SECURITY STRUCTURES IN THE GULF: PAST AND PRESENT

M. R. KHAN

The Persian Gulf region has been important since time immemorial. Long before the discovery of oil, great civilisations flourished here. It acted as a land bridge among three continents. Its location in the tropical zone and warm climate was conducive to human habitation and development. The region was central to the ancient Silk Route as well as the maritime trade of China during the early Middle Ages. The Persian Gulf itself, along with the Red Sea, has always been an important East-West communication link since the dawn of history. It was often the preferred link due to its developed ports, favourable winds and access to Central Asia, though the distance to the head of the Gulf from Europe was much longer than the distance to the head of the Red Sea. Therefore, control and security of the channel was of paramount importance to the competing great powers of the day. During the early part of history, the two dominating empires were the Byzantine and Persian. The Byzantine Empire controlled the western approaches of the Gulf while the Sasanids held the eastern approaches and the Gulf itself.[1]The two empires continued to engage in frequent warfare for nearly four hundred years for the control of the region. The rise of Islam towards the middle of the 7th century saw the decline of these empires. The Islamic Armies from Arabia swept through Palestine, Syria, Egypt, Yemen

* Commodore **M. R. Khan** (Retd.) is an expert on West Asia and a Senior Fellow at the Centre for Air Power Studies, New Delhi.

1. See Lawrence G. Potter, ed., *Persian Gulf in History* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 60.

and northern Africa, crossing over to the Iberian Peninsula. This virtually liquidated the Eastern Roman Empire. In another eastward thrust, they conquered Ctesiphone and ended the reign of the Sasanids over Persia.

Thus, the Arabs ended the centuries long balance of power between the two ancient empires in the region and established their own control. After the early Caliphs, who were Companions of the Prophet, the first Arab dynasty to rule over the region were the Umayyads. The Umayyads were replaced by another dynasty called the Abbasids. The Abbasids shifted the capital of the Arab Empire from Damascus to the new city of Baghdad established by Caliph Al-Mansoor. The main port of the empire became Basra at the mouth of the Euphrates, and the locus of the empire, the northern Gulf. Since the Abbasid Empire was large and powerful, the waters of the Gulf became secure and the region remained tranquil for close to 300 years. The Gulf grew in importance and much of the East-West traffic of the Red Sea also shifted to the Gulf. These were the days when the "China trade" flourished. Ships would sail mainly from ports of the northern Gulf laden with the goods of the West and Arabia, unload and reload at the Indian ports, touch the west coast of Malaya, shape course towards Indo-China and from there onwards to Canton. They would return with the goods of the East, touching ports along the same route and back to the Gulf. A round trip took 16 to 18 months, depending upon the monsoon winds. The Abbasids maintained conditions conducive to trade throughout their long imperium in the Gulf region. Similarly, in China, the Tang Dynasty maintained their rule from 618 to 907 CE with a strong stable government, ensuring security for merchants at each end of the route.

The China trade began to decline by the 10th century. Many factors contributed to the decline.[2] The Zanj revolt followed by the Qamaratian uprising weakened the Abbasid Empire considerably, resulting in its main ports, Basra and Siraf, losing their importance. The sacking of Baghdad by Halagu shifted the centre of the Islamic world to Cairo, ruled by the Fatimid Dynasty. Consequently, Jeddah in the Red Sea became the principal entrepot for trade with Egypt and the Mediterranean and also for trade with the

2. Alvin J. Cortell, ed., *The Persian Gulf States* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1980), p. 18.

Indian Ocean ports and Iran. The Tang Dynasty also never recovered from the revolt of Huang Chao, who, in 878, sacked Canton and is said to have massacred 1, 20,000 Muslims, Christian, Jews and Magians. Nevertheless, the China trade continued till the 15th century, but there were only a few direct sailings after the 11th century.

COLONIAL POWERS IN THE GULF

The first colonial power to appear in the Indian Ocean were the Portuguese. After struggling for nearly 600 years under Muslim rule, Portugal saw the Islamic world as its main enemy. Their early forays down the African west coast were inspired by a combination of religious zeal, commercial interest and colonial quest. They wanted to discover a direct route to India and onwards to China to loosen the Mamluk and Ottoman grip on Oriental trade and, at the same time, considered Christian expansion into Asian waters a maritime extension of the Crusades.[3] Beginning early in the 15th century, they continued to extend their sea voyages along the African coast till Bartolomeu Dias rounded the Cape of Good Hope in 1488. A decade thereafter, Vasco da Gama reached India in 1498. The Portuguese prepared for a long haul and their ships captured ports in the Indian Ocean littorals and built forts and factories. Their General, Alfonso De Albuquerque correctly appreciated that the entry to the Indian Ocean was through certain choke points, and whoever controlled these could control the trade passing through the Indian Ocean.

Albuquerque established the first Portuguese fort at Cochin in 1504, and then shifted his attention to the Gulf and the chokepoint at its mouth, Hormuz. He succeeded in capturing Qalhat, Quriyat, Muscat, Sohar, and Khawr Fakkan but failed to capture Hormuz in his first expedition to the Gulf in 1507. In 1510, he conquered Goa and in 1511, Malacca. His attempt to conquer the third choke point at Aden also failed in the face of stiff resistance, though he briefly held Socotra. Finally, in 1515, he managed to conquer Hormuz and subsequently built a fort at Jarun.

