# Visions of the Gulf: The Discourse of Arab-Iranian Rivalry and the Geopolitical Imaginations of Ba'thist Iraq and Pahlavi Iran

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As for the conceit of the nations, we have heard that golden saying of Diodorus Siculus. Every nation, according to him, whether Greek or barbarian, has had the same conceit that it before all other nations invented the comforts of human life and that its remembered history goes back to the very beginning of the world.

…

To this conceit of the nations there may be added that of the scholars, who will have it that whatever they know is as old as the world.

-   Giambattista Vico[1]

One writes out of a need to communicate and to commune with others, to denounce that which gives pain and to share that which gives happiness. One writes against one's solitude and against the solitude of others.

-   Eduardo Galeano[2]

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[1] Giambattista Vico, *The New Science*, trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1970), p. 55

[2] Eduardo Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent*, trans. Cedric Belfrage (London: Serpent's Tail, 2009), p. xiv

# Abstract

This thesis aims to explore the ways in which the Iranian and Iraqi states articulated and represented Gulf regional politics from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s. In recognising the limited amount of work looking at the role of discourses and ideas in the international relations of the Persian Gulf, this study hopes to add to our understanding of the geopolitics of the region at a moment of great transformation.

The late-1960s-to-mid-1970s period saw Gulf politics become localised due to a number of major shifts which empowered local states with greater regional roles and responsibilities. With the departure of the British, the decision of the US not to directly replace them and the decline of the Egypt-Syria axis in the aftermath of the 1967 War, the hub of West Asian power moved to the Gulf. Amidst this opening, Iran and Iraq, as two key states with strong claims to regional leadership, represented the Gulf's geopolitics with reference to notions of Arab-Iranian difference and rivalry.

In conceptualising geopolitics as a discursive practice and not merely a material geographical matter, this thesis shows that the discursive and ideational regimes constructed by Ba'thist Iraq and Pahlavi Iran at this time were mutually-anathematising and mutually-marginalising, hierarchising, othering and inferiorising along "Arab-Iranian" lines. The thesis makes use of discourse analysis, read alongside the geopolitical and foreign policy practices of the two states at the time, with reference to primary material in the form of interviews, speeches, private conversations, and diplomatic correspondence.

The thesis shows that bound up with the geopolitical imaginaries of the two states were notions of belonging, legitimacy, security, ownership and leadership, strongly tied up with domestic politics and considerations. Indeed, this is one instance where the domestic/international divide becomes markedly blurred, and geopolitics and nation- and state-making intimately related.

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# **<u>Acknowledgements</u>**

Writing a PhD is an experience defined by contradictions: it feels both long and short; energising and draining; an individual effort but bound up with those around you; and a compressed period of learning but also a profound exercise in intellectual humility. I can only wait and see what comes out of these contradictions.

For me, the notion that a PhD is a largely solitary exercise proved somewhat of an illusion. Of course any mistakes or shortcomings on these pages is only a reflection of myself, but it is only right to acknowledge and thank many people, certainly too many to include here.

I would like to start by thanking my supervisor, Dr. Arshin Adib-Moghaddam. His intellectual approach has had a striking impact on my own work. He has also shown me the necessity of an ethic of intellectual responsibility, particularly at times of misinformation and recklessness. His patience over these last few years has been invaluable.

I was only able to pursue this research thanks to the generosity of the Fereydoun Djam Charitable Trust and the Kamran Djam Scholarship programme at SOAS. Thank you to the trust for enabling the ambitions of people like myself and giving us the luxury to spend time learning and writing without financial burden.

I would also like to thank my family, for showing their own patience and for bearing with me over what has probably felt like a longer period of time for them than it has for myself. It is not easy to show acceptance and understanding for your child's or sibling's pursuit of a doctoral thesis during such precarious times. I thank them for doing so.

I have had the pleasure of spending the last few years teaching at SOAS alongside my research. I have learnt from my students more than I have taught them. They have reminded me of not just the importance of ceaseless curiosity but that oftentimes, the most complex questions are the simplest. My classes were a source of energy and inspiration during those moments which felt monotonous and intellectually difficult. Thank you to all of them.

And lastly, to my friends, and all those individuals over the last few years who have taken the time to show interest in my work, ask me questions, probe, challenge, and, indeed, improve. Those casual conversations were far more impactful than they may have realised.

To everyone, I am truly grateful.

# A Note on Translation and Transliteration

A simplified form of Arabic and Persian transliteration has been used throughout, making allowances for variations in pronunciation. I have referred to the transliteration style of the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* (*IJMES*) in this regard.[3] As such, diacritical marks have not been used, but the *ayn* and *hamzeh*/*hamza*, both indicated by an apostrophe, and *ezafeh*/*idhafah* have been retained in the case of both languages. For example, therefore, I have used *Shah* rather than *Šāh*, and have referred to the *Shatt al-ʿArab*, *Shibli al-ʿAysami*, *Ettela'at*, *tamaddon-e bozorg*, and so on.

Names of individuals have been used in the ways they are referred to most commonly in both the primary sources and the secondary literature. Thus, *Asadollah* and *Mohammad* when taken from the Persian, for instance *Asadollah Alam* and *Mohammad Reza Shah*, and *Hussein* and *Muhammed* from the Arabic, for instance *Saddam Hussein* and *Muhammed Mahjub*. The exception to this is when the names are quoted from a source, in which case the original transliteration remains.

Any translated material within the text was translated by the source cited, except as otherwise noted.

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|---|---|
| *al-Qawmiyyun* | Can be translated as "nationalists" but connotes a commitment to the (pan-)Arab nation as opposed to a focus only on citizens of the state, therefore here used to refer pan-Arabists. |
| *al-Wataniyyun* | Can be translated as "nationalists" or "patriots", or even "nationals" or "citizens", but here used to refer to "Iraq-firsters". |
| *Tamaddon-e bozorg* | "Great civilisation": Mohammad Reza Shah's idea of rediscovering Iran's ancient glory, its place amongst the world's great powers, and establishing itself as a "model country". |
| *Siyasat-e mostaqell-e melli* | "Independent national policy", the formulation which the Shah constructed to appeal to nationalist, non-aligned sentiment. |

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[3] The IJMES style guide can be found here: https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/international-journal-of-middle-east-studies/information/author-resources/ijmes-translation-and-transliteration-guide

# Acronyms and Abbreviations

AFP                     Agence France-Presse

BBC                     British Broadcasting Corporation

CIA                     Central Intelligence Agency

CIRS                    Centre for International and Regional Studies (Qatar)

CWIHP                   Cold War International History Project

FAA/FAE                 Federation of Arab Amirates/Emirates

FBIS                    Foreign Broadcast Information Service

FCO                     Foreign and Commonwealth Office (United Kingdom)

FO                      Foreign Office (United Kingdom)

FRUS                    Foreign Relations of the United States

GCC                     Gulf Cooperation Council

GDR                     German Democratic Republic

HST                     Hegemonic Stability Theory

ICP                     Iraqi Communist Party

IG                      Interdepartmental Group (United States)

IJMES                   International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies

IPC                     Iraq Petroleum Company

IR                      International Relations

IRG                     Interdepartmental Regional Group (United States)

JETRO-IDE               Japan External Trade Organisation-Institute of Developing Economies

JPRS                    Joint Publications Research Service

JRB                     Johannesburg Review of Books

LSE                     London School of Economics and Political Science

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|---|---|
| ME | Middle East |
| MP | Member of Parliament |
| NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organisation |
| NEA | Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs (United States) |
| NPF | National Patriotic Front (Iraq) |
| NSC | National Security Council (United States) |
| NY | New York |
| OPEC | Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries |
| PDRY | People's Democratic Republic of Yemen |
| RCC | Revolutionary Command Council (Iraq) |
| SOAS | School of Oriental and African Studies (United Kingdom) |
| SOFA | Status of Forces Agreement |
| SWB | Summary of World Broadcasts |
| UAE | United Arab Emirates |
| UAR | United Arab Republic |
| UK | United Kingdom |
| UN | United Nations |
| UPI | United Press International |
| US | United States of America |
| USSR | Union of Soviet Socialist Republics |

# Timeline of Events

**January 1963:** Mohammad Reza Shah launches the "White Revolution" in Iran after a national referendum

**June 1967:** War fought between Israel and neighbouring states of Egypt, Jordan and Syria

**January 1968:** The British announce their decision to withdraw from the Persian Gulf by 1971

**February 1968:** Bahrain, the Trucial States and Qatar announce their intention to form the Federation of Arab Emirates. Britain supports the idea and Iran strongly opposes it.

**July 1968:** Military coup in Iraq led by Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr brings Ba'thists to power

**April 1969:** Iraq asserts sovereignty over entire Shatt al-'Arab waterway by demanding that vessels sailing through it should neither raise Iranian flag nor carry Iranian naval personnel. Iran responds by abrogating 1937 treaty governing navigation rights, and sending freighter carrying an Iranian flag down the waterway.

Iraq, in turn expels around 20,000 Iraqis suspected of being of Iranian origin, revives use of term "Arabistan", and forms dissident group "Popular Front for the Liberation of Arabistan".

Iranian and Iraqi troops amass at border but without serious incident

**June 1969:** Major agreement reached for Soviet assistance in Iraqi oil exploitation

**March 1970:** Shah renounces Iran's historic claim to Bahrain following months of negotiations and a UN Mission

**1971:** Shah announces his vision of "great civilisation"

**August 1971:** Bahrain becomes independent state

**September 1971:** Qatar becomes independent state

**November 1971:** Iran moves its troops onto the Abu Musa and Tunb islands

**December 1971:** Britain completes its withdrawal from the Gulf, immediately after which follows the establishment of the United Arab Emirates as an independent state.

In response to Iran's moves on Lower Gulf islands, Iraq expels around 100,000 Iraqis suspected of being of Iranian origin, and skirmishes take place on Iran-Iraq border.

**1972:** Iran intervenes in Oman to assist Sultan Qaboos against leftist rebels

**April 1972:** Iraq and Soviet Union sign Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation

**June 1972:** Iraq Petroleum Company nationalised

**1973:** Shah begins support of Kurdish rebels in northern Iraq with US backing

**July 1973:** Failed coup attempt in Iraq, Ba'thists implicate Iran

National Patriotic Front formed by Ba'thists in Iraq

**October 1973:** War fought between Israel and mainly Egypt and Syria, limited Iraqi participation, Arab oil embargo also launched

**1974:** In response to Iran's increasing involvement, Iraq begins playing much more significant role in Omani civil war on the side of rebels

**March 1975:** Algiers Agreement signed between Shah and Saddam

# Introduction

Those who control it and milk it, should also name it. For the time being, it should be called the American Gulf. – Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini[4]

Unlike the piracy in the Strait of Gibraltar, our action in the Persian Gulf is to uphold int'l maritime rules. As I said in NY, it is *Iran* that guarantees the security of the Persian Gulf & the Strait of Hormuz (emphasis in original)…
– Mohammad Javad Zarif[5]

You as Persians have no business meddling in Arab matters. – King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz[6]

…Iran's leaders show no signs of bowing to this public pressure. Until they do, Saudi Arabia will continue to see itself as the last brick in the 'Arab wall' preventing the Gulf region from falling completely under Iran's revolutionary suzerainty. – Ali Shihabi[7]

The Persian Gulf is arguably proof that at least in the realm of political geography, size alone does not matter. It is around 990km long, with a maximum width of 370km, an average depth of 36m, and a surface area of around 239,000km²,[8] just slightly less than the United Kingdom. The waterway is a small sliver on the world map, but its significance both historically and currently renders its size an almost trivial detail. The last few years have simply reinforced this

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[4] Abdullah K. al-Shayji, 'Chapter Ten: Mutual Realities, Perceptions, and Impediments between the GCC States and Iran', in Lawrence G. Potter and Gary G. Sick (eds.), *Security in the Persian Gulf: Origins, Obstacles, and the Search for Consensus* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), p. 223

[5] Mohammad Javad Zarif, Twitter post, July 2019, 3:48 a.m., https://twitter.com/jzarif/status/1152530835154833408

[6] 'US Embassy Cables: Saudi King's Advice for Barack Obama', *The Guardian*, 28th Nov. 2010, accessed 6th Feb. 2019 https://www.theguardian.com/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/198178

[7] Ali Shihabi, 'The Iranian Threat: The Saudi Perspective', *LSE Middle East Centre Blog*, 15th June 2018

[8] Jochen Kaempf and Masoud Sadrinasab, 'The Circulation of the Persian Gulf: A Numerical Study', *Ocean Science*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Jul., 2006), p. 27
The terms "Persian Gulf" and "Gulf" will be used interchangeably throughout this research. For largely political reasons, the term "Arabian Gulf" is sometimes used, and has been done so since the 1950s according to most records, spurred on by Nasserite Egypt. Indeed, part of this research looks at this debate and what it tells us about competing geopolitical visions. However, this dispute will not be solved in this study, and I agree that "Persian Gulf" is reflective of widely-recognised historical norms. The United Nations (UN) Group of Experts on Geographical Names, in a 2006 session, stated likewise.
United Nations (UN) Group of Experts on Geographical Names, 'Historical, Geographical and Legal Validity of the Name: Persian Gulf', Working Group on Exonyms, No. 61 (Mar.-Apr., 2006); See Kourosh Ziabari, 'Which Gulf Do They Mean?', *LobeLog*, 7th Aug. 2019, accessed 8th Aug. 2019 https://lobelog.com/which-gulf-do-they-mean/

reality, and reminded us of the hold this part of the world has on the global political imagination and the global political and economic order. And over the past few years, this waterway and the region surrounding it, the Middle East, or the West Asia region as it will be referred to throughout this research,[9] has seen some of the most dramatic and consequential geopolitical developments in its modern history, as social movements and revolutionary upheavals have been thrown up against the realities of regional inter-state competition, power politics, and that ever-slippery notion of "national interests". It has been an often ugly tale of inspiriting popular movements clashing with the crudest manifestations of state survival instincts and *realpolitik*, with frequently violent and gruesome outcomes. But this current period has not only given observers and scholars of the region much to think about on revolution, security, alliance patterns and state transformation; we have also been given a window into how some of West Asia's key actors conceptualise the region's geography, the various meanings they attach to it, and how they spatialise it through identitarian and nationalist lenses. In other words, more fundamentally, and what is the major claim of this research, when looking at discourses of identity in the West Asia region, and the Gulf more specifically, we are also often looking at discourses of geopolitics: political actors are giving us an insight into how they see not just themselves and each other, but the region around them, the "nature" of its space, its security, its organisational schema, and its hierarchy. This has been a striking feature of the region's politics over the last few years.

Indeed, it would be dishonest to say that this contemporary reverberation was not one of the major attractions behind the pursuit of this research topic. It quickly becomes clear to anyone even slightly familiar with the literature on identity, foreign policy, state development and regional politics in West Asia, and the Gulf specifically, that nationalist, culturalist and even chauvinist discourses have been a marked feature of its modern history. And so, much of the

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[9] There is increasing debate over the nomenclature of the region. Out of historical and intellectual considerations, many scholars are opting to use the term "West Asia" to describe and geographically designate what has traditionally been called the "Middle East" since the twentieth century in the Euro-American political and academic spheres. I am sympathetic to the former, not for reasons of political performance, but due to the misleading centring and geopolitical assumptions which "Middle East" necessitates. As Arshin Adib-Moghaddam puts it, "The "Middle East" as we knew it has ceased to exist," though I would argue that it is not just the region *today* that we can designate in alternative terms. As this research tries to show, the Gulf and the surrounding region were very much subject to internal, autonomous dynamics which were, if anything, becoming increasingly localised during the period under question, and the region was not simply adjacent to Euro-American interests or perspectives. Geographical designations both reflect and impact analytical lenses. See Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, 'After the "Middle East": Turkey and Iran in a New Region', Japan External Trade Organisation-Institute of Developing Economies (JETRO-IDE), *Middle East Review*, Vol. 6 (May, 2019), pp. 75-81; Pinar Bilgin, 'Whose 'Middle East'? Geopolitical Inventions and Practices of Security', *International Relations*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (March, 2004), pp. 25-41; Mehran Kamrava, 'The Great Game in West Asia', in Mehran Kamrava (ed.), *The Great Game in West Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

language used today by state actors and political officials to articulate and represent contemporary events has a precedent, both in its deep genealogy as a cultural and literary narrative, and also in its manifestation in a range of political, and specifically state, discourses. Perhaps surprisingly to some, I am not referring here to the language of Shi'i-Sunni sectarianism, which is covered significantly more, both in the journalistic and scholarly realms,[10] but to the language of, and idea of, Arab-Iranian rivalry or hostility, which I see as a discourse which, amongst other things, characterises the regional politics and inter-state relations of West Asia, including the Persian Gulf, along nationalist lines and a clash therein. I should say that whilst I recognise that there is a rich opportunity to explore how exactly an idea found in literary and cultural worlds entered the realm of states and state practices in the West Asia region, this research focuses on the *politics*, or, as we shall see over the course of this study, the *geopolitics*, of this discourse of Arab-Iranian rivalry. Specifically, this research is interested in the two key states in the Persian Gulf for whom this discourse, as others have also suggested, was a most significant feature: Ba'thist Iraq (1963-2003) and Pahlavi Iran (1925-1979), with a focus on the period beginning in 1968 and ending in 1975, as a convergence of political factors and regional phenomena led to a new stage in the Gulf's international politics (this is the subject of chapter two). Specifically, as I lay out further down, significant work has been done on revealing and exploring the potent nationalist and culturalist configurations which constituted the Ba'thist and Pahlavi states, and their strong perceptions of their own identities, which in large part were based on ethnocentric imaginations emphasising, and indeed contrasting, Arab-ness and Iranian-ness/Persian-ness. This existing work has been formative to this research.

To be clear, in speaking about and referring to the Persian Gulf, I am referring to a sub-region within the broader West Asia region, comprised of states "with intense security interdependence over time,"[11] and where crucially, this security and interdependence are

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[10] See, for instance, Fanar Haddad, *Sectarianism in Iraq: Antagonistic Visions of Unity* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2011); Nader Hashemi and Danny Postel (eds.), *Sectarianisation: Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East* (London: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers Ltd., 2017); Toby Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf: Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the Arab Spring That Wasn't* (Stanford, California: Stanford Briefs, an imprint of Stanford University Press, 2013); Lawrence G. Potter (ed.), *Sectarian Politics in the Persian Gulf* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Frederic Wehrey (ed.), *Beyond Sunni and Shia: The Roots of Sectarianism in a Changing Middle East* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); Frederic M. Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf: From the Iraq War to the Arab Uprisings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).
[11] F. Gregory Gause, III, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 4
See also Anoushiravan Ehteshami, *Dynamics of Change in the Persian Gulf: Political Economy, War and Revolution* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 8

prominently featured in, and articulated in, state discourses. Regionalisation is always a complex scholarly exercise and certainly not neat or scientific, but as Gregory Gause puts it, borrowing from Barry Buzan's work on regions and regional security complexes, "certain geographically grouped states spend most of their time and effort worrying about each other, and not other states," and the Gulf, including Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and the smaller regional monarchies, qualify in this respect.[12] What authors like Buzan and Gause miss out, of course, is the role of discourse in constructing and articulating these "worries" and security concerns, the meanings lent to them, and the kinds of politics bound up with them. In a sense, this thesis goes to the heart of this process of sub-regionalisation and a formative historical moment in its consolidation.

## **Historical Resonance and Contemporary Urgency**

Particularly in the journalistic world, in the current environment which has seen a proliferation in interest on the international politics of West Asia, the ideas of rivalry, enmity and hostility between Iran and Arab states, or the "Arab world", appear frequently, representing regional politics as defined by a sense of competition between powers of, and powers representing, different ethnic and national groups. Counterposed terms such as "the Iranians" and "the Arabs", or Iran and the "Arab world", are used as lenses through which to understand and categorise the politics of the region. But what is perhaps even more significant, and more pertinent to this research, is the prominence of the same type of discourse amongst state actors in the region (and indeed an almost reflexive acceptance of this framing by much of the media and popular political discourse): Iran and the "Arab world" are used as tidy ethnic, national, cultural and political designations, and the two are placed against each other as regional competitors. Over the past few years, for instance, we have heard about Iranian "meddling" in "Arab affairs"; the "Arab world" feeling besieged by Iranian gains; an "Arab wall" standing against Iran; and Iran attempting to "divide" and "weaken" Arabs.[13] But the political prominence of this discourse is a *re-emergence* – it is not novel. And whilst this research will

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[12] F. Gregory Gause, III, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf*, p. 4
[13] '11 Arab countries accuse Iran of sponsoring Middle East terror', *The Times of Israel*, 14th Nov. 2016, accessed 7th April 2014 https://www.timesofisrael.com/11-arab-countries-accuse-iran-of-sponsoring-middle-east-terror/; 'Arab League condemns Iranian 'meddling' in Arab affairs', *Al Jazeera America*, 10th Jan. 2016, accessed 16th Oct. 2017 http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2016/1/10/arab-league-condemns-iranian-meddling-in-arab-affairs.html; Ali Shihabi, 'The Iranian Threat: The Saudi Perspective'; 'UAE says Iran is aiming for Arab 'chaos'', *The National*, 12th Sept. 2017, accessed 16th Oct. 2017 https://www.thenational.ae/world/uae-says-iran-is-aiming-for-arab-chaos-1.627928

not be focusing on the contemporary scene, it speaks to the entrenched, almost systemic, form of a particular articulation of the region's politics and a particular conceptualisation of space and ownership in the region. It is also interesting, following from that, that this representation has been shared and expressed in the region's modern history by a range of states, varied in both their structures and their identities.

What motivated this research was a convergence between this contemporary setting and the chance to build on and stretch out the existing work which has been done on the international politics of the Persian Gulf and the discourses which define it (vastly more has been done on the former than the latter), much of it looking at the 1980s and 1990s. There was a startling resonance, and even urgency, in the topic. We have seen analyses of the Arab-Iranian clash narrative from sociological perspectives, looking at narrations of regional encounters and social histories between Iranian and Arab populations; attempts at directly debunking the myth of an endemic hatred between the two through historical investigation; explorations of ethnocentric and exclusionary self/other narratives and their importance to state identities, and more. These encompass studies of nationalism, intellectual and cultural history, international relations and political science.[14] Arshin Adib-Moghaddam's book, for instance, which presents a constructivist account of Gulf regional politics, uncovers the ideational and cultural formations of exclusionary identity narratives which feed into persistent Arab-Iranian misperceptions and which have to a large extent helped to create the anarchic conditions of the Gulf.[15] It is quite possibly the only study which looks at this particular feature of the respective nationalisms of Ba'thist Iraq and Pahlavi Iran and its regional consequences in a systematic and cohesive fashion. Adib-Moghaddam talks about how the Pahlavi monarchy, including Reza Shah (1925-1941) and Mohammad Reza Shah (1941-1979), attempted to legitimate itself with reference to ancient, pre-Islamic Persian empires and the narration and cultivation of an "Aryanist" national identity deemed superior to the "Arab-Semitic other"; and on the other hand, how Ba'thist Iraq and Ba'thist intellectuals imagined and constructed a pure Arab nation which faced perennial enemies such as Jews and Persians, and the supposedly long-standing desire, particularly of

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[14] Works which have looked at the discourse, from various angles, include: Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, *The International Politics of the Persian Gulf: A Cultural Genealogy* (London: Routledge, 2006); Kourosh Ahmadi, 'The Myth of Iranian-Arab Enmity: A Deconstructive Approach', *Iranian Review of Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Summer, 2011), pp. 79-103; Ofra Bengio, *Saddam's Word: Political Discourse in Iraq* (New York: OUP, 1998); H.E. Chehabi, Peyman Jafari and Maral Jefroud (eds.), *Iran in the Middle East: Transnational Encounters and Social History* (London; New York: I.B.Tauris, 2015); Khair el-Din Haseeb (ed.), *Arab-Iranian Relations* (Beirut: Centre for Arab Unity Studies, 1998); Rouhollah K. Ramazani, *The Persian Gulf: Iran's Role* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1972).
[15] Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, *The International Politics of the Persian Gulf*, p. 8

the latter, to break up and fragment the Arab people.[16] His focus on the late 1960s until the mid-1970s is significantly less, though, and his chief analytical aim is to present a case for the political-cultural constitution of anarchy in the region, in response to a heavily realist-dominated scholarly scene, with the Iran-Iraq War and the Gulf War as the major flashpoints. Tareq Ismael also looks at the ideological bases of the Iran-Iraq War specifically (alongside the historical and the legal), as well as the regional consequences of what he sees as the antagonistic ideational constructions of an exclusivist Islamic ideology and secular nationalism, but he looks more at the expressed ideological anxieties of the respective actors rather than undertaking an ideational excavation or discourse analysis.[17]

Shahram Chubin and Charles Tripp's book on the Iran-Iraq War also makes mention of multiple statements made by Saddam and the Ba'thists in reference to the "Persian enemy", though in the case of this particular work, by virtue of the period of time it covers, the ethnic/nationalist anathematisation was predominantly (though not solely) uni-directional, and of course, the Pahlavi period is not extensively covered.[18] The book refers to, for example, Saddam's statements that "…the Persians who call themselves Muslims are but Magians," and his claims that Iranians are simply the latest manifestation of "the enmity of the Shu'ubists against the Arabs, seeking to exploit religion to cause the Arabs to abandon their radiant role of leadership."[19] Farzad Cyrus Sharifi-Yazdi, meanwhile, who looks at Gulf territorial disputes in the decade or so leading up to 1969, also brings to light the mutual othering between Iran and various Arab states and the suspicions it generated, although his overwhelming focus is on the actual conduct of territorial disputes (outlined below), the history of the respective claims and hegemonic rivalries, and the causal factors behind them, rather than the discursive representations of them.[20] Needless to say, these books, amongst others, have been formative to this study. I mention them as some of the key studies which do recognise the reality and the significance of the language of Arab-Iranian hostility in West Asian regional politics, but which focus either on different historical moments or hold different theoretical and analytical priorities.

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[16] Ibid, chapter 2
[17] Tareq Y. Ismael, *Iraq and Iran: Roots of Conflict* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1982)
See also Tareq Y. Ismael, 'Ideology in Recent Iraqi Foreign Policy', in Shirin Tahir-Kheli and Shaheen Ayubi (eds.), *The Iran-Iraq War: New Weapons, Old Conflicts* (New York, N.Y: Praeger, 1983), pp. 109-125. Here Ismael talks about the "Ba'thist worldview".
[18] Shahram Chubin and Charles Tripp, *Iran and Iraq at War* (London: Tauris, 1988)
[19] Ibid, pp. 101, 103
[20] Farzad Cyrus Sharifi-Yazdi, *Arab-Iranian Rivalry in the Persian Gulf: Territorial Disputes and the Balance of Power in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012)

Specifically, what becomes clear from works such as the above are a few vital factors which this study takes into account, and which this study aims to build on: state identities are analytically crucial and rigid materialist and realist analyses do a disservice by overlooking them; the Persian/Iranian and Arab self/other were central to the identity conceptions of Ba'thist Iraq and Pahlavi Iran; the narratives of each state effected the perceptions, and fed the mistrust, of the other; and finally, there were regional consequences to these kinds of discursive practices. Indeed, in the analytical and conceptual tradition of these works, I hope this study will help to bridge the gap between critical theories of international relations and the empirical study of the Gulf, and complement these explorations of the significance of state identities and identity discourses to inter-state relations and regional dynamics. But in addition to that, where I hope to add to our understanding of Gulf regional politics and state discourses, I draw my overarching theoretical framework from the fields of political geography and critical geopolitics. Chapter one goes into my various theoretical considerations and conceptual frameworks in more detail, however at this point I would say I decided to take this approach for one vital reason: going through both the secondary and primary material, it became clear that the Ba'thists and Pahlavians were talking about the Arab and Iranian self/other not just to represent and give meaning to themselves and each other, but to represent the space and the world around them. The discourse appeared to be about more than self-perception, culture and identity; it seemed to also be about the region, its spatial organisation and its character. Or, to formulate it alternatively: identity and self-perception seemed bound up with designations and understandings of space, at a time when fundamental regional shifts were taking place within that space. Claims to space were being made as the distribution of power across that space was radically changing. It is this dimension, I would argue, which seems to be largely missing from the scholarship, or at the very least, not explicitly elaborated upon.

It is worth briefly commenting here on my decision to look at Ba'thist Iraq and Pahlavi Iran in relation to the discourse of Arab-Iranian rivalry, particularly in the case of the former, though this is explicated in more detail later on. As already mentioned, this geopolitical discourse and nationalistic, ethnocentric claims more broadly were a core part of the identities and articulations of these two states, particularly during the period in question. It is true that the Egyptian state under Nasser also played up the notion of an anti-Arab Iranian threat, and Arab nationalist currents throughout the broader West Asia region shared similar views. However, by the late 1960s, Nasserism was losing its potency, and with it its assertive hostile discourse towards Iran. Further, it is the regional significance within the context of the Gulf and

developments occurring therein, in proximity to Iranian moves, from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s that sets apart the Iraqi Ba'thist state's employment of this geopolitical discourse. This is illustrated amongst other ways by how the Ba'thist apparatus leveraged it as a means to distinguish itself as the chief defender of Arab security and regional power above the other Arab states in the Gulf, particularly Saudi Arabia, which largely shied away from such articulations as a conservative, status quo power. Ba'thist Iraq, simply put, was unique in its discursive commitment to a particular geopolitical doctrine. and the construction of an antagonistic ideational environment in the Gulf.

I can also comment here on the chosen time period, albeit this is covered extensively in chapter two. The late-1960s-to-mid-1970s period saw a series of tensions and incidents between Iran and Iraq: an escalation in the dispute over the Shatt al-'Arab waterway (located in south-eastern Iraq, the last half of the waterway forms the border between the two countries, and is a zone of great strategic and economic significance for both as it passes key ports) as Iran abrogated a 1937 treaty concerning its border, provoking a strong Iraqi reaction (this was accompanied by flare-ups along the border); Iran's support of Kurdish rebels inside Iraq; Iran's takeover of the Gulf islands of Abu Musa and the Tunbs (the Greater and Lesser Tunbs), located in the Lower Gulf, in 1971, with opposition to it led by Iraq; and an intensification in Iranian claims to Bahrain (as well their final relinquishment, which is an interesting episode in and of itself). Chapter two (and the study as a whole) is not necessarily concerned with the conduct of these disputes and why different states sought to compete for different territories. It is not, in that sense, a study of Iranian and Iraqi policy. I will not be going into detail on any specific dispute either, nor the legal claims surrounding any of them. This has already been done in the existing literature, both from legal and political standpoints, although this is not to say that gaps do not remain.[21] More broadly, as well, as chapter two argues, this period of time was of huge significance for the Gulf as a whole, with a few major large-scale developments leading to the "localisation" of Gulf politics as well as a newfound geopolitical consciousness amongst its

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[21] See, amongst others, and from a range of disciplinary perspectives and encompassing varied ideological and political claims, Kourosh Ahmadi, *Islands and International Politics in the Persian Gulf: Abu Musa and the Tunbs in Strategic Perspective* (London; New York: Routledge, 2008); Hooshang Amirahmadi, *Small Islands, Big Politics: The Tonbs and Abu Musa in the Gulf* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996); Thomas R. Mattair, *The Three Occupied UAE Islands: The Tunbs and Abu Musa* (Abu Dhabi, U.A.E: The Emirates Centre for Strategic Studies and Research, 2005); Richard N. Schofield, *Evolution of the Shatt al-'Arab Boundary Dispute* (Wisbech: Middle East & North African Studies Press, 1986); Ahmad Razavi, *Continental Shelf Delimitation and Related Maritime Issues in the Persian Gulf* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1997); Farzad Cyrus Sharifi-Yazdi, *Arab-Iranian Rivalry in the Persian Gulf.*

various actors. Additionally, quite simply, this particular moment has been overlooked in much, if not most of, the literature (again, chapter two goes into this more thoroughly).

But this research was also undertaken with a strong conviction that the intense ideological and discursive climate we see during the Iran-Iraq War and the run-up to it, and again today, cannot be detached from the discourse of Arab-Iranian rivalry we see in the earlier period of the late 1960s to the mid-1970s. This earlier manifestation, indeed, was formative, in systematising a regional discourse and culture of exclusion, threat construction and perception, dynamics of rivalry, and the lack of a collective security architecture.

Briefly, there is an important observation which emerges from a survey of the literature on the Gulf generally, and its regional politics towards the late 20th century more specifically, including the 1980-88 war and the conditions surrounding it. Strikingly, 1980-88 and previous periods and points of conflict are talked about *predominantly* in isolation from one another (there are instances where they are connected). It appears as though many of the analyses and interpretations of the Iran-Iraq War, chiefly regarding its causes, focus on the war through the lens of the rupture brought about by revolutionary Iran and the consequent personal and ideological clashes engendered by it (and of course, the personal and ideological tend to collapse into one another when talking about Saddam and Khomeini). This approach frames the war as being sparked by a sudden, irreconcilable clash of state identities and state regional visions, the result of the new revolutionary state in Iran's self-conception radically changing from its predecessor and drastically changing regional threat perceptions and thus calculations. F. Gregory Gause, for instance, argues that the driving force behind Saddam's decision to go to war in 1980 was his belief that foreign forces were destabilising Iraq internally, threatening regime survival, but he does not place the development of this threat perception in a longer-term context.[22]

To be clear, such interpretations are undoubtedly crucial, and certainly not wrong. However, it is also worth considering a few other, often overlooked factors and integrating them into analyses of the Gulf from the 1960s to the 1980s and the Iran-Iraq War specifically, and these are relevant to this research: the threat perception felt by Saddam in the run-up to 1980 was directly linked to, and built upon, preceding perceptions and regional events taking place from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s, and there is strong evidence suggesting the Ba'thist state did

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[22] F. Gregory Gause, III, 'Iraq's Decisions to Go to War, 1980 and 1990', *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (Winter, 2002), pp. 47-70

not see the regional status quo at this time (in competition with the Shah) as sustainable or desirable in the longer-run, and hence it formed an important part of its decision to go to war later on; further, the discourse of Arab-Iranian rivalry was pertinent at this time both on the part of the Ba'thist and Pahlavi states; the representation of the Iran-Iraq War as an almost personalised clash of worldviews may, with this in mind, be partially misleading; and therefore, both the discursive climate and political realities of the late 1960s to mid-1970s were central in what was to come in the years after.[23] Shahram Chubin and Charles Tripp, for instance, point out "The perception of the continuity of the threat":

> The Iraqi regime began to see Khomeini as a reincarnation of the Shah: an ambitious Iranian autocrat, intent on using the resources of the Iranian state and the disaffected elements within Iraq to extend his own ambitions at the expense of the interests of the regime in Baghdad. Iraqi authorities saw Khomeini as the "turbaned Shah", acting within the same guidelines and towards much the same end.[24]

The period of regional competition between Ba'thist Iraq and Pahlavi Iran, therefore, played a determining role in the horror that was to come a few years later.[25] Quite simply, therefore, this study argues for a re-appraisal and appreciation of the significance of this period, in its impact on discourses in the Gulf region, and the structural ramifications it was to leave in place.

## Thinking about States and Discourses

But why look at discourse, and what do we mean by it? To be clear, this study is not interested in *why* particular discourses develop or seem particularly prominent and politically potent at particular times, or why they seem to wax and wane. In other words, there is no claim to have uncovered a causal theory of discourse (or, for that matter, identity). Undoubtedly, there is room to explore this in the field, both on a general, theoretical level, but also in the case of discourses and constructions of Arab-Iranian rivalry and difference. As mentioned above, some of the literature does go into the multi-causal and multi-constitutive dynamics behind

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[23] Shahram Chubin and Charles Tripp, *Iran and Iraq at War*
This text also presents a rare instance of explicit links being drawn between the 1980-88 war and developments of the preceding decade, albeit not in great detail. The claims that Chubin and Tripp make, however, are significant.
[24] Ibid, p. 26
[25] This includes the role of militarisation throughout the 1970s. See chapter three and Kayhan Barzegar, 'Balance of Power in the Persian Gulf', *Middle East Policy*, Vol. XVII, No. 3, (Fall, 2010), p. 76.

exclusionary nationalist discourses, including political, sociological, and cultural, but there is certainly space to investigate how such discourses change over time, the particular relation they have to state identities, and what they tell us about *who* is being spoken to. This section will outline some of the conceptual considerations which have been taken into account when approaching the notion of discourse and discourse analysis in this research, through reference to the theoretical literature. In latter sections, I discuss some specific works on West Asia and the Gulf which attend to the significance of discourse and identity in regional politics by commenting on the critical and constructivist fields more broadly. Here, however, I more generally try to show what exactly I mean by "discourse", and why I believe it to be significant.

I agree strongly with Vivian Schmidt's suggestion that scholarship on political discourse should focus on an approach whereby the aim is not necessarily "to interpret 'texts' without contexts and to understand reality as all words, whatever the deeds," but to see discourse "as a more generic term that encompasses not only the substantive content of ideas but also the interactive processes by which ideas are conveyed," and "refers not just to what is said (ideas) but also to who said what to whom, where, when, how, and why (discursive interactions). Defined in this way, discourse is not just about 'text'…but also about context…"[26] I take this conceptualisation to mean something very similar to Stuart Hall's notion of discourse, which borrowed heavily from Michel Foucault: discourse becomes "a system of representation", beyond micro-analyses of linguistics, and refers to the production of meaning and the way that particular topics, objects and subjects are understood and represented at particular moments.[27] It is this text-context dynamic, paying attention both to what is being done and/or said at a particular moment and how that relates to broader political, social and cultural contexts that can help to distinguish discourse from narrative or rhetoric, for instance. Despite clear overlaps between them, discourse is distinct in referring to the ensemble of ideas, claims, articulations and constructions about a particular object or series of objects and the delimitation of the possibilities for actions taken in regard to them.[28] This is where the politics of discourse becomes crucial, helping to draw attention to such notions as legitimacy, ownership and domination. These ideas are central to the approach taken in this research, situating the

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[26] Vivien A. Schmidt, 'Discursive Institutionalism: The Explanatory Power of Ideas and Discourse', *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Jun., 2008), p. 304

[27] Stuart Hall, 'The Work of Representation', in Stuart Hall, Jessica Evans and Sean Nixon (eds.) *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2013), p. 44

[28] See also Charlotte Epstein, *The Power of Words in International Relations: Birth of an Anti-Whaling Discourse* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008)

discourse of Arab-Iranian rivalry within both broader regional processes taking place in the Gulf during the period in question, as well as domestic social and cultural regimes developing within Iran and Iraq, drawing on the significance of state identity and self-perception, and productions of meaning and representation. And of course, on that note, as Jutta Weldes explains, when we look at and analyse discourses, we should pay attention to both "articulation" and "interpellation": the former being the process through which meaning is produced through particular linguistic and connotative formulations, creating specific representations of the world; and the latter being the production of identities and subject-positions, placing particular political actors at particular points of relation.[29]

What can distinguish state discourse and capture scholarly attention to it is that it has singular power both emanating from it but also working behind it. It is a "crucial constituent" of social and political domination, as Teun van Dijk puts it,[30] but I would add that it is also vital to dynamics of representation in the political and social spheres more broadly. Adding to this, because the state constructs and enacts policy, including foreign policy, and because of the weight of the machinery of the state (particularly when thinking about such entrenched states as Ba'thist Iraq and Pahlavi Iran, which chapter one touches on), its discourses are crucial to explore, playing an indispensable role in the representation and articulation of political issues. Nicholas Onuf contends that political, including state, discourses are important because they produce meanings and in doing so actively construct the reality upon which policy and actions are based (this is, of course, the quintessential constructivist view, which I comment on below). Following the mantra of "discourse as practice", he goes further and sees deeds as discursive, linking the material and the social. Social reality is discursively constituted; material reality is "out there", waiting precisely for this constitution.[31] In other words, this research stands firmly

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[29] Jutta Weldes, 'Constructing National Interests', *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (Sept., 1996), pp. 275-318
For more on articulation and interpellation, and from where Weldes draws much of her ideas, see Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: NLB, 1971); Stuart Hall, 'On Postmodernism and Articulation: An Interview with Stuart Hall', *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Summer, 1986), pp. 102-111; Stuart Hall, 'Signification, Representation, Ideology: Althusser and the Post-Structuralist Debates', *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Jun., 1985), pp. 91-114; John Kurt Jacobsen, 'Review: Much Ado About Ideas: The Cognitive Factor in Economic Policy', *World Politics*, Vol. 47, No. 2 (Jan., 1995), pp. 283-310; Jutta Weldes, *Constructing National Interests: The United States and the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).
[30] Teun A. van Dijk, 'Critical Discourse Analysis', in Deborah Schiffrin, Deborah Tannen and Heidi E. Hamilton (eds.), *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2004), p. 356
[31] Nicholas Onuf, *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989)

within the theoretical tradition and approach that sees discourse as more than "just words":[32] in addition to grappling with the "identity-policy nexus" which the constructivist approach attempts,[33] as indicated in the next section, the production of social and political meaning is vital to the construction and articulation of legitimation, the world of meaning within which political actions can be portrayed, made sense of, and validated, and within which political actors position themselves. These themes are consistently referred to throughout this research.

Onuf, therefore, much like Schmidt, Foucault, Hall and others, essentially claims that political *acts* can be seen as discursive, because in and of themselves they both produce meaning and have meanings attached to them. John Fiske, likewise, describes discourse as being not just about statements that are made but the social and political contexts in which they exist, and their relations to particular actions.[34] Van Dijk agrees with him, where he says that "Indeed, most political actions…are largely discursive," because not only do they have particular meanings attached to them, they produce their own meanings.[35] This idea of acts and actions being discursive is quite significant in the case of Ba'thist and Pahlavi foreign policy and foreign policy discourses in the period under question: as will become clear in further chapters, particular actions carried out by both were explicitly representative of ideas of Arab-Iranian power and rivalry, and indeed articulated as such.

This has significant consequences for how we think about identity and its relation to discourse. David Campbell, for instance, suggests a "fundamental reorientation of our understanding of foreign policy" whereby we depart from the notion that political action through foreign policy is seen as the manifestation and result of identity, but that the two develop mutually – in other words, concrete actions help to "make" identity, rather than merely being "caused" by it.[36] This is a line of thought which could be fruitful for assessing Ba'thist-Pahlavi discourses of Arab-Iranian rivalry, in exploring the full spectrum of the claims and possibilities of a particular way of representing the Persian Gulf region at a time when it was undergoing fundamental

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[32] Henrik Larsen, 'Discourse Analysis in the Study of European Foreign Policy', in Ben Tonra and Thomas Christiansen (eds.), *Rethinking European Union Foreign Policy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 62
[33] Oliver Daddow, 'Interpreting Foreign Policy through Discourse Analysis', *LSE Politics and Policy Blog*, 27th October 2015, accessed 8th August 2019 https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/interpreting-foreign-policy-through-discourse-analysis/
[34] John Fiske, *Media Matters: Race and Gender in U.S. Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 3
[35] Teun A. van Dijk, 'What Is Political Discourse Analysis?', in Jan Blommaert and Chris Bulcaen (eds.), *Political Linguistics (Belgian Journal of Linguistics)* (John Benjamins Publishing Company: Jan., 1998), p. 18
[36] David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), p. 61

transformations, and when the Ba'thist and Pahlavi states were in various respects particularly active on the foreign policy front. Kourosh Ahmadi's book, for instance, shows us the "Development of the issue of the three islands under different circumstances," referring to Abu Musa and the two Tunbs in the Gulf, and on occasion he points us to the way in which the issue was talked about by different regional powers at different times, particularly in the context of the rise and fall of Britain's presence in the region.[37] Where at times Ahmadi hints at the discursive changes and how the islands were represented in the imaginations of the Iranian and Arab states in different periods, it is clear his focus is not on the discourse of rivalry and he does not trace how the states positioned themselves, their regional power and their regional "rights" in relation to one another as political realities changed. What is interesting to explore, in other words, are the relations between discourses of identity, self-perception, and geopolitics, and perhaps viewing them as intimately bound up and mutually constitutive, rather than arranged in a hierarchy of causality.

Without a doubt, discourse analysis and attention to language and representation have become significantly more prominent in international relations scholarship, in large measure due to the critical and constructivist turns (more on this below and in chapter one). A significant gap remains, however, when it comes to geopolitics, although even this is certainly being bridged. As chapter one shows, much of geopolitics scholarship still sees through a materialist, realist lens, and thus this leaves plenty of room for further investigations into ideas of geopolitical imaginations, and, indeed, geopolitics *as discourse*.[38] This research looks to contribute to this. Chiefly, this study is interested in looking at, and perhaps even *re-conceptualising*, discourses of identity as also being discourses of geopolitics. I argue that the discourse of Arab-Iranian rivalry can be seen as not just a representation of self and other, but also a representation of, and a claim to, space and geography. How does this discourse – which attempts to represent the regional politics of the Persian Gulf (and the Middle East more broadly) along national lines of "Arab" and "Iranian/Persian" – talk about the region and its geography; what is it saying about space and the relations of power within that space; what does it mean that the discourse becomes so central to regional politics *as regional politics are undergoing major transformations*? At the most foundational level, in other words, one could ask: what is even meant by a "discourse of Arab-Iranian rivalry", and what am I claiming about regional politics and its discursive constitution at that time? In this research I aim to show that the Ba'thist and

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[37] Kourosh Ahmadi, *Islands and International Politics in the Persian Gulf*, p. viii
[38] William A. Gamson, *Talking Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992)

Pahlavi states represented and articulated the geopolitics and power politics of the Persian Gulf through a discourse *struck through with notions of, and references to, Arab-Iranian difference and competition*. These effectively came to form competing conceptions of the region, how it should look, how it should be organised, and what purpose it should serve as a political arena. Following from Adib-Moghaddam, who argues that exclusionary identity discourses and clashing conceptions of identity in Ba'thist Iraq and Pahlavi Iran sowed the ideational seeds for destruction and bloodshed, I would argue that it is not just mutually-marginalising nationalisms which gave rise to this, but incompatible geopolitical visions and geopolitical imaginations constituted by this discourse of Arab-Iranian rivalry. In other words, when we talk about the failure of the Gulf states to form an "inclusive" security architecture in the region, I believe the discursive and ideational regimes which have contributed to this can be more fully appreciated when we look at discourses of Arab-Iranian rivalry and difference during the period this study looks at.[39]

And so this is where the place of discourse specifically in geopolitics can be useful, explored in the field of critical geopolitics and strands of political geography more broadly. Chapter one explores the geopolitical theoretical framework of this research in more detail, but it is useful to touch on it here so as to see how it fits into other conceptual considerations and the research as a whole. Gearoid O Tuathail and John Agnew argue that geopolitics is at its core a discursive practice. Their notion of geopolitics as the "spatialisation" of international politics and its representation as a "world" characterised by particular types of places, peoples and dramas,[40] is an idea that lends itself to Gulf regional politics in the 1968-1975 period and Ba'thist-Pahlavi discourses of Arab-Iranian hostility: discourses which framed regional politics as sharply divided between two clearly delineated national groupings. O Tuathail and Agnew refer to this idea as the "fixing" of "the character of foreign places and foreign enemies."[41] This reflects David Campbell's argument that we should see foreign policy as shifting "*from a concern of relations between states that takes place across ahistorical, frozen, and pregiven boundaries, to a concern with the establishment of the boundaries* that constitute, at one and the same time,

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[39] Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, 'Persian Gulf Security Architecture Can Only Be Inclusive', interview with Javad Heirannia, Tehran Times, 1st September 2019, accessed 5th September 2019 https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/439813/Persian-Gulf-security-architecture-can-only-be-inclusive-Adib-Moghaddam; Frederic Wehrey and Richard Sokolsky, 'Imagining a New Security Order in the Persian Gulf', *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* (October, 2015)

[40] Gearoid O Tuathail and John Agnew, 'Geopolitics and Discourse: Practical Geopolitical Reasoning in American Foreign Policy', *Political Geography*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (March, 1992), pp. 190-204

[41] Ibid, p. 202

the "state" and "the international system (his emphasis)."'[42] Foreign policy is thus conceptualised discursively, as political practices which, essentially, *make* things foreign, and this differs from other arguments that maintain that either domestic politics determines foreign policy,[43] or international dynamics structure domestic politics, somewhat binary and limiting paradigms that require the primacy and antagonism of one over the other.[44] I would stretch Campbell's claim to say that the discourse of Arab-Iranian rivalry did not just make things and places foreign, so much as they tried to make them familiar and proximate to the respective states in question, and this was done through the evocation of ideas of legitimacy, rightful leadership, history, power, prestige and more. In other words, at a more general level, what I would like to pay attention to in my research are the dynamics which Martin Muller stresses critical geopolitics must take into account: how geopolitical transformations, and claims and aspirations to geopolitical power, are embedded and represented in state discourses.[45]

Finally, I would draw attention to the fact that oftentimes, discourses of enmity and international hostility are discussed and conceptualised alongside periods of violent conflict and war. This certainly applies to the discourse of Arab-Iranian rivalry, as noted above in those works which have recognised its significance. Undoubtedly, during such times hyper-nationalist representations and ideational constructions gain heightened salience, but I would argue that these kinds of discourses should be examined for what they potentially do, and how they potentially feature, more fundamentally in international politics. That is, they should not be seen just as an ideational source of catastrophic violence, but as a source and articulation of geopolitical visions and imaginaries. They may not always feature concomitantly with overt, explosive conflict. As chapter two shows, and as I have already pointed out, the 1968-1975 period certainly saw regional tensions and notable clashes, but relatively speaking, as many have pointed out, in the context of the history of the Gulf it was a rather subdued period as far as military conflict is concerned. But the discourse of Arab-Iranian rivalry was at this time still, I would argue, central to geopolitically constructing, and vying for, the region, and crucially, as I proposed above, it was formative to the political future of the Gulf and its ideational environment, and could even be said to have at least partly set the foundations for fundamental geopolitical antagonisms which exist to this day. In other words, one of the central claims of

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[42] David Campbell, *Writing Security*, p. 61

[43] James N. Rosenau (ed.), *Domestic Sources of Foreign Policy* (New York: Free Press, 1967)

[44] Peter Gourevitch, 'The Second Image Reversed: The International Sources of Domestic Politics', *International Organisation*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (Autumn, 1978), pp. 881-912

[45] Martin Muller, 'Doing Discourse Analysis in Critical Geopolitics', *L'Espace Politique*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Dec., 2010), p. 1

this research, and at the same time one of the motivations behind its pursuance, is the idea that discourses such as those of Arab-Iranian geopolitical rivalry are not simply salient for their role in extreme conflict, but for how they construct and represent the world.

