

## **The Kuwait Crisis of 1961 and its Consequences for Great Britain's Persian Gulf Policy**

**Helene von Bismarck**

### **Introduction**

On 1 July 1961, the British Government under Prime Minister Harold Macmillan launched a major military intervention in the emirate of Kuwait, the largest mobilization of British forces in the Middle East after the Suez crisis. The operation – code-named *Vantage* – was designed to prevent an Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, which had only recently obtained independence from British control. This article analyzes the Kuwait crisis and its consequences from the perspective of the British Government. It argues that the lessons the British learned from the Kuwait crisis had far-reaching consequences for Great Britain's military and political involvement in the entire Persian Gulf area.<sup>1</sup> The Kuwait crisis convinced the British Government that the security of the Persian Gulf was above all endangered by the President of Iraq, Abd al-Karim Qasim. As a result, a new defense plan for Kuwait was endorsed by the British Cabinet in October 1961. This plan – code-named *Sodabread* – had significant consequences for the scale of

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**Helene von Bismarck** is completing her PhD dissertation about British Policy in the Persian Gulf between 1961 and 1968 at the Humboldt-University in Berlin, Germany. Her e-mail is: mail@hvbismarck.de.

1 A note on terminology: since the 1950s the name of the Gulf has been the subject of a politicized dispute. While “Persian Gulf” is the more commonly used term in most international treaties, documents and maps, the name “Arabian Gulf” is widespread in many Arab countries. This article adopts the usage of the British Government records it is based upon and uses the name “Persian Gulf” to describe the area comprised of Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, the Trucial States (today's United Arab Emirates) and the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman.

Great Britain's military deployment in the Persian Gulf, as it provided for a larger military force stationed in the area. The existing military base in Bahrain was strengthened and new accommodation for the additional troops was constructed on the island. Based on records of the British Government from the British National Archives, this article will describe the events of the summer of 1961 before analyzing their military and political consequences for Great Britain's position in the Persian Gulf.<sup>2</sup>

The consequences of the Kuwait crisis for Great Britain's Persian Gulf policy are an issue which has been neglected by historians. Historical research on the Kuwait crisis has concentrated on the crisis itself from different perspectives. Rosemarie Said Zahlan gives a detailed account of the events of the summer of 1961 from the perspective of international relations and explains the background of the Iraqi claim to Kuwait.<sup>3</sup> Simon C. Smith describes the crisis and the historical debate about it, but does not discuss its consequences for Great Britain.<sup>4</sup> Miriam Joyce and William Taylor Fain both analyze the Kuwait crisis by putting it into the context of Anglo-American relations.<sup>5</sup>

The most extensive analysis of the crisis from the British perspective has been presented by Nigel John Ashton in two different articles.<sup>6</sup> Ashton describes in detail the decision-making process in London in the days before *Vantage* was launched.<sup>7</sup> He explains how the fear of an Iraqi annexation of Kuwait and the conviction that Britain would not be able to reverse an invasion once it had taken place motivated the British Government to launch a preemptive intervention in the emirate.<sup>8</sup> By addressing the question about the reasons for the British

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2 All archival references in this article refer to documents from the British National Archives, London.

3 Rosemarie Said Zahlan, "Shades of the Past: The Iraq-Kuwait Dispute, 1961," *Journal of Social Affairs*, 22, no. 87 (2005), pp. 47-80.

4 Simon C. Smith, *Kuwait, 1950-1965. Britain, the al-Sabah, and Oil* (Oxford and New York, 1999), pp. 116-24.

5 Miriam Joyce, "Preserving the Shaikhdom: London, Washington, Iraq and Kuwait, 1958-61," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 31, no. 2 (1995), pp. 281-292. William Taylor Fain, "John F. Kennedy and Harold Macmillan: Managing the 'Special Relationship' in the Persian Gulf Region, 1961-63," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 38, no. 4 (2002), pp. 95-122. Nigel John Ashton has also contributed to the discussion about the significance of the Kuwait crisis for Anglo-American relations with the chapter on the Middle East in his book *Kennedy, Macmillan and the Cold War. The Irony of Interdependence* (Basingstoke and New York, 2002), pp. 90-108.

6 Nigel John Ashton, "Britain and the Kuwaiti crisis, 1961," *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 9, no. 1 (1998), pp. 163-81. Nigel John Ashton, "A Microcosm of Decline: British Loss of Nerve and Military Intervention in Jordan and Kuwait, 1958 and 1961," *The Historical Journal*, 40, no. 4 (1997), pp. 1069-1083.

7 Ashton, "Britain and the Kuwaiti crisis, 1961," pp. 166-70.

8 Ashton, "A Microcosm of Decline," p. 1073.

intervention, Ashton contributes to an intense and controversial debate about this subject. Earlier accounts by John Bulloch and Mustafa M. Alani have doubted the reality of the military threat to Kuwait emanating from Iraq and questioned the sincerity of Britain's motives for the launch of *Vantage*.<sup>9</sup> Ashton on the other hand agrees with Morice Snell-Mendoza that the significance of Great Britain's economic interest in the independence of Kuwait was the driving force behind the British intervention.<sup>10</sup> Another subject Ashton addresses in both articles are the logistical and operational problems the British experienced during the intervention in Kuwait in 1961. He concludes that the operation distilled "the essence of the problem of British decline in the Middle East" and contributed to the British "loss of nerve" in the region.<sup>11</sup> This interpretation fits into a general trend which is discernible in the historical research about Great Britain and the Persian Gulf in the 1960s. The historical debate on British policy in the Persian Gulf in that decade has been concerned almost exclusively with the reasons for Great Britain's withdrawal from the region which was announced in January 1968.<sup>12</sup> Saki Dockrill and Simon C. Smith argue that the decision to leave the Gulf was taken after several defense reviews as a result of Great Britain's long-term economic decline.<sup>13</sup> Roger Louis stresses the impact of the devaluation crisis of November 1967 which led to the plan of the Wilson Government to abandon Great Britain's East of Suez role altogether.<sup>14</sup> Jeffrey Pickering and Shohei Sato argue that the decision to leave the Gulf was taken for essentially political reasons after a shift of power

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9 John Bulloch, *The Gulf: A Portrait of Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, and the UAE* (London, 1984), p. 63. Mustafa M. Alani, *Operation Vantage: British Military Intervention in Kuwait 1961* (Surbiton, 1990), p. 254.

10 Morice Snell-Mendoza's opinion is expressed in the title of his article: "In Defence of Oil: Britain's response to the Iraqi threat towards Kuwait, 1961," *Contemporary British History*, 10, no. 3 (1996), pp. 39-62.