3. Lawrence G. Potter and Gary J. Sick, eds., *Security in the Persian Gulf* (New York: Palgrave), p. 10.

Portuguese hegemony in the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean continued throughout the 16th century before fading in the face of serious challenges by the European rivals and resurgent local rulers. They built forts and factories on the Indian coast, with Goa as its epicentre as well as at Malacca, Ceylon, East Africa, and in the Gulf at Muscat, Hormuz and Jarun. The Portuguese had severe limitations, belonging to a small country in terms of manpower and imperial resources, and were always constrained due to the geographic dispersion of their strongholds. Their fanatical anti-Muslim zeal, high-handed behaviour with the local rulers, and low morale and bad discipline onboard their ships are cited as other reasons of the gradual decline of their imperium.[4]

The end of Portuguese predominance in the Gulf came when a joint expedition of Shah Abbas and the English East India Company captured their stronghold, Hormuz, in 1622, and Muscat, to where the Portuguese garrison had fled, fell to the Omanis in 1650. This also marked the emergence of the Omani sea power between 1650 and 1730, during which the Arabs expelled the Portuguese from the East African coast and harassed their remaining possessions on the western coast of India.

The beginning of the 17th century saw the rise of the Dutch as a significant sea power. The Dutch East India Company was formed in 1602, only two years after the establishment of the English company of the same name. They established their headquarters at Java in 1607. With the decline of the Portuguese, the situation in the Gulf and the Indian Ocean became a three-cornered contest among the English, Dutch and French for control of the lucrative trade, and dominance. The Dutch gradually usurped Portuguese forts, factories and settlements around the Indian Ocean, including the capture of Malacca in 1641, Ceylon in 1658 and Cochin in 1663. The main aim of the Dutch was to monopolise trade to China and the East Indies by restricting British interest in India. They concentrated on directing the China trade through their base at Java and protecting the onward route by establishing a station at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652.[5] In the Gulf, the

4. Ibid., p. 11.
5. Ibid., p. 11.

Dutch forced the English to vacate Bandar Abbas and rapidly proceeded to establish a monopoly on the spice trade between the East Indies and Iran. Throughout the 17th century, they often got the better of the British in trade wars as well as naval engagements. But Dutch superiority in the Gulf was short-lived. In the first half of the 18th century, their power in the western Indian Ocean began to decline mainly as a result of reverses in the European wars, including the war of the Spanish Succession(1713-14).[6]

THE BRITISH IMPERIUM IN THE GULF

The 18th century was one of the most chaotic in the Gulf. The disintegration of the Safavid Empire and consequent anarchy in Iran, contest among local petty states for dominance and the struggle among colonial powers such as Britain, France and Netherlands for supremacy resulted in the breakdown of security in the Gulf. Piracy was rampant and trade had declined greatly. The most powerful local ruler in the region was the Imam of Muscat. An agreement between him and the British East India Company in 1798 marked the turning point in the British involvement in the Gulf. This agreement, dated October 12, 1798, was apparently intended in part as a defensive measure against Napoleon's designs in the East, which included India. But, in reality, it constituted the first, in a series of acts, which gradually placed most of the principalities along the eastern and southern littoral of the Arabian Peninsula in varying degrees of dependence on Great Britain. A supplementary agreement dated January 18, 1800, stipulated that, "An English gentleman of respectability on the part of the honourable company, shall always reside at the port of Muscat and be an agent through whom all the intercourse between the states shall be conducted."[7] After the failure of Napoleon's great design for the invasion of India via Iran, the British captured the French headquarters at Mauritius in 1810. The loss of Mauritius, and reverses in the Anglo-French conflict in Europe, greatly weakened the French position in the Indian Ocean and dealt a severe blow to their colonial ambitions.

6. Ibid., p. 12.
7. Ibid., p. 80.

The 18th century was also the period when the British East India Company came to be firmly established in India as a mercantile as well as a political power. The company considered the Gulf a vital communication link for its expanding trade, and its dominance essential to security of its trade with the littorals of the Gulf as well as India.

In the 19th century, the Gulf shore was sparsely populated. There were no great cities and the prosperity of its people depended on fishing, trade and pearl diving. Tribal rivalries, competition for scarce resources and interference by foreign powers resulted in persistent maritime warfare which the British termed 'piracy'. Some tribal Sheikhs only fought with each other, while some others spared no one, including the European merchant shipping, and even a large squadron of British warships stationed in the Gulf could not prevent it. The problem was mitigated when a British Resident thought of the ingenious device of "trucial system". According to this system, the Gulf state had to sign a truce for the limited period of the pearling season and abstain from any hostilities during that period. Gradually, the truce periods were extended and finally the truce was made permanent. Hence, these states are sometimes also referred to as "trucial states". With the trucial system in place and the Gulf now safer for maritime trade, the British began to consolidate their position and started playing a regulating role not only between the Arab states but also among the warring clans of these states.

The Ottomans also staged a comeback under Mahmud II and re-established their control over Iraq in 1831. One of their Governors in Iraq, Midhat Pasha (1869-71) extended Ottoman authority along the Arabian shore of the Gulf. In 1871, an Ottoman seaborne expedition from Basra landed on Hasa coast, took Qatif and pushed inland towards Najd. The Al-Saud family put up strong resistance and prevented the Ottoman takeover of the Najd, but the expedition warded off the danger posed by Al-Saud to the Turkish control of all important Hijaz.

Despite the Ottoman presence on the Hasa coast, and in Iraq and Kuwait, the British reigned supreme in the Gulf from the middle of the 19th century. Their supremacy was based on their mastery of the seas. In fact, the whole

structure of the British Empire was built on, and kept ascendant by, sea power. The imperial policy included not only the mastery of the sea but also the control of vital choke points and ports of entry[8]. The British possessions came to include Gibraltar, Suez, Aden, South Africa, India, Ceylon, Singapore and Hongkong. The trucial system, mentioned earlier, was superintended and the security in the Gulf ensured by the vessels of the Gulf squadron of the Royal Indian Navy, which was also responsible for the surveys of the Gulf and for other assistance to navigation in the area.

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In the latter half of the 19th century, the British had become the sole regulating authority in the Gulf. They also assessed that constant engagements with the Arab chiefs of the littoral provided them protection of commerce, and helped maintain peace in the region. This was also the time of opening of the Suez Canal and closer connection of Europe and the East. As a gesture of advancing their role in the Gulf, the direct control of the British Residency in the Gulf was transferred from the subordinate Presidency of the Government of Bombay to the Supreme Government in Calcutta in 1873. Within the next twenty years, Britain assumed further formal control over Bahrain and the trucial states. The major reason for this forward movement was Ottoman occupation of Al-Hasa and their assertion of suzerainty over Kuwait and Qatar.

