some time, U.S. analysts had perceived an important strain of "Little Englandism" among many of Labour's adherents.<sup>106</sup> The left-wing members of the Labour backbench in the Commons were particularly vociferous in their criticism of Wilson's advocacy of a commitment to remain east of Suez, and during the March 1967 debate on defense expenditures, they made their views loudly known to the Prime Minister.<sup>107</sup> In May 1967 Ambassador Bruce had reported to the State Department that serious trouble was brewing for Wilson inside his own party. He observed, "The defense budget, East of Suez, the Common Market, Vietnam, and domestic economic policies each have their special critics. While they may not unite on one issue, their sum is a range of discontent that infects a large section of the party. Even the loyalists are unhappy over the Prime Minister's failure to punish leftist rebels."<sup>108</sup>

In the Persian Gulf, members of the Labour Party's left wing saw Britain supporting reactionary shaikhly regimes against the progressive forces of Arab nationalism. The Wilson government's effort to "modernise" its relations with the Gulf emirates, they believed, was merely an attempt to give traditional, exploitative British policies in the region a new face. The Victorian empire was past, they argued, and it was time for the British government to renounce its policies in the Gulf and bring its military forces home.<sup>109</sup>

Following devaluation, this view acquired a much wider following than it enjoyed before, and found proponents not just among Labour's backbench,

but in the cabinet as well. It added an important new rationale to Britain's January 1968 decision to withdraw from the Gulf, lending it a moral quality. In many ways, the new prominence of the left-Labour critique of Britain's imperial pretensions made a virtue of necessity. In an important sense, though, it marked a transformation in British thinking about its lingering imperial role in the Middle East and helped drive Wilson's difficult decision in early January to end Britain's long tenure as a Persian Gulf power.

\* \* \* \*

Between 1964 and 1968, the carefully constructed diplomatic and military structure Britain had struggled to establish in the Persian Gulf and Arabian Peninsula over the previous decade steadily disintegrated. Nationalist violence forced Britain from Aden and South Arabia at the same time the changing structure of Britain's oil interests in the Gulf made the defense of Kuwait a less important priority for policymakers in London. Meanwhile, Britain's deteriorating balance of payments, pressure for devaluation of the pound, and the Wilson government's efforts to define a place for Britain in Europe transformed a debate over the nation's ability to afford its global role into a heated political discussion of the wisdom and propriety of London's lingering presence in the Persian Gulf region and elsewhere east of Suez.

In Washington, the Johnson administration continued to define U.S. interests in the Gulf region in terms of its Cold War strategy of containing communism. The administration's increasing preoccupation with the war in Southeast Asia and the president's skepticism of the efficacy of conciliating revolutionary Arab nationalism reshaped the United States' policies in the Gulf and Arabia. While midlevel State Department officials and U.S. diplomats in the area continued to criticize many of the trappings and policies of Britain's late imperial presence in the region, their superiors seldom expressed such concern. Instead, they encouraged Britain to remain actively engaged in the Middle East and Asia and to maintain its presence in the Gulf. They feared that Britain's departure would leave a vacuum of power that could be exploited by the Soviet Union and its allies and which the United States would be obligated to fill at great expense to itself. Just as importantly, they believed Britain's abdication of its responsibilities in the Middle East would be a terrible political and psychological blow to an American public that was questioning the extent of the United States' foreign policy commitments.

## **“The Twilight of the Pax Britannica”: The United States and Britain’s Departure from the Persian Gulf Region, 1968–1972**

Early in the afternoon of December 19, 1971, the British warships HMS *Achilles* and HMS *Intrepid* weighed anchor and steamed slowly out of the port of Bahrain toward the open sea. Sir Geoffrey Arthur, the last British political resident in the Persian Gulf, reported poignantly to Foreign Secretary Lord Home:

There was no ceremony as the last British fighting unit withdrew from the Persian Gulf: a British merchant vessel in the opposite berth blew her siren, and *Intrepid*’s lone piper, scarcely audible above the bustle of the port, played what sounded like some Gaelic lament. That was all.<sup>1</sup>

For the previous six months, Britain had steadily drawn down the military forces that it had redeployed so carefully to the Gulf following its demoralizing departure from Aden. In May the Royal Air Force fighter squadrons at Bahrain and Sharjah had withdrawn, followed in July by the infantry battalion in Bahrain. The last Royal Navy minesweepers had sailed in the autumn, and Headquarters British Forces Gulf closed its doors on December 16 after just four years and nine months in existence.

Arthur noted with satisfaction the precision with which Britain’s military departure from the Gulf unfolded. “Not one single untoward incident marred the smoothest and most friendly parting that anyone could have wished for; the political and military ‘presences’ faded together, and nobody had anything but good to say of the way our soldiers, sailors, and airmen had conducted themselves during their stay in the Gulf.”<sup>2</sup> In the past four years, he recorded, the Gulf states and the British government had put in place a political structure that, if managed thoughtfully by the peoples of the Gulf, could preserve

peace in the region. Yet the seasoned diplomat fretted, “Instability and chaos may still be just around the corner.” The structure was fragile, “and a long experience of the Middle East has left me with a profound pessimism about the ability of the Arabs—and for that matter of Iranians as well—to preserve stability for long without our help.”<sup>3</sup>

On the same day that *Achilles* and *Intrepid* departed Bahrain, Arthur witnessed two episodes that gave him pause, because he believed they were portents of things to come in the Gulf. First, he noted that even before *Intrepid* was lost to sight over the horizon, Bahraini tugs had moved alongside two U.S. Navy destroyers, which they helped into the berths just vacated by the British warships. Second, and perhaps more ominously, returning to the residency, Geoffrey’s car was held up in traffic behind a truck bearing crates plainly marked “Made in the People’s Republic of China.”<sup>4</sup> The Persian Gulf, he realized, would never be the same.

### **The Johnson Administration and Britain’s Decision to Leave the Gulf**

In the wake of Harold Wilson’s decision to withdraw from the Persian Gulf, U.S. officials were stunned and reiterated their litany of fears concerning Britain’s abdication of its global role. Ambassador Bruce in London was aghast. In a letter to Assistant Secretary of State William Bundy, he judged the decision “calamitous, destructive, selfish, myopic, and threatening to world orderliness.”<sup>5</sup> President Johnson wrote the prime minister:

I cannot conceal from you my deep dismay upon learning this profoundly discouraging news. If these steps are taken, they will be tantamount to British withdrawal from world affairs, with all that means for the future safety and health of the free world. The structure of peace-keeping will be shaken to its foundations. Our own capability and political will could be gravely weakened if we have to man the ramparts alone.<sup>6</sup>

Senator Majority Leader Mike Mansfield expressed the fears of many on Capitol Hill when he told journalists on the day of Wilson’s announcement, “I am sorry the British feel they were forced to take this step, because I am certain we will be asked to fill the vacuum east of Suez. I don’t know how we are going to do it because I don’t think we have the men or resources for it.”<sup>7</sup>

British diplomats in the Gulf region were also stunned and angered by the way the Labour government had arrived at its decision to leave the Gulf and by the suddenness and tactlessness with which the decision was presented to the Gulf Rulers. In a blistering despatch to the Foreign Office, the political resident in Bahrain, Sir Stewart Crawford, decried the “cumulative and shattering

effect" he believed the announcement was sure to have on local confidence in British diplomacy. It now fell to Crawford and his colleagues in the region to "steady the essentially unstable boat" of the Gulf states and prepare them to navigate "the rock-strewn and as yet invisible rapids ahead."<sup>8</sup>

The chief of the defense staff, Air Marshal Sir Charles Elworthy, also expressed apprehension at the decision to withdraw from east of Suez. He told Wilson and Defense Secretary Healy on January 12 that the move posed "a grave risk of serious and possibly dangerous instability" in the Far East and Persian Gulf. Moreover, "it was clear that the whole process would impose very grave strain on the morale, discipline, and efficiency of the Forces" tasked with implementing the decision on a rapidly dwindling budget.<sup>9</sup>

Predictably, the Wilson government also faced a furious assault by the opposition Conservative Party in Parliament. Former prime minister and Conservative spokesman for foreign affairs Sir Alec Douglas-Home condemned the decision to withdraw from east of Suez as "a dereliction of stewardship, the like of which this country has not seen in the conduct of foreign policy before." It would be Conservative policy, he explained, to consult with the Rulers of the Gulf to arrive at the most practical way to reverse the Labour policy and maintain Britain's presence in the region.<sup>10</sup>

In Washington, British ambassador Sir Patrick Dean was relieved that by early March the initial American dismay at the British announcement appeared to ebb. The public response in the United States was by then "one of sadness at the passing of an era rather than indignation." However, he noted, it might have unfortunate consequences for U.S.-British diplomacy: "One must not assume that the Anglo-American relationship has emerged unscathed." Dean recognized, further, that the prime minister's announcement might prove costly for Britain's strategy of interdependence with the Americans. "In the short term," he wrote, "I doubt there will be any perceptible difference, but in the longer term I am afraid that it will inevitably mean a further erosion of our ability to influence American policy and American interest in consulting us." Still, interdependence was a strategy worth pursuing. "If we can keep the initiative in our hands we can both perhaps restrain American impatience (and the ham-handedness which sometimes goes with it) and show the United States Government that we are politically still a world power and a worthwhile partner."<sup>11</sup>

### **British Interests and Resources in the Gulf Region in the Late 1960s**

In the months immediately before and after Wilson's announcement, British foreign policy makers thought carefully about the value of the Gulf to Britain economically and politically. They appraised their resources in the region, the financial and political costs of preserving or withdrawing them, and the

difficult local issues that must be resolved before they were able to depart. At the beginning of 1968, British officials estimated that 40 percent of Britain's oil supplies, and 50 percent of Western Europe's, came from the Gulf. Forty percent of the Gulf's oil was in the hands of British firms and constituted £1,000 million in foreign investment. This made a "substantial" contribution to the country's balance of payments, "running around £200 million a year."<sup>12</sup> Persian Gulf oil would continue to be a vital commodity into the early 1970s. In 1971, the year the last British troops were to be withdrawn from the Gulf, the region's oil was estimated to account for more than 30 percent of the oil produced for the world market and comprised more than 60 percent of the earth's proven petroleum resources.<sup>13</sup>

As 1968 dawned, Britain's physical presence in the Gulf region numbered 8,400 soldiers, sailors, and airmen. Of these, 7,230 were stationed in the Gulf itself, mostly in Bahrain and Sharjah. The remainder were stationed on the island of Masirah, in the Arabian Sea south of Oman, and in Mauritius.<sup>14</sup> The cost of maintaining these forces was estimated to be a modest £12 million per annum. Yet, the effect of this expenditure on Britain's balance of payments was mitigated by the fact that most of these funds were to be spent within the sterling area for British equipment, consumer goods, and transportation.<sup>15</sup>

Clearly, the financial cost of remaining in the Gulf was not prohibitive. In fact, Sheikh Zayid ibn Sultan al-Nahyan of Abu Dhabi told Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Goronwy Roberts in early January that he would be happy to fund the cost of the British military presence in the Gulf from his own oil revenues. Two weeks later, Sheikh Rashid ibn Said al-Maktum of Dubai made a similar offer on behalf of the four largest Trucial Emirates.<sup>16</sup> Defence Secretary Healy politely declined, contending that the sheikhs' offer of £25 million annually would not meet the full cost maintaining the forces and their supporting facilities. In fact, Wilson and his advisers had concluded that the continued presence of British forces in the region could not play a stabilizing effect in the Gulf indefinitely, and that remaining would "have implications far beyond the Gulf for the size of the United Kingdom base and the shape and structure of all our forces."<sup>17</sup> More importantly, Wilson would find it impossible to convince the left wing of his own party that preserving Britain's role in the Gulf region was wise or just.

Wilson and his advisers realized there was much work to be done before the end of 1971. For more than a century, Britain had played a dual role as the defender of the Persian Gulf from foreign encroachment and as the keeper of the peace between the Gulf's quarrelsome peoples. The Pax Britannica had prevented conflict between the small emirates of the Gulf littoral and discouraged the large powers of the region from laying claim to their tiny neighbors. Before Britain withdrew from the region, British and U.S. officials realized, the

region's latent disputes must be settled and mechanisms created that could mediate the inevitable quarrels that would reemerge after 1971.

### Threats to Persian Gulf Region Security

British and American policymakers identified four principle sets of problems with which they would have to grapple in the years leading up to Britain's final withdrawal from the Gulf: the menace posed by Arab radicalism emanating from Iraq, Egypt, and South Yemen; the somewhat less pressing danger of the Soviet Union exploiting Britain's weakening position in the Gulf through its regional clients; the efforts of the larger Gulf region states to secure their interests and extend their influence in the wake of Britain's withdrawal; and the desire of the tiny Gulf emirates to resolve ancient territorial disputes and further regional ambitions at one another's expense. This complex matrix of interests and aspirations by the peoples of the Gulf region greatly complicated British and American diplomacy in the region. Further, it underscored the degree to which the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula composed a single strategic and political structure whose parts were inextricably intertwined and whose problems must be resolved together.

One of the most immediate potential threats to Gulf security appeared to be the Baathist government of Iraq. The Baghdad government maintained political and military ties to Moscow and promoted a brand of revolutionary Arab socialism. Further, the Iraqis still asserted their right to possess Kuwait, and their relations with neighboring Iran were tense, as both nations aspired to control the strategic Shatt al Arab waterway at the northern end of the Gulf. Iraq also harbored territorial ambitions over Iran's oil-rich southern Khuzistan province, whose population had a significant proportion of Arabs.<sup>18</sup>

Nasser's Egypt, too, seemed to British officials and their Gulf clients to be a continuing threat to the stability of the shaikhly regimes of the region and the security of British, Western, and Iranian interests. The British Defence Review Working Party concluded that "Egypt will continue to be the leading Arab country and the leading apostle of Arab nationalism and the revolutionary cause." Heartened by Britain's humiliation in Aden, which the Egyptian government regarded as a victory for the forces of anti-Westernism and anti-imperialism, "they hope to press on to a similar victory in the Gulf, which they see as the last major bastion of British influence in the Middle East."<sup>19</sup> The government in Cairo posed no direct threat of military aggression, but it did support financially the efforts of anti-British subversive organizations in the Gulf. Nasser opposed British-sponsored Gulf unification and any regional defense planning that included imperial Iran. But in the wake of defeat in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, Nasser's and Egypt's influence was no longer what it was in

the heady period after Suez, and the Egyptian threat did not appear serious. Some officials within the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) once again began urging that Britain reconsider its fraught relationship with Nasser. In July 1968, D. J. Speares minuted, "I am quite convinced that our over-all interests in the Middle East are likely to be furthered by . . . cultivating and maintaining good relations" with Cairo "rather than by the policies we followed in the past."<sup>20</sup>

Posing a much smaller risk for British interests in the Gulf was the Marxist-Leninist insurgency being waged by the People's Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf (PFLOAG) in Oman's southern Dhofar province. It was subsidized by the nascent People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, as well as by communist China and, later, the Soviet Union. Since 1965 the British had been helping Sultan Said bin Taimur, and later his son Sultan Qaboos, battle fighters described by British political resident in the Gulf Sir Geoffrey Arthur as "controlled by men dedicated to change of the most violent and radical kind, men who forbid prayer and whose reading, if they read at all, is not the Koran but the Thoughts of Chairman Mao."<sup>21</sup>

American officials appreciated the dangers posed by Iraq, Egypt, and PFLOAG, but they also comprehended the limits on their abilities to cause mischief in the Gulf. The State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research concluded in November 1968 that "although the theoretical potential for subversion by the radical Arab states in the Gulf area appears considerable, they in fact have only very limited subversion capability there at present. Significant changes would have to occur for any of them to mount a serious threat."<sup>22</sup> The Americans, who over the past two decades had devoted so much attention to disentangling the knotty problem of revolutionary Arab nationalism and directing its energies in ways consistent with U.S. and Western interests, now concluded that the phenomenon posed no serious dangers to their interests in the Gulf.

However, the Johnson administration was apprehensive that groups such as the Baath Party and PFLOAG appeared to offer the Soviet Union an opportunity to extend its influence into the Gulf region. On March 3, just weeks after Wilson's announcement of British withdrawal, the Soviet news agency TASS signaled that the Kremlin was taking an interest in recent Persian Gulf developments.<sup>23</sup> The U.S. embassy in Moscow cabled Washington the following day that "since announcement British intention pull out armed forces Soviets have shown signs of casting increasingly covetous eyes on Persian Gulf."<sup>24</sup> State Department official William Brewer noted to British officials in London later that spring that "the State Department were watching the growing Soviet interest in the Gulf." Moscow, he surmised "would probably try to play a larger role in this part of the world."<sup>25</sup> The development caused anxiety in Washington, which continued to regard the Persian Gulf and its oil resources as elements in its larger strategy of containing Soviet influence.<sup>26</sup>

### Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Anglo-American Planning for the Gulf

The large states of the Gulf, most importantly Iran and Saudi Arabia, were a source of deep concern and apprehension in both London and Washington. Their differences were dramatic, both culturally and politically, yet their cooperation was essential if the Gulf were to be stable after Britain's departure. Each had long-standing territorial claims on lands held by various smaller Gulf emirates, and British and American officials feared that efforts by the Iranians and Saudis to make good on these claims would complicate the process of British withdrawal and jeopardize the fragile political stability of the region.

Saudi Arabia remained the most powerful Arab state on the Gulf. Its political orientation was pro-Western, but its relationship with Britain had been troubled by the long unresolved dispute over the Buraimi oasis. Reconciliation between London and Jidda followed the 1962 Yemeni revolution, but Saudi King Faisal had watched uneasily as British power disintegrated in Aden in 1966 and 1967, leaving the radical independent South Yemen on his southern border. Wilson's January announcement had not caught Faisal completely by surprise, but he deplored it and feared it would leave a political vacuum in the Gulf. He told American ambassador Hermann Eilts of his "deep concern about 'friends' disengaging from Middle East area" and "railed against [the] Labor government's 'irresponsibility.'"<sup>27</sup> He later told British ambassador Morgan Man that he regarded Britain's departure from the Gulf as a logical sequel to its retreat from southwestern Arabia, another action that "encouraged those who would endanger the security of his country and of its dynasty."<sup>28</sup>

Officials in Washington and London were both concerned that Faisal would use Britain's impending departure from the Gulf to forcibly resolve the old Buraimi issue and to assert his territorial claims with Sheikh Zayed of Abu Dhabi and Sultan Said bin Taimur of Oman, dormant since the mid-1950s.<sup>29</sup> Saudi Arabia's traditional rivalry with Iran for dominance in the Persian Gulf region, and a simmering dispute between Tehran and Riyadh over the "median line" dividing Saudi and Iranian claims to offshore Gulf oil deposits, could also cause difficulties for British and U.S. policies.