11 Ashton, "A Microcosm of Decline," pp. 1070, 1083.

12 The exception to this rule is Miriam Joyce, *Ruling Shaikhs and Her Majesty's Government. 1960-1969* (London and Portland, OR, 2003). Joyce concentrates on the relationship between the British Government and the Persian Gulf Rulers. However, she does not discuss the consequences of the Kuwait crisis for Britain's Persian Gulf policy.

13 Saki Dockrill, *Britain's Retreat from East of Suez. The Choice between Europe and the World?* (Basingstoke and New York, 2002); Simon C. Smith, *Britain's Revival and Fall in the Gulf. Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and the Trucial States, 1950-71* (London and New York, 2004).

14 Louis argues: "The British did not leave the Gulf because they wanted to, or for reasons concerning the Gulf itself. They left, in short, because of the decision of Harold Wilson's Labour Government to rescue the British economy by taking severe measures including the evacuation of all troops from South-East Asia as well as those from the Gulf." Wm. Roger Louis, "The British Withdrawal from the Gulf, 1967-71," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 31, no. 1 (2003), pp. 83-108, see p. 84.

within the Labour Cabinet in November 1967.<sup>15</sup>

It is suggested in this article that the concentration by historians on Great Britain's decline in the Middle East and eventual withdrawal from the region has resulted in a tendency to overlook the fact that Great Britain's will to control the Gulf remained unbroken in the early 1960s. An analysis of Great Britain's last years in the Gulf which concentrates exclusively on the reasons for Britain's eventual withdrawal is in danger of telling only one part of the whole story. This paper will show that the Kuwait crisis of 1961 was an important defining moment for Great Britain's policy in the Persian Gulf. It left the British militarily more deeply committed in the Persian Gulf after Kuwait's independence than when the emirate had still been a British Protected State. The Kuwait crisis confirmed the British belief that Britain's military and political presence in the Gulf was indispensable to guarantee regional peace and security. Great Britain's determination to maintain the Pax Britannica in the Persian Gulf after the Kuwait crisis was greater than ever before.

### **The Kuwait Crisis in the Summer of 1961**

On 19 June 1961 the British Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, Sir William Luce, and the Ruler of Kuwait, Shaikh Abdullah al-Salim al-Sabah, signed a formal Exchange of Letters, granting Kuwait independence.<sup>16</sup> The new Anglo-Kuwait agreement abrogated the "Exclusive Agreement" of 1899 on which the relations between Great Britain and Kuwait had been based ever since.<sup>17</sup> While Great Britain still maintained a commitment to defend Kuwait on request, the political privileges the British had enjoyed in Kuwait since 1899 were ended. Great Britain's special position in the Persian Gulf was from now on officially confined to the Protected States of Bahrain, Qatar and the seven Trucial States. These nine countries remained the only ones in the Persian Gulf which were still connected to Great Britain by treaties dating back to the nineteenth century that limited their independence and their Rulers' sovereignty.<sup>18</sup> The British Government

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15 Jeffrey Pickering, *Britain's Withdrawal from East of Suez. The Politics of Retrenchment* (Basingstoke and New York, 1998); Shohei Sato, "Britain's Decision to Withdraw from the Persian Gulf, 1964-68: A Pattern and A Puzzle", *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 37, no. 1 (2009), pp. 99-117.

16 "Exchange of Letters between Her Majesty's Government and His Highness the Ruler of Kuwait," 19 June 1961, FO 93/137/15.

17 "Relations between Her Majesty's Government and the Rulers of the Persian Gulf States. List of Principal Agreements," August 1961, FO 371/156674.

18 The constitutional status of the Protected States was defined by a combination of treaties that had been concluded between the British Government and the local Rulers between 1820

hoped to keep the public profile of the new Anglo-Kuwaiti agreement as low as possible. The Exchange of Letters was presented to the world as an insignificant document which merely confirmed that the control of Kuwait's foreign affairs now lay with the Amir instead of the British Government. The reason for this way of presentation was the fear shared by the British and Shaikh Abdullah that the Exchange of Letters would draw too much attention to the previous predominant British position in Kuwait and to the special treaty relations which still existed between Great Britain and the other Protected States of the Gulf. It was feared that the new Anglo-Kuwaiti agreement could trigger a new round of public criticism of the British position in the Gulf by Arab nationalists.<sup>19</sup>

British attempts to keep public attention to the new agreement to a minimum proved futile, as the Exchange of Letters provoked a series of strong reactions throughout the Middle East. While most Middle Eastern governments congratulated Kuwait on obtaining independence from British control, the President of Iraq, General Abd al-Karim Qasim, reacted with surprise and anger. At a press conference held in Baghdad on 25 June he described the new Anglo-Kuwaiti agreement as illegal and invalid. The Kuwaitis responsible for its conclusion had in his view no authority to do so, because Kuwait was an integral part of Iraq. Qasim then announced his intention to appoint the Amir Shaikh Abdullah *Qaimmaqam* of Kuwait, thereby reducing his status from a head of state to a district governor subordinate to Baghdad.<sup>20</sup>

Qasim's claim that Kuwait belonged to Iraq was nothing new. Succeeding Iraqi governments had made similar statements since Iraq had become independent in 1932.<sup>21</sup> However, Qasim's comments of 25 June caused great concern in

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and 1916. The most important treaties between Great Britain and the Gulf States are listed in: "Relations between Her Majesty's Government and the Rulers of the Persian Gulf States. List of Principal Agreements," August 1961, FO 371/156674. For the legal status of the Persian Gulf States see Husain M. Albaharna, *The Legal Status of the Arabian Gulf States. A Study of their Treaty Relations and their International Problems* (Manchester, 1968) and J.B. Kelly, "The Legal and Historical Basis of the British Position in the Persian Gulf," *St. Anthony's Papers*, 4 (1958), pp. 119-140. For the historical background of Great Britain's special position in the Gulf see James Onley, *The Arabian Frontier of the Raj. Merchants, Rulers, and the British in the Nineteenth Century Gulf* (Oxford, 2007) and Uzi Rabi, "Britain's Special Position in the Gulf: Its Origins, Dynamics and Legacy," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 42, no. 3 (2006), pp. 351-64.

<sup>19</sup> Zahlan, p. 56.

<sup>20</sup> Smith, *Kuwait, 1950-1965*, p. 117.

