

The U.S. Occupation of Iraq and its Impact on the Security of the Arab Gulf Region

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INTRODUCTION

The Arabian Gulf region is a region of vital interests at the regional and global levels and forms the basis of the contemporary Arab regional system. The foreign policy of any of the Arab Gulf states is particularly important in the regional balance of power. The security of the Gulf region can never be isolated from Iraq's national security and vice versa, especially since Iraq is part of it. The stability or instability of the situation in the Arab Gulf region has been influential on the political, economic and security situation in Iraq. Iraq has been and continues to be the focus of regional challenges in the Gulf region, with the effects of internal conflicts that have affected its regional environment.

The American occupation of Iraq and the occurrence of the so-called "Arab Spring revolutions" helped to get influential Arab countries in the region, such as Egypt, Syria and, before that, Iraq out of the sphere of influence and regional political prominence. This gave other Gulf Arab states in the region, to put themselves in the face of crises.

Through the above, we can divide our research into three main axes from which to complete our research as follows:

- 1) Arab Gulf states' visions of Iraq's post-2003 future.
- 2) The security dimension of the Western Gulf region after 2003.
- 3) Strategic security of the Arabian Gulf after 2003.

1. Arab Gulf states' visions for the future of Iraq after 2003.

Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 did not mark the beginning of the Gulf crisis and the end of the Gulf in general, and one of the most important reasons is: (Al-Mansour, 2009, p. 582)

- 1) Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates exceeded their OPEC oil quotas, which led Iraq to lose from seven to 10 million dollars a year.
- 2) Kuwait exploiting oil wells in Rumaila in the Iraqi-Kuwaiti border area.
- 3) Iraq demanded the cancellation of Kuwait's aid debts during Iraq's war with Iran and its sacrifices to maintain the security of the Gulf. However, Kuwait has deemed it a loan to be repaid.

After Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, the US embargo, which lasted more than 12 years, affected the people and institutions as the UN inspection teams failed to produce a positive result on Iraq's nuclear program. The American and British administrations managed to exploit the media to give the world an exaggerated picture of Iraq's nuclear or biological capabilities, and the possibility that Iraq is attacking countries such as America and London. Iraq was occupied and its negative effects left several security gaps for the Arab region in general, and the Arab Gulf in particular.

Gulf security has received attention and care, in one way and another, from the Capitalist pole during the cold war of the twentieth century, in the face of the competition of socialist poles to enter the region. This situation prompted the West to take the justification for tightening the security grip on the Gulf states and their peoples, seas and space. The wealth, stability and relative security that the region enjoyed at the time,

formed one of the most important factors of development and well-being that the Gulf states are reaping today in the face of political and security storms. With the conclusion of the cold war, old Western security strategies in the Gulf expired, and the region entered a different security era.

After the US occupation of Iraq, the countries of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (henceforth GCC) entered the imperative to work together to determine their regional and international relations, enhance regional security stability, and spark the fever of Iraq. This was so as to overcome the face of a range of threats arising regionally particularly especially after Iraq's political and security situation became very worrying. Former Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal said the demobilization of the Iraqi army in 2003 after the fall of the Iraqi regime had many consequences.

Through the above, there are three regional, international and Gulf visions, depending on the interests of each force and its security and political needs: (Al-Atrash, 1892, p. 12)

- Iran believes that Gulf security is an internal affair and should reject US hegemony over it.
- The Arab Gulf states do not hide their fear of American exclusivity in the region, and its consequences, and prefer to reach agreements in which the security and stability of the region will be maintained, and that regional and international powers contribute to it.
- In coordination with increasing international powers in the Arabian Gulf, the United States has allowed the development of a new strategy to protect the security of the Arabian Gulf. These include:
 - Britain: Its policy and seriousness in taking responsibility for Gulf security has emerged through the importance of external military presence, and the 2015 Security and Defence Strategy Plan, the establishment of a new naval military base in Salman Port, in Manama.
 - France: In order to revive its role as an active force, it sought to have a role in the Arabian Gulf, especially after the terrorist attacks in Paris. The effects of the role of French forces

in the Arabian Gulf can be shown in the following: (Al-Hariri, 2018)

- The military presence in Djibouti is of benefit to the Gulf states, particularly the United Arab Emirates.
- Defence diplomacy was confirmed when France concluded huge arms contracts with the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, as well as joint military exercises.
- France, on the Iranian threat card, plays a role in confirming its existence and military and security cooperation.