Both the Wilson government and the Johnson administration realized that Iran's reaction to Britain's impending departure from the Gulf would be critically important. The shah was extremely eager that Iran should assume Britain's role in the Gulf, and he might reassert Iran's old claim to Bahrain. The island sheikhdom's inhabitants included a great many ethnic Persians, and the Tehran government often referred to Bahrain as Iran's "fourteenth province."

As early as 1965, the shah had expounded to U.S. ambassador Armin Meyer on "Iran's obvious destiny along with the Saudis, as heirs to [the] British, to protect security and tranquility of the Gulf not only from predatory regional threateners but in interest of [the] whole free world."<sup>30</sup> As he articulated a policy

of “independent nationalism,” the shah continued to assure the United States of his “desire to develop closer and cooperative relationships with the various Gulf riparian states” but was determined that “Iran could go it alone” in the Gulf, if necessary. In February 1968, the shah wrote to Johnson that “the Persian Gulf is vital for Iran and is a matter of life and death to us. So long as our heart beats and there is any strength left in us, we shall do our utmost to keep it a free zone and a stable one.”<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile, the Iranian prime minister, Amin Abbas Hoveida, declared that Iran would “not permit any country outside the region to interfere . . . Britain’s exit from one door must not result in America’s entrance from the other door—or in British re-entry in a new form.”<sup>32</sup> Privately, however, the shah was not so assertive or confident. He told Conservative Party leader Edward Heath in April 1969 that “he deplored the British decision to withdraw by the end of 1971, which he regarded as an incomprehensible loss of willpower. But once the British left it would not be possible to ask them to come back.”<sup>33</sup>

As usual, the shah was anxious. He worried about Iraqi designs on the Shatt al Arab and on Iranian Khuzistan and feared the radical, antimonarchical character of the government in Baghdad. He continued to fret about the dangers posed to his regime and the Gulf by Arab radicalism and by the influence this would give the Soviets in the region. In conversation with U.S. secretary of state William P. Rogers in October 1969, the shah recounted that he “saw the Soviets gaining domination of the area through a pincer movement, one arm of which started in the UAR and came up the Arabian Peninsula through Yemen. The other arm extended down from Iraq aimed toward Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.”<sup>34</sup>

### Competition and Conflict in the Lower Gulf

The most vexing issues that faced British and U.S. policy in the Gulf following Wilson’s announcement concerned the disposition of the tiny sheikhdoms of the southern Gulf, the seven Trucial States, as well as the larger and wealthier emirates of Bahrain and Qatar. While British diplomats had immersed themselves in the minutiae of the lower Gulf’s dynastic politics and territorial ambitions since the early nineteenth century, U.S. analysts struggled in the wake of Britain’s announcement to understand the complexities of the area. Relations among the small sheikhdoms were byzantine. The State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research noted that “the lower Gulf coast of the Arabian Peninsula is a checkerboard of small sheikhdoms, each as a general rule at odds with its neighbors and allied to its neighbors’ neighbors.”<sup>35</sup> The Americans were beginning to see the problems the British had long appreciated in the lower Gulf. Suppressing local rivalries and creating a structure that would promote Gulf unity and continue to keep local disputes under wraps would be a daunting task.<sup>36</sup>

What problems, specifically, might follow from the lower Gulf's disunity? In the wake of Wilson's January announcement, the Johnson administration expected the Gulf states to scramble for new patrons and for advantage over one another and feared this would open the door to Soviet influence in the region. The U.S. consulate general in Saudi Arabia cabled to Washington that "each of the lower Gulf rulers will play off one principal riparian against others for own advantage. Gulf will become a cockpit of heightened differences of kind of which Commies and other subversives thrive." Assistant Secretary of State Lucius Battle argued to Secretary Rusk that "in their search for powerful protectors, it seems clear the Gulf states would prefer a greater role on the part of the US, but they will trim their sails in any direction that future circumstances may dictate."<sup>37</sup>

Meanwhile, at the northern and southern ends of the Gulf, Kuwait, the largest and wealthiest of the Gulf oil emirates, and Muscat and Oman, autonomous and not formally under British protection, viewed Wilson's decision nervously. The emir of Kuwait saw his country as "at the vortex of a troubled region."<sup>38</sup> Would Britain's departure bring a renewed Iraqi threat to Kuwait's security? Would Nasser's Egypt make greater demands that Kuwait be more generous with its oil wealth to the Arab world? Would Iran attempt to bully it into recognizing Tehran's dominance in the area? British ambassador Sam Falle reported to London in 1970, "The rich Kuwaitis do not know what to do?"<sup>39</sup> British withdrawal from the region also posed dangers for Muscat and Oman. Although beset by rebellion in his southern Dhofar province, the sultan did not question the Labour government's decision. Still, as Crawford noted, "the decision must have disturbed him greatly, for it is bound to complicate the security situation within and on the borders of the Sultanate, and he has very little time to prepare for the final shock to the whole area which our withdrawal will cause."<sup>40</sup>

### Planning for Britain's Departure from the Gulf Begins

Soon after they had expressed their anger and anxiety and begun to appraise the daunting situation ahead of them, U.S. foreign policy makers, and their counterparts in London, began to plan carefully and deliberately for Britain's departure from the Gulf. In doing so, they followed the counsel of National Security Adviser Walt Rostow, who quoted American labor leader Joe Hill and urged President Johnson, "Don't mourn, organize!"<sup>41</sup>

American officials feared that Britain's withdrawal from the Gulf would produce a dangerous political vacuum in the region. Would the Soviet Union or Soviet-inspired Arab radicals attempt to fill it?<sup>42</sup> It was clear to them that it would be impossible for the United States to fill the breach.<sup>43</sup>

High-ranking Johnson administration officials emphasized that the United States had no intention of trying to replace Britain in the Gulf. The shock of the 1968 Tet offensive, launched a week after Wilson's announcement, brought

home the extent to which America was mired in Vietnam and unable to assume new obligations in the Middle East, while the growing gold drain at home rendered U.S. financial assistance to the Gulf unfeasible. Undersecretary of State Eugene Rostow told reporters on January 21, 1968, that “primarily, the responsibility for safety in the Persian Gulf and the Far East rests with the countries of those regions. We do not expect to have to rush in to fill a power vacuum.” Brewer, the State Department’s Officer in Charge of Arabian Peninsula Affairs, reiterated to an audience at Princeton University that “local leadership must—and will—carry on after the end of Britain’s historic role. The United States will continue to do what it can to help, but there can be no question of any ‘special role’ in Gulf affairs.”<sup>44</sup>

American strategy for the Gulf in 1968 aimed to prevent Soviet and communist diplomatic advances in the region in the wake of Wilson’s announcement. In order to accomplish this, U.S. foreign policy makers pursued a four-pronged program of

- (a) encouraging the British to maintain as much of their present special role in the Gulf as long as possible; (b) encouraging the Saudis and Iranians, in particular, to settle outstanding differences (sure to be an uphill struggle); (c) encouraging greater regional economic and, as feasible, political cooperation among the Gulf states; and (d) avoiding any undue military build-up by the Gulf littoral states while recognizing that some increase in indigenous forces is no doubt inevitable.<sup>45</sup>

If the Johnson administration could not prevail upon the Wilson government to reverse its decision to withdraw from the Gulf, it hoped at least to convince it to maintain some sort of British influence in the region after 1971. Harold Saunders of the NSC staff wrote to Rostow, “We hope the British will retain a substantial political position in the Persian Gulf and not dismantle its present network of political posts and treaties. Our reasoning is that the British, even if they may have to pull their troops out, can still do a lot to encourage new political and economic relationships in the Gulf. They have the influence and the experience where we do not.”<sup>46</sup> To some extent, the British strategy of interdependence, in place since 1957, appeared to be paying dividends for London, even if it encouraged the Americans to make unwanted demands on shrinking British financial resources.

The FCO, too, began to articulate its strategy for the Gulf in advance of the British withdrawal. Months before Wilson’s announcement, the government’s Defence Review Working Party noted that “the Protected States in the Gulf are the last remnant of our physical presence in the Middle East. We have kept the local peace, with a fair degree of success, for more than a century. Our aim must be, as far as possible, to leave behind us when we go a local system within which that peace can be preserved.”<sup>47</sup>

The key to this new system, FCO planners realized, was to encourage the Gulf's two most powerful states, Saudi Arabia and Iran, to cooperate with each other to establish a "local balance of power." They noted, "Iran and Saudi Arabia have a common interest in preserving stability in the Gulf. What is needed is that they should see that this common interest is more important than the pursuit of their narrow national interests and that they should convince the smaller states of their goodwill and their readiness to protect them."<sup>48</sup>

British official thinking on this matter had changed considerably over the past three years. Foreign Office strategists had initially been alarmed at imperial Iran's aspirations to dominate the Gulf as British power ebbed. They were dubious of the shah's motives and his sincerity in defending the interests of the small Gulf emirates. In early 1965, long before Britain contemplated withdrawing from the area, Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart advised Prime Minister Wilson, "The Iranians would no doubt like to be accepted as our heirs-apparent in the Gulf . . . [I]t may be necessary to disabuse the Shah of the idea that, if and when we ever leave the Persian Gulf, Iran can take our place . . . [T]his hope is quite illusory."<sup>49</sup> In the wake of Wilson's announcement, however, a strong Iran partnered with an acquiescent Saudi Arabia, seemed crucial to "help stage manage a peaceful transition to a new system in the Gulf after our departure."<sup>50</sup>

High-ranking U.S. officials were coming to the same conclusion. Undersecretary of State Rostow wrote to President Johnson that "in the Middle East, the idea is already forming up in the minds of the governments of Iran and Saudi Arabia . . . We shall have to move carefully, but we might give them both encouragement and sell them arms."<sup>51</sup>

It was clear in both London and Washington that formidable obstacles to Saudi-Iranian cooperation loomed. Most importantly, cultural differences and a long history of rivalry between the Gulf neighbors for local political dominance argued against an Arab-Persian partnership in the region. U.S. ambassador to Tehran Armin Meyer enumerated the barriers to cooperation between Iran and its Arab neighbors as

ancient imperial pride, tendency toward a superiority complex and a condescending attitude toward neighbors, intoxication over the recent remarkable progress in Iran, the fact that Iranians tend to be individualists (weight-lifters, painters, etc.) rather than team players, and Shia-originated reservations if the ultimate cause will benefit. Above and beyond these purely Persian characteristics, there is the virtual inevitability of heirs falling out when they try to divide a lucrative inheritance.<sup>52</sup>

Still, throughout 1968, State Department and NSC officials counseled Johnson to encourage Saudi-Iranian cooperation as the best way to foster a stable, pro-Western political order in the Gulf following Britain's departure.<sup>53</sup>

As they advocated Saudi-Iranian cooperation in the Gulf, British and American policymakers encouraged the Gulf emirates to cooperate politically and economically and to establish regional organizations through which to pursue their interests. For officials in London, federation seemed one appropriate remedy for the Gulf states' problems. During the early 1960s, the British government had helped establish federal arrangements between the states of Malaysia, Central Africa, the West Indies, and, most recently, South Arabia. The solution now seemed applicable in the Persian Gulf.

In February 1968, with British and U.S. encouragement, but largely on their own initiative, the Trucial sheikhdoms of Abu Dhabi and Dubai announced the formation of a federal union. The following month, representatives of the seven Trucial States, Qatar, and Bahrain convened in Dubai, where they announced their intention to establish a Federation of Arab Emirates (FAA). In Washington, officials greeted the formation of the FAA favorably, but with a degree of skepticism. The institutions of the new regional grouping seemed as yet undefined and without the ability to enforce decisions among the member states. Still, it seemed a promising start.<sup>54</sup>

Iran viewed the federal experiment with suspicion and believed it was a British-inspired plot to thwart Tehran's dominance in the Gulf. The shah and his advisers refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the federal union, in large part because they believed its consolidation would render it more difficult for Tehran to pursue its ends in three disputes with its Gulf neighbors. The first was the disagreement with Saudi Arabia over the "median line" in the Gulf demarcating Iranian and Saudi offshore oil-drilling rights. The second involved Iran's long-standing claim to Bahrain, and the third involved three islands near the Strait of Hormuz in the southern Gulf. Abu Musa, governed by the Gulf Arab emirate of Sharjah, and Greater Tunb and Lesser Tunb, administered by the government of Ras al-Khaimah, were both coveted by Iran, which valued them for reasons of prestige and because of their strategic position near the entrance to the Gulf. Iranian claims to Bahrain, Abu Musa, and the Tunbs put the shah's government on a diplomatic collision course with Britain's client states in the Gulf.<sup>55</sup>

The issue of the Gulf median line was dispatched by October 1968. In close consultation with the U.S. ambassadors in Tehran and Riyadh, the Saudi and Iranian governments, as well as executives from Aramco and the state-owned National Iranian Oil Company, negotiated a median line in the Gulf that satisfied all the parties involved. The shah was eager to remove an item from his diplomatic agenda that hindered his ability to address regional issues that mattered more to him: the dispositions of Bahrain, Abu Musa, and the Tunbs. It also demonstrated to both Washington and London that he was taking steps to strengthen his relations with the Saudis, as they had been urging him to do. Whether the shah's amicability would extend to the Bahrain and Gulf islands problems remained to be seen as 1968 drew to a close.

### Richard Nixon, Edward Heath, and the Anglo-American Relationship

Richard Nixon became president of the United States in January 1969, determined to reform and remake U.S. foreign policy.<sup>56</sup> Working in tandem with his Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, Henry Kissinger, Nixon came to office acutely aware that his government's political and financial resources were overextended and that he must shape his diplomacy accordingly. Nixon's Middle East diplomacy came to be focused predominantly on the Arab-Israeli conflict, which overshadowed developments in the Gulf region and marginalized those area experts concerned principally with the Gulf and with Britain's withdrawal from the area. The growing power of the White House in the conduct of American foreign policy and Kissinger's efforts to restructure the NSC system further excluded American Persian Gulf experts, except those who dealt principally with Iran. Furthermore, Nixon's uneasy relationship with the British government after the Conservative Party's electoral victory in June 1970 complicated the efforts of the United States to coordinate policy with Whitehall as the date of Britain's departure from the region approached.

Nixon and Kissinger recognized that the war in Vietnam and the cumulative costs of the United States' Cold War political and military commitments required them to scale back Washington's overseas obligations. As Kissinger wrote in 1968, "No country can act wisely simultaneously in every part of the globe at every moment of time."<sup>57</sup> Consequently, the new administration reconsidered its global priorities, and, as a result, many areas of the developing world received scant attention from the White House.

The problems of the Third World were almost uniformly subordinated to the necessity of building détente with the Soviet Union. Nixon wrote to Kissinger and to assistants H. R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman that "what happens in those parts of the world is not, in the final analysis, going to have any significant impact on the success of our foreign policy in the foreseeable future. The thing to do here is to farm out as much of the decision-making in those areas to the Departments [as possible]."<sup>58</sup> Odd Arne Westad notes perceptively that "Nixon viewed the Third World first and foremost as a source of disorder in international relations, which only counted to the superpowers if its internal squabbles were made use of by one superpower to threaten the key interests of the other, especially with regard to access to raw materials."<sup>59</sup>

Nixon incorporated the Cold War's periphery into the larger architecture of U.S.-Soviet détente through the mechanism of the "Nixon Doctrine." In doing so he attempted to identify ways in which the United States could exploit most effectively its limited power and to make active use of the United States' allies in the developing world as instruments of its containment policy. Articulated in July 1969, the doctrine stipulated that the United States would furnish to

allied nations “military and economic assistance when requested in accordance with our treaty commitments. But we shall look to the nation directly threatened to assume the primary responsibility of providing the manpower for its defense.”<sup>60</sup> Although it was most famously applied in the “Vietnamization” of the war in Indochina, it clearly had implications for U.S. diplomacy in regions of Asia other than the Far East. The president contended later in his memoirs that “the Nixon Doctrine was not a formula for getting America out of Asia, but one that provided the only sound basis for America’s staying in and continuing to play a responsible role in helping non-communist nations and neutrals as well as our Asian allies to defend their independence.”<sup>61</sup> Accordingly, the Nixon Doctrine evolved into a policy of subsidizing and arming a series of regional “policemen,” medium-sized states in key locations that acted as proxies for American power and building blocks in the structure of containment. In the Persian Gulf region, Iran would eagerly assume this role in the wake of Britain’s departure.<sup>62</sup>

Britain’s impending departure from the Gulf, which had so alarmed the Johnson administration, did not evoke such consternation or concern among senior officials in the Nixon White House. They regarded the Gulf region as a backwater. Asked later about his conception of the Persian Gulf in 1969, Kissinger responded, “I did not have one,” and expressed his personal lack of knowledge about the details of Gulf issues, stating, “I did not know how Saudi-Iranian relations worked, my priority was to get the Soviets out of the Middle East.”<sup>63</sup>

This lack of concern with the Gulf and with Anglo-American diplomacy in the region was reinforced by the centralization of foreign policy-making authority in the White House and Kissinger’s reorganization of the NSC, which shaped the way it studied and recommended action on specific issues. Nixon famously mistrusted career diplomats and other members of the foreign policy bureaucracy and came to office “determined to revitalize the NSC system and thereby shift the decision-making center of gravity from the bureaucracy to its rightful place in the White House’s West Basement.”<sup>64</sup> Kissinger abolished the inadequate Johnson-era Interdepartmental Regional Groups (IRGs) within the NSC and put in their place a series of Interdepartmental Groups (IGs) and an Under Secretaries Committee (USC), which coordinated the drafting of National Security Study Memoranda (NSSMs) on important foreign policy issues. These NSSMs were submitted to the NSC’s Review Group (RG), chaired by Kissinger, for discussion and debate, before being sent to the president. The White House was then able to issue a National Security Decision Memorandum (NSDM) outlining courses of action approved by the president.<sup>65</sup> The system was “highly centralized [and] hierarchical” although one contemporary observer noted that “the