<sup>21</sup> The reasoning presented was that Kuwait was historically part of the Basra province of the Ottoman Empire and that the Ruler of Kuwait had carried the Ottoman title of *Qaimmaqam*. When the British defeated the Ottomans in the First World War, Basra province was joined together with the provinces of Mosul and Baghdad to form the new state of Iraq. The Iraqi Government concluded from this that Kuwait was part of Iraq and refused to accept the validity of the Anglo-Kuwaiti

London. The British Government interpreted the press conference to be Qasim's announcement of a concrete Iraqi plan to annex Kuwait. Since Iraq's pro-British Hashemite monarchy had been overthrown by Qasim on 14 July 1958, the British had feared that Iraq could invade Kuwait and gain control of its vast oil resources, on which Great Britain was heavily dependent. British strategists had concentrated from the summer of 1958 onwards on drawing up contingency plans to counter a possible Iraqi attack on Kuwait.<sup>22</sup> The plan eventually agreed upon in November 1960, called Operation *Vantage*, depended on exploiting Great Britain's military resources throughout the Middle East region. It envisaged the use of the Middle East Command's facilities in Aden, the strategic reserve based in Kenya and the British staging posts and airfields in the Persian Gulf at Bahrain, Sharjah and Masirah Island.<sup>23</sup> In the days following Qasim's press conference, reports reached London that led Macmillan believe that the moment for the implementation of *Vantage* had come. The British ambassador to Iraq, Sir Humpfrey Trevelyan, informed the Foreign Office about rumors circulating in Baghdad that Qasim was concentrating troops in the Basra area only 40 miles away from the Kuwaiti border.<sup>24</sup> On 27 June 1961 Trevelyan warned that Qasim might plan to attack Kuwait on 14 July, on the third anniversary of the Iraqi Revolution.<sup>25</sup>

The British reaction to Trevelyan's warnings was quick and decisive: in a series of meetings of the Cabinet Defense Committee chaired by Macmillan on 29 and 30 June it was decided that only a British military intervention could prevent the annexation of Kuwait and that British troops should therefore be sent to Kuwait immediately.<sup>26</sup> First preparatory steps ensuring that *Vantage* could be implemented as swiftly and efficiently as possible were endorsed in the first meeting of the Defense Committee on the afternoon of 29 June.<sup>27</sup> The British Political Agent in Kuwait, Sir John Richmond, was instructed on the same day to

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agreement of 1899 or the border delineation between Iraq and Kuwait issued by the British in 1922. The Kuwaiti Government had always repudiated this claim because the Ottomans had never actually exercised control over Kuwait. Zahlan, p. 51. Smith, *Kuwait, 1950-1965*, p. 117.

22 Ashton, "Britain and the Kuwaiti crisis, 1961," p. 166.

23 Fain, pp. 102-3.

24 Ibid, p. 103.

25 Ashton, "Britain and the Kuwaiti crisis, 1961," p. 167.

26 Nigel John Ashton, in "Britain and the Kuwaiti crisis, 1961," has described the decision-making process in detail. However, his analysis was based on an incomplete collection of sources, because he did not have access to the record of the first meeting of the Defense Committee on 29 June 1961 at 4 p.m., which was still being withheld in the National Archives. This record has recently been declassified: Defense Committee Meetings (61) 11, 29 June 1961, 4 p.m., CAB 131/25. The other meetings of the Defense Committee were held on 29 June at 7 p.m., on 30 June at 3 p.m. and on 30 June on 9.15 p.m. See Defense Committee Papers (61) 41-43, CAB 131/26.

27 Defense Committee Meetings (61) 11, 29 June 1961, 4 p.m., CAB 131/25.

inform the Ruler of Kuwait of the imminence of the Iraqi threat and to persuade him to issue a formal request for British military help.<sup>28</sup> Such a request was in line with Article four of the Exchange of Letters which obligated Britain to come to Kuwait's defense if the Amir requested it.<sup>29</sup> Macmillan's aim was to present the military intervention to the world and especially to Arab public opinion as Great Britain's response to a Kuwaiti initiative. He was also determined to ensure the support of the US Government for the planned operation.<sup>30</sup> On 28 June, a letter was dispatched by Foreign Secretary Lord Home to the US Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, informing him about the Iraqi threat to Kuwait and asking him for his Government's support should a military crisis arise in the Middle East.<sup>31</sup> It was only after Lord Home had received a favorable reply by Rusk and after Richmond had successfully obtained Shaikh Abdullah's formal request that Macmillan ordered the launch of *Vantage* in the evening of 30 June.

The military build-up in Kuwait was completed within a few days without any disturbances. Eventually the total number of British troops in Kuwait reached 7,000.<sup>32</sup> However, while more and more British troops were sent into Kuwait, there were no signs of increasing troop movements in the Basra area, let alone of the Iraqi Army crossing the border into Kuwait.<sup>33</sup> The anniversary of the Iraqi revolution on 14 July came and went, but the expected invasion did not occur. In the meantime, the political pressure on the British Government increased. Both inside some Kuwaiti circles and in Arab public opinion in general the British operation was criticized. Conspiracy theories became more and more popular in the Middle East, claiming that the whole crisis was a British plot using Qasim's aggressive speech to create a pretext for the military occupation of Kuwait. The

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28 Ibid.

29 "Exchange of Letters between Her Majesty's Government and His Highness the Ruler of Kuwait," 19 June 1961, FO 93/137/15.

30 Cabinet Conclusions (61) 36, 29 June 1961, CAB 128/35, Part 3.

31 See Ashton, "Britain and the Kuwaiti crisis, 1961," p. 170 and Fain, p. 104. Home's letter was followed by a series of messages on 29 and 30 June. On the afternoon of 29 June, the matter was discussed at a meeting of the US National Security Council. During the discussion President Kennedy stressed the great economic importance of Kuwait to the Western world and announced his intention to give Great Britain full political and logistical support.

32 Smith, *Kuwait, 1950-1965*, p. 120.

33 The Defense Committee was informed about this as early as 1 July. However, it was agreed that the Iraqi troops already assembled fully justified the continued military build-up in Kuwait. See Defense Committee Papers (61) 44, 1 July 1961, CAB 131/26. In a meeting of the Defense Committee on 2 July it was argued that the lacking information about progress in the Iraqi build-up had to be attributed to the fact that the Iraqi invasion would probably be launched according to the original plan in mid-July. See Defense Committee Papers (61) 45, 2 July 1961, CAB 131/26.