## **Critical IR, West Asia and Identity**

The critical turn in international relations scholarship, questioning the assumptions of realist and materialist analyses, has been invaluable in bringing to prominence the role of ideas, discursive practices and identity in international politics and relations between states. The incorporation of these approaches and ideas in studies of West Asia have been crucial, with a few already mentioned. With the increasingly critical directions international relations theory has taken since its poststructuralist turn, I would say that questions have been opened, and continue "unresolved", precisely on the issues of state identities and discourses of identity, particularly in relation to questions of their ontology and the totality of their political significance.[46] Though this research does not aim to directly address such huge questions, there is definite convergence, and I have been particularly interested in writings which have pointed to some of the potential shortcomings in critical and constructivist scholarship, including particularly in their application to West Asia and the Gulf. Ba'thist Iraq and Pahlavi Iran, and the discourse of Arab-Iranian rivalry, may provide an interesting case study of the continuing gaps in the field, particularly in terms of how we think about the identities and self-representations of states, and how we conceptualise discourses therein. As chapter one shows, it may also provide some direction in the way of incorporating scholarship from other, related fields, such as political geography and geopolitics.

All in all, Christopher Hemmer and Peter Katzenstein's reflections on "eclectic theorising" have been valuable.[47] They draw on James Fearon and Alexander Wendt's claims that thinking in terms of schools of thought can "encourage scholars to be method-driven rather than problem-driven in their research, which may result in important questions or answers being ignored if they are not amenable to the preferred paradigmatic fashion."[48] Hence, an "eclectic"

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[46] For a good exploration of critical theories in international relations, see Andrew Linklater, *Beyond Realism and Marxism: Critical Theory and International Relations* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1990)

[47] Christopher Hemmer and Peter J. Katzenstein, 'Why Is There No NATO in Asia? Collective Identity, Regionalism, and the Origins of Multilateralism', *International Organisation*, Vol. 56, No. 3 (Summer, 2002), pp. 575-607

[48] James Fearon and Alexander Wendt, *Rationalism versus Constructivism: A Sceptical View* (Stanford University and University of Chicago: unpublished manuscript, 2001), p. 1.

approach actively looks to incorporate insights and conceptual tools from the range of theoretical frameworks available (from identity on the constructivist end to questions of power on the realist), and further, by doing so, enriches each of them in turn by addressing potential blindspots, assumptions and essentialisations.[49] But further, an eclectic method could also incorporate insights from other, related *fields*, as I hope to do, looking at political geography and geopolitics theory in particular. In this regard, therefore, at a broader and more fundamental level, this research is looking to contribute to the ongoing attempt to bridge the gap between international relations and the study of West Asia, and not simply by seeing what international relations theory can tell us about the region and how it can add to our understanding of it, but by finding ways in which the region and its politics can actually inform and enrich theory.[50]

To begin with, materialist and realist theories of politics view international relations through the conviction that state behaviour is exclusively driven by material rather than cultural and/or social factors.[51] As Ted Hopf puts it, in such approaches the only notion of "identity", if it can be called that, is the flat, universal conception that all states have of themselves as "self-interested" units,[52] concerned with, depending on your specific inclination, survival or power-maximisation. The idea that states may have particular cultural, ideological or ideational conceptions of themselves, which in turn impacts the way they act, does not feature. Naturally, following this, discursive representations are not afforded much significance, if at all. There is, following from this, a *systemic* bent in these types of approaches. That the "system", and the

[49] Christopher Hemmer and Peter J. Katzenstein, 'Why Is There No NATO in Asia?', p. 577

[50] Brent E. Sasley, 'Studying Middle Eastern International Relations Through IR Theory', *Middle Eastern Studies/Ortadoğu Etütleri*, Volume 2, No. 2 (Jan., 2011), pp. 9-32
See also Lisa Anderson, 'Scholarship, Policy, Debate and Conflict: Why We Study the Middle East and Why It Matters', *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (June, 2004), pp. 2-15; Pinar Bilgin, 'What Future for Middle Eastern Studies?', *Futures*, Vol. 38, No. 5 (2006), pp. 575-585; Fawaz A. Gerges, 'The Study of Middle East International Relations: A Critique', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (1991), pp. 208-220; Andrea Teti, 'Bridging the Gap: IR, Middle East Studies and the Disciplinary Politics of the Area Studies Controversy', *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (March, 2007), pp. 117-145; Morten Valbjorn, 'The Meeting of the Twain: Bridging the Gap between International Relations and Middle East Studies', *Cooperation and Conflict: Journal of the Nordic International Studies Association*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (June, 2003), pp. 163-173; Morten Valbjorn, 'Toward a 'Mesopotamian Turn': Disciplinarity and the Study of the International Relations of the Middle East', *Journal of Mediterranean Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Jan., 2004), pp. 47-75

[51] For overviews of realist theory in international relations, see Jack Donnelly, *Realism and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Joseph M. Grieco, 'Realist International Theory and the Study of World Politics', in Michael W. Doyle and G. John Ikenberry (eds.), *New Thinking in International Relations Theory* (Boulder, Colo.: WestviewPress, 1997), pp. 163-201; Jonathan Haslam, *No Virtue Like Necessity: Realist Thought in International Relations since Machiavelli* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); Robert O. Keohane (ed.), *Neorealism and Its Critics* (New York; Guildford: Columbia University Press, 1986).

[52] Ted Hopf, 'The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory', *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Summer, 1998), p. 175

material conditions it contains and produces, is the place to begin looking for answers to questions about state behaviour in international relations, and indeed that West Asia forms a "system" or a "regional subsystem", have underlain important works on the international politics of the region, some of which have been used in this research. Some have been efforts by international relations scholars with no particular Middle Eastern expertise to test general hypotheses against Middle East cases: John Mearsheimer on conventional deterrence; Stephen Walt on alliances and his notion of "balances of threat"; and Benjamin Miller on great power crisis behaviour.[53] Others have been works by regional specialists who have used systemic-level variables to explain specific Middle Eastern outcomes: Shibley Telhami on Camp David; Ian Lustick on the absence of Middle Eastern great powers; and Michael Barnett on inter-Arab politics.[54] Marxists and dependency theorists, meanwhile, see interaction in the region as reflective of the hierarchical structure of the international capitalist system, stressing the causal significance of the international division of labour, core-periphery dynamics, and the political economy of oil.[55] As F. Gregory Gause III explains, when looking at the international politics of West Asia, this kind of approach attempts to define precisely the elements of the West Asian international system, investigate the regularities generated by those elements, and identify changes, if any, that have occurred in it, and this can go some way in helping to explain state behaviour.[56] It should become clear that, for such theoreticians, looking at the particular geopolitical imaginations and geopolitical visions of particular states would not be considered a worthwhile endeavour in the attempt to grapple with inter-state behaviour and regional politics. Indeed, as chapter one explores in greater detail, there are close parallels between realist and materialist approaches in IR on the one hand, and conventional geopolitics on the

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[53] John J. Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983); Benjamin Miller, *When Opponents Cooperate: Great Power Conflict and Collaboration in World Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995); Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, N.Y.; London: Cornell University Press, 1987)

[54] Michael N. Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics: Negotiations in Regional Order* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Ian S. Lustick, "The Absence of Middle Eastern Great Powers: Political 'Backwardness' in Historical Perspective," *International Organisation*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (Autumn, 1997), pp. 653-683; Shibley Telhami, *Power and Leadership in International Bargaining: The Path to the Camp David Accords* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990)

[55] Samir Amin, *The Arab Nation: Nationalism and Class Struggles*, trans. Michael Pallis (London: Zed Press, 1978); Abbas al-Nasrawi, *Arab Nationalism, Oil, and the Political Economy of Dependency* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991); Simon Bromley, *Rethinking Middle East Politics: State Formation and Development* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994); Paul Salem, *Bitter Legacy: Ideology and Politics in the Arab World* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1994)
For examples of Marxist approaches to international relations, see Alexander Anievas (ed.), *Marxism and World Politics: Contesting Global Capitalism* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2009); Stephen Gill (ed.), *Gramsci, Historical Materialism and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[56] F. Gregory Gause III, 'Systemic Approaches to Middle East International Relations', *International Studies Review*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Spring, 1999), p. 12

other, in their prioritisation of "hard" realities and their sidelining of issues of representation, discourse and identity.

However, I would say that paying attention to systemic changes in the Gulf is absolutely essential when looking at the 1968-1975 period, as chapter two discusses, and Gause is right to point out that despite the potential blindspots and pitfalls of realist and systemic analyses, it is worthwhile to look at underlying, region-wide, inter-connected/ing dynamics when assessing regional politics and relations between states in West Asia.[57] This is not to suggest anything like a "systems" approach to discourse, or a systemic theory of discourse, but to acknowledge that, as I reiterate over the course of this research, the Ba'thist and Pahlavi states were conceptualising space in the Gulf region at a time when major transformations in the politics and composition of that space were occurring. Put simply, systemic changes were underfoot. As chapter two shows, what I mean by this is that the structural framework of regional politics, determined by a very direct form of imperial rule and imperial underwriting of regional security on the part of the British, came to a close, and a fundamentally new geopolitical era had begun. I am not arguing that this change *brought about* the discourse of Arab-Iranian rivalry and the self-perceptions of the Ba'thist and Pahlavi states, or that the "system" as a conceptual starting point offers all the top-down causal factors that we need for analysis. Rather, I am looking to see how the discourse made claims about the radically changing political geography of the region, and how the two were intimately bound up with one another. What this may point to, further, is the idea that how a state sees itself is related to how it sees the world around it, and vice versa. We should also not forget, of course, that viewing the Gulf or any other region as a system or sub-system does not automatically negate the possibility of a dialectical structure-actor approach, and again, chapter two draws this out (building on various other works which have already demonstrated this).[58]

In answer to realism, both constructivist and critical IR scholarship is greatly influenced by anti-foundational approaches, spurred on by the broader post-structuralist turn and its focus on language, discourse and representation in international politics. These approaches share the view that international political "realities" are invented or socially manufactured, rather than given facts of nature. Rather than seeing threats and opportunities as defined purely by tangible

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[57] Ibid, p. 15
[58] We should also not forget that there are even questions to ask about the idea of "regions" to begin with. See, for instance, John A. Agnew, 'Arguing with Regions', *Regional Studies*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (January, 2013), pp. 6-17.

geostrategic factors following a rational process that takes into account a state's resources and assets, and its cost-benefit assessment of the surrounding geopolitical environment, the constructivist approach recognises that how a state sees the outside world is determined by how it sees itself; how it assesses the regional and global order is founded on how it *perceives* itself within those orders.[59] This sense of self-perception influences state behaviour, and it is essential to understanding the interactions between the local, the regional and the global, and the discourses of national identity which permeate the political environment and give meaning to foreign policy choices.[60] Reflecting this, there has been much interest over the last few years in the impact of norms, identities, discourses, and other cultural constructions in West Asian politics, where material realities are given meaning in different ways by the narratives of identity and discourses emanating from various states.[61] Such approaches, it can be seen straight away, have significant ramifications for the topic of this study: can self-perceptions and identities be seen as having a geopolitical dimension; does the way a state talks about itself reflect the way it talks about the world around it, and vice versa? What does it actually mean for identities, (self-)perceptions, and discourses of identity to be bound up with geography and spatial power? These are some of the fundamental theoretical questions this research tries to grapple with.

It should be remembered, in this regard, that post-realist scholarship is of course not *necessarily* anti-systemic, anti-realist or anti-materialist, and there is a considerable amount in the way of bridging the gap between the different approaches. Following this line, it is not so much that there is no material reality, many critical scholars argue, so much as these material conditions are given meaning by political actors who project their identities and discourses onto them. I would, however, suggest opening up for questioning the notion that identities and representations are simply *projected* onto material, political realities, rather than, as I would argue, being bound up with them in a slightly more mutualistic fashion. This, again, relates

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[59] On constructivism, see Emanuel Adler, 'Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics', *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (Sept., 1997), pp. 319-363; Peter J. Katzenstein (ed.), *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York; Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1996); Vendulka Kubalkova, Nicholas Onuf and Paul Kowert (eds.), *International Relations in a Constructed World* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1998); John Gerard Ruggie, 'What Makes the World Hang Together? Neo-Utilitarianism and the Social Constructivist Challenge', *International Organisation*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (Autumn, 1998), pp. 855-885; Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
[60] Alexander Wendt, 'Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics', *International Organisation*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (Spring, 1992), p. 398
[61] Shibley Telhami and Michael N. Barnett (eds.), *Identity and Foreign Policy in the Middle East* (Ithaca, N.Y.: London: Cornell University Press, 2002)

closely to this study. In some sense, in reaction to realism and in the attempt to challenge it, some post-structuralist and constructivist scholarship has gone down the methodological path of reifying and simplifying state identity. I agree with David Campbell here, when he writes that it is a theoretically and historically "impoverished understanding" to see states as having "secure identities", or, as he puts it another way, "to simply understand international relations as the existence of atomised states that are fully fledged…entities in which identity is securely grounded…"[62] In other words, in the attempt to raise the theoretical importance of identity and ideas in the construction of international politics and its constitutive elements, critical and constructivist scholarship has at times almost gone *too far* in this regard, or rather, has not untangled its own core conceptual tenets, as it rightly asks realist work to do so. State identities can become conceptualised in sometimes stultified, static and self-contained ways. Chapter one brings up this issue specifically in regards to Ba'thist Iraq and Pahlavi Iran.

## The Place of Geopolitics in Nationalisms

It is on this issue, reconceptualising identities and discourses of identity, where the case study of Arab-Iranian rivalry can provide some avenues for investigation. Works on the Ba'thist and Pahlavi states are numerous, including on their identities and nationalisms, and Iraqi and Iranian nationalisms more broadly, although it has to be said that the former seems to have been worked on far less, and this is a noticeable gap in the field. As I mention elsewhere, this also applies to foreign policy, where far more has been written on Pahlavi Iran and the lack of systematic studies of Ba'thist foreign policy and geopolitics is quite striking (in its own very small way, I certainly hope this research adds to our understanding of Ba'thist regional politics and foreign policy).[63] On Iranian nationalism, there is a particularly significant amount of work

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[62] David Campbell, *Writing Security*, p. 61

[63] In addition to works already mentioned, on Pahlavi Iran and Iranian nationalism more broadly, see Ervand Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982); Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, *Psycho-Nationalism: Global Thought, Iranian Imaginations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Kamran Scot Aghaie and Afshin Marashi (eds.), *Rethinking Iranian Nationalism and Modernity* (University of Texas Press; 2014); Ali M. Ansari, *Modern Iran: The Pahlavis and After* (Harlow: Longman, 2007); Ali Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Mehrzad Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1996); Richard W. Cottam, *Nationalism in Iran* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1979); Nikkie R. Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2006); Ali Mirsepassi, *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernisation: Negotiating Modernity in Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
On Ba'thism and Iraqi and Arab nationalism more broadly, see Adeed Dawisha, *Iraq: A Political History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009); Toby Dodge, *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation Building and a History Denied* (London: C. Hurst, 2003); Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, *Iraq since*

on its relationship to modernity and its intellectual and political development. Over the last few years, there have been several invaluable publications. Reza Zia-Ebrahimi's book, *The Emergence of Iranian Nationalism: Race and the Politics of Dislocation*, has been especially pertinent to this research since it looks specifically at, amongst other issues, the intellectual origins and development of anti-Arabism.[64] Again, though, this is primarily an historical investigation. Ali Ansari's book on the politics of Iranian nationalism, similarly, looks at the domestic development of Iranian nationalist ideologies and their role in the creation of the state and their mobilisation in the legitimisation of different regimes.[65] But what I think will be crucial to take from these works, in the attempt to stretch them out, is the idea of Pahlavi Iranian nationalism *making claims about the region and its space*. Writings on Ba'thist nationalism and discourse, meanwhile, have been spearheaded by works such as that of Ofra Bengio's *Saddam's Word: Political Discourse in Iraq*.[66] This study, however, reflecting the general direction of the overall literature, is focused on the domestic realm and the role of nationalism therein. It is also, obviously, focused on Saddam, and in fact, on this note, it is worth pointing out that much of the time Ba'thist nationalism and Ba'thist xenophobic discourses are reduced to the figure of Saddam. Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, meanwhile, has an interesting section on the "geopolitics of pan-Arabism" in his work on the Gulf, but it is primarily focused on conceptions of the Arab nation in Ba'thism and the impact of exclusionary Ba'thist nationalism on the regional system.[67]

Interestingly, there is no similar section on Pahlavi Iranianism, which speaks to one crucial difference between the two nationalisms: Arab nationalism was an explicitly trans-national phenomenon; Iranians, or Persians, however, are not seen in the same way as a transnational group inhabiting multiple states, and modern Iranian nationalism has therefore not constructed such a discourse. Can Iranian nationalism even have a geopolitical, regional dimension or representation, in that case? What could even be the possible geopolitical or regional dimension

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*1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2001); Samir Khalil, *Republic of Fear: The Inside Story of Saddam's Iraq* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990); Liora Lukitz, *Iraq: The Search for National Identity* (London: Frank Cass, 1995); Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2012); Fu'ad Matar, *Saddam Hussein: A Biographical and Ideological Account of His Leadership Style and Crisis Management* (London: A Highlight Production, 1990); Tim Niblock (ed.), *Iraq: The Contemporary State* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982); Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007)

[64] Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, *The Emergence of Iranian Nationalism: Race and the Politics of Dislocation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016)

[65] Ali Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran*

[66] Ofra Bengio, *Saddam's Word*

[67] Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, *The International Politics of the Persian Gulf*, pp. 18-21

to the Pahlavi state's discourse of Persian supremacy and anti-Arabism in a region dominated by Arab states? Indeed, Wajih Kawtharani writes about how from the Arab perspective, the hyper-nationalism of the Pahlavians appeared belligerent, expansionist, hegemonic and fanatical, making geographical, cultural and ethnic neighbours uneasy.[68] These are some of the issues and questions this study engages with. Rouhollah Ramazani, for instance, in his book on Iran's role in the Gulf, describes a culture which claimed historically determined Iranian pre-eminence in the region, an outlook which had been a part of Iranian perceptions of the region for a long period of time.[69] Building on the work of Shahram Chubin and Sepehr Zabih, Farzad Cyrus Sharifi-Yazdi, for instance, actually touches on this issue in his work, looking at, for instance, domestic legitimation through the cultivation of nationalist credentials.[70] But I would argue there is more to this. There is a clear geopolitical dimension at play here, though not explicitly articulated as such by Ramazani and others. In other words, I would say it is more than a nationalist claim articulated within the domestic realm. How can we understand discourses of Iranian superiority, therefore, and *regional* superiority, in the midst of radical transformations within the region?

It could be suggested that there is a risk of approaching discourse purely instrumentally here. In other words, is this approach not insinuating that geopolitical conditions, and changes therein, are the *reason* for the appearance and expression of the discourse of Arab-Iranian rivalry? This is certainly not the intention. As stated before, I am not so much interested in the question of where ontological and causal primacy lies, a methodological obstacle that often besets various approaches to the "agent-structure problematique", and other, similar "meta-theoretical" dilemmas in the social sciences.[71] Through my research, however, I am not aiming to show that regional and geopolitical circumstances *forged* the self-conceptions of the Ba'thist and Pahlavi states, their representations, and discourses of Arab-Iranian rivalry. I am, rather, looking to apply John Agnew's notion of a "critical geopolitical perspective", for instance, which can help us to appreciate how the imposition of certain notions and ideas over a geographical space is a result of political actors seeking to spread, and even enforce, a particular

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[68] Wajih Kawtharani, 'Mutual Awareness between Arabs and Iranians', in Khair el-Din Haseeb (ed.), *Arab-Iranian Relations*, p. 75
[69] Rouhollah K. Ramazani, *The Persian Gulf,* p. 26
[70] Shahram Chubin and Sepehr Zabih, *The Foreign Relations of Iran: A Developing State in a Zone of Great Power Conflict* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1974); Farzad Cyrus Sharifi-Yazdi, *Arab-Iranian Rivalry in the Persian Gulf*, p. 47
[71] Alexander E. Wendt, 'The Agent-Structure Problem in International Relations Theory', *International Organisation*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (Summer, 1987), p. 338

"vantage point".[72] In other words, it is not so much that geography has a simple uni-directional effect on foreign policy, state behaviour, and inter-state conflict, but rather that geographical spaces are "mediated through the ascription of meaning to places and peoples: from the relative significance of different world regions to "national interests" to the use of metaphors and analogies from other places and times used to communicate and justify given courses of policy and action."[73]

**Thesis Structure and Research Methodology**

This research, therefore, engages with a range of disciplines and conceptual and empirical concerns: discourse analysis, foreign policy, state identity, geopolitics and political geography, international relations theory and Persian Gulf studies. I hope to provide some opportunities to connect what are often seen as detached fields as well as some opposing poles in international relations theory: ideas and materiality; the domestic and the regional; the structure and the actor; systems and representations. Ultimately, I hope to make a case for a few claims in this research and put forward a few arguments:

1 – During the 1968-1975 period, Ba'thist Iraq and Pahlavi Iran represented and articulated the geopolitics and international politics of the Persian Gulf through a discourse steeped in notions of Arab-Iranian difference and rivalry. Until now this has been primarily conceptualised as clashing discourses of nationalism, ethnocentrism, and so on, but I would argue we can also see it as the articulation of mutually-exclusive geopolitical imaginaries.

2 – Indeed, the 1968-1975 period is a fundamental period in the modern history of the international politics of the Gulf, and deserving of more attention. Going further, to get an insight into the systemic difficulties effecting the region today, both ideational and structural, this period of time can provide significant instruction. It set in motion long-term dynamics which constituted crises to come, and which exist to this day.

3 – Discourses of identity could be reconceptualised as discourses of geopolitics, or more specifically, there is an inherently geopolitical dimension that must be unpacked. More fundamentally, and following from that, we can say that state conceptions of identity themselves are inherently geopolitical. The discourse of Arab-Iranian rivalry illustrates this:

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[72] John Agnew, 'Is US Security Policy "Pivoting" from the Atlantic to Asia-Pacific? A Critical Geopolitical Perspective', *Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung*, Global Policy and Development (Sept., 2012), p. 4
[73] Ibid

oftentimes, when states talk about themselves, they are also making claims about the space around them.

A short word on the methodology of periodisation, though this is explicated in more detail in chapter two, is also necessary here. I agree utterly with John Agnew that "any periodisation is inherently contestable. Not only are the beginning and ending dates subject to criticism for false precision, history is itself dynamic and not readily divided into neat periods…But trying to understand the course of history means imposing some sort of order on it."[74] In a sense, therefore, my decision to focus on 1968-1975 is not totally arbitrary, but certainly not inviolable either. As chapter two shows, for instance, Farzad Cyrus Sharifi-Yazdi has argued that prior to 1968, fundamental developments were already under way. Even in this research, I have chosen 1968 as a "starting point" but also make mention of the vital significance of the 1967 War for the international politics of the Gulf. What is more important for this research than any claim to chronological precision is a sense of the convergence of several factors which I believe fundamentally transformed the political geography, and *perceptions* of the political geography, of the Gulf during a particular period of time. These include Britain's announcement to withdraw from the Gulf; the United States's decision to refrain from directly replacing the British; and the decline of the traditional West Asian core of the Egypt-Syria axis paving the way for an intra-regional shift towards the Gulf. I have chosen 1968 as the starting point because I would say that the aforementioned convergence of factors began to take shape from then, and I have chosen to end the study in 1975 because of the Algiers Agreement between Iran and Iraq which, as much of the scholarship agrees on, marked the end of a period of significant tension and the beginning of a new pragmatism and temperament in the region (which was again to break, of course, in 1979).[75] Admittedly, one could say that this research emphasises the late-1960s-to-mid-1970s period more generally, rather than laying any rigid commitment to specific years as starting and ending points (for example, 1968 as opposed to 1967). And to reiterate, as chapter two shows, this period seems relatively understudied in the literature.

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[74] John A. Agnew, *Geopolitics: Re-Visioning World Politics* (London; New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 85-86
[75] The 1975 Algiers Agreement, also knows as the Algiers Accord, was an agreement between Iran and Iraq to settle border disputes, notably regarding the Shatt al-'Arab waterway.
On the significance of the agreement in bringing to a close the period of tension which had begun in the late 1960s, see Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, *The International Politics of the Persian Gulf*, pp. 14-15; Kourosh Ahmadi, *Islands and International Politics in the Persian Gulf*, p. 100; Shahram Chubin and Charles Tripp, *Iran and Iraq at War*, p. 162; Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Gerd Nonneman with Charles Tripp, *War and Peace in the Gulf: Domestic Politics and Regional Relations in the 1990s* (Reading (Berkshire): Ithaca Press, 1991), pp. 37-39; F. Gregory Gause, III, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf*, pp. 37-38.

This study was carried out through primary research in various archives, both physically and through digital means, and by placing this material alongside the extant literature on the international politics of the Gulf. As a study focused on discourse, I chiefly looked at public statements, speeches and interviews made by Ba'thist and Pahlavi officials in a variety of fora, as well as official diplomatic conversations and meetings, many of them still unexplored in any systematic fashion in the literature, if touched on at all. These came overwhelmingly from Arab and Iranian sources, primarily official and semi-official media at the time in Iran and Iraq, and much of it translated by the Joint Publications Research Service (JPRS), a division of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in the United States. The content in this database comes from newspapers, journals, radio and television, from the levels of state and civil society, and today is located on a Readex database, *Middle East and North Africa: Global Perspectives 1958-1994*, using the NewsBank platform.[76] This curated content is an invaluable resource for researchers, and certainly proved as such for myself. I looked at commentary and statements made by those at the highest levels of the Ba'thist and Pahlavi states, as well as public figures closely associated with them, including journalists and intellectuals. Looking at the commentary in official and semi-official media, in addition to the statements of leading figures, allowed me to gain a more systematic and holistic view of dominant representations of, and discourses on, the Gulf. These outlets, at the time, certainly reflected Ba'thist and Pahlavi policies and perspectives, and include *Kayhan*, *Khandaniha*, *Tehran Mosavvar* and *Ettela'at* in the case of the latter, and *al-Thawrah*, *al-Ahwaz*, *al-Jumhuriyya* and *The Baghdad Observer* with the former. In other words, these publications, I would say, would have reflected the geopolitical imaginations of Ba'thist and Pahlavi politics. Later chapters identify these outlets again and provide some information on where they stood in relation to the Ba'thist and Pahlavi polities, including sources for further reading. In addition to the JPRS database, I also used the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) Daily Reports resource, also on a Readex database, which was also an open source intelligence record of the CIA for more than half a century and today operates as the Open Source Centre.[77] This essentially had similar material to the JPRS record, with the useful addition of media from elsewhere in the region as well as other parts of the world where Ba'thist and Pahlavi officials had been interviewed. I also made use of the BBC Summary of World Broadcasts Middle East (BBC/SWB/ME), and the Cold

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[76] 'Middle East and North Africa: Global Perspectives 1958-1994', *Joint Publications Research Service* (*JPRS*), product access required: https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/readex/welcome?p=TOPMENA

[77] 'Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) Daily Reports, 1941-1996', Archive of International Studies, Readex, product access required: https://www.readex.com/content/foreign-broadcast-information-service-fbis-daily-reports-1941-1996

War International History Project (CWIHP) in the Wilson Centre Digital Archive, which although has less material before the late 1970s and 1980s, still has some highly useful and revealing government records of Iran and Iraq for the period under study.[78] Slightly less systematically, I also referred to various memoirs, biographies and contemporaneous publications written by individuals at the highest decision-making levels across various contexts, as these can give vital details of first-hand accounts and revealing private conversations. And lastly, in the case of Iraq, I looked at a few official Ba'thist reports and documents which have been translated into English.

I decided to complement this dimension of material with reference to the diplomatic archives of the United States and the United Kingdom, through the *Foreign Relations of the United States* (*FRUS*) series and UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) files held at The National Archives at Kew, London, both of which contain invaluable and copious material on Gulf regional politics for the period in question, and specifically include abundant resources on Iranian and Iraqi decision-making, policy considerations, and positions on key regional issues. It may be surprising that in what is essentially a discourse analysis, I have decided to extensively consult UK and US historical records of major foreign policy decisions and diplomatic activity, but I think it forms an important component of this study and has significantly added to my analyses, partly because the UK and US were undeniably two of the major global powers involved in Gulf regional affairs at the time. These records help us to gauge a few things: Iranian and Iraqi policy considerations, preferences, and self-perceptions; their positions on fundamental issues in Gulf regional politics; and, vitally for this study, a further sense of how they saw the region and in what terms. In other words, I think that these ostensibly "private" conversations and records *also* give us an insight into the geopolitical imaginations of the Ba'thist and Pahlavi states. There is no reason to believe that what is "private" is not discursive. These resources contain records of major, high-level meetings and reports, including with Ba'thist and Pahlavi officials, and overlooking them in a study of this kind would have been a considerable oversight. On this note, I should say I certainly regret not being able to consult Pahlavi and Ba'thist diplomatic records, a result of notable limitations in both accessibility as well as limited declassification of material. This is a gap I cannot deny, and I reflect on this further in the conclusion. Having said that, I believe this would have been

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[78] Cold War International History Project (CWIHP), Digital Archive: International History Declassified, History and Public Policy Program, Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars, Washington, D.C., open access: https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/

a far more serious omission had this been a study of Ba'thist and Pahlavi foreign policy, geostrategy and decision-making, and I have tried my utmost to navigate this limitation through the other primary sources I have mentioned. Chiefly, I think the combination of Iranian and Iraqi public and media records on the one hand, including key commentary, statements and pronouncements by key figures and political officials, and an insight into diplomatic activity through the UK and US records on the other, enables a holistic assessment.

Crucially, it should be said, and as an extension of the particular conceptualisation of discourse I outlined above, in this study discourses are not read alone as isolated artefacts, but are read and interpreted alongside the implementation and practices of the foreign policies of the Ba'thist and Pahlavi states, alongside broader regional realities and strategies, and together with the domestic political, social and cultural contexts of Iran and Iraq at the time. This methodological approach allows us to explore the significance of representation and how exactly particular actions, practices and orientations were constructed, articulated and legitimated, and the context within which they appeared. It also allows us to appreciate the blurred lines between the domestic and international realms, an underlying theme of the research.

In the introduction I have laid out the primary objectives, considerations and arguments for this research. I have demonstrated how the combination of a sense of contemporary urgency and a historical curiosity, in part motivated by a gap in the extant literature on the international politics of the Gulf, pushed me to pursue this topic. By briefly sketching out the existing pathways and some of my own thoughts on the literature on discourse, state identity and critical IR work more broadly on West Asia and the Gulf in particular, I have given a sense of the direction this research takes, and some of the key empirical and conceptual considerations taken into account.

The first chapter will provide the theoretical grounding of the piece. By exploring particular ideas in critical geopolitics, political geography and geopolitics more broadly, as well as international relations theory, I propose combining the notions of geopolitical imaginations (or geopolitical imaginaries) and role conceptions as a way to understand how the Ba'thist and Pahlavi states were talking about themselves, their competitors, and the space around them, and where they claimed they belonged in that regard. I relate this more broadly to ideas surrounding identity and how we can potentially reconceptualise identity and identity discourses, and bring geopolitics to the heart of this. I lay out some of the core issues and

directions in realist/materialist geopolitics and critical geopolitics, and I place these parallel to some trends in mainstream IR, going on to identify some key conceptual and theoretical tools that can be used to think about how the Ba'thist and Pahlavi states articulated and represented the political geography of the Gulf from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s. I argue that talking about the discourse of Arab-Iranian rivalry as the articulation of competing geopolitical imaginaries can help us to understood not only what the two states were doing, but why it was so significant.

The second chapter gives a broad perspective of the overarching regional situation in the Gulf during the period in question. I do not look at the details of the specific territorial disputes which have been mentioned, and which took place during this time, nor do I look at their histories nor their legal contestations. I argue that what is so crucial about this time is a new geopolitical consciousness amongst major Gulf states brought about by the perception that West Asian regional power had shifted towards the Gulf area, triggered by three key dynamics and developments: the British withdrawal from the region; the US's decision not to act as a direct replacement, opening up a greater role for local states in the conduct of regional affairs; and the impact of the 1967 War in collapsing the Egyptian-Syrian axis which had formed the core of regional power, paving the way for the rise, assertion and insertion of the Gulf states in regional politics. Gulf powers, in other words, became aware of their own significance and the significance of the surrounding space. An unprecedented indigenisation of regional politics took hold, and an awareness amongst the key regional players thereof. By providing a more overarching, macro perspective, and emphasising spatial signification in the regional picture, we can situate issues of discourse and representation. I also provide a review of some of the literature and some critical thoughts in that regard.

Chapter three looks at how the Ba'thist and Pahlavi states represented and articulated the roles of extra-regional powers, and the place of notions of regional security and development in that regard. The modern history of the Gulf, as well as West Asia more broadly of course, has always been tied up with the question of "outside" powers. Regional states have been fully aware of this, and by looking at the way Ba'thist and Pahlavi officials discuss external powers and what roles they should play, we see that ideas of Arab-Iranian rivalry and difference are a vital part of their articulation and representation. The Ba'thist and Pahlavi states, in other words, talked about security, external powers, the future of the region and the fundamental structure of regional politics with a strong sense of their own proclaimed responsibilities as Arab and Iranian powers, and this fundamentally impacted how they viewed the region as a

particular kind of space. In looking at how they talked about the UK, US and Soviet Union specifically, we can get an insight into their visions for the region.

Chapter four looks at the roles Iran and Iraq constructed and articulated for themselves and for the region. By looking at how the two states talked about the socio-economic development and modernisation of the region, what purpose the region should serve, and what purpose *they* could serve in guaranteeing the prosperity of the region, we can see the different political and strategic priorities they had and how these were expressed with reference to Arab dignity and revolution in the case of Ba'thist Iraq, and stability and security against Arab radicalism in the case of Pahlavi Iran. Notions of regional leadership, hierarchy and ownership all come through.

As will become abundantly clear, chapters three and four overlap in a myriad of ways. Indeed, one of the central arguments this research tries to put across is that the real power and effect of the discourse of Arab-Iranian rivalry, and an appreciation of its various modalities, is only clear when we see its dimensions together. For instance, the Ba'thist and Pahlavi states' discourses on extra-regional powers in the Gulf and their self-positioning within Cold War vernaculars, the subject of chapter three, is closely tied to their role-conceptions, the subject of chapter four, and so on. Following this, references to the overlaps and interconnections are made throughout. In addition to that, as is apparent, I have decided not to structure the content and the analysis chronologically, which would require going through the various events and regional developments in the order in which they occurred. This, I think, would run the risk of becoming too analytically thin as well as highly repetitive. I have opted for a thematic approach whereby I focus in turn on various discursive features, which I think can offer a more useful way of systematically and coherently looking at the various dimensions of the discourses and looking at various representative constructions one-by-one. This, of course, does not mean that the events which took place are ignored – in fact, they are central to the analysis – but their chronological occurrence does not form the structure of the piece.

After the core chapters, I then conclude the piece by offering summary thoughts on the chapters, the theoretical implications of the research, and the prospects for future research in lieu of questions raised and questions unanswered.

# Chapter 1

# Identity Geopolitics: Imagination, Place and Purpose

Geography is fate. – Heraclitus[79]

For the first time we can perceive something of the real proportion of features and events on the stage of the whole world, and may seek a formula which shall express certain aspects, at any rate, of geographical causation in universal history…Man and not nature initiates, but nature in large measure controls. – Halford John Mackinder[80]

Perspective makes the single eye the centre of the visible world. Everything converges on the eye as the vanishing point of infinity. The visible world is arranged for the spectator as the universe was once thought to be arranged by God. – John Berger[81]

Imagination is everything. – Paul Gilroy[82]

Ba'thist Iraq and Pahlavi Iran both had a potent sense of their own identities and their place in the world. They were unwavering in their representations of themselves and of others, projecting both their very existences and responsibilities as a quest for the fulfilment of strongly-defined national destinies. A rich body of literature, as already stated, has shown this. Two actors with such powerful feelings of belonging and agency, in the midst of a region which was effectively "coming into its own", as it were (as the next chapter tries to show), would undoubtedly aim to assert themselves and their own perceived instrumentality, and position themselves at the top of the incipient regional hierarchy. This is certainly what we saw in the Gulf from the period beginning in the late 1960s. What we observe when looking at the discourse of Arab-Iranian rivalry is that, through such representations and articulations, the Iranian and Iraqi states were levelling competing visions of the region and the emerging

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[79] Ralph Ellison, *Going to the Territory* (New York: Random House, 1986), p. 198

[80] H. J. Mackinder, 'The Geographical Pivot of History', *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (Apr., 1904), p. 422

[81] John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and Penguin Books, 1972), p. 16

[82] Paul Gilroy, ''Imagination Is Everything': Paul Gilroy Chats to the JRB about Race, Land and South Africa's Role in Overthrowing the Racial Order', interview with Simon van Schalkwyk, *Johannesburg Review of Books*, 4th Apr. 2018, accessed 6th Apr. 2018 https://johannesburgreviewofbooks.com/2018/04/04/imagination-is-everything-paul-gilroy-chats-to-the-jrb-about-race-land-and-south-africas-role-in-overthrowing-the-racial-order/

regional order, or what we can call geopolitical imaginaries. What this means is that, when looking at these expressions of identity, we are also looking at expressions of how space and the political organisation of that space are being conceived. This discourse of identity, in other words, was also a discourse of geopolitics; or, at a more theoretically fundamental level, we can perhaps say that identity has an inherently geopolitical dimension communicated within it. This idea, as this chapter aims to show, has a strong grounding in much geopolitics scholarship, and it is for this reason that I try to weave together works on identity in international relations with the burgeoning literature in political geography and geopolitics theory. Hopefully this can offer some useful ways of bringing the bodies of work together, and perhaps suggest some ways to re-consider how we think about state identities in West Asia and the Gulf, as well as state identities more broadly.

This chapter, therefore, lays out the theoretical grounding of the piece and the conceptual toolbox which it draws from. I explore some key trajectories in critical geopolitics, political geography and geopolitics more broadly, and merge these with ideas surrounding identity and identity discourses. I lay out some of the core issues and directions in realist/materialist geopolitics and critical geopolitics, place these parallel to some trends in mainstream IR, and identify some key conceptual and theoretical notions that can be used to think about how the Ba'thist and Pahlavi states articulated and represented the political geography of the Gulf, and their roles within it, from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s.

It is also worth mentioning from the outset that the exclusionary nationalisms and ethnocentric discourses of the Ba'thist and Pahlavi states were far from identical, and significantly different in their formulations and political contexts. Specifically, the "nations" and "peoples" that the two states claimed to represent were positioned very differently, and meant very different things, on the regional scale. Of course, this research is not a study of Ba'thist and Pahlavi nationalisms as such, but this is important to consider going forward. The (pan-)Arabist nationalism of the Ba'thist state was explicitly *transnational*, because the Arab *nation* was seen as transnational, and under the rulership of a whole range of different states. In other words, the political, cultural and national community imagined and articulated by the Ba'thist state (and, for example, someone like Nasser in Egypt) was not limited to a single polity. The community was seen as transcending the boundaries of any single state. The Pahlavians, by contrast, were essentially speaking to and constructing a "people" who were seen as already living under a single state. As such, the Iranianism of the Pahlavis was not transnational in the same sense, and not articulated, or even targeted, in the same way as the narrative of Iraqi

Ba'thists. There are a few interesting consequences to this: firstly, and perhaps most obviously, the precise framing and language of the discourses will vary, reflecting the divergent ways in which the two states see both themselves, their roles and their purported "communities"; and secondly, this then surely shapes the geopolitical imaginations of the two states and the various ways in which they attempted to construct their roles and positions in the region, as well as their geopolitical projects. This will be a key focus, and one of the arguments, of this study: that their geopolitical discourses were not identical, reflecting differing self-definitions and self-conceptions, but ultimately shared a common desire to shape the region both materially and ideationally.

To reiterate, as opposed to proposing a form of methodological "geopolitical determinism" in the construction of state identities (in other words, purporting that state identity is causally determined by geopolitics),[83] I am looking to explore the ways in which the discourse of Arab-Iranian rivalry encapsulates more than state self-definitions and exclusionary, ethnocentric nationalisms: it also involves a claim to space and an envisioning of that particular space in various ways. I would certainly not say the discourse was a "product" of the material, geopolitical realities of the time, or argue for a geopolitical theory of state identity, let alone a materialist one. Rather, I am looking to uncover the geopolitical dimensions of discourses of state identity, through a conceptualisation of the discourse of Arab-Iranian rivalry as a geopolitical imaginary.

## Geopolitics and International Relations: Dialogues and Gaps

Geopolitics represents a rich theoretical and conceptual tradition. Similar to international relations and social and political theory more broadly, it has likewise undertaken various turns and manifestations, including that which we could describe as the "critical".[84] The dynamic and diverse trends that have come to form contemporary political geography and geopolitics have therefore become "open to geographers and non-geographers" alike, and have crucially gone beyond looking at geography in purely physical terms.[85] There are a few key reasons why

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[83] Efraim Karsh, 'Geopolitical Determinism: The Origins of the Iran-Iraq War', *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (Spring, 1990), pp. 256-268

[84] For detailed explorations of varying approaches to geopolitics and different geopolitical traditions, see Klaus Dodds and David Atkinson (eds.), *Geopolitical Traditions: A Century of Geopolitical Thought* (London; New York: Routledge, 2000); Gearóid Ó Tuathail, Simon Dalby and Paul Routledge (eds.), *The Geopolitics Reader* (London: Routledge, 1998).

[85] John Agnew, Katharyne Mytchell, and Gearóid Ó Tuathail, 'Chapter 1: Introduction', in John Agnew, Katharyne Mytchell, and Gearóid Ó Tuathail (eds.), *A Companion to Political Geography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), p. 5

I have chosen to look at geopolitics and conceptual frameworks associated with it as the grounding for this research, and hopefully this chapter will make this clear. I could have, for instance, stayed within the slightly more direct path of constructivist international relations theory and its work on identity. I would respond to this, however, by suggesting that it may actually be misleading in the first instance to create too much of a divide between the different fields, as there are some fundamental overlaps. As Peter Taylor has shown, geopolitical thinking and international relations scholarship have some common roots and strong connections. Traditional geopolitics, for instance, borrows heavily from realist conceptions of power politics, is very state-centric, and sees inter-state relations as playing out on a world stage defined by fixed physical features (it has also conventionally seen itself as aiding the state in its activities and accumulation of power vis-à-vis other states, again much like realism).[86] And likewise, the critical approaches in geopolitics have interacted closely with those in international relations, stressing the ambiguity, contingency and social construction of the political world, looking at discourses and representations and exploring the construction of meaning and identity.[87] As Aylin Güney and Nazif Mandaci have argued, it is arguably the case that critical geopolitics scholars were actually inspired by constructivist theory (and critical theory more broadly) in the first place.[88] Further, as Güney and Mandaci point out, a critical geopolitical approach and an appreciation of geopolitical discourses is vital to understanding the slightly more practical realms of security and foreign policy: the latter two are fundamentally formed by "geopolitical imaginations and codes", or political actors' conceptualisations of the space around them.[89] Andrew Latham, for instance, has shown that in the case of the United States post-Cold War, "foreign and defence policy is guided by what might be called a "common geopolitical *imaginary* (emphasis his).""[90] There are thus vital

For effective demonstrations of the deep significance of how spaces and places are represented and conceptualised, from different disciplinary and political perspectives, see, amongst others, Michael Heffernan, *The Meaning of Europe: Geography and Geopolitics* (London: Arnold, 1998); Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996); Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979). Indeed, in a sense, Said's text is a work of critical geopolitics.

[86] Peter J. Taylor, *Political Geography: World-Economy, Nation-State and Locality* (Harlow: Longman Scientific & Technical, 1993)

[87] Gearóid Ó Tuathail and John Agnew, 'Geopolitics and Discourse', pp. 190-204

[88] Aylin Güney and Nazif Mandaci, 'The Meta-Geography of the Middle East and North Africa in Turkey's New Geopolitical Imagination', *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 44, Nos. 5-6 (Oct., 2013), p. 433

[89] Ibid, pp. 431, 433

See also Kevin R. Cox, Murray Low and Jennifer Robinson, 'Introduction: Political Geography: Traditions and Turns', in Kevin R. Cox, Murray Low and Jennifer Robinson (eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Political Geography* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2008), pp. 1-14

[90] Andrew A. Latham, 'China in the Contemporary American Geopolitical Imagination', *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (Fall, 2001), p. 138

linkages between critical strands of geopolitical scholarship and the actual practice of international relations, as well as of course its theory.

Of course, despite some inter-disciplinary dialogue and awareness thereof, I would agree to some extent with Virginie Mamadouh and Gertjan Dijkink that the disciplinary gap, particularly between international relations and geopolitics, remains unfortunate and considerable, with most of the work taking place across the two focusing on "boundary-making processes" and borders, or in other words, limited to a particular set of physical features of sovereign nation-states, their construction and reproduction, and the various meanings attached to them.[91] John Agnew has also made the crucial point that critical geopolitics still remains rather provincial in its scholarly and analytical reach, and its geographical scope: "the overwhelming body of work in critical geopolitics has focused on the contemporary United States and the European colonial powers, often as if they were the sole active forces in world politics toying with the docile masses in the rest of the world."[92] And on a related but somewhat darker note, Barry Buzan and George Lawson remind us that "Combined with discussions of (white) racial and (Western) civilisational superiority was late nineteenth-century work on geopolitics by figures such as [Friedrich] Ratzel, [Halford] Mackinder, [Alfred Thayer] Mahan and [Karl] Haushofer. Geopolitics emerged from the nineteenth-century complex of imperial competition, nationalism and racism…towards an intensification of imperial competition as European powers sought to re-divide existing territory. Geopolitics was influential in imperial thinking…"[93] Indeed it is undeniable that geopolitics has a somewhat sinister past. The desire to forget and let go of this legacy, rather than reckoning with it, may go some way in explaining the distance between geopolitics and international relations to this day, and in addition to that Agnew's comments would suggest that the more recent post-colonial and critical burgeoning in international relations scholarship may find much of geopolitics theory too stultified.

In this light, though not necessarily focused on the excavation of this troubled past, I hope this study goes some way in helping to both bridge some of the interdisciplinary gaps and extend

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[91] Virginie Mamadouh and Gertjan Dijkink, 'Geopolitics, International Relations and Political Geography: The Politics of Geopolitical Discourse', *Geopolitics*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (Sept., 2006), p. 352

[92] John Agnew, 'Emerging China and Critical Geopolitics: Between World Politics and Chinese Particularity', *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, Vol. 51, No. 5 (Sept.-Oct., 2010), p. 569

[93] Barry Buzan and George Lawson, *The Global Transformation: History, Modernity and the Making of International Relations* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 52-53
See also Lucian M. Ashworth, 'Mapping a New World: Geography and the Interwar Study of International Relations', *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (Mar., 2013), pp. 138-149; Stefano Guzzini (ed.), *The Return of Geopolitics in Europe?: Social Mechanisms and Foreign Policy Identity Crises* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012)

the critical application of the approach outside of the Euro-American landscape (which perhaps, in its own small way, may contribute to a form of redress in the discipline). Hopefully, we can see what geopolitical thought can teach us about the Gulf and the discourse of Arab-Iranian rivalry, and likewise in reverse, what the case study can teach us about the discipline. Despite the admitted shortcomings, looking particularly at the literature on geopolitics was motivated by the fact that the tradition has explored in fascinating ways the role of space and political geography, and their relationships to representations and power, in both the construction of statehood and inter-state dynamics. I would perhaps go even further and argue that geopolitics is, in some sense at least, fundamentally about statecraft, and not only because it involves physical projections of power over space, militarisation and securitisation in the name of state stability. I would suggest it has great significance in at least two other ways, which are particularly pertinent to this study: firstly, on the material level, it captures how inter-state dynamics, actions that states take against each other, foreign policy-making and practice, and a state's relationship with its surrounding physical environment all effect the very internal development of the state (a useful counter to much realist (and other) scholarship that insists on the neat international/domestic divide); and secondly, it reminds us that a state's construction of its own identity and sense of place and purpose is intimately tied to its construction and understanding of the world around it and the geography of international politics. These are key notions to think about in this study. As the next chapters touch on, the late-1960s-to-mid-1970s period was in some ways a formative period of state formation in the Gulf, even for those states already formally sovereign and autonomous (such as Iran and Iraq, the former which was desperate to cultivate domestic nationalist legitimacy, and the latter which was going through a consolidation of power after a seizure of the state). Just as Charles Tilly told us that "War makes states,"[94] perhaps we could also say that "Geopolitics makes states" as well, and indeed, that "States make geopolitics". This approach echoes the work of Reem Abou-el-Fadl, who argues, in the context of Egypt and Turkey in the Cold War, that foreign policy and nation-making are mutually constitutive and that the domestic/international divide is far more ambiguous than is often suggested.[95] Looking at political geography, by its very nature, is a reflection on space and power and how these are conceived, and in turn how these conceptions lend themselves to competition between states and *representations* of

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[94] Charles Tilly, 'War Making and State Making as Organised Crime', in Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer and Theda Skocpol (eds.), *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 170

[95] Reem Abou-el-Fadl, *Foreign Policy as Nation Making: Turkey and Egypt in the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019)

competition between states at potentially formative moments. This is central to the way this research tries to approach the discourse of Arab-Iranian rivalry, and how it tries to locate the significance of the discourse at a particular moment in Gulf history.