Middle East shop is one of the few to have a high degree of autonomy from 'normal' procedures."<sup>66</sup>

The Kissinger-NSC system ensured that foreign policy issues of great interest to the administration were addressed expeditiously, while others, such as Anglo-American diplomacy in the Persian Gulf, were frequently ignored. This was confirmed to the minister of the British embassy in Washington by a member of the White House staff, who told him in May 1969 that "Kissinger had only 'vaguely mentioned' the Gulf and appeared in no great hurry to refer the matter to the National Security Council. Since the NSC machinery was so 'clogged up' anyway, there was little chance of attention being turned quickly to the Gulf."<sup>67</sup>

Consequently, much of the Nixon administration's policy in the Gulf was crafted by the careerists in the State Department's Bureau of Near East Affairs, headed by Assistant Secretary of State Joseph Sisco. The British ambassador to Washington, John Freeman, noted that, indeed, "the State Department labors in this vineyard without much oversight."<sup>68</sup> But this presented the British with a real opportunity. Sir Patrick Dean, shortly before he left the Washington embassy, wrote to a Paul Gore-Booth at the Foreign Office:

Clearly, the Bureau of Near East Affairs are anxious to be in the best possible position to brief the new administration on the Gulf and regard an exchange of views with us as necessary preparation for doing so. This could provide us with a good opportunity to influence the new administration at an early stage in the direction we wish.<sup>69</sup>

Cultivating influence in Washington was to be difficult for the British during the Nixon years. The Anglo-American relationship, far from warm during the 1960s, became positively chilly during the early 1970s, which hindered the coordination of U.S. and British policies in the Persian Gulf. Things got off to a bad start when the Labour government appointed John Freeman, former editor of the left-leaning British magazine *New Statesman*, as Britain's ambassador to Washington in late 1968. Years earlier, Freeman had opined that Nixon was "a man of no principle whatsoever except a willingness to sacrifice everything in the cause of Dick Nixon."<sup>70</sup>

Nixon, however, was an Anglophile. He placed great value in the transatlantic relationship, and with uncharacteristic grace he put this affront behind him and welcomed Freeman warmly to the White House. The new president, Freeman noted, indulged freely in the rhetoric of the "special relationship," but concluded, "I would not in any case put sentiment high on the list of President Nixon's personal motivations . . . I would not count on it to influence his judgment where he sees that significant American interests are involved." Still,

“in terms of close and candid consultation at many levels we have been treated exceptionally—and probably uniquely—well.”<sup>71</sup> These consultations were a key element in London’s continuing strategy of interdependence.

Henry Kissinger correctly identified interdependence as the cornerstone of Britain’s diplomacy with Washington and the essence of the special relationship. He wrote later of the

pattern of consultation so matter-of-factly intimate that it became psychologically impossible to ignore British views. They evolved a habit of meetings so regular that autonomous American action somehow came to seem to violate club rules. Above all, they used effectively an abundance of wisdom and trustworthiness of conduct so exceptional that successive American leaders saw it in their self-interest to obtain British advice before taking major decisions.<sup>72</sup>

Kissinger greatly overstated the effectiveness of interdependence, but he accurately discerned its motivations.

The British strategy became steadily less effective as the personal chemistry between Nixon and Conservative Prime Minister Edward Heath deteriorated in 1970 and 1971. Part of the problem was grounded in policy. Heath wanted to keep the United States at arm’s length as he prepared to make application again for British membership in the common market. The U.S. embassy in London observed that “the Prime Minister and a substantial element of his Cabinet have endeavored to achieve a measure of respectability in Britain’s relationships with Europe by downplaying—or even disavowing—the existence of a symbiotic Anglo-American relationship.”<sup>73</sup> Heath’s attitude frustrated Nixon administration policymakers.

Former British ambassador to Washington Sir Robin Renwick concluded later that “Heath’s personality would have inhibited the ‘special relationship’ even if his convictions had not.” The prime minister often appeared “inflexible and doctrinaire” to the Americans, while Nixon’s own introversion and lack of personal warmth were well known.<sup>74</sup> Kissinger likened them to “a couple who have been told by everyone that they should be in love and who try mightily but futilely to justify these expectations . . . Both were rather austere personalities.”<sup>75</sup> Thus, policy differences and personality clashes soured Anglo-American relations and underscored the importance of the personal rapport between U.S. and British leaders in cementing the “special relationship.” By the end of 1971, a Foreign Office memorandum noted, “the sources of strain in Anglo-American . . . relations have increased in number and seriousness . . . The President is in an irritable mood . . . The old ease and closeness of Anglo-American inter-communication have been lost.”<sup>76</sup> In such a climate, managing U.S.-British diplomacy in the Persian Gulf region was not easy.

### Nixon, Heath, and the Persian Gulf Region

Throughout the first half of 1969 State Department and Foreign Office officials consulted closely on Gulf matters, but the NSC did not turn to the Persian Gulf until July. That summer, NSSM 66 commissioned the Interdepartmental Group for the Near East and South Asia to prepare a study for the RG that assessed the implications of Britain's withdrawal from the Gulf for U.S. interests and the "choices in setting general U.S. posture towards the various political entities in the Gulf area—our political relationships, diplomatic representation, arms aid policy." The study was specifically to address the matter of U.S. naval policy in the Gulf following the British withdrawal and the continuation of MIDEASTFOR's mission.<sup>77</sup> For the next year, the IG report ground through channels until it was ready to present to the RG.

Meanwhile, the quarrelsome peoples of the Gulf continued to complicate the tasks of American and British policymakers as they pursued their own interests in the region. Saudi Arabia and Iran particularly challenged the patience and skill of U.S. and British diplomats. Saudi Arabia continued to be the United States' most important ally in the Arab world, and the Nixon administration recognized its critical value to achieving an overall Persian Gulf political settlement before the end of 1971. The State Department advised that as the largest and wealthiest state in the Arabian Peninsula, Saudi Arabia was "capable of playing a leading, but not dominant, role in the area" and that it must continue to build a cooperative relationship with Iran. On that front, the department noted, "periodic high level exchanges of views have taken place, though with less frequency and fewer results than might have been hoped." American and British diplomats further appreciated that Saudi endorsement would be crucial to the success of the FAA, but that "the Saudi attitude toward the area is still encumbered by tribal grievances, border disputes and deep seated suspicion of Iranian intentions."<sup>78</sup>

The State Department and Foreign Office also watched carefully as the states of the southern Gulf attempted to secure the union of its nine members. Their prospects appeared dim. Saudi differences with Abu Dhabi over their common border and the disposition of the Buraimi oasis continued to plague regional diplomacy. Iran's claims to Bahrain, and to Abu Musa and the Tunbs, also threatened to bring down the federation and created serious tension between Tehran and London.<sup>79</sup>

As the most powerful and ambitious state in the region, Iran held the key to a successful Persian Gulf settlement. Still, it remained intransigent over Bahrain and its title to the Gulf islands. By the middle of 1969, however, the shah recognized that his claim to Bahrain was unlikely to be acknowledged and that it could be a useful bargaining chip in his bid to take Abu Musa and the Tunbs. However, he could not back away from his claim without losing face.

British ambassador to Iran Sir Denis Wright, working closely with the shah, arrived at a formula by which Iran requested a UN-sponsored plebiscite in Bahrain to determine the wishes of the emirate's population as to who should rule them. In March 1970, UN special envoy Vittorio Winspeare Guicciardi administered a plebiscite that found that the vast majority of Bahrainis wished to remain independent from Iran. The General Assembly endorsed Winspeare Guicciardi's report on May 11, and the shah relinquished his claims to Bahrain. He was now free to turn his attention to Abu Musa and the Tunbs.<sup>80</sup>

On the islands the shah remained adamant. Having compromised on the issues of the Gulf median line and Bahrain, it was now a matter of prestige for Iran to have its way on this matter. More importantly, the strategic value of the islands to Iran was increasing as the imperial government expanded its navy and emphasized its role as the principle guardian of the Straits of Hormuz.<sup>81</sup> The shah decided to make his recognition of the federation contingent upon Iran's acquisition of Abu Musa and the Tunbs, and when Conservative Party leader Edward Heath spoke with him in Tehran in April 1969, the shah reiterated "with great emphasis that for reasons of prestige and strategy he must have the two [*sic*] islands."<sup>82</sup>

When the Conservatives returned to power in Britain in June 1970, the Nixon administration was initially quite pleased. It had noted Heath's repeated pledges to reverse the Labour Party's decision to withdraw from east of Suez, although the State Department advised that "we consider it very unlikely that a Conservative government would—or could—do more than maintain a token military presence in Southeast Asia and slow down withdrawal from the Persian Gulf."<sup>83</sup>

The new foreign secretary, Douglas-Home, a confirmed Atlanticist, quickly cabled to the British embassy in Washington, "I am considering future policy in the Persian Gulf. I particularly wish to carry the Americans with on this."<sup>84</sup> At the same time, Home cabled British political resident Stewart Crawford in Bahrain to ask for his views on the practicability of reversing the Labour government's decision to withdraw and the possibility of prolonging the British military presence in the Gulf. Crawford, the political agents in the Gulf states, and the British chiefs of mission in the Middle East were unanimous: the Wilson government's policy, which had been put in train 18 months earlier, was now irreversible. Further, the FCO's Arabian department summarized, "None of H.M.'s representatives consulted has expressed a positive view that a prolongation of the British presence in the Gulf would facilitate the achievement of our twin aims (which all posts endorse) of settling disputes and building stability in the area."<sup>85</sup>

The Heath government's most important, and wisest, decision was to appoint Luce, former governor of Aden and political resident in the Persian Gulf, as Home's Personal Representative for the Coordination of General

Policy toward the Persian Gulf in July 1970. Wm. Roger Louis writes that "Luce was one of the last great Proconsuls."<sup>86</sup> With experience in the region extending to the 1950s, he, better than anyone, understood the unity of British interests in the Arabian Peninsula and Persian Gulf. The new special envoy was tasked with examining the feasibility of the Conservatives' pledge to prolong the British presence in the Gulf and with facilitating the merger of the lower Gulf states into a viable union. In the process he was to liaise with Gulf regional governments and the United States.<sup>87</sup> In August and September, Luce made an extensive tour of the Gulf to meet with local Rulers and British diplomats.

### **Kissinger, the NSC, and the Gulf**

Eleven months after NSSM 66 commissioned the NSC's Interdepartmental Group for the Near East and South Asia to study the Persian Gulf, Henry Kissinger's RG sat down to discuss its findings. That the meeting convened nine months behind schedule attests to the low priority Kissinger and the Nixon White House attached to Persian Gulf issues. The basis of the RG's discussion was a lengthy paper prepared in the State Department, which was surprisingly sanguine about the safety of Western interests in the region in the wake of Britain's military departure. The alarmist language that had characterized American assessments of the region's future early the previous year was gone. Instead, the IG paper concluded that the political power vacuum in the Gulf that observers over the past two years had feared would emerge would probably not appear. Britain would continue to play an important role in the Gulf through its continued diplomatic presence and military aid. The American economic presence in the area would help, but, most importantly, a new set of regional interrelationships would fill the vacuum. Further, Soviet and radical Arab designs in the region faced practical and political obstacles that would probably not allow them to destabilize the Gulf.

This was fortunate, because the IG report also concluded that there were "serious limitations" on the ability of the United States to act effectively in the Gulf region. American capital assistance stood little chance of winning influence in an oil-rich region. However, it concluded that technical assistance, as well as government and private "cultural and educational assistance and exchanges," were likely to be effective tools of policy.

After a brief discussion on June 5, 1970, Kissinger and the other members of the RG recommended that the United States continue to foster Saudi-Iranian cooperation in the region and also begin to develop stronger bilateral relations and an expanded diplomatic presence in the lower Gulf. Kissinger also commissioned the Under Secretaries Committee to "prepare a blueprint of what the optimum American presence would be in terms of establishment of embassies, economic and cultural programs, etc." He said he hoped another

meeting on the subject could be avoided and then plunged the RG into a discussion of Arab-Israeli affairs.<sup>88</sup>

What is remarkable about the IG report on the Persian Gulf and its brief consideration by the RG (the June 5 meeting lasted barely 20 minutes) is how little anxiety or concern the NSC evinced about the future security of the Gulf. The reasons for this are unclear. Perhaps the NSC was confident in Britain's ability to foster a stable political edifice in the region before the end of 1971. Perhaps the NSC genuinely believed the United States had few resources at its disposal with which to shape events in the Gulf. Perhaps it was merely uninterested. In any case, the RG's recommendations for U.S. Gulf policy were rather anemic compared with the more dramatic political and military solutions to foreign policy problems usually favored by the Nixon White House. In fact, the RG failed to discuss the single military issue that NSSM 66 asked it to contemplate: the continued presence of MIDEASTFOR in the Gulf.

Not everyone at the White House was so complacent that the Gulf could be secured for the West with such ease. Chester Crocker, an NSC staffer, prepared an additional study in October that called for a closer look at American policy in the Gulf in the "twilight of the Pax Britannica." "Rosy assumptions are not enough," Crocker argued. In general, "the U.S. faces the prospect that its substantial interests in the Gulf will become more vulnerable as the U.K. withdraws . . . However, the prospects are not so bleak as to preclude useful U.S. moves." More attention should be given to the possibilities of supporting a continued "forward" British presence in the Gulf region or, alternatively, adopting a "dynamic, innovative" unilateral American policy in the Gulf.<sup>89</sup>

No one, it seems, was in the mood to heed Crocker. Later that month Nixon approved measures that would be formalized in NSDM 92, "U.S. Policy toward the Persian Gulf." The document specified that the United States would continue to foster Saudi-Iranian cooperation in the Gulf, maintain MIDEASTFOR at its current strength, and expand U.S. diplomatic representation in the Gulf, and directed the Under Secretaries Committee of the NSC to "review plans for U.S. technical assistance and cultural exchange in this area."<sup>90</sup>

### **The Luce Report**

In the autumn and winter of 1970 and 1971, the Heath government and Luce continued to examine the feasibility of maintaining a British presence in the Gulf and to resolve the outstanding diplomatic issues in the region that had arisen after January 1968. Whether Britain would withdraw completely and irrevocably from the Gulf region was a matter of great interest to American foreign policy planners. The Johnson and Nixon administrations both

hoped that the British would continue to exert some political and military influence in the region after its formal presence was dissolved, and the British government took steps to reassure the Americans that they would do so. Even before the Labour government stepped down, a senior Foreign Office official told an American diplomat that Britain "was still regarded by small Gulf states as [a] 'Great Power' in the area and that HMG would expect to continue to provide 'political' advice to FAA and individual states." He surmised that "Britain would still be involved one way or another in Gulf security affairs."<sup>91</sup> The State Department continued to stress that the United States welcomed the "maximum possible future British presence in the Gulf."<sup>92</sup>

Luce agreed that a continued British political presence and military influence in the Gulf was imperative after 1971, but he concluded that it would be impossible to reverse the Labour government's decision to withdraw formally from the Gulf. He told the American chargé d'affaires in London that "that decision and its consequences are facts which have to be dealt with now."<sup>93</sup> In the autumn of 1970, Luce traveled to the Gulf and produced two reports that established a blueprint for future British policy. The key to Gulf security, Luce concluded, was the establishment of a secure union of the lower Gulf states. He urged the government to terminate its exclusive treaty relationships with Bahrain, Qatar, and the Trucial States by the end of 1971 and replace them with treaties of friendship. This arrangement would permit Britain "to preserve as much influence as possible with a view to maintaining stability and to limit communist influence in the area to the greatest possible extent." While all British troops should be withdrawn from the Gulf by the end of 1971, and no specific defense commitments should be made to the Gulf states, other measures might be taken to extend British military influence in the area. Specifically, the Trucial Oman Scouts (previously known as the Trucial Oman Levies) should be transferred to local control and made the foundation of a union defense force. London should continue lending British officers to the new federal military, sending Royal Navy vessels for port calls in the Gulf, and conducting joint training exercises with Gulf region militaries.<sup>94</sup>

Following the Heath government's approval of his report, Luce traveled to Washington in January 1971 to consult with Secretary of State Rogers and Assistant Secretary Sisco on Gulf issues, to break the news that the Heath government would be keeping to the former Labour government's timetable for withdrawal, but to reassure the Americans that Britain would retain some residual presence and influence in the region.

Luce and the British embassy officials who accompanied him to the State Department found that the Americans did not appear to be surprised, nor did they seem prepared to discuss Gulf issues in any detail. G. E. Millard, of the embassy staff, noted ruefully to Luce afterward that "there is a widespread ignorance here about what goes on in that part of the world. Even within the

State Department, whose Arabists are very knowledgeable and experienced, there are few who know the Gulf." Sisco, he continued sardonically, appeared "surprisingly vague about some aspects of Persian Gulf affairs" but "showed a splendidly old-fashioned enthusiasm for British frigates and troops."<sup>95</sup> Still, Millard was gratified that Sisco and Kissinger appeared to be taking a closer interest in Gulf affairs at the beginning of 1971, even if their grasp of the details was shaky.

American officials became increasingly apprehensive as the states of the southern Gulf struggled to shore up their federation before the British withdrew. The State Department urged the Heath government to renew its efforts to solidify the union and address lingering Saudi-Iranian disagreements with the emirates that jeopardized their merger. Foreign Secretary Home promised to "get hold of the shah and Faisal and 'knock their heads together.'"<sup>96</sup> Subsequent diplomacy was difficult. The Saudis, Iranians, and the Rulers of the emirates drove British officials in the Gulf to distraction, prompting Crawford to write from Bahrain, "God save me from my friends!"<sup>97</sup> The solution brokered by Luce in early 1971 eventually entailed a union of six of the seven Trucial States (Ras al-Khaimah joined months later), with the larger states of Bahrain and Qatar opting for independence by the summer of 1971. American and British pressure convinced the Saudis to shelve their claim to Buraimi temporarily, but not to abandon it.