absence of a visible Iraqi threat to Kuwait was used as prove for this theory.<sup>34</sup> The US Government also concluded by the end of the first week of July that the British had overstated the military threat Iraq posed to Kuwait.<sup>35</sup> Within a few weeks after the completion of the military build-up, the Macmillan Government therefore found itself in the ironic situation that its most urgent problem was to find a way to withdraw the British troops without jeopardizing Kuwait's independence. While the British realized that their political position became increasingly untenable with every day that their troops remained in Kuwait, they were unwilling to leave before a suitable alternative deterrent against possible future Iraqi attacks had been set in place.<sup>36</sup> This was clearly stated by Lord Home in a meeting of the Defense Committee on 18 July. It was agreed by the members of the committee that, given Qasim's irrational and unpredictable character, an Iraqi attack on Kuwait – though increasingly unlikely at this stage – remained a danger the British had to be prepared for: "In fact it was now more probable that the Iraqis would aim at subversion of the present regime from within than make a direct military attack. The possibility of rash action by General Qasim could not, however, be discounted."<sup>37</sup>

A solution to the British dilemma presented itself in a peace-keeping mission for Kuwait raised by the Arab League. The British Government supported the idea of such a regional solution to the Kuwait problem. It encouraged the Ruler of Kuwait to dispatch his nephew, Shaikh Jabir, in the second week of July to various regional capitals, seeking support for Kuwait's membership application to the League. In turn, Jabir promised that the Amir was willing to request a British military withdrawal as soon as an Arab League peacekeeping force had been sent to Kuwait.<sup>38</sup> This proposal was incorporated in the Saudi Arabian resolution which formed the basis of Kuwait's admittance to the Arab League as a full member on 20 July.<sup>39</sup> An Arab League military committee arrived in Kuwait on 8 August to discuss the necessary preparations for a peacekeeping mission with the Ruler. Only four days later, on 12 August, the Amir and the Secretary-General of the Arab League, Abdel Khalek Hassouna, signed an agreement providing the establishment of an Arab League Security Force responsible for the defense of Kuwait.<sup>40</sup> After this agreement was signed, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Sudan began

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34 Zahlan, pp. 72-73.

35 See Fain, p. 105 and Ashton, "Britain and the Kuwaiti crisis, 1961," p. 172.

36 Defense Committee Papers (61) 48, 18 July 1961, CAB 131/26.

37 Ibid.

38 Smith, *Kuwait, 1950-1965*, p. 122.

39 Zahlan, p. 75.

40 Miriam Joyce, *Kuwait, 1945-1996. An Anglo-American Perspective* (London and Portland, OR, 1998), p. 108.

to dispatch soldiers to Kuwait. The gradual withdrawal of British troops started on 27 September. By 10 October, all British soldiers, except a small group responsible for preparing vehicles and equipment for storage, had left Kuwait.<sup>41</sup>

### **The Consequences of the Kuwait Crisis for British Deployment in the Persian Gulf**

Once the agreement about the establishment of a peacekeeping force had been signed by the Amir of Kuwait and the Secretary-General of the Arab League, an intense debate started in London about the future of the British military commitment to Kuwait. The debate in the Cabinet and in the responsible departments – the Treasury, the Foreign Office, the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Power – centered on the possible consequences that the arrival of the Arab League Security Force could have on Great Britain's military presence in the Gulf. It was agreed that the Government had to decide about the future of the British defense commitment included in the Exchange of Letters of 19 June 1961 and about redeployment in the Persian Gulf before the British troops had been withdrawn from Kuwait.

A first step in the decision-making process was the evaluation of *Vantage* by the British military. A working party was set up by the Chiefs of Staff Committee to prepare a report about the soon to be concluded intervention.<sup>42</sup> The final version of this report was approved by the Chiefs of Staff Committee on 6 September 1961. It concluded that the major weakness of *Vantage* had been its need for a relatively long warning period. The intervention plan had been based on the assumption that the British would be warned of an imminent Iraqi attack at least four days before enough Iraqi troops had been assembled in the Basra area to start the invasion. However, "it was not until 29<sup>th</sup> June, 1961 ... that the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East was informed that a complete tank regiment could be in Basra by the morning of 1<sup>st</sup> July, 1961."<sup>43</sup> As Iraq had then unexpectedly abstained from attack the insufficient warning period had not had any serious consequences on the success of the operation. However, the Chiefs of Staff agreed that if the military commitment of Great Britain to defend Kuwait was to be upheld, the intervention plans for future operations had to take this risk into account and to

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41 "Current Position in Kuwait." Annex to Chiefs of Staff Committee Memoranda (61) 366, 4 October 1961, DEFE 5/118.

42 "Operation Vantage. Report by the Working Party," Chiefs of Staff Committee Memoranda (61) 271, 16 October 1961, DEFE 5/116.

43 "Operation Vantage. Report by the Working Party," Annex to Chiefs of Staff Committee Memoranda (61) 309, 8 September 1961, DEFE 5/116.

reduce the calculated warning period.<sup>44</sup> The Chiefs of Staff had little or no faith in the value of the presence of the Arab League force in Kuwait as a military deterrent against an Iraqi attack. This was clearly stated in a plan for “Redeployment of British Forces after Withdrawal from Kuwait” approved by the Chiefs of Staff Committee on 22 August 1961.<sup>45</sup> Based on a new detailed assessment of the military threat to Kuwait the report concluded that during the following twelve months an Iraqi attack could take place at any time without warning.<sup>46</sup> As such an invasion would probably aim to conquer Kuwait town and to occupy the airfields, any British plan to counter an Iraqi surprise attack had to take into account that the Arab League forces present in Kuwait would only be able to hold the airfields and other vital points of re-entry for British troops against the Iraqi invasion for thirty-six hours at most.

The conclusions reached by the Chiefs of Staff were incorporated in a new intervention plan for Kuwait which was submitted to the Cabinet by the Minister of Defense, Harold Watkinson, on 1 September.<sup>47</sup> Watkinson informed his colleagues that from the military point of view the only realistic way to implement the British obligation to defend Kuwait was to prepare for an intervention within thirty-six hours. A smaller part of the British troops was to be introduced into Kuwait within this period and to defend the points of entry until the remainder of the British troops arrived during the following sixty hours. The memorandum submitted by the Minister of Defense pointed out that the new intervention plan had far-reaching consequences for the scale and the cost of Great Britain’s military deployment in the Persian Gulf. To meet the requirements of the higher state of readiness, the total number of British troops earmarked for the Kuwait operation had to be increased. Since Great Britain was supposed to defend Kuwait without having any troops stationed inside the emirate, the new intervention plan provided for the increase of British forces stationed in the Persian Gulf. Great Britain’s military installations in the area included a Royal Air Force (R.A.F.) base and a small navy station in Bahrain as well as R.A.F. airfields and staging posts in Sharjah and on Masirah Island in Oman. To meet the requirements of the new intervention plan, a parachute battalion group had to be stationed permanently in Bahrain. The Minister of Defense pointed out that the implementation of the plan to deploy more land forces to the Persian Gulf required the construction

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44 “Redeployment of British Forces after Withdrawal from Kuwait,” Annex to Chiefs of Staff Committee Memoranda (61) 291, 28 September 1961, DEFE 5/116.