There are other worrying security and political challenges for the GCC countries and for many reasons, the most important of which are: (Sayed, 2017, January)

- Regional threats strongly reflect themselves on the GCC countries, specifically on the status of the ruling political systems and their future challenges.
- The emergence of regional powers, which have been able to strengthen their presence from the force present in the region. This has led to the divergence of specific Iranian and American projects and initiatives, which serve their interests primarily, on Gulf security.

The Iraqi scene continues to burst on all possibilities, and its reflection on most regional and Arab regimes, especially the Gulf, is represented by the following strategies: (Al-Hariri, 2018)

- The political perception of the ruling Arab elites, and their maintenance of the sovereignty of nationalism.
- The United States is working to maintain the security of the Gulf states, to avoid potential threats from Iran.
- The attempt to promote Qatari retreat, or find serious consensual ways of working together, against any threats.

- The chances that could threaten the Gulf security situation are reduced through a regime based on improving the image of Iraq's political and security situation.

2. The security dimension of the Arabian Gulf region after 2003

Former U.S. President George W. Bush has made it clear that the failure of the United States in Iraq will have serious military and security implications, even for moderate countries in the region. However, what has raised concerns in Iraq is the increase in incidents of violence and their level of complexity. This provided a clear invitation and signal to join the new international composition, given the long-term presence of U.S. forces in Iraq through a long-term security agreement.

So, the countries of the region will play no dominant role in its own space, as it will take into account the presence of the United States rather than finding a role in the region (Mahiou, 2008)

The security situation in Iraq has become a particular problem for the United States of America and especially for the American forces, and according to the German satirist Volker Pispers, this means that (Israel) cannot be politically and economically isolated from what is happening in Iraq.

The agreement with the United States of America has a major impact on (the future of the Arab regional system and its overall problems). So, the future depends on reforming an important aspect of the person responsible in the pyramid system, the Arab League, because despite repeated attempts to break, end or dismantle the system, it continues to recover and return to the region.

The Arabian Gulf region has grown into a global focal point due to its growing strategic importance over the past decades. However, concerns about the stability of this vital region continue to cast a shadow over this concern and global security. The contours of this geopolitical change are also very clear, and since the Arab-Israeli conflict has been the main concern in the Middle East until recently, the Arabian Gulf has effectively taken centre stage in the Middle East conflict in previous decades. It makes it one of the

most important strategic regions in the world (Ignatius, 2009).

The security of the Arabian Gulf represents all independence and territorial integrity, ensuring its political, social and internal economic stability, and keeping it immune to any external threat whether this concept adheres to the state or the individual, or the international system, or the regional system. One of the most important political objectives of the Arab Gulf states is a more fortified and effective actions to fortify the axes of the surrounding region. This was particularly discussed by the famous Al-Sharq al-Awsat Newspaper, Issue No. 9673 - 23/5/2005.

2.1 Developments in the security of the Arabian Gulf.

The majority of Gulf political elites are aware of the reality of differences over the security of the Arabian Gulf, and their lack of certainty about the seriousness of the escalating threats regionally and internationally from the fever of terrorism and its threats. This needs unity of purpose and integration of performance to take care of Gulf security and stability.

The concept of Gulf security has evolved several times and reflected phases of conflict in the region, the term was first launched in the US plan announced by Kissinger in 1968 to replace Britain, which announced the military withdrawal plan in three years in December, and to ensure the flow of oil. Regional security in the Gulf region cannot be achieved through a local balance of power, which has previously proved unsuccessful and the region has entered two wars. Reliance on the U.S. presence will not last long because America says its presence will not always be in the region, and the solution is coordinated security.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the Gulf regional system witnessed what could cautiously be defined as a form of local balance of power, especially as of 1975. Iran was the first party to this balance equation, while Iraq represented its second party. The local regional balance collapsed by striking the Iraqi force in 1991, which was strategically neutralized.

This experience has been marred by several gaps, resulting in a failure of the local balance of power to sustain fragile stability. With this order, the region ended up in two major wars, within a decade: the Iran-

Iraq war, between 1980-1988, the Second Gulf War of 1990 – 1991 (Hamad, 2013, February).