The largest country and the most coveted possession in the British Empire was undoubtedly India. Lord Curzon, the Viceroy of India from 1898 to 1905, believed that the security of the British Empire in India was unquestionably bound with the British supremacy in the Gulf. He said, "If we lose control of the Gulf, we shall not rule long in India." Therefore, the Government of India, and Curzon as its chief protagonist, argued that Britain must seize control of additional buffer territory to safeguard India. Whitehall, on the other hand, countered that it was already a case of imperial overreach and the empire could not support an unending expansion and that influence and indirect

8. J. E. Peierson, "Historical Pattern of Gulf Security," in Ibid., p. 13.

control was preferable to conquest and direct administration. By this time, the Gulf, besides being considered the outer perimeter of India, had also become a vital communication route with the invention of the telegraph.

By the end of the 19th century, the British predominance in the Gulf was complete and they were truly in a hegemonic position. The British administration in the Gulf was a part of the Government of India's far flung Residency system. The Political Resident in the Persian Gulf (PRPG) was headquartered at Busher (on the Iranian coast) until 1947 and thereafter at Manamah, Bahrain. The Resident subordinates included Political Agents, Political Officers and native agents, stationed at Muscat, Bandar Abbas, Sharjah, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Doha Manamah, Kuwait and Basra (after 1914)[9]. A new series of formal treaties was signed with all the chieftains and the Sheikhs of the littoral states. The terms of the treaties generally stipulated cessation of responsibility for defence and foreign relations to the British, and in return, the local Sheikhs were recognised as the legitimate rulers. Thus, a system of governance, for centuries based on tribal customs and of first among equals, was converted into territorial states complemented with hereditary rule through designated, presumed loyal, individuals and their families.

During the closing years of the 19th century and the early 20th century, the British perceived only two major threats to their supremacy in the Gulf and consequently to their Indian Empire: Russia and Germany. Russia's expansion in Central Asia and its machinations to gain influence over the Qajar court were viewed by the British with suspicion as part of the intrigue dubbed by Rudyard Kipling as the "Great Game". The perennial British fear was that Russia, in competition with Germany, would seek a warm water port in the Gulf to connect with a railway. Successive defeats at the hands of Russia during the 19th century had forced Persia to cede its Caucasus territories to it. The Russian influence in Iran reached its peak in the early years of the 20th century and the country was divided into two formal zones of the British and Russian influence. The Russian officered Cossack Brigade played a significant role during the constitutional revolution and it was an officer

9. Ibid., p. 14.

from this brigade, Reza Khan, who usurped the throne in 1921 and later assumed the title of Shah in 1925. After the Russian revolution, the Russian role diminished for some time but the Soviet Union joined Britain in invading Iran during World War II. The forced occupation of Iran by these two colonial powers left a deep adverse impression on the Iranian psyche which is a source of problems even in the 21st century.

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The defeat of Germany in World War I and dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire in the aftermath saw extension of British control or influence over Mesopotamia, Palestine and Hijaz and French paramountcy in Syria and Lebanon. The imperial lines of communication now had enhanced security, in the Red Sea as well as the Gulf. At the end of World War I, the British dominance of the Gulf was at its peak. There were no international rivals; the regional powers—Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia—were all linked to Britain. It was already in control of the minor states of the Gulf. During this period, Britain was party to a number of agreements on delimitation of boundaries between the littoral states of the Gulf, some of which were based on imperial interests and are the cause of much friction even in the contemporary Gulf.

Between the wars, there were two developments which enhanced the strategic importance of the Gulf, particularly to the Western powers. The first comprised the great leaps in aviation technology which made the military as well as commercial use of air transportation a viable option and, consequently, the Gulf became an important part of the East-West aerial lines of communication. The second was the discovery of oil. Oil was first discovered in commercial amounts at Masjide Sulaiman in Iran in 1908 and, the following year, the Anglo-Persian Oil Company was formed to exploit it. The British government acquired a majority share-holding in the company in 1914. Commercial quantities of oil were discovered in Iraq in 1927 and subsequently in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Kuwait. Though oil was considered important, its full strategic potential was

hardly appreciated prior to World War II. In 1940, the Gulf oil represented less than 5 percent of the world oil production but it was large enough to provide German war-time needs and some thought was given to preventing German incursion into the region. But the Germans had their hands full elsewhere and showed no interest in the Gulf.

The German invasion of Russia in June 1941 resulted in Iran assuming fresh importance in the Allied calculations. Firstly, the British feared that the Russian collapse would allow the Germans to penetrate deep into Central Asia and access the Gulf oil. However, these apprehensions proved unfounded, as mentioned earlier. Secondly, it was considered desirable to use the Iranian route for supplies to Russia as it was safe from the scourge of German bombers. It was feared that the Axis influence in Iran may obstruct this route. The two powers invaded Iran on August 25, 1941, forcing the abdication of Reza Shah and formation of a new puppet government. The route proved helpful but inadequate due to the amount of supplies required and insufficient facilities in the Iranian ports and at Basra. Bahrain played an important role in the Allied war efforts with its well developed oil fields, refinery and the naval base at Jufayr.

