



## The Attitude of British Diplomats in Iraq Towards Arab Issues: Kuwait as a Case Study (1932- 1939)

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Reiceved 23/10/2023  
Accepted 06/02/2024  
Published 15/04/2024

### **Keywords:**

Kuwait,  
Iraq,  
smuggling,  
borders,  
the embassy.

### **Abstract**

The British were busy with controlling the Gulf region for strategic, economic, and political reasons, especially Iraq and Kuwait, which Britain looked into. Britain also played a role in the path of Arab and regional issues, where Iraqi-Kuwaiti relations witnessed political tensions and in several occasions. The Iraqi official authorities informed the British embassy that Kuwait constitutes an obstacle to Iraq's arrival in the sea, and there are official Iraqi statements that Kuwait is affiliated with Iraq.

These statements became a source of concern for the British, so during the years 1932–1939, it tried to contain problems between the two parties, including among them problems (border demarcation, smuggling, construction of a port, and Sheikh property). The sheikhs of Kuwait entered into secret relations with Britain in order to preserve its political entity, which led to the tense Iraqi-Kuwaiti relations, so British diplomats tried to persuade Iraq to solve these problems and recognise the borders of Kuwait.

Hence the importance of this research, as it highlighted these events through historical sources, including British documents, to extrapolate the reality of Iraqi-Kuwaiti relations and the role of the British embassy between them, as well as following the research's analytical approach in its writing.

### **About the Journal**

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## 1. 1. Introduction

Iraq was one of the important colonies of Great Britain, and British diplomats and consuls had given considerable attention to the political, economic, and social conditions in the country. Britain exploited the efforts of its diplomats and Envoys, who were writing detailed reports on Iraq, to enhance its domination over the country. Britain seized the opportunity of the First World War (1914–1918) to occupy Iraq, and UK gained the mandate over Iraq until it later became independent (in theory) in 1932. British diplomats had an active role in Iraq's foreign affairs, especially in Arab and regional issues. The Kuwait crisis demonstrates to what extent the British were involved in Iraqi-Kuwaiti relations during the monarchy era. Iraqi statesmen during this period demanded sovereignty over Kuwait and were reluctant to recognise its sovereignty. This demand was based on the Historical Allegation that Kuwait used to be part of the province of Basra; for this reason, the Iraqi-Kuwaiti relationship was marked by instability. This gave room for British diplomats to have a considerable role. The crux of the matter was that Iraq needed access to the sea, and Kuwait was a barrier. However, there are some statements by official figures in the Iraqi government that Kuwait belongs to Iraq. The British were working for stability in the region.

**1.2. Research importance:** The importance of the paper lies in its thorough research on the hitherto untold role the British diplomats played in the crisis. It is noteworthy that the British diplomats were instrumental on several occasions in defusing the crisis, controlling smuggling, and establishing a port. The British statesmen on the ground played an equally important role in preserving the dominion of the Sheikh of Kuwait and his.

**1.3. Research question:** The researcher tried to answer several questions, including: did the demarcation of borders have any role in improving relations between them? Was Britain defending Kuwaiti or Iraqi interests, and was she being partial? In their attempts to settle disputed issues, how did the British diplomats serve their own country's interests?

**1.4. Research Methodology:** The researcher depends on the description methodology; it utilised British documents to a considerable extent. In addition, the memoirs of the diplomats and British and Iraqi statesmen were equally used. The contemporary papers and relevant secondary sources were also sources of the research.

**1.5. Research contents:** The research has an introduction and two section. The preface deals with the historical background of British-Kuwaiti diplomatic relations since the late nineteenth century, specifically during the reign of Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah (1837–1915). This was followed by a survey of the historical developments of bilateral relations between Iraq and Kuwait until 1932. The first section addresses the attitude of British diplomats towards the Iraqi government's claims and attempts to annex Kuwait. The second section deals with the issues affecting bilateral relations between Kuwait and Iraq and the role of the British Embassy in them. This chapter pays special attention to the issues of border demarcation, smuggling, the proposal to establish a port in Kuwait, and the issue of the Sheikh of Kuwait's property in Iraq. In addition to the role of the embassy in ending the conflict. The conclusion included the results reached by the researcher.

## 2. British- Kuwaiti Diplomatic Relations Before 1932:

British control in Kuwait goes back to the period of influence of Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah (1837-1915) (Abu Hakimah, 1948, P 329), The latter made a secret agreement with Britain in 1899, in which the sheikh pledged that he would not accept the appointment of governors from outside Kuwait, it meaning no governors are accepted for any region without the consent of the British Government. In 1900, the Ottoman Empire felt that there was an agreement without knowing its content. The treaty granted Britain authority over Kuwait, and the British obtained the approval of Sheikh Mubarak that he would not offer any privilege to any one without their approval ( Bacik, 2008, P 64)

Britain felt concern over its interests as a result of the rising German expansions into the Middle East, and there was an alliance between Germany and the Ottoman Empire, the British acquisition of Kuwait became a necessity. In 1912, the Ottomans pressured Sheikh Mubarak to agree to assist German plans in the Ottoman territories, It opened the doors of trade to the Germans, as well as a railway project in the Gulf (Casey, 2007,p64).