As I reiterate in the next chapter, which tries most fundamentally to show, the Persian Gulf, as Anoushiravan Ehteshami has put it, "epitomises geopolitics".[96] It does so not only because its geography and geographical position has been deemed of vital commercial and strategic importance by global powers and hegemons for centuries, but also because territoriality in the era of modern statehood in the region has had a profoundly precarious reputation: space, and ownership of space, simply has not been settled, a result, at least in part, of the potent transnational identities which exist there, and the resultant discursive legacies that have formed from them. Crucially, I would suggest that it is not just clashing exclusivist identities that prevent processes of regional conciliation, whether on issues of territory or otherwise, but clashing geopolitical imaginations (and, of course, I recognise the link between these two). To be clear, my conception of geopolitics is that it includes both practice and discourse (or of course, alternatively, we could say that discourse is also *practical*), and I would caution against an approach that reduces geopolitics *purely* to representation and the construction of meanings, and not the actions that accompany them or the physical world they are laying claim to (more on this below).[97] In other words, I would not say that geopolitics is *only* discourse, unless, again, we are envisioning discourse as practice. I agree with Phil Kelly, that just as we cannot jettison critical geopolitical theory in its entirety because of its blind spots, likewise we cannot do so with the more classical, traditional geopolitical approaches either: "…productive linkages between the two may be located. Both possess value and should be maintained if the wider field of geopolitics is to be kept vibrant and contributive…"[98] Kelly goes on to point out that it is not that the physical world or physical geographies *don't* have any impact on foreign policy and state behaviour – they do, and there is simply too much evidence to deny this – but that these physical realities are made sense of and mediated through representative discourses, often those relating to identity.[99] On a parallel note, when looking at foreign policy, for instance, David Campbell's work has shown us that not only do states' identities and self-conceptions impact their foreign policy decisions, but those decisions and actions, and the experiences they

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[96] Anoushiravan Ehteshami, *Dynamics of Change in the Persian Gulf*, p. 15
[97] Gearóid Ó Tuathail, 'Critical Geopolitics: The Social Construction of Place and Space in the Practice of Statecraft', unpublished PhD thesis (1989), Department of Geography, Syracuse University
[98] Phil Kelly, 'A Critique of Critical Geopolitics', *Geopolitics*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Mar., 2006), p. 24
[99] Ibid, pp. 49-50

engender, in turn impact those self-definitions.[100] There is a dialectical relationship between these dynamics, and one should not be discounted for the other. Similarly, I would not say that the physical realities of the geographical world are insignificant, but that they figure intimately with geopolitical imaginations and representations. Chapter two illustrates why this complementary, intra-disciplinary approach is particularly important to this study, as the discourse of Arab-Iranian rivalry is conceptualised as a geopolitical imaginary representing geographical power during a period when radical regional changes were taking place and the structure of regional politics entered a new era. In other words, material and systemic changes in the regional distribution of power were occurring, but particular states, i.e. Iran and Iraq, saw these changes in particular ways, in the context of their more fundamental conceptions of themselves, the region itself and their respective positions within it, and this was reflected in their discourses.

This chapter will not provide a thorough exploration of the full spectrum of geopolitical thought. What I try to do is to point to some of the fruitful strands and interpretations of geopolitics theory and critical geography, those which have offered useful concepts and frameworks within which to think about the international politics of the Gulf and the discourse of Arab-Iranian rivalry. In particular, I look at geopolitical discourse as a form of imagination and claim to space, whereby the geographical world is constructed and represented according to states' understandings of their place within it, and a particular view of their own power and role. This is not just about naming and ownership, though these are also vital. It is also about imaginings of power and belonging, and a contest between visions of the world (or, in the case of this particular research topic, visions of the region).[101] Then I go on to explore the idea of role-conceptions, a perhaps under-utilised conceptual tool and framework, at least in the study of West Asia and the Gulf, to understanding how states see their position, orientation and purpose in their surrounding political spaces and political orders. I suggest that looking at role-conceptions ties in neatly to the lens of geopolitical imaginations, and that Ba'thist and Pahlavi discourses were replete with references to both *their* roles, but also what they saw as the role of the Gulf region.

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[100] David Campbell, *Writing Security*
[101] Neil Smith, 'Geography, Empire and Social Theory', *Progress in Human Geography*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (Dec., 1994), pp. 550-560

## Geopolitics as "Hard" Competition

There is, of course, one interpretation of, and approach to, geography and geopolitics amongst both political officials and scholars which sees geography as "innocent", a reference simply to the physical outcomes of tectonic and natural processes that have made the world as it appears to us, objective and fixed in its earthly reality, and awaiting human imposition.[102] In this imagination, geography is "out there", waiting to be built upon and acted upon, and thus geopolitics is simply the concrete interaction of different authorities and political communities over territories that they may be competing for (or simply interacting within). Harold and Margaret Sprout, writing in 1960, conceived international politics as fundamentally driven by location, physical space, resources, and geographical distance between interacting political communities, or what they together call "non-human factors of environment".[103] The writings of Colin Gray present geopolitics almost as the grand structure or framework – neutral, objective and empirical – *within which* inter-state phenomena take place, and so geopolitical analysis is purely the assessment of the natural, physical determinants of, and restrictions on, foreign policy and state behaviour.[104] For Gray, and others, there is the added dimension of geopolitics and geopolitical analysis being explicitly in the service of furthering American power and confronting Soviet Russia. On that note, and again similar to much realist scholarship, it is perhaps not surprising that this particular tradition of geopolitical thought has often been closely tied to state practice and state policy, as geopolitics becomes the lens through which to assess inter-state rivalry and competition on the earth's physical terrain, the global geographic distribution of power, and territorial contraction and expansion.[105] Andrew

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[102] Klaus Dodds, *Global Geopolitics: A Critical Introduction* (Oxfordshire, England; New York, New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 28

[103] Harold Sprout and Margaret Sprout, 'Geography and International Politics in an Era of Revolutionary Change', *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Mar., 1960), p. 146

[104] Colin S. Gray, *Geopolitics of the Nuclear Era: Heartland, Rimlands, and the Technological Revolution* (New York: Crane, Russak and Co., 1977); Colin S. Gray, *The Geopolitics of Super Power* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1988)
See also Saul Bernard Cohen, *Geography and Politics in a World Divided* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); Saul Bernard Cohen, *Geopolitics: The Geography of International Relations* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015); Geoffrey Sloan, *Geopolitics, Geography and Strategic History* (London: Routledge, 2017)
For an illustration of how this particular view of the relationship between geography and international politics has become especially prominent as of late, beyond the academic world, see Tim Marshall, *Prisoners of Geography: Ten Maps that Tell You Everything You Need to Know about Global Politics* (London: Elliott and Thompson Limited, 2016). Marshall's book went on to become an international best-seller.

[105] See, for instance, John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); George F. Kennan, *Memoirs, 1925-1950* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1967); George F. Kennan (published under the pseudonym 'X'), 'The Sources of Soviet Conduct', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 65, No. 4 (Spring, 1987), pp. 852-868.

Bacevich puts it succinctly when he states that geopolitics "centres on ordering competition between nations."[106] In this approach, geopolitical analysis becomes a matter of "problem-solving", enabling "relationships and institutions" of interest to "work smoothly by dealing effectively with particular sources of trouble."[107] Put simply, it has a policy orientation. It is no surprise, for instance, that former United States National Security Adviser and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger was said to have a fixation with geopolitical *realpolitik*, as he saw it, in the 1970s, and in some accounts is even credited with reviving the idea of geopolitics in the Euro-American world.[108] To some extent, in these sorts of approaches, "geopolitical" almost seems to be used synonymously with "regional", because of the focus on physical geography and land and because it is used to simply refer to the space within which inter-state politics takes place.[109] Antto Vihma summarises the range of these kinds of approaches nicely, describing it as a "'double identity'…split between geographers and IR scholars. For geographers, 'classical geopolitics' is often about the geographical conditions influencing international politics…for IR scholars, the essence of geopolitics is the study and practice of international power relations, typically with an emphasis on military power, within a defined geographic setting."[110]

In the case of Arab-Iranian rivalry and territorial competition between the major powers of the Gulf during the period in question, particularly Iran and Iraq, this traditional geopolitical approach would focus on the physical contest for territory, the geographical limitations and opportunities for different states, the specificities of the geography of the Gulf as a whole (lengths of coastlines for differing states, for example), and the ebb and flow of territorial expansion and contraction. Or, as Edward Luttwak would put it, the analytical emphasis would be on the state of zero-sum territorial competition along military and political lines among states.[111] When talking about the Gulf as a whole, this more conventional framework is something that certainly cannot be ignored. As Anwar Gargash puts it, "Geographic…realities

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[106] Andrew Bacevich, 'An Alternative to US World Dominance', *The Boston Globe*, 2nd Aug. 2019, accessed 3rd Aug. 2019, https://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/2019/08/02/alternative-world-dominance/UDeMOf7cmWTXpInH8nGNLO/story.html

[107] Robert W. Cox, 'Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Summer, 1981), pp. 128-129

[108] Leslie Hepple, 'The Revival of Geopolitics', *Political Geography Quarterly*, Vol. 5, No. 4, supplement issue (Oct., 1986), pp. S25-S26

[109] Gearóid Ó Tuathail, *Critical Geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 17

[110] Antto Vihma, 'Geoeconomic Analysis and the Limits of Critical Geopolitics: A New Engagement with Edward Luttwak', *Geopolitics*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Apr., 2018), p. 5

[111] Edward N. Luttwak, 'From Geopolitics to Geo-Economics: Logic of Conflict, Grammar of Commerce', *The National Interest*, No. 20 (Summer, 1990), pp. 17-23

are difficult to ignore…Plainly, the Gulf is split between large regional states and smaller states, and affected by geographic…facts that influence regional relations and produce mutual perceptions."[112] He goes on to point out the "Mistrust in regional relations, influenced by great variations in size…"[113] Geography is hugely internally differentiated in the Gulf region, both in terms of the physical sizes of different states and relative access to Gulf waters, and this undoubtedly effects the way states perceive their own capabilities, opportunities, limitations and relations with others. The next chapter will touch on this a bit more. Further, there was, indeed, a high level of competition for various territories in the Gulf between Iran and Iraq (as well as other regional states) during the period under study, amidst a major structural shift in regional politics. Direct imperial supervisory presence on the part of the British ended, the region was vacated by them, and a new geopolitical period began which saw the major regional powers attempting to position themselves as leading powers, and making claims to territory therein. The material geographical relations of power were undergoing extensive changes and inter-state competition escalated, with considerable structural effects on the future of the region. And so, to be clear, an approach which raises these points is neither insignificant nor analytically incorrect. It is, rather, unfinished and unable to present the entire political picture: it would be quite remarkable to look at the geopolitics of this period and overlook the employment of a conspicuous and powerful discourse on the part of two of the most significant states in the region, which explicitly sought to represent its political geography in mutually antagonistic ways. In addition, whilst indeed states of the region face differing geographical facts on the ground, it is vital to see how this effects their self-perceptions and in turn how these are articulated.

## Critical Geopolitics: Bringing in Representation

And this is where the importance of the critical geopolitical tradition comes through. Mehran Kamrava explains, correctly of course, that "There is an intimate connection between geography and power, with the geographic dimensions of power being often defined as "geopolitics"…"[114] The critical approach, it could be said, tries to gauge the other side of this dynamic: what are the political dimensions of geography? The critical approach stresses that

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[112] Anwar M. Gargash, 'Chapter Twelve: Prospects for Conflict and Cooperation: The Gulf toward the Year 2000', in Gary G. Sick and Lawrence G. Potter (eds.), *The Persian Gulf at the Millennium: Essays in Economy, Security, and Religion* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), p. 321
[113] Ibid
[114] Mehran Kamrava, 'The Great Game in West Asia', p. 1

the practice of geopolitics is not merely about the realities and conditions of the physical world and the geological terrain on which inter-state interaction takes place, but about how these lands and worlds are envisioned, talked about and understood by different political actors. In other words, the world and its various spaces are mediated by conceptions of identity, history, culture, values, and more. Gearóid Ó Tuathail and John Agnew describe this grand process as "spatialisation", whereby international politics and the geographical spaces within which it plays out are represented as particular kinds of worlds and places and made meaningful.[115] This, as they describe, is done through discourse, which, by borrowing from Hayward Alker and David Sylvan, they see as the world of meaning within which speech, texts and acts are made sense of and understood (as opposed to merely the speech, texts and acts themselves, to reiterate what was mentioned in the introduction).[116] Geopolitics, therefore, is discursive,[117] and the critical tradition aims to challenge some of the assumptions of realist and neo-realist theories of international relations which see geopolitical power, geopolitical behaviour, state security and foreign policy as defined purely by material capabilities and considerations, which are fixed and empirically objectivated by political actors. I should make the point, however, that even a lens which appreciates the role of discursive practice can fall into a "great-power" perspective trap, illustrated by Ted Fertik's claim, for example, that "Geopolitics is the discourse of the balance of power between leading states on a global scale."[118] I do not see why this has to be the case: as suggested above, it can be said that all states have geopolitics and geopolitical visions, and the critical geopolitical tradition gives us the tools to explore this. It is no surprise, along these lines, that some of the formative points in the development of critical geopolitics have come in the context and aftermath of significant moments in international politics post-Cold War. This is interesting when we consider that critical geopolitics addresses both scholarship and claims made by states. With the former, critical political geographers aim to emphasise representational processes in foreign policy, and with the latter, there is an attempt to hold to account truth-claims made about the world and its geography. It is strikingly clear, therefore, just how significant, and even urgent, critical geopolitics can be in political analysis. David Campbell, for instance, in 1993, showed us that the construction of geographically

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[115] Gearóid Ó Tuathail and John Agnew, 'Geopolitics and Discourse', p. 190
For an interesting exploration of some of the geographical assumptions and interpretative processes which have come to spatialise the modern world, see Martin W. Lewis and Kären E. Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).
[116] See Hayward R. Alker and David Sylvan, 'Some Contributions of Discourse Analysis to Political Science', *Kosmopolis*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (1994), pp. 5-25
[117] Derek Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations* (Cambridge, MA; Oxford: Blackwell, 1994)
[118] Ted Fertik, 'Geopolitics for the Left: Getting Out from under the "Liberal International Order"', *n+1*, 11th Mar. 2019, accessed 12th Mar. 2019 https://nplusonemag.com/online-only/online-only/geopolitics-for-the-left/

separate entities, starkly divided, and values associated with those entities, was central to the United States' understanding of the Gulf War and in giving meaning to its launching of the campaign.[119] And Simon Dalby has written about the post-9/11 geopolitical environment, which he sees as characterised by an association of particular geographical spaces with designated friends or foes, and insecurities.[120] Contrary to the charge that is often levelled against critical theoretical approaches more broadly in the social sciences, we certainly cannot describe this as being "divorced from the real world".

Geopolitical traditions such as these, therefore, share a fundamental interest in the meanings given to particular places, and the roles of these conceptualisations in then lending meaning to state actions. They have formed a crucial component of the critical geopolitical tradition which this study draws from, and this research hopes to expand on them and to address some potential blindspots. Even much of the critical geopolitical scholarship, for instance, pays relatively little attention to the place of identity in geopolitics and state geopolitical practice. In other words, the discursive construction and representation of geographical spaces is explored but the role of state identity and self-perception in mediating, articulating or constituting this construction is not touched upon. The broader point about what geopolitical discourse *is*, however, of course still stands, but this study is interested in looking at how geopolitics and identity are tightly bound up with one another, not necessarily by going into detail about the role of expressions of geographical difference in the construction of Ba'thist and Pahlavi identities (which is outside the scope of this piece), but by looking at how the discourse of Arab-Iranian rivalry brings geopolitics and identity together as a geopolitical imaginary, not just in the sense of a projection of identity across space and territory, but in terms of how space and spatial power are conceptualised.

I should mention that this research certainly does not make a claim to exploring the "totality" of Ba'thist and Pahlavi geopolitical discourses during the period in question. Leaving aside the question of whether this is a feasible pursuit or not,[121] what this study does try to do is to look at the ways in which Iranian and Iraqi political elites and actors constructed and articulated some of the most vital foreign policy and regional practices of the period along the lines of

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[119] David Campbell, *Politics Without Principle: Sovereignty, Ethics, and the Narratives of the Gulf War* (Boulder; London: Lynne Rienner, 1993)
[120] Simon Dalby, 'Imperialism, Domination, Culture: The Continued Relevance of Critical Geopolitics', *Geopolitics*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (Sept., 2008), pp. 413-436
[121] Emile Badarin, *Palestinian Political Discourse: Between Exile and Occupation* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), p. 15

Arab-Iranian difference and confrontation. It is with this that the critical geopolitical lens can be of great value.

For instance, as this chapter tries to show, and as many scholars have pointed out, space, territory and identity are intimately linked (and this is not necessarily just a feature of modernity and the era of nation-statehood).[122] In other words, physical geography and the physical world are given meaning, a meaning which corresponds closely to a sense of how particular states or political communities which are claiming those geographies and spaces see themselves. And further, this works the other way around as well: it is not just that territories and spaces have meanings and identities associated with them; identities in turn have geographies associated with them and are often constructed and articulated in relation to a particular geographic reference.[123] David Newman even argues that the formation of national identity is in itself "a function of the attachment to territory…," as "Landscapes are imbued with a symbolic and mythical characteristic."[124] The idea of territory in particular, as Anssi Paasi has described, is significant because "Several important dimensions of social life and social power come together in territory: material elements such as land, functional elements like control of space, symbolic dimensions like social identity."[125] Whilst this study is not so much concerned with *why* Iran and Iraq, as regional powers, pursued territorial ambitions during the period in question (in other words, why particular territories were deemed so significant and why actions were taken to claim them), and whilst the respective constitutions of Iranian and Iraqi nationalisms and the place of territory therein are beyond its scope, Paasi's observation, building on the work of Pierre Hassner, captures the multi-dimensional significance of the notion of territory to social and political organisation, including, most importantly for this research, the link to identity and power.[126] In other words, what this research tries to do, in part, is to show that there is an inherently spatial and geopolitical dimension to the articulation of state identities, and the discourse of Arab-Iranian rivalry is testament to this.

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[122] David Newman, 'Real Spaces, Symbolic Spaces: Interrelated Notions of Territory in the Arab-Israeli Conflict', in Paul F. Diehl (ed.), *A Road Map to War: Territorial Dimensions of International Conflict* (Nashville, Tenn.; London: Vanderbilt University Press, 1999), p. 4
See also Robert David Sack, *Human Territoriality: Its Theory and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986)
[123] Simon Dalby, 'Calling 911: Geopolitics, Security and America's New War', in Stanley D. Brunn (ed.), *11 September and Its Aftermath: The Geopolitics of Terror* (London; Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2004), pp. 61-62
[124] David Newman, 'Real Spaces, Symbolic Spaces', p. 4
[125] Anssi Paasi, 'Chapter 8: Territory', in John Agnew, Katharyne Mytchell, and Gerard Toal (Gearóid Ó Tuathail) (eds.), *A Companion to Political Geography*, p. 109
[126] See Pierre Hassner, 'Obstinate and Obsolete: Non-Territorial Transnational Forces versus the European Territorial State', in Ola Tunander, Pavel K. Baev and Victoria Ingrid Einagel (eds.), *Geopolitics in Post-Wall Europe: Security, Territory and Identity* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), p. 57

Indeed, the importance of, and attachment to, territory, and territoriality as a focus of political organisation, increased exponentially with the rise of the modern nation-state, and so it is central to claims of statehood, claims of sovereignty and authority, and claims of legitimacy.[127] As Shahram Chubin and Charles Tripp have put it, under "the territorial nation-state – territory has also taken on a mythic or symbolic value. It has become incorporated into people's ideas about their identity…"[128] One could draw a link here with the Gulf in the late-1960s-to-mid-1970s period. As the Gulf was becoming sub-regionalised (developing as a semi-autonomous subregion with internal dynamics and geopolitical significance distinct from the wider West Asia region around it, as discussed in chapter two) and localised with the departure of the British, regional players arguably saw this as the region's official "entry" into the modern international system of independent, territorialised nation-states. Claims to territory and sovereignty (which are inseparable) would gain heightened importance in this scenario, tied as they are to notions of recognition and legitimacy.[129] I would actually take a different view to that of Chubin and Tripp, writing in 1993, when they suggested that the end of the Cold War would be a turning point in the Gulf for the consolidation of "state-based nationalism" and its infusion with territorial issues, and that it was that moment which represented "the early phases of self-definition and self-identification..."[130] In a sense, Chubin and Tripp were perhaps suggesting that the sub-regionalisation of the Gulf would occur after the end of the Cold War, with its consequent effects on perceptions of identity, regional politics and territorial claims. As I try to show in the next chapter, I actually think the period from the late-1960s resembles this moment more accurately, opening up the region to internal contestation and battles for territorial legitimacy, together with intense nationalisms (but this is of course not to deny the huge ramifications of the fall of the Soviet Union on the politics of the region). At the very least, this is certainly the case for Iran and Iraq, two of the most significant states in the region. The discourse of Arab-Iranian rivalry and its competing claims to space, as we will see over the course of this study, is a fantastic illustration of the territoriality of nationalism (and vice versa, of course). To be clear, in this research I am less interested in exploring the role of territory in Ba'thist and Pahlavi nationalisms than I am in seeing what exactly their nationalist

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[127] John Agnew, 'The Territorial Trap: The Geographical Assumptions of International Relations Theory', *Review of International Political Economy*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Spring, 1994), pp. 53-80

[128] Shahram Chubin & Charles Tripp, 'Domestic Politics and Territorial Disputes in the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula', *Survival*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (Winter, 1993), p. 3

[129] For the link between territory and sovereignty, see Colin Flint and Peter J. Taylor, *Political Geography: World-Economy, Nation-State and Locality* (Milton: Routledge, 2018)

[130] Shahram Chubin & Charles Tripp, 'Domestic Politics and Territorial Disputes in the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula', pp. 7-8

discourses were *doing* as particular kinds of geopolitical visions, and how territorial claims were articulated in this regard.

Indeed, scholars have pointed out the potent nationalism which soaked regional rivalries and territorial contestation, colouring claims to domination and claims to particular lands. Shirin Hunter makes the interesting point that regional competition between the 1950s and 1970s coincided with the rise of nationalism on both sides of the Gulf, and so this intensified and politicised the perceived cultural and historical dimensions of such rivalries.[131] Likewise, Rouhollah Ramazani argues that modern nationalism added a particularly toxic element to regional conflicts, and that whilst pre-existing attitudes of mistrust and suspicion may have existed amongst political elites and publics, the consolidation of nation-states and nationalist projects systematically politicised these attitudes and projected them onto regional power struggles.[132] And in the case of Iran specifically, Shahram Chubin and Sepehr Zabih have pointed out that the Gulf has always been strongly linked with "Persian nationalist and cultural mythology" and in much of the national imagination symbolises "Iran's perceptions of its past greatness and historical heritage."[133] They suggest, therefore, that Iran's foreign policy in the Gulf under the Shah was largely motivated by nationalist urges.[134] Farzad Cyrus Sharifi-Yazdi also makes the important observation that as British power declined, Arab and Iranian nationalisms which were previously targeted towards Britain as the extra-territorial imperial power then locked on to each other and regional issues were therefore articulated through this lens.[135] As chapter four goes on to show in the case of Ba'thist and Pahlavi discourses, I would slightly reformulate this and argue that Arab and Iranian nationalisms did indeed lock onto each other but still made reference to, and associated each other with, "colonial" powers in the attempt to delegitimise each other. More broadly, whilst these observations are crucial to understanding how nationalist discourses and nationalist imaginations punctuated regional politics at the time, this research tries to take this slightly further. Andrew Latham talks about how the end of the Cold War effectively led to "a new geopolitical imaginary" amongst political actors and officials in the United States, and I believe a very similar claim can be made for Ba'thist Iraq and Pahlavi Iran in the late-1960s-to-mid-1970s period in reference to the Gulf

[131] Shireen T. Hunter, 'Iran and Syria: From Hostility to Limited Alliance', in Hooshang Amirahmadi and Nader Entessar (eds.), *Iran and the Arab World* (London: Macmillan, 1993), p. 198
[132] Rouhollah K. Ramazani, *The Persian Gulf*, p. 34
[133] Shahram Chubin and Sepehr Zabih, *The Foreign Relations of Iran*, p. 194
[134] Ibid
[135] Farzad Cyrus Sharifi-Yazdi, *Arab-Iranian Rivalry in the Persian Gulf*, p. 54

region.[136] I would describe it at the very least as the reawakening and consolidation of a previously muted geopolitical imaginary in that the key actors had changed, or at least more specifically, *the* regional custodian had departed, and remaining actors such as Iran and Iraq felt a renewed sense of self-importance, and the shared space they inhabited was in a moment of huge flux.

## **Identity in Geopolitics**

At this point it may be worth exploring what exactly is meant by identity, and where a particular theorisation of it fits into this research. To reiterate what was mentioned in the previous chapter, much of the work that has been done on exclusionary discourses in the Persian Gulf and broader West Asia region has conceptualised such representations within frameworks of identity (both in terms of identity-construction as well as expressions of identity), cultural dynamics and/or nationalism. And to be clear, far from rejecting or overlooking these dimensions, this study seeks to complement such works by suggesting that in addition to talking about discourses of national, ethnic and cultural rivalry and enmity in these ways, we could also see them as expressions of geopolitical claims and imaginations. Perhaps even further, and on a more ontological note, scholars of West Asia and the Gulf could be pushed to re-evaluate how we think about state identities in the first place.

I would argue that the "sprawl of scholarship" on identity (both generally and within West Asia scholarship, and largely within, but not limited to, constructivist literature) has not necessarily paid much attention to issues of "conceptual clarity".[137] That is, when positing identity as a fundamental feature of international politics, it is not always clear what scholars mean by the actual term. To clarify, this is most definitely not a call to fix a single definition or core meaning in the realm of international relations to be used across differing contexts, empirical or otherwise (my own suggestion of honing in on the idea of role-conceptions can be found below).[138] Rather, identity seems to appear as the kind of "essentially contested concept" which Walter Gallie famously wrote on, whereby its proper use and definitional core are up for

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[136] Andrew A. Latham, 'China in the Contemporary American Geopolitical Imagination', p. 140

[137] Rawi Abdelal, Yoshiko M. Herrera, Alastair Iain Johnston and Rose McDermott, 'Identity as a Variable', *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (Dec., 2006), p. 695

[138] For nonetheless valuable attempts to do so, see, in addition to the Abdelal et al. article, Jens Bartelson, *The Critique of the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Glenn Chafetz, Michael Spirtas and Benjamin Frankel, 'Introduction: Tracing the Influence of Identity on Foreign Policy', *Security Studies*, Vol. 8, Nos. 2–3 (Dec., 1998), pp. 7–22; Marc Lynch, 'Abandoning Iraq: Jordan's Alliances and the Politics of State Identity', *Security Studies*, Vol. 8, Nos. 2–3 (Dec., 1998), pp. 347–388.

debate.[139] Crucially, in Gallie's formulation, these "disputes" are characterised and sustained by a range of "perfectly respectable arguments and evidence."[140] Therefore, rather than despairing at the lack of fixity, scholars of international relations, including those writing on West Asia and the Gulf, should see this as an opportunity for conceptual plurality, lending itself to a variety of case studies and empirical puzzles. But because of this very fluidity, when scholars take the concept of identity and its "definition" for granted, rather than something to be broken down, this can be unhelpful. Most commonly, and understandably, identities and identity discourses in West Asia are often talked about in the context of self/other constructions, whereby "a sense of Self is socially constructed with or against certain Others."[141] This understanding of identity emphasises interaction between and amongst political actors, mutual constitution, and how cultural meaning and representations fit into this, and from which a sense of "who" and "what" you are can be derived. As Fred Lawson suggests, this relatively newer scholarship looking at "the construction of rival cultural formations" in the Gulf as a source of hostility and as an ideational legitimation of conflict has indeed added to our understanding of the region's international politics.[142]

But what can be added to such analyses, and such approaches to identity formation and inter-state interaction, is an assessment of the place of geographical space and conceptions thereof precisely *in these* discourses and cultural formations. My argument is that embedded in these sorts of discourses, exemplified by the face-off between Pahlavi and Ba'thist ultra-nationalisms, are geopolitical imaginations and claims to space. This is significant because it suggests that notions of identity are not only political, but they are also *geo*-political, and both the construction and the representation of state identities, nationalisms, and exclusionary political cultures contain within them visions of regional order and contestations of geographical power. As this research suggests, such discourses became heightened in a period where in the Gulf, this geography of power was going through a major transformation.

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[139] W.B. Gallie, 'Essentially Contested Concepts', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, New Series, Vol. 56 (1955-1956), pp. 167-198

[140] Ibid, p. 169

[141] Felix Berenskoetter, 'Identity in International Relations', in Robert A. Denemark (ed.), *The International Studies Encyclopedia, Vol. VI* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p. 3602
To see how this is applied fruitfully in the Middle East/Gulf context, see Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, *The International Politics of the Persian Gulf*.

[142] Fred Lawson, 'From Here We Begin: A Survey of Scholarship on the International Relations of the Gulf', in Matteo Legrenzi (ed.), *Security in the Gulf: Historical Legacies and Future Prospects* (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 21

It is also worth mentioning at this point that there is an important critique particularly of more conventional constructivist conceptualisations of identity which risk designating singular identities to singular states. Ted Hopf refers to this as "conventional" constructivism's assumption "that it can specify a set of conditions under which one can expect to see one identity or another."[143] Mark Hoffman describes this as "minimal foundationalism".[144] Already touched upon in the introductory chapter, the more critical constructivist literature rightly raises the possibility that states are comprised of competing conceptions and claims of identity, fluidity of identity, and are characterised by internal identity differentiation, rendering the notion of "uncovering" *an* identity a flawed one. Attaching unitary, fixed identities to entire states seems theoretically defective according to this account.[145] As Paul Gilroy puts it, albeit in a slightly different disciplinary context, we need to recognise "the instability and mutability of identities which are always unfinished, always being remade."[146] Indeed, if this is the case, then why talk about Ba'thist identity and Pahlavi identity in their respective singular forms?[147] Surely there were multiple conceptions and articulations of identity within such expansive and wide-reaching states and political groupings. Indeed, in a sense, this piece of research actually *reinforces* this notion, and this should become clear in later chapters as some of the tensions within the identity discourses and geopolitical claims of Ba'thist Iraq and Pahlavi Iran are explicated. But some also point to the fact that, for instance, both the Ba'thist and Pahlavi states, and their policies and discourses, had Islamic, or Islamicised, dimensions, in addition to their ethnocentricities. This is quite striking: neither the Ba'thists (Arabists) nor the Pahlavians (Iranianists) were alien to using language referring to Islam and Muslims, and this is particularly interesting in the case of the Pahlavi state (and seemingly picked out less in the

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[143] Ted Hopf, 'The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory', p. 183

[144] Mark Hoffman, 'Restructuring, Reconstruction, Reinscription, Rearticulation: Four Voices in Critical International Theory', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Spring, 1991), p. 170

[145] Ted Hopf, 'The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory', pp. 171-200
Hopf's article is a good account of this intra-constructivist debate.
See also Bulent Aras and Aylin Gorener, 'National Role Conceptions and Foreign Policy Orientation: The Ideational Bases of the Justice and Development Party's Foreign Policy Activism in the Middle East', *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Mar., 2010), pp. 73-92

[146] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993), p. xi

[147] In the case of Pahlavi Iran, for instance, Ali Mirsepassi offers a striking re-interpretation of cultural discourses, conceptions of modernity and identity politics amongst Pahlavi elites. See Ali Mirsepassi, *Iran's Quiet Revolution: The Downfall of the Pahlavi State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019). Zhand Shakibi's forthcoming work will add to this growing body of literature. See Zhand Shakibi, *Pahlavi Iran and the Politics of Occidentalism: The Shah and the Rastakhiz Party* (I.B. Tauris, 2019, forthcoming at time of writing).
On Ba'thist Iraq, and specifically the Islamic vernacular in Saddam's discourse which became more prominent towards the period of the Gulf War, there are also some instructive works. See, for instance, Ofra Bengio, *Saddam's Word*; James Piscatori (ed.), *Islamic Fundamentalisms and the Gulf Crisis* (Chicago: Fundamentalism Project, American Academy of Sciences, 1991).

scholarship), considering that the Iranianist identity was partly about the elevation of *pre-Islamic* Iran, as already mentioned, and a certain elevation of the non-Islamic over the Islamic. This seems to be little talked about, and the conventional juxtaposition of pre- and post-revolutionary Iranian state identity is of course often one that is made out to be Persian nationalist/ethnocentrist vs. religious/Islamic.[148] Primary documentation shows multiple instances of the Shah using the language of Islam, Islamic nations, Islamic unity and cooperation, and Muslim brotherhood.[149] Saddam, meanwhile, began adopting a more explicitly Islamic tone towards and during the Second Gulf War, and indeed it reached its peak during this particular period, with him adopting the name "Abdullah" (meaning "servant of God" and possibly an allusion to the name of the Prophet Muhammad's father), and talking about his "Islamic mission".[150] James Piscatori describes this as his "turn towards Islam" at the time of the Gulf War.[151] So what consequences does this have for the notion of a singular Ba'thist and singular Pahlavi identity? Do we reduce these articulations merely to political calculation and instrumentalism, or do they suggest a greater sense of ambivalence and fluidity in these states' identity conceptions?

Whilst a thorough discussion of this issue is beyond the scope of this research, it clearly has ramifications for the study, considering one of its major claims is that Iraq and Iran made claims to space based on strongly-held self-perceptions. So whilst I agree with the critical constructivist claim, and indeed believe it to be both conceptually and empirically vital, I also sympathise with those scholars who have argued that the Ba'thist and Pahlavi states were constituted by notions of identity and identity *discourses* which were dominant and thickly articulated *especially at particular historical moments*, despite, indeed, strong evidence that there were internal variations and tensions (and this is certainly a burgeoning field of study at the time of writing in the case of Pahlavi Iran). Of course, therefore, this is not to deny that there indeed could have been competing and co-existing conceptions of Pahlavi-Iranian and Ba'thist-Iraqi state identities and nationalist imaginations, but it is more a recognition that there

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[148] For an excavation of the revolutionary state's Islamic cosmology, see Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, 'Islamic Utopian Romanticism and the Foreign Policy Culture of Iran', *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Fall, 2005), pp. 265-292.

[149] See, for instance, 'The Shah Interviewed by UPI Correspondent', *Ettela'at*, 21st April 1966, published in Joint Publications Research Service Reports (JPRS), Press Information Report on Iran, No. 2, where he talks about collectivism among "Islamic nations"; or 'Two Facets of the Shahanshah's Trip', *Tehran Mosavvar Magazine*, 10th June 1966, published in Joint Publications Research Service Reports (JPRS), Press Information Report on Iran, No. 3, which refers to "bonds of friendship with Islamic nations".

[150] Ofra Bengio, *Saddam's Word*, pp. 37, p. 183

[151] James Piscatori, 'Religion and Realpolitik: Islamic Responses to the Gulf War', in James Piscatori (ed.), *Islamic Fundamentalisms and the Gulf Crisis*, pp. 2-3

were dominant discourses and dominant conceptions, which have already been described, among policymakers and state officials, *particularly* during the period under study. I believe this is particularly the right approach to take with the Ba'thist and Pahlavi states because they were "narrowly-based regimes" with close insider groups and a tightly-constructed and severely-limited political-cultural, culture-articulating, and policy-articulating elite, even restricted to just a few individuals.[152] In regards to Ba'thist Iraq, which we could define as a revolutionary, pan-Arab, party-based regime dominated by army officers, Chubin and Tripp describe how "The coups d'état which brought the Ba'th back to power in July 1968…created a new group of 'insiders', narrowly defined even by Iraqi standards…real power was seen to be increasingly in the hands of Saddam Hussein…and his associates who were mastering the machinery of the state…This group was characterised by a similar background in the conspiratorial and persecuted Ba'th of the late 1950s."[153] And in the case of Iran, a nominal constitutional monarchy operating under parliamentary rule (but which in practice by the time of the period in question effectively saw the Shah in control of governance and the parliament sidelined), Faisal al-Saud writes how "The nature of government in Iran…left little room for non-governmental institutions to play a significant role in foreign policy-making. Efforts to find a significant role for institutions such as political parties, pressure groups, the media and the bureaucracy proved fruitless. Foreign policy-making was largely centralised in the hands of the Shah and his close associates."[154] All of this, of course, is not to conflate foreign policy-making with state identity or identity discourses, constructions and articulations; and it is certainly not to claim that political culture is reducible to the realm of political elites or the state. Rather, I would argue that exploring the articulation of the geopolitical imaginations of Ba'thist Iraq and Pahlavi Iran during the period of time under study, as well as questions of state identity more broadly, can be done effectively without sacrificing analytical rigour by recognising dominant conceptions in state identity discourses amongst closely-knit and tightly controlled political circles.

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[152] Brent E. Sasley, 'Studying Middle Eastern International Relations Through IR Theory', p. 21
[153] Shahram Chubin and Charles Tripp, *Iran and Iraq at War*, pp. 15-16
[154] Faisal bin Salman al-Saud, *Iran, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf: Power Politics in Transition 1968-1971* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2003), p. x
See also Shahram Chubin and Sepehr Zabih, *The Foreign Relations of Iran*, pp. 11-17, from which al-Saud draws from.

## Geopolitical Imaginations: Envisioning Space

And so what do I mean exactly by a geopolitical imagination and why do I think it is useful as a way to think about the discourse of Arab-Iranian rivalry? In some ways, as recent geopolitics scholarship has shown, geopolitics itself *is* to some extent about imagination, or the envisioning and conceptualising of space. For John Agnew and Simon Dalby, geopolitics is about how "The world is actively spatialised, divided up, labelled, sorted out into a hierarchy of places of greater or lesser 'importance'… This process provides the geographical framing within which political elites and mass publics act in the world in pursuit of their own identities and interests."[155] And then again for Dalby, geopolitics is also about "the designation of spaces as theirs and ours, the distinctions between hostile and friendly places…"[156] Geopolitics, therefore, at a fundamental level, almost becomes a process of constant imagining and re-imagining. Whereas Agnew and Dalby's formulations suggest that a particular kind of geopolitical reasoning provides the geographical framework for the pursuit of identities and interests, I would suggest that this geopolitical reasoning is in some sense also a reflection of states' self-understandings in the first place. The geographical world, therefore, comes to be a central part of how states understand themselves and their roles in the political world, and goes through a process of interpretation and representation. This is where I think much of the value of the concept of "geopolitical imagination" lies: it weaves together the significance of identity with geography and geopolitics. The discourse of Arab-Iranian rivalry demonstrates that when states seem to be talking about themselves, and indeed an "other", they may also be talking about the physical world around them and articulating a vision for their surrounding regional order.

For Aylin Güney and Nazif Mandaci, writing on Turkey, geopolitical imagination "refers to how countries construct the world," and they argue, rightfully in my opinion, that it can be "a key analytical tool" in understanding the geopolitical outlooks and foreign and security policies of different states.[157] Geopolitical imaginations provide a framework for understanding how states "depict their geopolitical surroundings, how they define security based on representations of danger…," and "the identification of current and potential allies and

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[155] John A. Agnew, *Geopolitics*, p. 3; Simon Dalby, 'Calling 911', p. 61
[156] Simon Dalby, 'Calling 911', p. 61
[157] Aylin Güney and Nazif Mandaci, 'The Meta-Geography of the Middle East and North Africa in Turkey's New Geopolitical Imagination', p. 433

enemies…," amongst other features.[158] In other words, it is about the construction and representation of the space and the world surrounding a particular political actor. The inclusion of notions of security is worth picking up briefly, as this will form a considerable part of later chapters. I would argue that security is undoubtedly a vital component in any given geopolitical imagination because security is always "mapped": friends and enemies, threats and opportunities, risks and safety, must be located "somewhere". In other words, security as well becomes geographically "imagined". I am not so much interested in discussing the foreign and defence policies of the Ba'thist and Pahlavi states, or contextualising them within Third World security considerations,[159] as I am in looking at how Ba'thist and Pahlavi geopolitical discourse talked about and imagined security in the Gulf. The geopolitical imaginaries of these two states, in other words, incorporated ideas of security. Writing on Cold War-era U.S. national security policy, John Lewis Gaddis famously talked about the notion of "geopolitical codes", or representations which informed particular strategic assumptions, and even though he did not refer to the concept of a "geopolitical imagination" himself, his idea of "codes" has been incorporated into much critical geopolitics scholarship, including those writing specifically on geopolitical imaginations, and more fundamentally he demonstrated the importance of constructions of meaning.[160] Gaddis's work undoubtedly pre-empted some of the work on geopolitical imaginations as he suggested that national security policy was intimately tied to representations and significations of the world. Similarly, in his discussion of China in contemporary U.S. political discourse, Andrew Latham describes geopolitical imagination, or "geopolitical imaginary", as a set of "basic geopolitical assumptions, representations, and designations…that…constitutes a basic interpretive framework (or imaginary) that shapes the way foreign policy officials understand – and thus act in – the world."[161] Geopolitical imagination, therefore, refers to how states see and talk about the world around them,

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[158] Ibid

See also Gertjan Dijkink, *National Identity and Geopolitical Visions: Maps of Pride and Pain* (London; New York: Routledge, 1996); Colin Flint, *Introduction to Geopolitics* (London: Routledge, 2006)

[159] There is a rich body of literature on the specificities of security in the Third World, particularly focusing on ideas of "regime security", and this could certainly apply to Ba'thist Iraq and Pahlavi Iran. See, for instance, Mohammed Ayoob, *The Third World Security Predicament: State Making, Regional Conflict, and the International System* (Boulder; London: Lynne Rienner, 1995); Edward E. Azar and Chung-in Moon, *National Security in the Third World: The Management of Internal and External Threats* (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1988); Steven R. David, 'Explaining Third World Alignment', *World Politics*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (Jan., 1991), pp. 233-256; Brian L. Job (ed.), *The Insecurity Dilemma: National Security of Third World States* (Boulder, Colo.; London: Lynne Rienner, 1992).

[160] John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, p. 8

See also Aylin Güney and Fulya Gökcan, 'The 'Greater Middle East' as a 'Modern' Geopolitical Imagination in American Foreign Policy', *Geopolitics*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Feb., 2010), pp. 22-38. For Güney and Gökcan, geopolitical codes are central to the idea of geopolitical imaginations.

[161] Andrew A. Latham, 'China in the Contemporary American Geopolitical Imagination', p. 138

characterised by a series of markers and signifiers, and it can provide a useful lens for understanding the political, discursive and military interactions between Ba'thist Iraq and Pahlavi Iran, as well as their respective geopolitical outlooks individually. The discourse of Arab-Iranian rivalry reflected not just how these states saw themselves and each other, but how they saw the Gulf region at a moment of major transformation, and their role within the changing and newly-developing regional order. Of course, not only is this theoretically intriguing, but, as Pinar Bilgin illustrates, it reminds us that the way states construct the regions they are situated in is tightly connected to the concrete foreign policies they pursue in and towards their regions and their understandings of regional security.[162] As she puts it succinctly, this is the link between "geopolitical inventions" and "practices of security".[163] The critical geopolitical lens, therefore, certainly cannot be accused of lacking political, material or "real-world" urgency.

**The "Roles" of States**

And I would complete the theoretical lens to be used for this research with the idea of role-conceptions. This is intimately tied to what has already been mentioned in regards to state identity more broadly and representations of the surrounding geographical world of the Ba'thist and Pahlavi states. The notion of role-conceptions has already been referred to but here it can be unpacked slightly more. I would say that the idea of role-conceptions could have a more significant place in studies of the international relations of the Gulf and West Asia more broadly, and seems to be utilised rarely. It is especially useful and significant both in relation to explorations of identity and in relation to ideas of geopolitical imaginaries, and I would argue it helps to both complement these different epistemological fields and possibly fill in any gaps as well. Richard Adigbuo even suggests that looking at role-conceptions can help to overcome some of the narrow Euro-American-oriented tendencies of international relations theory by giving more importance to how the experiences, histories and self-perceptions of different political actors effect their political actions (and in the case of states, their foreign policies).[164] More fundamentally, and for the central purpose of this research, looking at the role-conceptions of the Ba'thist and Pahlavi states in a sense acts as a bridging mechanism between

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[162] Pinar Bilgin, *Regional Security in the Middle East: A Critical Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 13-15
[163] Pinar Bilgin, 'Whose 'Middle East'?'
[164] Richard Adigbuo, 'Beyond IR Theories: The Case for National Role Conceptions', *Politikon*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Apr., 2007), pp. 83-97

identity and geopolitics: that is, as stated before, when we talk about a state's perception of itself, we should also be talking about its perception of where it fits in the surrounding order. When we talk about a state's identity, we are also in some way talking about its sense of *purpose*. Looking at role conceptions essentially reminds us that identities have a geopolitical dimension. It should become apparent that the role-conception framework is significant throughout this research, but particularly for chapter four, and my argument is that the way Ba'thist Iraq and Pahlavi Iran articulated their roles in the Gulf was intimately tied to notions of Arab-Iranian rivalry and difference.

Kal Holsti is of course one of the pre-eminent theorists associated with investigating the idea of role-conceptions. For Holsti, the perceptions and preferences of state elites are significantly shaped by that state's foreign policy role-conception, which in turn is impacted by history, geography, political culture, and so on.[165] He argues that role-conceptions are about behaviour and performance, the fulfilment of ostensible duties, norms and expectations, which are historically and culturally constructed.[166] Ehteshami and Hinnebusch suggest that role-conception is about "a distinctive place or mission" within a surrounding political community or political order, thus bringing together notions of both position and performance.[167] Naomi Wish, similarly, argues that "National role conceptions are defined as foreign policy makers' perceptions of their nations' positions in the international system,"[168] although I would disagree with the idea that it has to be limited to foreign policy makers, and for her the emphasis seems to be on place, rather than performance. Adigbuo is certainly right, therefore, that the role concept has been defined in a range of ways, and that is "because role can assume multiple meanings: a contribution or function, an influence or impact, an expected behaviour, policy decision or a rank."[169]

In this research I would like to specifically approach role-conception with two aspects in mind. Firstly, I would approach it with an emphasis on place and mission. What I mean here is that role-conception refers to a state's sense of both where it stands and where it belongs in a surrounding political order on the one hand, and what its purpose is within that order on the

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[165] See K.J. Holsti, *International Politics: A Framework for Analysis* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1995)

[166] K.J. Holsti, 'National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy', *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Sep., 1970), pp. 238-239

[167] Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Raymond A. Hinnebusch, *Syria and Iran*, p. 14

[168] Naomi Bailin Wish, 'Foreign Policy Makers and Their National Role Conceptions', *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (Dec., 1980), p. 533

[169] Richard Adigbuo, 'Beyond IR Theories', p. 89

other. This brings together notions of belonging, status, prestige and practice, all of which are strikingly apparent in Ba'thist and Pahlavi discourses. Both Iran and Iraq had a very powerful sense of where they stood in the Gulf order, particularly as it was changing, but they also had a forceful perception of what they were meant to do by virtue of that position, and this perception was penetrated by notions of Arab-Iranian competition and difference. Secondly, I would explicitly argue that role-conceptions are geopolitical in their orientation: a state sees its place and purpose within a larger environment and within a larger space, and this space in turn is seen in particular ways. In other words, role-conceptions feed into geopolitical imaginaries, but geopolitical imaginaries also help to constitute role-conceptions. Again, this becomes very apparent when we look at Ba'thist and Pahlavi discourses. When we talk about role-conceptions in this instance, therefore, we are really talking about *geopolitical* role-conceptions.

## Conclusion: Imagined Spaces, Imagined Roles

The theoretical tradition of geopolitics has a rather mixed reputation, and certainly what could be described as a dark underside. However, the breadth of geopolitics scholarship, and particularly the critical strands which engage with the claims of power, grapple with discursive assumptions, and attend to matters of representation, leave us with a rich body of work to make use of. This chapter has laid out some of the key directions in both conventional, materialist traditions of geopolitical thought which posit political geography as the realm of the physical world of great power interaction, as well as the more recently-developing interrogative streams which conceptualise geopolitics as a discursive practice.

By pointing out what each of these theoretical currents can offer, and by incorporating this study of the international politics of the Gulf into the conceptual world of geopolitics, this chapter has sketched out the key ways in which viewing the discourse of Arab-Iranian rivalry as articulations and representations of geopolitical imaginaries can help us to uncover its ideational configuration as well as its regional significance. This exercise, in turn, can reveal some fascinating claims about security, regional order, primacy and proclaimed geopolitical purpose. The latter of these, conceptually framed as role-conceptions, has also been utilised far too little in studies of the Gulf and broader West Asian international politics, providing us an insight into the ways in which how the Ba'thist and Pahlavi states articulated themselves was intimately bound up with how they positioned themselves in the surrounding regional order and their missions therein.