45 *Ibid.*

46 *Ibid.*

47 “Kuwait. Memorandum by the Minister of Defense,” Cabinet Memoranda (61) 133, 1 September 1961, CAB 129/106.

of accommodation for these troops in Bahrain. This was a costly enterprise the British Government would have to be prepared to pay for, he argued:

Such a redeployment will involve stationing more troops in Bahrain/Sharjah than there were before the Kuwaiti operation, keeping some of them at a higher state of readiness, and employing more armour and artillery. The increased numbers will require additional accommodation, which in early days, at least, would have to be tents. If the commitment is to be a long-term one and certainly before the next hot season, better accommodation would be required. It is estimated that the cheapest air-conditioned accommodation would cost some £500,000.<sup>48</sup>

Watkinson also explained that the R.A.F. should increase its presence in the Persian Gulf by stationing a detachment of Hunter G.A.9 planes in Bahrain. This deployment, which was required to ensure the re-entry of Britain's forces in Kuwait within the proposed time-scale, involved the provision of air-conditioned accommodation at Bahrain which would cost the British state another £100,000 pounds. The Minister however conceded that the air-deployment plan was the most flexible element in the planning.<sup>49</sup>

Another necessary but costly implication of the new intervention plan was the need to create a stockpile of British weapons in Kuwait and to leave the necessary personnel for maintenance behind once the British troops withdrew. The equipment that had to be prepositioned in the emirate included twenty-four tanks, twenty-four armored cars, twelve field guns, engineer equipment, heavy vehicles and ammunition.<sup>50</sup> It was also necessary to deploy a mobile radar system in Kuwait that could be used by the R.A.F. in case of a British intervention. The Amir had already been consulted on this matter and had agreed to pay for the running costs of the stockpiling.<sup>51</sup>

The memorandum of the Minister of Defense was discussed in a meeting of the Cabinet on 5 September. While the ministers agreed that the stockpile of British weapons in Kuwait should be established immediately, they concluded that a fresh political assessment of British interests and responsibilities in the

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48 "Kuwait. Memorandum by the Minister of Defense," Cabinet Memoranda (61) 133, 1 September 1961, CAB 129/106.

49 *Ibid.* For the details of the planned air force deployment see Annex B.

50 Annex A to *ibid.*

51 "Kuwait. Memorandum by the Minister of Defense," Cabinet Memoranda (61) 133, 1 September 1961, CAB 129/106.

Persian Gulf was needed before the expensive and time-consuming redeployment of British troops described by the Minister of Defense could be endorsed.<sup>52</sup> In the following weeks, an interdepartmental working party of officials including representatives from the Foreign Office, the Treasury, the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Power discussed the costs and benefits of a continued British commitment to defend Kuwait. Their results were presented to the Cabinet by the Lord Privy Seal, Edward Heath, on 2 October.<sup>53</sup>

The report provided a detailed assessment of the mainly economic British interests in Kuwait and analyzed the possible dangers to those interests. It explained that Kuwait's vast oil reserves benefitted the British economy in three different ways.<sup>54</sup> The concession for the exploration of Kuwait's oil reserves belonged to the Kuwait Oil Company of which fifty percent were owned by British Petroleum and fifty percent by the Gulf Oil Company of Pittsburgh, USA. Fifty-one percent of British Petroleum's shares were owned by the British Government. The enormous profits both companies made by extracting and selling Kuwait's oil therefore significantly benefitted Britain's balance of payments. A policy designed to safeguard British interests had to ensure that the profitable way in which Kuwait's oil was extracted and transported was maintained in the future. The second economic advantage for Great Britain was Kuwait's membership in the Sterling Area. During a period of dollar shortage, the British industry was able to meet its ever-growing need for energy by buying oil from Kuwait and paying for it in pound sterling. Kuwait held large reserves of sterling and invested a great proportion of its oil earnings in the City of London, thus contributing to the stability of the pound sterling. A change of policy of the Government of Kuwait which included a withdrawal from the Sterling Area would therefore have serious repercussions for the British economy. The third economic advantage for Great Britain was Kuwait's position as an independent oil producer in the Middle East with friendly policies towards the United Kingdom and the West in general. The report stressed that the main aim of a policy aiming to preserve the British interest was to make sure that Kuwait's integrity was not compromised by another Middle Eastern country. This reasoning reflected the increasingly difficult bargaining position of the United Kingdom in the Middle East. Since the overthrow of the Anglophile Hashemite monarchy of Iraq in 1958, Kuwait, the Protected States of the Gulf, Oman and Iran remained the only British allies left in the region.

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52 Cabinet Conclusions (61) 49, 5 September 1961, CAB 128/35, Part 5.

53 "Kuwait. Memorandum by the Lord Privy Seal," Cabinet Memoranda (61) 140, 2 October 1961, CAB 129/106.

54 "Kuwait. Report by Officials," Annex to Cabinet Memoranda (61) 140, 2 October 1961, CAB 129/160.

It was argued in the working party's report that the invasion and annexation of Kuwait by one of the other Middle Eastern oil producing countries would reduce the number of independent oil producers and give the remaining ones increased power to dictate the prices:

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 major Middle Eastern oil producers (Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Iran) or transit States (the United Arab Republic), and thus provides an invaluable insurance that oil will continue to flow from the Middle East in adequate quantities and on reasonable terms ....<sup>55</sup>

Having analyzed different ways by which Kuwait's integrity could be threatened in the future, the report discussed whether Great Britain could rely on a purely political strategy to safeguard its significant economic interest in the emirate. It was argued that Kuwait's membership in the Arab League and the prospect of joining the United Nations added to its security. A British policy aiming to persuade the Amir to invest some of his oil wealth in other Arab countries might also help to stabilize his position and to make him more immune against attempts to stir up subversion in his country. However, the report concluded that while such a political strategy might help to counter some of the threats facing Kuwait from its neighbors, it was insufficient to eliminate the threat of an Iraqi attack. Iraq's potential to annex Kuwait was regarded as the greatest danger to the emirate's security and Great Britain's economic interest there. This threat could not be countered by diplomacy alone:

It is possible, though far from certain, that the risk of attack from Saudi Arabia or of subversion by the U.A.R. could be discounted, provided the Kuwait Government followed sensible policies, but the threat from Iraq is in a different class, given the unprecedented and conspiratorial nature of General Qassim and his need for a striking success to bolster his position in Iraq and the Arab world. For him, the seizure of Kuwait would represent a tremendous success and, and at least for so long as he is in control of Iraqi policy ..., there is bound to be a serious danger that the Iraqi claim will be pursued by violent means if the Iraqis see a chance