Negotiations took place between the Ottomans and the British. In 1913, to discuss the influence of Britain and keep the Germans out of the Gulf, They have agreed that Kuwait is a sub-district of Basra. At the outbreak of World War I, Britain landed its forces in the port of Faw and the port of Kuwait, The Sheikh of Kuwait asked Britain for protection. After the war, Britain detached the Kuwaiti district from Basra, and in 1921, Kuwait's authority was transferred from the Political Residency to the British Colonial Office. When King Faisal I began to build the modern Iraqi state, he encouraged Prime Minister Yassin al-Hashemi to raise the issue of Kuwait on August 2, 1924, where al-Hashemi indicated that the Shatt al-Arab region and the head of the Arabian Gulf are within one state and demanded its return to Iraq (Al-Bazzaz, 1993, P 194). This was the first official statement by the Iraqi government on this matter, to annex Kuwait to Iraq,. However, Britain pressured the Iraqi government to implement the provisions of the Uqair Treaty 1922, Which It defines the border line between Iraq and Kuwait, in another meaning separating Kuwait from Iraq, as according to the letter Percy Cox sent on April 19, 1923, to the ruler of Kuwait, Ahmed Al-Jaber (1885–1951), without the knowledge of the Iraqi government (Dickson,1990, p288).

The apparent main goal of British support for the agreement was the presence of oil traces in the region. This was also intended to put an end to Ibn Saud'sm, he was an Arab political and tribal leader, who founded Saudi Arabia, influence in Iraq (Macmillan, USA, 1993), and the Kuwaiti side did not hide their concern about these procedures (Casey, 2007, 55). After that, in 1923 Cox visited Sheikh Ahmed Al-Sabah and told him that Britain had recognised the "Green Line" treaty was signed between the Ottoman Empire in 1913 (Finnie,1992, p.32), and a line was drawn up to settle the Iraqi-Kuwaiti borders, according to Britain's approval (Finnie,1992,p32). Kuwait became the subject of many meetings in Britain. British officials in the Middle East declared the official protection of Kuwait in 1929 (Finnie,1992,p84).

Francis Humphreys referred to the issue of borders in the annual report of his embassy for 1932, sked Prime Minister Nouri Al-Saeed to recognise the borders Which Cox referred to in 1923, Nuri al-Saeed confirmed that his country did not recognise this border line (India Office,1932 ,p 3).

In March 1932, an incident occurred that removed the border marker board. This caused a conflict between them. The British representative intervened to resolve the dispute with Prime Minister Nouri Al-Saeed and Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Ruler of Kuwait. It was recommended that the borders be determined officially through modern means, as this was the reason for Iraq's nomination to join the League of Nations. (India Officem, 1932, p-6-20).

### **3.1. The British Diplomatic Attitude towards the Iraqi Government Claims to Annex Kuwait:**

One of the reasons for the Iraqi demand to annex Kuwait is the appeal of the slogan of Arab unity, which King Faisal emphasized after the 1920 revolution against the British forces in Iraq. It became a point of concern for the British, For details, look at (Abbas, 2014, P 236-240).

The first attempt to propagate the idea of annexing Kuwait to Iraq was made by Prime Minister Yassin Al-Hashimi on August 2, 1924, when he stated that the Shatt al-Arab region and the head of the Arabian Gulf were within one state (Iraq) and demanded its return to this country. This is the first official statement by the Iraqi government on this issue. After that, Britain put pressure on the Iraqi government to implement the terms of the Uqair Agreement because it recognised the separation of Kuwait from Iraq. This is according to the letter sent by the British High Commissioner Percy Cox on April 19, 1923, to Sheikh of Kuwait, Ahmed Al-Jaber, without the knowledge of the Iraqi government (Dickson,1990, p288).

There was an indirect attempt by King Faisal I to annex Kuwait, which sought to build a railway line to Kuwait and an Iraqi port in Kuwait City. However, Britain vetoed this project in 1932, and, on July 14, the British ambassador, Humphreys, asked the Iraqi prime minister, Nuri al-Said, to begin correspondence with the Kuwaiti authorities to demarcate the borders between the two countries. Nevertheless, the Iraqi government refused this, and some Iraqi politicians campaigned for the return of Iraqi sovereignty over the Gulf (Finnie, 1992, p78).

There was another reason behind the Iraqi claims to annex Kuwait, which was the admiration of King Ghazi and some military and political leaders for German ideology. As the General Director of Education, Sami Shawkat (1893-1987) (Madison, 1998, p. 10), pointed out that the government ordered him to educate young people on the German military spirit, urging them to participate in the Nazi party congresses. King Ghazi was glad with the successes achieved by Hitler in annexing Austria and the Czechoslovak province of Swidat (is a region located in western Czechia), to Germany, which motivated the king to imagine Kuwait as a part of Iraq. In his efforts to regain Kuwait for Iraq, Ghazi was assisted by the existence of the Kuwaiti National Youth Bloc, among Kuwaiti youth, appeals to the Iraqi government return of Kuwait to Iraq (Veritas Press, 1990, p. 4), which he encouraged and assisted, and the fact that many Kuwaitis owned large farms and fields in Basra. This was a direct reason for pushing the King and some politicians to think about and work for the annexation of Kuwait to Iraq. Besides, the Iraqi press played a prominent and influential role in inciting officials to demand the annexation of Kuwait. This gained momentum and led to some prominent Kuwaiti individuals' appealing to King Ghazi to demand the annexation of Kuwait.(Al-Alawi, 1995, p 62)