The most important gap in this order has been manifested in the absence of a stable or mutual deterrent factor, which is supposed to prevent any party from initiating war on the understanding of the enormity of the price it will pay. This factor has not been clear or effective for all parties concerned hence the failure of this regime in its Gulf regional experience and produced wars and destruction.

Today, there is a frantic arms race taking place in the Territory, in which its parties appear to be once again moving towards reorganizing the Territory on the basis of the balance of local power, which is moving in different rather than identical directions. It is doubtful that the required “deterrence” factor will be provided to prevent the parties concerned from slipping into crises and wars (Al-Khafaji, 2016, p. 69).

The U.S. strategy began to rely on direct intervention, the formation of rapid intervention forces, and the U.S. pursuit of naval facilities and ground bases in the Gulf States. This was embodied by the Carter Doctrine in January 1980, and that it would not allow any country to control the Arabian Gulf, and would use military force, protecting its interests in exchange for any external threat. (Gerges, 1997, pp. 15-17).

One of the most important American security bases for the Arabian Gulf is: (Al-Marhoun, 2006)

- Use of military force to counter any threat to U.S. interests in the Arabian Gulf.
- The American forces have gained a degree of credibility in the Gulf states towards their American presence.

The activity of the United States of America, which is part of the 1995 U.S. Defence Strategy Statement, included three axes: (Al-Essawi, 2006)

- 1) The Gulf States are replacing the primary responsibility to defend their security by improving their domestic defence capabilities.
- 2) Emphasizing the strengthening of cooperation between the GCC countries,

through the stages of extreme tension in the region, to increase collective regional defences.

- 3) Strengthening U.S. Military Force Capabilities in the Gulf

The GCC countries adopted these three axes as the basis for their regional security, which declined after Iraq entered Kuwait in 1990, by signing bilateral security agreements with the United States, and giving priority to each Gulf state to build its own military power. It includes the establishment of a single joint air defence link network and an early warning system, with serious ambition to develop the Island’s shield forces, unified armoured formations and vehicles, and increase its number to 25,000 men.

2.2 U.S. pressure factors on the Arab Gulf countries

The Gulf Arab States have come under a series of mixed U.S. pressures in an attempt to link them to the so-called "war on terrorism". This came a time when the strategic international importance of the Gulf region has escalated, and serious threats have increased from the strategic balance that is devoted with the U.S. occupation of Iraq, Iran’s adoption of the nuclear program, to the dangers of so-called "terrorism" and weapons of mass destruction.

Here, the Americans played a new role and there were transformations, including: (Al-Qinawi, 2012)

- The emergence of the United States of America as a single superpower after the transformations of the new world order.
- Military and security agreements, signed unilaterally by the United States of America with members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, as an alternative to Gulf collective security.
- The objective reality has imposed many political, economic and military challenges and changes, which have become a serious threat to national security and to global security as a whole. This stems from the importance of the Gulf region for the following reasons: (Abdul Rahman, 1997)
 - The Gulf has the largest oil reservoir in the world.

- The Arabian Gulf region has contributed to the formulation of many contemporary transformations and changes on the international and regional levels.

There is an important security link between the Arab Gulf region and Iraq, so any increase in security tensions or instability in any Gulf state or Iraq has a significant impact on the rest of the countries and the region in general, and represents a regional and international strategy. It is a meeting area for the most frequent transport routes between Asia, Europe and Africa, and Iraq holds the task of the eastern borders of the Arab world, all of which continue to represent hotbeds of competition, regional and international conflicts alike.

The GCC policy affirmed its security priorities, by identifying the sources of danger and threat. However, they rely on the bilateral strategic alliance with the United States of America, which did not help them to move the Gulf Cooperation Council to a central position in regional parallels. Also, the change of regional and international alliances, reinforced the conviction of the Gulf states that the Cooperation Council in its composition is unable to deter or repel threats, and its inability to achieve balance, especially towards Iran. (Harzali, 2019)

The relative cohesion of the six GCC countries varies depending on the underlying circumstances and policy options of the GCC, regional countries and forces outside the region. In periods of high levels of cohesion, the GCC countries — Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates — are meeting on key issues under way and cooperating to strengthen their overall capabilities. In periods of low levels of cohesion, member States are vulnerable to working on contradictory targets, and internal fighting may emerge in the form of cracks. (Wasser et al., 2016)

3. Strategic Security of the Arabian Gulf After 2003.

Gulf security has become the centre of political analysts' attention due to the unprecedented security threats witnessed by the Arabian Gulf, as Saudi-Iranian differences escalated against the backdrop of

the contradiction of their contacts and roles in the region and the role of the Saudi coalition in 2015 with its war on Yemen.

