

Security in the Gulf

The British Empire employed a diverse range of strategies to establish and then maintain control over its overseas territories in the Middle East. This new interpretation of how Britain maintained order, protected its interests and carried out its defence obligations in the Gulf in the decades before its withdrawal from the region in 1971, looks at how the British government increasingly sought to achieve security with great economy of force by building up local militaries instead of deploying costly military forces from the home country. Benefitting from the extensive use of recently declassified British government archival documents and India Office records, this highly original narrative weighs the successes and failures of Britain's use of 'indirect rule' among the small states of Eastern Arabia, including Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the seven Trucial States and Oman. Drawing important lessons for scholars and policymakers about the limitations of trying to outsource security to local partners, *Security in the Gulf* is a remarkable study of the deployment of British colonial policy in the Middle East before 1971.

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Security in the Gulf

Local Militaries before British Withdrawal

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Preface

Great powers have employed a range of strategies to establish and then maintain control over foreign territories and communities. As deploying military force from the home country is often costly – not to mention logistically stretching when long distances are involved – many great powers have used indigenous forces to extend control or protect influence in overseas territories. This study charts the extent to which Britain employed this method in its informal empire among the small states of Eastern Arabia: Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the seven Trucial States (modern-day UAE), and Oman before 1971.

Resolved in the defence of its imperial lines of communication to India and the protection of mercantile shipping, Britain first organised and enforced a set of maritime truces with the local Arab coastal shaikhs of Eastern Arabia. Throughout the first part of the nineteenth century, the primary concern in the Gulf for the British, operating through the Government of India, was the cessation of piracy and maritime warfare. Later, British interests expanded to include suppressing the activities of slave traders and arms traffickers. At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, Britain also sought to exclude foreign powers from gaining a foothold in the area. It was during this time that the British government assumed full responsibility for the external relations of these shaikhdoms and conferred the status of ‘protected state’ upon them. Up to this point, when Britain needed to protect its interests or use force to compel local rulers to comply with its wishes, naval power usually sufficed.

By the midpoint of the twentieth century, Britain’s interests in the area had swelled and migrated inland – first because of the establishment of air stations servicing the imperial air route to India, then as a result of oil exploration and production. At the same time, growing international opposition to colonialism and a steady reduction in Britain’s ability to project military power overseas made it more and

more difficult for Britain to discharge its security duties in the Gulf. So how did Britain attempt to bridge this gap?

Existing studies of British security policy in the Gulf have focused almost exclusively on Britain's formal military architecture. Using India Office records and British government archival documents, this book provides a reinterpretation of the means by which Britain sought to maintain order, protect its interests in the region and discharge its defence obligations with great economy of force. The record, it will be shown, points to a broad British policy before 1971 of enhancing the coercive instruments available to the local rulers. Rather than having to revert to using its own military forces, Britain wanted the Gulf rulers to acquire a monopoly over the use of force within their territories and to be in a stronger position to defend their own domains against cross-border raiders and covetous neighbours. This policy was not always successful; Britain was progressively drawn into the internal security affairs of a number of its protégés, especially after World War II.

The security forces that emerged – armed police forces, gendarmeries and militaries – varied considerably, as did Britain's involvement in their establishment and running. Nevertheless, taken as whole, a trend emerges between 1921 and 1971 of Britain pushing the Gulf states to take over more and more of the security burden. Indeed, at a time when its traditional sources of global power were fading, indigenous military forces were an important tool for Britain as it pursued and protected its interests before withdrawal in December 1971. This aspect of Britain's approach to security in the Gulf has largely been overlooked.

Abbreviations

ADDF	Abu Dhabi Defence Force
AIOC	Anglo-Iraq Oil Company
AOC	Air Officer Commanding
APL	Aden Protectorate Levies
BDF	Bahrain Defence Force
BNG	Bahrain National Guard
CDS	Chief of Defence Staff
CGS	Chief of General Staff
CID	Committee for Imperial Defence
CSAF	Commander Sultan's Armed Forces
DDF	Dubai Defence Force
DIO	Desert Intelligence Officer
GOCMELF	General Officer Commanding Middle East Land Forces
GOI	Government of India
HQLFPG	Headquarters Land Forces, Persian Gulf
IPC	Iraq Petroleum Company
JIC	Joint Intelligence Committee
KAF	Kuwait Armed Force
KLT	Kuwait Liaison Team
LDC (PG)	Local Defence Committee, Persian Gulf
LST	Landing Ship (Tank)
MCC (PG)	Military Coordination Committee, Persian Gulf
MI	Muscat Infantry
MLC	Muscat Levy Corps
MOFF	Muscat and Oman Field Force
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
NFR	Northern Frontier Regiment
PA	Political Agent
PDO	Petroleum Development Oman
PO	Political Officer
RAF	Royal Air Force

RAKMF	Ras al-Khaimah Mobile Force
SAF	Sultan's Armed Forces
SAOPG	Senior Army Office, Persian Gulf
SAS	Special Air Service
SNG	Sharjah National Guard
SNOGP	Senior Naval Officer, Persian Gulf
SOAF	Sultan of Oman's Air Force
SON	Sultan of Oman's Navy
SRAFOPG	Senior RAF Officer, Persian Gulf
SSO	Special Service Officers
TOL	Trucial Oman Levies
TOS	Trucial Oman Scouts
UAE	United Arab Emirates