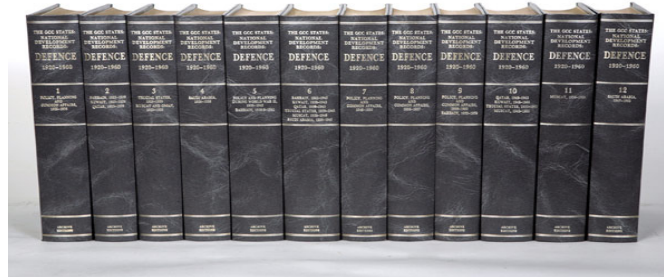


The GCC States: National Development Records: Defence in the Gulf States and Saudi Arabia 1920–1960

Editor: A. Burdett



As part of the three set series on the development of the GCC states this set contains documentary evidence for the origins and expansion of defence capacity within the Gulf States and Saudi Arabia in the formative years of the 20th century. These 8000 pages provide historical evidence for the origins and development of defensive capability in the Gulf States and the material reveals the early independence and strength of Saudi Arabia as distinct from the Gulf States.

The documents, all taken from the British Government archives in London, examine local security issues in detail throughout the period, including facilities and arrangements during World War II. There is extensive information about the origins and development of local levy forces in Bahrain, Muscat and the Trucial States; and about the emergence of independent armed strength in Saudi Arabia, Oman and Kuwait. Information is included on the sources of military administration, institutions and traditions owed originally to British influence and the increasing power and influence of the USA.

Historical Overview

These volumes establish a collection of primary documents relating to the evolution of regional and local defence resources in the six member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council: Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Throughout the period of the collection, from the 1920s to the early 1960s, the records reflect the independent status of Saudi Arabia and its markedly lesser degree of military dependence on Britain. The records indicate to some extent the rapid development of U.S. influence in Saudi Arabia.

Otherwise the collection traces the involvement of Britain with the defensive interests of the Gulf states according to their differing internal situations and treaty obligations. The general background to the volumes is inevitably formed by the evolving picture of British defence policy in the Middle East, accompanied by the emergence of local security resources in individual states as they follow increasingly separate lines of development in the post-war period.

The period covered by the collection begins and ends with British preoccupations over the protection of Kuwait initially in the 1920s, leading to difficulty over conflicting commitments to Ibn Saud; and at the time of Kuwaiti independence in 1961, when the requirement for action against the Iraqi threat conflicted with earlier reassessments indicating a reduced British presence in the Gulf.

The British defence role in the Gulf in the 1950s, as expressed by the Ministry of Defence, was specifically articulated to protect oil field interests while preserving a strong echo of imperial strategy along the route to India:

“ Our responsibilities in the Persian Gulf are the protection of British lives and property in the oilfields, the maintenance of the security of our staging posts and the honouring of our treaty obligations to the local Shaikhdoms.” [from PRO:DEFE 5/54; Joint Planning Staff paper, 13 August 1954.]

The documents examine local security issues in detail throughout the period, including facilities and arrangements during World War II. There is extensive information about the origins and development of local levy forces in Bahrain, Muscat and the Trucial States; and about the emergence of independent armed strength in Saudi Arabia, Oman and Kuwait in particular. The records also reveal much about the organisation and administration of security affairs, some of these arrangements being destined to survive long into the modern period of independence and affluence.

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