Moreover, the 2017 blockade of Qatar continues to mislead Gulf cooperation, and repeated Iranian threats to close the strategic Strait of Hormuz if the United States liquidates Iran's oil exports further worsens the region as well as moving the U.S. aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln toward Gulf waters. This is in addition to the mysterious targets of oil tankers at the port of Fujairah and the bombing of oil tankers in the Gulf of Oman in 2019.

All these events have affected the security of the Gulf and its international navigation, as well as hindering the GCC system of work and its main mission in ensuring the regional security of the Arabian Gulf. The continued escalation and hostility of the political discourse of Saudi and Iranian leaders towards each other may lead to a military confrontation from which the Gulf states and the entire Arab region are not spared. (Idris, 2001, p.53).

However, oil is the largest source of energy consumption in the world, so it is the focus of the growing economy of various major world powers and there are three dimensions in view of international and regional conflicts: (Al-Jumaili, 2019, p. 17)

- 1) The dimension of the military and security relations between the Gulf states.
- 2) Military and security dimensions of joint exercises and patrols between Gulf states.
- 3) Increasing the US military presence and containing the Iraqi and Iranian powers.

The United States of America has sought to employ this region in for own interests given its importance to the U.S. economy, and strengthens its position as a “destination” for the world’s most competitive economies, notably natural oil and gas.

The Arabian Gulf region has therefore become at the heart of U.S. national security, the focus of attention of the United States of America and western powers seeking hegemony and influence, and not allowing Russia, which is accelerating its appropriate position and competition for the United States of America in the region. Also, the growing European

Union, is currently working on security missions and agreements with the Arab Gulf states. There is also China, which is trying to build its global power in steady steps, to secure a prominent position in the new world order.

All of these strategies confirm the presence of U.S. military forces in the Arabian Gulf, having been able to occupy Iraq in 2003, militarily (Behrozi & Nasimi, 2020)

So, the U.S. presence in the Gulf remains critical to both Washington and its partners, while maintaining a strong military option to consolidate influence, and the subtle distinction between different types of U.S. military presence. This includes naval, air bases, camps on the ground, intensive training missions, and the deployment of small and temporary special operations forces or military assistance missions in embassies, which helps to find the convincing rationale necessary to justify effective and sustainable force. (Al-Talei, 2021)

The outcomes of new Gulf security system are reflected through developments in U.S.-Gulf relations, after the events of September 11, 2001. While this partnership is important, the Arab Gulf states have other partnerships with international powers, including Russia, China, the European Union, and NATO as part of the Istanbul Initiative, which are diverse and complementary to and do not conflict with the U.S. partnership.

Thus, the United States needs a clearer understanding of the precise identification of the challenges required by the long-term presence of the armed forces, the potential use of force, and under any circumstances. Hence, it is necessary to find a new consensus on U.S. national security objectives in the Gulf and the Middle East more broadly. The ultimate goal should be to strengthen a new regional security model that includes all major players, and is directed to seek win-win solutions rather than zero confrontations.

A wide-ranging dialogue is needed on how and why U.S. forces are restructured in the Gulf, and the lessons learned after the 9/11, 2001 era, that the United States should now certainly be able to do much or at least enough at a lower cost (El-Sayed, 1987, p. 47)

Among these American visions of the work of its security agenda in the Arabian Gulf are:

First: Democratic Vision:

The re-launching of the Speech to Promote Democracy raises the question of the values, interests and standards by which it will balance its relations with Arab governments with which it has strategic interests, and on the other hand, to demonstrate its rejection of human rights violations and public freedoms.

The United States will face two problems related to the credibility of its proposal to promote democracy in the Arab region. The first is related to its policy on the issues of the region while the second lies in its bias toward the ruling elites. The goal of the vision is to turn the systems of government into a democracy with a Western system, and to review its educational and religious curricula to apply democracy according to the American vision.