King Ghazi was known for his nationalist tendencies, and he calls for the liberation of the Arab states and their reunification under the leadership of an Arab country. His call for the annexation of Kuwait should be understood within this context. Radio Qasr al-Zuhur, which he had established, had a prominent role in revitalising the Kuwaiti Arab nationalist movement inside Kuwait. For these reasons, the British officials had realised that the king's presence on the throne had become a threat to their interests (Safwat, 1969, p 207). Consequently, the British Ambassador Maurice Peterson (1937–1939) declared publicly that "King Ghazi must be controlled or overthrown", and in the meeting of Sheikh Ahmed Al-Sabah with King Ghazi in Baghdad, they agreed to find ways to annex Kuwait to Iraq, but Britain intervened and prevented King Ghazi from travelling to Kuwait to achieve that plan. On the other hand, the Iraqi Foreign Minister, Tawfiq Al-Suwaidi, informed Maurice Peterson that the Ottoman-British agreement in 1913 proved that Kuwait is an area under the Basra, and Iraq did not recognise any change in the status of Kuwait (Al-Bazzaz, 1993, p 194).

There was an impression in Iraqi political circles that the annexation of Kuwait was of great significance for Iraqi politics. Some Iraqis argued that the annexation of Kuwait was not a goal but rather a solution to the problem, and this belief spread among Iraqi ordinary citizens. Hence, the Iraqi King in 1938 made an open reference to the "liberation of Kuwait from British influence (Al-Alawi, 1995, p 48).

In 1938, the Kuwaiti Legislative Council decided to return Kuwait to Iraq. On March 7, 1939, some Kuwaitis sent telegrams to King Ghazi calling for Iraq to intervene against the ruler of Kuwait and the British. On March 10, 1939, there was an uprising in Kuwait, and the demonstrators raised the Iraqi flag and banners reading, "Kuwait is part of Iraq". The Kuwaiti authorities, with the help of the British, used force to crush the uprising, and King Ghazi demanded that the British embassy intervene publicly by releasing all the detainees and warned the sheikh to stop all repressive measures against the movement. The king was secretly preparing for a military intervention in Kuwait, and he issued orders to the army chief of staff to implement this order. However, some of the military and political officials in Iraq were able to convince the king that the intervention was an aggression against the British, and the British administration, which had a dominant influence in Iraq, would not allow the military to be carried out (Faraj, 1987, p 218).

British Ambassador Peterson called King Ghazi and warned him to stop supporting the Kuwaiti opposition and to abandon any claims to annex Kuwait to Iraq. King Ghazi rejected the ambassador's request and then died in a car accident on April 5, 1939. It is believed that he was assassinated by British agents because of these allegations (Ralph, 1991, p4).

On September 3, 1932, Humphreys sent a letter to the Foreign Ministry, referring to the meeting between the rulers of Kuwait and King Faisal I in Baghdad. The meeting was related to settling the borders between them (F.O 5642, 1933,p7), and despite the prevailing impression among the British embassy staff in Iraq, there was an Iraqi desire to gradually reintegrate Kuwait into Iraq, and this tendency had some credence in the political scene. Nevertheless, Iraqi Foreign Minister Nouri al-Saeed assured the British ambassador that his country had no intention of annexing Kuwait and that the Iraqi government was willing to establish friendly relations with the Sheikh of Kuwait. The British ambassador in Baghdad

announced that he had a desire to play the role of mediator between them (F.O 6223, 1936, p16).

In 1935, there was an attempt to settle the differences between Iraq and Kuwait. The matter has become difficult because the Iraqi government's policy has focused on gradually subjecting Kuwait to its political influence. The ruler of Kuwait complained to the British Embassy in Baghdad about press reports in Iraq in which he asserted that "Iraq demanded the annexation of Kuwait and that Kuwait supported this step". The Iraqi government denied any connection to these articles (F.O 6223, 1936, p16).

In April 1937, the Iraqi government contacted the British Embassy in Baghdad, asking them to provide information about the history of Kuwaiti nationality law. The Iraqi Foreign Ministry indicated that the reason for this request relates to the issues linking this matter to the Iraqi nationality law and to put an end to requests to exempt people from mandatory military service on the allegation that they were Kuwaitis (F.O 4241, 1938, p40).

In November 1937, the British Embassy learned that Iraqi administrative experts were ready to formulate a stand against Kuwait. According to the experts, Kuwait would not be permanently separated from the Ottoman Empire until the date of ratification of the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. Accordingly, the residents of Kuwait became legally within the scope of Article 3 of the Nationality Law. This legislation stated that former Ottoman nationals residing in Iraq (including Kuwait) had become automatically Iraqi citizens starting August 6, 1924. The British Embassy sought to prove the nationality of those who were being recruited, and Ambassador Archibald Clark Kerr pointed out that the Iraqi government was conducting forced recruitment (F.O 4241, 1938, p40).