# Chapter 2

# Space for Manoeuvre: The Opening Up of the Gulf

> British imperialism has been behaving as owner of the Arab-populated areas of the Persian Gulf as a master ever since the 19th century when it began its activities under the pretext of fighting piracy and slave-running. It did what it wanted in that region but this is no longer the case. – *Kayhan*, June 1970[170]

> We also stress that the foreign imperialist ambitions in the Arab Gulf area constitute a serious threat to the area's security and stability…Because the Arab Gulf area has the biggest oil resources in the world, it is coveted by the imperialist states, particularly the United States, Britain and the Iranian reactionaries. – Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr, May 1974[171]

The period beginning in the late 1960s marked an era of great transformation for the Gulf and its international politics. In fact, as this chapter tries to demonstrate, the tumult of this period was both caused by, and in turn helped to feed into, a fundamental but ultimately inconclusive rearrangement in the distribution of regional power. No single power was able to establish itself as the explicit hegemon capable of imposing its will on the region. Key states, including Iran and Iraq, attempted to both insert *and* assert themselves within this fissure, in the midst of what was effectively a regional geopolitical opening: an opening of space, both imaginative and physical. This particular break and shift can also be described as systemic, in both its form and its effects, as it witnessed the end of the status quo of British hegemony as the organising and creative framework of Gulf regional politics, and emergent attempts at recalibration, if not replacement, by various local powers.[172] Indeed, it would not be hyperbolic to say that "The wounds opened at that time have not yet healed," reminding us "that geopolitics is a key driver of change in the subregion,"[173] which, as I argue, should be conceptualised as a discursive and imaginative practice bound up with the self-perceptions of states and processes of ideational legitimation, as well as encompassing the material geographical dimensions of international relations. Important to keep in mind throughout this chapter will be the geopolitical framework

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[170] 'Iran's Sovereignty over Tonbs and Abu Musa Is a Fact', *Kayhan*, Tehran, 9th June 1970, published in Joint Publications Research Service Reports (JPRS), Translations on the Near East, No. 490
[171] 'Al-Bakr May Day Message Delivered by Ba'th Party Official', *Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS)*, FBIS-MEA-74-089, 1st May 1974
[172] F. Gregory Gause, III, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf*, p. 16
[173] Anoushiravan Ehteshami, *Dynamics of Change in the Persian Gulf*, p. ix

explored in the previous section: how political actors *conceive* geographical space, the opportunities it provides, and the prospects that are deemed to exist by states vis-à-vis other states that they may see themselves as competing with, determined, crucially, by changing conditions.[174] With reference to the discourses employed by Iran and Iraq at this time, we can get an insight into how they perceived and represented the changes taking place, and what kind of ideational and discursive regimes were being constructed.

To reiterate, the 1968-1975 period saw a series of tensions, rivalries and incidents between Iran and Iraq: an escalation in the dispute over the Shatt al-'Arab waterway; Iran's support of Kurdish rebels inside Iraq; border skirmishes between the two countries; Iran's takeover of the Abu Musa and the Tunb islands, with a noticeable Iraqi reaction; and an intensification in Iranian claims to Bahrain (and then a dropping of that claim). Again, I am not so interested in going into the territorial, historical, political or legal details of these disputes, either collectively or separately. This is because, firstly, as Richard Schofield suggests, if anything the debate over legal and historical rights from either side obscures a history of territorial power "marked by its fluidity and impermanence", and thus can be highly misleading (and as indicated in the introduction, a significant amount has already been written on competing claims).[175] And secondly, and more importantly, I am more interested in seeing how these various disputes were represented and articulated within broader geopolitical imaginaries. What I am interested in doing in this particular chapter is laying out a more macro perspective, of the overarching regional shifts and changing circumstances which went some way in creating the conditions for these escalations to occur, and which might help us to appreciate just why exactly this period in Gulf international politics was both so significant and fascinating, arguably with ramifications to this day. I argue that there were three overarching processes and turning points at work in awakening the geopolitical consciousness of key regional states, leading them to envision the space around them in penetrating ways: the departure of the British; the absence of a like-for-like replacement; and the decline of the traditional core of the West Asia region. First I will briefly look at some of the trends, features and gaps of the existing literature on the international politics of the Gulf, specifically in relation to the period under question; then I will explore each of the three key regional geopolitical developments, with reference to some of the ways in which Iran and Iraq discursively constructed and represented them and their positions towards them. My overarching claim in this chapter is that the late-1960s-to-mid-

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[174] John A. Agnew, *Geopolitics*, p. 5
[175] Richard Schofield, 'Chapter Seven: Anything but Black and White: A Commentary on the Lower Gulf Islands Dispute', in Lawrence G. Potter and Gary G. Sick (eds.), *Security in the Persian Gulf*, p. 178

1970s period is absolutely central to the sub-regionalisation of the Gulf, and this is reflected in the discourses of Iranian and Iraqi state actors.

## A View of Gulf Scholarship

I would not necessarily characterise the literature on the international politics of the Gulf as "meagre", as Gregory Gause does, but I do think there are some tendencies and potential gaps that should be considered, particularly about the period of time under study.[176] There can often be a temptation to look at the late-1960s-to-mid-1970s period and characterise it as calm and uneventful, if not relatively inconsequential. This outlook, I believe, is potentially unhelpful, in the analytical sense at least, and is ironically, in some way, a casualty of the modern history of the Gulf itself: a history which in the mere timespan of two to three decades has seen incredible levels of violence and bloodshed and chronically high levels of threat perception, and indeed, misperception.[177] Because of this crisis-littered foreground, periods which may not see largescale military conflict such as the Iran-Iraq War and the Gulf Wars can appear in comparison less worthy of attention or mundane, or, interestingly, if having occurred some time ago, become the victim of disciplinary rigidity and fall under the purview of historical scholarship rather than international relations (and indeed this reflects the deeply counter-productive lack of the incorporation of the former into the latter in many instances).[178] Gause, for instance, explains in reference to increases in oil wealth that "While the oil price increases had enormous effects on the domestic politics and societies of the Gulf states, and on the level of international interest in the region," and "Despite the social upheavals occasioned by the oil price rise and the political changes that came after the British withdrawal, this was the most stable period of modern Gulf international politics."[179] Obviously, this is a fair assessment: my argument is not that this is an inaccurate claim, but that the conventional representation of relative stability on the surface may be obscuring significant underlying tensions and regional manoeuvres which would have major consequences later on (interestingly, Gause's formulation also usefully reminds us that much of the attention is often focused on oil, and beyond transnational identities, he does not pay much attention to ideational or discursive factors). Further, even if it *were* to be relatively tempered, that does not mean significant shifts could not be taking place. In fact, I would argue that it is perhaps in part an excessively

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[176] F. Gregory Gause, III, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf*, p. 3
[177] Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, *The International Politics of the Persian Gulf*, p. 16
[178] John M. Hobson and George Lawson, 'What Is History in International Relations?', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 2, pp. 415-435
[179] F. Gregory Gause, III, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf*, p. 17

materialist focus, and the overlooking of ideational and discursive processes, which leads to the neglect of this period and the understating of its significance.

There could be a few other reasons for the marginalisation of this period in addition to the "crisis orientation" of much of Gulf scholarship. Firstly, as John Peterson reminds us, the transition of imperial stewardship was not a straightforward or quick affair. Not only was the winding down of British supervision quite a gradual and decades-long process (as opposed to something that simply "happened" in 1971 alone), the US's "entry" was also somewhat slow and discontinuous, and even non-committal well into the 1970s, due to a variety of factors (this is particularly important to bear in mind given the common narrative of one imperial power simply stepping in to fill the shoes of another).[180] The lack of scholarly interest, at least from imperial metropoles, therefore, could be a reflection of the lack of overt imperial presence and the somewhat blurry and indecisive imperial exchange, in a region not yet familiar or significant enough for the US to warrant direct engagement, where the "military implications" of the final British departure "were negligible," and "the political impact as seen from London and Washington…relatively minimal."[181]

Secondly, and relatedly, at this stage in its history the Gulf is presented as being in the early days of its *modern* development, with, of course, the chief paradigmatic markers of modernity of sovereignty, territoriality and distinct national identities. Indeed, as Mehran Kamrava reminds us, in the Gulf the "process of state-building and crafting national identities for many is…an ongoing project."[182] As such, there may be a teleological bias in seeing the Gulf around the late 1960s as not yet fully "developed" as a part of the world comprised of independent states engendering autonomous inter-state dynamics, and so in the infancy of its modern evolution and absent noteworthy political phenomena, and thus scholarly attention.[183] This would understandably lead to its marginalisation in the international relations field which notoriously sees through the modern state.[184] In fact, a comment by Geoffrey Arthur, Assistant Under Secretary at the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), in a meeting in 1969 with US colleagues illustrates this mentality strikingly, at least at the level of officialdom: "The

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[180] J.E. Peterson, 'Chapter One: The Historical Pattern of Gulf Security', in Lawrence G. Potter and Gary G. Sick (eds.), *Security in the Persian Gulf*, pp. 22-23
[181] Ibid, p. 23
[182] Mehran Kamrava, 'The Changing International Relations of the Persian Gulf', in Mehran Kamrava (ed.), *The International Politics of the Persian Gulf* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2011), p. 13
[183] Aram Ziai, 'Post-Development: Premature Burials and Haunting Ghosts', *Development and Change*, Vol. 46, No. 4 (Jul., 2015), p. 834
[184] John Gerard Ruggie, 'Territoriality and Beyond: Problematising Modernity in International Relations', *International Organisation*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (Winter, 1993), pp. 139-174

British have been there in some force for 100 years and have, in effect, frozen the situation…"[185] A US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) memorandum from 1969 uses the exact same language: "British guardianship of the Persian Gulf kept the peace but froze the political makeup of the area for a century."[186] And in the year before, a CIA intelligence report describes how parts of the Gulf are "virtually unchanged since the 15th century. Only two or three of the states in the area deserve to be called countries – Iran, Saudi Arabia, and possibly Kuwait."[187] It could be said, in some sense, that no "international relations" were even deemed to exist in the region according to a particular imagination. This, of course, is a total misrepresentation. Even a brief survey of the documentary record for the period, including US, British and regional sources, illustrates the range of disputes, interactions and conflicts. It would be a mistake to claim that British imperial power flattened or arrested the region's international politics.

I would put forward a crucial argument at this point, which is either explicitly countered in much of the existing scholarship or, in other cases, underappreciated. Working off of the assumption that, as stated, British withdrawal had in fact been gradually occurring over an extended period of time prior to 1971, and was in effect an accepted eventuality by the late 1960s, and that the US had not simply directly replaced them either in terms of influence or physical presence, it is significant that this period of the late 1960s to the mid-1970s arguably turns out to have been a period in the history of the Gulf, particularly its modern history, where direct imperial presence was actually *not* vital, or at least certainly not the primary political force. There was no overwhelming imperial penetration of regional politics and the regional order during this time. This is important for a few reasons. Firstly, if we were to accept (as I would) the contention that this period was, in relative terms, composed, it is interesting that it took place *in that period* where an imperial hegemon was not a directly present local player. This challenges some key assumptions of particular strands of international relations theory in regards to the relationship between hegemony, imperial power, and stability, especially when it comes to a region such as the Persian Gulf which is often seen as endemically unstable and

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[185] *Foreign Relations of the United States* (*FRUS*), 1969-1976, Vol. XXIV, Middle East Region and Arabian Peninsula, 1969-1972; Jordan, September 1970, eds. Linda W. Qaimmaqami and Adam M. Howard (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 2008), Document 72
[186] *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1969-1976, Vol. XXIV, Document 75
[187] *Foreign Relations of the United States* (*FRUS*), 1964-1968, Vol. XXI, Near East Region; Arabian Peninsula, ed. Nina Davis Howland (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 2000), Document 139

prone to violence, and thus in need of a clear hegemonic manager.[188] Secondly, as this chapter and the research as a whole try to show, this period was therefore seen as somewhat of a window of opportunity for regional players such as Iran and Iraq. In the absence of an undeniable imperial manager of regional affairs, this opening in the Gulf offered a chance for new spatial imaginations and geopolitical assertions, and this is where the discourse of Arab-Iranian rivalry becomes interesting to observe.

Of course, these two claims seem curious side-by-side, and indeed some might say contradictory. I would argue that a newfound sense of competition and the lack of direct military conflict resulting from that competition are not necessarily irreconcilable, but the two dynamics undoubtedly created a curious structural tension which manifested itself in the various territorial clashes which the period saw, which did not spill over into a regional explosion. This, I would say, formed the structural spine of the region during the period in question: in the midst of the regional opening, Iran and Iraq (and Saudi Arabia) each tried to establish themselves as regional players and even dominant powers according to distinct military capabilities and ideological platforms, but yet outright conflagration and violations of the regional status quo were prevented by Iran and Saudi Arabia's joint role as regional guardians, backed by the US under the "twin-pillars" policy.[189] This fraught relationship between attempts to contest regional influence and a determination to prevent any radical changes from the two leading powers helps to explain the simmering-but-not-explosive differences during the period.

By laying out the regional geopolitical picture during the period in question, therefore, this chapter goes some way in highlighting the significance of this time (and so the reason for choosing it for study), which is not only fascinating but, I would argue, formative in what was to come in the region in the following years, even up until today. In this period, the Persian Gulf became a more openly contested space, and as this research tries to show, the self-perceptions of the Iranian and Iraqi states and the discourses which reflected them were in an

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[188] J.B. Kelly, for instance, in his well-known text, takes this conventional view in lamenting the withdrawal of British forces and the resulting power vacuum it created, describing the Gulf as a major source of mischief for the West. He viewed the region through a deeply colonial lens.
See J. B. Kelly, *Arabia, the Gulf and the West* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980)
For a succinct breakdown of what is known as "Hegemonic Stability Theory (HST)", see Doug Stokes, 'Trump, American Hegemony and the Future of the Liberal International Order', *International Affairs*, Vol. 94, No. 1 (Jan., 2018), p. 138.
For the limitations of HST, see Duncan Snidal, 'The Limits of Hegemonic Stability Theory', *International Organisation*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (Autumn, 1985), pp. 579-614.
[189] Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Gerd Nonneman with Charles Tripp, *War and Peace in the Gulf*, p. 92

intimate relationship with this changing political geography. As the Gulf became sub-regionalised (developed as a semi-autonomous subregion with internal dynamics distinct from the wider region around it, as discussed later on), local actors began to assert themselves as independent geopolitical players through discourses expressing self-aware roles and regional visions. The sense of spatial and geopolitical opening created by the transformations was key to the understandings of the major powers, including Iran and Iraq, of regional opportunities at the time, and discourses and perceptions of identity formed intimately in relation to these circumstances. Discourses of identity reflected this rejuvenated self-consciousness on the part of major states as they saw themselves as geopolitical contenders. This meant that the Gulf region as a whole, including particular territories inside it, became conceptualised in identitarian terms by the Iranian and Iraqi states, reflecting the self-perceptions of these states and thus their attempts to define the character of the region *in their image*. What this dynamic shows, I believe, is that discourses and perceptions of identity were tightly bound up with questions of space and political geography. In fact, I would go further and argue that state identities have an *inherently* geopolitical dimension, and it is perhaps time for scholars of the Gulf, and even West Asia more broadly, to consider this conceptual approach when thinking about states in the region, as opposed to an internalist analysis of identity discourses which focuses solely on the role of the cultural archaeology of identity. Clearly, therefore, the argument is not a dismissal of identity or identity discourses and their centrality to state behaviour, but an appreciation of their multiple dimensions. This chapter will introduce and explore some of these ideas, which are then elaborated upon in subsequent chapters.

And the key to the aforementioned regional and geopolitical changes, I would argue, was not just the British withdrawal and the absence of direct imperial penetration, but a striking *intra-regional* shift in power within the broader West Asia region – the decline of the (pan-)Arab core, chiefly with the 1967 War – which is far less acknowledged in the scholarship in terms of its impact on the Gulf (and which is significant particularly in regards to both the Iraqi and Iranian states' (self-)perceptions).[190] What we see in this period as a result of the convergence of these two factors is the decline of one part of the West Asia system, and the rise of another, and a concomitant shift in spatial signification. I would argue that the late 1960s marked the beginning of the modern sub-regionalisation of the Persian Gulf: the dramatic growth in its geopolitical importance both to the broader region and the international order at large, and

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[190] Hussein J. Agha and Ahmad S. Khalidi, *Syria and Iran: Rivalry and Cooperation* (London: Pinter, 1995), p. 2

specifically the development of distinct dynamics, high levels of interaction, and recognition thereof between its particular collection of states.[191] Or, to borrow Faisal bin Salman al-Saud's phraseology, from the late 1960s, "Gulf politics went local."[192] In other words, it became its own distinctive theatre of inter-state relations and inter-state challenges, and those very states recognised this. This period in the Gulf is a fascinating reminder of the dialectical links between region-wide changes and domestic phenomena; the regional and sub-regional spheres; actors and structures; and the ideational and the material.

Although they are linked, there is a distinction to be drawn here between the notion of geopolitical "significance" on the one hand, and regional activity on the other: one is the perceived significance of the region to extra-regional politics and powers in the surrounding region and the global order at large; the other is the level of internal activity and dynamic interaction. As already mentioned, oftentimes the temptation to talk about a region such as the Persian Gulf (with the periodic strategic and geo-economic status attached to it throughout history by various imperial powers) solely in terms of its significance to the world outside of it may sideline the reality of its internal activity when such importance is deemed not to exist. A US Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs (NEA) memorandum from 1968 incisively states that "The Gulf's importance in the world oil picture often obscures its fundamental strategic significance."[193] John Agnew describes this tendency eloquently, whereby in particular imaginations the very *idea* of geopolitics, or geopolitical significance more specifically, refers to a hierarchically spatialised world in which different places are ranked and talked about according to their importance to the prevailing global order.[194] I bring this up not to say that it is analytically mistaken, but that it should be borne in mind. Both geopolitical significance and the realities of regional interaction, of course, are crucial, including in this research. I would argue that in the case of the Gulf during this period, there was a considerable

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[191] Anoushiravan Ehteshami, *Dynamics of Change in the Persian Gulf*, p. 1
For detailed explorations of regions, subregions, systems and subsystems, and how to conceptualise these in relation to inter-state dynamics, see, amongst others Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era* (Colchester, UK: ECPR Press, 2007); Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); David A. Lake and Patrick M. Morgan (eds.), *Regional Orders: Building Security in a New World* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997); Robert Stewart-Ingersoll and Derrick Frazier, *Regional Powers and Security Orders: A Theoretical Framework* (New York; Routledge, 2012).
[192] Faisal bin Salman al-Saud, *Iran, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf*, p. viii
Al-Saud's book is one of the few which focuses on, and emphasises the significance of, this period, although he looks at Iran-Saudi relations primarily and finishes off slightly earlier than this research does.
[193] *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1964-1968, Vol. XXI, Document 138
[194] John A. Agnew, *Geopolitics*, p. 3

intensification both in the level of internal interaction between local states and an increasing sense of the geopolitical importance of the region, both internationally, and, of more interest to this research, among regional actors.

## **The British Departure**

First we turn to the undoubted importance of the political and military withdrawal of the British from the Gulf, and specifically the effects that it had on the role-conceptions and representations of the key regional powers, especially Iran and Iraq, the geopolitical opening it created, and the new regional structure characterised by a somewhat hesitant and physically distant imperial backing of local surrogates.[195]

As mentioned above, the overarching framework for regional security and the international relations of the region for many decades was British hegemony, providing security guarantees and diplomatic mediation for various local states with a direct, physical presence.[196] By hegemony here I mean domination (i.e. *not* absolute power or control, and so suggesting constant contestation of various forms), in its myriad military, commercial and political forms, exercised by one state over others, or in this case, exercised by one state over a particular (sub-)region and the states within it. Vitally, as John Agnew reminds us, it is not simply a matter of coercion: it is the ability to write and enforce the "rules of the game" by which others abide in order to be able to survive and participate in international political life themselves.[197] Thinking about the conceptual framework of this piece, I would take this slightly further: it is about the enforcement of a particular geopolitical imaginary, a dominant vision of the geography of political power and its organisation, spatial and otherwise. Under their custodianship, the British acted as the stabilising and balancing force, preventing regional conflict and acting as the vanguard of the interests of Western states.[198] Whilst the British were the dominant power,

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[195] For good discussions on the British role in the Gulf, including in providing a security umbrella, particularly for the smaller Gulf states, see Glen Balfour-Paul, *The End of Empire in the Middle East: Britain's Relinquishment of Power in Her Last Three Arab Dependencies* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1991); Philip Darby, *British Defence Policy East of Suez, 1947-1968* (London: Oxford University Press for the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1993); Donald Hawley, *The Trucial States* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1970); J. B. Kelly, *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1795-1880* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968); James Onley, *The Arabian Frontier of the British Raj: Merchants, Rulers, and the British in the Nineteenth-Century Gulf* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); James Onley, 'Britain and the Gulf Shaikhdoms, 1820–1971: The Politics of Protection', *Centre for International and Regional Studies (CIRS) Occasional Paper*, School of Foreign Service in Qatar, Georgetown University, No. 4 (2009), pp. 1–44.

[196] House of Commons debate, 12th June 1967, c62, c76
See the comments made by then-Foreign Secretary George Brown, in response to questions, for a succinct British articulation of this policy.

[197] John A. Agnew, *Geopolitics*, p. 3

[198] *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1964-1968, Vol. XXI, Documents 122, 131-133

the larger states of the region were constrained in what they could do, particularly in relation to the smaller states, but additionally, as is the specific focus of this piece, the right, or perhaps the position, of custodian and regional guardian was filled. In other words, the responsibility for ensuring security lay with them. This role of regional hegemon could be seen as connoting prestige, strategic and regional supremacy, and great power status. To be clear, what I mean here is not that this position of the British was universally seen as legitimate and rightful (it certainly was not, and below we will see how the Ba'thists and Pahlavians described Britain's role in antagonistic terms), but that the role of chief regional power and guarantor would be a coveted one by states which saw themselves in particular ways, because of the image and meaning that position was seen to project and convey (as well as the political opportunities it would afford). As we will see at various points throughout this research, this theme of prestige appears frequently. And so, it was the perception and representation of regional politics amongst local states which was crucial at this time, as new opportunities were sensed and a new hierarchy seen to be in the making, as well as a position at the top of this hierarchy. As the incumbent custodian was leaving, competition for its mantle intensified, particularly amongst Ba'thist Iraq and Pahlavi Iran.

As has already been mentioned, the decline of British power and presence in the Gulf region (and West Asia more broadly) had been occurring for many years prior to its formal announcement in 1968 that it would officially and fully withdraw by 1971. From the effective handover of primacy in Saudi Arabia to the US after World War II, to the Iran coup of 1953 (one of its many ironies was that, whilst it was initially the idea of the British, it ended up vastly diminishing their role in the country from that point on in favour of the US), to the Suez Crisis of 1956, and the overthrow of the British-backed Hashemite monarchy in Iraq in 1958 (which in many ways began the era of Iraqi state Arab nationalism), a series of blows against British power occurred in remarkably quick succession. Fred Halliday, for example, argues that it was actually 1958 which effectively "marked the beginning of the end for British influence in the Gulf…"[199] Certainly, the post-WWII era as a whole was that of Britain's *long* decline in the Gulf region, unable to push back against local forces which were in some ways reflections of the region's nation- and state-formation and processes of decolonisation. Farzad Cyrus Sharifi-Yazdi is absolutely correct to question the current periodisation of Gulf regional politics in much of the scholarship, and through his work he crucially reveals the development of regional

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[199] Fred Halliday, 'Arabs and Persians: Beyond the Geopolitics of the Gulf', *Cahiers d'Études sur la Méditerranée Orientale et le Monde Turco-Iranien*, No. 22 (July-December, 1996), p. 260

rivalry some time before the British had left.[200] He argues that it was actually in the decade or so leading *up to* British withdrawal that regional rivalries and hegemonic competition began to form and "find expression in territorial disputes."[201] This is important to bear in mind for two reasons: it challenges the notion that British imperial rule was omnipotent and acted as an absolute stop-block on regional competition; and it raises the point that the region was arguably a contested space before the late 1960s or early 1970s.

Sharifi-Yazdi himself, however, also contends that British withdrawal did signal "the dawn of a new geopolitical era for the Persian Gulf states."[202] I would agree with this, and argue that Britain's official withdrawal (and its initial announcement) had a particular significance. Firstly, despite the sense of long and gradual decline occurring over the course of a decade, we should not underestimate the significance of Britain's continuing military and political commitment to the smaller Arab states of the region into the 1960s. One of the clearest illustrations of this, of course, would be the return of British forces to newly-independent Kuwait in 1961 in response to Iraqi threats, which was not just important because of the military and power-political deterrence then and there, but because it acted as a demonstration of Britain's continuing interest in playing the role of custodian in the region in the future.[203] And, as Kourosh Ahmadi reminds us, the Kuwait incident in 1961 actually contributed to Iraq's isolation from other Arab states in the region, indicating continued acceptance of, and commitment to, the British-sustained status quo.[204] I agree with Gregory Gause here, that even the small British military presence in the region, combined with Britain's commitments to the Gulf emirates and Oman, in effect tempered any sense of competition.[205] After all, Bahrain, Qatar, the Trucial States and Oman continued to be British protectorates until 1971, and there were still British navy and military bases in the region until that point.[206] At this stage, the Gulf was perhaps not yet the more openly contested space it was to become later on.

And indeed, both the Ba'thist and Pahlavi states came to employ discourses strongly opposed to the British presence in the Gulf by the time the announcement came around. In fact, certainly their public statements against Britain's continuing guardianship of the Gulf were without a

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[200] Farzad Cyrus Sharifi-Yazdi, *Arab-Iranian Rivalry in the Persian Gulf*, pp. 25, 51
[201] Ibid, p. 6
[202] Ibid, p. 176
[203] For an account of this, see Mustafa M. Alani, *Operation Vantage: British Military Intervention in Kuwait, 1961* (Surbiton: LAAM, 1990).
[204] Kourosh Ahmadi, *Islands and International Politics in the Persian Gulf*, p. 110
[205] F. Gregory Gause, III, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf*, p. 16
[206] See J. B. Kelly, *Arabia, the Gulf and the West*, chapter two

doubt the strongest to come out of any regional states, in contrast to the anxieties and hesitations expressed towards the prospect of British withdrawal by others, including Saudi Arabia at first. In the case of Iran, there is an interesting trajectory worth mentioning. In a 1962 telegram to London from the British embassy in Tehran, the Shah is actually described as eager to forge closer ties with the British to make sure their role in the region continues, particularly to combat Egypt's Nasser.[207] And a 1964 telegram from the US Embassy in Iraq to the State Department describes the Shah feeling uneasy about what he saw at that time as a long-term trend of British withdrawal coinciding with developing relations between the United Arab Republic (UAR) and Iraq.[208] I would say it is important to bring this up for a few reasons: firstly, it reminds us of the Shah's fixation with Nasserism and the supposed threat of radical pan-Arabism that he felt more broadly; secondly, it also reveals the Pahlavi state's fundamental preoccupation with notions of security and stability in the Gulf, as well as, crucially, the construction of a central role for Iran in combatting radical pan-Arabism (and this is crucial in the context of representations of Arab-Iranian rivalry); thirdly, it suggests that there was no strong fundamental ideological, cultural or political principle against the British role in terms of a committed anti-imperialist position; and lastly, it brings up the simple question of what actually changed in Iran's position considering its proclaimed opposition to the British later on, or alternatively, how we make sense of the discourse.

When the Conservatives came to power in the UK in 1970, taking over from the Labour Party, withdrawal from the Gulf was actually reassessed and the prospect of a reversal of the decision was considered. Tellingly, Iran adamantly opposed any change in the withdrawal timetable (and even Saudi Arabia, which in desperation initially actually offered to provide funding to allow the British to stay, also wanted them now to keep to the withdrawal plan).[209] But even earlier on, a US State Department paper from April 1968, for instance, describes "the strain which has recently developed in Iran's relations with the U.K. over the future of the Persian Gulf area," likely referring to Iran's sense that the British were sabotaging their regional ambitions.[210] And a memorandum of conversation from high-level US and UK Middle East talks in Washington later on in that year describes how Iranian officials labelled the British as

[207] PRO/FO, 371/168832, from Tehran to London, 11th December 1962

[208] *Foreign Relations of the United States* (*FRUS*), 1964–1968, Volume XXII, Iran, ed. Nina Davis Howland (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1999), Document 27

[209] F. Gregory Gause, III, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf*, p. 22
The rulers of Abu Dhabi, Qatar and Bahrain also offered to finance a continuing British military presence in the region. See *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1964-1968, Vol. XXI, Document 141.

[210] *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Vol. XXI*, Document 28

"imperialists".[211] These comments were made in the context of disagreements over plans to establish a Federation of Arab Emirates (or alternatively spelled "Amirates" in the original documentation, becoming FAA), a proposal backed strongly (and indeed initially put forward) by the British and opposed by Iran. The federation was to include Bahrain, Qatar and the Trucial States, and was seen by Iran as an attempt to thwart its territorial claims to Bahrain and the Lower Gulf islands of Abu Musa and the Tunbs. The remarks represent quite a change in sentiment towards British rule, marked by a sense that Britain was now an obstacle in the way of Iranian regional ambitions and an unwanted, illegitimate outside force.

The sentiments were echoed in Pahlavi discourse. In January 1968, in the aftermath of Britain's announcement, then-Prime Minister of Iran Amir-Abbas Hoveyda gave an interview to the Financial Times where he warned imperial powers *tout court* to leave the Gulf conclusively once the British had left, and, according to the interviewer, expressed great eagerness regarding Britain's departure.[212] And in an interview with a Kuwaiti newspaper in May of that year, the Shah insisted that the Gulf didn't need Britain and that indigenous actors could "make up for the British withdrawal."[213] Dariush Homayoun, a prominent Iranian journalist and intellectual, and later Minister of Information and Tourism, wrote a piece in the political magazine *Khandaniha* in 1969, when the magazine was closely aligned to the monarchy and sympathetic to its policies, on the proposal to establish the FAA, backed by the British and opposed by Iran, describing how "The British completely ignore the new realities of the Persian Gulf and continue to live in the military and political world of 150 years ago when they were the sole power to fill the vacuum."[214] A *Kayhan* editorial from 1970, speaking on the issue of Abu Musa and the Tunbs, claimed that "British imperialism has been behaving as owner of the Arab-populated areas of the Persian Gulf as a master ever since the 19th century when it began its activities under the pretext of fighting piracy and slave-running. It did what it wanted in that region but this is no longer the case."[215] The Shah, this time in 1970, spoke of the "colonialist heritage of Great Britain" and how Iran "did not accept British colonialism…"[216] And in 1971, as reported again in *Kayhan*, a daily newspaper at that time effectively acting as an arm of the

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[211] *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Vol. XXI*, Document 156
[212] FCO 8/25, File No. B3/3 *Financial Times* Article, 29th January 1968; FCO 8/25, File No. B3/3 Foreign Office Note (69/5), 5th February 1968
[213] 'Shah Interviewed by Kuwaiti Newspaper', *Kayhan*, Tehran, 12th May 1968, published in Joint Publications Research Service Reports (JPRS), Translations on the Near East, No. 289
[214] 'The Gulf Federation', *Khandaniha*, Tehran, 4th November 1969, published in Joint Publications Research Service Reports (JPRS), Translations on the Near East, No. 405
[215] 'Iran's Sovereignty over Tonbs and Abu Musa Is a Fact'
[216] Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), *Agence France-Presse* (*AFP*), Paris, 25th May 1970

Pahlavi state, the Shah echoed that language again when he stated to a reporter with great assuredness "that the English will leave the Persian Gulf and…their colonial heritage must also go."[217]

This kind of discourse had the effect of rendering the British as an illegitimate and unwanted power, whose presence was stultifying and counterproductive for the region, and whose departure would lead to a new era marked by independence and self-determination, both for the Gulf region as a whole and for its constituent states. This stands in stark contrast to the previous sense that the British could be a viable security partner in the region. From the comments referenced above, it is also interesting to see a discourse which at times claims to speak on behalf of the region and its interests, and not just Iran. Further, it also projects a sense of self-assuredness and leadership, representing the withdrawal as a moment to relish and a moment of opportunity, rather than a threat to security or cause for anxiety. And whilst indeed it was in part a reflection of the increasing Pahlavi perception that the British were standing in the way of Iranian ambitions, the various other political dimensions and the political development of this kind of "anti-colonial" discourse amidst regional and domestic Iranian developments should also be explored, and the next chapter will deal with this in more detail.

In the case of Iraq, it could be said that overt opposition to the British based on more fundamental ideological and political grounds was more long-standing, undoubtedly due to Britain's history in Iraq, and Iraqi discourse reflects this. Mustafa Alani explained in an interview with Farzad Cyrus Sharifi-Yazdi that Baghdad, even under President Abd al-Rahman 'Arif (president from 1966-1968) who effectively sidelined and neutralised the Ba'thists,[218] very much welcomed Britain's decision and saw their exit as a huge opportunity.[219] We can go even further back: under Prime Minister 'Abd al-Karim Qasim (ruling from 1958-1963), Iraqi political discourse pushed the "myth" that the country's well-endowed "natural boundaries" had been "deliberately flouted by the British" to restrict Iraq's access to the sea and erode its

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[217] 'Shah Discusses Persian Gulf', *Kayhan*, Tehran, 20th February 1971, published in Joint Publications Research Service Reports (JPRS), Translations on the Near East, No. 601

For accounts of *Kayhan* and its close ties to the Pahlavi monarchy, see Ashraf Pahlavi, *Faces in a Mirror: Memoirs from Exile* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1980); and see also the Encyclopaedia Iranica entry for 'Kayhan', accessible online: http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/kayhan-newspaper.
On both *Kayhan* and *Ettela'at*'s loyalty to the Pahlavi state, see Abbas Milani, *Eminent Persians: The Men and Women Who Made Modern Iran, 1941-1979* (Syracuse, N.Y.: London: Syracuse University Press; Eurospan, 2008), p. 398.

[218] Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of Its Communists, Ba'thists, and Free Officers* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1978), pp. 1003-1026; John F. Devlin, *The Ba'th Party: A History from Its Origins to 1966* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1976), pp. 255-279

[219] Farzad Cyrus Sharifi-Yazdi, *Arab-Iranian Rivalry in the Persian Gulf*, p. 223

power (it is fascinating to compare this to Pahlavi discourse which identically argued that Britain had historically conspired to cut Iran's influence in the Gulf down to size, referred to in chapter four).[220] And so to some extent, Iraqi Ba'thist discourse was built on a deeper political culture and tradition of anti-colonialism and anti-British sentiment. In a 1969 interview with the Iraqi newspaper *Saut al-Fallah* (*Farmer's Voice*), President at the time Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr repeats the accusation against "the British occupiers" stifling Iraqi power throughout history, sabotaging its sovereignty, and eroding its regional interests.[221] And in a 1972 speech at the Kremlin, Saddam Hussein, who at the time was Deputy Secretary-General of the Ba'th Regional Leadership and Deputy Chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), described "British imperialist circles" targeting both Iraq and the Gulf region and "Arab world" more broadly.[222] Crucially, part of the self-distinguishing narrative of Iraqi Ba'thist discourse was the indictment of previous regimes for not adequately standing up to the British and for not doing enough to remove Britain from the "Arab world".[223]

Ba'thist discourse, therefore, also presented the British as an illegitimate and unwanted power in the Gulf region, and an occupying force hampering Iraqi capabilities in particular. The Ba'thist state was presented as the true defender of Arabs and the Arab world against the British. Whilst certainly coming from a deep political culture and political discourse of resistance against the British, it should also be read as an attempt to construct the region along West/non-West lines in tandem with Cold War thinking and efforts to strike close relations with the Soviets and "radical bloc" countries, both in the aftermath of the British withdrawal and as the Ba'thists were attempting to consolidate both domestic and regional power after the 1968 coup. Geopolitically, it presents the post-'68 moment as a step forward in the removal of an alien power from the Gulf and in particular in the removal of an imperial power which was seen as having done so much damage to Iraq in particular.

We can see, therefore, both significant change and continuity in discursive trends when looking at Ba'thist and Pahlavi representations of the British and their withdrawal. Clearly, despite the undeniable pre-existing regional tensions and bids for territory before Britain's departure, the decision to finally leave and the exit itself did change the dynamics of the region and Iraqi and

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[220] Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, p. 160
[221] 'Iraqi President Discusses Revolutionary Aims', *Saut al-Fallah*, East Berlin, Horizont, 1st June 1969, published in Joint Publications Research Service Reports (JPRS), Translations on the Near East, No. 360
[222] 'Speeches Exchanged by Comrade Kosygin and Comrade Saddam Husayn at Kremlin', *al-Thawrah*, Baghdad, 13th February 1972, published in Joint Publications Research Service Reports (JPRS), Translations on the Near East, No. 732
[223] Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, p. 160

Iranian discourse presented it as a major moment both for the Gulf generally and for themselves specifically. It was certainly articulated as a geopolitical transformation and a positive one at that, both reflecting to an extent the self-perceptions of the two states but also legitimating their respective domestic and regional postures and policies. Such discourses were about the construction and cultivation of legitimacy, positioning and claims to leadership. It is telling, for example, that in the aforementioned US and UK Middle East talks in 1968 it is described how "Immediately after the UK announced its intentions to withdraw…rivalries intensified," and Iran in particular "had moved rapidly after the announcement…"[224] In the same year, the British embassy in Baghdad reported to the UK FCO that Iraq was ready to increase its "penetration" of, and activity in, the Gulf, in the aftermath of the UK's announcement.[225] As long as there was a formal, external imperial guarantor of regional security affairs, even though increasingly limited, the distinct ambitions and designs of individual local states could not be pursued in earnest, and further, in the discursive and representational realms, no other actor could claim to be the dominant power and assume the mantle that previously belonged to that imperial power. This will be discussed at length later on, but crucially, both Ba'thist and Pahlavi discourses presented Iran and Iraq as very much playing the role of regional guardian that Britain had occupied (albeit in different ways), and so as long as the latter was still nominally in place, the former's chance for self-realisation had not yet materialised. John Peterson is right, therefore, in describing British withdrawal as "tantamount to removal of the safety net."[226]

Further, as mentioned, and as is essentially the key purpose behind this chapter, the British announcement and their ultimate withdrawal *converged with a series of other processes and events* which took place in a relatively short time-span in the Gulf (all within the period under study), which came together to form a quite remarkable set of circumstances impacting the region, the intensity of its local dynamics, and its broader significance. These include, to reiterate, the collapse of the Arab core of the wider West Asia region after the 1967 War, the Ba'thist coup in 1968, the absence of a direct extra-regional replacement, and rising oil wealth and levels of militarisation in the region.

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[224] *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1969-1976, Vol. XXIV, Document 156
[225] FCO 8/525, Baghdad to FCO Letter from J.B. Armitage, 3rd April 1968
[226] J.E. Peterson, 'The Historical Pattern of Gulf Security', p. 23

**<u>No Substitute</u>**

The post-British US role in the Gulf in much of the scholarship on the international politics of the region is, I would say, somewhat simplified and misrepresented, and this has significant consequences for how we assess local dynamics, local actors, and the extent of autonomous manoeuvring. There is often a suggestion that the US simply replaced the British, one-for-one, with one imperial power stepping in to fill the shoes and the role of another. Mehran Kamrava, for instance, states that "When Britain withdrew from the region in 1971, the United States stepped in to fill what it perceived to be a critical vacuum of power guarding Western interests," and that "When Britain withdrew in 1971, it did so knowing that its erstwhile ally, the United States, would fill the ensuing vacuum of power…"[227] Hassan al-Alkim describes "direct American involvement in the Arabian Gulf" after Britain's departure,[228] and Raymond Hinnebusch claims that "Under the Nixon doctrine, Washington tried to fill it [the power vacuum]" after Britain had left.[229] Characterisations such as these are potentially misleading in two ways in the specific context of the period under study: they mischaracterise what the United States was attempting to do; and they overstate the reality and presence of US power in the Gulf. This not only leads us to assume that regional politics went from one direct external organiser to another, but it also risks underplaying the geopolitical openness of the period, and further, the extent to which regional powers such as Iran and Iraq *did not see* the Gulf as simply changing imperial hands. Additionally, it risks flattening the course of the United States' post-British Gulf policy, by portraying the entire duration of the 1970s and beyond as one of unchanging direct American involvement. As Steven Wright and others have shown, however, it might be more accurate to describe US policy in the Gulf as progressively becoming more entangled and more directly involved with time, especially militarily, with the Gulf War and the Iraq War as particular escalation points.[230] Gilbert Achcar, similarly, describes how "U.S.

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[227] Mehran Kamrava, 'The Changing International Relations of the Persian Gulf', pp. 3, 9

[228] Hassan al-Alkim, 'Chapter Six: The Islands Question: An Arabian Perspective', in Lawrence G. Potter and Gary G. Sick (eds.), *Security in the Persian Gulf*, p. 157

[229] Raymond A. Hinnebusch, *The International Politics of the Middle East* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2015), p. 60

[230] Steven Wright, *The United States and Persian Gulf Security: The Foundations of the War on Terror* (Reading, UK: Ithaca Press, 2007)
See also John C. Campbell, 'The Superpowers in the Persian Gulf Region', in Abbas Amirie (ed.), *The Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean in International Affairs* (Tehran: Institute for International Political and Economic Studies, 1975). Campbell goes on to argue that *no* superpower managed to assert anything resembling effective dominance or control amidst Britain's decline in the region.
In addition to works mentioned in footnote 57, see also Steven A. Yetiv, *The Absence of Grand Strategy: The United States in the Persian Gulf, 1972-2005* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

regional hegemony had never before reached the level it attained in 1990-1991; before then, you had several countervailing powers: the Soviet Union, Arab nationalism, and so on."[231]

Following from that observation, it would be more accurate, I think, to describe the post-British era as one where the Gulf experienced a significantly distant and indirect form of imperial influence, and, categorically, not one of US *direct control* of the region. It has already been mentioned that US policy in the Gulf has gone through stages; at this stage, crucially, its level of commitment and involvement was relatively low. In a joint 1968 Interdepartmental Regional Group (IRG) and NEA paper on United States policy in the Middle East, the country's policy aims include "support[ing] the forces of independence and modernisation in the area…keep[ing] to a low level of involvement in local politics," and, interestingly, trying to "promote a larger role in the area for Western European states…"[232] Throughout the documentary record, there is a striking determination to convince the British to retain their influence. In a February 1968 State Department paper, US goals include "encouraging the British to maintain as much of their present special role in the Gulf as long as possible," and this is then reiterated: "…we should urge the British to maintain certain elements of their position beyond 1971 – particularly in providing leadership and technical assistance to indigenous security forces."[233] There is not only a clear reluctance to engage in a closely-committed role, but the preference is for other powers to take the lead in guaranteeing security in the region and protecting Western interests. This is not actually surprising considering the broader reality facing the United States and its international commitments at the time. The late 1960s and early 1970s marked the height of the Vietnam War: not only was there limited military capacity to dedicate elsewhere, but popular opinion as it was began to turn against the campaign in Vietnam and the political capital that would be necessary to mobilise for new military commitments was effectively non-existent.[234] John Peterson raises the interesting point that in addition to lack of capacity, there was also a feeling on the part of US officials and policymakers that the Gulf was "unfamiliar territory", and that a direct regional presence, in the form of an actual political, military and security architecture at least, would thus be difficult to engineer.[235] Illustrating this, in a memorandum to National Security Council (NSC) staff and Walt Rostow, Special Assistant to the President of the United States at the time, one

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[231] Noam Chomsky and Gilbert Achcar, *Perilous Power: The Middle East and U.S. Foreign Policy: Dialogues on Terror, Democracy, War, and Justice* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2006), p. 67
[232] *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1964-1968, Vol. XXI, Document 31
[233] *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1964-1968, Vol. XXI, Document 132
[234] Faisal bin Salman al-Saud, *Iran, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf*, p. 18
[235] J.E. Peterson, 'The Historical Pattern of Gulf Security', p. 23

member of the NSC states that the British "have the influence and the experience where we do not."[236]

This is not to say US interests and influence in the region were negligible. But the direct military, diplomatic and political presence which the British had, rendering them overt supervisors and managers of regional affairs, was simply not there. Indeed, as the next chapter talks about in more detail, what we had instead was the US outsourcing responsibilities for regional security to local actors, chiefly Iran and Saudi Arabia, and on the other hand, the Soviet Union forging increasingly close ties with Iraq. The former, of course, was known as President Nixon's "twin-pillar" doctrine, and chapter three explore this in greater depth, including how representations of Arab-Iranian rivalry and difference were implicated in the discourses surrounding such geopolitical relationships. But more broadly, what is significant to point out in this chapter is the fact that the US was not directly, physically replacing the British and taking on Britain's exact role, and this left the region more geopolitically open and more internally autonomous.

Andrew Hurrell and Louise Fawcett write that the end of the Cold War marked that point which shifted "the burden of responsibility for regional order firmly onto the states of that region."[237] I would argue that this relatively brief period from the late 1960s was the antecedent, and crucially, appeared in Ba'thist and Pahlavi discourses as such, with both presenting visions of regional autonomy and a refusal to accept another imperial power simply "replacing" the British. These discourses are crucial to consider because it shows us how the Iranian and Iraqi states were adamantly portraying the region as entering a new, post-imperial phase, which enabled particular forms of political legitimation and action. A revealing illustration of a discourse marked by a sense of self-confidence and atmosphere of self-determination can be found in a *Kayhan* editorial from March 1968, in reference to negotiations between Iran and the oil consortium which managed the country's oil production:

> "…the influence of Western oil companies in the oil affairs of the Middle East is decreasing. This, of course, is neither unnatural nor illogical, because the progress and education of the Middle Eastern masses is not under the control of the oil companies, as the oil is. The people of this area, and particularly of Iran,

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[236] *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1964-1968, Vol. XXI, Document 133

[237] Louise Fawcett and Andrew Hurrell, 'Conclusion: Regionalism and International Order?', in Louise Fawcett and Andrew Hurrell (eds.), *Regionalism in World Politics: Regional Organisation and International Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 311

are blessed with deep understanding and perception of the issues and know today, better than they did in the past, how to get what is rightfully theirs."[238]

This extract is illuminating for how, amongst other things, it insists that Western economic power is on the decline in the broader region and indeed views that as a "natural" and "logical" development. Shortly after Britain's announcement in January 1968, a strongly-worded editorial appeared again in *Kayhan*, stating: "…the withdrawal of British forces from the area does not and will not mean that another foreign power will take its place, whether this power be America, Britain in different garb, or any other outsider."[239] Asadollah Alam, who served as Iran's Prime Minister from 1962 to 1964 and then Minister of the Royal Court from 1967 to 1977, and who was undoubtedly one of the Shah's closest advisers, reported that in 1969 the Shah had stated in an interview "his determination to prevent the US Navy, which had a small presence in Bahrain, from replacing Britain as Bahrain's protector," and that he reiterated to Alam later that "…he had meant exactly what he said and that the Americans should take careful note of our opposition to foreign intervention in the Gulf."[240] Later chapters will explore in more depth the kind of political considerations and political contexts that were bound up with such discursive formulations. Needless to say, it is significant that the US is presented as just another "foreign power" which should be resisted and how the region is portrayed as having gone beyond the era of imperial hegemony.

In the case of Iraq, it is interesting to see a discourse which emphasises not necessarily the end of imperialism in the Gulf region per se, but the continuation of imperial designs and the suggestion that extra-regional machinations were continuing through the use of local clients. Whilst of course acknowledging the British withdrawal and welcoming it, as stated earlier, Ba'thist discourse would habitually lump together Britain and the US alongside Zionism, Iran and "reactionary" Arab states in the Gulf region and portray them as acting together, both against the interests of the region and specifically against Iraq. Post-'68, the Iraqi state's discourse focused more on resistance to the local proxies of intransigent imperialism, portraying the Gulf as a region still not fully independent or autonomous, despite the physical departure of the British. In 1969, President al-Bakr spoke of the local "accomplices" of

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[238] 'Kayhan Criticises London Times Oil Editorial', *Kayhan*, Tehran, 6th March 1968, published in Joint Publications Research Service Reports (JPRS), Translations on the Near East, No. 266
[239] 'Editorials on Persian Gulf Security and Cooperation', *Kayhan*, Tehran, 15th January 1968, published in Joint Publications Research Service Reports (JPRS), Translations on the Near East, No. 263
[240] Asadollah Alam, *The Shah and I: The Confidential Diary of Iran's Royal Court, 1969-1977* (London: I.B.Tauris, 1991), p. 46

imperialism, the need for "the elimination of old and new colonialism in this area," "insidious imperialist activities against our revolution and our people," and a "struggle against all imperialist, Zionist and reactionary forces."[241] In 1972, Saddam proclaimed that

> "…we are subjected to very serious aggression, which threatens our existence and our future through the Zionist usurpers, aided openly and absolutely by American imperialism and all the forces of imperialism and reaction in the world and the area.
>
> In our country, Iraq, our people are subjected to various kinds of plotting and conspiracies devised by American and British imperialist circles, monopolistic companies, and reactionary circles…[242] (Iran is specifically mentioned and singled out, which we will go into in the next chapter.)