The Arab index revealed that 88 percent of Arabs represented by their countries refuse to recognize (Israel), compared to 6 percent who said their countries accept the recognition of Israel. Remarkably, half of those who agreed that their countries would recognize Israel in return required the establishment of an independent Palestinian State. According to the same index, about 22 percent of Arabs considered Israel the most threatening country for their countries, followed by the United States with 14 percent. Overall, Israel ranked first as the most threatening country for the entire Arab region. (Idris, 2012).

Second: (NATO) regional led by the United States:

The Gulf partnership with regional and international “security” organizations requires the development of a unified Gulf perspective and strategy to strengthen ties with one of NATO’s most important bodies, given the developments and transformations of the surrounding environment at various political, security, military and economic levels. The Gulf states should do everything in this direction, as their collective partnership with NATO has become a necessity imposed by the data and interactions of the current international and regional landscape, and an

urgent demand required by indicators and reasons for the foreseeable future.

The strategic partnership between NATO and the Gulf states was represented by the Istanbul Initiative 10 years ago, based on a set of considerations that reflect the willingness of both parties to secure their interests in a manner appropriate to the nature of developments in the international system and regional interactions in the Middle East region in general. Of particular note here are the implications of the aftermath of the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s, and the structural implications and fundamental changes that these developments have brought about on the international, regional and Gulf levels.

NATO has been working as a military and security organization in cooperation with multiple nationalities for more than half a century, with a wealth of experience provided to non-NATO countries. Over the past decade, NATO has developed the necessary political and military ties with non-NATO countries to make more effective cooperation and to consider NATO's interest in Arab Gulf security through: (Al-Essawi, 2008, p. 74)

- The new dynamic of Gulf security and the term foreign policy.
- The Gulf states have emerged as important players by virtue of their own rights, as the Gulf states have shown a desire to meet these challenges of change.
- The Gulf states have shown a strong determination to preserve their Islamic and Arab heritage, with the challenges and opportunities posed by globalization emerging.

From another perspective and following Israeli shuttle visits to a number of Arab Gulf states, it is clear that the series of bilateral military and security relations is expanding. This is happening through arms deals, intelligence coordination, to the direct Israeli presence at military bases there, whether through American fleets or official Israeli forces. It is clear that we are facing a remarkable military development in the region, seeking to integrate Israel into it, through an unprecedented military alliance. This would increase tensions in the Gulf states on the one hand,

and encourage hostile forces, particularly Iran, its allies and arms on the other. This could increase its attacks, particularly the Houthis, allowing Israel to penetrate the region through its widest military doors.

At the same time, Israel's call for the formation of a new military alliance in the region coincides with the Ukraine-Russia war, which could trigger a new front of tension around the world, and give the occupation legitimacy to penetrate the region, with the consent of its leaders, to face the threats represented by Iran.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Gulf states can continue their balanced policies instead of the policy of axes that are weakening the Gulf due to the slide towards security chaos in the region. This has allowed the opening of wide doors to Iranian ambitions, not to mention the policy of dictations pursued by the U.S. administration under the pretext of confronting the Iranian threat,

Therefore, the GCC countries must now work to prevent the deterioration of their policies in order to close the doors to the extension of the influence of other approaching countries. This can be achieved by working quickly to end all outstanding files and find solutions to crises the continuation of which leads to repercussions on them, and away from American requirements and dictates.

Where are the Gulf states moving in light of these challenges locally, regionally and internationally? Accordingly, limiting the U.S. strategy to the Arabian Gulf to three factors (energy source security, counter-terrorism and Iranian behaviour evaluation). It is only natural that Iran will try to acquire some papers to its advantage in light of the U.S. (Israeli) threats and the problematic presence among Iran and the Arab Gulf states, which have escalated to the point of waving war due to U.S. exploitation of Iranian ambitions.

As a result of the lack of a unified security and strategic vision and the difference between these countries in identifying external threats to their security and border problems despite the high level of demands that the GULF Cooperation Council calls for, here we have to ask about the role of the Cooperation Council in building strategies and programs to achieve national security. Is it indeed able to, alone and

independent of the rest of the Arabs, reach understandings with Iran in order to ward off American blackmail and dictates? Iraq remains a political strategic challenge.

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