In December 1937, instructions were received from the Foreign Office of the ambassador in Iraq to inform the Government of Iraq that the British Government was concerned about its policy towards the Ruler of Kuwait. It urged the government of Iraq to suspend legal procedures that threaten Kuwait's sovereignty until new proposals were presented to settle the disputes peacefully (F.O 4241, 1938, p39).

On October 4, 1938, the British Government considered the proposals of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Tawfiq Al-Suwaidi, regarding legal and historical matters for Kuwait. The British Foreign Secretary stated that his country would find it extremely difficult to accept any Iraqi claim on Kuwait based on legal or historical grounds. Furthermore, the embassy exerted a lot of pressure on the Iraqi government to accept the British point of view on settling the issue between Iraq and Kuwait based on the lines proposed (F.O 5656, 1938, p34). British Ambassador Basil Newton (1939–1941) asked Prime Minister Nuri al-Saeed to draw the borders of Iraq and Kuwait, based on the proposal offered by Sir Percy Cox in 1923 and the later belief that his proposal would benefit the governments of Iraq and Kuwait (India Office, 1940, p 89).

### **3.2 The British Embassy's Mediating Role in Kuwaiti-Iraq Disputes:**

The British documents of the period under study indicate the active and assertive role played by the British diplomats in issues dealing with border problems, tribal affairs, matters pertaining to the property of the sheikh of Kuwait, and the issue of smuggling between Kuwait and Iraq. These controversial issues and the thorny issues provided avenues through which British diplomats exercised their dominant influence in Iraqi external ties, especially in those issues that were dealing with the bilateral relations between Kuwait and Iraq. Later, it was thought that the annexation of Kuwait would deny the British an important means of having influence in Iraq.

### **3.2.1. The issue of border demarcation**

The issue of demarcating the border between Iraq and Kuwait was of interest to the British ambassadors in Iraq in particular. In July 1932, the British Embassy asked the Iraqi Prime Minister to enter correspondence with the Kuwaiti authorities regarding the demarcation of the border between them. The Colonial Office reported to Francis Humphreys, reaffirming the existing borders between Iraq and Kuwait, which Percy Cox pointed out in 1923. On July 21, 1932, the Iraqi Prime Minister asked Francis Humphreys On July 21, 1932, to take necessary action to obtain approval from the Kuwaiti authorities to approve the existing borders between them as follows: from Wadi Al-Awja, then north to Wadi Safwan, and eastward, passing south of Safwan and Umm Qasr, to the Khor Al-Zubair junction with Khor Abdullah (India Office 2828, 1932, p64), and the islands of Al-Warla, Bubiyan, Failaka, Aouba Kubar, Qar, and Umm Al-Muradin follow Kuwait through the same channel (F.O 5642, 1933, p8). Then the British Embassy in Baghdad informed the British Political Agency in Kuwait that Nuri Al-Saeed had confirmed the borders between them with the approval of the British government. The Sheikh of Kuwait was informed about this and then officially announced his approval of it (India Office 2828, 1932, p68).

In April 1934, the discussion continued between the three parties on border issues, but their relations did not improve as the raids continued between the Iraqi and Kuwaiti sides. Due to the lack of clarity and blurry conditions on the border issue, there were exchanges of accusations. The Iraqi police were pursuing the smugglers, and Kuwait got up and submitted a complaint against them to the British administration. The British emphasise that the borders would be demarcated amicably to end these problems. Then the British Embassy submitted a letter of protest to the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In December 1934, Nouri Al-Saeed promised to issue orders to the customs' police to avoid all activities until the border issue was resolved (F.O 3399, 1935, p12).

In September 1936, the Sheikh of Kuwait declared that the Iraqi customs' police crossed the border and entered Kuwaiti waters near Bubiyan Island. The British Embassy made inquiries with the Customs Director in Baghdad, who argued that the information was incorrect. Then the Political Resident in Kuwait proposed forming a committee with the Governor of Basra and the Political Agent in Kuwait to investigate all incidents that caused complaints by both countries and stressed the necessity of holding a joint meeting between them in London to finalise the border demarcation. However, the fall of Yassin al-Hashimi's government on October 29, 1936, rendered this meeting impossible (F.O 5829, 1937, p35).

Border problems between the two countries continued. In January 1937, the British administration in Iraq requested that the political agent in Kuwait meet with the British advisor to the Iraqi government to investigate the border incidents. On the Iraqi side, it was agreed that Major Sargon Ward, an officer and advisor in the Iraqi police, and the Iraqi police commander in Mosul would conduct investigations in the places where the problems happened on the border between Kuwait and Iraq. Therefore, Foreign Minister Naji Shawkat sent a letter to British Ambassador Clark, pointing out that no case of incursion had been confirmed and that the violation events were due to the lack of a proper border between the two countries (F.O 4241, 1937, p38).