The post-war years saw the gradual waning of the British Empire. The subcontinent was divided in two independent countries, India and Pakistan. Withdrawal from the subcontinent did not mean the end of British interest in the region. Britain still had substantial commitments in Southeast Asia and the Far East and its forces in those areas needed support. By 1949-50, more than 80 per cent of Britain's crude imports came from the Gulf area. Any interruption of supplies would have had severe effects on Britain's economic recovery. Additionally, there was fear of the southward thrust of the USSR and the threat to the interests of the entire Western Alliance. The United States entered the Gulf scene gradually. The process had started with American minority interest in British oil concessions and it then became pronounced with the establishment of the Arabian-American Oil Company (ARAMCO) concessions in Saudi Arabia. The American armed forces utilised the Gulf air facilities of Britain during World War II. Subsequently, the US built an airfield at Dhahran, established a small naval presence in the Gulf

(headquartered at Bahrain) and initiated a long and close relationship with Iran under the rule of Mohammed Reza Shah. Thus, by the mid-Fifties, the British influence in two of the most important countries of the Gulf had receded and been replaced by the American influence.[10] The final withdrawal of British troops from the Suez Canal base in 1954 and the disastrous Suez War of 1956 further eroded British influence in the region. However, the British did not formally withdraw from the region till 1971.

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THE BAGHDAD PACT-CENTO

Initially, the Baghdad Pact was a pact signed between Turkey and Iraq on February 24, 1955, as a bilateral pact on security and cooperation. The two invited other countries of the region, recognised by them (this clause was to exclude Israel) and concerned with peace and security in the area, to join in. Later in the year, it was joined by Great Britain, Pakistan and Iran and a permanent organisation was set up at Baghdad. Though US exhortations and promises of economic aid were the main incentives for the signing of the pact, the United States did not formally join the pact for technical reasons although it was closely associated with it and a member of all its committees and functional groups—in fact, a full member in all but name.[11] A *coup d'etat* in Iraq in July 1958 overthrew the Hashimite King and Gen Qasim became the President, who denounced the pact. Iraq finally withdrew from the treaty in March 1959.

The headquarters of the pact were moved to Ankara in August 1959 and the name changed to the "Central Treaty Organisation"(CENTO). The pact and its later *avatar*, had only limited success. The main objectives of the

10. Ibid., p. 22.
11. The reason that the US could not join the treaty formally was that the obligations of the treaty were general cooperation for defence and security, whereas the relevant two Acts of the Congress were limited to the defence of these countries against Communist armed aggression. Ralph H. Magnus, "International Organisations in the Persian Gulf," in Ibid., pp. 179-180.

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regional member countries of the treaty were two-fold. Firstly, they believed that it would provide a cooperative defence bulwark against aggression from any country of the region; and secondly, it would ensure security through the promised intervention of the US and the UK against any expansionist intent from the USSR, as in the past, a purely regional Sa'dabad Pact had failed to do so. The other Arab countries were also expected to join the pact and exercise the attractive option of the two great powers of the day providing the security umbrella. However, the rise of Arab nationalism under the charismatic leadership of Gamal Abd al-Nasser, who denounced the pact as an imperialist conspiracy, prevented any other country of the region from joining the pact.

After the formal withdrawal of the British from the Gulf in 1971, the Shah of Iran tried to use the CENTO structure to implement his hegemony in the Gulf. But Washington's apathy due to its heavy involvement in Vietnam, did not allow him much headway. Iran withdrew from the CENTO following its Islamic revolution in February 1979, and soon thereafter, the Foreign Ministers of Iran, Turkey and Pakistan met and announced their intention to dissolve the CENTO. The CENTO hardly had anything to show on the positive side and its effectiveness was greatly diminished because of political developments in the region and an anti-imperial wave sweeping West Asia as a whole.

NIXON DOCTRINE OR THE TWIN PILLARS POLICY

The British withdrawal from the Gulf was a gradual process which started in the mid-1950s and was completed in 1971. When the Nixon Administration took over in 1969, there was a growing public demand, in the backdrop of the Vietnam War, to limit costly US commitments abroad. Thus, a comprehensive review of the Persian Gulf situation was undertaken as a part of a global effort to redefine US security interests. The outcome

of this review was the Nixon Doctrine, which placed primary reliance on security cooperation with regional states as a means of protecting US interests around the world.[12] Another constraint on US options was that knowledge of Persian Gulf affairs in the strategic community and the foreign service of the United States was scanty, because so far it had almost entirely relied on British presence in the region. Since Iraq, after the Baathist revolution, was already in the Soviet camp, and considered a grave threat to American ally, Israel, it was decided to rely on Iran and the somewhat weaker, but considered reliable, Saudi Arabia. The overall situation in the Gulf, was assessed as stable and no immediate threat to American interest was foreseen.

In May 1972, the United States agreed to increase the number of military advisers in Iran and assured the Shah access to some of the most sophisticated non-nuclear weapon systems in the US military arsenal.

During the post-War years, Washington had developed a close working relationship with the Shah of Iran. He was obligated to the US as he was brought back to power through a Central Investigation Agency (CIA) engineered coup, after a republican movement led by Mohammed Musaddiq had forced him to flee Iran in the 1950s, and whereas Riyadh was squeamish about its relations with the US due to Arab sentiments on Palestine, he had no qualms about flaunting his close relations with Washington. Iran was also considered a suitable partner, based on the strategic assessment that it alone could bring order to the region, as it was the largest country in the Gulf, with substantial military power and economic resources. Moreover, it was also suitably located between the southwestern part of the Soviet Union, which was considered the main threat to US interests, and the Gulf. President Nixon, along with his National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger, visited Iran in May 1972 for three days and a deal was concluded between the two countries. According to the terms of the deal, the United States agreed to increase the number of military advisers in Iran and assured the

12. Lawrence G. Potter, ed., *The United States and the Persian Gulf in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 296.