More problematic was the issue of Abu Musa and the Tunbs, which remained intractable. The State Department urged the Foreign Office to press the matter with the Trucial States and the Iranians, and Assistant Secretary of State Joseph Sisco expressed the United States' concern "for the sake of British and US interests that no canker sore be left after British withdrawal from Gulf in 1971 which could be exploited by radical Arabs."<sup>98</sup> Home was equally frustrated that a Gulf political settlement might founder on "those ridiculous rocks," but the shah resolutely maintained Iran's claim to them. He told Home "personally and categorically that if he did not get the islands he would torpedo the proposed union."<sup>99</sup> In the end, the shah did not make good on his threat to sink the federation. However, on November 30, the day before the British government dissolved its treaties with the Trucial States and the United Arab Emirates was proclaimed, the shah sent troops to occupy the islands. The move caused consternation among the Gulf Arabs and deeply embarrassed the British, but did not delay the turnover of British power in the Gulf, which was complete by mid-December.

Despite its inability to arrive at a mutually agreeable solution to the islands dispute with Iran, Britain's diplomacy in the Gulf in advance of its final withdrawal was skillful and, mostly, successful. D. G. Allen of the Foreign Office's Arabian Department wrote hopefully to Geoffrey Arthur in Bahrain, "We have left behind a structure which is capable of functioning if Arabs and Iranians

alike will only give it a chance . . . Perhaps the hymn (Ancient and Modern: for a Service of Farewell to Missionaries or Emigrants) sums it up:

Farewell! In hope and love,  
In faith and peace and prayer . . .<sup>100</sup>

Secretary of State Rogers reported to President Nixon, "While the Gulf will continue to present its share of problems, the statesmanship demonstrated to date by the principal parties concerned augurs well for the future evolution of that region." The United States, however, had remained largely passive during the endgame of Britain's diplomacy in the region. Rogers wrote, "In these developments we have played a supporting role in close consultation with the British, encouraging their efforts to resolve the problems of withdrawal while urging Iran and the Arab states concerned to approach these problems in a cooperative and flexible manner."<sup>101</sup> Distracted by its other diplomatic priorities, the Nixon administration regarded the Gulf as a diplomatic backwater whose security was largely the responsibility of its British allies. The exception to this was Iran, on which Nixon and Kissinger lavished attention in a bid to make the shah the "policeman" of the Persian Gulf region.

### **Iran and the Nixon Doctrine in the Persian Gulf**

Robert Litwak notes correctly that "the evolving American relationship with Iran after 1969 was hailed by the [Nixon] Administration as a paradigmatic application of the Nixon Doctrine."<sup>102</sup> It is also a paradigmatic illustration of the shah's efforts to manipulate his superpower patron to support imperial Iranian foreign policy goals. In short, the Nixon administration and the shah used each other to achieve their ends in the Persian Gulf region.

Britain's retreat from the Persian Gulf afforded the shah the opportunity to make Iran the undisputed hegemon in the Gulf region, "the ruler from whom all had to seek permission and indulgence."<sup>103</sup> He feared that the vacuum that would open when Britain finally departed would invite superpower intervention in the region and that the Soviet Union would attempt to extend its influence into the Gulf through its radical Arab clients. The shah also judged correctly that the United States, preoccupied with its other foreign policy obligations, would support him as a proxy in its regional containment structure.

Richard Nixon and the shah enjoyed a long personal relationship dating to the 1950s. Nixon had traveled numerous times to Tehran in public and private capacities before his 1968 election as president and had been received very well by the shah. Personal relationships were important in determining Nixon's views on foreign policy issues, and the Iranian Ruler impressed him as someone who, like himself, saw the world in grand geopolitical terms. He respected

the shah's analysis of foreign policy matters and encouraged his ambitions as a leader. Nixon told the U.S. ambassador to Iran, Douglas MacArthur II, that despite the reservations of his State and Defense Department advisers, he was "stronger than horseradish for him."<sup>104</sup>

Henry Kissinger also believed the shah was a useful friend in the Persian Gulf region, uniquely able to "fill the vacuum left by British withdrawal, now menaced by Soviet intrusion and radical momentum." Even better, he wrote later in his memoirs, "this was achievable without any American resources since the shah was willing to pay for the equipment out of his own oil revenues." Moreover, Kissinger was confident in the shah's reliability. He was "that rarest of leaders, an unconditional ally."<sup>105</sup>

The shah was delighted to confirm this impression, stating repeatedly to U.S. officials that his country and the United States were "natural allies" in promoting peace and security in the Persian Gulf and that his country was a "bastion of stability and progress in an increasingly unstable area."<sup>106</sup> The shah hoped to spread the umbrella of Iranian "stability and progress" throughout the Gulf and beyond. Moreover, following Britain's complete withdrawal, the shah asserted, the Persian Gulf would become a "closed sea." Iran would oppose the presence or influence of any nonlittoral power in the Gulf. Iran's "security perimeter" would be extended beyond the Gulf. Its frontiers would reach into southeastern Arabia and beyond the Gulf of Oman, into the Indian Ocean.<sup>107</sup> The shah, like British and American strategists, appreciated that Arabia and the Indian Ocean were critical to Persian Gulf security.

At once ambitious and anxious, the shah believed he must acquire a large modern military to defend these new frontiers, and he told American journalist Fred Friendly that "Iran would continue to develop defense capabilities so that it could match 'all potential troublemakers in the area combined.'" Indeed, he required an "over-kill" capability in order to defend Iranian interests without outside assistance,<sup>108</sup> and he regularly reminded American officials that this was critical since he was "defending the vital interests of the U.S., NATO, Japan, and the free world in the Gulf."<sup>109</sup>

Traditionally, it had been U.S. policy to discourage the shah from spending large sums of his nation's oil wealth on his military, "since the need for so much additional equipment is questionable in our view and its purchase diverts resources from development."<sup>110</sup> A year after the British announced their impending withdrawal from the Gulf, however, things looked different to the Nixon administration.<sup>111</sup>

Becoming a regional hegemon was not an inexpensive proposition, and the shah recognized that his formidable oil wealth might not be sufficient to pay for the large modern military he desired. He must sell more oil (preferably to the United States) at higher prices or receive more money from the multinational oil consortium that was established in his country following the 1953

ouster of Mussadiq. The shah failed to persuade the Nixon administration to buy larger volumes of Iranian oil, but the United States encouraged the shah to increase the price of his petroleum. As long as Persian Gulf oil continued to flow to the West, price was a secondary consideration to the Nixon administration.<sup>112</sup> Consequently, in 1970, the shah renegotiated his arrangement with the Iranian oil consortium to raise his share of its profits to 55 percent. The following year he led the revolt of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) against the oil companies that produced the 1971 Tehran Agreement, which raised the price of oil and the profits Persian Gulf host countries would reap from its sale. As a result, Iran's oil revenues increased from \$885 million in 1971 to \$1.6 billion in 1972. Iran could now afford its role as the regional policeman of the Persian Gulf.<sup>113</sup>

The shah saw the enunciation of the Nixon Doctrine as a godsend, an opportunity for Iran to consolidate its dominance in the Persian Gulf and to pursue its aims of regional political and military supremacy. American policy-makers were leery of the shah's grandiose plans, but nevertheless encouraged Iran to act as one of the "regional middle powers" on which the United States' policy of containment on the Cold War's periphery depended.

Nixon and Kissinger were particularly intrigued by Iran's potential to act on behalf of American interests in the Gulf. During a meeting of CENTO foreign ministers in Washington in the spring of 1970, the president asked the State Department to prepare a study on "just how far the U.S. could go in leaving it to Iran to guarantee stability in the Persian Gulf." Analysts within the Bureau of Near East Affairs responded that Iran should play a "substantial and positive role," but that Iranian ambitions could be channeled most effectively within a cooperative regional framework. Coordinating his policies with the moderate Arab governments in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states to solve the islands problem and to create a secure federation of the emirates would best serve the shah's, the United States' and the Arabs' interests.<sup>114</sup>

So, the Nixon Doctrine entailed a regional strategy for the Persian Gulf in which the shah's Iran was to play a critical role. In turn, the United States' Gulf policy was folded into the larger strategy of détente and the containment of Soviet power on the Cold War's periphery. As a result, senior Nixon administration foreign policy makers were largely indifferent to the details of British diplomacy in the Gulf in the two years before the final withdrawal. This seemed to them to be a distraction from their more pressing task of creating a powerful regional client state that could secure U.S. and Western interests in the area.

In May 1972, President Nixon stopped for two days in Tehran on the return trip from his Moscow summit with Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev. The presidential visit was intended to reinforce to the shah his growing importance to the United States and to allay the shah's anxiety that U.S.-Soviet détente would

open the door to increased communist and radical influence in the Gulf region. Kissinger urged the president to emphasize to him that “Iran’s strength, vitality, bold leadership, and willingness to assume regional responsibility are a classic example of what the United States under the Nixon Doctrine values highly in an ally.” The national security adviser then explained to Nixon in language that he knew the president and the shah would both find compelling:

The US-Iranian partnership is a crucial pillar of the global structure of peace the US is seeking to build. Your trips to Peking and Moscow exemplify your effort to develop a secure balance among the great powers. Great-power restraint—which we are seeking to build into the system—devolves more responsibility onto regional powers. The US is counting on Iran to make a major contribution to regional and Third World stability, in the Persian Gulf and indeed in the Middle East and the whole non-aligned world.<sup>115</sup>

During his visit, Nixon promised to sell Iran the weaponry the shah believed he required to fulfill his role as regional policeman in the Gulf. The president pledged to provide the latest F-14 and F-15 fighter aircraft, laser bombs, and “all available sophisticated weapons short of the atomic bomb.”<sup>116</sup> At the conclusion of their meetings, Nixon leaned across the table and asked the shah to understand the purpose of American policy. “‘Protect me,’ he said. ‘Don’t look at détente as something that weakens you but as a way for the United States to gain influence.’ The Nixon Doctrine was a way for the U.S. to build a new long-term policy on [the] support of allies.” Thus, Nixon succinctly captured the essence of his larger foreign policy, explained the mechanism by which it would be enacted along the Cold War’s periphery, and entreated the shah to play an essential role in the Persian Gulf region.

### Naval Issues and the Indian Ocean

Of particular interest to the shah was the fate of the small American naval detachment, MIDEASTFOR, which had been stationed in Bahrain since 1949. Consisting of a converted seaplane tender and two aging destroyers, MIDEASTFOR served to “show the flag” by making port calls throughout the Gulf, Red Sea, Arabian Sea, and the Indian Ocean. It kept a very low profile, exercised no political or military commitment or function, and its home port was scrupulously termed a “facility” rather than a “base.”<sup>117</sup>

With Britain’s imminent departure from the Gulf, the states involved in the region took a keen interest in whether the U.S. naval contingent would remain. The Saudis, Bahrainis, and the Arabs of the Trucial States, with an eye on Iranian designs in the Gulf, were eager that MIDEASTFOR stay. The shah stated publicly on many occasions that when the British Royal Navy left the Gulf he did not wish to see it replaced by the Americans, Soviet, or anyone else.

Privately, however, he told the Americans that he did not object to a U.S. naval presence.<sup>118</sup> The British were also keen to know the United States' plans for MIDEASTFOR. They began inquiring about American intentions in September 1968, when they offered the U.S. Navy the right of first refusal to the Royal Navy facility at Jufair after the final withdrawal.<sup>119</sup>

The issue of MIDEASTFOR's continuing mission in the Gulf region was directly addressed by NSSM 66. It was a major topic explored in the IG paper examined by the NSC in June 1970, but it received scant attention from the RG. There was heated disagreement within the State Department over whether MIDEASTFOR should remain in the Gulf after 1971. A majority of officials believed the small detachment played a useful symbolic role in the area. A vocal minority, however, disagreed. Lee Dinsmore, the U.S. consul general in Dhahran in the late 1960s and early 1970s, told a congressional subcommittee that he believed the presence of MIDEASTFOR was "a magnet to the Soviets, that if we can have a home port in the Gulf, the Soviets may very well come to feel that they have an equal interest in having one."<sup>120</sup> By the time the issue was submitted to President Nixon, the NSC recommended that MIDEASTFOR be maintained at its current level. Nixon concurred when he approved NSDM 92 in November 1970, and on December 23, 1971, just four days after the last Royal Navy ships weighed anchor, the United States concluded an agreement with the Ruler of Bahrain to take over HMS *Jufair*.<sup>121</sup>

Explaining the decision to the shah in Tehran, U.S. ambassador MacArthur contended that the result was inevitable given the Soviets' recent interest in the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf. Between 1905 and 1967 no Russian naval vessels had entered the Gulf, while in the past two and a half years there had been five visits by small Soviet naval contingents.<sup>122</sup> These port calls were part of a larger pattern of Soviet naval behavior in the region that alarmed the British and elicited two NSSMs and several meetings of the RG in the Nixon White House.<sup>123</sup>

American and British strategic planners understood that their interests in the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean were intertwined. A paper prepared for the NSC noted that critically important Persian Gulf oil must be transported through the Indian Ocean to Europe and Japan.<sup>124</sup> At the same time, the British Ministry of Defence fretted that if Soviet ships in the Indian Ocean "interfered with the passage of merchant ships going round the Cape, they would immediately interrupt the bulk of oil deliveries from the Persian Gulf to African states and Europe. This would enable them to throttle trade and industry within a relatively short time."<sup>125</sup>

After much consideration, the Department of Defense and the Nixon White House concluded that the growing Russian presence in the Indian Ocean constituted only a "moderate" threat to the U.S. interest in containing Soviet power.<sup>126</sup> The British, however, valued the Indian Ocean for very different reasons than the

Americans. Foreign Secretary Home wrote to his cabinet colleague Julian Amery that the ocean guarded the trade routes and lines of transportation between Britain and its Commonwealth partners in Southeast Asia and Australia. In this sense, the differences between British and American interests in the Indian Ocean paralleled their different interests in the Persian Gulf. Home continued to Amery that "Britain alone cannot bear the entire burden of response to the Soviet naval threat. US/UK agreements such as that on BIOT, which encourage increased American involvement and operations in the Indian Ocean, are therefore very much in our general political and strategic interests."<sup>127</sup>

The British Indian Ocean Territory reemerged as an item on the Anglo-American diplomatic agenda in September 1968 when the Wilson government approved a new U.S. plan to build an "austere" military communications and refueling facility on Diego Garcia, along with a dredged anchorage for ships, oil-storage bunkers, and an airstrip. This was to be paid for by the U.S. government alone. It was agreed that the British would have the right to use the facility, that British communications specialists would serve there, and that the Union Jack would fly over the island.<sup>128</sup> American officials described the function of the facility as linking U.S. naval communications between its stations in Ethiopia and Australia. This would be particularly useful to MIDEASTFOR, which operated in areas of the Red Sea, Persian Gulf, Arabian Sea, and Indian Ocean, where its communications requirements could not be met.<sup>129</sup> The costs of the facility were funded by a classified appropriations item approved by Congress in December 1970, and U.S. Navy Seabees began construction of the facility in March 1971.

The Anglo-American project, which had lapsed in mid-1967, was clearly given new life by the British decision in January 1968 to abandon its military bases in the Gulf. Although the U.S. and British governments were careful never to say they were cooperating to build a new military "base" in the Persian Gulf region, Diego Garcia's potential was evident to the peoples of the Indian Ocean basin. The governments of India, Pakistan, Ceylon, and Tanzania vocally criticized the facility when news of its construction leaked to the press. Surely this was neocolonialism. Surely this would bring Cold War tensions and conflict to the area. In September 1970 the summit of nonaligned nations, meeting in Lusaka, Zambia, adopted a resolution offered by Ceylonese prime minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike calling for a nuclear-free "peace zone" in the Indian Ocean area. The following January, the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Singapore loudly condemned the Anglo-American project on Diego Garcia.<sup>130</sup>

Further complicating matters for the British and Americans on Diego Garcia was the issue of what to do with the island's approximately 500 residents. Originally described by London and Washington as itinerant "contract laborers"

from the island's copra plantations, it emerged that many of these Chagossians and their families had been living on the island for generations. The Americans urged that all residents of Diego Garcia be removed, and as the islanders' history became clear it was obvious that the human cost of defending the Persian Gulf region would be formidable in the era of American ascent and British retreat.<sup>131</sup>

### Ironies

On November 15, 1973, U.S. secretary of defense James Schlesinger spoke with Lord Cromer, the British ambassador to Washington, about the situation in the Middle East. Hostilities between Israel and its Arab neighbors in October's Yom Kippur War had only recently concluded, and on October 17, the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) decided to punish the United States and the other nations that had assisted Israel in the war by launching an oil embargo against them. By withholding Persian Gulf oil, the nations of the Muslim Middle East hoped to cripple the Western economies and change U.S. policy in the region. Schlesinger told Cromer that the U.S. and Western economies could not be held hostage by "under-developed, under-populated" nations and that "it was no longer obvious to him that the U.S. could not use force" to break the month-long embargo. Six days later Kissinger told reporters that the United States would have to determine countermeasures against the OPEC states if the embargo continued "unreasonably and indefinitely." Schlesinger, in the meantime, began sounding out British officials on the possibility of using the facility on Diego Garcia to support American activity in the Gulf region. Was the United States planning a military strike to seize the Persian Gulf oil fields?

Senior officials in the Heath government thought it was likely that the United States was considering the use of military force in the Middle East. Consequently, Sir Percy Craddock and the British Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) produced a study in December that explored "how the government might want to react" if the Nixon administration did so.<sup>132</sup> When the JIC study was declassified at the beginning of 2003, the British press covered the story breathlessly. "British Feared U.S. Invasion of Saudi Arabia," read the *Daily Telegraph's* lead story on January 1. "Heath Feared U.S. Plan to Invade Gulf," *The Guardian's* headline trumpeted the same day, while the article recounted the "clashes" and "suspicions" between the White House and Downing Street surrounding the issue.<sup>133</sup> In fact, although the Nixon administration had been dismayed by Heath's refusal to allow U.S. military equipment to be routed to Israel through British bases, and while Heath had deplored Nixon's failure to consult with his allies before issuing a nuclear alert during the war, there is no evidence in the documentary record that the Heath government "feared" U.S.

military action in the Gulf. The tone of the report to the prime minister is sober and correct. British officials could only have noted the irony that after years of trying unsuccessfully to engage the United States in joint planning to seize the Gulf oil fields if necessary, the Americans were now considering that possibility almost two years after the last British military units had been withdrawn from the region.