The exchange of accusations continued between the Iraqi and Kuwaiti sides. In October 1937, the Sheikh of Kuwait informed the British Embassy of Continuing Iraqi police raids and infiltration on the Kuwait border. The British ambassador presented a protest letter to the Iraqi government in November, demanding an investigation. This situation continued during the year 1938, as relations between Iraq and Kuwait remained tense about the border issue. The British government believed that these events would end with the official demarcation of the border, and after these borders had received formal recognition by the Kuwaiti and Iraqi sides (F.O 5656, 1939, p33).

### **3.2.2.Smuggling Issue**

In 1932, the smuggling (Smuggling was the process of transporting goods from Kuwait to Iraq illegally and without paying taxes, in addition to unlicensed items such as weapons) operation was a major problem that caused the deterioration of British-Iraqi relations on the one hand and Iraqi-Kuwaiti relations on the other. The smuggling from Kuwait to Iraq was a major obstacle to improving relations between the two countries. Iraqi customs officials maintained this due to the fact that the volume of smuggled goods entering Iraq in this way was large. Many confrontations took place with armed smugglers. After these events, the Iraqi customs authorities had the traffic of smuggling under control. To achieve that, a customs point was set up in Al-Faw when entering Iraqi territory. However, this caused a delay in the arrival of Kuwaiti boats. After that, the Sheikh of Kuwait Ahmad Al. alsubah) protested against this procedure. The Iraqi government expressed its regret for not being able to ease the customs' restrictions. But the Iraqi government argued that the sheikh of Kuwait could not guarantee that the boats would not be involved in smuggling and complained that Kuwaiti officials were not cooperating with them on border issues (F.O 5642, 1933, p9).

During the year 1933, the size of trade between Iraq and Kuwait had reduced considerably, and this was due to difficult restrictions on smuggling. The Iraqi government made proposals to the British Embassy and the Political Resident in the Gulf that the Sheikh of Kuwait collaborate with them in developing preventive anti-smuggling measures. The British Embassy sent Iraqi proposals to Sheikh Kuwait, but the sheikh's delay in responding led to clashes between the Iraqi police and Kuwaiti smugglers. Consequently, three Kuwaitis were killed in April 1933. The incident was the subject of strong protests by the Sheikh of Kuwait. He pointed out that there was no evidence that his men were smugglers. The Iraqi police attacked to the suspected boats outside its country's territorial waters. which caused The British Political Resident in the Gulf suggested that an Iraqi customs official go to Kuwait and

talk about the smuggling problem in a friendly manner. The proposal was rejected by the Iraqi government. In October 1933, the British ambassador intervened and persuaded the Iraqi government to agree to invite Kuwaiti representatives to Baghdad to discuss smuggling matters (F.O 5310, 1934, p11).

On February 15, 1934, a conference was held between representatives of Iraq and Kuwait, and this was attended by British delegates and advisors in both countries to discuss border security issues between them, especially the issue of smuggling threats from Kuwait into Iraq. The conference participants emphasise the necessity of preventing smuggling, and the British officials urged the Sheikh of Kuwait to pledge to prevent smuggling and that procedures should be taken to prevent it. The British officials thought that the Sheikh was not willing to accept any proposals, so the negotiations did not function. Because the sheikh did not have a clear position, the conference led to failure (F.O 3399, 1935, p37).

In December 1934, the Iraqi Foreign Minister, Nouri al-Saeed, informed the British ambassador to Iraq, Humphreys, that he was unable to reach any understanding with the Sheikh of Kuwait. Nouri indicated that the British government could deal directly with the smuggling issue. The Iraqi premier suggested that Britain could also urge the Sheikh to accept a formula for the solution to the smuggling issue. Should the Sheikh refuse, he would not have the right to any complaint or any measure that the Iraqi government might take to exert pressure on him. Nouri also explained that smuggling had a dangerous impact on Iraq's revenues, and if an agreement was not reached, Iraq would be forced to take measures, including a siege of Kuwait, by the end of 1934. Therefore, Nuri asked the British Embassy to look into the issue with urgency. On September 23, 1934, the Iraqi delegation, consisting of the Director General of Foreign Affairs and the Governor of Basra, visited Kuwait, and upon their arrival, they informed the Acting Political Resident of the following proposals: the Sheikh of Kuwait should pledge to prevent smuggling by placing the Kuwaiti customs administration in the hands of Iraqi customs officials, and imports should be restricted. The Sheikh rejected these suggestions. It was clear that the sheikh was not willing to accept any suggestions (F.O 3399, 1935, p38). Because the proposals were not in the interest of his country.

The issue of smuggling was a serious concern for the British ambassadors. In May 1934, the British Embassy took the initiative to hold further discussions with the Iraqi authorities. This discussion aimed to find the best means to urge the Sheikh of Kuwait to accept a suitable solution to smuggling issues. It appointed a British customs director in Kuwait, and this official was asked to work with the Iraqi customs authorities and the political commissioner in Kuwait. The Iraqi government accepted the proposal, but the Sheikh of Kuwait rejected it. Then the Sheikh of Kuwait visited London in June 1934 and suggested that all goods exported from Kuwait to Iraq carry a permit, but the Iraqi government was not convinced by this proposal. On September 11, the British Foreign Office informed its embassy that the Iraqi government had decided to take the necessary steps to combat smuggling. The Prime Minister described the measures to the British Embassy as preventive. It appeared from reports issued by the Political Commissioner in Kuwait that the procedures taken by the Iraqi government were largely effective. This time, it appears that the Sheikh of Kuwait was pleased that the

Iraqi government was solely responsible for preventing smuggling (F.O 6223, 1935, p17). From the economic side, Kuwait benefits from this smuggling.