Further, the official political report of the Eighth Congress of the Ba'th Party in 1974 describes the new imperialism acting through the loyalty of local rulers to "encircle" the Gulf region, and, interestingly, in hindsight decries the inability of Gulf Arab states to use the opportunity provided by the 1967 War and the post-'68 moment to secure the Gulf region for the Arab people.[243] It is interesting, therefore, to see a discourse which recognises both change and continuity, that the British had indeed departed but that imperial plotting now relied on local actors to do its bidding. In significant ways, as the next few chapters will show, this notion was crucial to Ba'thist politics, self-representations, and claims of Arab-Iranian rivalry and difference.

**The Decline of One Section; the Rise of Another**

Paul Noble writes that the "Middle East regional system is not a single undifferentiated arena but rather a complex of partly distinct but overlapping and interrelated sectors," or "a system of systems".[244] Similarly, Mohammed Ayoob states that "the Persian Gulf is a subregion of a wider region, most appropriately called West Asia…The political and strategic dynamics of

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[241] 'Iraqi President Discusses Revolutionary Aims'
[242] 'Speeches Exchanged by Comrade Kosygin and Comrade Saddam Husayn at Kremlin'
[243] 'The Political Report of the Eighth Congress of the Arab Ba'th Socialist Party in Iraq', *Foreign Broadcast Information Service* (*FBIS*), FBIS-MEA-74-049, Baghdad Domestic Service, 7th March 1974
[244] Paul Noble, 'From Arab System to Middle Eastern System?: Regional Pressures and Constraints', in Bahgat Korany and Ali E. Hillal Dessouki (eds.), *The Foreign Policies of Arab States: The Challenge of Globalisation* (Cairo; New York: American University in Cairo Press, 2008), p. 101

the Gulf subregion cannot be insulated from those of this larger region."[245] It could be said that the period under study marked the crystallisation of the Persian Gulf as a distinct, but not detached, sector or system within the West Asian web. With this in mind, I would agree with Adam Hanieh that "the Gulf has typically been approached as a zone somewhat akin to a 'gated community'…Gulf studies has been similarly parochial…with little attention shown to how the Gulf both shapes and is shaped by the wider region."[246] This sub-section has been written with this consideration in mind, and attempts to overcome it. Indeed, I would argue that it was the beginning of the *decline* of one sector of the broader West Asia region which was concomitant with the rise of another, a connection not drawn in much, if not most, of the scholarship. Gregory Gause, for instance, states how in his book on the international politics of the Gulf, "Year 1971 is the starting point…because it marks an important turning point in the region's history."[247] There is no doubt, as this chapter has indeed argued, that British withdrawal was pivotal in enabling more open inter-state competition. But, in the years before, I would say regional changes were already under way, and not just because of Britain's withdrawal announcement in 1968.

The June 1967 War, its consequences for pan-Arabism (both organisationally and ideologically), and its material impact on the Arab states involved, should be seen as a key part of the picture which helped lay the foundations for an intra-regional geopolitical shift from the Arab states of the Levant (and North Africa) towards the Gulf.[248] The 1967 War, in fact, forms an important backdrop to the time-period under study. Fought between Israel and the neighbouring states of Egypt, Jordan and Syria in June 1967, this war brought the Egyptian Sinai Peninsula, the Syrian Golan Heights and the Palestinian territories of the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and the Gaza Strip under Israeli control. The war was a stunning success for Israel and a major defeat for the Arab states involved. It was, in some sense, the first in the series of turning points which have already been mentioned above, and again, of particular interest for this study, it had a special significance in its effects on the spatial imaginations and conceptualisations of key Persian Gulf states, notably Iran and Iraq. To

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[245] Mohammed Ayoob, 'American Policy toward the Persian Gulf: Strategies, Effectiveness, and Consequences', in Mehran Kamrava (ed.), *The International Politics of the Persian Gulf*, p. 120
[246] Adam Hanieh, 'Understanding the Role of the Gulf States', *The Middle East in London*, Vol. 12, No. 5, Special Issue: The Middle East at SOAS (Oct.-Nov., 2016), p. 14
[247] F. Gregory Gause, III, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf*, p. 1
[248] Much has been written on the war itself and its consequences for West Asia as a whole. See, for instance, Guy Laron, *The Six-Day War: The Breaking of the Middle East* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2017); William Roger Louis and Avi Shlaim (eds.), *The 1967 Arab-Israeli War: Origins and Consequences* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Tom Segev, *1967: Israel, the War and the Year that Transformed the Middle East* (London: Little, Brown, 2007).

reiterate, as already mentioned, this particular factor and its significance should be taken as part of a series of processes impacting the Gulf region in the period under study. I should also say at this point, as an aside, that the consequences of the 1967 War for the intra-regional distribution of power, its role in the shift towards the Gulf, and its various consequences for the major Gulf states, is a topic beckoning further research and analysis. To date, quite understandably, the dominant focus has been on the states directly involved, and what I have here, at best, are a few provisional, introductory comments, tailored to the specific focus of this chapter.

Raymond Hinnebusch describes pan-Arabism, and its particular manifestation under Gamal Abdel Nasser and Egypt during his rule, as a kind of "regime", in that because of it, both politically and ideologically, "State leaders were at least partially socialised into *roles* (emphasis his): a proper Arab state defends regional autonomy from the West, promotes the Palestine cause and co-operates with other Arab states for the common interest."[249] Indeed, Michael Barnett even wrote that pan-Arab norms deriving from, and helping to constitute, a shared transnational and supra-state identity, became as important as material resources and the distribution of power in shaping Arab state behaviour: they created expectations and behavioural standards for state leaders, and failing to meet these became treacherous for them.[250] As Morten Valbjorn described, it actually became a guiding principle in regional affairs.[251] This goes some way to explaining why, for instance, a definitively conservative, Islamic monarchy – Saudi Arabia – which was often the target of pan-Arabist accusations, would lead the way in "the historically most effective pan-Arabist political act," the 1973 oil embargo.[252] But what writings on pan-Arabism often overlook is the way pan-Arabism conceptualised the region and its geography. This will be discussed in more detail later on, however at this point it is vital to consider the following: pan-Arabism did not just create supra-state norms and expectations and ideationally impact inter-state relations, it also made political-

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[249] Raymond A. Hinnebusch, *The International Politics of the Middle East*, p. 6

[250] Michael N. Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics*

[251] Morten Valbjorn, 'Arab Nationalism(s) in Transformation: From Arab Interstate Societies to an Arab-Islamic World Society', in Barry Buzan and Ana Gonzalez-Pelaez (eds.), *International Society and the Middle East: English School Theory at the Regional Level* (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 140-169 The scholarship on Arab nationalism and pan-Arabism is copious. See, for instance, Youssef M. Choueiri, *Arab Nationalism: A History: Nation and State in the Arab World* (Oxford; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2000); Tawfic E. Farah, *Pan-Arabism and Arab Nationalism: The Continuing Debate* (Boulder; London: Westview Press, 1987); Derek Hopwood, *Arab Nation, Arab Nationalism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000); Bassam Tibi, *Arab Nationalism: Between Islam and the Nation-State*, trans. Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997)

[252] Matteo Legrenzi and Marina Calculli, 'Middle East Security: Continuity and Change', in Louise Fawcett (ed.), *International Relations of the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 209

geographical claims about what defined the region, where and with whom geopolitical power should lie, and which community had rights to ownership and domination over its space. The region's geography, figures like Nasser and Ba'thists insisted, was fundamentally Arab. We can already surmise how this would be significant, in different ways, for Ba'thist Iraq and Pahlavi Iran.

It is often said that the 1967 Arab-Israeli War led to the collapse of pan-Arabism. Raymond Hinnebusch, for instance, claims that "the disastrous 1967 defeat [of the Arab states] by Israel, helped 'de-construct' the Pan-Arab regime" and led to the diminishing ideological import of pan-Arab norms and the subsequent consolidation of more realist state behaviour in the region along balance-of-power lines.[253] Fouad Ajami famously described the war as "the Waterloo of Pan-Arabism", severely delegitimising not just the claims of pan-Arab leaders and the resistance narrative of pan-Arab discourse, but structurally weakening the regional order which claimed to uphold it.[254] Indeed, there is no doubt that the Israeli victory and its subsequent territorial gains "battered the prestige of Nasser's pan-Arabism" and fundamentally changed the relationship between Palestinian nationalism and its regional Arab sponsors.[255] In a telegram from the United States embassy in Iraq to the State Department on 8th June 1967 (the war began on the 5th), it is reported that severe internal divisions among Iraqi political leaders were appearing over accusations that some were "not contributing to the national cause," and Iraqi political society is described as coming "to grips with the trauma of the outbreak of hostilities and subsequent Israeli gains."[256] And of course, part of the Ba'th's "indictment" of the 'Arif government was its "lack of dedication to the pan-Arab cause."[257] (A striking reminder, it is worth mentioning, of the interplay between region-wide interactions and domestic-level changes in the Gulf.) And in April 1968, Mohammed Nofal, Assistant Secretary General of the Arab League at the time, insisted to a reporter in Tehran "that the Arabs had not lost the war, because the war was not over. "We have lost the battle," he said, "but not the war.""[258]  It was a humbling moment with wide-ranging regional consequences on the pan-Arab imagination and the conduct of Arab politics.

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[253] Raymond A. Hinnebusch, *The International Politics of the Middle East*, p. 7
[254] Fouad Ajami, 'The End of Pan-Arabism', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 57, No. 2 (Winter, 1978), p. 357
[255] Zachary Laub, 'How Six Days in 1967 Shaped the Modern Middle East', Expert Roundup, *Council on Foreign Relations*, 2nd June 2017
[256] *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1964-1968, Vol. XXI, Document 195
[257] Shahram Chubin and Charles Tripp, *Iran and Iraq at War*, p. 190
[258] 'Kayhan Interviews Arab League Official', *Kayhan*, Tehran, 24th April 1968, published in Joint Publications Research Service Reports (JPRS), Translations on the Near East, No. 275

But it is the *intra*-regional dimension of its consequences which are often underestimated, and the Persian Gulf is marginalised therein in such analyses. Anoushiravan Ehteshami is one of the few to raise this. It is not that pan-Arabism as an ideological force saw its death after the 1967 War: it is perhaps the case, more accurately, that it shifted locale. With the Israeli capture of both Egyptian and Syrian territory (the Sinai Peninsula and the Golan Heights, respectively), the war, and the defeat of the Arab states involved, saw a dramatic decline in the power and influence of Egypt and Syria individually, the collapse of Egypt-Syria together as the pan-Arab axis and the pillar of the Arab order of the Levant and North Africa, and the beginning of the decline of the traditional focal point of the West Asia system.[259] A UK FCO memorandum in 1968, for instance, describes Nasser's "power for mischief" and destructive role in Yemen coming to an end after the 1967 defeat [after a military coup in Yemen in 1962 overthrew the royalist regime, civil war broke out and Egypt intervened to support republican forces].[260] A US State Department paper from 1968 similarly states how the war "shattered Nasser's ambitions and brought an end to his adventure in Yemen."[261] This is just to demonstrate some of the very real strategic consequences that the war had for the broader region, with the diminishing of previously major players. John Kelly similarly describes how after the war "Egypt was defeated, bankrupt and shaken by internal unrest", and forced to cede to Saudi demands in exchange for financial assistance.[262] Mohammed Ayoob, in the effort to demonstrate the linkages between the Gulf and the wider region, takes this further, suggesting that Saudi policy in Yemen had actually bled Egypt of resources it could have used in the 1967 War, a result which then in turn favoured the rising Gulf states, a perfect illustration of how region and sub-region can interact and effect each other mutually.[263] Syria, meanwhile, had experienced a coup in just the previous year, and it was a fragile polity even before the war, to the extent that the initial intention, interestingly, was actually to minimise the country's involvement in the fighting.[264] The strategic circumstances determining regional politics were clearly changing, and they were changing in the Gulf states' favour.

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[259] Anoushiravan Ehteshami, *Dynamics of Change in the Persian Gulf*, pp. 9-10
For an exploration of the systemic and structural consequences of the war on Arab and regional politics, see
Alan R. Taylor, *The Arab Balance of Power* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1982).
[260] FCO 8/12O8, Foreign Office Memorandum on Relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran: The State Visit by the Shah to Saudi Arabia and Its Background, 3rd December 1968
[261] *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1964-1968, Vol. XXI, Document 30
[262] J. B. Kelly, *Arabia, the Gulf and the West*, pp. 31-32
[263] Mohammed Ayoob, 'American Policy toward the Persian Gulf', pp. 121-122
[264] Itamar Rabinovich, 'Syria and the Six-Day War: A 50-Years Perspective', *Brookings Institution*, 30th May 2017, accessed 2nd March 2018, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2017/05/30/syria-and-the-six-day-war-a-50-years-perspective/

But the defeat of the traditional pan-Arab powerhouses, Egypt and Syria, did not mean that pan-Arabism disappeared so much as it shifted to the Gulf. It was the Egypt-centric manifestation of pan-Arabism which fell, not the project or the discourse of pan-Arabism *per se*, and Jubin Goodarzi is correct when he suggests that Arab politics and pan-Arabism entered a new phase at this point, rather than collapsing altogether.[265] Certainly, to borrow Ehteshami and Hinnebusch's phrasing, it was perhaps at that point still "premature to write the obituary for pan-Arabism."[266] Yezid Sayigh echoes this, claiming that "The 1967 War undermined the pan-Arabism of Nasser and the [Syrian] Ba'th and put an end to the *first* phase of autonomous Arab regional politics (my emphasis)."[267] The waning of the traditional "pan-Arab strategic shelter", as Ehteshami describes it, held up by nationalist states such as Egypt and Syria, led to a "centreless Arab region", allowing the Gulf states, with their rapidly increasing financial reserves and military power, to come to the fore. It is interesting, for instance, to see a 1969 US Interdepartmental Group (IG) paper making mention of the fact that many Palestinians were living in the Gulf and that Gulf actors were becoming an important source of funding for Palestinian guerrillas, or "fedayeen" as the paper puts it (in other words, they were arguably becoming the chief hub of funding after the Egyptian-Syrian defeat).[268] Clearly, even specifically vis-à-vis Israel-Palestine and the Palestinian cause, the Gulf's significance increased greatly post-1967, and the strategic reach of Gulf states was expanding.

And this opening would allow a rising, consciously, explicitly pan-Arab Gulf state such as Iraq to insert itself into both the ideological and structural vacuum (although of course even a conservative state such as Saudi, as mentioned above, started to take a more proactive stance in the following years, again merely reinforcing the role of the Gulf as a whole). As is mentioned at various points in this research, one of the central claims of the Ba'thist Iraqi state was that it was the heir to Nasser's pan-Arab project. In a sense, therefore, Nasser's decline enabled Iraqi Ba'thism's rise, or at least the ability of the Ba'thist state to distinguish itself. Coming into power in 1968, the Ba'thists very much saw themselves as taking on the mantle of the Arab cause, claiming Nasser's legacy and thus leadership of the cause of pan-Arabism, to the extent that, as Shahram Chubin and Sepehr Zabih describe, they even employed similar

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[265] Jubin M. Goodarzi, *Syria and Iran: Diplomatic Alliance and Power Politics in the Middle East* (London; New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2006), pp. 11-13
[266] Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Raymond A. Hinnebusch, *Syria and Iran: Middle Powers in a Penetrated Regional System* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 14
[267] Yezid Sayigh, 'The Gulf Crisis: Why the Arab Regional Order Failed', *International Affairs*, Vol. 67, No. 3 (July, 1991), p. 490
[268] *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1969-1976, Vol. XXIV, Document 76

discourses and representations of inter-state conflict (this is the subject of later chapters).[269] Jasim Abdulghani describes how the war dealt Nasser's "influence, prestige and objectives" in the Gulf a severe blow, leaving open an "ideological vacuum" which the Ba'thists hoped to fill.[270] In 1969, the UK FCO reported:

> "…Iraq has a natural interest there [the Persian Gulf] for geographical reasons and there is the added incentive of being able to encroach upon the position of the UAR [United Arab Republic] at a time when Nasser is preoccupied with problems nearer to home."[271]

As was mentioned before, even under President 'Arif Iraq adopted pan-Arabist discourses and attempted to align itself with the pan-Arab political and normative regime, but this was significantly intensified after the arrival of the Ba'thists, who not only attempted to fill the geostrategic void left by Nasser specifically in the Gulf, but also took on, and I would argue considerably escalated, his pan-Arab discourse and claims of Arab-Iranian rivalry. Again, it is worth repeating that part of the Ba'thist condemnation of the 'Arif regime was its lack of pan-Arab credentials and specifically its lack of effort in supporting the Arab cause in the June '67 War. It is striking and indicative, and not incidental I would argue, how Ba'thist discourse claimed that the hub of Arab activity, the vehicle for Arab liberation, and the centre of the "Arab homeland" in the aftermath of the '67 War was now the Gulf, in part because of the "petroleum weapon", as they put it, at the disposal of the region's states, but also because it was now the frontline against the anti-Arab axis *due largely to Iraq's efforts*.[272] The Ba'th Party political report from 1974 lambasts regional Arab states for the defeat against Israel, identifies the Gulf in the aftermath of that as the new locus of Arab power and the struggle for Arab liberation, and crucially, draws a link between the failure to defend "Arabism" in the Gulf with the failure to defeat Zionism.[273] Ba'thist discourse is crucial, therefore, in portraying a fundamental shift in Arab politics and Arab political power post-'67, locating their own rise in '68 within, lending themselves the mantle of the leadership of Arab freedom with the defeat of the major Arab powers at the hands of Israel, and identifying the Gulf as the new crucial zone of activity.

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[269] Shahram Chubin and Sepehr Zabih, *The Foreign Relations of Iran*, pp. 187-192
[270] J.M. Abdulghani, *Iraq & Iran: The Years of Crisis* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), p. 78
[271] FCO 17/869, Baghdad to FCO Letter from M.K. Jenner, 12th April 1969
[272] 'With the Worsening Energy Crisis, Washington Looks to Add Iran and Israel to NATO', *al-Thawrah*, Baghdad, 28th February 1973, published in Joint Publications Research Service Reports (JPRS), Translations on the Near East, No. 940
[273] 'The Political Report of the Eighth Congress of the Arab Ba'th Socialist Party in Iraq'

And indeed, the consequences of the 1967 War also impacted Iran. It was not just Arab states in the region which were affected by the war: as Ehteshami puts it, even a regional player like Iran, which was of course not tied to pan-Arabism and was not bound by the "Arab cause", was given some space to "extend [its] strategic reach".[274] Indeed for Iran, the fall of what was seen as a hostile power was sure to be significant. Nasserite Egypt's pan-Arabism was very much seen as subversive and dangerous by Pahlavi Iran, particularly because Nasser had often interjected himself into Gulf regional politics, saturating Egyptian media at times with his pronouncements regarding Gulf affairs.[275] In May 1966, for instance, Iranian newspaper *Ettela'at*, closely aligned with the monarchy and effectively semi-official at that time, commented on *Radio Cairo* and *Al-Ahram*'s (both effectively outlets for Nasser) coverage about supposed Iranian cooperation with imperial powers in the Gulf and the outlets' incitement to Arab revolt inside Iran: "In recent days Nasser's anti-Iranian campaign has gathered force. We had a news item from *Radio Cairo* yesterday stating that the Arabistan Freedom Front (referring by another name to the Khuzestan Province in western Iran bordering Iraq) considers the separation of Khuzestan from Iran proper as the only way to ensure the success of the Arab revolution."[276] That same year, *Tehran Mosavvar*, an army publication,[277] reported on discussions between the Shah and Yugoslavia's Tito on the issue of Egypt-Iran relations, where the Shah was described as requesting "an official apology by the Egyptian Government…cessation of anti-Iranian propaganda, and the termination of comic claims in the Persian Gulf…"[278] Pahlavi discourse, therefore, identified Nasserite Egypt as a significant hostile power.

And so not only is it important that after Egypt's '67 defeat and Nasserism's demise the relationship between the two countries cooled and eventually normalised, with Nasser toning down the rhetoric against Iran, but Pahlavi discourse towards Nasser was then echoed in the discourse towards Ba'thist Iraq, with exactly the same tropes around Arabistan/Khuzestan and pan-Arabist claims in the Gulf. Chubin and Zabih explain how the rhetorical clashes between

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[274] Anoushiravan Ehteshami, *Dynamics of Change in the Persian Gulf*, pp. 10-11

[275] For a look at Nasser's regional policies and his attitudes particularly towards other Arab states, see Malcolm H. Kerr, *The Arab Cold War: Gamal 'Abd al-Nasir and His Rivals, 1958-1970* (London: Oxford University Press for the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1971).

[276] 'Iran "Intrigues" in the Persian Gulf', *Ettela'at*, Tehran, 15th May 1966, published in Joint Publications Research Service Reports (JPRS), Press Information Report on Iran, No. 2
For information on *Ettela'at* see the Encyclopaedia Iranica entry, accessible online: http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/ettelaat.

[277] Ali Rahnema, *Behind the 1953 Coup in Iran: Thugs, Turncoats, Soldiers, and Spooks* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 83

[278] 'Shahanshah-Tito Talks', *Tehran Mosavvar*, Tehran, 10th June 1966, published in Joint Publications Research Service Reports (JPRS), Press Information Report on Iran, No. 3

Iran and Egypt were pronounced from 1960 until 1967, significantly dwindled after the Six-Day War, and then resumed with the Ba'thists essentially substituting for Egypt, almost as if the rivalry had become displaced and the threat had transported.[279] There was a continuous discourse of Nasserite infiltration of Iraq even before the Ba'thists had come to power, and an *Ettela'at* piece in 1966 even claimed that the only reason Iran-Iraq relations under 'Arif had not warmed more significantly was because of the infiltration and sabotaging efforts of "pro-Egypt elements".[280] Ironically, in the Pahlavi view, the events of 1968 would have been seen as justification for their concerns. The ghost of Nasser, it appeared, now occupied Baghdad. It was a curious situation for the Shah's Iran: having felt as though one significant rival had exited the scene, thus proving cause for celebration and a sense of boldness and opportunity, very quickly this nemesis materialised in a different form and place, and took on and intensified the hostile discourse. It is revealing to see a Dariush Homayoun piece in 1969 employing the same discourse which sees pan-Arabism as having shifted to the Gulf post-'67, or after what he vaguely calls "their defeats" in reference to Arab powers, and Iraq having picked up the mantle of hostility towards Iran.[281] There was, therefore, a striking discursive construction of linking the Six-Day War, the downfall of Nasserite Egypt, the rise of Ba'thist Iraq and the geopolitical significance of the Gulf.

As the old Arab order of West Asia and North Africa declined, the concomitant rise of Persian Gulf states caused by the major dynamics outlined throughout this chapter (absence of direct imperial supervisor, wealth and arms accumulation) changed the geography of regional power, and the rise of the geopolitical significance of the Gulf (in Agnew's sense of the concept) altered perceptions of spatial implication.

## Conclusion: Sub-regionalisation

The 1970s, as Anoushiravan Ehteshami puts it, witnessed "the death of the Arab order at the altar of the subregions."[282] This is the central claim of this chapter. An intriguing convergence of factors occurring in quick succession – some domestic, some systemic, each impacting the other – birthed the Persian Gulf as an area of highly concentrated and intense inter-state interactions, with territorial competition, hegemonic shuffling and strong threat perceptions

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[279] Shahram Chubin and Sepehr Zabih, *The Foreign Relations of Iran*, pp. 145-148

[280] 'New Political Waves in the Middle East', *Ettela'at*, Tehran, 7th April 1966, published in Joint Publications Research Service Reports (JPRS), Press Information Report on Iran, No. 1

[281] 'The Struggle Forced upon Iran', *Khandaniha*, Tehran, 4th November 1969, published in Joint Publications Research Service Reports (JPRS), Translations on the Near East, No. 372

[282] Anoushiravan Ehteshami, *Dynamics of Change in the Persian Gulf*, p. 10

and levels of apprehension. Regional rivalry and local states' concerns with each other had of course existed before, but it was the coming together of multiple circumstances and changes, and not any single one in isolation, which created a new geopolitical openness and geographical vacuum, leaving spaces, and in some sense the space of the region as a whole, to be claimed by powers which saw themselves in particularly entitled ways.

The impact of the British withdrawal from the region should not be underestimated. It was undoubtedly a process stretched out over a significant period of time, and British imperial guardianship had never had absolute control over regional affairs, but the announcement of their departure in 1968, together with their physical exit three years later, ended the formality of external imperial protection, and notably, even into the 1960s Britain *was* still demonstrating its political and military presence, albeit dwindled. The title of regional custodian, crucially, was now officially up for grabs, and the area had been vacated.

And the United States did not simply take up the position. Absent the political will and sufficient military resources to commit to a direct supervisory role, the US opted for a policy which left matters of regional security and stabilisation up to its chosen local mediators, Iran and Saudi Arabia. This arrangement of imperial distance not only meant that they had no physical presence in the region comparable to that of the British, but it gave the local states sponsored by it the room for independent action. The policy also entailed staggering levels of arms purchases, particularly by Iran, and this scheme was somewhat mirrored in the relationship between the Soviet Union and Iraq. The result, enabled by unprecedented oil wealth, was an acute militarisation of the region, which was to have disastrous consequences years later. The development of militaries gave these states the ability to project power and compete for regional hegemon.

This sense of competition was at least partly enabled by the growing relative geopolitical importance of the Gulf. The decline of one part of the Middle East starting in the late 1960s dampened the role of the Egypt-Syria axis, both structurally and ideationally as representatives of the pan-Arab cause, leaving the role for Iraq to take up after the Ba'thist coup of 1968, and contributing greatly to the increase in relative systemic power and influence of the major Gulf states. This was a fundamental component to the consolidation of inter-state dynamics in the Gulf, and one that is often overlooked. The geopolitical focus and significance of the broader region shifted to the Gulf. Nasserite Egypt, and its downfall, effected both Iran and Iraq in specific ways, leaving a legacy to be claimed for the latter, and one to be feared by the former.

The continuation and escalation of Nasser's politics – particularly his discourse of Arab-Iranian rivalry – by Ba'thist Iraq brought the threat much closer in proximity to Iran.

And thus it was with the winding down of British hegemony, the absence of a like-for-like replacement and instead a new quasi-imperial regional order, and the downfall of the old pan-Arab Egyptian-Syrian pillar that the indigenisation of Gulf regional politics entered a new phase. The 1968 Ba'thist coup in Iraq and the inundation of military equipment were also crucial factors. This did indeed mark the birth of the Persian Gulf as a subregion of great import, as locality arose and the major actors attempted to assert themselves and claim the space for themselves, in their own image. As such, the role of state discourses, as indicated, was also crucial, articulating the geopolitics of the region in ways which constructed particular forms of legitimacy, particular threats, significations, and particular positions for the respective actors. It is these discourses that we will now explore in depth.

# Chapter 3

## Outsiders and Allies: Extra-Regional Powers and Ba'thist and Pahlavi Politics

> "Long live the Arab friendship with the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc countries, with the non-aligned countries and all the forces supporting the Arabs." – Shibli al-'Aysami, April 1974[283]

> "[Nixon] gave me everything I asked for." – Mohammad Reza Shah, May 1972[284]

The alliances which the previous chapter briefly touched on characterised many of the key dynamics, discourses and trajectories of Gulf regional politics during the Cold War period, and the articulation and representation of these alliances are the subject of this chapter. I am, of course, referring chiefly to the ties between the US/West and Iran, on the one hand, and the Soviet Union and Iraq on the other, and I would argue they are a significant feature of Ba'thist-Pahlavi discourses which should be explored. Both the United States and the Soviet Union had strategic, economic and political interests in the Gulf, and this was in part practiced through the fostering of close relations with specific states.[285] These great power relationships proved central to the international relations of the Gulf, and the discourses surrounding them were a vital part of the way the region's politics were articulated, constructed and legitimated. I should state that this chapter in no way addresses the totality of the Cold War alliances, dynamics and policies which the Ba'thist and Pahlavi states pursued and were embedded in. As the range of scholarship referenced both below and in the previous chapter has indicated, both states to an extent diversified their relationships and were not strictly "one-sided". Still, as will hopefully become clear, there were clear discourses and representations that dominated for various reasons.

It is certainly true that the nature of the sources I consulted may have methodologically determined my decision to focus on this particular issue, however it is also true that these Cold War relationships were undoubtedly of major import, both to the region and specifically to Iran

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[283] 'Ba'th Official Discusses National Policies', *Foreign Broadcast Information Service* (*FBIS*), FBIS-MEA-74-069, 7th April 1974

[284] Asadollah Alam, *The Shah and I*, p. 225

[285] In addition to the works referenced throughout this chapter, on Cold War politics in the region see Yezid Sayigh and Avi Shlaim (eds.), *The Cold War and the Middle East* (Oxford: OUP, 1997).

and Iraq, and Ba'thist-Pahlavi discourses reflect this. Most significantly, this chapter aims to show that rather than the Cold War, in terms of both its practices and its discourses, being *imposed* unilaterally on the region and the Ba'thist and Pahlavi states, and structurally constraining their behaviours and ambitions, it was appropriated, moulded and manipulated by these two key actors to serve their strategic interests and objectives *and* the representations and images they aimed to convey to various actors, in line with their self-perceptions and their goals of legitimation. As I argue, the discourses employed by Iran and Iraq during the period in question in regards to these alliances and their relationship to the geopolitics of the Gulf, and the ways in which they were used to articulate and construct regional politics, were marked by the representation and production of notions of Arab-Iranian rivalry and difference. Iran and Iraq employed discourses which brought together a Cold War vernacular with claims of combating radical Arabism in the case of the former, and the protection of Gulf Arabism and confrontation against Iranian aggression in the case of the latter. In a sense, therefore, Cold War discourses and discourses of Arab-Iranian rivalry in the Gulf became interdependent and mutually constitutive at this time. By looking at how Cold War political and strategic ties were articulated and how Iran and Iraq talked about "outside" powers, we can also get an insight into some crucial dimensions of regional inter-state dynamics, including conceptions of security and development, regional political organisation, and competing notions of belonging and legitimacy. In fact, the subject of how regional powers such as Iran and Iraq talked about their geopolitical relationships and alliance patterns, and what purposes they were meant to serve in and to the region, is an effective window into how they constructed and viewed the Gulf region more fundamentally. There are clear interconnections in this regard between this chapter and the next, where I explore clashing role-conceptions, and this chapter will already start to point to this theme.

In addition, this chapter will introduce some of the discourse on security, which the next chapter will then continue in a different thematic context. It is fitting that notions of security would be relevant to the topic of this chapter. Over the years, policymakers, government officials and scholars alike have dedicated much attention to both the reality and the politics of regional security in the Gulf, and the role of extra-regional powers has been absolutely central throughout within the competing claims made by various actors. Indeed, security, or more specifically the lack thereof, has probably been *the* key political and scholarly preoccupation in regards to this sub-region (and reflecting that, the specific area of security studies is a huge

part of the literature and discussions on the Gulf more broadly).[286] Significantly, both historically *and currently*, the discourses of regional states and state actors have placed security at the centre of their geopolitical claims, and this chapter reminds us that conceptions of security and claims surrounding regional alliances and extra-regional relations are often utterly inseparable.[287]

As will become clear in this chapter, the dynamics and vernacular of the Cold War featured markedly in the discourses of the Ba'thist and Pahlavi states, but at the same time, as the last chapter also demonstrated, there was a recognition that regional politics had entered a new era and that local states had a new autonomy, and this was reflected in their discourses. In the case of the US particularly, there is no doubt that over the course of the 1970s, its engagement with the Gulf, and its relationship with regional partners such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, deepened in military, political and financial terms.[288] Yet, during the period in question, there was a notable degree of autonomous regional action. As Gause explains, there is an essential irony in US influence in the Gulf at this time: the combination of the intense militarisation which was enabled by the provisions of arms and the economic autonomy granted by unprecedented oil prices (which then in turn was used to purchase those arms) enabled local actors to assert themselves, at least to a notable degree (though Gause, of course, would not so much emphasise the role of discourse in constructing and articulating this autonomy, which chapter two explored).[289] Many point to the 1973 oil embargo, for example, as a striking illustration of the degree of sovereign decision-making on the part of regional states enabled by the newly-found

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[286] Fred H. Lawson, 'From Here We Begin', pp. 345-352

[287] A fascinating recent illustration of this is a conversation between former Saudi Ambassador to the United States and former Director General of Saudi Arabia's intelligence agency, Prince Turki al-Faisal, and former spokesman for Iran's nuclear negotiators and former Head of the Foreign Relations Committee of Iran's National Security Council, Seyyed Hossein Mousavian: 'A Saudi-Iranian Dialogue on Regional Security', *Lobelog*, 23rd April 2018, accessed 25th April 2018 https://lobelog.com/a-saudi-iranian-dialogue-on-regional-security/.

[288] For details on this period and the evolution of US policy in relation to local powers, see James A. Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations* (London; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); Mark J. Gasiorowski, *U.S. Foreign Policy and the Shah: Building a Client State in Iran* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1991); Henry Kissinger, *The White House Years* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson: Joseph, 1979); Bruce Robellet Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East: Great Power Conflict and Diplomacy in Iran, Turkey, and Greece* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980); Nadav Safran, *Saudi Arabia: The Ceaseless Quest for Security* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1985); Ray Takeyh, *The Origins of the Eisenhower Doctrine: The US, Britain and Nasser's Egypt, 1953-57* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000).

[289] F. Gregory Gause, III, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf*, pp. 31-34

"oil weapon".[290]  It was a similar story with the Soviet Union, who were increasingly making inroads into the Gulf, chiefly through Iraq.

A major consequence of this dynamic of superpower involvement, it should be said, was the unprecedented militarisation of the Gulf region, and I would point this out specifically because it is both overlooked and relevant to the region to this day, but also because it has consequences outside of the purely material realm and is therefore tied up with the argument of this research: here I am referring to the importance of prestige. John Agnew argues that it is a particular feature of the modern geopolitical era and the world of sovereign, territorially-bound states that "military prestige was the main measure of competitive success," bound up in part with the underlying desire to emulate the core powers of the day.[291] This particular period in Gulf regional politics is a striking demonstration of the idea that this kind of military build-up is not merely about the functional utility of the arms in question: it is a form of communication, projection and status acquisition. It is not simply about what the weapons can do, but about what it means to possess them. As Agnew puts it, "The history of arms races is perhaps the best example of the pursuit of primacy."[292]  Importantly, as we will see over the next few chapters, prestige, and especially military prestige, occupies a significant space in Ba'thist-Pahlavi discourses. The notion of prestige has significant conceptual currency in the field of IR and could be concisely described as the *recognition* of power, status and significance.[293] Crucially, because of the role of recognition, I would argue that prestige is both claimed and recognised discursively, and so its legitimation is inherently intersubjective and dynamic. I would also add, however, that for this research it is geopolitical prestige that is particularly important, the recognition of the geopolitical role of a state and its claims to be fulfilling that role and fulfilling its status claims within an espoused geopolitical hierarchy and imaginary.

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[290] On the 1973 oil embargo, including both its political-economic and regional dimensions, see James Bamberg, *British Petroleum and Global Oil, 1950-1975: The Challenge of Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Robert R. Copaken, *The Arab Oil Weapon of 1973-74 as a Double-Edged Sword: Its Implications for Future Energy Security* (Durham: University of Durham, Institute for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, 2003); F. Gregory Gause, 'British and American Policies in the Persian Gulf, 1968-1973', *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (Oct., 1985), pp. 247-273; Robert Mabro, 'The Oil Weapon: Can It Be Used Today?', *Harvard International Review*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (Oct., 2007), pp. 56-60; Dankwart A. Rustow, *Oil and Turmoil: America Faces OPEC and the Middle East* (New York: Norton, 1982); Daniel Yergin, *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money and Power* (New York; London: Simon & Schuster, 1991).
[291] John A. Agnew, *Geopolitics*, p. 68
[292] Ibid
[293] Yuen Foong Khong, 'Power as Prestige in World Politics', *International Affairs*, Vol. 95, No. 1 (Jan., 2019), pp. 119–142; Youngho Kim, 'Does Prestige Matter in International Politics?', *Journal of International and Area Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Jun., 2004), pp. 39-55; Steve Wood, 'Prestige in World Politics: History, Theory, Expression', *International Politics*, Vol. 50, No. 3 (May, 2013), pp. 387-411

When looking at Ba'thist and Pahlavi discourses it becomes clear just how prominent a theme this is.

And so international power politics were not only helping to provide the material foundations for inter-state competition, but also occupying a key space in state discourses, especially those emphasising notions such as complicity with empire, and the counterposing of monarchy and republic, pro-Western and pro-Soviet, and radical and conservative.[294] This is yet another reminder of Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Raymond Hinnebusch's claim that the "penetration" of the Middle East by external powers has had a significant impact on the way "middle powers" such as Iran and Iraq see themselves and their regional roles.[295] I would emphasise, however, that the discourses of leading states such as Iran and Iraq illustrate that the key actors were not merely passive: the way that they represented and articulated the roles of external powers, and their relationships to them, were closely tied to their own objectives, strategies of legitimation, projections and self-perceptions.

This chapter references a few developments during the period in question which took place on both the regional scale and specifically in Iran and Iraq, events which may not be familiar to some readers. Whilst some of them have been mentioned at earlier points, I will briefly point out a few of them here for the sake of clarity. From around 1962 to 1976, we have the Omani Civil War, also known as the Dhofar Rebellion, where a leftist-Arabist armed struggle was waged against the Omani state with several regional states (including Iran and Iraq) and even international actors becoming involved. In April 1969, Iraq demanded that vessels sailing through the Shatt al-'Arab waterway should neither raise the Iranian flag nor carry Iranian naval personnel. Iran responded by abrogating the 1937 treaty governing navigation rights, and sent a freighter carrying an Iranian flag down the waterway. Iraq, in turn, expelled thousands of Iraqis suspected of being of Iranian origin, revived the use of the term "Arabistan" in reference to Khuzestan, and formed the dissident group "Popular Front for the Liberation of Arabistan". Iranian and Iraqi troops amassed at the border but without serious incident. Another potentially explosive flare up then occurred in November 1971, when Iran moved its troops onto the disputed islands of Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunbs. In response, in December, Iraq again expelled around 100,000 Iraqis suspected of being of Iranian origin, and skirmishes took place on the Iran-Iraq border. A couple of years later, in 1973, Iran began supporting Kurdish rebels in northern Iraq as a way to bleed the Iraqi state. In Iraq, by the late

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[294] Tim Niblock, 'Iraqi Policies towards the Arab States of the Gulf', in Tim Niblock (ed.), *Iraq*, pp. 125-149
[295] Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Raymond A. Hinnebusch, *Syria and Iran*

1960s and into the 1970s, formal agreements were being signed and put into practice with the Soviet Union, notably the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in 1972, marking the increasing consolidation of relations between the two. The stark significance of this period, and the assertiveness of Iran and Iraq, are clear to see, therefore, and it is within this context that we can now explore the discourses surrounding extra-regional powers.

## The Iranian "Island of Stability"

As the previous chapter suggested, instead of the US opting to act as a direct replacement for the British in the Gulf, what we had was the outsourcing of regional security and power balancing to local actors, chiefly Iran and Saudi Arabia, who "operated as military and financial pillars to assure stability and thwart the radical Arab regimes that were then in the ascendance, often with overt Soviet backing."[296] This, of course, was President Nixon's "twin-pillar" doctrine.[297] The two states were "empowered" to ensure regional stability and security with vast amounts of military equipment. Particularly in the case of Iran, this policy fed the perception that the Pahlavi state had of its proclaimed role in the Gulf, especially in regards to the authority it attempted to project over the region and the supreme position it attempted to claim.[298] Chapter four discusses this in detail. Essentially, the imperial clientelist relationship between the US and Iran did not socialise or institutionalise the latter into a discourse of passivity or dependence, and there were several reasons behind this. The decision of the US (and the Western bloc more broadly) to identify Iran as its regional surrogate fed into self-aggrandising and self-assured representative constructions of an Iran-centred Gulf regional order, whilst paradoxically of course rendering the Pahlavi state materially dependent on the US. Roham Alvandi's work, tracing the Shah's diplomatic manoeuvrings and regional assertiveness, and the various stages of the US-Iran Cold War relationship, illustrates this strikingly,[299] though again his work attends less to how Pahlavi discourse during the period in question attempted to *represent* itself to various audiences, appropriating a Cold War vernacular to construct a particular position and image. There was a curious tension between

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[296] Kayhan Barzegar, 'Balance of Power in the Persian Gulf', p. 78

[297] Jeffrey Kimball, 'The Nixon Doctrine: A Saga of Misunderstanding', *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 1, Presidential Doctrines (Mar., 2006), pp. 59-74

[298] Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, *The International Politics of the Persian Gulf*, p. 12

[299] Roham Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah: The United States and Iran in the Cold War* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014)
See also C.D. Carr, 'US Arms Transfers to Iran: 1948-1972', PhD Thesis, London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), London (1980). Carr talks about the idea of "reverse influence" held by the Shah in extracting financial and military assistance from the US.

the Pahlavi state's structural dependence, on the one hand, and a discourse of independence, on the other, which was reflected in Pahlavi geopolitical claims. Along these lines, it is also important to note that within the "twin-pillar" framework, Saudi was the distinctly secondary partner, and Iran was seen as the fulcrum and of significantly greater geopolitical importance as a buffer against the Soviet Union: this further legitimated its self-perception.[300] William Quandt, light-heartedly but pointedly, said the policy could be more accurately described as "one pillar and a half."[301]

Indeed, one of the most striking features of much of Pahlavi discourse is the palpable attempt to claim independence and a posture of anti-imperialism. This stands in stark contrast to the notion of the Shah as a client of the US and the West, a picture, of course, backed up by an array of scholarship referenced above as well as in the previous chapter. It is intriguing to see Pahlavi discourse underplay Iran's alliance with, and dependence on, the US, and I would argue there are a few reasons for this. When talking about Iran's relationship with the US and Western powers, Pahlavi discourse has an almost dissimulating effect. In July 1967, both *Kayhan* and *Ettela'at* reported on a forthcoming visit by the Shah to Washington, describing relations between the two countries in somewhat restrained terms, with the latter describing them as "normal at present" and the former commenting on Iran's balanced position between East and West.[302] The context is vital here in order to appreciate the geopolitical positioning that Pahlavi discourse attempted to convey. Just a few weeks after the 1967 War and the beginning of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, it was impossible for any regional leader to ignore deep local sentiments calling for solidarity with the Palestinians, from both Arab *and* Islamic political cultures and movements. The Shah was especially susceptible to the latter due to developments inside Iran, hence the particular attachment to the issue of Jerusalem. In other words, in order to portray and validate a claim to regional leadership at such a sensitive and crucial moment, Pahlavi discourse conveyed a type of strategic distance from the US and its Israeli ally and opposition to Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories, ostensibly "aligning" itself with domestic and regional opinion. This, I would argue, was tied up with the Pahlavi state's sustained attempt during the period in question to represent itself as independent and as the legitimate regional leader, *both domestically and regionally*.

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[300] Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Gerd Nonneman with Charles Tripp, *War and Peace in the Gulf*, p. 92
[301] Hussein Sirriyeh, *US Policy in the Gulf, 1968-1977: Aftermath of British Withdrawal* (London: Ithaca, 1984), p. 63
[302] 'The Shah's Visit to Washington', *Ettela'at* and *Kayhan*, Tehran, 13th July 1967, published in Joint Publications Research Service Reports (JPRS), Press Information Report on Iran, No. 29

And so, in an interview to a Kuwaiti newspaper in 1968, the Shah stated assertively that "Our concern and efforts are directed only toward the highest interests of Iran and whatever we do springs from our independent national policy (*siyasat-e mostaqell-e melli*)."[303] And in 1970, Amir-Abbas Hoveyda, Prime Minister of Iran at the time, claimed that Iran was the only Gulf country that was pushing for Gulf independence and the departure of outside powers.[304] In 1972, Abbas Mas'udi, who was Vice President of Iran's Senate for nearly eleven years and maintained close relations with the Shah (as well as his father, Reza Pahlavi), and who was often tasked with undertaking diplomatic visits to Gulf states, urged in a speech to the Rotary Club, in front of an international audience, for both the Soviet Union and the United States to refrain from interfering in the region, that the Gulf would never again come under the hold of foreign powers, and that Iran was opposed to all forms of extra-regional encroachment.[305] Again, it is the noticeable inclusion of the US as an "imperialist" foreign power like others that is striking, considering the intimate ties between the country and Iran at that time. After all, we are talking about a state which, in 1964, gave immunity to the civilian and military staff of US military missions in Iran, as well as their dependents, which included immunity for criminal acts committed outside of the scope of their duties. This Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) was a major escalation point in pre-revolutionary Iran within opposition currents, with the agreement exceeding even what the US had negotiated with NATO allies in Europe and reinforcing the perception of the Shah as a US client.[306] In another interview in 1969 with British Labour Member of Parliament (MP) Roy Roebuck, the Shah again reiterated his opposition to the United States, described as an "outside power", assuming the role previously held by the British.[307]

And so how can we explain the politics behind this discourse? Certainly, there was of course the domestic consideration of responding to accusations of dependency by adopting a

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[303] 'Shah Interviewed by Kuwaiti Newspaper'

[304] 'Gulf States' Silence over British Troops', *Kayhan*, Tehran, 25th June 1970, published in Joint Publications Research Service Reports (JPRS), Translations on the Near East, No. 496
On Hoveyda, his political significance and his ideational and cultural milieu in Pahlavi Iran, see Abbas Milani, *The Persian Sphinx: Amir Abbas Hoveyda and the Riddle of the Iranian Revolution* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000).

[305] 'Major Powers Fear Each Other in the Persian Gulf', *Ettela'at*, Tehran, 25th July 1972, published in Joint Publications Research Service Reports (JPRS), Translations on the Near East, No. 814
For information on Mas'udi, see Encyclopaedia Iranica entry for *Ettela'at*, accessible online: http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/ettelaat.

[306] See Abbas Milani, *The Persian Sphinc*, pp. 158–163; Richard Pfau, 'The Legal Status of American Forces in Iran', *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Spring, 1974), pp. 141-153

[307] 'Renouncement of Iran's Claim Over Bahrain Will Be Treason', *Kayhan*, Tehran, 14th September 1969, published in Joint Publications Research Service Reports (JPRS), Translations on the Near East, No. 939

discursive posture of non-alignment, independence, and anti-imperialism. Fred Lawson describes how, after the British withdrew from the Gulf and the US began inserting itself into the region, "Local governments took pains to keep their strategic ties to Washington as limited and low-key as possible."[308] The US documentary record corroborates this. There are repeated descriptions of the Pahlavi state's desire to portray itself as untied to any particular power, with an "independent foreign policy of its own,"[309] and from the mid-1960s, it was reported how the Shah felt "a need to appear more independent of the US" and "pay increasing lip service to 'non-alignment'."[310] As pointed out above, this was a constant consideration and form of domestic pressure which the Shah had to contend with in the aftermath of the 1953 coup, which formed a permanent cloud of illegitimacy around his rule and a perpetual sense that he was tied to the US.[311] As will be apparent, this problem of legitimacy is a recurring theme informing Pahlavi geopolitical discourse. In addition to this, however, I would add that the strategic concern that Iran (and other conservative actors in the region) had regarding the risk of direct US involvement drawing the Soviet Union into the region and thus turning the Gulf into another Cold War battleground also formed a component of Pahlavi geopolitical discourse which tried to minimise the prospects of US interference; and lastly, and crucially in line with the purpose of this piece, I would argue that this discourse of strategic distance and independence was vital to the regional role that the Pahlavi state was attempting to construct and articulate for itself. Chapter four goes into this role-construction in more detail, but I would argue that Pahlavi Iran's representation of its geopolitical alliances and international relations during this period was a way of legitimating an image that would justify its leadership position. A fascinating piece in *Ettela'at* from 1973, written by Mohammad Poorhad, the newspaper's chief political commentator at the time, argues that it is actually Iran's independence and unmatched power in the first place, which no other state could compare to, that justified its leadership position and its ability to balance "East" and "West".[312] This is a fundamental point: it was not just domestic politics and Pahlavi domestic political discourse which was bound up with this precarious legitimacy and reputation of imperialist clientelism, but also the *geopolitical*

[308] Fred Lawson, 'Security Dilemmas in the Contemporary Persian Gulf', in Mehran Kamrava (ed.), *The International Politics of the Persian Gulf*, p. 64

[309] *Foreign Relations of the United States* (*FRUS*), 1969-1976, Vol. E-4, Documents on Iran and Iraq, 1969-1972, ed. Monica Belmonte (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 2006), Document 2

[310] *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1964–1968, Volume XXII, Document 23

[311] On this chronic problem of legitimacy and the consequences of the 1953 coup for the Shah's image, within the broader context of US-Iran relations, see James A. Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*; Mark J. Gasiorowski, *U.S. Foreign Policy and the Shah*.