Irony abounded in the years surrounding Britain's withdrawal from the Gulf. Following decades of American criticism of Britain's "antiquated" imperial posture in the Gulf, the Johnson and Nixon administrations worked assiduously to convince London to reverse its decision to withdraw and then to persuade the Heath government to preserve as much influence in the region as possible after 1971. Further, after years of attempting to dissociate itself from the British presence in the Gulf in order not to be tarred with the brush of European imperialism, the United States found itself in the 1970s assailed in the West and in the Middle East for assuming Britain's imperial mantle in the Gulf. Fred Halliday, for example, in his influential 1974 study of Gulf region war and politics, *Arabia without Sultans*, argued from a Marxist perspective that by the end of the 1960s the United States "had achieved a dominant position within imperialist control of the Middle East, parallel to the transition from direct to post-colonial control."<sup>134</sup> Edward Said, in *Orientalism* and in later works, contended, "Imperialism did not end, did not become suddenly 'past' once decolonization had set in motion the dismantling of the classical empires." The United States assumed a critical role in extending the Western imperial tradition in the Middle East and elsewhere. Indeed, "the parallel between European and American imperial designs on the Orient (Near and Far East) is obvious."<sup>135</sup> British firebrand Tariq Ali wrote passionately that American imperialism, laced with racism and cultural chauvinism, has deep roots but reached its full flowering in the Middle East after the disappearance of the European colonial empires.<sup>136</sup>

Castigation of the United States' inherited "imperial" role in the Middle East and Persian Gulf was, of course, not limited to Western faculty commons. It flourished throughout the Gulf region in the years following Britain's withdrawal. Nowhere was this more important than in Iran in the years surrounding the revolution that toppled the shah's imperial government. In the early 1970s, as the Nixon administration worked to establish the shah as the Western watchdog in the Gulf, a pamphlet appeared on the streets of Tehran titled *Heir to Colonialism*, an inflammatory tract that argued that the United States had emerged as the inheritor to Britain's imperial legacy in the Middle East. Though blacklisted by the shah, "clandestine editions were hastily prepared and *Heir to Colonialism* sold more than 50,000 copies and attracted at least ten times as many readers."<sup>137</sup> The leader of the Islamist opposition to the shah's government, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, also mobilized the rhetoric of

anti-imperialism against the United States in the late 1970s, depicting the shah as a puppet of American colonialism in the Gulf region who must be swept from power. "America is the number one enemy of the deprived and oppressed people of the world," he instructed his followers. "There is no crime America will not commit in order to maintain its political, economic, and military domination of those parts of the world where it predominates."<sup>138</sup> Representations of the United States as an imperial power in the region emerged in Western intellectual circles and in Middle Eastern souks well before Britain's departure from the Persian Gulf region, but the disappearance of Britain's permanent military presence in the Gulf, the West's growing dependence on Gulf oil, and Washington's expanding political and military relationship with the shah's Iran reinforced this characterization.

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Britain's formal departure from the Persian Gulf followed almost four years of carefully and skillfully conducted negotiations with the nations of the region as well as close consultation with the United States. It proved to be a complex business. Frequently, the story of Britain's final years in the Gulf region is caricatured as an attempt by Whitehall to cut expensive foreign policy commitments during an era of economic and diplomatic retrenchment. The imperative of reconciling their resources and foreign obligations clearly motivated British policymakers, but much else was at work. British officials were reappraising their strategic and political priorities in these years, particularly in Europe and its former imperial dependencies. The Conservative electoral victory of June 1970 underscored the divisions between the political parties and within the foreign policy establishment over British goals and obligations in the Gulf and produced a careful final study of Britain's posture in the region by Luce. The British government, it was decided, would strive to exert political influence in the Gulf even after its last military units withdrew. Finally, the change in administrations in Washington in January 1969 produced uncertainty in London about American intentions and commitments in the Gulf, and the frosty relationship between President Richard Nixon and Prime Minister Edward Heath complicated Anglo-American efforts to reach accord on Persian Gulf issues.

Nixon's administration, like Lyndon Johnson's before it, struggled to come to terms with Britain's decision to leave the Gulf and to identify surrogates for British power there. His diplomacy in the Gulf has often been reduced to an account of the burgeoning U.S.-Iranian relationship, but it was much more complex and rich than this account allows, and it abounded in irony. Nixon and his special assistant for national security affairs, Henry Kissinger, worked to fit the Gulf region into the larger calculus of their global strategy of *détente* and containment. As they erected the so-called twin pillars (a term not found

in the contemporary documentary record), Nixon's subordinates thought carefully about U.S. obligations to Saudi Arabia, the place of the Gulf nations in their Third World strategy, regional rivalries, and conflicts, and they struggled to tie Anglo-American military assets in the Indian Ocean to the strategic requirements of U.S. policy in the Middle East. However, U.S. Gulf policy during the Nixon years must be counted a failure. In contrast to Britain's skillful diplomacy in advance of its departure, American policy in the Gulf region during the same period was uncertain and distracted. Nixon's misplaced confidence in the prospect of Saudi-Iranian cooperation in the Gulf and uncritical support of the shah sowed the seeds of instability in the region. In a painful irony, these policies provoked charges of U.S. imperial designs in the area after years of efforts by American policymakers to avoid being tarred with the brush of British imperialism in the Gulf and Arabia.

## Conclusion

# The United States, Great Britain, and the Persian Gulf Region in Historical Perspective

What historical and historiographical conclusions are to be drawn from the tortuous story of Anglo-American diplomacy in the Persian Gulf region from the 1950s to the early 1970s? What themes suggest themselves as most important to scholars of the period and of the region? What is most striking is the largeness and rich diversity of the Persian Gulf area. As conceived by British and U.S. policymakers during the Cold War, it extended from the expanses of the western Indian Ocean to the mouth of the Red Sea, eastward to the Strait of Hormuz, and north to Kuwait. The region comprised the tiny, but increasingly wealthy, Persian Gulf sheikhdoms, the even smaller coral atolls of the Indian Ocean island chains, the bustling and chaotic port colony of Aden and its desolate hinterlands, as well as the large and politically powerful monarchies of Saudi Arabia and Iran. Arabs, Persians, Shias, Sunnis, South Asians, East Africans, Britons, and Americans all converged in the Gulf region in pursuit of their varied interests. It is a mistake, therefore, to view the Persian Gulf as merely an assemblage of tiny oil emirates on the western shore of an inland waterway. Rather, it is a large region of Southwest Asia whose highly varied but interrelated parts composed a single diplomatic theater for U.S. and British foreign policy-makers and strategists during the middle twentieth century.

Further, the Persian Gulf region was home to a polyglot assortment of quarrelsome peoples who entertained territorial and dynastic ambitions rooted in centuries-old claims and grievances. As the British and U.S. governments struggled to define and secure their interests in the Gulf and Arabia, the indigenous peoples of the region vigorously pursued their own destinies. Frequently, Western and Middle Eastern ambitions conflicted; at other times, they complemented one another.

The Norwegian historian Geir Lundestad has coined the term “empire by invitation” to describe the efforts of relatively weak nations to harness the power and influence of stronger patrons to their own interests.<sup>1</sup> His work has been refined in recent years by many historians seeking to explore the process by which small states pursued their interests during the Cold War struggle between the superpowers.<sup>2</sup> This dynamic played out in the Persian Gulf region in complex ways. On one important level, the states of the Persian Gulf region proved adroit at manipulating the power of both Britain and the United States as they pursued regional interests that long antedated the Cold War and late imperial concerns of policymakers in London and Washington. The rulers of the small Gulf emirates used the Pax Britannica and British patronage to secure their thrones and fortunes from their regional rivals. Saudi Arabia and Iran, meanwhile, established themselves as useful Cold War allies of the United States and exploited the wealth and prestige this brought them to pursue ancient territorial ambitions and regional political supremacy.

During the period examined in this study, however, the fate of the Gulf region and its peoples was determined largely in London and, later, Washington as Britain and the United States attempted to establish a diplomatic *modus vivendi* in the area during the era of the Cold War and European imperial retrenchment. In the decades following the Second World War, Britain worked to preserve its formal and informal empire in the Gulf and Arabia, secure its traditional interests in the region, and reform its political and administrative apparatus in the Middle East. At the same time, the United States concentrated on winning the Cold War against Soviet communism and worked to harness the petroleum resources and military facilities of the Gulf region to this end. Thus, British and American interests were not identical. They coincided more often than not, but were rooted in different interpretations of the Gulf region’s ultimate value to their larger foreign policies.

For Britain, the value of the Persian Gulf evolved continually during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and its interests there were myriad. It recognized the need to secure and stabilize the Gulf for a constantly shifting series of economic and strategic reasons. In the postwar period, the Gulf was a link in Britain’s chain of imperial and Commonwealth communications, the sale of Gulf oil by British firms was a major contributor to London’s balance of payments, and British political hegemony in the region served as proof of its political vitality and influence.

Britain’s formal and informal imperial relationships in the Gulf region were many and equally diverse, and a hodgepodge of bureaucracies managed London’s diplomacy in the region over the years.<sup>3</sup> The government of British India, the India Office in London, the Foreign Office, and the Colonial Office all played direct roles in the government and administration of the Persian Gulf region through the years. Additionally, the British military greatly influenced

London's strategic and political choices in the region, while the British Petroleum Company, in which the government owned a controlling interest, helped define Britain's economic and commercial priorities in the Gulf and Arabia.

The diversity of British interests in the Gulf region, and the many administrative agencies and interest groups that attempted to secure them, complicated London's diplomacy in the area during the era of imperial retreat in the 1950s and 1960s. In the Gulf, Britain clung to its late imperial obligations and prerogatives much longer than it was able to do in the rest of the Middle East, and British officials struggled to coordinate their colonial, foreign, military, and economic policies in the region. During the 1950s and early 1960s, they worked to build a single political and military edifice extending from Aden to Kuwait. In the late 1960s, when the Labour government decided finally to end its military and political roles in the Gulf area, British officials had to devise strategies to deal with both formal decolonization (in the case of Aden) and retrenchment from its informal empire elsewhere in the Gulf.

A latecomer to the affairs of the region, the United States pursued commercial, humanitarian, and missionary interests in the area in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but during the Second World War it recognized the strategic value of the region's petroleum and military bases to the prosecution of the war against the Axis powers. In the late 1940s, the United States became convinced that securing those resources was critical to waging Cold War against the Soviet Union. But the U.S. government's insistence on assessing the Persian Gulf's and Arabia's value in terms primarily of its global Cold War strategy often put it at odds with London, whose regional interests were more parochial.

Like the British government, the U.S. government found it impossible to speak with one voice on Persian Gulf issues. The White House, the State Department's Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, the CIA, and the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff frequently espoused different views on the proper course for American policy in the Gulf. Complicating matters further, Washington's relationship with the large American oil firms operating in the Gulf region, especially Aramco, was a complex mixture of cooperation and conflict. For more than two decades, historians have stressed the close association and coordination between the government and the oil companies in fashioning and implementing U.S. Middle East policies.<sup>4</sup> An examination of Anglo-American diplomacy in the Persian Gulf region, however, reveals that the American oil companies' pursuit of profit and the U.S. government's pursuit of stability and security often proved inconsistent and repeatedly put diplomats and business executives at odds with each other.

The United States' and Britain's complex bilateral relationship complicated their efforts to forge coherent and coordinated policies in the Gulf region.

In recent years, scholars have done much to dissect the Anglo-American alliance and to dispel the myth of the “special relationship” that emerged from Churchillian rhetoric. David Reynolds, Christopher Thorne, Robert Hathaway, and Alex Danchev, for example, have each shown that U.S.-British diplomacy after the Second World War was marked by competition, suspicion, and resentment as often as cooperation.<sup>5</sup> In its most extreme form in Britain, this revisionist school of “special relationship” scholarship contends that the United States worked actively to undermine British interests and dismantle the British Empire.<sup>6</sup>

There is, in fact, little evidence to suggest that the U.S. government worked insidiously to bring down Britain’s empire during the Cold War. In the Middle East, in fact, the opposite was true. An examination of U.S. strategy in the Gulf region demonstrates that American officials worked to bolster British imperial interests in the area as a bulwark against Soviet encroachment in the Middle East. However, the revisionists’ contention that friction was one of the defining characteristics of U.S.-British relations in the postwar era is amply borne out in this study. In retrospect, it is clear that U.S. suspicions of British imperial practices and institutions in the Gulf made Anglo-American relations in the Gulf more difficult. Further, British suspicion of American encroachments into its traditional Middle Eastern sphere of influence and resentment of Washington’s refusal to support unequivocally British policies in the region rendered Anglo-American diplomacy very tense. The larger point to be made is that the political and strategic challenges that Washington and London confronted in “far-flung” areas of the world, on the peripheries of the Cold War, and during the process of British imperial retreat shaped the content and character of Anglo-American relations in important ways.

British and American differences over policy in the colonial and developing worlds were not unique to the Persian Gulf region. A great deal of recent scholarship has explored American anticolonialism and its relationship to the expansion of U.S. power and the course of Anglo-American relations. Wm. Roger Louis, Peter Hahn, and Ronald Robinson, especially, have written perceptively of the uneasy mix of altruism, self-interest, and diplomatic calculation that informed U.S. policy toward the British Empire. Louis and Robinson have recently asked whether the British Empire, in fact, “decolonized in the 1960s or informalized as part of the old story of free trade imperialism with a new American twist.” They suggest that the United States and Britain established a sort of condominium in the developing world that replaced the formal structure of the British Empire with an informal structure financed by Washington. The case of the Persian Gulf region offers no evidence that this is the case.<sup>7</sup>

While deep disagreements over the moral and pragmatic costs of British imperialism and colonialism divided the Anglo-American alliance on issues

concerning the developing world, officials in Washington and London also differed vehemently over how best to treat the phenomenon of nationalism in the Middle East. This study makes clear that their conflicting assessments of the dangers posed to Western interests by revolutionary Arab and Iranian nationalism were instrumental in determining the course of Britain's and the United States' diplomacy in the Persian Gulf region.

Since the era of the Vietnam conflict, historians have examined the efforts of Western nations to either confront or placate indigenous nationalism during the Cold War.<sup>8</sup> What is apparent from an examination of the Persian Gulf region is that local nationalism was a particularly fractious and volatile phenomenon. American and British policymakers found themselves forced to confront anti-Western revolutionary nationalism of the kind espoused by Iranian prime minister Muhammad Mussadiq and Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser, but also the irredentist nationalism that motivated Yemeni claims to Aden and Iraqi claims to Kuwait. Further, conservative monarchical nationalism fueled Saudi Arabian claims to the Buraimi oasis and parts of southeastern Arabia, as well as Iranian aspirations to be the region's hegemon in the wake of Britain's departure.

American government officials generally counseled their British allies to make compromises where possible in order to conciliate revolutionary Middle Eastern nationalists. In so doing, they hoped to secure Western economic and military assets in the region. American officials recognized that local nationalists were not simply communists and believed that their energies might be redirected to serve Western ends. By establishing good relations with Nasser's Egypt, for example, U.S. policymakers hoped to position the United States as a champion of change and progressive reform in the Middle East.

Meanwhile, British officials believed that radical nationalist goals in the Persian Gulf and Arabia were irreconcilable with London's interests there. Revolutionary Middle Eastern nationalism was dedicated to the expulsion of Britain from the region and the eradication of British influence from the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula. Senior policymakers in Whitehall deplored American naïveté in trying to conciliate the nationalists. They further noted the irony of U.S. policy that courted the proponents of radical change in the region while making the regimes in Saudi Arabia and Iran, among the region's most reactionary, the centerpieces of its diplomacy.

It seems clear that however inconsistent the United States' policy was toward Middle Eastern nationalism, it was correct in its basic assertion that the Western nations must recognize the aspirations of the nationalists, both revolutionary and moderate, as legitimate, and must fashion a diplomacy that conciliated this incendiary phenomenon. In this view the United States garnered sympathy from many Foreign Office officials and British diplomats in the Middle East. American policymakers were profoundly mistaken, however,

in believing that Middle Eastern nationalism could be co-opted and made to serve Western interests in the Gulf and Arabia. They greatly underestimated the volatility as well as the highly factionalized and personalized nature of the movement.

It would be inaccurate to interpret the course of Anglo-American diplomacy in the Persian Gulf region solely as a story of resentments, friction, and conflict. Rather, it is the story of two close allies struggling mightily to overcome mutual suspicions and to cooperate in a critically important region of the world. American policymakers believed Britain had an important role to play in the Persian Gulf region, both as the principal defender of the area from outside attack and as the keeper of the peace between the region's peoples. They encouraged Britain to remain actively engaged in the affairs of the Gulf. By the same token, the great majority of British officials recognized that American participation in Gulf and Arabian Peninsula affairs was indispensable to the Middle East's security.

In short, U.S. and British interests in the Persian Gulf region can be said to have run parallel, more often than not during the 1950s and 1960s, but they were never identical. Both Washington and London wanted to see the area at peace, free from Soviet influence, and open to Western investment. Both wanted Western access to the region's petroleum at reasonable prices and to the military facilities of the area. Beyond this, they disagreed on the place of the region in their larger foreign policies and the methods and institutions best suited to secure the interests they shared.