Shah access to some of the most sophisticated non-nuclear weapon systems in the US military arsenal. The Shah in return agreed to accept a key role in protecting Western interests in the Persian Gulf region.[13]

The Shah began taking his role as the Gulf hegemon seriously. In 1973, he sent troops to assist the Sultan of Oman in putting down a Marxist led rebellion. He hit upon a common chord with the southern Gulf states and Saudi Arabia, and made common cause with them in taking measures to contain the new aggressive Baath regime in Iraq. As a result, his occupation of the two Tunb Islands and coercion with Sharjah to share sovereignty on Abu Musa were condoned by the Western powers as well as the Gulf regimes. As a consolation gesture, and under pressure from Britain and Saudi Arabia, the Shah agreed to relinquish Iran's claim to Bahrain. He was also part of a tripartite covert action plan, along with the US and Israel, to destabilise Iraq by supporting a Kurdish rebellion[14]. He ditched the plan when he signed a border agreement with Iraq, which included the long disputed Shatt al Arab waterway between the two countries. The Twin Pillars policy collapsed with the overthrow of the Shah and the Islamic revolution in Iran.

THE CARTER DOCTRINE, CREATION OF CENTRAL COMMAND

A number of developments in the region toward the end of the 1970s changed the strategic picture considerably, foremost among them the Iranian Revolution led by the leading cleric of Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini, in February 1979, and creation of an Islamic regime in Iran, hostile to the United States in the extreme. The regime's early enthusiasm to export its Islamic revolution to the neighbouring states of Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia became a cause of deep anxiety in these countries and presented a spectre of widespread instability to Washington. The other major events which contributed to the altered strategic picture in the region were the invasion of North Yemen by its Marxist neighbour to the south, the Marxist led Saur Revolution in Afghanistan in April 1978, the Ethopian-

13. Ibid., p. 297.
14. Ibid., p. 298.

Soviet Treaty in November 1978, the assassination of US Ambassador Adolph Dubs in Kabul in February 1979, and the dissolution of CENTO, as mentioned above.

The US response to these events was piecemeal. It dispatched a carrier task force to the Arabian Sea, rushed emergency military aid to Yemen, transferred sophisticated Airborne Warning and Control Systems (AWACS) to Saudi Arabia and decided to support the Afghan Mujahideen fighting the regime. But the feeling in Washington was that it was not in a position to counter effectively these game changing events which had brought its main adversary into a position where it could threaten vital Western interests, and a more comprehensive strategy must be evolved, sooner than later, to arrest erosion of American power in the region. Some initial steps were taken to create a Rapid Deployment Force and negotiations initiated with the Southern Gulf countries, Kenya and Somalia, about the possible creation of facilities. A further blow to American prestige was delivered by the hostile Iranian regime when 52 hostages were taken in the embassy in Tehran, and the US able to do precious little except sending a second aircraft carrier to the region.

The murder of Afghan Prime Minister Hafizullah Amin and the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union with more than 1,00,000 troops in December 1979 was the proverbial last straw in this chain of events. Under pressure to act decisively, the Carter regime abandoned efforts to adopt a more accommodating policy with the Soviets, including the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) II. The policy shift was articulated by President Carter in his State of the Union address of January 23, 1980. He stated, "An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force." The declaration which was later referred to as the Carter Doctrine, indicated Washington's resolve to gain and keep control of the region by whatever means, though at that juncture, it had limited capabilities to do so. It was a case of history repeating itself as the doctrine was similar to the enunciation of the British policy in 1903

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by Lord Lansdowne, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, when he stated in the Parliament, "We should regard the establishment of a naval base, or the fortified port, in the Persian Gulf by any other power as a very grave menace to British interests, and we should certainly resist it with all means at our disposal."[15]

The Reagan Administration adopted the Carter Doctrine and set about translating intentions into capabilities. The Rapid Deployment Force was created at Tampa, Florida, in 1980. By 1983, it had evolved into the US Central Command with earmarked forces totalling 230,000 military personnel drawn from the four Services, then one of six US unified multi-Service Commands, with a theatre of operations centred in Southwest Asia and Northeast Africa. Its basic mission reflected the two themes that have dominated the US regional policy from the very beginning "to assure continued access to Persian Gulf oil and to prevent the Soviets from acquiring political-military control directly or through proxies."[16]

By the time the Iran-Iraq War broke out in September 1980, Washington was in the early stages of building its military capabilities for intervention in the Gulf. It decided to rely on maintaining a balance of power policy in the region and preventing either of the two warring countries from emerging as a hegemonic power at the end of the war. Accordingly, the United States did several flip-flops during the course of the war. Initially, it assumed a neutral posture but later tilted in favour of Iraq as Iran drove back the Iraqi forces and counter-attacked across the border and appeared to be winning. In 1985-86, when it suspected that the USSR might take advantage of the prevailing chaos and anarchy in Iran, substantial arms and spares for weapon systems sold during the Shah's regime, were covertly transferred to Iran through Israel. The funds from the arms sale were used

15. Potter, n. 1, Potter and Sick, n. 3, p. 24.
16. Ibid., p. 299.

to support the Nicaraguan counter-revolutionaries. Towards the end of the war in 1987-88, when Iran, in retaliation against Iraqi air attacks on its shipping in the Gulf, started using mines and small, unmarked armed boats against Iraqi as well as neutral shipping headed towards Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, US policy decidedly shifted in favour of Iraq and it decided to reflag eleven Kuwaiti tankers with the US flag. It also moved a substantial number of naval ships into or near the Gulf and began escorting tanker convoys to and from Kuwait. The US and Iranian naval forces clashed several times during the so-called tanker war. In one such action on April 18, 1988, the United States Navy, in retaliation to a US ship hitting an Iranian mine, sank two Iranian oil platforms, two frigates and damaged four gun boats. These events signalled that Washington was now ready to intervene with military force in the region to protect its perceived interests.

The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989 and the break-up of the USSR did not bring any immediate changes in US policy in the Gulf. In spite of ample proof of Saddam Husain's use of chemical weapons against his own populations and the Kurdish genocide at Anfal, the US thought it expedient to continue a policy of limited support to Saddam Husain. Washington also ignored several indications that Baghdad was in the quest for nuclear and other Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). This policy under Bush I came under much criticism within and outside the US, after the annexation of Kuwait by Saddam and the Gulf War.

