

GCC Military Spending: High but to What Purpose? *by Pieter Wezeman*

Table 1: GCC Military Expenditure by Country in US\$ millions (2002 - 2014)

Country	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Bahrain	538	618	623	585	641	695	752	841	840	1033	1150	1271	1319
Kuwait	4505	4855	5225	5057	4999	5310	4889	4782	4716	5394	5856	5666	NA
Oman	3505	3687	4145	4997	5343	5413	5154	4822	5094	6668	11985	11218	8985
Qatar	1252	1263	1164	1229	1320	1700	2193	1938	1913	NA	NA	NA	NA
Saudi Arabia	25761	25951	28849	34762	39600	45613	44769	46004	47879	48531	54913	62933	73717
UAE	8677	9170	10199	9305	9238	9816	11959	14080	17658	19182	18898	23150	21877

Note: Figures are in US\$ millions at constant 2011 prices and exchange rates.
Figures in blue are SIPRI estimates.

Table 2: GCC Countries' Military Expenditure as % of GDP (2014)

Country	Military Spending in US\$ millions	GDP in US\$ billions	% of GDP
Bahrain	1433	33.9	4.2
Kuwait	NA	163.6	NA
Oman	9623	81.8	11.6
Qatar	NA	210.1	NA
Saudi Arabia	80762	746.2	10.4
United Arab Emirates	22755	399.5	5.1

Note: Figures are in US\$ millions at 2014 prices and exchange rates. GDP based on World Bank 2014 Data.

Table 3: Supplier Countries' Shares of Total Transfers of Major Arms to GCC Countries for the Period 2010-2014

Rank	Country	Share
1	United States	48.1
2	United Kingdom	18.6
3	France	8.3
4	Spain	4.5
5	Russia	4.0
6	Italy	3.2
7	Sweden	2.7
8	Germany	2.7
9	Turkey	2.4
10	Switzerland	2.0
11	Canada	1.5
12	Netherlands	0.9
13	Belgium	0.4
14	others	0.7

Note: Figures are based on SIPRI Trend Indicator Values (TIVs)

Despite its relatively small size in terms of population and area, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is estimated to include two of the world's top 15 military spenders, Saudi Arabia (ranked 4th) and the United Arab Emirates (ranked 14th). Estimated military expenditure in GCC states has increased rapidly over the period of 2005-2014. For example, military spending increased 135 percent in the UAE and 112 percent in Saudi Arabia.

GCC countries are opaque or highly secretive in the field of military matters. The latest available figure for Qatar's military expenditure is for 2010, when it was estimated to be \$1.9 billion. However, there are strong indications that its spending had increased significantly by 2014.

No data for UAE military spending for 2014 is available. The 'defense and security' included in the official

Saudi budget is not explained in any detail. It is uncertain if it includes all costs for arms procurement, financial aid to militaries in Egypt and Lebanon, or military operations in Yemen and Syria.

In recent years, high oil prices have enabled higher military spending for GCC states, and it remains to be seen how the last year's lower oil prices will affect this. But it is the political and military motives behind the spending that are the most difficult to assess.

None of the GCC countries publish defense white papers or other documents to explain their large investments in military capabilities. Still the behavior of GCC states and available statements by state officials offer some insight into their priorities and motives. Firstly, well-armed paramilitary forces are considered key for protecting the existing political systems in GCC states against any form of internal opposition. Secondly, GCC states perceive Iran as a major direct threat that needs to be contained. This is despite Iran's lower military spending, which is probably less than a quarter that of Saudi Arabia alone. In addition, Iran's weapons are worn and obsolete due to a lack of resources and a United Nations arms embargo. Thirdly, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar each seek to increase their influence in the Middle East and deem military power a major instrument to this end.

In recent years, these factors together have led to most of the GCC states not only expanding military capability, but also using it uni- or multilaterally in Bahrain, Libya, Syria and Yemen. Moreover, with decision-making conducted in secret by small groups of elites, a question mark remains over the extent to which the relentless marketing efforts of arms producers shape GCC military procurement and spending behavior. Regional conventional arms control does not seem to be high on the agenda of GCC countries nor of their arms suppliers, which are primarily the United States and Europe.

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