In 1936, the British Embassy informed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of its country that Iraq's successful application of anti-smuggling procedures was satisfactory. Although confrontations between the police and smuggler gangs were still frequent, it was revealed that Kuwaitis were smuggling weapons to the tribes during the tribal revolution in the Middle Euphrates region, because Kuwait was economically profitable. On July 25, confrontations happened between the police and Kuwaiti smugglers, and five of them were killed. The incident became a lesson for Kuwaitis because it reduced the smuggling process. In a meeting between Prime Minister Yassin Al-Hashimi and Ambassador Clark Kerr, Al-Hashimi requested cooperation from the ambassador in order to achieve preventive procedures at the border. Al-Hashimi confirmed that smuggling was the main reason for the deterioration of his country's relations with Kuwait. Then Clark Kerr informed the Foreign Ministry of his country. Britain attempts to reach a solution between the two parties and proposes a settlement, and there must be an agreement between them on the following proposals: Preventing smuggling under the proposed agreement. The British Embassy proposed the formation of a joint committee to deal with border incidents and the formation of a committee to delineate the land borders between Iraq and Kuwait. These proposals were under consideration by the relevant parties until the end of 1936 (F.O 5829, 1935, p36).

In April 1937, the Iraqi government informed the British Embassy that there was an illegal export of Tea from Al-India to Kuwait, and this was openly imported into Iraq by smuggling. The British Embassy replied that he would submit the matter to the Government of India, and he hoped that the Government of India would put an end to this illegal trade. Should the government of India continue to export tea to Iraq, it must be in an official manner. Al-Hindi responded that Iraq should choose the type of tea they prefer to import according to official procedures. The proposals were referred to the Iraqi government in November 1937, but there were no indications that the Iraqi government had submitted these proposals, and they were not received by the British Embassy until the end of that year (F.O 4241, 1938, p30).

In August 1937, the Acting British Foreign Secretary wrote a letter to the British government informing him that the Iraqi customs police had arrested two Bedouin tribesmen with smuggled goods from Kuwait. Among the smuggled goods were two rifles and a lot of ammunition. Sheikh Kuwait informed Foreign Minister Naji Shawkat in November 1936 that he had taken all necessary measures to prevent the Kuwaitis from smuggling weapons to Iraq. Besides, Iraq did not provide the names and nationalities of the detainees with certainty; the issue was neglected by the British (F.O 4241, 1938, p38).

In May 1938, Iraq repeated its complaint about the illegal smuggling of tea into Iraq from Kuwait and indicated that the authorities in India should take further steps to prevent the illegal export of tea to Gulf ports. In November, the Government of India sent official shipments with the British Embassy flag, and the Iraqi government was informed. Nevertheless, the mentioned procedures only led to an increase in the extent of smuggling and the Iraqi government's complaint (F.O 5656, 1939, p28). On August 29, 1938, Iraqi Foreign Minister Tawfiq Al-Suwaidi visited London to discuss the issue of arms smuggling. There he

proposed forming a customs union between Iraq and Kuwait, and the northern border line of Kuwait would extend from west to east at latitude 29°35' instead of 30' north. To give Iraqi services more space to operate in South Zubayr (F.O 5656, 1939, p33).

### **3.2.3.The Issue of a Port Between Iraq and Kuwait**

In the year 1932, King Faisal presented a project to build Iraqi ports in Kuwait City and link Iraq to the Gulf to ease trade matters at sea. It seems that his goal was indirectly an attempt to weaken Kuwait's role in terms of politics and economy, so Britain vetoed the project. Humphreys forced Iraq to respect the sovereignty of Kuwait and to drop the project. Despite London's insistence that these ports requested by Iraq belong to Kuwait according to previous agreements, King Faisal was frustrated by the British attempt to deny Iraq a port on the gulf (Finnie,1992, p78).

In 1938, Iraq tried again to establish a port in the Gulf. There was a proposal by the Iraqi government to establish an Iraqi port in the Kuwait and to extend the Baghdad-Basra railway to Kuwait in order to connect Iraq to the Gulf. But Kuwait had a strong reservation about this project because it viewed it as an incursion into its territory. On August 29, 1938, Al-Suwaidi explained to the British side his government's attitude towards Kuwait in a memorandum that was delivered to the British Foreign Office Undersecretary. It declared that Kuwait, from the Iraqi point of view, had not only become a centre for arms trade and smuggling but had also prevented Iraq from reaching the open sea (F.O 5656, 1939, p33).