SOME GEO- POLITICAL ASPECTS OF SECURITY IN THE GULF

The Persian Gulf is a landlocked body of water with an area of 239,000 sq km, it is 990 km long and 338 km at its widest stretch. The Strait of Hormuz, its narrowest point, is 56 km across. The deepest water (up to 80 m) is off the Iranian coast.[17] There are eight countries on its littoral. Three of them, Iran, Iraq, and the Saudi Arabia, are considered medium powers, based on traditional elements of national power such as population, area, size of the armed forces, and economy. The other five, Oman, the UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar, are small countries with limited resources. Their internal

17. "Appendix A. The Persian Gulf" in Cortell, n. 2, pp. 541-543.

The five smaller states of the region feel particularly vulnerable as no matter how much they spend on security, they still cannot defend themselves against their bigger neighbours on their own.

political structure is fragile and indigenous populations small. Their boundaries were drawn during the British imperium in the Gulf and were a perennial source of conflict till only a few years ago. Many of these boundary disputes have been resolved through the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the other international fora like the UN and the International Court of Justice. But a few, with potential for conflict, remain.

The relationship between the medium powers has been adversarial rather than cooperative. Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia not only had different political structures but also different state ideologies. Iran is quasi-theocratic, Shia and partly republican. Iraq, before the fall of Saddam, was Baathist, dictatorial, and secular. It is a democracy now under the American guidance, but the real contours of its political system will emerge only after the US withdrawal. Saudi Arabia is a conservative, theocratic monarchy, with a state ideology based on the tenets of the Sunni, Salafi version of Islam, resurrected by a Najadi cleric, Mohammed Bin Abdul Wahab, in the 19th century. These differences and rivalry for the leadership of the region, as well as of the Islamic world at large, have been the cause of much friction in the region, leading to two of the most devastating wars in the recent history of the Gulf. In the past, each of these countries has tried to dominate the security system in the region, and Iran continues to do so.

Six of these states are extremely rich in hydrocarbon reserves, Oman and Bahrain being the exceptions. Saudi Arabia, Iran and Iraq have some of the largest deposits of hydrocarbons. Overall, the Gulf holds 62 percent of the world oil reserves and 40 percent of the natural gas reserves.[18]The mineral wealth of the region has made it an area of vital interest to the great powers, especially the United States, which consumes 25 percent of the total oil production of the world. Japan and Europe are also heavily dependent on

18. World proved reserves of oil and natural gas, US Energy Information Administration 2008.

import of the Gulf oil for their economic well-being. In recent years, China too, as it rapidly industrialises, has developed a humongous appetite for oil from the Gulf and has been meddling in its geo-political equations.

The five smaller states of the region feel particularly vulnerable as no matter how much they spend on security, they still cannot defend themselves against their bigger neighbours on their own. The Islamic Revolution in Iran, with its early zeal to spread it beyond its borders, and the invasion of Kuwait by the Iraqi forces in 1990 further enhanced this feeling of vulnerability. The formation of the GCC has done little to assuage this perennial feeling of insecurity among the southern states of the Gulf because of longstanding mutual suspicions. The United States, if anything, tries its best to exaggerate these fears to legitimise its large military presence in the region. The control of such a vital area, besides protecting the oil interests of Washington and its allies, gives it a critical leverage in world affairs. The rulers of these states feel reassured with Washington's military presence and formal guarantee of security through alliances. This dependency gives Washington great leverage with the rulers of these states and a virtual monopoly of arms sales to the region, which it sometimes shares with its Western Alliance as a favour. However, anti-American feelings among the indigenous inhabitants of these states are high due to the blatant and unconditional US support to some of the most oppressive Israeli policies in Palestine in recent times, as well as due to the long history of conflict between the world of Islam and Christianity. This paradox, which is sometimes referred to as the dilemma of Gulf security, requires fine balancing of external vulnerability versus internal security on the part of the ruling elite of these states, and militates against their democratisation. This phenomenon also constrains US ability to pressurise them to do so, in spite of its oft-repeated rhetoric to bring in democracy in the region.

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The Emirs and Sheikhs of the Gulf have tried to counter the paradox by providing exceptional welfare measures to their populations like free education up to the highest level, free health facilities, highly subsidised housing, soft loans, lucrative franchises and almost guaranteed employment. This has been much easier for the high oil income states per capita like the UAE, Kuwait and Qatar but much tougher for Saudi Arabia, Oman and Bahrain and, consequently, they have been vulnerable to internal disturbances, particularly Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, which are also plagued by religious conflict. The overall internal security situation in all the southern Gulf states is uncertain and fluid and, to a large extent, dependent on world oil prices. Any unusual dip in the prices could lead to reduction in entitlements and increase in the internal security problems in these states.

POST GULF WAR US SECURITY POLICY AND DUAL CONTAINMENT

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the Gulf War has been analysed in some detail in my previous papers. So also, the often asked questions like why did Saddam reject various face saving formulas? And why did the US leave his regime intact? Perhaps the most significant error of the Bush I regime was to allow Saddam the use of helicopters in suppressing a Shia rebellion in the south. It allowed him to once again consolidate his power and ensure the survival of his regime. The logic of leaving some of his military intact was that it would help him keep the country together and also provide a potential balance against a hostile Iran.[19] However, there were some contradictions in this policy, as extremely humiliating ceasefire resolutions were slapped on him and crippling sanctions imposed in the name of preventing him from going ahead with his perceived WMD programme, with the hope that their implementation would lead to the personal humiliation of Saddam, resulting in a change of regime, not by the pro-Iran Shias but his own Generals. Both these measures resulted in weakening Iraq but did not accomplish the desired aim of change of regime.

19. Phebe Marrin, "US Strategy Towards the Persian Gulf," in Cartell, n. 2, p. 16.

A review of the Gulf policy was undertaken in May 1993 by the incoming Clinton Administration and a policy of "dual containment" unveiled by Martin Indyk of the National Security Council staff. It was explicitly founded on four basic premises:[20]

- Both Iraq and Iran are hostile to American interests in the Middle East and, implicitly, are likely to remain so for the indefinite future.
- Iran now presented the more serious threat.
- Seeking regional security by balancing Iraq and Iran against each other would be ineffective, dangerous and unnecessary.
- The Gulf War coalition could be sustained to defend the region against the threats posed by both countries.