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55 Ibid.

of success. There is no political instrument open to us to influence General Qassim against pursuing his claim....<sup>56</sup>

The broad conclusion from the analysis of Great Britain's interests in Kuwait, the risks threatening those interests and the political methods employable to safeguard them was to recommend that the British Government should maintain its military commitment to defend Kuwait, at least as long as Qasim was in power. The report asked the members of Cabinet to endorse the military intervention plan for Kuwait submitted by the Minister of Defense providing for a state of readiness of only thirty-six hours for the British troops earmarked for the Kuwait operation. These recommendations were endorsed by the Cabinet on 5 October.<sup>57</sup> At the same meeting, the ministers also agreed that authority should be given to the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, to take immediate limited military action in case of an Iraqi attack on Kuwait, provided that the Amir had made a request for British assistance and the Political Resident had agreed that it was politically desirable to meet this request.<sup>58</sup> It was agreed that the Commander-in-Chief could not afford to lose valuable time for the implementation of the defense plan while he was waiting for instructions from the Government in London.<sup>59</sup>

On 24 October 1961, the Chiefs of Staff Committee instructed the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, to adopt Reinforced Theatre plan No. 13 – code-named Operation *Sodabread* – as contingency plan for a British intervention in Kuwait in case of an Iraqi attack.<sup>60</sup> The total British land force earmarked for the operation consisted of one reinforced Brigade group of four infantry battalions, including tanks, armored cars, artillery and a parachute battalion group. The entire force was stationed in the Middle East Command area: two infantry battalions in Kenya, one in Aden, and the parachute battalion group in Bahrain.<sup>61</sup> The Royal Air Force deployment for Operation *Sodabread* consisted of two DF/GA squadrons

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56 Ibid.

57 Cabinet Conclusions (61) 53, 5 October 1961, CAB 128/35, Part 5.

58 Cabinet Memoranda (61) 145, 2 October 1961, CAB 129/160. The action the Commander-in-Chief was authorized to take before he received official instructions from London was limited to offensive air action against Iraqi ground and air forces in and over Kuwait, the activation of the British stockpile in the emirate and all necessary measures preparing for intervention short of moving British land forces into Kuwait.

59 Cabinet Conclusions (61) 53, 5 October 1961, CAB 128/35, Part 5.

60 Chiefs of Staff Committee Memoranda (61) 413, 31 October 1961, DEFE 5/ 119.

61 The defense plan relied on the use of nearly all of Britain's land forces stationed in the Middle East Command area, except for one infantry battalion in Kenya and one battalion in Aden. See "Intervention in Kuwait," Annex to Chiefs of Staff Committee Memoranda (61) 413, 31 October 1961, DEFE 5/119.

stationed in Aden and Bahrain. In case of a British intervention in Kuwait, a squadron of Canberra planes from Germany was to be deployed to Sharjah to fly ground attacks from the R.A.F. airfield, supported by a Canberra Photographic Reconnaissance detachment from Bahrain. The British Navy would participate in the operation with three frigates, an Amphibious Warfare Squadron and coastal minesweepers from the Middle East Command area.<sup>62</sup>

### **The Consequences of the Kuwait Crisis for Great Britain's Persian Gulf Policy**

The implementation of the new intervention plan, Operation *Sodabread*, depended upon the Ruler of Bahrain's permission for the permanent stationing of a British parachute battalion group on his territory. Until 1961, the presence in Bahrain of British Army personnel – as opposed to Royal Navy sailors or Royal Air Force airmen who had been there since the 1930s – had been based on the sufferance of the Ruler rather than on formal agreements. When the deployment of British troops to Bahrain had begun in March 1956 and had been accelerated during the Suez crisis later that year, the Ruler had conceded reluctantly. He had expressed his hopes that these troops would not remain in Bahrain indefinitely and had accepted the Political Resident's oral assurance that they would eventually be withdrawn. This, however, did not happen, and 425 British Army soldiers remained stationed in Bahrain until 1961. They were accommodated at the British Naval base in Jufair and the Royal Air Force base in Muharraq, because the British Army did not own any land in Bahrain.<sup>63</sup> Great Britain brought more troops in during the Kuwait intervention in July 1961, merely informing the Ruler about the increase, but not asking for his consent. Eventually the total number of British troops in Bahrain reached 1,100. When it was decided in London in October 1961 that these forces should remain permanently in Bahrain, it was acknowledged that they could not be accommodated within the Royal Navy base at Jufair or the Royal Air Force base at Muharraq. The land occupied by the British services was insufficient to meet the requirements of an entire battalion group. Additional land had to be purchased or leased for the construction of suitable accommodation. The British had therefore no choice but to ask for the Ruler's consent to their new deployment plan.<sup>64</sup>

On 25 October 1961, Sir William Luce dispatched a formal letter to the

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> "Status of British Forces in Bahrain," Memorandum prepared by the Political Agency in Bahrain, enclosed with a letter from David G. Crawford to H.B. Walker, Confidential, 30 September 1961, FO 371/156726.

<sup>64</sup> "Status of British Forces in Bahrain," Minute by H.B. Walker, 30 August 1961, FO 371/156726.

Ruler of Bahrain, Shaikh Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifah, requesting his consent to the increase of British troops permanently stationed on his territory.<sup>65</sup> He also informed Salman of the request of the British Government to lease additional land for the construction of a new army camp and put forward different suggestions for suitable sites. Luce's strategy to persuade the Ruler was to convince Salman that the stationing of additional troops on his territory was in his own interest. The letter started with a statement of British aims and interests in the Gulf which lay in the fulfillment of the treaty obligations the British Government had towards the Rulers of the Gulf States. Luce reminded Shaikh Salman of the importance of Kuwait's independence and integrity. He explained that Great Britain could no longer guarantee the defense of Kuwait if Shaikh Salman did not agree to the increase of British troops in Bahrain. Luce also stressed the benefits that the stationing of additional troops in Bahrain would have for the local economy. He reminded Salman of the contribution the presence of British Army personnel had already made to the commerce and the trade of Bahrain. Luce assured the Ruler that the planned redeployment would increase this effect and also create new employment on the island.<sup>66</sup>

The reply of Bahrain's Ruler to Luce's letter was not as welcoming as the British had hoped. While Shaikh Salman accepted in principle that an entire battalion group remained stationed in Bahrain and offered the British Government the needed land for leasing, he made his consent subject to two conditions. The Ruler did not welcome the idea of British troops being stationed indefinitely on the island. He wanted to limit the British deployment to a period of fifteen years. In Salman's formal reply to Luce's letter on 1 November, he stated that it was unlikely that the threat to Kuwait's security would exist for longer than such a period.<sup>67</sup> The second condition Salman named was the assurance of the British Government that the troops stationed in Bahrain would be used for the defense of Kuwait or Bahrain only. Referring to the statement in Luce's letter that an increased deployment was necessary from the point of view of British political and strategic interests in the Persian Gulf area, the Ruler expressed his fear that the British troops stationed in Bahrain could be used for an attack on a country with which he wished to maintain cordial relations. Such an attack would expose Bahrain to the criticism of the Arab world:

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<sup>65</sup> Letter from Sir William Luce to Shaikh Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifah, Ruler of Bahrain, Secret, 25 October 1961, FO 371/156726.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Letter from Shaikh Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifah, Ruler of Bahrain, to Sir William Luce, Secret, 1 November 1961, FO 371/156726.