Regarding direct access to the sea, Al-Suwaidi proposed two alternative locations for a port and railway station: first, a suitable location on Kuwait Bay, and second, the internal extension of Khor Abdullah (Khor Al-Zubair). In the first case, Iraq would ask to rent from Kuwait a site for the port and a corridor for the railway line, and he went on to say that in the second case, the border would be necessary to give a sufficient area in Umm Qasr (a possible location) and completely abandon the lands of Khor Kamel in Iraq (F.O 5656, 1939, p34). The proposal was never materialised, and it appears that there was a British desire to prevent Iraq's access to the Gulf through the secession of Kuwait. This led to an open request by King Ghazi's to annex Kuwait to Iraq; his request was rejected by the British side (Schoenman, 1990 , p5). This may account for his subsequent death in an obscure incident.

### **3.2.4. Sheikh's property in Iraq:**

On November 3, 1914, during World War I, the British Consul General in the Gulf wrote a letter to the ruler of Kuwait indicating that should Kuwait provide help in the war, the Sheikh of Kuwait would receive palm gardens in Basra for his family without paying taxes. The British government, to reward the Kuwaiti ruler's loyalty to Britain, ordered the Iraqi British administration to exempt that property from taxes until 1932. But when the land revenue system underwent change, taxes were assessed based on land area, and the execution of the new tax law did not include tax immunity. The Iraqi government did not recognise immunities; Sheikh protested against this. The sheikh considered the imposition of taxes on his property a violation of the earlier promises. So the British representative submitted an official request to postpone the implementation of the new law regarding the Sheikh's

properties, as the law stipulates that the Sheikh's gardens and properties are included in the new tax system (F.O 5642, 1933, p8).

On March 9, 1933, the Sheikh of Kuwait resorted to the Iraqi judiciary and confirmed that he had immunity. His request was rejected by the Iraqi court, and he was prevented from filing appeals to the court's decision due to a lack of legal documents. Nevertheless, the sheikh made an official protest against the court's decision, and the British Embassy asked the sheikh to record all the losses incurred. Despite the embassy's intervention, no solution has been found to compensate the sheikh for the losses resulting from the application of the new system (F.O 5310, 1934, p10).

In a British report issued on February 11, 1934, where the Sheikh of Kuwait was prosecuting a number of lawsuits against the farmer who refused delivery of palm crops, the Basra court asked the sheikh to swear on his request. He was unable to obtain his rights through the court. After that, the sheikh asked the British Embassy to intervene in order to restore his rights by convincing the Iraqi government to postpone consideration of the case for four months. The embassy was unable to reach any decision on the issue of compensation for the sheikh and confirmed that the issue is still under study and discussion (F.O 3399, 1935, p10).

In June 1936, the Public Prosecutor in Basra demanded the downfall of the property of the Sheikh of Kuwait in Iraq. The British Embassy in Iraq proposed a settlement for the issue of the application of the land settlement law. For the year 1932, the boundaries of their lands would be determined, and their ownership would be registered by the Tabu department in Iraq. But the fall of the Yasin al-Hashemite government on October 29, 1936, and the formation of a new government headed by Hikmat Suleiman led to further consideration of the matter. Thus, the Iraqi government declared that it in principle accepted the proposals submitted by the British embassy with regard to the issue. However, the issue stayed unsettled (F.O 582999, 1937, p 36). Iraqi officials were against returning the Sheikh's Kuwaiti property due to the lack of legal documents, in addition to the fact that Iraqi officials considered that the Sheikh, with the encouragement of the British, was requesting this property.

In August 1937, there was still no progress made in settling the Sheikh's properties in Iraq, and the new government in Iraq announced that it was still adhering to its previous stand on this issue. Iraq informed the British Embassy that they could no longer accept the appeal of the Sheikh's agents in the Iraqi courts. At the same time, Iraqi plaintiffs were prevented from filing lawsuits against the ruler of Kuwait in court due to the embassy's refusal. In November 1937, the Iraqi government summoned the sheikh's lawyer in Basra as a defendant in a complaint related to the sheikh's ownership. In December, the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs informed its ambassador that it was concerned about procedures taken by the Iraqi government and urged a stop to the proceedings until proposals were presented to solve the matter (F.O 4241, 1938, p39).

In June 1938, the court issued a decision to transfer the sheikh's properties in Iraq to the Land Settlement Court. The embassy interfered in the matter, after which the Iraqi government accepted the proposal made by the embassy in July 1936. which the Land Settlement Law determines the validity of the sheikh's property in Iraq. The Land Settlement Law also

provides for cases relating to the application of the sheikh's properties in Iraq. After that, the embassy began to press for a declaration of land settlement in the Al-Faw region until 1939, without providing the required declaration (F.O 5656, 1939, p35).

#### 4. Conclusions

The annexation of Kuwait was an urgent need for Iraq to reach the sea port, as the Shatt al-Arab region and the head of the Arabian Gulf were within a unified administration. For the annexation, Iraq relied on legal and historical evidence.

Sheikhs of Kuwait during the period of the study viewed their areas and properties as their inalienable rights, which had been threatened unduly by Iraqi authorities. They resorted to British diplomats' assistance on a continuous basis to preserve their interests. They were convinced that they could not preserve it except with the help of the British diplomats in Iraq, the Gulf, and London. These diplomats utilised the situation to further enhance their power in Iraq, Kuwait, and the Gulf. The British government used the Kuwait card to procure several agreements with Iraqi and Kuwaiti officials; some of these agreements were secret, and some were public.