Though preference for a change of regime was maintained covertly, it was not made an overt part of the policy. As mentioned above, it was different from the policies followed earlier since the 1970s in the sense that the policy of balancing Iran and Iraq was scuttled. Indyk declared that since Iraq was effectively boxed in by the UN sanctions, and Iran crippled economically and militarily, "we don't need to rely on one to balance the other" and the United States was the predominant power in the Gulf with the "means to counter both the Iraqi and Iranian regimes."[21] The containment of these two major powers of the Gulf was to be achieved mainly through sanctions but there was also a military component, especially in the case of Iraq. The two no-fly zones in the north and the south were slapped on Iraq in order to protect the pro-American Kurds and Kuwait, and clip Saddam's wings further. Enforcement of these no-fly zones required direct injection of US and British forces in ever larger numbers and high-tech equipment for early warning in the southern Gulf states, especially in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. The increasing US military footprint and repeated attacks on Iraqi sites, displayed prominently on Arab television networks, deepened resentment against the Americans in the streets of the Gulf and led to an increase in

20. Joseph Macmillan, "US Interests and Objectives" in Richard D. Sokolsky, ed., *The United States and the Persian Gulf* (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 2004), p. 21.
21. "The Clinton Administration's Approach to Middle East," article by Martin Indyk, in Proceedings of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, May 18-19, 1993.

The dual containment had only limited success against Iran, as even close allies of the US like Turkey, France and Germany continued to do business with Iran.

terrorist activity, resulting in the bombing of US facilities in Riyadh and Al-Khobar. The worst, however, was still to come.

The dual containment had only limited success against Iran, as even close allies of the US like Turkey, France and Germany continued to do business with Iran. Due to the compulsions of internal politics, the Clinton Administration also failed to take advantage of favourable developments in Iran like the coming of the reformist Khatami as President and the opening of the society in terms of social mores and freedom of the press under him. Some overtures, also by Khatami, like his famous reconciliatory speech on Canadian TV and the initiative of the Dialogue of Civilisations were also ignored. And despite much rhetoric of regime change in Iran, little was done to help the reformers. In Iraq, two covert attempts were made in 1995 and 1996 to stage a CIA supported internal coup but both attempts ended in failure.[22] Similarly, the Clinton Administration's attempts to win the heart and minds of the Arab street by brokering a peace process in Palestine and creating a favourable security situation in the region, also came to nought, despite the persistent efforts, because of the intransigence of both the parties and some of the intractable issues involved. One significant development in the Gulf security structure, after the Gulf War and during the dual containment, was the entrance of the US as a resident political and military power in the Gulf and its intention to stay there over the long haul.[23]

PRESENT SECURITY STRUCTURE IN THE GULF

The Bush II Administration took over in January 2000, but there was no significant change in the Gulf policy during the first ten months of the new Administration. Secretary of State Colin Powell, under pressure from

22. *Washington Post*, January 20, 1993, and ABC news transcript no.97062601 dated 26, 1997.
23. Potter, n. 1, p. 303.

allies and the international community to loosen sanctions against Iraq and Iran, proposed "smart sanctions", meaning loosening up on essential imports to Iraq but tightening up on border controls to prevent smuggling of military and dual use items. The Administration also had divided council on Iran, between those who favoured opening up and a softer attitude towards Iran to help the reformists, and those who favoured tightening up. Nevertheless, the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA) was renewed in 2001, signalling continuation of the policy followed during the Clinton era.

The neutralisation of Iraq as a Gulf power entirely changed the geo-strategic landscape of the Gulf.

However, the events of 9/11 and the ascendancy of a group broadly known as "neoconservatives", led by the Vice President, who advocated the use of unparalleled US power to shape global environments in its favour, altered the picture completely. The early focus of the Bush II foreign policy team was on shaping a strategy to prevent the emergence of a future rival such as China. But post 9/11, the focus, inevitably, shifted to the Gulf and Afghanistan, and a strategy of preemptive military intervention was adopted.

The neutralisation of Iraq as a Gulf power entirely changed the geo-strategic landscape of the Gulf. It gave encouragement to the long suppressed political aspirations of the Shias, who form the majority in Iran, Iraq and Bahrain and are a significant minority in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Lebanon. Their newly awakened political assertion gave rise to Sunni fears, especially in Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Jordan, and talk of a dominant Shiite crescent stretching from Iran through Iraq and Syria into Lebanon. The rise of non-state groups like the Mahdi's Army and the various Sunni insurgent groups in Iraq, including the Al Qaeda, and Hezbollah in Lebanon, equipped with new generations of conventional weapons such as the RPG-29, advanced sniper rifles, remotely piloted vehicles loaded with explosives and new surface-to-surface rockets gave an alarming dimension to the Gulf security and aroused deep concern for stability in the smaller countries of the Gulf.

The problem of non-state groups was compounded by the fact that some of the Gulf states have deliberately followed a policy of keeping the military weak to prevent the possibility of internal coups. These factors forced the southern Gulf states into an increasing degree of dependence on the United States for the security of their regimes. Gone was the squeamishness they displayed prior to the Gulf War in allowing US bases on their soil due to public sentiments. Virtually all these states renewed a series of bilateral defence cooperation agreements with Washington, first signed in the 1990s, which included, among other things, large scale pre-positioned war equipment, including rumoured tactical nuclear weapons, interoperability clauses, basing facilities, military construction, and the legal status of the US forces in these countries. The only exception was Saudi Arabia from where most of the American personnel were withdrawn due to domestic conditions and the premier US air base, Prince Sultan Air Base, was handed over to the Saudi forces. All the facilities which existed at the air base, were replicated at the Al Udeid Combined Air Operation Centre in Qatar. This base was extensively used by the US military during the invasion of Iraq, and continues to be its premier base in the Gulf.