It is tempting, from the vantage of the early twenty-first century, to limn the history of Anglo-American diplomacy in the Gulf region as a straightforward story of the "changing of the guard" or "passing of the torch" from Britain to the United States in the last redoubt of European power in the Middle East. This would be a gross oversimplification. An examination of U.S.-British diplomacy in the Persian Gulf and Arabia illuminates the determination of successive British governments not to cede Britain's position in the Gulf until the last possible moment. Rather, they hoped to use American power and influence to secure the Gulf emirates and the South Arabian Federation as spheres of British influence. This desire lay at the heart of the strategy of "interdependence" articulated in London in the months following the 1956 Suez crisis. Only when a declining Treasury forced the Labour cabinet to reconsider the political and financial costs of remaining in the Gulf did the British government decide, reluctantly, to withdraw finally from the area. Even then, the Conservative government of Edward Heath took steps to ensure that British influence continued in the region after the special treaty relationships were dissolved and the last British troops left.

Similarly, U.S. officials had no desire to assume Britain's role and obligations in the Persian Gulf area. Indeed, they worked strenuously to avoid taking

on expensive new responsibilities in the Middle East during the era of British imperial retrenchment there. For many years, they actively subsidized London's presence in the region politically and economically. When the Wilson government made it clear that it could not sustain Britain's position in the Gulf, the Johnson administration took steps to establish Iran and Saudi Arabia as proxies for British power, anticipating the policy that its successor would formalize through the mechanism of the Nixon Doctrine.

Finally, the question must be asked: Were U.S. and British policies successful in securing Washington's and London's interests in the Persian Gulf region between 1950 and 1972? The question defies a simple answer and depends entirely upon the criteria used to measure success. Was Britain's continued status as a Persian Gulf and Arabian power an end unto itself of London's foreign and colonial policy? If so, British policy in the region clearly failed, as Britain was ultimately obliged to withdraw from the Gulf after 1971 for political and economic reasons. More accurately, British policymakers viewed Britain's position in the Gulf region as a means toward several ends: the uninterrupted supply of inexpensive Gulf oil to the West; the security of British investments and markets in the area; the preservation of lines of communication to Britain's Commonwealth partners in East Africa, Southeast Asia, and Australia; and as a source of prestige that could be translated into political influence, particularly in Washington.

Since Britain's departure in December 1971, Gulf oil has continued to flow to Britain, Western Europe, Japan, and the United States with few interruptions. British markets and investments in the Gulf region have prospered. London's communications with its friends and allies in Africa, Australia, and the Pacific remain intact, while the necessity to reinforce its military commitments in Southeast Asia through the Gulf vanished after Britain's withdrawal from Malaysia and Singapore. Britain remains an important and influential ally of the United States without its Persian Gulf political and military assets. In short, the sky did not fall for British interests in the Gulf after the last Royal Navy vessel weighed anchor in Bahrain. The assumptions on which London's Gulf policy rested during the 1950s and 1960s were shown to be mistaken, and Britain's military presence and direct political role in the region were proven to be expensive irrelevancies.

Similarly, the premises on which U.S. diplomacy in the Persian Gulf region was based were deeply flawed and produced faulty policies. While U.S. policy in the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula had as its highest priority the prevention of Soviet and communist penetration of the area, these were never serious dangers. Local communist power was negligible. As British officials understood, the Soviet Union, although active diplomatically in the Middle East after the mid-1950s, never intended to move into the region militarily. American policymakers did comprehend that commercial imperatives rather than

Britain's regional military guarantee would secure the flow of Gulf oil to the West. They also properly appreciated the need to acknowledge the aspirations of local nationalists in the Gulf and Arabia. But, as we have seen, they mistakenly believed that they could co-opt the volatile energies of Arab nationalist sentiment for the West.

Further, U.S. diplomacy in the Gulf, frequently characterized by open distaste and contempt for British institutions and practices in the region, rendered Anglo-American relations there testy and difficult. The United States' efforts to distance itself from Britain politically in the eyes of the local Arabs complicated the attempts of officials in Washington and London to coordinate their policies in the region. Finally, U.S. efforts to keep Britain engaged in the Gulf and Arabia, the core of American policy in the area, came to naught as domestic political and economic dictates inevitably forced Britain's withdrawal. Subsequent American attempts to make Iran and Saudi Arabia surrogates for British power in the Gulf failed as well by the end of the 1970s.

The record of U.S.-British diplomacy in the Gulf region is, therefore, a troubled one. It is marked by tension and littered with important failures more often than it is characterized by lasting successes. However, the efforts of the U.S. and British governments to preserve the "toll-gates and barbicans" of Western power in the Persian Gulf and Arabian Peninsula reward close examination. They underscore the formidable difficulties even the closest of allies confront in establishing cooperative policies, and they illuminate an important chapter in the history of Western diplomacy on the Cold War's periphery during the era of European imperial retreat.

# Notes

## Introduction

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2. Georges Brondel, "The Sources of Energy 1920–1970," in Carlo M. Cipolla, *The Fontana Economic History of Europe, The Twentieth Century, Part One* (London: Collins/Fontana Books, 1975), pp. 240–49; David Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled: British Policy and World Power in the Twentieth Century* (London: Longman, 1991), pp. 190–91; Ethan B. Kapstein, *The Insecure Alliance: Energy Crises and Western Politics Since 1944* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 59–75; *POWE* 33/2615, "Middle East Oil," 11 March 1963; Richard Gott, "The Kuwait Incident," in *Survey of International Affairs, 1961*, ed. D.C. Watt (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 521–22.
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## Chapter 1

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- no. 1 (New York: Frederick Praeger, 1958); J. B. Kelly, "Great Game or Grand Illusion," *Survey: A Journal of East & West Studies* 25, no. 2 (Spring 1980): 109–27; Halford L. Hoskins, "Background of the British Position in Arabia," *Middle East Journal* 1, no. 2 (April 1947): 137–47; Herbert F. Liebesny, "International Relations of Arabia: The Dependent Areas," *Middle East Journal* 1, no. 2 (April 1947): 148–68; J. F. Standish, "British Maritime Policy in the Persian Gulf," *Middle Eastern Studies* 3, no. 4 (July 1967): 324–54.
3. The best single source on Aden in this period remains R. J. Gavin, *Aden under British Rule, 1839–1967* (London: C. Hurst, 1975), pp. 1–130.
  4. Richard Hall, *Empires of the Monsoon: A History of the Indian Ocean and Its Invaders* (London: Harper Collins, 1996), pp. 355–57; Kelly, "Legal and Historical Basis," pp. 127–28.
  5. See David Fromkin, "The Great Game in Asia," *Foreign Affairs* 58, no. 4 (Spring 1980): 934–51; David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Avon Books, 1989), pp. 26–32; Edward Ingram, *The Beginnings of the Great Game in Asia, 1828–1834* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979); Peter Hopkirk, *The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia* (New York: Kodansha International, 1992); Karl E. Meyer and Shareen Blair Brysac, *Tournament of Shadows: The Great Game and the Race for Empire in Central Asia* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1999).
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  7. C. U. Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries*, 5th. Edn., 14 volumes (Calcutta: 1929), vol. 11, pp. 317–18, quoted in Kelly, "The British Position in the Persian Gulf," p. 134; Gavin, *Aden under British Rule*, pp. 131–55.
  8. G. S. Graham, *The Politics of Naval Supremacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), p. 89.
  9. "Treaty Relationships with Persian Gulf States," Department of State Memorandum from the Office of the Legal Advisor to the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, 9 February 1968, Secret, Department of State Central Files (hereafter DOSCF), POL 33 PERSIAN GULF; "The Arab Shaikhdoms of the Persian Gulf," Foreign Office Memorandum by B. A. B. Burrows, Eastern Department, 6 June 1949, FO 371/74960; Liebesny, "International Relations of Arabia," pp. 156–58; Bernard Burrows, *Footnotes in the Sand: The Gulf in Transition, 1953–1958* (London: Michael Russell, 1990), pp. 9–27.
  10. Blyth, "Britain versus India," pp. 105–06; Burrows, *Footnotes in the Sand*, p. 17.
  11. Liebesny, "International Relations of Arabia," pp. 150–56; Smith, "Rulers and Residents," p. 509.
  12. Liebesny, "International Relations of Arabia," pp. 162–64.
  13. The best sources on early American contacts with the Middle East and Persian Gulf include John A. DeNovo, *American Interests and Policies in the Middle East, 1900–1939* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1963); James A. Field, *America and the Mediterranean World, 1776–1882* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969); Robert D. Kaplan, *The Arabists: The Romance of an American Elite* (New York: Free Press, 1993); Joseph J. Malone, "America and the

- Arabian Peninsula: The First Two Hundred Years,” *Middle East Journal* 30, no. 3 (Summer 1976): 406–24; Michael A. Palmer, *Guardians of the Gulf: A History of America’s Expanding Role in the Persian Gulf, 1833–1992* (New York: Free Press, 1992).
14. Palmer, *Guardians of the Gulf*, pp. 3–5; Malone, “America and the Arabian Peninsula,” pp. 409–11, Hall, *Empires of the Monsoon*, pp. 397–400.
  15. Palmer, *Guardians of the Gulf*, p. 6.
  16. American interests in the Gulf region were not exclusively commercial in the early years of U.S. involvement there. They were philanthropic and missionary as well. The Arabian Mission, established at New Brunswick, New Jersey, in 1889, established missions, schools and hospitals in Amara and Basra in Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Oman. Hunter Miller, ed., *Treaties and Other International Acts of the United States of America*, vol. 7 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1931–48), pp. 466, 469–73; Palmer, *Guardians of the Gulf*, p. 7; Malone, “America in the Arabian Peninsula,” pp. 411–12.
  17. For early British efforts to exploit Persian Gulf oil, see Marian Kent, *Moguls and Mandarins: Oil, Imperialism and the Middle East in British Foreign Policy, 1900–1940* (London: Frank Cass, 1993); Benjamin Shwadran, *The Middle East, Oil, and the Great Powers* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1955); Fiona Venn, *Oil Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century* (London: Macmillan, 1986); Daniel Yergin, *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money, and Power* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), pp. 134–302.
  18. “Policy and Information Statement on Arab Principalities of the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman,” 15 March 1946, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS*), 1946, 7:65.
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  20. American efforts to exploit Persian Gulf oil are examined in Anderson, *Aramco, the United States, and Saudi Arabia: A Study in the Dynamics of Foreign Oil Policy, 1933–1950* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981); Anthony Cave Brown, *Oil, God, and Gold: The Story of ARAMCO and the Saudi Kings* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999); Aaron David Miller, *Search for Security: Saudi Arabian Oil and American Foreign Policy, 1939–1949* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); David S. Painter, *Oil and the American Century: The Political Economy of U.S. Foreign Oil Policy, 1941–1954* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); Yergin, *Prize*, pp. 165–280.
  21. In exchange for the concession, Casoc agreed to pay the royal government “an initial cash advance of £50,000 and an annual rental of £5,000 until oil was discovered, a further cash advance of £100,000 after discovery, and royalties at the rate of four shillings per ton. The government agreed to forego its right to tax the company, and the company agreed ‘as far as practical’ to employ Saudi nationals and to refrain from interference in the internal affairs of the country.” Anderson, *ARAMCO*, p. 25.
  22. By 1938 Dammam produced oil in commercial quantities, and Casoc refined the crude at a new facility constructed by SOCAL to serve its oil interests in both Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. But production was only half the oil battle in Saudi Arabia.

- In order to dispose of the growing supply of Saudi petroleum Casoc decided to merge with the Texas Oil Company, whose marketing and distribution network were extensive. Between 1938 and 1940, Casoc's production rose from fewer than 500,000 barrels per year to more than 5 million. The story of the U.S. oil concession in Saudi Arabia is best told in Anderson, *ARAMCO*, 21–33, 16–31; Miller, *Search for Security*, pp. 18–26; Yergin, *Prize*, pp. 283–92.
23. Miller, *Search for Security*, p. 24.
  24. For American diplomacy in Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf region during the Second World War, see Rachel Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil: America's Uneasy Partnership with Saudi Arabia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 36–49; Thomas W. Lippman, *Inside the Mirage: America's Fragile Partnership with Saudi Arabia* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2004), pp. 25–27, 97–100; Parker Hart, *Saudi Arabia and the United States: Birth of a Security Partnership* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), pp. 13–50; Benson Lee Grayson, *Saudi American Relations* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1982), pp. 25–64; David E. Long, *The United States and Saudi Arabia: Ambivalent Allies* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1985), pp. 101–06; Barry Rubin, "Anglo-American Relations in Saudi Arabia, 1941–45," *Journal of Contemporary History* 14, no. 2 (April 1979): 253–68; Michael B. Stoff, *Oil, War, and American Security: The Search for a National Policy on Foreign Oil, 1941–1947* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980); Anderson, *ARAMCO*, pp. 35–123; Miller, *Search for Security*, pp. 32–149; Painter, *Oil and the American Century*, pp. 32–95; Palmer, *Guardians of the Gulf*, pp. 20–39.
  25. Department of State Telegram 1327, Cairo to Washington, 27 July 1943, *FRUS*, 1943, 3:935–37.
  26. More than 80 percent of the petroleum used by the Allied Powers in their war against Germany and Japan came from American wells, but Aramco production of Saudi oil nearly quintupled during the war years, going from 12,000 barrels per day to 59,000 barrels per day. In addition, the company constructed a new oil refinery at Ras Tanura capable of handling 50,000 barrels daily. On January 31, 1944, Casoc formally changed its name to the Arabian American Oil Company (Aramco); see *FRUS*, 1944, 4:12; Roy Leblicher, *ARAMCO and World Oil: Handbook for American Employees* (New York: Arabian American Oil Company, 1952), p. 77; "The Secretary of State to the Minister Resident in Saudi Arabia (Moose)," 9 October 1943, *FRUS*, 1943, 4:938–39.
  27. Draft Memorandum to President Truman prepared by the State Department's Chief of the Division of Near Eastern Affairs (Merriam), early August 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, 8:45–48.
  28. "Foreign Petroleum Policy of the United States," Memorandum by the Inter-Divisional Petroleum Committee of the Department of State, 11 April 1944, *FRUS*, 1944, 5:27–33. See also Memorandum by the Assistant Secretary of State (Clayton) to President Roosevelt, undated c. November 1944, *FRUS*, 1943, 5:37–38.
  29. Quoted in Miller, *Search for Security*, pp. 101–102.
  30. Michael B. Stoff, "The Anglo-American Oil Agreement and the Wartime Search for Foreign Oil Policy," *Business History Review* 55, no. 1 (Spring 1981): 59–74; Miller, *Search for Security*, pp. 99–107; Yergin, *Prize*, pp. 399–403.
  31. See T. H. Vail Motter, *The Persian Corridor and Aid to Russia, The United States Army in World War II, The Middle East*, Office of the Chief of Military History,

- Department of the Army (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1952); James A. Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), pp. 18–20; Thomas A. Bryson, *American Diplomatic Relations with the Middle East, 1784–1975: A Survey* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1977), pp. 117–20.
32. J. Rives Childs, *Foreign Service Farewell: My Years in the Near East* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1969), p. 146.
  33. On July 29, 1944 the American Minister in Jidda raised the issue with the Saudi foreign minister. An airfield at Dhahran would shorten the route taken by U.S. air traffic between Cairo and Karachi by 212 miles and eliminate the need to stop, in transit, at British fields in Abadan and Habbaniya in Iran and Iraq. As put succinctly by James L. Gormly, “the use of Dhahran was desired to shorten the flying distance to Karachi, to provide a needed fuel stop, to permit planes to carry more supplies, and to support the growing American oil facility in the area.” James M. Gormly, “Keeping the Open Door in Saudi Arabia: The United States and the Dhahran Airfield, 1945–1946,” *Diplomatic History* 4, no. 2 (Spring 1980): 193.
  34. James F. Schnabel, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1945–1947*, History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1996), pp. 139–49; see also Melvyn P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), pp. 56–59.
  35. Gormly, “Keeping the Open Door,” pp. 196–99.
  36. John J. McCloy to the Department of State, 31 January 1945, quoted in Leffler, *Preponderance of Power*, p. 58.
  37. Rubin, “Anglo-American Relations,” p. 253.
  38. *Ibid.*, p. 254.
  39. Hart, *Saudi Arabia and the United States*, p. 22.
  40. John Kent, Introduction to *British Documents on the End of Empire* (hereafter *BDEE*), *Egypt and the Defence of the Middle East* (London: The Stationery Office, 1998), series B, vol. 1, p. xliii.
  41. Churchill to Roosevelt, 20 February 1944 and 4 March 1944, quoted in Wm. Roger Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East, 1945–1951: Arab Nationalism, the United States, and Postwar Imperialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 188; Rubin, “Anglo-American Relations,” p. 260.
  42. “The Meeting of the President and the King.” The Minister in Saudi Arabia (Eddy) to the Secretary of State, 3 March 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, 8:8–9; Hart, *Saudi Arabia and the United States*, p. 38; Rubin, “Anglo-American Relations,” p. 255; Minute by Thomas Wikely, 30 November 1945, quoted in Louis, *British Empire*, p. 192.
  43. Quoted in R. N. Gardner, *Sterling-Dollar Diplomacy in Current Perspective* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. xiii.
  44. A Foreign Office memorandum of March 1944 anticipated this issue and expressed it succinctly:

They [the Americans] have enormous power, but it is the power of the reservoir behind the dam, which may overflow uselessly or be run through pipes to drive turbines. The transmutation of their power into useful forms, and its direction into advantageous channels, is our concern. . . . It must be

our purpose not to balance our power against that of America, but to make use of American power for purposes which we regard as good. . . . A strong American policy must therefore be based not on a determination to resist American suggestions or demands, but on an understanding of the way in which their political machinery works, and a knowledge of how to make it work to the world's advantage—and our own. . . . [W]e must use the power of the United States to preserve the Commonwealth and the Empire.

“Essentials of an American Policy,” 21 March 1944, FO 371/38523, reproduced in John Baylis, ed., *Anglo-American Relations since 1939: An Enduring Alliance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), pp. 34–36.