King Ghazi was eager to annex Kuwait to Iraq, but British diplomats stood against his ambitions, and there were some parties in Iraq that alleged that the British were involved in the regicide case.

It has been proven that knowing the border between Iraq and Kuwait is just an issue that the British highlighted to preserve their economic and strategic interests.

Francis Humphreys was one of the most prominent British diplomats during the period of study and was preoccupied with the Iraqi-Kuwaiti issue for the interests of his country.

In addition, the Iraq and Kuwait relations, especially in the issues pertaining to the demarcation of borders, smuggling, and property disputes, demonstrate to what extent British diplomats in post-1932 independent Iraq were involved in formulating Iraq's foreign policy and other issues relating to Iraq's national security.

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## موقف الدبلوماسيين البريطانيين في العراق تجاه القضايا العربية كويت نموذجاً

1939-1932

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لقد انشغل البريطانيون بالسيطرة على منطقة الخليج لأسباب استراتيجية واقتصادية وسياسية، خاصة العراق والكويت اللتين اهتمت بهما بريطانيا. كما لعبت بريطانيا دوراً في مسار القضايا العربية والإقليمية، حيث شهدت العلاقات العراقية الكويتية توترات سياسية في عدة مناسبات. وأبلغت الجهات الرسمية العراقية السفارة البريطانية أن الكويت تشكل عائقاً أمام وصول العراق بحراً، وهناك تصريحات عراقية رسمية تفيد بأن الكويت تابعة للعراق. أصبحت هذه التصريحات مصدر قلق للبريطانيين، فحاولوا خلال الأعوام 1939-1932 احتواء المشاكل بين الطرفين، ومن بينها مشاكل (ترسيم الحدود، التهريب، بناء الميناء، وأملاك الشيخ). ودخل شيوخ الكويت في علاقات سرية مع بريطانيا حفاظاً على كيانه السياسي، مما أدى إلى توتر العلاقات العراقية الكويتية، فحاول الدبلوماسيون البريطانيون إقناع العراق بحل هذه المشاكل والاعتراف بحدود الكويت. ومن هنا تأتي أهمية هذا البحث، إذ سلط الضوء على هذه الأحداث من خلال المصادر التاريخية، بما فيها الوثائق البريطانية، لاستقراء واقع العلاقات العراقية الكويتية ودور السفارة البريطانية بينهما، فضلاً عن اتباع المنهج التحليلي للبحث في كتابته.

الكلمات المفتاحية (الكويت، العراق، تهريب، حدود، السفارة)

## هه لويستي ديلوماتكاره بهريتانيه كان له عيراق بهرامبر پرسه عه ره بيه كان، كويت به نموونه

1932-1939

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بريتانيا سه رقالي كونترول كردنى ناوچه كانى كه نداو بو، له بهر هو كاري ستراتيجى و ثابورى وساسى، به تايهت عيراق و كويت برتانيا بيا گرن گي زياترى بيدهدا، وهروها رولى له پرسه عه ره بى وهريمه تيه كان هه بو، گرژى و نالوزى نيوان عيراق و كويت باشترين گهواهي دهري نهو راسته بوون، له لايهنى خو شيه وه عيراق به بهريتانيه كانى راگه يانده بو كويت بهر بهرسته له بهر دهه گهيشتى سنوره كانى به دهريا، ليدوانه فهريمه كانى عيراقيش جهختيان له وه ده كرده وه كويت سه به عيراقه.

نهم ليدوانان ههش بونه سه رجاهوى دلته راو كيتى بهريتانيه كان، له ماوهوى نيوان سالانى 1932-1939، ههولى بريتانيا لهو ماويه نهو بوو كيشه كانى نيوان نهو دوو لايهه چاره سه ر بكات له وانهش كيشه كانى (سنور، قاچاخچيه تى، دورست كردنى بهندهر، وهروها مولكه كانى شيهه كانى كويت)، شيهه كانى كويتش به مه به سسى پاراستنى خوزيان، له گهل بريتانيا په پوهندى نهيتيان دورست كرد، نهمهش گرژى و نالوزى له نيوان عيراق و كويت زياتر كرد، ديبلوماتكاره بهريتانيه كان ههولياندا كه عيراق رازى بكه، بو چاره سه ر كردنى سه رجهم كيشه كان له ناوياندا داننانى عيراق به سنورى كويت،

گرنگى تويزينه وه كه له وهدا خوى ده دوزينه وه، كه نهم روداوانه له زير روشناى بهلگه نامه كان و چه ندين سه رجاهوى گرن، رومالى په پوهنديه كانى نيوان عيراق و كويت ورولى ديبلوماتكاره بهريتانيه كان تاوتوى كردوه، بو نهم مه به ستهش له نووسينى تويزينه وه كه په پوهوى له ميتودى شيكارى كراوه له خ سيسته روى سه رنج وتينيه كان، نه وهش به پشت به ستن به سه رجاهوى ميژويه كان له نيويشياندا بهلگه نامه بهريتانيه كان.

روشه سه ره تايه كان (كويت، عيراق، دزه كردن، سنور، بالتيز خانه).