[312] 'Iran's Role vis-à-vis East-West Oil Rivalry Discussed', *Ettela'at*, Tehran, 3rd June 1973, published in Joint Publications Research Service Reports (JPRS), Translations on the Near East, No. 985

discourse of the Pahlavi state, employed in part to portray Iran as an independent actor and "rightfully" at the centre of the Gulf order.[313]

## Arab Radicalism and the Cold War Threat

But beyond the discourse of non-alignment and independence in the way that it constructed itself, what we see from the Pahlavi state was a representation of the international relations of the Gulf marked by a persistent threat of communist infiltration that worked its way from the Soviet Union into the region through Arab radicalism, and it is here that notions of Arab-Iranian difference come through significantly. As a conservative monarch, the Shah identified communism as a major threat in the region, and was also deeply fearful of communist infiltration inside Iran posing a threat to his reign. Iran "fight[s] communism at home," as he once remarked amidst the country's intervention in Oman against a leftist uprising.[314] On this, he was strongly aligned with US interests and policies in the Gulf, and thus the Cold War geopolitical imagination was markedly reflected in Pahlavi discourse. As Roham Alvandi put it, "For the Americans, the Shah painted Iran's regional conflict with Iraq in Cold War colours."[315] A crucial feature of this discourse was the portrayal of Iran as the trusted partner for combatting communism and the identification of Arab states, and Iraq in particular, as susceptible to communist infiltration due to burgeoning pan-Arabism and the wave of Arab radicalism. Iran's cooperation and willingness to work with Western powers, in other words, was represented as vital to combatting the destabilising alliance between radical Arab forces and communist movements. In a 1972 meeting with US President Nixon and Henry Kissinger, National Security Advisor at the time, the Shah spoke of his fears that in Iraq "the Soviets would establish a coalition of the Kurds, the Baathists, and the Communists; the Kurdish

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[313] Part autobiography, part personal political manifesto, for an insight into the kind of political and cultural vision the Shah articulated for Iran and the position he felt it could attain under his reign, see Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, *Mission for My Country* (London: Hutchinson, 1961).
For a fascinating insight into the deeply contradictory claims and self-perceptions of the Shah, where he reveals both his dependency on the US and his claims to being a model for independence simultaneously, see Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, *Pasokh beh Tarikh* (S.l.: Intisharat-e Shahr-e Ab, 1992).
For biographical explorations which look at his political life and his cultural and ideational worldview, see Margaret Laing, *The Shah* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1977); Abbas Milani, *The Shah* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).
[314] 'Shah Interviewed on Oman Situation, Oil Affairs', *Foreign Broadcast Information Service* (*FBIS*), FBIS-MEA-74-029, Tehran Domestic Service, 8th February 1974
[315] Roham Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah*, p. 42

problem…could become an asset to the Communists," and he insisted that to combat this Iran needed to be empowered and centred in regional politics.[316]

Going further back as the new Gulf order was on the horizon is instructive in seeing the type of geopolitical claims put forward by the Pahlavi state. In the aftermath of the 1967 War, it is revealing to see the Shah insinuate Arab states' "unreliability" and tendency towards radicalism in his interview with Roy Roebuck. As *Kayhan* reported:

> In regard to oil, the Shah said Western nations must buy more of the product from Iran and less from *nations which are less stable and do not have friendly relations with the West* (my emphasis). He noted that during the 1967 Israeli-Arab war the flow of Iranian oil to the West did not stop. The Shah pointed out that part of the funds paid to oil producing countries find their way into President Nasir's treasury.[317]

What we see here is the implication of Arab oil-producing states into notions of instability, unpredictability and unreliability, with Iran described as "a dependable source of oil supply to the West."[318] There is a clear attempt to render Iran more palatable to the Western bloc than Arab states, which he suggests, in somewhat vague fashion, were liable to supporting Nasserist radicalism in the region and becoming tied up with destabilising political currents. His remark regarding the '67 War and his highlighting of Iran's continued cooperation with the West, in contrast to, as he is clearly implying, the Arab states, adds to this. Clearly here the Shah is speaking to a particular audience, appealing to Western powers, and these kinds of claims certainly stand in tension with his discourse of independence and non-alignment. This was, of course, part of his broader attempt to ensure the continued patronage and support of the Western bloc in enabling Iran's ambitions in the region, by appearing Western-friendly, and points to a fundamental tension, if not contradiction, in Pahlavi geopolitical discourse (this particular feature, of the construction of proximity to the West, is explored in more depth in the next chapter). This layered, and perhaps fraught, discourse, is vital to understanding the Pahlavi state's underlying geopolitical dilemma and the need to cultivate multiple legitimacies, by, simultaneously, claiming a position of independence, appealing to the geopolitical imagination and interests of the Western bloc, and combating radical Arabism, which, as the next chapter shows, was not just an appeal to geopolitical sensibilities couched in terms of "stability", but

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[316] *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1969-1976, Vol. E-4, Document 200
[317] 'Renouncement of Iran's Claim Over Bahrain Will Be Treason'
[318] Ibid

was also bound up with a nationalist imagination and politics of fighting against Arab expansion.

The 1968 coup in Iraq was an important moment in Pahlavi discourse. We know, for instance, that the Shah used the Ba'thist coup to further escalate and exploit US fears of a leftist takeover of the country as well as Soviet and communist penetration of the Gulf region more broadly, in order to extract further military provisions. Indeed, the wider Pahlavi perception and discourse surrounding post-1968 Iraq and the threat it posed to Iran is illustrated sharply by Dariush Homayoun's comments in 1969, clearly strongly geared towards a domestic audience:

> If up to now weak and rootless Iraqi governments have been the standard-bearers of the fight against non-Arab and Iranian elements in the region, the future possibility of more coordinated Arab efforts in this direction should not be dismissed. Even now Iraq is trying to involve Syria in its fight against Iranians and non-Arabs.[319]

Notwithstanding Homayoun's crude denunciation of previous "rootless" Iraqi regimes, the comment is revealing for the way in which the 1968 Ba'thist seizure of the state is clearly seen as a significant turning point and a considerable escalation of pre-existing radical trends and anti-Iranian efforts. Indeed the Shah himself magnified the coinciding of Britain's withdrawal and the 1968 coup to drive home the prospect of a leftist-Arabist threat and insist on Iran's role as the bulwark against radical Arabism and communism in the region, even suggesting that "Soviet domination" was imminent in Iraq.[320] His comment to Henry Kissinger in 1969, who at this point was Assistant to the US President for National Security Affairs, that Iran was "an island of stability" in the region further reinforces the kind of image at the heart of the Pahlavi view of the Gulf, *both of itself and of others*, as well as the role and legitimacy the Pahlavi state was attempting to construct for itself.[321] We can see in both Homayoun's and the Shah's comments the way in which the discursive linkage between Arabism, radicalism and instability could speak to multiple audiences in the context of multiple political considerations, serving to position Pahlavi Iran not just as facing down the threat of a coordinated Arab attack against Iranians and non-Arabs in the Gulf, but as the bulwark against particular constructed geopolitical threats.

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[319] 'The Struggle Forced upon Iran'
[320] Roham Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah*, pp. 46-47
[321] *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1969-1976, Vol. E-4, Document 29

And so, along similar lines, in a series of editorials on the subject of Bahrain in 1970, Abbas Mas'udi wrote that "Ba'thists, extremists and Yemeni communists loath to see a solution of the Bahrain issue which would deprive them of the means by which they could exercise influence over the Persian Gulf region."[322] As the next chapter goes into in more detail, the Pahlavi state's claim to Bahrain, despite eventually being renounced, occupied a vital position in broader nationalist politics, but here we can see its geopolitical signification as well. By raising the spectre of communism in this way and thus appealing to a Cold War cosmology, implicating both the Soviet Union and the Western bloc by extension, Mas'udi represents the Gulf as a space threatened by a radical Arab-leftist axis, with Iran and its allies standing for stability and moderation, and portrays Bahrain as a launching pad for wider Ba'thist-communist machinations in the region. Iran's position on, and approach to, Bahrain, was therefore both domestically and geopolitically legitimated, a matter not just of Iran's historical right to it, but of regional stability as well. In fact, this discursive move of linking Iran's territorial ambitions and self-proclaimed territorial rights was often couched in terms of preventing takeovers by extremists, again directly appealing to Cold War imperatives, constructing legitimacy for Iran's actions, and reinforcing Iran's regional role and position. And so *Kayhan* reported in mid-1970, in a statement both highly belittling towards the Arab states but also which implicates them as obstacles to stability, on the issue of the Gulf islands of Abu Musa and the Tunbs (more on this below):

> It therefore follows that Britain's view about Iran's sovereignty over these islands is irrelevant just as the statements of Arabs near and far cannot change the situation…

> …With the approach of the date of British troop withdrawals from the Persian Gulf, reactionary circles want to create a basis for chaos and confusion which would give them a pretext for their later interference…

> With Iran's assertion of its rights over the two Tonbs and Abu Musa islands, intriguers have lost another means of achieving their destructive ends…If at the last moment Britain wants to benevolently pet the rulers it has under its protection, it cannot do it at Iran's expense.[323]

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[322] 'Discussions on Bahrain', *Ettela'at*, Tehran, 7th April 1970, published in Joint Publications Research Service Reports (JPRS), Translations on the Near East, No. 462
[323] 'Iran's Sovereignty over Tonbs and Abu Musa Is a Fact'

This highly condescending and inferiorising discourse articulates Britain's position on the islands issue, and the position of the Arab rulers seemingly under its tutelage, not just as an affront to Iran but a serious cause for instability. Along similar lines, Dariush Homayoun, a year earlier, described how with the British withdrawal, the "policy of pan-Arabists in expanding the eastern struggle into a fight between Arabs and non-Arabs will be more fully expanded…,"[324] employing a discourse which suggested that radical Arab forces were leveraging the Cold War and Soviet power to not just challenge Iran as a non-Arab power but to embroil the Gulf region into destabilising Cold War power politics. Indeed, one of the Pahlavi state's major assertions was that interference by any one of the Cold War superpowers in the Gulf would antagonise the other, pushing the region into a dangerous dynamic. This is one of the ways in which it positioned Iran as an essential independent regional power, to ostensibly prevent this from happening. In 1974, therefore, in the context of Iran's intervention in helping to suppress an Arabist-leftist uprising in Oman, *Kayhan* strongly criticised the Soviet Union's *Pravda* publication for suggesting Iran was the antagonist in the region and fired back. Iran's intervention in Oman was particularly important at that time because it was seen as a legitimation and reflection of its role as the Gulf region's proclaimed "independent" guardian of security against radical Arabism and leftism, and it crucially carried out this action without any prior consultation with the British or the US (indeed, James Goode describes the intervention as one of the Shah's most successful and effective foreign policy initiatives, partly for the way in which it validated his self-perception and his geopolitical claims).[325] Crucially, it should also be said that Iran's intervention in Oman led to Iraqi support for the revolutionaries becoming much more significant in 1974, with high-level contacts established and the funnelling of both weapons and financial resources,[326] once again demonstrating an interactive and relational dynamic in the two countries' regional policies and perceptions. Interestingly, in addition, Iran's interference prompted a high degree of consternation amongst regional Arab

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[324] 'The Struggle Forced upon Iran'

[325] James F. Goode, 'Assisting Our Brothers, Defending Ourselves: The Iranian Intervention in Oman, 1972–75', *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (May, 2014), pp. 441-462

[326] Abdel Razzaq Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution: Republicans, Sultans, and Empires in Oman, 1965-1976* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 297
Takriti's book is the most significant account of the armed uprising, also known as the Dhufar Revolution, and he rightly argues that it is vastly overlooked in both regional and broader Cold War history. It was the longest running major armed struggle in the history of the Arabian Peninsula, and Britain's last "classic colonial" war, p. 132.
See also Fred Halliday, 'Class Struggle in the Arab Gulf', *New Left Review*, Vol. 58, No. 1 (Nov.-Dec., 1969), pp. 31-36

states and even prompted a coordinated Arab League response, with the intervention perceived as a non-Arab power intervening in Arab affairs.[327]

In regards to the *Kayhan* piece, it is revealing in the way it positions the Soviet Union, Iran, Iraq and communist forces, and where it identifies the threat of instability emanating from. In commenting on the *Pravda* article, it says:

> …the paper's readers were told that Iran supposedly harboured indefinable designs against the Arab states of the Persian Gulf.
>
> …
>
> The article speaks of an "unprecedented arms race" in the region, indirectly blaming Iran for it. But everyone knows that while it takes two to tango, an arms race can be started by one country. A brief glance at arms build-ups in the region shows that the arms race began with the introduction of supersonic fighter-bombers…a development that took place with the supply of supersonic MiGs to Iraq and a number of other Arab states by the USSR.
>
> This was not an isolated event. During the past two years alone, the USSR is believed to have supplied Iraq with sophisticated arms worth some $2 billion…
>
> As for Iran's military support for Oman, *Pravda* could not have forgotten repeated assertions by Soviet leaders…that the affairs of the Persian Gulf concern its littoral states only. But in Dhofar, as everyone knows, we now have military experts helping the South Yemeni-sponsored insurgents from a number of communist countries…
>
> Furthermore, peace and stability in the Persian Gulf, a condition the Soviet leaders have acknowledged as desirable on so many occasions, cannot be secured through giving free reign to subversive activities and all other efforts aimed at imposing a particular ideological pattern on the nations of the area.

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[327] Abdel Razzaq Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution*, p. 298

> *Pravda*'s article might, therefore, be interpreted as encouragement for subversive activities…[328]

The piece firmly locates the source of instability informed in part by the militarisation of the region as residing amongst Arab states, in particular Iraq, and their purchases from the Soviet Union. Further, the specific case of Oman is bound up with communist infiltration and the broader threat to the Gulf. This discursive formulation then juxtaposes the destabilising role of the USSR and its Arab state allies with Iran's role as the responsible, status-quo actor protecting countries of the region facing the threat of subversion. The Cold War framework is explicit, but again it is the coding of Arab states as standing on the "other side" of the Cold War dynamic and as the actors responsible for regional instability that is significant. The Cold War cosmology, in other words, is appropriated to signify and reinforce notions of Arab-Iranian difference and competition, and the ostensible outstanding geopolitical role played by Iran (the next chapter deals with this in more detail). Bijan Khajehpour-Khoei describes this kind of projection and imagination as a

> ""big brother" attitude…The relationship of protector (Iran) and protected (Arab neighbours) was clearly also implanted in the region by the US policy of the 1970s that declared under the Shah the regional "gendarme". The result is that Iranians tend to perceive their Arab neighbours as states that need Iranian protection and support, thus belittling them."[329]

I would, of course, strongly contest the notion that this relationship was simply an "implantation" imposed by the US onto the Gulf region, but a representation of the region constructed and articulated by the Pahlavi state in line with the way it perceived itself and attempted to position itself, within the Cold War framework. Significantly, again, as has already been mentioned, these discursive layers construct multiple kinds of legitimacy and speak to multiple audiences. Iran as the "big brother" lends itself to a nationalist impulse and sentiment that speaks to a sense of Iranian regional pre-eminence and geopolitical superiority, but the interpellation of the Arab states into positions whereby they are posited as susceptible to instability and subversive infiltration is also crucial.

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[328] '*Pravda*'s Surprise Move', *Kayhan*, Tehran, 2nd June 1974, published in Joint Publications Research Service Reports (JPRS), Translations on the Near East, No. 1182

[329] Bijan Khajehpour-Khoei, 'Chapter 11: Mutual Perceptions in the Persian Gulf Region: An Iranian Perspective', in Lawrence G. Potter and Gary G. Sick (eds.), *Security in the Persian Gulf*, p. 246

And of course the Pahlavi state was doing this from early on in the period, as mentioned before. In a private conversation in 1969, for instance, the Shah raised the alarm over the prospect of "a Syria and Iraq joined under a Red regime," and drew a connection between Soviet ambitions in the Gulf region and increasingly "reckless behaviour" on the part of Iraq.[330] To be clear, it is now well understood that the Shah would emphasise, if not exaggerate, Soviet and communist penetration in the Gulf to US officials in order to spur greater financial and military assistance.[331] But the point here is that, with the variegated politics and circumstances informing the employment of such representations, which have been pointed out already, Pahlavi geopolitical discourses surrounding the role of the great powers in the Gulf and the international relations of the region effectively brought together Cold War dynamics with claims of Arab-Iranian rivalry, and gestured towards Arab-Iranian difference around notions such as reliability, in order to legitimate the centring of Iran in the Gulf region. More fundamentally, this goes to the construction of a geopolitical imaginary whereby Pahlavi Iran, at one and the same time: placed itself at the helm of the regional order as protector; portrayed itself as an independent great power capable of carrying the responsibilities of combatting radical Arabism and leftism; and yet attempted to legitimate itself with Western powers in order to enable and validate that very role, in part by emphasising Iranian proximity to the West vis-à-vis the Arab states.

## "Arab Friendship" with the Soviet Union

As the US's twin-pillar doctrine incorporated Iran and Saudi Arabia, on the other side Iraq was developing a closer relationship with the Soviet Union during the period in question, a relationship articulated in deeply ideological, significant and comradely terms, as we will see below.[332] Certainly in material respects, the US's investments and involvements via Iran were

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[330] *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1969-1976, Vol. E-4, Document 6

[331] April R. Summitt, 'For a White Revolution: John F. Kennedy and the Shah of Iran', *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 58, No. 4 (Autumn, 2004), pp. 560-575
See also Roham Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah*; C.D. Carr, 'US Arms Transfers to Iran'; Mark J. Gasiorowski, *U.S. Foreign Policy and the Shah*

[332] For the Ba'thist view on their own policy, see *Experience and Progress: The Political Report of the Eighth Congress of the Arab Baath Socialist Party in Iraq, January 1974* (London: Ithaca Press, 1979).
For a look at Soviet Middle East policy, including relations with Iraq, see Johan Franzén, *Red Star over Iraq: Iraqi Communism before Saddam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); Galia Golan, *Soviet Policies in the Middle East from World War Two to Gorbachev* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Talal Nizameddin, *Russia and the Middle East: Towards a New Foreign Policy* (London: Hurst & Company, 1999); Haim Shemesh, *Soviet-Iraqi Relations, 1968-1988: In the Shadow of the Iraq-Iran Conflict* (Boulder: London: Lynne Rienner, 1992); Oles M. Smolansky with Bettie M. Smolansky, *The USSR and Iraq: The Soviet Quest for Influence* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1991); Alexey Vasiliev, *Russia's Middle East Policy: From Lenin to Putin* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2018).

considerably greater in the region, but Soviet-Iraqi ties were also consequential, illustrated, for example, by the fact that by 1978, Iran had 459 combat aircraft, Iraq had 339, and Saudi Arabia had just 171; Iran had 1,870 tanks, Iraq had 1,800, and Saudi Arabia just 325.[333] (This arms race, it should be noted, ultimately played a decisive role in creating the conditions for the Iran-Iraq War years later, intensely saturating the region with military equipment.)[334] Iraq was both in material and ideological aspects the closest thing to a competitor for Iran in the Gulf, and its developing ties to the Soviet Union occupied a very prominent place in Ba'thist discourse, emphasising the invaluable role of the Soviets in advancing Arabism and defending against Iranian-Western aggression in the region. Again, therefore, the Cold War cosmology became imbricated in local discourses and dynamics, and the Ba'thist state used and leveraged its increasing ties with the Soviet Union to the "Western-Iranian" axis and claim the mantle of Arab resistance. Its discourse reflects this.

For Ba'thist Iraq, its developing relations with the Soviet Union and its broader international posture and strategic outlook were discursively linked to its claims of fighting imperialism, Zionism and reactionism, and in particular Iran, all forces which it deemed to be arrayed against the Arab nation and its prosperity, independence and unity in the Gulf. The Ba'thist state would not shy away from crediting the Soviet Union for its role in promoting Iraqi growth and industrial development, both of which were articulated as essential to Iraqi national and geopolitical strength and, by extension, Arab security and progress in the Gulf. We can compare this to the more distant impression that Pahlavi discourse attempted to convey in regards to US ties, for the reasons mentioned above, particularly to a domestic and regional audience. Certainly, the Ba'thist state did not face analogous domestic pressures which claimed it was acting at the behest of an extra-regional power, but in addition to that, the discourse of close friendship and ideological affinity with the Soviet Union was employed in the context of a still precariously-balanced Iraqi state that was regionally- and internationally-isolated and in desperate need of international investment, if not a great-power patron. This was particularly urgent considering its primary foe in the region, Iran, was quickly developing its own extra-regional relationships and superpower-sponsorship, and the gap in state capacity and military capability between the two was significant. This is important to bear in mind when considering the Iraqi state's push for a particular geopolitical orientation and its discursive posture. And so certainly, partly for this reason, the Ba'thist state was both relatively quick, and bold, in

[333] Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Gerd Nonneman with Charles Tripp, *War and Peace in the Gulf*, p. 93
[334] Kayhan Barzegar, 'Balance of Power in the Persian Gulf', p. 76

explicitly placing itself in the Cold War Eastern camp, and as we will see below, this drive was particularly emphatic at specific regional moments and this is reflected in the discourse. A statement made by President al-Bakr in 1969 in regards to recognition of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) illustrates this sharply, as well as the direct link drawn between its alliance decisions and its supposed defence of Arabism:

> The full recognition of the German Democratic Republic by Iraq was a direct blow against the aggressive imperialist policy of the Bonn government, which is in accord with the interests of Israel and which is directed against the struggle of the Arab nation. The recognition confirmed the capability of the revolutionary regime in Iraq to negotiate and to make decisions free of subjection or hesitancy in the interest of the masses and of the goals of our Arab people and their fateful questions. It is necessary to transform the recognition of the GDR by Iraq into a general Arab standpoint…[335]

In a fascinating meeting between a leading member of Iraq's security apparatus and East German officials, they discuss security and military cooperation, and socialist solidarity against the United States and reactionary Gulf states suspected of plotting against the Ba'thist regime. Indeed, it seems the GDR was a first port-of-call for the Iraqis, as this took place even before any significant overtures had been made towards the Soviet Union. The minutes of the meeting state that "…the President, the Revolutionary Command Council and the Iraqi Ministry of Interior have decided to turn to the socialist countries for help. So far the Iraqi security organs have addressed only the GDR for support…It is possible that they will also turn to the USSR following an according decision by the Revolutionary Command Council."[336] The meeting is a revealing insight into the thinking of the Ba'thist apparatus early on, the strategic and political considerations behind its socialist geopolitics, the threats it identified, and the Cold War position it sought to construct for itself in order to combat its proclaimed foes.

Indeed 1969 was a significant year for Iraq's international relations and the above meeting proved prescient. In that year Iraq and the USSR signed their first agreement ensuring Soviet assistance in the development of Iraq's oil infrastructure, amidst an intensifying dispute with the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC), in turn often a target of Ba'thist anti-imperialist and anti-

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[335] 'Iraqi President Discusses Revolutionary Aims'

[336] "Report about a Meeting with the General Director of the Iraqi Directorate for Security, Lieutenant General al-Ani," September 18th 1969, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, BStU, ZA, SdM 1172

Western rhetoric and eventually the target of successful nationalisation.[337] The agreement and its context are noteworthy: at this moment not only was the Ba'th Party attempting to appeal to leftist tendencies within the political terrain so as to lessen the potential for intra-elite divides, they were also upping the ante against the IPC which they perceived as potentially the most important ongoing element of foreign control in Iraqi national life. The agreement with the Soviets to exploit the oilfields in North Rumaila, south of the country, was a huge moment in marginalising the consortium and scoring both economic and ideological points for the state.[338] And so, in a 1969 report published in *al-Thawrah*, the Ba'th Party's newspaper, it is proudly described how relations between Iraq and the Soviet Union "have been progressing continuously since the great July Revolution," and that "When one quickly reviews the industrial progress in Iraq, one finds that many of the big projects were established through the loyal cooperation of our Soviet friends."[339] The report goes on to describe Soviet assistance in heavy and light industry, agriculture, technical training, and more as vital to Iraq's national development, and proudly states:

> When one knows that the months that followed the 17 July Revolution have witnessed the exchange of numerous visits by the officials of both countries…one can imagine the extent to which friendship between the two countries is growing.
>
> Every time the relationship registers new progress…[340]

As Anoush Ehteshami explained, 1969 and the Shatt al-'Arab incident, where the Ba'thist state demanded Iran comply with conditions it said fell under a 1937 treaty governing navigation rights along the waterway, and in response to which Iran abrogated the treaty and sent in an Iranian merchant ship, was a significant escalation point in driving Iraq towards the Soviet Union. The dispute over the Shatt al-'Arab could be described as a particular type of boundary dispute and the reflection of a particular conceptualisation of certain kinds of boundaries: "Boundaries as assertions of historical rights."[341] As such, the conflicts over such boundaries are bound up with projections of power and dominance, historical national fulfilment and national legitimacy. In adding to the Ba'thists' sense of isolation, if not inferiorisation, with

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[337] Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, p. 200
[338] Ibid
[339] 'A Quarter of a Century of Iraqi-Soviet Relations', *al-Thawrah*, Baghdad, 9th September 1969, published in Joint Publications Research Service Reports (JPRS), Translations on the Near East, No. 394
[340] Ibid
[341] J.E. Peterson, 'Sovereignty and Boundaries in the Gulf States: Settling the Peripheries', in Mehran Kamrava (ed.), *The International Politics of the Persian Gulf*, p. 29

the Iranians seen as having unequivocally won a victory and asserted a clear position of dominance, this incident substantially increased the Ba'thist perception that Iraq needed to match Iran, with its own superpower backer. Over the next few years, the discourse of the Iraqi-Soviet relationship became markedly closer and more significant.[342]

## **Western Imperialism and Iranian Reaction**

1972 was a notable moment for Iraqi-Soviet ties, seen as a momentous occasion for this relationship and its concretisation. In February of that year, Saddam visited Moscow to discuss the systematisation of Soviet assistance to Iraq, culminating in the watershed Iraqi-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation a few months later in April, which called for economic, military and political cooperation and consultations on international affairs of mutual interest.[343] It should be stressed that just a few months before, Iran had made its moves on the three Gulf islands and Britain had officially completed its withdrawal from the region. The climate was intense and the moment hugely significant, and the agreement was seen as a further step in reducing the potential disadvantages Iraq had vis-à-vis Iran and incorporating the former more concretely within the "revolutionary" security and economic bloc. In a speech delivered at the Kremlin during that visit, which gives an insight into the ideological and political representation of the alliance afforded by the Ba'thists, Saddam spoke of the two countries' "ties of solidarity and friendly cooperation", working towards Arab liberation and "the revolutionary destruction of imperialism" which worked through a variety of international and regional actors, "especially Iranian reaction", to oppose the Arab people.[344] It is also fascinating to see how such alliances were defended against accusations from other Arab states. Saudi Arabia, for instance, was criticised for raising the notion of "Russian domination" over Arab countries, and was accused of doing the work of American imperialism in levelling such an allegation.[345] Indeed, Shibli al-'Aysami, leading figure of the Iraqi Ba'th Party after having fled Syria, declared it thus in 1974: "Long live the Arab friendship with the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc countries, with the non-aligned countries and all the forces supporting the Arabs."[346] The legitimation and articulation of this geopolitical bloc and alliance formation,

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[342] Anoushiravan Ehteshami, *Dynamics of Change in the Persian Gulf*, p. 113
See also Roham Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah*, p. 46
[343] Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, p. 146
[344] 'Speeches Exchanged by Comrade Kosygin and Comrade Saddam Husayn at Kremlin'
[345] 'Footnotes to the So-called Geneva Peace Conference', *al-Thawrah*, Baghdad, 28th December 1973, published in Joint Publications Research Service Reports (JPRS), Translations on the Near East, No. 1103
[346] 'Ba'th Official Discusses National Policies'

and its purported role in the Gulf region (as well as West Asia more broadly) was fundamentally tied to Arab solidarity.

The year after the signing of the treaty, President al-Bakr signed the National Action Charter in 1973, together with 'Aziz Muhammed, Secretary-General of the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP). Previously, the ICP was bitterly harassed and repressed by the Ba'th Party apparatus, but with the significant consolidation of relations with the Soviet Union in the year before, the decision was made to bring the ICP into the National Patriotic Front (NPF) to win further favour with the Soviets, as well as to appropriate the strength and popularity of the ICP, effectively neutralising them, and to consolidate a "united" domestic governing elite. Interestingly, this was seen to be of the utmost importance in the context of the military conflict with the Kurdish rebels in the north of the country, backed by Iran.[347] This newfound (although somewhat short-lived) and rather manufactured elite coherence was thus fundamentally tied to perceptions of Iranian aggression and a state which saw itself as under siege from multiple corners, with Iran at the core of its troubles. The 1973 charter could therefore be seen as a document heralding, at least ostensibly, a reinvigorated political future and an augmented state cohesion, essential for the integrity of the Ba'thist state and revolutionary Arabism. Its geopolitical pronouncements are important to consider. On the Iraqi-Soviet alliance, the charter said:

> The alliance on a strategic basis between the progressive and liberated Arab regimes and the progressive movements in the Arab homeland on one side and the international revolutionary forces, foremost of which is the socialist camp on the other, is especially important. It is necessary to achieve the strongest kinds of cooperation, solidarity and understanding between them based on the belief in the unity of the general goals and the destiny between the Arab revolutionary movement and the international revolutionary movement.
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> …
>
> …A specific and very important transformation was achieved in Iraq's relations with the Soviet Union by the conclusion of the treaty of friendship

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[347] Nazih N. Ayubi, *Over-stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1995), p. 424
See also Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, pp. 189, 201

and cooperation that materialised the two countries' desire to strengthen their cooperation in all political, economic, cultural and military fields and to develop their cooperation toward a firm strategic alliance.[348]

Crucially, straight after elaborating on the ties between Iraq and the Soviet Union, the charter goes on to talk about Iran, commenting on

> Iraq's participation with all possible resources in the pan-Arab battle against the imperialist and Zionist enemy…exposing the imperialist plots and Iranian ambitions in the Arab Gulf and strong opposition to imperialist and reactionary schemes to overthrow the national authority and to restore the imperialist and reactionary influence in the country.[349]

The last point is important: by 1973, not only had Iran been implicated in an attempt to overthrow the Ba'thist state through a coup, but the militaries of the two countries had been involved in multiple skirmishes on their border, and as stated Iran had begun arming and supporting Kurdish rebels in the north of Iraq. The necessity of the Iraqi-Soviet alliance to the defence of the Arab revolution and of Gulf Arabism was asserted at a high point of Iranian power projection in the region and in particular Iran's specific targeting of Iraq through multiple strategic, political and military channels.

And indeed, Iraqi-Soviet ties were *explicitly* articulated as being in opposition to the US-Iran axis. It was not just that Iraq represented itself and its relations with the Soviet Union as working in defence of the Arab nation and in defence of an "Arab region", it was also portrayed as essential to challenging and counterbalancing the role of the "imperial" powers, as they were defined, and their "client" states in the region which sought to weaken and fragment the Arab world. In the same speech made by al-'Aysami referenced previously, just before declaring Arab solidarity with the Soviet Union and the international socialist bloc, he condemns Iran's role in arming and supporting Kurdish rebels in northern Iraq, which was becoming increasingly substantial by 1974, in the following terms:

> Sisters and brothers, when imperialism under the United States felt it was unable to keep Israel equal or rather superior in its power to the Arab nation in the name of maintaining the balance of power, the United States tried to

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[348] 'Iraqi National Action Charter', *Foreign Broadcast Information Service* (*FBIS*), FBIS-MEA-73-172-S, Baghdad Domestic Service, 26th August 1973
[349] Ibid

reduce the pressure on Israel by arming Iran along the eastern borders of the
Arab homeland…[350]

Not only is this significant for the representation of the US-Iran axis standing against the Arab nation and the geopolitical apposition suggested between Iran and Israel, but, as chapter two suggested, in locating the intra-regional shift in the focus of struggle away from the West Asia core towards the Gulf, or "the eastern border of the Arab homeland," and also insinuating the geographical and geopolitical centrality of Iraq. The geopolitical visualisation of an "Arab homeland" increasingly encircled, and the Gulf as the new stage and space of strategic attention, not only legitimates Iraq's role but it also "Arabises" Iran-Iraq hostilities as well as articulating the regional "balance of power" along Arab-Iranian lines. Cold War alliance patterns are discursively implicated inside these lines.

But even much before the compounding of tensions between Iran and Iraq towards the mid-1970s, as the date of British withdrawal was approaching towards December 1971, and as the prospect of Iran's takeover of the Abu Musa and Tunb islands was looming, President al-Bakr declared that "…the protection of the Arabism of the Gulf required augmenting ties with the international forces supporting Arab rights, especially the Soviet Union [and the People's Republic of China]."[351] Again, Iran and Iran's regional moves were placed at the centre of this discourse of anti-Arabism alongside Western powers and the issue was appropriated into the discursive frameworks of Arab-Iranian rivalry and the East-West struggle. Added to that, as the new stage in Gulf regional politics was seen to be approaching, and as perceptions of post-British Iranian domination were strengthening, it is the discourse of geopolitical urgency and the need to legitimate what were seen as imperative alliance formations that becomes palpable. In his speech at the Kremlin referenced above, Saddam singled out "Iranian reaction" acting as an extension of "American and British imperialist circles", and claimed that:

…the feeling is growing in the ranks of our people of the necessity of rapid and
earnest activity to bring about relations of cooperation among all the peoples and
forces fighting against imperialism, Zionism and reaction in the world…on the
strength of the support of the socialist countries…[352]

[350] Ibid
[351] Haim Shemesh, *Soviet-Iraqi Relations, 1968-1988*, p. 60
[352] 'Speeches Exchanged by Comrade Kosygin and Comrade Saddam Husayn at Kremlin'

In December 1971, just a few weeks after Iran had stationed troops on Abu Musa island by prior agreement with Sharjah and had taken the Tunb islands by force (inflicting several casualties upon a police detachment from Ras al-Khaimah),[353] Soviet Defence Minister Andrei Grechko visited Baghdad, and *al-Thawrah* declared that the conquest of the three "Arab islands" by Iran necessitated raising the Iraqi-Soviet relationship to the level of a "strategic alliance".[354] Interestingly, this visit was a precursor to Saddam's meeting in Moscow referenced above, leading to the formal, wide-ranging cooperation treaty of 1972, where Saddam repeated the same formulation in the aftermath of Iran's moves on the islands:

> Just as our people are growing increasingly conscious of the necessity for quick action to consolidate the domestic fronts in every Arab country through uniting the progressive forces in the framework of joint action…so likewise with the advancement of relations between our countries, Iraq and the Soviet Union, to the stage of a firm strategic alliance.[355]

Ba'thist discourse and policy regarding the Soviet Union was demonstrably in part tied up with perceptions of Iranian domination in the Gulf, represented as an attempt to forge strategic and ideological relations in defence of the Gulf's "Arabism". In other words, it illustrates the relationality and interactivity between the discourses and practices of the alliances. This particular case is important because from the moment Iran carried out its actions, the issue of the three islands became a central rallying cry in the Ba'thist discourse of anti-Iranianism and defence of the Arab nation, and the Iraqi state attempted to be the Arab flag-bearer on this question, breaking diplomatic ties with Iran (as well as the British) in response, expelling more than 100,000 Iraqis identified as being of "Iranian origin", and even provoking skirmishes on the Iran-Iraq border.[356] The image of Iran asserting its "Iranianist" claims and occupying "Arab islands" as soon as the British had left was not just ostensibly a validation of the threat perception, but a reminder of the need to forge revolutionary alliances to defend Gulf Arabism.

Continuing this notion, in his May Day message of 1974, President al-Bakr described how "the Arab Gulf area…is coveted by the imperialist states, particularly the United States, Britain and the Iranian reactionaries," and spoke of how "…foreign imperialist ambitions in the Arab Gulf area constitute a serious threat to the area's security and stability…threatening the Arabism of

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[353] J. B. Kelly, *Arabia, the Gulf and the West*, p. 95
[354] Haim Shemesh, *Soviet-Iraqi Relations*, p. 61
[355] 'Speeches Exchanged by Comrade Kosygin and Comrade Saddam Husayn at Kremlin'
[356] Kourosh Ahmadi, *Islands and International Politics in the Persian Gulf*, pp. 100, 106

the area…"[357] He went on to describe how "Our Arab people consider the honest Soviet support of their just struggle…a major factor in the fight against aggression in one of the most important strategic and rich areas in the world."[358] As mentioned above, by 1974 relations between Iran and Iraq were deeply adversarial on multiple fronts, including at that time most notably the former's backing and arming of Kurdish rebels in the latter's north, which left Iraqi regional ambitions temporarily in check, occupied significant amounts of its military's attention, and even led to a series of violent incidents along the Iran-Iraq border to the point where UN observers were requested to visit by both sides.[359] In being squeezed in this way, Ba'thist discourse emphasised the Western/US-Iranian axis of aggression in the region and the necessity of Arab solidarity with the socialist bloc. A joint statement released by representatives of the Ba'th Party and representatives of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), during a visit by Iraqi officials to South Yemen that year, stated how:

> The two sides agreed that the aggressive subversive policy adopted by world imperialism, led by the United States, and particularly its activities in the Arab area which aim at destroying the progressive forces and the national democratic regimes, constitutes a serious danger to world peace and security. The two sides evaluated the role of the friendly socialist states…in strengthening the struggle of the peoples fighting against imperialism and reaction and for their emancipation and social progress.
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> …
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> …They also reviewed the aggressive expansionist role of Iran in implementing the aims of US imperialism.[360]

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[357] 'Al-Bakr May Day Message Delivered by Ba'th Party Official'
[358] Ibid
[359] Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, p. 203
For further reading on the Kurdish struggle in Iraq, including this particular phase, see Edmund Ghareeb, *The Kurdish Question in Iraq* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1981); Saad Jawad, *Iraq and the Kurdish Question, 1958–1970* (London: Ithaca Press, 1981); Saad Jawad, 'The Kurdish Question in Iraq: Historical Background and Future Settlement', *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Jan., 2008), pp. 25 -41; David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000), pp. 323-342; Edgar O'Ballance, *The Kurdish Struggle, 1920-94* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), pp. 81-101
For the Ba'thist state's appraisal of the insurgency, see also Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr, *President Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr Announces the End of the Insurgency of the Agent Pocket in the North of the Country* (Baghdad: Ministry of Information, 1975).
[360] 'Joint Statement on Visit of Iraqi Party Group', *Foreign Broadcast Information Service* (*FBIS*), FBIS-MEA-74-055, Baghdad Domestic Service, 15th March 1974

This tying together of the success of Arab democracy and progressive revolution in the Gulf region with the expansion of relations with the international socialist bloc is important in the way it situates the Gulf in the global political scene at the time, as well as for the way in which it interpellates Iran effectively as an arm or extension of US empire in the region. Echoing that sentiment, in March 1974, Na'im Haddad, who was Secretary-General of the NPF and member of the RCC, commented on the joint US-Iranian role in supporting the Kurdish rebels in northern Iraq, and specifically the part played by Henry Kissinger, with a press release describing how:

> Referring to the phenomenal arms deal being arranged by Iranian reaction, Comrade Haddad expressed the belief that the deals are aimed at enabling the Iranian authorities to suppress the national (*watani*) forces…and at turning Iran into a tyrannical aggressive power playing the role of the imperialist policeman against the Arab people in the Gulf, and against the nationalist, progressive and socialist Iraqi revolution.[361]

Iran's role, again, is articulated as being a function of imperialism against Gulf Arabs in general and Iraq in particular. And so, in response to this, the kinds of regional alliances the Ba'thist state had with actors such as the PDRY were vital to Iraq's positioning in the region, the legitimacy it was attempting to develop and project, and the networks it was cultivating in a scene where it was perceived as isolated and lacking political friends. The Ba'th Party's 1974 political report articulates this kind of discourse, reflecting on the development of its alliances over the years but also clearly commenting on the contemporary moment when the Ba'thist state perceived itself as being under national and geopolitical duress:

> …the success of the party in crystallising a principled and improved formula for an alliance with the Soviet Union and the progressive forces in the world, began to show that the revolutionary experiment in Iraq was a solid basis for the Arab struggle…This placed the party in new, advanced positions in the Arab revolutionary movement.[362]

And after commenting specifically on Iran's role in the Shatt al-'Arab and Kurdish questions, the report states:

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[361] 'Ba'th Official Denounces Kissinger, Zionists, Iran', *Foreign Broadcast Information Service* (*FBIS*), FBIS-MEA-74-062, Baghdad Domestic Service, 21st March 1974
[362] 'The Political Report of the Eighth Congress of the Arab Ba'th Socialist Party in Iraq'

Relations with the socialist countries, particularly the Soviet Union, occupy an advanced place in our foreign relations, especially since the signing of the Iraqi-Soviet treaty in 1972…our struggle is mainly directed against international forces which have colossal political, military and economic resources, namely against world imperialism, Zionism…and their local allies…For these reasons, alliance with an international force that has political, military and economic resources, and which comes close to us in regard to the principles, aims and interests in the process of our national struggle against the aforementioned enemies is a correct and very essential operation, provided that the characteristics distinguishing our Arab revolution are maintained.

Our Arab revolution, which is a part of this comprehensive world revolution, must meet with the Soviet Union and the socialist countries, which represent the largest forces of the world revolution. The alliance of the parties in these two revolutions is a natural thing.[363]

This discourse not only positions the consolidation of the Iraqi-Soviet alliance as a response to the Western-Iranian axis, it articulates the centrality of Arab revolution and the defence of Arabism as its key legitimating thrust. In addition to that, Iraq's burgeoning alliances with progressive global forces were portrayed as giving it the strategic and political edge to lead the Arab movement, no doubt a claim to leadership vis-à-vis other Arab states, particularly in the aftermath of the 1973 war and tensions with Syria (more on this below). The interactive dynamic with Iranian practice and policy is striking here. In other pronouncements, there is talk of American imperialism aiming to co-opt and weaken Arab leadership in the Gulf and pave the way for Iranian "reaction" and "domination" to expand in the region,[364] the penetration of American capital via Tehran to subvert "Arab Gulf" economic independence,[365] and even suggestions that Iran was close to joining NATO and had American and NATO backing in its "anti-Arab" activities in the Gulf region.[366] The 1974 party report even suggested that "Iranian immigration on a large scale," into the "Arab Gulf area", was part of the British and American attempt to "perfect their control" over the region.[367] What we see in these kinds of discursive

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[363] Ibid
[364] 'Footnotes to the So-called Geneva Peace Conference'
[365] 'Iraq Criticises Egyptian-Iranian Accord'
[366] 'With the Worsening Energy Crisis, Washington Looks to Add Iran and Israel to NATO'
[367] 'The Political Report of the Eighth Congress of the Arab Ba'th Socialist Party in Iraq'

formulations is the construction of a geopolitical imaginary which places Cold War alliances in opposition to each other along the lines of Arab-Iranian rivalry, where the preservation of the Arabism of the Gulf is ensured by Iraqi-Soviet cooperation explicitly constructed as standing against US/Western-Iranian regional machinations. Extra-regional alliances with the great powers of the day, in other words, were represented as bound up with regional Arab-Iranian struggle, and were crucial to ideas of legitimation.

It is also worth exploring the point about how "security" is conceptualised alongside the "Arabism" of the area, something which the next chapter touches on as well. The official report of the Ba'th Party's Eighth Congress employs the same discourse in this regard as al-Bakr's May Day message, occurring in the same year, 1974, claiming that "foreign imperialist ambitions in the Arab Gulf area constitute a serious threat to the area's security and stability" with "dangers threatening the Arabism of the area…"[368] Importantly, by this time, not only had Iran taken up its position on the three Gulf islands, but significant developments had taken place in the West Asia region more broadly. After the 1973 Arab-Israeli War which resulted in an Israeli military victory and the failure of Egypt and Syria to gain back territories lost in the 1967 War, the Syrian and Iraqi Ba'thist states exchanged accusations of a lack of commitment to the Palestinian cause, soon escalating into denunciations. With yet another defeat for the West Asia Arab axis and questions raised concerning the pan-Arab legitimacy of each state, the Iraqi Ba'thist discourse emphasising the Gulf's Arabism alongside its security could be seen as an attempt to yet again heighten the centrality of the Gulf in pan-Arab politics and "Arab security", and elevate the importance of the Iraqi state in the ideational regime of "Arab steadfastness". On this note, Pinar Bilgin reminds us that there is a "mutually constitutive relationship" between the construction of "regions" and both "conceptions and practices of security".[369]

It is worth exploring here the place of security in pan-Arabist discourses more broadly, including in the Iraqi Ba'thist imagination specifically, and relating it back to the notion of geopolitical imaginaries. Regions are indeed inventions, as Kären Wigen and Martin Lewis have shown in a systematic fashion, and this includes some of the most "common-sensical" and taken-for-granted regions we speak about in quotidian discourse.[370] But by looking at the imaginative regionalisation undertaken by states such as Ba'thist Iraq, we see that the process

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[368] Ibid
[369] Pinar Bilgin, 'Whose 'Middle East'?', p. 26
[370] Martin W. Lewis and Kären E. Wigen, *The Myth of Continents*

of constructing, envisioning and articulating regions reveals much more than the fact they are simply inventions. Foremost amongst these, I would argue, and certainly in the case of the Ba'thist Iraqi state, constructions of regions reflect conceptions of security, which in turn shine a light on notions of ownership and belonging. As I mention above, it is highly instructive how Ba'thist Iraqi discourse conceptualised "security" in the Gulf alongside "Arabism", and I believe it reveals much about how the Iraqi state tried to construct the notion of an organic and rightful order in the region and to whom the region belonged, as well as reflecting deeper anxieties of regional power as strategic shifts were taking place. Abdel Monem Said Aly reminds us that a significant dimension of the Arab nationalist project was opposition to any regional formulation or architecture which was seen to undermine the "Arab character" or "Arab unity" of what was perceived to be "their" part of the world.[371] For Ba'thist Iraq, the notion of the "Persian Gulf" was unacceptable for this reason, but further, what the alignment between Arabism and security did was conceptualise the latter as more than simply a military or strategic matter: it was also about identity and the nation.[372] The security of the Gulf, in other words, was bound up with the preservation of its Arab character, or, as I would argue, and as I explore more in the next chapter, its proclaimed Arab ontology. In a sense, therefore, Gulf Arabism *was* Gulf security. Further, again, if we view it in the context of regional developments, we can see the discourse positioned both the Gulf generally and Iraq specifically as the vanguard of pan-Arab prosperity and security. Connecting this to its discourse on Iran and the threat of the Western imperial-Iranian axis, by "Arabising" the region and regional security, and indeed in turn by securitising and regionalising Arabism, Ba'thist Iraqi discourse positioned non-Arab Iran as a geopolitical outsider and a geopolitical threat, not just in the military sense, but in an existential manner as a threat to the very essential character of the Gulf.

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[371] Abdel Monem Said Aly, 'The Shattered Consensus: Arab Perceptions of Security', *The International Spectator: Italian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (Oct.-Dec., 1996), pp. 23-52
[372] Baghat Korany, 'National Security in the Arab World: The Persistence of Dualism', in Dan Tschirgi (ed.), *The Arab World Today* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1994), p. 173
On this topic of varying conceptions of security and regionalisation in the Arab world, see also Abdel Monem Said Aly, 'The Superpowers and Regional Security in the Middle East', in Mohammed Ayoob (ed.), *Regional Security in the Third World: Case Studies from Southeast Asia and the Middle East* (London: Croom Helm, 1986); Gamil Mattar and Ali E. Hillal Dessouki, *Al-Nizam al-Iqlimi al-'Arabi* (Beirut: Dar al-Mustaqbal al-'Arabi, 1983); Bassam Tibi, 'From Pan-Arabism to the Community of Sovereign States: Redefining the Arab and Arabism in the Aftermath of the Second Gulf War', in Michael C. Hudson (ed.), *The Middle East Dilemma: The Politics and Economics of Arab Integration* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999)

## Conclusion: Cold War Colours

The Cold War was not simply the structure of international relations which was super-imposed onto the Gulf, unilaterally restricting and pacifying the practices and discourses of regional states such as Iran and Iraq. To be sure, it formed the context within which they operated as political actors, significantly influencing the contours of their discourses, but both states moulded and manipulated the circumstances of great power politics during the period in question to pursue their own regional objectives and strategies, fulfil their perceived roles, and articulate the politics of the Gulf region in self-centring, self-legitimating ways, reinforcing representations of Arab-Iranian confrontation and difference.

Pahlavi Iran was a deeply internally conflicted, unsure and paradoxical state in its discursive practices and geopolitical claims, a result in large part to an underlying legitimacy deficit. Pahlavi discourse attempted both to render Iran as adjacent, if not friendly, to the West, by heightening notions of Arab instability and unreliability, but also claimed itself independent. The overall effect of its broader discursive modalities, however, situated the Arab states in a secondary position in the regional hierarchy.

Ba'thist Iraq, meanwhile, was not only concerned with competing with a fast-rising, Western-backed Iran on the regional scale, but with essential domestic power consolidation and geopolitical legitimation having just come to power as the Gulf was in a moment of transformation. As such, representing itself and its Soviet friends, and the socialist bloc more broadly, as vital to the Arabism of the region and as the frontline in the defence against the US-Iran axis in the Gulf, Iraq was positioned atop the regional hierarchy in its own way and the paradigm of extra-regional relations were articulated as bound up with the Gulf Arab struggle against Iranian aggression.