... it is inevitable for Us to foresee the possibility that the military force stationed in Bahrain might be used by Her Majesty's Government against a country with whom We had every wish to maintain friendly relations. The consequence would certainly be that We should be accused by such country and by the whole Arab world of allowing Our country to be used as a base of operations against them with incalculable harm, in the case of Saudi Arabia for example, to Our economy.<sup>68</sup>

Salman's conditions were discussed extensively both inside the Foreign Office and among the Chiefs of Staff. It was agreed that the Ruler of Bahrain's condition to set a time-limit for the stationing of British troops on his island could be met without difficulty.<sup>69</sup> Salman's second condition was less popular: the Chiefs of Staff did not wish to have their hands tied by such an agreement which limited military planning and the free use of British troops in the Gulf.<sup>70</sup> The Foreign Office feared that the agreement with the Ruler of Bahrain could become public and motivate the Ruler of Sharjah to make similar demands.<sup>71</sup> The Political Resident was less pessimistic: he argued that the Ruler of Sharjah would hardly ask for a similar assurance, because the economy of his shaikhdom depended almost entirely on Great Britain's military requirements in Sharjah. Luce was confident that the Ruler would not risk his most important source of income by making the use of the R.A.F. airfield and staging post subject to conditions.<sup>72</sup> Luce urged the British Government repeatedly to accept the Ruler of Bahrain's terms because he felt certain that Great Britain would otherwise not obtain the requested permission for redeployment.<sup>73</sup> He reminded the Foreign Office that the tone of Shaikh

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> The Commander-in-Chief for the Middle East agreed that a period of 15 years should cover the requirement to protect Kuwait against foreign aggression. Telegram from the Commander-in-Chief Middle East to the Ministry of Defense, Secret, 8 November 1961, FO 371/156726. That the Commander-in-Chief's opinion was shared in the Foreign Office shows a Minute by Robert Walmsley to Steward Crawford, Secret, "British Troops in Bahrain," 14 November 1961, FO 371/156726.

<sup>70</sup> "Operation SODABREAD: Negotiations with the Ruler of Bahrain about the building of the new barrack accommodation," Minute by J.P. Waterfield to Mr. Given, Top Secret, 6 November 1961, FO 371/156726.

<sup>71</sup> Telegram from FO to Bahrain, No. 1961 Secret, 8 November 1961, FO 371/156726.

<sup>72</sup> Telegram from Bahrain to FO, No. 780 A Secret, 10 November 1961, FO 371/156726.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. Also see Telegram from Bahrain to FO, No. 766 Secret, 3 November 1961, FO 371/156726. The debate about the Ruler of Sharjah remained theoretical, as the Ruler of Bahrain promised to keep the new agreement secret.

Salman's reply was friendly and cooperative and that there was no point in risking his friendship by refusing to accept his conditions.<sup>74</sup> On 20 November Luce was eventually able to inform the Ruler of Bahrain that the British Government had consented to his stipulations.<sup>75</sup> A lease agreement was concluded shortly afterwards, followed by the construction of the army camp on the west coast of Bahrain, at Hamalah. The British parachute battalion group remained stationed on the island until 1971.

The discussions with the Government of Bahrain about redeployment were one aspect of the immediate and direct impact the decision to maintain the Kuwait commitment had on Great Britain's policy towards the Protected States of the Gulf. Britain's Persian Gulf policy now more than ever aimed for the best possible relations with the Protected States. This was due to the peculiar nature of the constitutional status of Qatar, Bahrain and the Trucial States. Since none of the Protected States were colonies, the deployment of British troops to the area depended on the goodwill of the local governments and Britain's privileged political position in the Protected States. Political influence on the other hand could only be maintained if the local Rulers remained assured that Great Britain was not only willing, but militarily capable of defending them against foreign aggression. It was this delicate balance of British influence and responsibility in the Gulf which shaped the effect of the Kuwait crisis on British policy towards the Protected States.

The British intervention in July 1961 triggered an intense debate in the Foreign Office about what lessons could be learned from the crisis for Great Britain's future policy in the Gulf. This debate was influenced to a high degree by a report sent by Sir William Luce to the Foreign Secretary, Lord Home, on 22 November 1961.<sup>76</sup> According to Luce, Operation *Vantage* had been a significant success for Great Britain. By preventing the annexation of Kuwait by Iraq, the intervention had not only strengthened the Anglo-Kuwaiti friendship, but also bolstered British prestige in the other Gulf States: "British stock in this area has perhaps never stood higher than it did on the morrow of our intervention in Kuwait."<sup>77</sup> Luce described the concern of the Rulers of the Protected States about Qasim's aggressiveness towards Kuwait and their approval of Britain's subsequent military

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74 Telegram from Bahrain to FO, No. 766 Secret, 3 November 1961, FO 371/156726.

75 Letter from Sir William Luce to Shaikh Isa bin Salman Al Khalifah, Ruler of Bahrain, Secret, 20 November 1961, FO 371/156726. Shaikh Salman passed away on 2 November 1961. The letter was therefore addressed to Salman's successor as Ruler of Bahrain, his son Isa.