The role of the United States in the current Gulf security structure is somewhat based on the East Asian and European models and relies heavily on its alliances in the region and force projection capabilities in the so-called arc of instability, through Main Operating Bases (MOB), Forward Operating Sites (FOS) and an array of more modest Cooperative Security Locations (CSL) spread throughout the Gulf and Central Asia. These facilities are linked and mutually supportive. The whole security structure is based on the premise that these forward deployed forces will be able to address regional contingencies expeditiously, with Special Operations Forces and weapon platforms capable of stand-off, precision strikes. For the local rulers, the facilities are intended to protect them from external as well as internal threats.[24] They are costing the US exchequer billions of dollars, some of which come from the oil rich Gulf regimes, but not all.

24. James A. Russel, "Charting US Security Strategy in the Persian Gulf" in Potter and Sick, n. 3, p. 49.

This heavy financial burden, along with the expenditure being incurred on war-fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan, has had serious detrimental effects on the US economy and is now being seriously questioned in Washington, not only because of the unbearable financial burden but also because of the military-political disconnect, as is evident from the ambivalence of the Gulf rulers towards Iran, which in Washington's calculus is the main threat to the region because of its nuclear ambition and hostile posture towards American interests.[25] The debate on whether the United States should revert to a policy of over the horizon protection and mainly rely on its formidable navy and its futuristic "sea basing" concept, or maintain the status quo, is so far inchoate and inconclusive.

TOWARDS A MORE VIABLE REGIONAL SECURITY STRUCTURE FOR THE GULF

Since the British departure, except for a brief period in the 1970s, security structures in the Gulf have been based either on the realist school's "balance of power" theory or a hegemonic external power, the United States in this case, as the only credible guarantor of peace. Both these models have been unsuccessful. The constant state of confrontation between Iran and the US over the nuclear issue, and the situation in Iraq does not augur well for peace and harmony in the Gulf. India too is a big stakeholder in the Gulf, as brought out in the earlier papers, and any instability in the region directly affects our national security. Therefore, it is only appropriate to contemplate on a more viable security structure in the region.

The political systems and national institutions of public opinion are still evolving in the Gulf. The boundaries of many states in the region are still under dispute and a constant source of friction. Political awakening has given rise to many ethnic, religious and class conflicts within states and even among states. Mutual suspicions of rulers, most of them lacking legitimacy, have also been a source of instability. So far, there is no regional forum where all the states of the region are represented. The biggest drawback

25. For example, Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem Al Thani's statement to reporters in March 2007 and widely reported in the Gulf press, "We will not participate by any means to harm Iran from Qatar" and similar statements, time to time, by the other Gulf rulers.

Another stumbling block to regional security is the large US presence in the region and its confrontational attitude towards Iran.

of the GCC was that it excluded Iran and Iraq, the two biggest countries of the region. Therefore, the first step towards a cooperative security structure should be the creation of a forum on the lines of the Association of Southeast Nations (ASEAN) or ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), or even Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). The forum, then, can be used for confidence building measures on the pattern adopted during the Cold War at Stockholm in 1986, and modified in Vienna in 1990. The initiative has to come from Iran and Saudi Arabia, as Iraq's political structure is yet to stabilise. The two must sit down together despite differences, as has happened on numerous occasions in international politics. Perhaps the only condition required is that both countries refrain from covert attempts to destabilise each other's regimes. Turkey could play the role of a mediator in view of its growing influence in the Arab world and its good relations with Iran.

Another stumbling block to regional security is the large US presence in the region and its confrontational attitude towards Iran. During the 1990s, when some kind of rapprochement was on the cards between Iran and Saudi Arabia, Washington feared for the legitimacy of its large presence if rapprochement were to materialise, and used its influence to abort it. The fact is that Iran is the most populous and technologically advanced country in the region, with the largest armed forces. Its oil and gas reserves when converted to Barrels of Oil Equivalent (BOE), are a match for Saudi Arabia. It has other strategic advantages such as the majority of the Gulf population is Shia; Iran has considerable influence in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Persian speaking states in Central Asia, and has good relations with the large Muslim states in the neighbourhood, Pakistan, Turkey and Syria, and influence with Hezbollah and Hamas, hence its hankering for regional primacy is easy to comprehend. This denial of primacy is at the root of its confrontation with the US. Therefore, a broader engagement with Iran, not entirely focussed on its nuclear programme, is essential to security in the

Gulf. A rapprochement between the US and Iran will make an inclusive regional forum a reality. On its part, Iran must give up its unnecessarily virulent rhetoric against Israel and aggressive behaviour towards some of the Gulf states.

A just and peaceful solution of the Palestinian problem on the lines of the two-state solution being proposed, will also go a long way in improving security in the region. Successive US regimes have tried to broker peace between Israel and the Palestinians, without any real headway. The intransigence of the present Israeli government on the crucial issue of stopping construction in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and President Obama's inability to force the issue, has once again exposed how the compulsions of domestic politics in the US can mess up the security situation in the Gulf. A quick resolution of the Palestinian issue will greatly assuage the feelings of the Arab street, prevent Iran from rabble rousing, weaken Hezbollah, Hamas and Al Qaeda, and thereby, greatly improve the security situation in the entire West Asia. Washington must rise above partisan politics to force the issue in Palestine and mitigate the volatile situation in the region.

Lastly, the United States, after withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan, must reduce its military footprint in the region and revert to over the horizon security policy based on the mobility of its formidable navy. It should also factor in a broader policy geared towards creating a stable, prosperous and predictable regional environment in which WMD and terrorism are just some of the troublesome issues. Environmental concerns, domestic socio-economic developments, transnational threats, and lingering distrust between small and large states in the Gulf should all get an equal share of attention. All these together form a broader vision of security.