# Chapter 4

# Revolution and Stability: Place and Purpose

> Asadollah [Alam] had studied this phenomenon and concluded, that the key to success was popularity based upon a measure of nationalistic fervour, which in turn must be founded in some patriotic aspiration, such as the recovery of Bahrain or a struggle against Arab expansion. – Arthur Kellas, British diplomat, late 1950s[373]

> The increasing Iranian infiltration of the Arab Gulf is threatening to turn part of the Arabs into new displaced Palestinians, and planting another alien racialist entity in the body of the Arab nation. – *The Baghdad Observer*, 1972[374]

By looking at how the two states talked about and represented their geopolitical alliances and how they discursively positioned themselves within the Cold War imagination, the previous chapter began to give us a picture of more fundamental and broader questions of how the two states constructed Gulf security and regional dynamics in ways that suggested, sometimes strongly and sometimes more subtly, Arab-Iranian difference. This chapter will build on this by looking at how Iran and Iraq talked more specifically about their *own* roles in the region as well as the role of the region itself. The previous chapter showed that part of the geopolitical imaginary of Iran and Iraq were discourses which positioned the Gulf within the Cold War in fundamentally irreconcilable ways: Iran articulating the threat of radical (pan-)Arabism and the spread of leftism with Soviet encroachment, and positioning itself at the centre of the fight against this; and Iraq representing the Soviet Union as a vital ally of Arabs in combatting anti-Arab Gulf forces, led by Iran and its alliance with Western imperial powers. Cold War extra-regional relations which were becoming increasingly important in the aftermath of the British withdrawal were discursively legitimated by both actors with reference to notions of Arabism and Arab radicalism in the Gulf. But beyond this, and more fundamentally, what did Iran and Iraq feel their purpose was in the region? Where did they claim to fit in the region's geopolitics,

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[373] Quoted in Ali M. Ansari, 'Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi & the Myth of Imperial Authority', PhD Thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London (1998), p. 213

[374] 'A Second Palestine in the Arab Gulf', *The Baghdad Observer*, Baghdad, 29th December 1972, published in Joint Publications Research Service Reports (JPRS), Translations on the Near East, No. 899

and why? Did they have any notion of a grand mission? How were these articulated with respect to notions of Arab-Iranian difference and rivalry?

We can see Ba'thist Iraq and Pahlavi Iran as "regional middle powers"[375] or "regional great powers".[376] This has already been alluded to at various points in previous chapters, where the two states have been described as aspirational and seeking a type of great power status of their own within the Gulf region. This conceptualisation could be particularly appropriate since, taking into account what was explored in chapters two and three, Ba'thist Iraq and Pahlavi Iran represented themselves as "States aggrieved by the hegemony of external powers over the regional system…,"[377] and this positionality came to form a vital part of the way they constructed and projected themselves. It is the articulation of these very roles that we turn to here.

What this chapter aims to show is that the geopolitical roles that Ba'thist Iraq and Pahlavi Iran saw for themselves were steeped in notions and representations of Arab-Iranian rivalry, and were fundamentally *geopolitical* role conceptions. First I will look at Ba'thist and Pahlavi discourses of modernisation and development in the Gulf, then focusing specifically on their geopolitical role conceptions. It becomes clear that the way the two states articulated and understood their sense of "belonging" in the Gulf, and what they saw as their purpose in the region, both reflected and reinforced particular ideas they had about themselves and each other, expressing notions of culture, history and identity, all converging to construct geopolitical roles and responsibilities immersed in claims of Arab-ness and Iranian-ness. In other words, claims to leadership, claims to identity and claims to space all came together in these geopolitical role conceptions and geopolitical imaginaries. Further, claims to Arab-ness and Iranian-ness were explicitly used to *justify* these perceived roles and privileges. And once again, both the differences and similarities are fascinating to see, reflecting the specific conditions and specific characteristics of each state.

Once again, it is worth laying out the historical context in terms of the particular developments which occurred and are referenced in the chapter. On the regional scale much of it is the same as that described previously, including the war in Oman, clashes over the Shatt al-'Arab, the Kurdish question, and the conflict over the three Lower Gulf islands. Adding to this now in

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[375] Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Raymond A. Hinnebusch, *Syria and Iran*, p. 6
Of course, Ehteshami and Hinnebusch talk about this in reference to revolutionary Iran and Ba'thist Syria, but I would argue it is also a fruitful way to think about Pahlavi Iran and Ba'thist Iraq.
[376] Iver B. Neumann, *Regional Great Powers in International Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 1992)
[377] Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Raymond A. Hinnebusch, *Syria and Iran*, p. 6

this chapter, however, is the significance of domestic socio-economic transformations taking place in Iran and Iraq. In the case of the former, we have the Pahlavi state's drive to modernise Iran through a top-down developmentalist agenda described in nationalistic and civilisationalist terms as the recovery of Iranian greatness. The latter, meanwhile, spent this period of time attempting to consolidate state control over the domestic economy, including the restructuring of the oil industry, and boost infrastructure development in partnership with the Soviet Union. This went hand-in-hand with a political centralisation process that included both neutralisation and incorporation of various political groups and factions. Once again, therefore, we can clearly see the tight connections between the domestic and regional realms.

## Geo-economic Imaginaries: Modernisation and Development in the Gulf

Both Ba'thist and Pahlavi discourses had a significant focus on notions of modernisation and development, and fascinatingly, these were viewed in a geopolitical and regional scope as well as a domestic one. As has been mentioned, particularly in chapters two and three, the late-1960s-to-mid-1970s period, especially into the early 1970s, was a major moment in Gulf "modernisation", economic consolidation and socio-economic transformation, not only because of the growing significance of oil production and oil prices on the regional, but, indeed partly following from that, also because of various national programmes of industrialisation and modernisation. When looking at Ba'thist and Pahlavi discourses, the salience of this is clear. By leveraging self-proclaimed domestic socio-economic success and prosperity, both states used such claims to garner legitimacy for regional leadership roles in justifying their centrality to the Gulf and stressing their pivotal roles therein. Whilst Ba'thist Iraq articulated a vision of geopolitical development and modernisation which served Arabism in the Gulf region, Pahlavi Iran's discourse involved the representation of Iran as the most advanced, modern power in the region capable of guarding against leftist and Arab radicalism, with the Arab states interpellated lower down in the hierarchy. We can describe this as a "geo-economic" discourse and vision in so far as it concerns the imagination of a type of regional economic order, and a particular representation of economic power, primacy and purpose across a particular space, with notions of legitimacy and leadership being bound up with it.[378]

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[378] Antto Vihma, 'Geoeconomic Analysis and the Limits of Critical Geopolitics', pp. 1-21

## The Pahlavi Civilisational Drive and Iran as the Model Moderniser

Indeed the Pahlavi state's socio-economic policy and vision featured a prominent "civilisational" discourse. The late-1960s-to-mid-1970s period was in the midst of the Shah's "White Revolution", launched in 1963, envisioned as a bloodless industrial and economic revolution to catapult Iran into the ranks of the leading modern states of the world, fundamentally reconfigure Iranian class and social relations (thus pre-empting and preventing leftist agitation), legitimate Pahlavi rule, and more broadly cultivate and reinforce the image of Iran as an exceptional nation where ruler and ruled are united under a type of étatist utopia and the needs of the latter are provided by the former (of course, this was part of the drive towards what the Shah called *tamaddon-e bozorg*, or "great civilisation").[379] In an editorial describing a visit the Shah had made to southern Iran in 1971, therefore, it is described how "The Shah's visits to Fars and Hormozgan provinces are important events in the lives of people in these regions, once the strongholds of feudalism," because of "the stability, security and prosperity they have enjoyed because of the Revolution."[380] Interestingly, the piece goes on to note "the significance of the progress of the educational and developmental sectors of the region, which is so important to Iran in assuring the stability and security of the Persian Gulf area," demonstrating a geopolitical and geo-economic vision which ties the domestic and regional spheres together.

The grandiose national(ist) ambitions of Pahlavi developmental policy which was articulated as such to international audiences, as well as domestic, is indicated in a 1973 interview where the Shah declared:

> What I want for Iran is very simple, very clear, very ambitious and very possible. In 20 or 25 years I want it to be ahead of the greatest nations of the world.

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[379] On the White Revolution, see, amongst others, Ervand Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, pp. 126-158; Ali M. Ansari, 'The Myth of the White Revolution: Mohammad Reza Shah, 'Modernisation' and the Consolidation of Power', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (Jul., 2001), pp. 1-24; Ali M. Ansari, 'Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi & the Myth of Imperial Authority', pp. 229-279; Nikkie R. Keddie, *Modern Iran*, pp. 148-170; Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, *The White Revolution* (Tehran: Imperial Pahlavi Library, 1967). On the "great civilisation", see Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, *Beh Su-ye Tamaddon-e Bozorg* (Tehran: Markaz-e Pazhuhesh va Nashr-e Farhang-e Siyasi-e Dawran-e Pahlavi, 1977).
[380] Rejuvenation of Southern Iran', *Kayhan*, Tehran, 29th April 1971, published in Joint Publications Research Service Reports (JPRS), Translations on the Near East, No. 621

> We will have 60 million people in 25 years. With that number of people, we can be the most advanced country and do better than any other country. Some people say that we will be one of the five most developed countries of the world.[381]

And similarly, in an interview with *Der Spiegel*, after being asked how he thought Iran could become one of the world's most advanced countries in such a short space of time (which he would frequently assert), the Shah responded:

> Energy, perseverance and the steadfastness of our nation – one of our superior attributes…
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> …
>
> Our people are hardworking who are thirsty for knowledge. There is no doubt about this. Ask your people what kind of people work in our country. We have every type of motivation as well. We have our own customs and we have a very ancient history which goes back 3,000 years. Why should we copy others?[382]

Importantly, I would argue that these kinds of discourses should be conceptualised within and alongside broader Iranian nationalist conceptualisations of modernity. The idea of proximity to the West and West-adjacency has already been touched on in previous sections, and it is relevant again here, reminding us of the lines cutting across nationalism and geopolitics. Such civilisational and nationalistic claims should be seen as an appeal made within the context of a particular geopolitical imagination and a particular claim about Iranian nationhood and state power. Joya Blondel Saad's work on modern Persian literature showed us that particular strains of Iranian nationalism, and this certainly includes the Pahlavi variant, incorporated a potent pro-Western and anti-Arab outlook, enabling an "importation" and internalisation of modes of modernisation as well as cultural markers associated with the "West".[383] I would argue this could be stretched further to incorporate a geopolitical conceptual framework. John Agnew describes how the "acquisition of primacy among states [is] equivalent to…status allocation…" and that modern states have "formed a status system analogous to that found among social

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[381] 'Shah of Iran Urges Arabs to End Their Oil Embargo', *New York Times*, 22nd December 1973

[382] 'Shah Gives Views on Oil in Der Spiegel Interview', *Foreign Broadcast Information Service* (*FBIS*), FBIS-MEA-74-005, Tehran Domestic Service, 6th January 1974

[383] Joya Blondel Saad, *The Image of Arabs in Modern Persian Literature* (Lanham, MD: UP of America, 1996), p. 134

groups. Each sought to emulate the more prestigious and more modern states above them in the hierarchy…Modernisation entailed the endless emulation of successful Great Powers by aspiring ones."[384] This idea was talked about in chapter three specifically in regards to military power, but it applies here as well. Thus, in addition to the strategic pragmatism behind the Pahlavi state's alignment with Western regional interests and priorities, there is the additional component of the ideological imperatives and ideational structures of modern geopolitics, which led to Great Power emulation for the purpose of climbing up the international hierarchy among "aspiring powers". And thus we have statements such as those above, and like Prime Minister Hoveyda's in 1975 announcing that "Even now I can see our country in the ranks of the strongest nations" when discussing Iran's economic and industrial development,[385] and the Shah claiming that "…the per capita income of our people will increase at such a rate that in five years we will be ahead of European countries…"[386] There is a clear attempt to create legitimisation, recognition and status through a process of imitation and association. This, I believe, was vital to the Pahlavi project of validating its claim to a regional leadership role and distinguishing Iran from the "lesser" Arab states. This becomes clear in the discursive formulations below.

The Pahlavi modernising drive, therefore, had a pronounced nationalistic impulse and should be seen as a component of broader strategies of legitimation undertaken by Pahlavi elites to galvanise an Iranianist culture in response, at least in part, to accusations of clientelist dependency and Western-centrism. When we take this into account alongside the decision to abandon the Islamic *hijri* calendar in favour of an imperial one, for instance, or the now-infamous 1971 celebration commemorating 2,500 years of Iranian empire in Persepolis, we can gauge the kinds of civilisational meanings both bound up with broader Pahlavi policy and conveyed by it.[387] Just to add, it is of great significance that the 2,500th celebrations were held just a few months before Britain's official withdrawal from the Gulf, an announcement of sorts proclaiming Iran's reclamation of its role in the region. In a 1975 speech by Hoveyda, at the third congress of the *Iran Novin Party* (*New Iran Party*), a royalist political party, the Pahlavi state and Pahlavi regional policy are described as central to the prosperity, security and stability of the Gulf, with Iran under the Pahlavi state presented as an unequivocal economic and industrial success, with "new economic and social standards unparalleled in the history of a

[384] John A. Agnew, *Geopolitics*, pp. 67-68
[385] 'Premier Hoveyda Explains Public Programs'
[386] 'Shah Interviewed by Editor of Indian Weekly'
[387] Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, *The International Politics of the Persian Gulf*, p. 17

similar nation…"[388] It is not insignificant that Hoveyda uses this idea of unparalleled success to then legitimate Iran's premier role in the Gulf. This should be seen as fitting together with the geopolitical discourse employed by the Pahlavi state in regards to the Gulf and the position it attempted to construct for itself in regional politics. In adopting a discourse which tied together modernisation, economic advancement, and Iranian civilisational and national greatness, the Pahlavi geopolitical imagination, I would argue, incorporated a coded (although at times even explicit) mode of articulating Arab-Iranian difference when it came to regional development which placed the Arab states as secondary to Iran.

**Hierarchies of Progress**

The Shah's comments to Roy Roebuck in 1969 referenced in the previous chapter are useful to go back to in this regard, particularly on the question of oil production at a time when oil prices were on a steady upward trajectory *and* Iran was looking to continue financing domestic economic and social reforms, reflected in his request for increased production in Iran to be carried out by the Western oil consortium in the country. It is instructive that right after representing Iran as *the* reliable oil producer to a British audience, suggesting the Arab states were "unstable" and contributing to regional subversion, and calling on Western countries to focus on purchasing more oil from Iran, the *Kayhan* piece goes further:

> On the other hand, the Shah said, Iran uses its oil revenues to create a stable
> society through investments in modern industries and the creation of a better
> life for every Iranian. He said this has ensured domestic peace in Iran and
> ensured the country as a dependable source of oil supply to the West.[389]

The juxtaposition the Shah attempts to create between the Arab states and Iran is important here, constructing a geopolitical, and indeed even geo-economic, regional order where Arab states were presented as obstacles to Western interests and Iran was the guarantor of regional stability; and where Iran has ensured domestic peace through responsible investment and modernisation, unlike the Arab states whose oil funds ostensibly finance Nasserist pan-Arab radicalism. This discourse ties together Iran's domestic prosperity with its regional primacy and creates a clear relation of difference and hierarchy along Arab-Iranian lines.

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[388] 'Premier Hoveyda Explains Public Programs'
[389] 'Renouncement of Iran's Claim Over Bahrain Will Be Treason'

But even a few years before as oil production, oil prices, and regional modernisation were firmly on the regional political agenda, Iranian political commentators were employing this kind of hierarchising and condescending discourse and demonstrating how they viewed the region's geo-economy. A December 1966 editorial, commenting on the lack of friendship and cooperation from Arab states, in particular Saudi Arabia, on the issue of oil production quotas amongst regional states and Iran's call to increase its own, put it like so:

> Most important is how an oil producing nation of the Persian Gulf which has problems and pains in common with other oil producing nations of the area, can oppose another nation's efforts in trying to solve its problems?

> We are proud that Iran is the standard bearer of change and evolution in the oil policies of the Persian Gulf area…Isn't it true that whatever progress Iran achieves in these directions will make the work of others who strive for such objectives later easier?...As long as one can be a lion and ask for one's rights, why should a nation act against the interests of a country with interests similar to its own?[390]

In mapping time onto space,[391] by portraying Iran as "ahead" of the Arab oil-producing states, a model to be emulated, and at the apex of regional development, and through the explicit use of the lion as the imperial nationalist symbol of Iran, we can see once again a type of coding of Arab-Iranian difference through the construction of a hierarchy which plays to Iranianist sentiment and presents Arab states as unreasonable and irrational. Such statements could be made in much cruder ways at times, such as Dariush Homayoun's claim in 1969, when similar debates over oil production quotas and prices were taking place, that

> …So long as there is oil under the ground, Arab oil-producing states will be Iran's competitors…

> In so far as they are able, the Arabs will not let Iran alone in the Persian Gulf. Iran must not allow itself any illusions as to common Arab intentions in that region. The only question is the extent of the ability of Arab governments in creating difficulties for Iran and Iranians…It is a place where the Arabs most

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[390] 'Friendship Must Be Proved in Practice', *Peygham-e Emruz*, Tehran, 4th December 1966, published in Joint Publications Research Service Reports (JPRS), Press Information Report on Iran, No. 15
[391] John A. Agnew, *Geopolitics*, pp. 35, 47
For an exploration of the uses of time in constructing paradigms of power and inequality, see Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

certainly do not welcome Iran and Iranians. It is not a question of coexistence but a situation where Arabs would – if they could – prevent the presence of non-Arabs.[392]

Not only is the sense of a direct, unequivocal geopolitical clash striking here, it is the perception of Iran and Iranians as "unbelonging" and stifled, at a time when not only oil production and oil prices were on the regional agenda, but so were Iran's claims to Bahrain and the Lower Gulf islands.

In 1973, amidst the oil embargo launched against those states perceived to be supporting Israel against Egypt and Syria, this kind of discourse was employed yet again. In an interview to *Le Monde* in Paris, Prime Minister Hoveyda declared that "In our view oil should not be used for political purposes. We have told the Arabs this on several occasions…"[393] It should also be said that in the same interview, when asked about the potential costs to industrialised countries of high oil prices, Hoveyda insisted that "We do not want to ruin Western civilisation, to which we Iranians belong."[394] A few days earlier, the Shah urged the Arab states in the Gulf to drop the embargo lest they risk the future prosperity and economic development of the region, questioning their logic and suggesting they were unaware of the costs involved. Once again he positioned Iran as the reliable, mature actor in the region and the Arab states as compromising the region's development. It is also worth pointing out the quite striking comment he makes in the same interview when pressed by the interviewer on Arab "resentment" towards Iran's ties with Israel and its refusal to join the embargo: "I will not accept anyone's pressures, friend or foe. Why should there be resentments? They say we are Muslims, but we are Aryans."[395]

Indeed, when we place these kinds of discourses next to statements made by the Shah that Arab states were socially and economically "backward" and not inclined to reform (unlike himself, of course),[396] thus making them susceptible to Arab radicalism,[397] we can see the kind of geopolitical imaginary being constructed and articulated, as well as the legitimacy being cultivated, by Pahlavi elites, on issues of Gulf economic development and modernisation. Pahlavi geo-economic and geopolitical discourse in this regard attempted to align Iran with the

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[392] The Struggle Forced upon Iran'
[393] 'Prime Minister Interviewed on Oil Issue', *Foreign Broadcast Information Service* (*FBIS*), FBIS-MEA-74-003, Le Monde, Paris, 28th December 1973
[394] Ibid
[395] 'Shah of Iran Urges Arabs to End Their Oil Embargo'
[396] *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1969-1976, Vol. E-4, Document 201
[397] Roham Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah*, p. 53

Western bloc, appeal to domestic nationalist sentiment amidst a socio-economic revolution at home, and position Iran at the helm of the region's advancement.

**Ba'thist Iraq Overcoming Arab "Backwardness"**

The Ba'thist developmental vision had a similar modernising thrust reflected in its discourse and policies, both at home and in the Gulf region more broadly. Intriguingly, much like Pahlavi Iran, the Ba'thist state sought and appealed to the aesthetic (as well as the practical materialisation) of modernisation, reinforcing Agnew's claim referenced above regarding the hegemonic tendencies of the modern geopolitical imagination and its shared features. In the case of Ba'thist Iraq, this was not just a case of the need to compete with the chief powers of the day and Iraq's key regional rival, Iran, but it was also brought about by the claim that Iraq stood at the forefront of Arab liberation and Arab economic advancement. As detailed above and in the previous chapter on Iraq's ties to the Soviet Union, much of Ba'thist discourse demonstrates this, with Iraqi industrial and economic development presented as accomplishments for Arab power and the defence of Arab people, a model for the overcoming of "backwardness". Some of the discourses we will see below are further demonstrations of not only the modernising impulse and modernist representational modalities, but the attempt to render them regionally hegemonic.

With a strong emphasis on egalitarian growth and redistribution, beginning with agrarian reform post-coup to combat feudal "backwardness" and moving on to oil nationalisation, domestic reinvestment of oil revenues, and state-led industrialisation, Ba'thist economic policy and socio-economic discourse was oriented towards enhancing domestic legitimacy, cultivating a social base, boosting Iraqi power in the region and achieving a significant degree of economic autonomy and diversification.[398] A 1970 editorial in *al-Thawrah* illustrates profoundly the Ba'thist discourse of unprecedented accomplishment, revolutionary change and state-led modernisation when speaking on socio-economic progress in Basra, in southern Iraq, traditionally seen as an underdeveloped and impoverished region:

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[398] Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, pp. 156-163
See also Amazia Baram, 'The Ruling Political Elite in Bathi Iraq, 1968-1986: The Changing Features of a Collective Profile', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (Nov., 1989), pp. 447-493; Derek Hopwood, Habib Ishow and Thomas Koszinowski (eds.), *Iraq: Power and Society* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1993); Abbas al-Nasrawi, *The Economy of Iraq: Oil, Wars, Destruction of Development and Prospects, 1950-2010* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994); Edith Penrose and E.F. Penrose, *Iraq: International Relations and National Development* (London: E. Benn, 1978)

…What, then, has the revolution brought to it?

The hand of the revolution reached out to this crushed city, extended to it after it had undergone oppressive and dreadful periods. It reached out to apply scientific and practical methods in administration and to give radical solutions to the major social issues. Also, the revolution had the best understanding of making popular and governmental undertakings take on a mass imprimatur…

After the triumph of the merging of the people and the government to transform the relations of production, work began to proceed rapidly…in order to arrive at the implementation of the revolutionary system soundly and quickly.

…all work-loving people have exerted the maximum effort to build a new Iraq.[399]

As Charles Tripp succinctly put it, the Ba'thist economic programme, certainly during the period in question, was defined by "The two themes of populism and patronage…,"[400] and this is reflected in the collectivist Arabist discourse it adopted when talking about development and progress on the regional scale. Overcoming "backwardness" and aspiring for technical and scientific excellence was not just a policy or a practice with functional purpose but a legitimisation of the Ba'thist project, not just domestically, but amongst the Arab nation at large. Indeed, what comes through is an attempt to garner both domestic and regional legitimacy, position Iraq as the pivot of Arab prosperity vis-à-vis other Arab states, and render the Gulf the zone for Arab progress.

## "Arab Development" for the "Arab Gulf"

A series of comments made by Saddam in 1974, after the Ba'thist state had carried out nationalisation on a significant scale, including in oil production, gives us an insight into the deeply *political* way in which economic transformation was viewed, and thus the regional, geopolitical significance it would take on:

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[399] 'Basra', *al-Thawrah*, Baghdad, 16th April 1970, published in Joint Publications Research Service Reports (JPRS), Translations on the Near East, No. 474

[400] Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, p. 199

The picture of new economic development exists in our philosophy and basic ideologies. We do not separate politics from economy…In other words, we must not push politics to a certain limit when our work to build an economy harmonious with our declared political objectives lag behind…Consequently, our interest in foreign policy, Arab policy and the mobilisation of the masses and the party is equal in importance to our interest in building the new economy and eliminating backwardness.[401]

The insistence on the inseparability of the political and economic spheres and the intriguing linkage drawn between foreign policy, "Arab" policy and economic advancement illustrates the notion of economic purpose and economic power at the heart of Ba'thist discourse and the political role it was designated to play. And so we see in 1969 a piece in *al-Jumhuriyya* referring to Iraq's unprecedented role in the development of "Arab ports" in the "Arab Gulf" following an amendment to Iraqi Ports Law 40. Multiple contexts are important to consider here: firstly, this was still a precarious period for the Ba'thist apparatus as power was still being consolidated, particularly within the military wing of the Ba'th Party by Saddam; secondly, that same year Iraq had signed its agreement with the Soviet Union to begin exploitation of the country's oil fields, outside of the purview of the IPC, and thus marking the beginning of the end of the latter's dominance in Iraq's oil industry and a victory for Ba'thist claims of economic autonomy and resistance; and thirdly, earlier on in the year the Ba'thist government threatened to close the Shatt al-'Arab waterway to Iranian shipping unless Iran complied with a number of conditions under a 1937 treaty, in response to which the Shah abrogated the treaty and sent in naval escorts to accompany Iranian shipping along the waterway. And so this period was vital not just for the consolidation of Ba'thist control and legitimacy at home, but the cultivation of its regional power and pan-Arab credentials around the Gulf region. Thus the *al-Jumhuriyya* piece states:

A new amendment has been introduced into the Iraqi Ports Law No. 40 of 1956. Under the new amendment, the Iraqi Ports Service will carry out development and construction projects in the Arab ports of the Arab Gulf and will manage and exploit the free zones that will be established within the areas under its jurisdiction.

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[401] Saddam Husayn Meeting with Arab Journalists', *Foreign Broadcast Information Service* (*FBIS*), FBIS-MEA-74-071, INA, Baghdad, 11th April 1974

…

> Since the ports along the Arab Gulf are in need of development and Iraqi expertise and equipment to avoid being controlled by exploiters, the Iraqi government is ready to provide this area with every possible aid and assistance.[402]

This discourse has the effect of identifying the "Arab" Gulf as a zone of development and of placing Iraq at its centre, carving out a sphere of influence where the Ba'thist state is presented as the best-positioned and most capable guarantor of defence against exploiters. The notion of "Arab ports" needing Iraqi expertise and equipment is important for the hierarchical claim it suggests as well as the economic self-assurance expressed by a state receiving new investments. Along similar lines, just a few months after the abrogation of the Shatt al-'Arab treaty, it is instructive that President al-Bakr described "the development of society for progress and justice" at home, agricultural modernisation, and the revolutionary national economic programme brought about as of 1968 alongside the development and security of the "Arabian Gulf", which could ensure regional resistance to counter-revolution and to Iranian aggression.[403] The Governor of Basra employed the same discourse the year after in a series of remarks made just a few months after the Pahlavi state was implicated in an attempt to overthrow the Ba'thists and at a time when Iran was continuing to lay claim to Bahrain. Governor Muhammed Mahjub, also a member of the RCC, tied the radical progress and development that Basra had seen since 1968 to the "progressive revolution trying to liberate the Arab lands…," juxtaposing socio-economic progress at home with development throughout the Arab Gulf region, and claiming that rapid modernisation and the improvement of economic indicators and conditions in Basra, as "a sensitive province[s] with regard to our geographic position," was a step towards regional Arab prosperity and tantamount to fortifying the Arab Gulf against Iranian colonialism.[404] This interesting discursive move has the effect of not just Arabising, but securitising development and modernisation and tying it to Arab defence at a moment when Iran was perceived as a major regional threat.

Into the 1970s, as Iraqi state-led industrialisation was picking up and as the grand objective of nationalisation of the IPC was achieved in 1972, marking a high point of domestic

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[402] 'Iraqi Ports Law Amended to Enable Iraqi Ports Service to Carry Out Development Projects in Ports along the Arab Gulf', *al-Jumhuriyya*, Baghdad, 7th October 1969, published in Joint Publications Research Service Reports (JPRS), Translations on the Near East, No. 399
[403] 'Iraqi President Discusses Revolutionary Aims'
[404] 'Basra'

legitimacy,[405] Iraqi economic power and both socialist and pan-Arab credentials, alongside the augmentation of tensions with Iran across multiple fronts, this nationalist developmentalist geopolitical and geo-economic discourse gained renewed prominence. In 1974, at the twenty-seventh anniversary of the founding of the Arab Socialist Ba'th Party and some months after the 1973 war, Shibli al-'Aysami declared that:

> The nationalisation of the operations of the Iraq Oil Company was a practical implementation of the slogan "Arab oil is for the Arabs". The effects and results of this nationalisation…were a serious challenge to imperialism, a great threat to its interests and a great embarrassment to the reactionary governments which were cooperating with imperialism.
>
> …
>
> …it is worth mentioning that Saudi and Gulf money does not aim to achieve the integration of the Arab economy and encourage development and essential projects as much as to exploit and bind the Arab regimes with its policy."[406]

This discursive move of anathematising and delegitimising other Arab states, mentioned throughout, is worth exploring as it was a significant feature of Iraqi Ba'thist discourse and its geopolitical imagination. Eberhard Kienle explained how the cultural system and political logic of pan-Arabism often meant that states such as Ba'thist Iraq would discredit perceived rivals and augment their own nationalist credentials as a tactic of domestic legitimation.[407] This is the kind of "regulative norm" or regulative claim that constructivist scholars argue is designed to specify the proper enactment of a particular identity, or I would argue the fulfilment of a role.[408] But I would argue that there is a geopolitical dimension to this and that we cannot analytically reduce it to a move for domestic utility, especially when we see the discourse employed at

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[405] See Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr, *President Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr Announces the End of Foreign Control of Our Oil* (Baghdad: Ministry of Information, 1975)

[406] 'Ba'th Official Discusses National Policies'
For further examples of oil nationalisation, Arab development, modernisation, and Arab dignity and liberation being discursively linked, see 'National Oil Company to Exploit Oilfields Directly', *al-Thawrah*, Baghdad, 12th December 1971, published in Joint Publications Research Service Reports (JPRS), Translations on the Near East, No. 723; 'Oil Companies Charged with Anti-Iraq Policy', *al-Thawrah*, Baghdad, 18th January 1972, published in Joint Publications Research Service Reports (JPRS), Translations on the Near East, No. 717.

[407] Eberhard Kienle, *Ba'th v. Ba'th: The Conflict between Syria and Iraq, 1968-1989* (London: I.B.Tauris, 1990), pp. 1-30

[408] Peter J. Katzenstein, 'Introduction: Alternative Perspectives on National Security', in Peter J. Katzenstein (ed.), *The Culture of National Security*, p. 5; Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, 'International Norm Dynamics and Political Change', *International Organisation*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (Autumn, 1998), p. 891

times where the Ba'thist state is looking to consolidate both its domestic and regional position, as indicated above. Through the imprecation of "failing" Arab leaders in the region and their inability to protect Arabs and Arabism in the Gulf and the wider region, Ba'thist discourse was constructing a regional hierarchy of Arab leadership and communicating a particular geopolitical pyramid with itself at the top. This is a key dimension of why a state with a discourse like that of Ba'thist Iraq would claim a distinctive place and mission for itself *vis-à-vis other Arab states*, by reinforcing the pan-Arab norm and using it as a measure of legitimacy.[409] This kind of norm and appeal not only pushes states to fulfil particular roles or identities ascribed to them (perhaps by themselves), it simultaneously delegitimises and dismisses them as not fulfilling the role in the first instance.

Putting the focus back on Iran, Al-'Aysami then went on to single out "Iran's role as an imperialist tool…as the watchdog for imperialist interests in the Gulf area" and the expansion of its control over the "Arab Gulf", claiming that economic strength and coordination amongst Arab Gulf states and the directing of Arab wealth and resources towards the defence of Arab liberation was the surest path to victory.[410] This is a call for a collective geo-economic politicisation and this discourse of placing Iraq as not just at the head of a geopolitical Arab vanguard but a geo-economic one is repeated in *al-Thawrah* just a few months before the nationalisation of IPC was carried out in 1972, but notably, also a few months after Iran had moved onto the Tunb and Abu Musa islands, where it is described how "the revolution in Iraq is working today…to build a strong, advancing national economy that will be the basis for the unified Arab economy…," acting as a revolutionary base from which to liberate "all usurped Arab territories," referring not just to Palestine but also the Gulf islands.[411] And again in 1975, in a piece describing tensions between Iraq and Iran, and "Iranian ambitions in the Arab land", it is mentioned how "Iraq is truly preoccupied with achieving fundamental transformation in the various aspects of the country's life. While admitting its *regional* necessity (my emphasis), this transformation is being carried out as a means of qualifying the region to play its role in the national and international arenas…and for the sake of national unity and economic and social progress."[412] Again, therefore, questions of the political and the economic are merged

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[409] Bahgat Korany, 'The Dialectics of Inter-Arab Relations, 1967–1987', in Yehuda Lukacs and Abdalla M. Battah (eds.), *The Arab-Israeli Conflict: Two Decades of Change* (Boulder, Colo.; London: Westview, 1988), pp. 164-178
[410] Ibid
[411] 'Ba'th Party Hailed on Silver Jubilee', *al-Thawrah*, Baghdad, 4th April 1972, published in Joint Publications Research Service Reports (JPRS), Translations on the Near East, No. 799
[412] 'Who Is Responsible?'

together, as well as the domestic and the regional, and socio-economic transformations are constructed as serving an explicitly Arab political, and geopolitical, purpose

By representing development, economic progress and modernisation in the Gulf as a defence of Arabism, and indeed by articulating the notion of "Arab Gulf development" at a more ontological level, Ba'thist discourse constructed a geopolitical and geo-economic vision which depicted the Gulf as a platform for, and sphere of, Arab advancement, threatened by Iranian domination and aggression. In the context of Ba'thist state consolidation, tension with Iran and the cultivation of both domestic and regional legitimacy, Iraq positioned itself at the head of Arab economic progress. Not only did Ba'thist discourse, therefore, conceptualise the geo-economy of the Gulf in line with its commitment to Arabism, in this regard it suggested the Gulf region actually had a *role* to play, and this is what we move on to next.

## Clashing Purposes

The Ba'thist and Pahlavi states articulated goals, purposes and positions that marked them out in the region in different ways, and once again, in looking at this particular dimension of their geopolitical discourses we can see how conceptions of identity, domestic politics, geopolitical claims and strategic orientations come together. Indeed despite deep ideological differences between these two polities, it is the fact that they were so strikingly similar in the way they constructed and articulated their roles in the Gulf that makes them fascinating to compare. It could even be said that the similarities, rather than the differences, are what made these two states so culturally and ideationally antagonistic.[413] As Anwar Gargash puts it, somewhat polemically, their state ideologies were arguably "diametrically opposed" *because* they were both ideationally and culturally "self-righteous".[414] It is interesting to see a CIA report from 1975 echo this assertion: "Iran and Iraq are natural competitors in the Gulf…Both the Shah and

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[413] Whilst making the point in a slightly different context, Jubin Goodarzi argues similarly that in the case of alliance/rivalry patterns in the Middle East, it is often ironically states which share common ideological claims which are more likely to clash, particularly when those claims are made in regards to leadership roles and hegemonic legitimacy. Ba'thist-Pahlavi rivalry and discourses of rivalry demonstrate that this can be the case even when the broader ideologies in question are quite different. Different ideologies and political cultures can still make similar claims.
See Jubin M. Goodarzi, *Syria and Iran*, pp. 8-9
[414] Anwar M. Gargash, 'Chapter Twelve: Prospects for Conflict and Cooperation', p. 322

Saddam Husayn have widely differing views of how the region should evolve politically and both aspire to regional leadership and dominance."[415]

**Iran: Trusted Stabiliser and Historic Pre-eminence**


Pahlavi Iran constructed a geopolitical role which presented itself as not just the guarantor of security and stability against radical leftism and Arabism, appealing to the strategic interests and geopolitical imaginations of the Western bloc, but also the reviver of proclaimed Iranian primacy and national greatness in the Gulf region, a reflection of Pahlavi nationalist culture but also an effort to cultivate domestic legitimacy and appeal to nationalist sentiment. These political considerations and circumstances will be familiar as they have been touched on previously throughout the piece. A significant dimension of this, as we will see, was the representation and articulation of Arab states as inferior and unstable, lacking the capabilities to fulfil the role of regional guardian, and a deeply hierarchical view of the Gulf region amongst Pahlavi elites.

Following the announcement of Britain's withdrawal from the Gulf, and amidst its practically declining role in the preceding years, Pahlavi Iran coloured the region in the terms of Cold War politics in an attempt to draw in the support of the US and the Western bloc for Iran's role as regional security guarantor, containing Soviet influence and combatting destabilising local actors, chiefly Ba'thist Iraq. It is interesting in this regard to see the construction of the role of the Gulf in international politics in Pahlavi discourse aligned with Western interests but also aligned with a certain historical political-cultural perception of the significance of the waterway.

In this regard, the discourse of stability and security was ubiquitous, as was the geopolitical and strategic centring of Iran. As talk ensued regarding a possible reversal of the British

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[415] *Foreign Relations of the United States* (*FRUS*), 1969–1976, Volume XXVII, Iran; Iraq, 1973-1976, ed. Monica Belmonte (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 2012), Document 286
At this time, as the report describes, Saddam is identified as a pivotal figure in the Iraqi state apparatus, hence his singling out even before he became president: at the time he was Vice Chairman of the RCC and Assistant Secretary-General of the Ba'th Party.
On Saddam's personal significance to Ba'thist Iraqi politics and his political and ideational worldview, in the way of biographies, see Shiva Balaghi, *Saddam Hussein: A Biography* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2006); Con Coughlin, *Saddam: The Secret Life* (London: Pan, 2003); Efraim Karsh, *Saddam Hussein: A Political Biography* (London: Brassey's, 1991); Fu'ad Matar, *Saddam Hussein: The Man, the Cause and the Future* (London: Third World Centre, 1981); Fu'ad Matar, *Saddam Hussein: A Biographical and Ideological Account of His Leadership Style and Crisis Management*.

decision to withdraw, *Kayhan* reported on comments made by the Shah in September 1969 that "the guarantee of navigation in the region will be Iran's responsibility which it is fully capable of performing," also noting "the Shah's confidence in being able to prevent any events which would adversely affect the security of the region and provide a pretext for foreign intervention" due to Iran's superior military capabilities relative to the rest of the region.[416] It is in this very same interview that the Shah goes on to call Western powers to rely more on Iran as a stable source of oil supply, intimating that the Arab states were less stable and reliable due to the threat of radical Arabism and their previous use of oil as a weapon in the 1967 War.[417] Of course earlier on in 1969, as already mentioned, Iran was not only suspected of being involved in a coup attempt in Iraq, but tensions between the two countries escalated significantly over the Shatt al-'Arab and Iran's subsequent abrogation of the 1937 navigation treaty. As such, we can see this period of time as significant for Iran in constructing and validating its role as custodian in the region, but also in establishing and making clear the regional hierarchy, both to external backers and to local actors. And so, in September 1969 again, *Ettela'at* reports on Iran's unmatched, leading role in solving border and oil exploration disputes:

> Common bordering waters in many areas led to some disputes which Iran took the lead in resolving…
>
> The second continental shelf agreement for the exploration and exploitation of oil in the Persian Gulf is symbolic of Iran's policy of safeguarding the collective security of the Persian Gulf.
>
> …
>
> The geographical and geophysical aspects of the Persian Gulf are such as could have led to various disputes between countries to the north and south of the area. As a result Iran started negotiations aimed at ensuring the security of the region and was finally successful in drawing up a firm and just agreement…[418]

The positioning of Iran as leading the way in solving regional disputes is significant. A short while after, the same discourse was employed in regards to the issue of Bahrain. The Pahlavi

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[416] 'Renouncement of Iran's Claim Over Bahrain Will Be Treason'
[417] Ibid
[418] 'Iran Takes Lead in Safeguarding Security in the Persian Gulf', *Ettela'at*, Tehran, 21st September 1969, published in Joint Publications Research Service Reports (JPRS), Translations on the Near East, No. 393

state resurrected and politicised Iran's claim to Bahrain in 1957, a claim seen to be a historical one based on the argument that Iran had exercised sovereignty over the island for centuries, only to have it wrested away by the British in collusion with the al-Khalifah tribe after an invasion by the latter. In 1957, the Pahlavi state declared Bahrain to be a province of Iran, and the issue was seen to be of significant value in helping the Shah to buttress his questionable nationalist credentials and legitimacy post-1953. Naturally, therefore, the departure of the British would lead to a new phase in the question. But Iran in fact relinquished the claim in 1970 after agreeing to a United Nations (UN) Mission to ascertain Bahraini opinion on independence (primarily due to strategic considerations), and the discourse surrounding it is instructive in the way that it was seen to both legitimate and enable Iran's proclaimed premier role in the region. Abbas Mas'udi wrote in 1970 that the decision to agree to a UN Mission

> …will provide the way for Persian Gulf countries to cooperate in maintaining
> the stability and security of the region against any foreign aggression. Thus
> Iran – as the largest country of the area and the one which controls all the
> northern shores of the Gulf – will be able to assume its rightful role as a
> power in all of that region…
>
> …
>
> …the rulers of the Persian Gulf are not defensively prepared and depend on
> Iran for protection against possible foreign aggression and intrigues –
> especially from their neighbours.[419]

Addressing the likely nationalist criticism, the decision was thus represented as a step towards ensuring Iran's leadership and primacy in the Gulf. Very clearly oriented towards legitimating the decision to renounce a claim that was historically articulated so passionately and patriotically, it is presented as a necessary step to enabling Iran to fulfil its supreme role in the region. This strong perception of a regional hierarchy and the interpellation of the Arab states to a relegated and almost passive role, in need of Iran, was confirmed by an assistant to Edward Heath, who was leader of the UK's Conservative Party at the time, during a meeting with Iran's Prime Minister Hoveyda and Foreign Minister Ardeshir Zahedi, again in early 1970 just before the decision was made to relinquish the claim to Bahrain. Heath's assistant was struck by the

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[419] 'Discussions on Bahrain'

Iranians' "lack of regard for Gulf rulers, and their determination that Iran should be the dominant military power around her own shores."[420]

The same sentiment was repeated in slightly cruder terms the year before, amidst discussions between Asadollah Alam and Sir Denis Wright, British Ambassador to Iran, on the subject of Abu Musa and the Tunbs, which Iran was much more insistent on compared to Bahrain. Wright tried to warn Alam that Iran's regional assertiveness was being perceived by "the Arabs" as aggressive and troubling, to which Alam responded, "…to hell with it…What have the Arabs ever done for us? If only they would stop all this nonsense, agree to pay for the defence of the Gulf, and let us get on with the work. We are prepared to draw up a fifty year's defence agreement with them…all in all it will be much the same as the agreement they once had with the British."[421] In 1971, as the islands issue was taking on an increasingly confrontational tone and as the British were preparing to leave late in the year, the Shah repeated Iran's primacy in the region and its superior capabilities in relation to the other states:

> …The Shah expressed the opinion that Iran will replace the English as protector and guardian of the Persian Gulf.
>
> He said: "We are the only country which has the necessary economic and military resources to protect this region. Naturally, we hope all the countries of the area will help to ensure its security. But they cannot produce a military force equal to ours. It takes years to create a navy and air force."[422]

The articulation of this hierarchy which stressed Iranian primacy and coded the inferiority of the Arab states was done alongside an emphasis on the notion that Iran's role was something ordained by, and found in, history. Central to the Pahlavi claim was the belief in its *historical* role, and its appeal to this history, which could be read not only as an attempt to boost its domestic nationalist legitimacy but as a reflection of a self-perception of historical Iranian pre-eminence. This includes, but goes beyond, the issue of the nomenclature of the waterway, and of course its geopolitical significance should not be conflated with the historical debate over what the "rightful" title of the Gulf is and what it historically has been.[423] The geopolitical

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[420] Douglas Hurd, *An End to Promises: Sketch of a Government, 1970-74* (London: Collins, 1979), p. 43
Zahedi was a highly significant figure in the Pahlavi state. See Ardeshir Zahedi, *The Memoirs of Ardeshir Zahedi*, trans. Farhang Jahanpour (Bethesda, Md.: Ibex Publishers, 2012).
[421] Asadollah Alam, *The Shah and I*, p. 34
[422] 'Shah Discusses Persian Gulf'
[423] There are various works which have explored this question of historical naming and convention. For a detailed summary, as well as a useful inclusion of further references, see C. Edmund Bosworth, 'The Nomenclature of the Persian Gulf', *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 1/2 (Winter-Spring, 1997), pp. 77-94.

impact of the naming and the broader claim of historical domination, of the waterway historically being a zone of Iranian power, is of course of great import. And so, in 1973, the British having left, Iran having occupied the Gulf islands and still in a state of conflict with Iraq, amidst the energy crisis and fears of an intensifying rivalry in the Gulf region between the Cold War powers, Mohammad Poorhad commented that:

> …such are the newfangled factors which have forced Iran to leave nothing to chance and hazard. At this point, one is reminded of the role played by Iran in the Persian Gulf for two centuries.
>
> …
>
> And it is to this region that all of Iran's attention is truly drawn. The stability and tranquillity of those emerald-green waters are now such a matter of life-and-death for Iran that the Persian Gulf pops up in any initiative and any policy.
>
> That, of course, is the result of a certain revival of an historical role…[424]

Indeed, a US national intelligence estimate report echoes this feature of the Pahlavi geopolitical imagination: "The Shah is acutely conscious of Iran's great past…He is determined to ensure for Iran a position of power and leadership to which he believes it is entitled on the basis of its history and standing in the region. The Shah sees the British withdrawal from the Gulf as a development which gives Iran an opportunity to restore its historic position in the Gulf…"[425] Indeed, the speed with which Iran made its moves on the Lower Gulf islands after the British withdrawal is testament to this perception. Rouhollah Ramazani demonstrated importantly in his work on Iranian foreign policy in the Gulf that in the Pahlavi state's conception of the region's geopolitics, the historic designation of the waterway as the "Persian Gulf" (*Khalij-e Fars*) was proof of Iranian pre-dominance and of a supposedly uninterrupted role as pre-eminent power in the region, and this was tied to notions of Persian superiority.[426] As Richard Schofield reminds us, it was during the mid-1840s when the Persian prime minister at the time, Haji Mirza Aghassi, famously declared the waters (and in fact all of the islands as well) of the Gulf as Persian and belonging to Iran, a claim informed by a sense of possessiveness and

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[424] 'Iran's Role vis-à-vis East-West Oil Rivalry Discussed'
[425] *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1969-1976, Vol. E-4, Document 86
[426] Rouhollah K. Ramazani, *The Persian Gulf*, p. 26

historical imperial prestige.[427] Naming and conceptions of regional power were linked. And so, in an interview with *al-Hawadith* in 1974, the Shah describes the disagreement over the nomenclature of the Gulf and the belief by some that it should be called the "Arab Gulf" (led, it should be noted at this point in time, by Iraq) as "childish behaviour" based on a misreading of history:

> Only children do this. The name of the gulf is the "Persian Gulf". Why change it? It is not true that during the days of the Ottoman Empire it was called the Arab Gulf. It was called the "Basra Gulf" and not the Arab Gulf. The Ottoman Empire is gone…If we want to change historical names, we too can find many such names to change. No one in the world does so, but all accept historical names.[428]

The invocation of "childishness" in the Shah's statement, I would argue, should not be overlooked in the infantilisation it conjures up. It is another form of hierarchy construction and geopolitical positioning, another reference to discourses and notions of maturity which have been mentioned previously and which were vital to the Pahlavi state's self-presentation as well as presentation of others. Further, I would argue that the issue of naming should be placed within the broader processes of sub-regionalisation taking place in the Gulf at the time, as chapter two explained. The tussle over naming, in other words, was a tussle over meaning and a clash of claims as to what this part of West Asia was to look like and what its geopolitical architecture was to reflect as its star rose.