76 Dispatch from Sir William Luce to the Earl of Home, No. 98, 22 November 1961, FO 371/156670.

77 *Ibid.*

intervention. He interpreted these reactions to the Kuwait crisis as proof that the local Rulers now appreciated Great Britain's presence in the Gulf even more than before because they regarded it as vital for their own survival. The consequence of this increased British popularity in the Gulf was a renewed British commitment to the defense of Bahrain, Qatar, and the Trucial States. The Political Resident was convinced that Great Britain's influential position in the Gulf was to a large degree based on the local governments' confidence and trust in this commitment. Great Britain could not withdraw from any part of its responsibilities in the Gulf without running the risk of a serious loss of prestige, which would erode British power in the region. The British needed continued good relations with the Rulers of the Protected States to maintain their defense commitment towards Kuwait. Therefore, Luce argued:

... it is no exaggeration to say that Britain at this moment 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 fifteen years.<sup>78</sup>

For the Political Resident, the Kuwait crisis was a confirmation that the Persian Gulf would remain for the foreseeable future an unstable area, where only Britain could maintain peace and security. Nobody but the British could guarantee the integrity and independence of Kuwait, which was too weak to defend itself against Qasim's territorial ambitions. For Qatar, Bahrain and the Trucial States, Great Britain's defense commitment was as indispensable as it was for Kuwait. The Protected States were too small, both in territory and in population, to have a real prospect of remaining independent if Great Britain withdrew its protection. Luce concluded that there seemed to be no policy available to the British Government that would enable Great Britain to withdraw from the Gulf in the foreseeable future:

The plain fact, as I see it, is that British withdrawal from the Gulf, whenever and for whatever reasons it may come about, is likely to turn that area in a jungle of power politics and smash-and-grab, and there is very little that Her Majesty's Government can do

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78 Ibid.

about it in the meantime.<sup>79</sup>

Sir William Luce's report of 22 November 1961 met widespread approval in the different departments of the Foreign Office. There was general agreement with his most important conclusion that the Kuwait crisis had proven the value of the Pax Britannica in the Gulf.<sup>80</sup> Great Britain should not withdraw from its military or political responsibilities in the region in the foreseeable future.<sup>81</sup> The importance of Great Britain's major interests in the area – the security of the Gulf Shaikhdoms and the undisturbed access to the oil of Kuwait – was too great.

### Conclusion

The Exchange of Letters of 19 June 1961 did not just alter the constitutional relationship between Great Britain and Kuwait. It also triggered a chain of events which had significant repercussions for Great Britain's military and political position in the entire Gulf region. President Qasim's aggressive reaction to the new Anglo-Kuwaiti agreement convinced the British Government that an Iraqi attack on Kuwait was imminent. To forestall the feared invasion, Operation *Vantage* was launched on 1 July 1961. When the expected Iraqi attack did not take place, the British did not conclude that they had been wrong about the Iraqi threat to Kuwait. On the contrary, the British military and the Foreign Office remained convinced of Qasim's intention to invade and annex Kuwait at the earliest opportunity. It was this fear of Iraqi aggression that motivated the British Government to maintain its commitment to defend Kuwait in the future. A new defense plan for Kuwait, called Operation *Sodabread*, was endorsed by the British Cabinet providing for a higher state of readiness for the British forces that were to be employed in case of an intervention in the emirate. As a result, a larger

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79 Ibid.

80 H.B. Walker stated in a Minute on 9 January 1962: "I do not think we need at all dissent from Sir William Luce's conclusions. All politics are in essence power politics, and a country of the great wealth and small size of Kuwait can hardly expect to survive except by a balance of forces in the area, which will not exist so long as Brigadier Qasim takes his present line, or by the backing of friendly troops, which only we can provide." E.F.G. Maynard agreed in a Minute on 12 January 1962: "However there is no doubt the validity of Sir William Luce's statement that our military presence in the Gulf is Kuwait's only safeguard." Both Minutes can be found at FO 371/156670.

81 The possible results of a premature withdrawal of British protection were described by E.F. Given in a Minute written in early January 1962: "The larger neighbors of the Gulf States are notoriously rapacious and it would have been asking a good deal of the most Buddhist-minded state not to help itself to the riches of even so modest a place as Bahrain, let alone Kuwait, Qatar or (in the future) Abu Dhabi. We must face the fact that the Gulf States are so scattered that they cannot defend their riches against their larger neighbors." FO 371/156670.

military force was stationed in the Gulf: a parachute battalion group was deployed to Bahrain and accommodated in a new army camp constructed on the island. The new intervention plan also increased the importance of the existing R.A.F. airfields and staging posts in Bahrain and Sharjah and the Navy base in Bahrain. The deployment of British troops to the Gulf depended on the consent of the local Rulers. The British Government therefore had to maintain close and friendly relations with the Protected States, leading it to make greater concessions to their Rulers in the 1960s.

On 8 February 1963, President Qasim was ousted from power by the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party.<sup>82</sup> The new Iraqi Government concluded an agreement with Kuwait, recognizing its independence and confirming it with an exchange of Ambassadors. In the light of these events the British Government reconsidered the Kuwait commitment. However, it was concluded that even though an Iraqi attack on the emirate was for the moment unlikely, the situation in Iraq was not stable enough to rely on it in the long term. Great Britain's withdrawal from its defense commitments would send the wrong signal, reducing the deterrent value of Great Britain's defense arrangements in the rest of the Persian Gulf.<sup>83</sup> As a result of these considerations, the high state of readiness of the British troops earmarked for an intervention in Kuwait remained unchanged, as did Britain's military presence in the Gulf.<sup>84</sup> When the British Government decided in November 1965 to give up the Aden base within the next three years, it was agreed with the Ruler of Kuwait that Great Britain's commitment to defend the emirate would from 1 January 1967 onwards be limited to the provision of air support.<sup>85</sup> The British ground forces stationed in the Gulf were unable to protect Kuwait without support from Aden.<sup>86</sup> However, this new agreement with the Ruler of Kuwait was kept secret because the British Government wanted to avoid the impression that Britain was withdrawing from its responsibilities in the Persian Gulf. The British forces stationed in Bahrain, Sharjah and Masirah Island remained in place. It was not

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82 Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, 2d ed. (Boulder, CO and Oxford, 2004), pp. 116-17.

83 "Iraq-Kuwait Agreement Defense Implications. Memorandum by the Foreign Office," Cabinet Defense and Oversea Policy (Official) Committee Papers (63) 4, 11 October 1963, CAB 148/16.

84 "Middle East Command Forces. Memorandum by the Ministry of Defense," Cabinet Defense and Oversea Policy (Official) Committee Papers (63) 3, 31 October 1963, CAB 148/3.

85 "The Kuwait Commitment in the Period to 1970/71," Cabinet Defense and Oversea Policy (Official) Committee (67) 7, 23 May 1967, CAB 148/8.

86 "Forces and Facilities in the Persian Gulf. Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Defense," Cabinet Defense and Oversea Policy (Official) Committee Memoranda (66) 22, 19 January 1966, CAB 148/27.

until 1971, when Great Britain completed its withdrawal from the Persian Gulf, that the Exchange of Letters and the British commitment to defend Kuwait were formally terminated.