45. Between 1941 and 1945, U.S. oil consumption grew from 1.49 billion barrels of oil per year to 1.77 billion. Keeping pace, U.S. production climbed from 1.4 billion barrels yearly to 1.7 billion. After the war, oil increased its share of total U.S. energy consumption from 30.5 percent in 1945 to 37.2 percent in 1950. Painter, *Oil and the American Century*, pp. 96–98; Palmer, *Guardians of the Gulf*, pp. 268–69.
46. During the war, production of Persian Gulf oil had exploded from 12,950 metric tons per year to 25,950 metric tons as the Allies came to rely on the region's petroleum reservoirs. That amount more than trebled to 85,925 metric tons by 1950. Aramco production in Saudi Arabia increased from 58,000 barrels per day to 547,000 barrels daily in the first five years after the war, while British concessions in Iran and Iraq increased production from 436,000 barrels per day in 1945 to 780,000 barrels per day in 1950. Ethan B. Kapstein, *The Insecure Alliance: Energy Crises and World Politics Since 1944* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 59–63; George Philip, *The Political Economy of International Oil* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), pp. 103–05; Georges Brondel, “The Sources of Energy, 1920–1970,” in *The Fontana Economic History of Europe: The Twentieth Century, Part I*, ed. Carlo M. Cipolla (London: Collins/Fontana Books, 1972), pp. 242–47.
47. Quoted in Painter, *Oil and the American Century*, p. 156.
48. Acting Secretary of the Interior Oscar Chapman commented in May 1948, “The European Recovery Program was most carefully designed to relieve the present drain on American petroleum supplies and to result in most of Europe's requirements being met from the Middle East.” Furthermore, David Painter writes, “more than 10 per cent of the total aid expended under ERP was spent on oil, more than for any other single commodity. Between April 1948 and December 1951 56 per cent of the oil supplied to the Marshall Plan countries by U.S. companies was financed by the Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA) and its successor, the Mutual Security Agency (MSA).” Miller, *Search for Security*, p. 178; Painter, *Oil and the American Century*, pp. 155–56.
49. “The British and American Positions,” Memorandum Prepared in the Department of State, undated, ca. October 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, 5:513.
50. “Specific Current Questions,” Memorandum prepared in the Department of State, undated, ca. October 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, 5:547–48.
51. Letter from President Truman to King Ibn Saud, 31 October 1951, *FRUS*, 1950, 5:1190–1191.

52. Long, *United States and Saudi Arabia*, pp. 34–36, 106–07; Hart, *Saudi Arabia and the United States*, p. 58; Painter, *Oil and the American Century*, pp. 165–71; Yergin, *Prize*, pp. 445–49.
53. “Policy and Information Statement on Arab Principalities of the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman,” Memorandum Prepared in the Department of State, 15 March 1946, *FRUS*, 1946, 7:67–68.
54. “Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense by the Joint Chiefs,” 30 November 1951, JCS 1887/29, quoted in David R. Devereux, *The Formulation of British Defense Policy towards the Middle East, 1948–56* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990), p. 110.
55. Memorandum by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee, 12 October 1946, *FRUS*, 1946, 7:631–33.
56. Palmer, *Guardians of the Gulf*, p. 45.
57. Walter Mills, ed., *The Forrestal Diaries* (New York: Viking, 1951), vol. 9, pp. 2026–27, quoted in Palmer, *Guardians of the Gulf*, p. 43.
58. “Shortage of Oil Threatens Our Defense, Forrestal Says,” *New York Times*, 20 January 1948, pp. 1, 14.
59. Quoted in David Alan Rosenberg, “The U.S. Navy and the Problem of Oil in a Future War: The Outline of a Strategic Dilemma, 1945–1950,” *Naval War College Review* 29, no. 1 (Summer 1976): 54; Michael J. Cohen, *Fighting World War Three from the Middle East: Allied Contingency Plans, 1945–1954* (London: Frank Cass, 1997), p. 6.
60. “Petroleum Crisis in Venezuela,” U.S. Army *Intelligence Review*, 23 May 1946, pp. 2–7, quoted in Miller, *Search for Security*, p. 177.
61. On the importance of Middle Eastern airbases to allied war fighting strategies, see Cohen, *Fighting World War Three*, pp. 1–61; Peter Hahn, *The United States, Great Britain, and Egypt, 1945–1956: Strategy and Diplomacy in the Early Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), pp. 53–54, 74, 95; Kenneth Condit, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, Volume II, 1947–1949*, History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1996), pp. 153–63; “U.S. Strategic Position in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East,” 14 November 1949, *FRUS*, 1949, 6:58–59; Leffler, *Preponderance of Power*, p. 238.
62. Rosenberg, “U.S. Navy,” pp. 56–59. At this point, the Navy acquired allies in the State Department who feared the political repercussions among the Arab states of abandoning Gulf defense completely. A 1951 State Department memorandum asserted that “the peoples we plan to abandon in war are the same peoples we must continue to work with upon liberation and in the post-war period, when access to local resources and facilities would have to be renegotiated in an adverse atmosphere.” “Re-Evaluation of U.S. Plans for the Middle East,” Paper Prepared in the Department of State, undated, *FRUS*, 1951, 5:10–11.
63. For information on MIDEASTFOR, see Michael Palmer, *On Course to Desert Storm: The United States Navy and the Persian Gulf* (Washington, D.C.: Naval Historical Center, 1992), pp. 35–40; Peter W. DeForth, “U.S. Naval Presence in the Persian Gulf: The Mideast Force Since World War II,” *Naval War College Review* 28, no. 1 (Summer 1975): 28–38; Rosenberg, “Oil in a Future War,” pp. 53–64.
64. “Defence of the Middle East,” War Cabinet Memorandum by Mr. Eden, 13 April 1945, CAB 66/65, WP(45)256, reprinted in John Kent, ed., *BDEE, Egypt and the Defence of the Middle East, Part I, 1945–1949*, series B, vol. 4, p. 7.

65. "British Policy and Organisation in the Middle East," Memorandum by Lord Altrincham, 2 September 1945, CO 732/88, no. 5a, *BDEE, Egypt and the Defence of the Middle East*, vol. 1, p. 39.
66. "Imperial Security in the Middle East," War Cabinet Memorandum by Sir E. Grigg (later Lord Altrincham), 2 July 1945, CAB 66/67, CP(45)55, *BDEE, Egypt and the Defence of the Middle East*, vol. 1, p. 21.
67. "Introductory Paper on the Middle East Submitted Informally by the United Kingdom Representatives [to the Washington Talks]," undated, ca. October 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, 5:569.
68. Wm. Roger Louis emphasizes the importance British strategists placed on Africa and the value of the Middle East to African defense. He writes, "In the late 1940s, Africa gradually superseded India as one of the ultimate justifications of the British Empire. The Middle East, which itself had incalculable potential in oil, was its defence. Africa, where the British Empire might be maintained indefinitely, became the mystique." Louis, *British Empire*, p. 16
69. "Defence of the Middle East," War Cabinet Memorandum by Mr. Eden, 13 May 1945, *BDEE, Egypt and the Defence of the Middle East*, vol. 1, p. 8 "British Strategic Requirements in the Middle East," Report by the COS to the Cabinet Defence Committee, 18 June 1946, *BDEE, Egypt and the Defence of the Middle East*, vol. 1, pp. 151, 158–62.
70. "Strategic Implications of an Independent Libya," Memorandum by the COS on the Position of Libya in Middle Eastern Defence Strategy, 10 November 1949, DEFE 5/18, COS(49)381, in *BDEE*, series B, vol. 2, p. 3.
71. John Kent, Introduction to *BDEE*, series B. vol. 4, *Egypt and the Defence of the Middle East, 1945–1954*, p. xxxvii.
72. David R. Devereux, "Britain, the Commonwealth, and the Defence of the Middle East," pp. 330, 342, "Middle East Policy Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs," 17 September 1945, CP(45)174, CAB 129/4.
73. "Future Defence Policy in the Suez Canal Area," draft aide memoire by the Post Hostilities Planning Staff for the COS, 18 April 1945, CAB 81/46, PHP(45)13, annex, "Imperial Security in the Middle East," War Cabinet Memorandum by Sir E. Grigg (later Lord Altrincham), 2 July 1945.
74. "Middle East Policy," COS Committee Minutes on the Washington Talks with the Americans, 21 November 1947, DEFE 4/8, COS 144(47)1.
75. Michael Wright, the assistant undersecretary at the Foreign Office, noted happily, "The principal result of the Washington talks is that for the first time American policy has crystallised on the line of supporting British policy. It is not the Americans who have altered our policy, but we who have secured American support for our position." Minute of 20 January 1948, FO 371/68041, quoted in Wm. Roger Louis and Ronald Robinson, "The Imperialism of Decolonization," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 22, no. 3:502n88. For U.S. documentation on the 1947 Pentagon Talks, see *FRUS*, 1947, 5:485–626.
76. "Specific Current Questions," Memorandum Prepared in the Department of State, undated, ca. October 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, 5:535.
77. "Considerations in Support of Policy in Respect of the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East Drawn Up After Consultation with the British Group," Memorandum

- by the Chief of the Division of South Asian Affairs (Hare), 5 November 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, 5:579.
78. "Staff Study 'Intermezzo,'" Report by the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East to the COS, 13 May 1948, DEFE 5/11, COS(48)111, *BDEE*, vol. 1, pp. 277–80. See, also, Cohen, *Fighting World War Three*, pp. 161–62.
  79. Officials in London did not like the idea of abandoning the Gulf. The British Joint Planning Staff wrote in October 1948, "We are most reluctant to leave, completely unprotected, the whole of the Persian Gulf area, thus abandoning all the Middle East oil and presenting the enemy with a large area from which he can develop threats to our sea and air routes along the Red Sea and Southern Arabia and organise activities which may threaten our main Middle East positions. The loss of air bases in the Persian Gulf will, moreover, make any possible return to this area an operation of considerable difficulty. With the resources available to us no other course is possible. "Emergency Planning for the Defence of the Middle East," Report by the JPS to the COS, 7 October 1948 (JP(48)106), 11 October 1948, DEFE 4/16, COS 145(48)2, annexes, *BDEE*, *Egypt and the Defence of the Middle East*, vol. 1, p. 294.
  80. "Digest of Plan 'Speedway,'" COS Committee Memorandum on the Global War Emergency Plan for the Period to July 1950, 16 December 1948, DEFE 5/9, COS (48)210, annex, *BDEE*, *Egypt and the Defence of the Middle East*, vol. 1, pp. 299–305; Cohen, *Fighting World War Three*, pp. 163–73.
  81. "Memorandum of a Conversation between the Secretary of State and Crown Prince Saud," 17 January 1947, *FRUS*, 1947, 5:738–41; Department of State Telegram, Jidda to Washington, 6 April 1949, Secret, *FRUS*, 1949, vol. 6, pp. 1594–96; Department of State Telegram, Jidda to Washington, 17 November 1949, Top Secret, *FRUS*, 1949, 6:1618–1620; Department of State Telegram, Jidda to Washington, 17 November 1949, Top Secret, *FRUS*, 1949, 6:1620–22; Hart, *Saudi Arabia and the United States*, pp. 45–48.
  82. State Department Telegram, Washington to Jidda, 26 July 1947, Top Secret, *FRUS*, 1947, 5:752. See, also, Editorial Note, *FRUS*, 1949, 6:1624.
  83. "Middle East Problems," letter from Sir W. Smart (retired) to Sir J. Bowker on Anglo-American Relations, Egyptian Politics, and Middle East Defence. Minutes by T. E. Evans, J. de C. Hamilton, and C. B. Duke," 11 October 1952, FO 141/1454, no. 175, in *BDEE*, vol. 2, pp. 467–73.
  84. Makin's report of his tour, found in FO 371/98343, is reprinted as Annex 2 in Bernard Burrows, *Footnotes in the Sand* (London: Michael Russell, 1990), pp. 157–60.
  85. For the views of the British military on early Middle Eastern nationalism, see "Middle East Policy: Report by the JPS to the COS, 6 Nov 1945," 9 November 1945, CAB 79/41, in *BDEE*, vol. 1, p. 52; "A Chain of Gibaltars," Memorandum by General J. Glubb on the Means to Retain Britain's Middle Eastern Position, 23 May 1951, FO 371/91223, no. 29, in *BDEE*, vol. 2, p. 175.
  86. For an excellent overview of American anticolonialism and the British Empire, see Wm. Roger Louis, "American Anti-Colonialism and the Dissolution of the British Empire," *International Affairs* 61, no. 3 (1985): 395–420.
  87. U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson noted, "The Middle East presented a picture that might have been drawn by Karl Marx himself—with the masses a disinherited

- and poverty-stricken proletariat, no middle class, a small and corrupt ruling class pushed about by foreigners who sought to exploit priceless natural resources, whether oil or canal. Was there ever such an opportunity to invoke inherent xenophobia to destroy the foreigner and his system and substitute the communist solution?" Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1969), p. 600.
88. "United States Security Interests in the Eastern Mediterranean," JCS 1641/1, 10 March 1946, quoted in Cohen, *Fighting World War Three*, p. 34.
  89. The most important works on the Iran crisis of 1951–1954 include *FRUS*, 1952–1954, vol. 10, *Iran, 1951–1954*; National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 28, "The Secret CIA History of the Iran Coup, 1953" (includes the CIA Clandestine Service History, "Overthrow of Premier Mossadeq of Iran, November 1952–August 1953," completed in March 1954 by Dr. Donald Wilbur), [www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/](http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/); Mark J. Gasiorowski and Malcolm Byrne, eds., *Mohammad Mosaddeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2004); Steve Marsh, *Anglo-American Relations and Cold War Oil: Crisis in Iran* (Basingtoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Mark J. Gasiorowski, "The 1953 Coup d'Etat in Iran," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19, no. 3 (August 1987): 261–86; Mary Ann Heiss, *Empire and Nationhood: The United States, Great Britain, and Iranian Oil, 1950–1954* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Mary Ann Heiss, "Real Men Don't Wear Pajamas: Anglo-American Cultural Perceptions of Mohammed Mossadeq and the Iranian Oil Nationalization Dispute," in *Empire and Revolution: The United States and the Third World Since 1945*, ed. Peter L. Hahn and Mary Ann Heiss (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2001); James F. Goode, *The United States and Iran: In the Shadow of Mussadiq* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997); James A. Bill and Wm. Roger Louis, eds., *Mussadiq, Iranian Nationalism, and Oil* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1988); J. H. Bamberg, *The History of the British Petroleum Company, Volume 2, The Anglo-Iranian Years, 1928–1954* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 383–523; Mostafa Elm, *Oil, Power, and Principle: Iran's Oil Nationalization and its Aftermath* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1992); H. W. Brands, "The Cairo-Tehran Connection in Anglo-American Rivalry in the Middle East, 1951–1953," *International History Review* 11, no. 3 (August 1989): 434–56; Francis J. Gavin, "Politics, Power, and U.S. Policy in Iran, 1950–1953," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 1, no. 1 (Winter 1999): 56–89; Brian Lapping, *End of Empire* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), pp. 191–226; C. M. Woodhouse, *Something Ventured* (London: Grenada, 1982); Kermit Roosevelt, *Countercoup: The Struggle for the Control of Iran* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979).
  90. Natalia I. Yegorova, "The Iran Crisis of 1945–46: A View from the Russian Archives, Working Paper No. 15 (Washington, D.C.: The Cold War International History Project, 1996); Bill, *Eagle and the Lion*, pp. 31–38; Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict Between Iran and America* (New York: Random House, 2004), pp. 44–48; Leffler, *Preponderance of Power*, pp. 79–80.
  91. Valued at over £120 million, the facility was Britain's single-most expensive overseas investment. It produced 660,000 barrels of oil per day, nearly 33 percent of the

- Middle East's total output, and 6 percent of the world's total output, and provided 31 percent of Europe's refined oil. Further, the sale of Iranian oil produced £400 million in foreign exchange for Britain annually. Abadan was a major source of aviation fuel and fuel oil for the Eastern hemisphere and produced 85 percent of the fuel oil consumed by the Royal Navy. See, Heiss, "Real Men Don't Wear Pajamas," p. 179, Kapstein, *Insecure Alliance*, p. 79, Painter, *Oil and the American Century*, p. 174, Leffler, *Preponderance of Power*, p. 422.
92. Quoted in Bill and Louis, *Mussadiq*, pp. 229–30.
  93. For a thorough treatment of the complex relationship between AIOC, the British government and the government of Iran during these negotiations, see Steve Marsh, "HMG, AIOC, and the Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis: In Defence of Anglo-Iranian," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 12, no. 4 (December 2001): 143–74.
  94. "Iran," NSC 107/2, 27 June 1951, Top Secret, *FRUS*, 1952–1954, 10:72; Malcolm Byrne, "The Road to Intervention: Factors Influencing U.S. Policy toward Iran, 1945–1953," chapter 6 in *Mohammad Mosaddeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran*, ed. Mark J. Gasiorowski and Malcolm Byrne (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004), pp. 201–226.
  95. Gasiorowski, "Coup d'Etat in Iran," pp. 262–63.
  96. Foreign Office Telegram, Tehran to London, 19 November 1951, FO 371, EP/1024/10, quoted in Brands, "Cairo-Tehran Connection," p. 440.
  97. The acting foreign secretary, the Marquis of Salisbury, reiterated in August 1953, "If we give Washington the impression that we are only concerned with our oil to the exclusion of any consideration of the necessity of keeping Persia in the anti-communist camp, we may lose all control over American actions. That would be disastrous." Memorandum by the Foreign Secretary, 5 August 1952, CAB 129/54, C(52)276, quoted in Brands, "Cairo-Tehran Connection," pp. 449–50, Memorandum from Lord Salisbury to Prime Minister Churchill, 28 August 1953, PREM 11/276, quoted in Brands, "Cairo-Tehran Connection," p. 454.
  98. In fact, Mussadiq opposed the Tudeh until he was deposed, while the Tudeh suspected until the summer of 1953 that Mussadiq was an agent of the United States. Maziar Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause: The Failure of the Left in Iran* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000), pp. 3–16; Sussan Siavoshi, *Liberal Nationalism in Iran: The Failure of a Movement* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1990).
  99. National Security Archive Briefing Book No. 28, "The Secret CIA History of the Iran Coup, 1953"; Barry Rubin, *Paved with Good Intentions: The American Experience and Iran* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 55–56; Gavin, "Politics, Power and U.S. Policy," pp. 87–89; Brands, "Cairo-Tehran Connection," pp. 450–54; Gasiorowski, "Coup D'Etat in Iran," pp. 271–75.
  100. Its efforts must be counted a success, at least in the short term. As Mary Ann Heiss has concluded, "The government stabilized a friendly regime in Tehran without seriously alienating the British. The prospect of significant oil sales seemed to stave off the chances of a communist takeover in Iran; Western interests would continue to dominate Iran's oil, thereby denying that precious resource to the Soviet Union. With Iran squarely in the Western camp, moreover, at least one door had been closed to Soviet expansion in to the oil-rich and strategically important region of the Middle East." Heiss, *Empire and Nationhood*, p. 220.