And such pronouncements were not merely about designation of the waters, but Iran's claims regarding historical possession of the territories within them. Indeed this is what we see on the issues of Bahrain and Abu Musa and the Tunbs. Despite the claim to the former being relinquished after the UN Mission, the legitimacy of the claim and Iran's historical sovereignty over Bahrain were never renounced and were often couched in discourses of broader Arab-Iranian rivalry and difference, and Iranian regional pre-eminence. John Peterson describes it as a territorial claim couched in the language of "manifest destiny" (and the same for Abu Musa and the Tunbs).[429] But I would argue that such claims at this time, to Bahrain or to the Lower

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[427] Richard N. Schofield, 'Chapter Six: Border Disputes in the Gulf: Past, Present, and Future', in Gary G. Sick and Lawrence G. Potter (eds.), *The Persian Gulf at the Millennium*, p. 144

[428] 'Shah Interviewed by Lebanese Weekly 'al-Hawadith'', *Foreign Broadcast Information Service* (*FBIS*), FBIS-MEA-74-241, al-Hawadith, Beirut, 13th December 1974

[429] J.E. Peterson, 'Sovereignty and Boundaries in the Gulf States', p. 48

Gulf islands, were about more than just the territorial consciousness of Iranian nationalism.[430] Thus, Abbas Mas'udi described how:

> …British imperialism always blocked Iran's moves on its claims to Bahrain but its recent support of our request to the United Nations on a referendum shows that Britain has accepted Iran's viewpoint on the claim to the island and reversed its previous stand of placating the Arabs by denying any basis for our claim. We should also take note of the fact that Arab nations – both those friendly and those with whom our relations are strained – consider Bahrain an Arab area, completely refuse to accept that Iran has any rights there…and ignore the fact of Iranian rule over the territory at one time.[431]

Mas'udi not only sets up clear lines of Arab-Iranian antagonism and confrontation, but Bahrain, and the claim to it, is made to serve as an illustration of broader regional dynamics: eventual acceptance of Iran's position, at least on the part of the British; and the notion of Arab nations as a collective acting with intransigence against Iran's purportedly reasonable and rightful claims. This was echoed in comments made by the Shah in 1969, comments which also indicate that Bahrain was in fact also *instrumentalised* in the Pahlavi state's geopolitical discourse and practice of Arab-Iranian rivalry as an assertion of Iranian power and regional dominance:

> If I were to agree to the renunciation of Iran's claim over Bahrain without such a test, it would be considered a betrayal of my people. Bahrain belongs to the Iranian people. We will not recognise the proposed Federation of Arab Emirates if Bahrain is a member. If Bahrain becomes independent, we shall not recognise it.[432]

For the Shah, the idea of Bahrain becoming a member of the federation without the Iranian claim having been addressed was a threat both to his domestic standing and the regional standing of Iran, ad would serve as a lack of recognition of Iran's proclaimed position and role. Abu Musa and the Tunbs functioned similarly as demonstrations of historical Iranian pre-eminence and an almost dismissive, condescending orientation towards the Arab states of the region. It was not merely about the territorial claims, but how they featured in geopolitical

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[430] Firoozeh Kashani–Sabet, 'Cultures of Iranianness: The Evolving Polemic of Iranian Nationalism', in Nikki R. Keddie and Rudi Mathee (eds.), *Iran and the Surrounding World: Interactions in Culture and Cultural Politics* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), pp. 163, 177
Press, 2002), 162–181.
[431] 'Discussions on Bahrain
[432] 'Renouncement of Iran's Claim Over Bahrain Will Be Treason'

discourse and deeper geopolitical claims about ostensible historical regional standing, or the fundamental Iranian-ness of the waterway. A striking comment made by Asadollah Alam to British diplomat Arthur Kellas in the late 1950s illustrates the political considerations and anxieties which partly informed such geopolitical claims, anxieties in the aftermath of 1953 referenced above and in the previous chapter:

> Asadollah explained that to his mind the problem of the survival of the regime was a matter not so much of economics as of psychology and public relations. Colonel Nasser had contrived to inspire the Egyptian people with new zeal by persuading them that his government was their own. Dr. Mosaddeq had elicited the same enthusiasm by the same means. Asadollah had studied this phenomenon and concluded, that the key to success was popularity based upon a measure of nationalistic fervour, which in turn must be founded in some patriotic aspiration, such as the recovery of Bahrain or a struggle against Arab expansion.[433]

Indeed, we can see this politics of legitimation articulated through the defence of Iranian power against Arab expansion behind much of the discourse which has been referenced throughout this research. And so, along similar lines, as the Shah said in early 1971, preparing for the British exit:

> These islands belong to Iran. We have English maritime maps and other documents which confirm this. We will retake these islands by force if necessary, because I do not want an "overseer" to put my country up for public sale.[434]

In 1972, after Iran had effectively taken the islands and a group of Arab states had formally written to the UN to adjudicate the issue, Mas'udi was reported as saying, in reference to the action taken by the group of Arab states, that

> the incident must not be taken seriously, even though the Iranian people have not welcomed the action…the Arab countries had done so merely to please themselves and one another because they well knew that they were

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[433] Quoted in Ali M. Ansari, 'Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi & the Myth of Imperial Authority', p. 213
[434] 'Shah Discusses Persian Gulf'

misrepresenting the true situation and that their action could neither change Iran's will nor set back the clock of history.[435]

The Pahlavi state's discourse on Iran's role in the Gulf region and its trans-historicity, and the hierarchies of power it articulated and intimated vis-à-vis the Arab states, was strongly marked by notions of Arab-Iranian difference and Iranian strategic and geopolitical superiority. When we consider this together with the Iranianist civilisational discourse of Pahlavi nationalism and perceptions of Arab inferiority, sharply demonstrated by comments such as those made by the Shah towards Kissinger in 1972 that "…the Arabs were not mature; they were flamboyant and always trespassing on the rights of others,"[436] the construction of a regional make-up with Iran at the peak of the system and Arab states and Arab political players effectively reduced to a lesser, marginal role, has a particularly anathematising effect. As Abdullah al-Shayji explains, from the perspective of Arab states in the region, this kind of hierarchising discourse can be seen as marginalising, domineering and condescending.[437]

**Iraq as the Protector of Gulf Arabism**

For Ba'thist Iraq, in the period in question, the Gulf appeared in its discourse not as a zone to be protected and secured against radical upheaval and instability, but as an arena of Arab struggle and as the frontline for broader Arab liberation, a platform from which to launch a wider Arab awakening. Ba'thist discourse should be read in the context of the state's attempt to consolidate power at a precarious moment at home and cultivate legitimacy both domestically and regionally at a moment where it had few allies in the Gulf: thus, its focus on combating Iranian ambitions and constructing the Gulf as a zone for the defence of Arabism.

And so, in the run-up to the British withdrawal, as opposed to Pahlavi geopolitical discourse which represented the Gulf as under threat from Arab radicalism and leftism, the Gulf was portrayed as an Arab region under threat from Iranian expansionism, seen as a continuation, of course, of British and other colonial rule. Amidst Iran's abrogation of the 1937 Shatt al-'Arab treaty in April 1969, President al-Bakr commented a few months later:

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[435] 'Major Powers Fear Each Other in the Persian Gulf'
[436] *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1969-1976, Vol. E-4, Document 201
[437] Abdullah K. al-Shayji, 'Chapter Ten: Mutual Realities, Perceptions, and Impediments between the GCC States and Iran', in Lawrence G. Potter and Gary G. Sick (eds.), *Security in the Persian Gulf*, p. 222

It is known that the progressive revolution of 17th July 1968, within a very few months, struck painful blows against imperialism and its agents and bases in Iraq as well as in the Arab homeland.

The revolution undertook this effort by a series of revolutionary measures in the political and economic fields. As could not be expected otherwise, imperialism set its propaganda machine and its accomplices in motion simultaneously and according to a previously drafted plan, in order to exert pressure on the progressive regime and to overthrow it. Although Iran has been aiming its avaricious desires at some Iraqi territorial waters and areas, as well as smuggling in the Arabian Gulf, the one-sided abrogation of the treaty of 1937 by Iran can only be interpreted as an essential component of the insidious imperialist activities against our revolution and our people.[438]

The sense of embattlement portrayed here is important in the way it represents the Shatt al-'Arab incident as one dimension in a broader campaign to subvert the revolutionary project. As Adib-Moghaddam suggests, this discourse of embattlement and besiegement also serves the function of legitimating the "garrison state" and the violence it may carry out, as well as domestic entrenchment.[439] This would be particularly pertinent at a moment when the Ba'thist apparatus was still consolidating itself. And indeed, a form of violence was certainly carried out. In response to Iran's abrogation and the Shah defiantly sending the Iranian navy to escort Iranian vessels along the waterway, it should be noted, the Ba'thist state expelled around 20,000 Iraqis suspected of being of Iranian origin, thereby removing the "other" domestically as it was confronting it geopolitically (and an action repeated a few years later after Iran's moves on the Gulf islands, as mentioned in the previous chapter), revived the use of the term "Arabistan" to refer to the Iranian province of Khuzestan, and formed the dissident group "Popular Front for the Liberation of Arabistan". Troops from both sides also amassed at the border but without serious incident.[440] Richard Schofield has described Iraq's deeply-engrained "negative consciousness" surrounding coastal access to the Gulf, and in particular its resolve over the Shatt al-'Arab vis-à-vis Iran, in the following way:

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[438] 'Iraqi President Discusses Revolutionary Aims'

[439] Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, *The International Politics of the Persian Gulf*, p. 6

[440] On the abrogation of the treaty, the circumstances surrounding it, and the fallout, see Shahram Chubin and Sepehr Zabih, *The Foreign Relations of Iran*, pp. 185-187; Rouhollah K. Ramazani, *Iran's Foreign Policy, 1941-1973: A Study of Foreign Policy in Modernising Nations* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1975); Hussein Sirriyeh, 'Development of the Iraqi-Iranian Dispute, 1847-1975', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (Jul., 1985), pp. 485-487

> Because of the proximity of Iraq's international boundaries with Kuwait to the south and Iran to the southeast, separated only by the Faw Peninsula, a largely undevelopable mud flat, access to the sea has been an overriding concern for successive Baghdad regimes. One has only to glance at a map to realise that Iraq, with its miniscule shoreline on the Gulf, can be classified as a geographically disadvantaged state. It has long perceived itself as "squeezed out" of the Gulf. Traditionally, this consciousness has stiffened Iraq's resolve not to make territorial concessions to Iran over the Shatt al-'Arab.[441]

Schofield goes on to describe Iraq, across various ruling regimes, as perceiving itself as a "big garage with a very small door" due to its geographical restrictions.[442] What is perhaps missing here, however, is that the way the issue was represented lent itself to the legitimation of the set of actions undertaken by the Ba'thist state in the instance of 1969, and positioned Iraq within the broader geopolitical scene of pan-Arabism."Arabising" and regionalising the issue, and articulating it as one step in the wider Iranian effort to dominate the Gulf region, centred Iraq in the geopolitical picture of Arab-Iranian confrontation.

In the same manner of representing the Gulf as an Arab homeland in the midst of a revolution against colonial rule and under Iranian siege, *al-Thawrah* reported in 1970, as Iran was laying its claims to Bahrain and the Lower Gulf islands and scuttling efforts to form the Federation of Arab Emirates:

> It is obvious that colonialism is not lying still. There is a progressive revolution trying to liberate the Arab lands which have been stolen. It struggles against every reactionary organisation. Thus, we find that colonialism is beginning to move its reactionary puppet in Iran to seize hold of Iraq and the Arab Gulf.[443]

Not only is the discourse of revolution notable, contrasting with the Pahlavi vernacular of stability, thus portraying the Gulf region as one in radical motion and transformation, but so is the juxtaposition of Iranian aggression with the Arab-ness of the Gulf as well as the positioning of Iraq as a vital component in a seemingly imminent threat to the entirety of the Gulf region.

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[441] Richard N. Schofield, 'Chapter Six: Border Disputes in the Gulf', p. 138
[442] Ibid, p. 141
[443] 'Basra'

This kind of geopolitical foregrounding was central to Ba'thist discourse, whereby Iraq was legitimated as the route to the Arab nation and Arab security, and thus the chief target of Iranian aggression. Governor Muhammed Mahjub of Basra is then quoted, in a passage also referencing the vital geopolitical position Ba'thist discourse afforded to the party:

> Basra is regarded as one of the sensitive provinces with regard to our geographic position, since it faces Iran in the east and stretches along the Arab Gulf, which today is subjected to the most loathsome colonialist plot on the part of Iran and the agents of colonialism, utilising their information and propaganda clarions to assert that the Arab Gulf is the Persian Gulf and its territories ought revert to Iran. But the plot shall not pass as long as there is a people and a leading party standing on the ready against every one who lets himself be seduced to lay hold of Arab territories.[444]

Crucial here is not just the mention of Arab territories or use of the term "Arab Gulf", but the broader production of geographical meaning and representation which portrays the Gulf as an Arab space under threat from Iran. Of course, on the issue of nomenclature, before the Ba'thists in Iraq it was Nasserite Egypt which popularised the political usage of "Arabian Gulf" (*al-Khalij al-'Arabi*) in the 1950s.[445] Interestingly, it should be mentioned that it was under Prime Minister 'Abd al-Karim Qasim, in 1961, that an Iraqi government was first recorded as using the term "Arabian Gulf" and promoting the renaming of the waterway.[446] Post-1968, however, the context was significantly more volatile and the conflictual relations between Iran and Iraq more serious. Again, here, therefore, I am referring to the importance of sub-regionalisation during the period in question. The use of the term "Arab(ian) Gulf" during this period in Ba'thist discourse was more than a matter of simply responding to and mirroring the use of "Persian Gulf". As chapter three suggested, it also served to carve out the new centre of Arab emancipatory politics away from the Levant, particularly significant when we think about the post-1967 context referenced previously, and it specified Iraq's area of geopolitical focus, combining pan-Arabism with Iraqi state interests. But in addition to this, there is a claim to

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[444] 'Basra'

[445] For information on Nasser's use of this term and the effects it had, see, amongst others, Shahram Chubin and Sepehr Zabih, *The Foreign Relations of Iran*; Farzad Cyrus Sharifi-Yazdi, *Arab-Iranian Rivalry in the Persian Gulf*

[446] Ibrahim al-Marashi, 'Iraq's Gulf Policy and Regime Security from the Monarchy to the Post-Ba'athist Era', in Matteo Legrenzi (ed.), *Security in the Gulf*, p. 120

spatial ownership and spatial belonging. Abdullah al-Shayji expressed this essentialised geopolitics of Arabism in regards to the waterway's title quite concisely:

> One of the most contentious issues from an Arab perspective is the Iranians' insistence on naming the body of water that divides them "Persian Gulf". From an Arab perspective, this demonstrates the arrogance and hidden agenda for dominance that the Iranians harbour towards them. The Arabs are quick to point out that eight countries border the "Arabian Gulf" and only one – Iran – is not Arab.[447]

Indeed as time went on, as the British withdrawal drew closer and finally came about, and as Iran increasingly asserted its position at the top of the new regional hierarchy, Ba'thist discourse began emphasising the need to preserve the fundamental "Arabness" of the Gulf region. This was a crucial feature of the Iraqi state's geopolitical imagination as well as its nationalism. In fact, it could be read as the geopoliticisation of Arab, and specifically Ba'thist, nationalism. Michel Aflaq, founder of the Ba'th Party in 1947, adopted and espoused Sati' al-Husri's notion of "Arabness", which defined Arab nationhood and the source of it as a political identity as primarily determined by shared language, which was the crucial common component of the imagined (pan-)Arab people.[448] Ba'thist discourse took this notion and articulated it as a defining feature of the Gulf region as a whole, necessarily excluding and marginalising Iran from the regional picture. And so Governor Mahjub, in this vein, commented specifically on the issue of Bahrain that

> …it is up to the Arab states to be aware of their historical responsibilities in the face of the crucial issues, to move promptly before time lapses. Iran, according to the indications which we have, will undertake a land and sea operation on Bahrain. Thereupon, Arabism will live a second Palestine tragedy. It is up to all Arabs to prepare from this point on a defence of the

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[447] Abdullah K. al-Shayji, 'Mutual Realities, Perceptions, and Impediments between the GCC States and Iran', p. 222

[448] Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, *The International Politics of the Persian Gulf*, p. 19
For more on both Aflaq and al-Husri, foundational figures in Arab nationalist thought, including specifically for Ba'thism, see Michel Aflaq, *Fi Sabil al-Ba'th* (Beirut: Dar al-Tali'ah, 1959); William L. Cleveland, *The Making of an Arab Nationalist: Ottomanism and Arabism in the Life and Thought of Sati' al-Husri* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1971); Sati' al-Husri, *Ara' wa-Ahadith fil-Qawmiyyah al-'Arabiyyah* (Beirut: Darr al-'Ilm lil-Malayyin, 1956).

Arabness of Bahrain and the remaining emirates of the Arab Gulf, to stand

up to the plot of the client Shahanshah.[449]

The theme of a "second Palestine" is important here not only because of the way in which it positions the Gulf as the new focus of Arab struggle, but because of how it insinuates Iran as as the "second Israel" colonising Arab land. It should be remembered that Ba'thist political culture forged a tradition of identifying Iranians/Persians and Jews as the chief twin threats to the Arab nation, and comparing "Persian nationalism" with Zionism.[450] Indeed, an infamous Ba'thist pamphlet entitled *Three Whom God Should Not Have Created: Persians, Jews and Flies*, written in 1940, was published later under Saddam.[451] A statement from a piece in *al-Thawrah* in 1975 also strikingly demonstrates the way in which Iranian nationalism was perceived in Ba'thist circles, and crucially, as has been mentioned throughout, the perception of inferiorisation: "The class reality of the ruling group in Iran represents the most reactionary and fascist of the Iranian bourgeoisie. This group is loaded with the concepts and actions of national superiority."[452]

We can see further instances of the explicitly geopolitical articulation of this notion. In December 1972, one year after Iran's taking of Abu Musa and the Tunbs and as tensions with Iran were particularly heightened, *The Baghdad Observer*, employing almost the exact same discursive formulations, commented on how

The increasing Iranian infiltration of the Arab Gulf is threatening to turn part of the Arabs into new displaced Palestinians, and planting another alien racialist entity in the body of the Arab nation.

In keeping with an aggressive expansionist plan, Iranian infiltration is being carried out for the purpose of Persianising the Arab Gulf…

…

As a result of the encouragement of the emigration of Iranian elements into the Arab Gulf, and opposition to the entry of the Arab element, the number

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[449] 'Basra'

[450] Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, *The International Politics of the Persian Gulf*, p. 6; Kourosh Ahmadi, *Islands and International Politics in the Persian Gulf*, p. 102

[451] Trita Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the United States* (New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 97

For an exploration of this fanatical representation of Iranians/Persians in Ba'thist literature, see Talal Atrissi, 'The Image of the Iranians in Arab Schoolbooks', Khair el-Din Haseeb (ed.), *Arab-Iranian Relations*.

[452] 'Who Is Responsible?'

of Iranians in the Arab Gulf is steadily increasing. With the Iranian occupation of the Gulf islands, and the rising power of Iranian aggression, Gulf Arabism is being imperilled. Throughout the next few years we shall face the rise of another alien structure in the territories of the Arab nation, an alien entity upon Arab land.[453]

This particular accusation of demographic engineering via immigration is repeated in the 1974 Ba'th Party political report, which stated that the movement of Iranians to Arab Gulf states was "a colonialist phenomenon, posing a threat to the Arabism of the Persian Gulf analogous to the Zionist colonisation of Palestine."[454] Importantly, this is not just nationalist chauvinism and xenophobia, but a claim couched in geopolitical terms: this immigration, together with Iran's taking of the Lower Gulf islands, was described as an "imperialist plot whose objective was to circumscribe centres of revolution, primarily Iraq, and work for their enfeeblement and fall."[455] Iraq, in other words, as the bastion of Arabism, was being encircled. On another level, such discourses make claims regarding the very ontological, primordial character of the Gulf region, *who* belongs *where*, and which political powers are legitimate and *of the region*, made at a time of territorial disputes and regional jockeying.

The "Arabness" or "Arab character" of the Gulf were not simply representations of the region's essential quality, but an attempt to geopolitically position it within broader Arab politics and discourses of Arab struggle. As has been mentioned previously at various points, Ba'thist discourse centred the Gulf as a platform for Arab liberation, a significant claim to make in post-1967 West Asian geopolitics. Reporting on the October 1973 Arab-Israeli war, in December of that year *al-Thawrah* spoke of how oil wealth, the use of the "oil weapon" and policies of oil nationalisation in the Gulf, of course all claimed to be led by Iraq, in response to the war against those deemed to be supporting the Israeli war effort proved the centrality of the region to Arab liberation and the fight against imperialism.[456] Another piece written at the same time said the same, this time adding that the centrality of the Gulf was not just because of what it could offer to Arab peoples in terms of resources and revolutionary power against imperialism and Zionism, but because the Gulf was also the heart of "Arab reaction" which also needed to

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[453] 'A Second Palestine in the Arab Gulf'
[454] 'The Political Report of the Eighth Congress of the Arab Ba'th Socialist Party in Iraq'
See also Tareq Y. Ismael, *Iraq and Iran*, p. 29
[455] Ibid
[456] 'Nationalisation, the Revolutionary Path', *al-Thawrah*, Baghdad, 30th December 1973, published in Joint Publications Research Service Reports (JPRS), Translations on the Near East, No. 1102

be fought.[457] The 1974 Ba'th Party political report claims that in the Gulf, "…after the discovery of oil, British and American imperialists began basing their policy on this new element," and attempted to "perfect their control of the area" because of what it contained and the political, revolutionary potential it had.[458] And so, in Ba'thist discourse, the Gulf was the new (pan-)Arab core of the West Asia region.

And alongside the role of the region, the role of Iraq is also articulated. The task of the defence of Arabs and Arabness in the Gulf and the ability of the Gulf to play its role in the liberation of the entire Arab nation depended on Iraq. As Rodger Davies, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State in the US Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs at the time, put it in 1972, Iraq believed this to be its own "manifest destiny".[459] As Kourosh Ahmadi puts it, "Iraq, by virtue of its size and pan-Arab orientation, saw itself as the guardian of Arabism in the Gulf…Convinced of its messianic pan-Arab role and bent on establishing a new socialist revolutionary order in a unified Arab state under its leadership, the Ba'ath Party saw Iraq as the launching pad from which to overthrow the Gulf status quo."[460] And so, Muhammed Mahjub put it like so: "History will not be kind to those who temporise on the right of the Gulf's Arabism. Iranian mobilisation against Iraq is only a part of the implementation of their squalid plot in the Arab Gulf."[461]

In the joint statement with the PDRY during the visit to South Yemen in 1974, this regional role and Iran's proclaimed suffocation of it is described, with specific reference to recent clashes, Iran's intervention in Oman, and its role in the Kurdish rebellion in northern Iraq:

> The two sides…declared that Iran's recurring attacks on the Iraqi borders and its military interference against the national liberation revolution in Oman are aimed at distracting the progressive regime in Iraq from realising development, democratic achievements and a peaceful democratic solution to the Kurdish problem, and preventing it from assuming its actual role in the Arab arena and in the Gulf area. They are also aimed at destroying the revolution in the Arab Gulf…[462]

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[457] 'Footnotes to the So-called Geneva Peace Conference'
[458] 'The Political Report of the Eighth Congress of the Arab Ba'th Socialist Party in Iraq'
[459] *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1969-1976, Vol. E-4, Document 306
[460] Kourosh Ahmadi, *Islands and International Politics in the Persian Gulf*, p. 100
[461] 'Basra'
[462] 'Joint Statement on Visit of Iraqi Party Group'

At this particular peak in Iran-Iraq hostilities, it is instructive to see both the discursive linking of various struggles and arenas in the "Arab Gulf area" as well as the claim that Iran's attacks against Iraq were part of a regional strategy, aimed not just at the domestic constriction of Iraqi development and progression, but at the prevention of Iraq fulfilling its regional role.

The Ba'th Party's 1974 political report states clearly the prime position afforded to Iraq in Gulf geopolitics and the defence of Arabism and the intimacy between the national and regional spheres, reiterating the discourse of a hierarchy amongst Arab states and Iraq's role at its head:

> The responsibility of the Socialist Arab Ba'th Party and the 17th July Revolution toward the Arab Gulf area stems from the revolution's national principles and aims. In its capacity as the biggest Arab country and the most advanced in the area in most fields, Iraq shoulders the political burden of defending this area against the dangers and ambitions threatening it. It considers that it is essential to stress the nature and national importance of this area and the dangers threatening it.[463]

And in 1975, when Iraq-Iran tensions were at a particular high-point before the Algiers Accord, *al-Thawrah* asserted in a piece on relations between the two countries that

> First, under the canopy of national principles and under the theoretical and practical standards held by the revolution in this country, there can be no separation between the regional and national positions as long as the ultimate end of the regional positions pours into a national current and constitutes a part of the national framework. This is because a revolution in a country like Iraq, for example, constitutes one of the mainstays of national struggle.
>
> Second, the regional soil is national soil. Consequently, defending it means defending the national soil and it also means the responsibility for defending the regional soil is a national responsibility.
>
> Third, Iraq is truly preoccupied with achieving fundamental transformation…this transformation is being carried out as a means of qualifying the region to play its role in the national and international arenas…
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> …

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[463] 'The Political Report of the Eighth Congress of the Arab Ba'th Socialist Party in Iraq'

> Clearly, Iraq is the first obstacle in the face of serious Iranian ambitions in the Arab land…[464]

Iraq is placed on the frontlines of Iran's efforts against the Gulf and Gulf Arabism, and regional and national interests and destinies become inseparable. And so, "…we say that what is taking place between Iraq and Iran is not an Iraqi-Iranian dispute but an Arab-Iranian dispute in which Iraq shoulders the responsibility for the first line of confrontation."[465] This collapsing of the domestic/national and the regional, and the discursive and political move towards explicit regionalisation of the conflict along Arab-Iranian lines, is significant. Another dimension could also be read into such formulations, and into broader discursive constructions within which, as mentioned above, Arab and Ba'thist nationalisms were geopoliticsed: that is, the attempt to politically link and inter-relate the positions of *al-wataniyyun* (essentially, "Iraq-firsters") and *al-qawmiyyun* (pan-Arabists), long a dividing line in the Iraqi domestic scene all the way back to King Ghazi bin Faisal in the 1930s.[466] Crucially, therefore the role of Iraq and the role of the Gulf in serving the Arab nation and the revolutionary cause are constructed as mutually constitutive. And so, at a rally in 1975, Saddam is quoted as saying:

> The aggression Iraq is being exposed to is not an Iraqi problem but an Arab problem. The aggression to which your Iraqi region is being exposed, this imperialist aggression – a serious aspect of which is being implemented by the Iranian authorities by open and direct methods – is not an Iraqi problem and is not a problem between Iraq and Iran. It is an Arab problem because it is one of the serious aspects of the aggression and plotting to which our Arab nation is being exposed.[467]

## Conclusion: Inferiorisation and Anathematisation

At a moment of huge transformation for the Gulf region, two states which perceived themselves in magnanimous ways articulated and constructed vital roles for themselves both in the region's socio-economic development and its geopolitical destiny. This was in part a recognition by the Ba'thist and Pahlavi states, and a reflection of the fact, that the Gulf was "coming into its own" in both senses, as a region abundant in an increasingly-vital resource, and a region whose

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[464] 'Who Is Responsible?'
[465] Ibid
[466] Ibrahim al-Marashi, 'Iraq's Gulf Policy and Regime Security from the Monarchy to the Post-Ba'athist Era'
[467] Ibid

dynamics and security were becoming more localised and at the same time more and more implicated in global power politics and the global political economy. The discourses of Iran and Iraq represented their respective roles, and the roles of the region, in mutually anathematising ways marked by notions of Arab-Iranian difference and confrontation.

Pahlavi Iran's discourse of historic Iranian pre-eminence, its political and geopolitical patronisation of the Arab states, and its civilisational self-perception effectively inferiorised the Arab states and placed them as secondary to Iran in the regional hierarchy. This was often done in coded though clearly noticeable ways, and at times was more explicit. Indeed the discourse of the recovery of Iran's greatness in the Gulf was a crucial part of the Pahlavi state's attempt to cultivate nationalist legitimacy, and the Arab states became the target of this.

Ba'thist Iraq, meanwhile, in carving out a role for itself post-coup, at an important moment in its domestic power-consolidation, took on the mantle of pan-Arabism, located the Gulf as the new focus of Arab power and Arab liberation, and presented Iran as the chief threat to Arab security and the Gulf's Arabism. In essentialising the ontological character of the region and laying a claim to its geopolitical role in broader West Asian Arab liberation, Ba'thist discourse placed itself at the centre of the region's "Arab" destiny.

# Conclusion: A Formative Moment for Imagining the Gulf

"In international affairs, there are three wasps' nests besides the Balkans: Morocco and the Mediterranean, the Persian Gulf, and the American Monroe Doctrine; God grant that we may never fall into one of them." – Otto von Bismarck[468]

The ideational currents and discursive regimes employed by the Ba'thist and Pahlavi states during the late-1960s-to-mid-1970s period were to have huge ramifications for the Gulf region in the following years and decades, and indeed, I would argue, to this day. The discourse of Arab-Iranian rivalry, which I have conceptualised as a geopolitical imaginary which articulates the regional politics and spatiality of the Gulf along the lines of Arab-Iranian difference and confrontation, consolidated mutually-anathematising and mutually-exclusivising geopolitical visions. Notions of security, belonging, legitimacy, regional positionality, and more, became terrains of contestation between competing claims to supremacy and hierarchy which emphasised difference and superiority/inferiority complexes. At a time when the Gulf region was "coming into its own", and regional affairs becoming more localised and indigenised, what could have been a moment to articulate inclusive, sustainable, long-term visions for regional cooperation became something quite different.

Various works have looked at the ideological, ideational and cultural bases of Gulf insecurity, and the Iran-Iraq War in particular.[469] This study has explored what it suggests is one of the formative periods in the constitution of this underlying discursive and imaginative hostility: a clash of geopolitical visions and geopolitical imaginations. When the Algiers Accords were signed in 1975, the employment of such discourses saw a noticeable decline alongside a significant decrease in tensions between Iran and Iraq. Following this, of course, there was to be a massive rupture and return to "anarchy" in 1979 and then of course into 1980, and importantly, the simmering effects of the discursive geopolitical regime in question once again took centre stage. Discourses, as such, do not become "silent": they are, rather, worlds of meaning and representation which interact, constitute, contest and produce on many levels and

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[468] Cited in Mary Evelyn Townsend, *The Rise and Fall of the German Colonial Empire,* 1884-1918 (New York: Macmillan, 1930), p. 309
[469] Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, *The International Politics of the Persian Gulf*; Tareq Y. Ismael, *Iraq and Iran*; Shahram Chubin and Charles Tripp, *Iran and Iraq at War*

in many "clusters", employed by different actors at different times.[470] The kinds of discourses we have been seeing in the Gulf and the West Asia region more broadly over the last few years are testament to this, with some of the formulations almost exactly replicating the kinds of meanings and images explored in this research. The potency and intransigence of certain systems of representation cannot be ignored.

And indeed these discourses were employed by two key states in the region which saw the post-British moment as one of opportunity, though in very different ways: the chance to exploit an opening in the region's politics, stake their claim to its leadership, and carve out their own visions of its geopolitics and its political architecture. Both Iran and Iraq employed discourses that placed themselves at the centre and at the apex of the Gulf, discourses of geopolitical vanguardism that appeared antagonistic, self-assured, and dismissive. Both states were at vital – though rather qualitatively different – periods of their nation-making and state-making projects. The intersection of the vitality of their respective domestic moments, on the one hand, and the regional moment, on the other, meant that their geopolitics and geopolitical discourses would undoubtedly be inseparable from domestic political circumstances and considerations. Indeed the blurring of the domestic/international divide was a key feature of their discourses. Added to this, of course, were the self-perceptions and cultural and ideational archaeologies of these two states: the way they saw themselves, their histories and their roles.

Pahlavi Iran, struggling with a chronic and foundational dilemma of legitimacy, was in the midst of a domestic socio-economic transformation and a campaign of nationalist cultivation which articulated a culturalist, civilisational, and at times chauvinist Iranianism, informed by the self-perception of the Pahlavi dynasty and the need to galvanise domestic sentiment whilst accusations of pro-Western dependency and US clientelism were ubiquitous. Both leftist and Islamist cultures and movements of solidarity were profound during the period in question, in Iran and in the Gulf/West Asia region more broadly, and the Pahlavi state could not ignore this. With the departure of the British and the reluctance of the US to become directly embroiled in the Gulf, the Shah sensed an opportunity to secure a position for Iran as the region's custodian, validating a certain self-perception but also ostensibly, as he saw it, answering accusations that cast him as a mere geopolitical proxy. Thus, we see the construction of a layered geopolitical imaginary that placed Iran at the head of the Gulf order, dismissed and inferiorised the Arab states, and appealed to Western Cold War interests whilst claiming independence

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[470] Emile Badarin, *Palestinian Political Discourse*, p. 18

simultaneously. Throughout these layers, claims and notions of Arab-Iranian difference and Iranian exceptionalism were crucial, legitimating geopolitical and foreign policy practices at home but also signalling to Western powers Iran's superior status and capabilities.

The Ba'thists, meanwhile, had only seized the state apparatus comprehensively in 1968 after having been effectively repressed and driven underground in the years before, post-1963.[471] At a fragile moment, lacking friends and allies both domestically and in the region, and in the context of the ideational and organisational decline of pan-Arabism in the traditional West Asia core, the Ba'thist state launched itself to the forefront of Arab liberation, in the attempt to align Iraqi needs and realities with pan-Arab aspirations and opportunities. The Ba'thist state needed to consolidate power, transform social relations and economic production, develop legitimacy and, much like Iran and taking into consideration Cold War dynamics, find a superpower sponsor to buttress its power and give material life to its vision. Ba'thist discourse, therefore, identified the Gulf as the new centre of Arab struggle, placed itself at the centre of alignment and collective strength for the Arab states, firmly located itself in the Cold War Eastern/socialist bloc, and singled out the expansion of Iranian power and Iranian domination in the Gulf as the overwhelming threat to the region's Arabist destiny.

The discourses of both, therefore, weaved together notions of belonging and ownership, conceptions of security and regional organisation, and constructions of legitimacy. In looking at and unpacking their formulations, we can see how they viewed themselves and the region, and what kind of political and spatialised claims they were making. Indeed what this research has tried to show is that it was not just exclusionary identity politics and identity discourses which aggravated and ideationally constituted Ba'thist-Pahlavi confrontation, as well as wider Gulf insecurity, but exclusionary geopolitical visions and imaginations. It was not just the way these two states talked about themselves and each other, but the way talked about, constructed and articulated the region itself and its space.

In chapter one, I explored the theoretical toolbox and conceptual framework the research made use of. The critical geopolitical tradition – which sees geopolitics not just as the hard geographical terrain on which political actors operate and compete but the way in which political geography is articulated, represented and made sense of – offered me an opportunity to conceptualise the discourses of Ba'thist Iraq and Pahlavi Iran in interesting and, hopefully, valuable ways. The notion of geopolitical imaginaries was an effective one in suggesting that

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[471] Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, p. 175

what the two states were doing was articulating their respective visions of the region and constructing it in highly antagonistic and mutually-marginalising ways.

Chapter two then argued for the centrality of the period under study in Gulf regional politics. The late-1960s-to-mid-1970s period saw at least three key geopolitical shifts which together had the effect of localising the region's politics and shifting the broader arc of West Asian power towards it – the departure of the British, the absence of a direct substitute and the decision of Cold War powers instead to back respective surrogates, and the decline of the Egypt-Syria axis and the collapse of the traditional regional core post-1967. The chapter also demonstrated the way in which the Ba'thist and Pahlavi states articulated and represented these transformative developments, already carving out geopolitical spaces and roles for themselves, jockeying for regional legitimacy and leadership, pronouncing the renewed significance of the region, and identifying future directions.

Chapter three began the systematic discourse analysis by looking at the way in which Iran and Iraq discursively and strategically positioned themselves in superpower Cold War politics. The roles of extra-regional powers were vital to the geopolitics of the Gulf, especially in the aftermath of the British withdrawal, and Iraqi and Iranian state discourses demonstrate this. The chapter showed that the two states were not merely passive geopolitical sponges or sounding boards. They indeed recognised the significance of Cold War dynamics and placed themselves within it, but used both its cosmology and its material offerings to lend themselves legitimacy, articulate and pursue their own geopolitical ambitions and visions, and position themselves on the regional scale.

Crucially, notions of Arab-Iranian difference and confrontation were central to their strategies and claims of legitimation. The discourse of the Cold War and the discourse of Arab-Iranian rivalry became closely bound-up and mutually-constitutive. The Ba'thist state articulated its increasingly close ties to the Soviet Union as vital to the future of Gulf Arabism and defence against US/Western-Iranian expansion, and Pahlavi Iran aligned itself to Western interests surrounding stability and the containment of radical forces by centring Arab radicalism and Arab instability as the source of communist penetration and Iran as the guarantor of security. Superpower politics and the roles of extra-regional powers, in other words, were articulated as deeply tied to notions of Arab-Iranian rivalry.

Chapter four then looked more specifically at role-constructions. It began by looking at how Iran and Iraq represented development in the Gulf region. This period was of great importance

in the economic transformation of the region with oil production, oil prices and domestic campaigns for socio-economic transformation occupying vital spaces in state discourses and policies. "Modernisation" was a key consideration and a crucial part of Ba'thist and Pahlavi imaginations, and a large part of not only their strategies to consolidate power but also to the way they legitimated themselves domestically and regionally.

As such, Pahlavi developmentalist and geo-economic discourse had a notable civilisational dimension, representing Iran as more advanced than the Arab states and thus the bedrock of Gulf "modernisation". Notions of Arab "regression", "instability" and "backwardness" were often coded, sometimes explicit. The Ba'thist state, meanwhile, firmly located "Arab development" as essential to the prosperity of Arabism in the Gulf. "Arab modernisation" was deeply political and politicised, explicitly portrayed as a vital defence against Iranian aggression by ensuring Arab ownership and Arab oil wealth (or the "oil weapon") to strike at imperialist machinations.

Then, the chapter looked at how the two states talked about their respective purposes in the region, as well as the purpose of the region itself. Pahlavi Iran spoke of its historic pre-eminence, its superior capabilities and its advanced position to construct a geopolitical imaginary which marginalised, dismissed and inferiorised the Arab states. This was not only a particular way, but was also a gesture to nationalist sentiment. The Ba'thist state, on the other hand, not only geopolitically "othered" Iran and claimed its un-belonging to the region, but also positioned the Gulf as serving the purpose of Arab liberation and as characterised by its Arab essence, re-orienting the pan-Arab core towards the Gulf and placing Iraq at the centre.

**Theoretical Findings**

This piece has tried to grapple with multiple theoretical puzzles, empirical concerns and scholarly areas: foreign policy practice, discourse, nationalism, inter-state relations and geopolitics. In bringing these areas of enquiry together, exploring a period of time less focussed-upon, and conceptualising Gulf geopolitics with an emphasis on ideational factors, it is hoped that readers can get a sense of the potential value in approaching Gulf regional politics in this particular way.

One key theoretical assertion to be made from this piece is an appreciation of geopolitics in the Persian Gulf as an imaginative and discursive enterprise, as well as the foreign policy practices and material manifestations of inter-state interaction. This particular approach is yet to be

systematised in the field, despite undoubtedly crucial works in the extant literature. It is tempting to say that the heavily materialist and realist approach to Gulf geopolitical commentary is because the region is such a profound focus of state interest and international intrigue, thus requiring "policy recommendations" and "hard analysis". But, ideas and representations are crucial. As this piece has shown, by delving into discourses, and reading them alongside geopolitical developments, foreign policy and domestic circumstances, we are provided a window into multiple components of state politics and practice: issues of legitimacy construction, power consolidation, conceptions of security and belonging, identity and self-perception, anxieties of power, and more.

By looking at the discourse of Arab-Iranian rivalry as the construction of a geopolitical imaginary, we have seen how the Gulf was spatialised and conceptualised in profoundly exclusivist and alienating ways, with desperate, and ongoing, consequences. As such, discourses and practices are interactive. It is not about whether discourse "causes" something to happen or someone to do something: it is about the way it represents reality, the ideational archaeology it lays down, the meaning it gives, the political processes it is bound up with, and environment of perception it gives rise to. On that note, it is also not the case that discourse is useful only in so far as it gives us a window into self-perception and the identity-policy nexus mentioned in the introduction. Just as realists may dismiss discourse as "just words", we also cannot say that it is "only words", or take discourses at "face-value". Pahlavi claims of anti-imperialism were shown to be a good illustration of this. Discourses tell us about much more than just the way political actors see themselves.

Likewise, we can also see that nationalist geopolitical discourses and claims are not merely speaking to the "domestic" audience, but could be attempting to construct legitimacy in the face of other actors, whilst inferiorising and anathematising potential competitors. And so, following this, in examining these kinds of discourses and their modalities, we can peer into the imperatives brought about by political conditions and considerations at particular moments (hence, again, the purpose of reading discourse alongside foreign and domestic policies in this research): legitimacy, domestic power, security, navigation of the international environment and geopolitical positioning.

Following closely from this, this piece also suggested that nationalist discourses could also be geopolitical and have geopolitical ramifications, and indeed, that nationalism by its nature could be conceptualised as incorporating geopolitical claims in the sense that it often makes

claims to spaces contested by other actors. Pahlavi and Ba'thist nationalisms are striking illustrations of this, the latter perhaps slightly more expectedly due to the common formulations and geographical projections of pan-Arabism. But as the research showed, even Pahlavi nationalist discourse made claims about Iranian power and pre-eminence across the Gulf, how the Gulf regional order should look, and at the same time dismissed surrounding regional states and their importance and value to the region, sometimes in coded ways, and sometimes explicitly.

Lastly, this research has demonstrated that geopolitics and foreign policy are tightly linked to nation- and state-making. At a period when both the Gulf as a region and its constituent states were undergoing major transformations, the blurring of the lines between the domestic/national and the international are clear to see. As the region was "coming into its own", its international relations becoming more localised, and Cold War dynamics picking up, both Iran and Iraq were in the midst of significant socio-economic and political changes in different ways. Pahlavi Iran was in the middle of the institution of its modernisation and industrialisation programme and facing a rising movement of Islamic solidarity and an Islamic political culture, and the Ba'thists in Iraq were attempting to consolidate power and re-calibrate large sections of the Iraqi economy having just seized the governing apparatus. Both states were focused on cultivating legitimacy alongside these changes, whilst also attempting to position themselves within the new, developing Gulf order. Their discourses show us the convergence of these considerations and phenomena, especially when read alongside their policies and practices. This idea of geopolitics as nation- and state-making, I would argue, is a potentially fruitful one for further studies on Gulf politics.

## Further Questions and Research Possibilities

As hesitant as I would be to suggest that this research provides us with any definitive answers about what was a complex, understudied period, and a layered set of discursive phenomena, I can confidently say that it points the way to further fascinating questions.

To begin with, as was stated in the introduction and chapter two, there are two empirical issues which are ripe for further investigation. The first is Ba'thist foreign policy on a broad level. In comparison, the scholarship on Pahlavi foreign policy, led by luminaries such as Ramazani, Chubin and Zabih, is abundant. There is a desperate need for analyses of Ba'thist foreign policy away from the focus on the Iran-Iraq War and the Gulf War. In particular, as this research

attempts to bring to light, the immediate post-1968 moment and the period leading into the 1970s require further exploration, empirical investigation and theorisation. This should not just be limited, of course, to Iraqi-Soviet relations, but Iraq's broader Cold War positioning, its discourse on Third World alliance-making, its attempts to balance against different external sponsors, and its cultivation of regional alliances. These issues have been looked at but I would argue not systematically and not conceptually, and certainly not within a discursive lens.

The second empirical issue is the effect of the 1967 War on Gulf dynamics. Chapter two only gave a glance at two particular considerations: the perceptions of regional actors of the war and its consequences, and the construction and imagination of the Gulf as the core of West Asian politics and power in its aftermath. This intra-regional shift, in material, structural and imaginative terms, should be a fruitful path for further research, and its significance would not stop there, but would be in line with a broader disciplinary mission to integrate the Gulf and its inter-state relations into the broader region: how does it shape, and how is it shaped by, the wider West Asian complex? As the core chapters showed, the archival material to assess the discourses in relation to this post-'67 dynamic, particularly in official and semi-official media, can be exploited, difficulties notwithstanding when thinking about diplomatic records from the countries in question.

On that note, it is impossible to deny that access to diplomatic material from the Ba'thist and Pahlavi eras could have added a significant empirical dimension to this research. As I mentioned in the introduction, this would have been a more stark omission had I been primarily investigating the development of their foreign policies, specifically their decision-making processes and their policy decisions, but nonetheless it would have indeed been invaluable. Further research in line with the topic of this thesis would undoubtedly benefit from access to such material. I should add that the fact that such archives are not systematically and easily accessible at this time merely reminds us how much more potential work there is to be done, and how much more we have in the way of exploring Ba'thist and Pahlavi politics, discourses and foreign policy.

On the subject of discourses of Arab-Iranian rivalry in particular, I would suggest four fascinating areas for further study. As was mentioned at various points, Nasserite Egypt employed an Arabist discourse of hostility to Iran and Iranian power some time before the Iraqi

Ba'thists.[472] In much the same way as this research, which attempted to place the interactive, mutually reinforcing discourses of the Ba'thists and Pahlavis side-by-side, I believe a similar approach can be taken with Nasserite Egypt and Pahlavi Iran. A discourse analysis which looks at the kinds of tropes, constructions and articulations employed by these two actors, and the ways in which they imagined the region, both the Gulf and West Asia more broadly in this particular case, could give us an additional insight into the formation of this particular discursive regime which has defined so much of the geopolitically anathematising and exclusivising politics of the region for so many decades. In turn, a comparison of Nasserite and Ba'thist discourses could also be intriguing, particularly in gauging the continuities and divergences. And, of course, these should be done in relation to their foreign policy and geopolitical actions.

And secondly, despite treating 1975 and the signing of the Algiers Accord as the "cut-off" point for the research, it would be worth investigating the employment of the discourse of Arab-Iranian rivalry during a period of relative ostensible "calm" between Iran and Iraq. In other words, in the 1975-1979 period, which is often treated as an interim moment in-between two periods of conflict and tension, it would be interesting to see what kind of "work" this discourse was doing, if at all: where was it being employed, by whom, to what possible effects, and in what contexts? In doing this, we can not only gain a better understanding of the potential deep entrenchment of this kind of geopolitical imaginary, but we can more clearly see the medium-to-long-term discursive arc which led up to the catastrophic war that began in 1980.

Thirdly, there is room to explore an interesting dynamic which was mentioned in chapter one. Both the Ba'thist and Pahlavi states, alongside their ethnocentrisms, nationalisms, and chauvinisms, also employed Islamicised discourses at varying times. Undoubtedly, in the case of both, there were political considerations at play here, responding to shifting regional and domestic political cultures and sustaining legitimacy in the process. The precise contours of this Islamic vernacular in relation to discourses of Arab-Iranian rivalry would be interesting to assess: how, if at all, did they relate to each other; how did these states employ them both and in what circumstances; were they neatly insulated from one another; what was the relationship between their formulations; and fundamentally, what does it tell us about state identity that such a range of identity discourses and identity claims can be articulated?

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[472] Shahram Chubin and Sepehr Zabih, *The Foreign Relations of Iran*, pp. 145-148; Farzad Cyrus Sharifi-Yazdi, *Arab-Iranian Rivalry in the Persian Gulf*, p. 53

Lastly, there is a genealogical and historical question at play. The notion of Arabs and Iranians/Persians possessing an historical enmity and hostility towards one another is not an infrequent one. It is worth asking where the politicisation of this narrative – and its transmutation into a state discourse – can be originated. In other words, was there a rupture point that we can identify, where an idea found in literature and cultural works entered the realm of states and state practices? On a similar note, in the same way that Reza Zia-Ebrahimi looked at the anti-Arab racial narrative at the heart of particular expressions and modes of Iranian nationalism,[473] perhaps there is room for a systematic historical work looking specifically at the anti-Iranian element of certain discourses of Arab nationalism, and how it developed in the context of modernity.

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[473] Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, *The Emergence of Iranian Nationalism*

# **Appendix**

## **List of Individuals Referenced**

**al-'Aysami, Shibli.** In 1947, together with Michel Aflaq, he became a founding member of the Arab Socialist Ba'th Party and from 1963 to 1964 he held various ministerial posts in the Syrian government. In 1964 he became Secretary-General of the Syrian Regional Command of the Ba'th Party and in 1965 he became Vice President of Syria. Following a 1966 coup in Syria, al-'Aysami fled to Iraq. In 1974 the Iraqi Branch of the Ba'th Party installed a rival National Command of the party with al-'Aysami as Deputy Secretary-General until 1979.

**al-Bakr, Ahmad Hassan.** President of Iraq from 1968 to 1979. He became Prime Minister after 1963 but was removed from power by Abd al-Salam 'Arif in 1964. Instrumental in bringing the Ba'th to power in 1968.

**Alam, Asadollah.** An Iranian politician who was Prime Minister of Iran from 1962 to 1964. He was also Minister of the Royal Court from 1967 to 1977, and one of the Shah's closest friends and advisors.

**'Arif, Abd al-Rahman**. President of Iraq from 1966 to 1968, when he was overthrown in a Ba'thist-led coup.

**Grechko, Andrei.** Soviet Union Minister of Defence from 1967 to 1976 and Marshal of the Soviet Union, the USSR's highest military rank.

**Haddad, Na'im.** Secretary-General of the Iraqi National Patriotic Front and member of the Revolutionary Command Council.

**Homayoun, Dariush.** An Iranian journalist, intellectual, and politician. He was the Minister of Information and Tourism from 1977 to 1978, founder of the daily newspaper *Ayandegan*, and one-time high-ranking member of the Rastakhiz Party (the party founded by Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and Iran's only legal political party from 1975 to 1979).

**Hoveyda, Amir-Abbas.** An Iranian economist and politician who served as Prime Minister of Iran from 1965 to 1977, the longest serving prime minister in Iran's history.

**Hussein, Saddam.** President of Iraq from 1979 until 2003. Deputy Secretary-General of the Ba'th Regional Leadership and Deputy Chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council from 1969 to 1979. He was a chief architect of the Ba'th state and its policies after a 1968 coup.

**Kissinger, Henry.** An American diplomat and foreign policy thinker who served as US Secretary of State from 1973 to 1977 and National Security Advisor from 1969 to 1975, under Presidents Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford.

**Mahjub, Muhammed.** Governor of Basra and member of the Revolutionary Command Council.

**Mas'udi, Abbas.** Close friend and advisor to both Reza Shah and Mohammad Reza Shah, he was a long-standing member of Iran's political elite. He was also a member of Iran's parliament and a senator.

**Muhammed, 'Aziz.** A prominent dissident in Iraq during the era of the monarchy, he went on to become leader of the Iraqi Communist Party in 1964 and remained in that position until 1993.

**Pahlavi, Mohammad Reza.** The last Shah of Iran, reigning from 1941 to 1979, he was the second and last monarch of the Pahlavi dynasty. He came to power during World War II after an Anglo-Soviet invasion forced the abdication of his father, Reza Shah Pahlavi. After a coup in 1953 which overthrew Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddeq, the monarchy became the unchallenged centre of power in Iran, but left it lacking legitimacy.

**Poorhad, Mohammad.** Chief political commentator of *Ettela'at* newspaper in Iran, closely tied to the monarchy.

**Qasim, 'Abd al-Karim.** Prime Minister of Iraq from 1958, after the overthrow of the monarchy, until 1963, when he was overthrown in a coup and executed.

**Roebuck, Roy.** British journalist and Labour Party politician, he was a member of the British parliament from 1966 to 1970.

**Rostow, Walt.** An American economist and academic who served as Special Assistant for National Security Affairs to US President Lyndon Johnson from 1966 to 1969.

**Wright, Sir Denis.** British diplomat and ambassador to Iran from 1963 to 1971.

**Zahedi, Ardeshir.** Iranian diplomat who served as the country's Foreign Minister from 1966 to 1971 and its ambassador to the United States and the United Kingdom during the 1960s and 1970s.

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