## Chapter 2

1. "Middle East: Anglo-American Policy," note for the cabinet by Mr. Selwyn Lloyd, circulating a letter from Sir Roger Makins to the Foreign Office, dated 25 January 1954, CAB 129/66, C. (54) 53.
2. See David Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled: British Policy and World Power in the 20th Century* (London: Longman Group, 1991), p. 202; Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945–1963* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 115–117.
3. See, especially, BDEE, *Egypt and the Defence of the Middle East*, Vols. 1–3 (London: The Stationery Office, 1998); Peter L. Hahn, *The United States, Great Britain, and Egypt: Strategy and Diplomacy in the Early Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Wm. Roger Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East, 1945–1951: Arab Nationalism, the United States, and Postwar Imperialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 226–64; Brian Lapping, *End of Empire* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), pp. 227–77.
4. *Eisenhower Diary* entry, 6 January 1953, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library (hereafter DDEL), copies of DDE personal.
5. John Baylis, *Anglo-American Defence Relations, 1939–1984*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1984), p. 60.
6. Robert Ferrell, *The Eisenhower Diaries* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1981), entry for December 21, 1951, p. 208; Ritchie Owendale, *Anglo-American Relations in the Twentieth Century* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), p. 103.
7. See, most importantly, the CIA's report "The Breakup of the Colonial Empires and Its Implications for US Security," ORE 25–48, 3 September 1948. The full text of the document may be found on the web site of the National Intelligence Council, [http://www.dni.gov/nic/PDF\\_GIF\\_declass\\_support/vietnam/ORE\\_25-48.pdf](http://www.dni.gov/nic/PDF_GIF_declass_support/vietnam/ORE_25-48.pdf).
8. "British Policy toward the Near East in the Light of Intensified Arab Nationalism," Foreign Service Despatch, Damascus to Washington, 31 August 1951, Department of State Central Decimal File (hereafter DOSCDF), 641.80/8–3151. See also William Stivers, *America's Confrontation with Revolutionary Change in the Middle East, 1948–1983* (London: Macmillan, 1986).
9. Letter from Eisenhower to Churchill, 22 July 1954, DDEL, Ann Whitman Series, DDE Diaries, Box 4, Personal Diary, January–November 1954.
10. "United States Objectives and Policies with Respect to the Near East," Statement of Policy by the National Security Council, NSC 155/1, 14 July 1953, Top Secret, *FRUS*, 1952–1954, 10:401; "United States Objectives and Policies with Regard to the Near East," Statement of Policy by the National Security Council, NSC 5428, 23 July 1954, Top Secret, *FRUS*, 1952–1954, 10:529; "Progress Report on United States Objectives and Policies with Respect to the Near East (NSC 5428)," Operations Coordinating Board Report, 22 December 1956, *FRUS*, 1955–1957, 12:424.
11. "United States Objectives and Policies with Respect to the Near East," Report to the National Security Council by the Executive Secretary, 14 July 1953, Top Secret, DDEL, White House Office Files, NSC Policy Papers, NSC 155/1—Near East (2), Box 5.

12. See Hahn, *United States*, pp. 131–79; Scott Lucas, “The Limits of Ideology: U.S. Foreign Policy and Arab Nationalism in the Early Cold War,” in *The United States and Decolonization: Power and Freedom*, ed. David Ryan and Victor Pungong (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), pp. 140–67; H. W. Brands, *The Specter of Neutralism: The United States and the Emergence of the Third World, 1947–1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), pp. 223–52.
13. Letter by General Sir John Glubb to the Foreign Office, 23 May 1951, FO 371/91223, no. 29.
14. “Defence Policy and Global Strategy,” Memorandum by the COS for the Cabinet Defence Committee, 17 June 1952, CAB 131/12, D(52)26; “Defence Questions in the Middle East Area,” Memorandum by the Chiefs of Staff to the Cabinet Defence Committee, D. (55) 3, 10 January 1955, CAB 131/15.
15. “United States Objectives and Policies with Respect to the Near East,” NSC 5428, *FRUS*, 1952–1954, 9:525.
16. “Defence Policy and Global Strategy,” Memorandum by the COS for the Cabinet Defence Committee, 17 June 1952, CAB 131/12, D(52)26.
17. See, for example, Letter from Sir Hugh Fraser to Foreign Secretary Eden, 8 March 1955, FO 371/114559.
18. “Relative U.S.-U.K. Roles in the Middle East,” Briefing Paper for President Eisenhower Prepared in the Department of State, 27 November 1953, *DDEL*, Ann Whitman File, International Series, Bermuda, Misc.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Report on the Persian Gulf by Sir Roger Makins, 20 March 1952, FO 371/98343.
21. “Letter from Sir Hugh Fraser to Foreign Secretary Eden,” 8 March 1955, FO 371/114559.
22. See David E. Long, *The United States and Saudi Arabia: Ambivalent Allies* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985), pp. 34–39, 78–79.
23. David S. Painter, *Oil and the American Century: The Political Economy of U.S. Foreign Oil Policy, 1941–1954* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), pp. 102–10; Benjamin Schwadran, *The Middle East, Oil, and the Great Powers* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1955), p. 343; Roy Leblicher, *ARAMCO and World Oil* (New York: Russell F. Moore, 1952), p. 77; “Middle East Oil Situation,” Preliminary Paper, Economic Intelligence Committee’s Ad Hoc Working Group on Middle East Oil, 3 May 1955, *CIA Research Reports, Middle East, 1946–1976* (Washington, D.C.: University Publications of America, 1983).
24. In 1953 petroleum and natural gas supplied approximately half of the total energy consumed by the United States. America’s booming industrial economy craved increasing volumes of oil. The United States accounted for 60 percent of the world demand for oil and consumed 7 million barrels of petroleum per day. By the mid-1970s, energy experts estimated, it would consume twice that amount. Meanwhile, U.S. dependence on supplies of foreign oil increased. Because it had implemented a hemispheric oil policy in the aftermath of the Second World War, in order to conserve indigenous petroleum supplies for times of emergency or war, the United States became a net importer of oil in 1948. Meanwhile, U.S. domestic reserves of petroleum amounted to only about one-third of the world’s total. “Security and International Issues Arising from the Current Situation in Petroleum,” NSC 138/1,

- Report by the Departments of State, Defense, and the Interior, 6 January 1953, *FRUS*, 1952–1954, 9:637–48.
25. In 1953 experts estimated the oil reserves of the Gulf region to be approximately 52 billion barrels, about half the total known world reserves. By 1955, that estimate had increased to 230 billion barrels, 71 percent of the free world's known reserves. The same year, the six principal nations of Western Europe (the United Kingdom, France, Italy, the Netherlands, West Germany, and Belgium) imported 93 million metric tons of oil, 90 percent of it from the Gulf area. Britain imported 28 million tons of crude oil from the Persian Gulf in 1955, primarily from Kuwait. Further, the Persian Gulf nations supplied more than 65 percent of the oil needs of the remainder of the Eastern Hemisphere. "Middle East Oil: The Eastern Hemisphere's Dependence on Middle Eastern Oil," Paper Prepared in the British Embassy, 17 August 1953, *FRUS*, 1952–1954, 9:706–08; "Middle East Oil Situation," Preliminary Paper prepared by the Economic Intelligence Committee's Ad Hoc Working Group on Middle East Oil, 3 May 1955, *CIA Research Reports, Middle East, 1946–1976*; Foreign Office Telegram, London to Washington, 30 April 1956, PREM 11/1473.
  26. "Middle East Defence Strategy," Letter from M. R. Wright to Sir Ralph Stevenson, 20 October 1950, FO 371/80456, no. 143.
  27. "Security and International Issues Arising from the Current Situation in Petroleum," *FRUS*, 1952–1954, 9:639.
  28. "Middle East Oil," Cabinet Note by Mr. [Harold] Macmillan. *Annex: Report by the Middle East Oil (Official) Committee*, 14 October 1955, CAB 129/78, CP (55)152.
  29. "The Contribution of Oil to the United Kingdom's Balance of Payments," Report by the Ministry of Fuel and Power, Petroleum Division, [undated, ca. mid-1955], FO 371/114966.
  30. "Security and International Issues Arising from the Current Situation in Petroleum," *FRUS*, 1952–1954, 9:641.
  31. Letter from Sir Rupert Hay to the Foreign Secretary, 11 June 1952, FO 371/98333. See also Riad N. El-Rayyes, "Arab Nationalism and the Gulf," *Journal of Arab Affairs* 6, no. 2 (1987): 109–45.
  32. Letter from Willie Morris to D. M. H. Riches (Foreign Office, Eastern Department), 15 February 1956, FO 371/120575.
  33. "A Review of Our Middle East Strategy in the Light of Present Assumptions," Report by the British Defense Coordination Committee, Middle East, to the COS, 18 September 1952, DEFE 5/41, COS (52)519, annex; Michael J. Cohen, *Fighting World War Three from the Middle East: Allied Contingency Plans, 1945–1954* (London: Frank Cass, 1997), pp. 301–07.
  34. "Middle East Defense Planning," Memorandum by Elmer B. Staats, Executive Officer, National Security Council, 19 May 1955, DDEL, White House Office Files, NSC Staff Papers, OCB Central File Series, OCB 091.4, Near East (File #2) (2) April–November 1955, Box 78; David R. Devereux, "Britain and the Failure of Collective Defence in the Middle East, 1948–53," in *Britain and the First Cold War*, ed. Ann Deighton (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), p. 237–52.
  35. Cohen, *Fighting World War Three*, p. 309–10; Letter from the Deputy Under Secretary of State (Matthews) to the Secretary of Defense (Lovett), 15 August 1952, *FRUS*,

- 1952–1954, 9:266–67; Robert J. Watson, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1953–1954*, Vol. 5, *History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1986), p. 325.
36. Documentation on Dulles's Middle East trip may be found in *FRUS, 1952–1954*, 9:1–167; the secretary of state's report to the National Security Council concerning his trip may be found in *FRUS, 1952–1954*, 9:379–86.
  37. Watson, *Joint Chiefs of Staff*, pp. 336–38.
  38. Kenneth W. Condit, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1955–1956*, *History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff*, Vol. 6 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1992), pp. 152–53.
  39. David Devereux, *The Formulation of British Defense Policy towards the Middle East, 1948–56* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), pp. 100–20; Ritchie Owendale, *Britain, the United States, and the Transfer of Power in the Middle East, 1945–1962*, pp. 108–39; Cohen, *Fighting World War Three*, pp. 318–23; Hahn, *United States*, pp. 171–79; W. Scott Lucas, "The Path to Suez: Britain and the Struggle for the Middle East, 1953–56," in *Britain and the First Cold War*, ed. Ann Deighton, pp. 253–72.
  40. "A Review of Our Middle East Strategy in Light of Present Assumptions," Report by the British Defence Coordination Committee to the COS, 18 September 1952, COS (52) 519, annex, DEFE 5/41; JPS quote on Britain's quest for prestige cited by John Kent in *BDEE, Egypt and the Defence of the Middle East*, Vol. 1, p. lxxxv; Devereux, *Formulation of British Defense Policy*, pp. 141–47.
  41. Nigel John Ashton, "The Hijacking of a Pact: The Formation of the Baghdad Pact and Anglo-American Tensions in the Middle East, 1955–8," *Review of International Studies* 19, no. 2 (April 1993): 123–37; Magnus Persson, *Great Britain, the United States, and the Security of the Middle East: The Formation of the Baghdad Pact* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1998); Brian Holden Reid, "The 'Northern Tier' and the Baghdad Pact," in *Churchill's Peacetime Administration, 1951–1955*, ed. John W. Young (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1988); Condit, *Joint Chiefs of Staff*, pp. 154–64.
  42. Nathan J. Citino, *From Arab Nationalism to OPEC: Eisenhower, King Saud, and the Making of U.S.-Saudi Relations* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), pp. 69–70, 77–78; Rachel Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil: America's Uneasy Partnership with Saudi Arabia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 68–73.
  43. "Middle East Defence Arrangements," Foreign Office Telegram no. 350, Cairo to London, 5 March 1953, FO 371/115495, no. 399; Fawaz Gerges, *The Superpowers in the Middle East: Regional and International Politics, 1955–1967* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), pp. 24–27; Malcolm H. Kerr, *The Arab Cold War: Gamal Abd Al-Nasir and His Rivals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 4–5; Nadav Safran, *Saudi Arabia: The Ceaseless Quest for Security* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 78–79.
  44. "Economic Review of the Year 1953," Foreign Service Despatch No. 196, Kuwait to Washington, 4 January 1954, DOSCDF 886d.00/1–454.
  45. Britain's relationship with Kuwait extended to the 1890s. In order to forestall Russian and German railroad schemes linking Europe to the head of the Gulf, British officials approached the ruler of Kuwait to accept a "special treaty relationship"

- with them as the rulers of the lower Gulf had already done. The Ruler, Mubarak al-Sabah, was, at the time, under great pressure from the Ottoman government to acknowledge Turkish authority in his tiny and remote emirate and was eager to assert his political autonomy from the Sublime Porte. He accepted the offer in January 1899. In November 1914, at the beginning of the First World War, the British government recognized Kuwait as a sheikhdom independent from Ottoman control and under Indian protection. The Indian and British governments established a close relationship with the al-Sabah family that anticipated that established by the Americans with the al-Saud 30 years later. Miriam Joyce, *Kuwait, 1945–1996: An Anglo-American Perspective* (London: Frank Cass, 1998), pp. ix–xii; J. B. Kelly, “The Legal and Historical Basis of the British Position in the Persian Gulf,” *St. Antony’s Papers*, no. 4, *Middle Eastern Affairs*, no. 1 (New York: Frederick Praeger, 1958),” pp. 135–36; Simon C. Smith, *Kuwait 1950–1965: Britain, the al-Sabah, and Oil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 1–14.
46. “Basic Outline of Kuwait Oil Company, Ltd. (KOC) Operations,” Foreign Service Despatch, Kuwait to Washington, 27 June 1953, DOSCDF 886d.2553/6–2753; Joyce, *Kuwait, 1945–1996*, pp. 1–26; Homa Katouzian, “Oil Boycott and the Political Economy: Mussadiq and the Strategy of Non-Oil Economics,” in *Mussadiq, Iranian Nationalism, and Oil*, ed. James A. Bill and Wm. Roger Louis (London: I. B. Tauris, 1988), pp. 203–27.
  47. Letter from Berthoud to Sir L. Rowan, 16 October 1952, FO 371/98399.
  48. In January 1951 a Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs memorandum described the political agent in Kuwait, H. J. Jakins, as “exceedingly unpopular not only with the Kuwaitis but with Americans and with a surprisingly large number of British residents. General opinion about him is that he is a snob, is stupid, and ‘about as subtle as a blockbuster.’ He seems to be of the old school of imperialism which finds it so hard to keep in step with the times.” “Comments re Kuwait,” Memorandum produced in the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, 29 January 1951, DOSCDF 786d.00/1–2951.
  49. Department of State Telegram, Basra to Washington, 8 February 1950, 786d.11/2–850.
  50. “Exequatur for United States Consul in Kuwait,” Memorandum by the Assistant Legal Adviser for Administration and Foreign Service to the Acting Officer in Charge, Arabian Peninsula Affairs, 29 December 1950, *FRUS*, 1951, 5:998–99. The full story of U.S. efforts to open a consulate in Kuwait is told in Joyce, *Kuwait 1945–1996*, pp. 8–25.
  51. “British Reply to U.S. Memorandum on Kuwait,” Memorandum of a Conversation at the Department of State, 30 April 1956, DOSCDF 786d.00/4–3056. See also Talcott W. Seelye, Oral History Interview, 4 March 1995, Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training.
  52. David Holden, *Farwell to Arabia* (New York: Walker and Company, 1966), p. 20.
  53. James Morris, “Aden between Two Ages,” *Economist*, August 4, 1956, appended to Foreign Service Despatch, Aden to Washington, 28 August 1956, DOSCDF 746c.00/8–2856.
  54. James Bamberg, *British Petroleum and Global Oil, 1950–1975: The Challenge of Nationalism, The History of the British Petroleum Company* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 26–28; Gillian King, *Imperial Outpost—Aden: Its Place in British Strategy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 42–45.

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## Chapter 4

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"Our economic interest in Kuwait arises from the following factors:

- (a) the size and accessibility of its vast oil reserves and the ease with which they can be extracted and transported. Since British Petroleum has a half share in the Kuwait Oil Company's concession and Shell buys on favourable terms the bulk of the American partner's [Gulf Oil] share, Kuwait oil is of great importance and profit to the United Kingdom's balance of payments. In 1960, B.P. drew 98% of their supplies from the Middle East, 51% from Kuwait. Shell met 40% of their business outside the Americas from Kuwait and hope to find profitable oil in the off-shore concession which they have been awarded
- (b) because of its independence, affluence, and friendship with us Kuwait stands in the way of a consolidation of control of Middle East oil by one or more of the remaining Middle East producers (Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Iran) or transit states (the United Arab Republic) and thus provides a valuable insurance that oil will continue to flow from the Middle East in adequate quantities on reasonable terms (the Middle East supplies three quarters of the oil used outside the Americas).
- (c) Kuwait's membership of the sterling area and readiness to accept payment for oil in sterling and to hold substantial amounts of sterling. ("Future Policy in the Persian Gulf: Kuwait," GEN.745/4, 25 September 1961, CAB 130/178.)

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## Chapter 5

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  15. "A View of US-UK Policy Relations," State Department Airgram, London to Washington, 23 May 1966, DOSCF POL 1 UK-US.
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at least one of America's major partners and allies seem to be helping her in the effort, there will be a revulsion of American opinion against it, with damaging longer term consequences for American interests."

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