Gulf Affairs
Spring 2016

Featuring
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Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs
State of Kuwait

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Foreword by
George Friedman

GCC Security Amid Regional Crises
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Gulf Affairs is an independent, non-partisan journal organized by OxGAPS, with the aim of bridging the voices of scholars, practitioners, and policy-makers to further knowledge and dialogue on pressing issues, challenges and opportunities facing the six member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

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Cover: A member of the Saudi forces stands to attention during a visit by Yemeni Prime Minister Khaled Bahah at the Saudi-led coalition military base in Yemen’s southern embattled city of Aden on 28 September 2015.

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The Issue ‘GCC Security Amid Regional Crises’ was supported by:

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Foreword
by George Friedman

Several processes are at work in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region, one layered over the other. At the top is a massive shift in how the global economy works following the 2008 financial crisis. This period began a crisis for exporting countries. Put simply, 2008 diminished the capacity of the United States and Europe to import manufactured products, which struck China particularly hard inasmuch as it was heavily dependent on manufactured exports. There was a significant lag in perception catching up to reality. Expectations that the Chinese appetite for industrial minerals, including oil, would remain steady kept prices up. When it became clear that these expectations were unrealistic, the price of oil plunged. Europe, in particular, has not returned to pre-2008 consumption patterns and neither has the United States. Therefore, with increased production and decreased demand, the economics of oil have created a new economic reality for the GCC.

The second layer is a fundamental shift in how the United States approaches the region. The lesson of Iraq, and also Afghanistan, has been that the United States has the ability to destroy armies, but not to occupy hostile nations unless it is prepared to absorb ongoing casualties. Since the costs outweigh the benefits to the United States, the US has adopted a new strategy in which it is prepared to support efforts by powers native to the region with material, intelligence, and air power, but is not prepared to absorb the cost of direct intervention on the ground. In effect, the United States has adopted a strategy of maintaining a regional balance of power, rather than of using its own force to manage the situation. A result of this strategy is that the United States is prepared to live with much higher levels of instability than it was previously.

The United States sees four major powers in the region, only one of them Arab. They are Iran, Saudi Arabia, Israel and Turkey. The US understands the hostility between these powers and finds it useful to maintain the balance of power. Part of this policy is drawing away, to a limited degree, from Israel and moving towards, to a limited degree, Iran. It will not allow Saudi national interest to drive US policy, but regards Turkey as the key relationship, difficult to manage, but ultimately the main force in the region. The United States sees the operation Saudi Arabia led in Yemen, with strong GCC support, as the model for managing regional problems. While the US supported the operation, it was native air forces, mainly those from GCC members, that bore the burden of the mission.

This shift in US strategy, coupled with prior actions, particularly the invasion of Iraq and support for anti-Assad forces in Syria, has led to the collapse of the region as the British and French had defined it. Iraq and Syria have effectively ceased to exist as nations, with the Islamic State defining a new entity in parts of both countries. And the governments of each have ceased to actually govern either country but have instead, as was the case in Lebanon in the 1970s and 1980s, become simply another faction fighting for power and territory. The conflict is contained by the box created by Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Israel, but tensions between these nations, as well as complex forces within each of them, create an unpredictable dynamic. And it should be noted that the defeat of Islamic State as a near conventional military force will likely result in the same outcome as the defeat of the Iraqi Army did: a guerrilla war by a well-trained, highly motivated, and ruthless force that will have to be managed by regional powers.
There are, therefore, three challenges facing the GCC. First, there is the fundamental shift in the global economy that requires new models of economic development as an urgent matter of national security. Second, there is the shift in the American willingness to guarantee regional security, forcing the GCC to continue the development of a self-reliant defense strategy. Finally, the GCC must face the fact that it will be primarily responsible for managing its relations between conflicting regional powers, particularly Saudi Arabia and Iran. There are options open to the GCC, but all carry costs and risks. The US will partly bear these burdens, but the main responsibility will fall on the GCC to forge an alliance with a single power and bear its fate, and create a smaller balance of power among regional players without binding itself to anyone. It will also have to either accept powerlessness in the conflicts to its northwest, whatever outcome emerges, or create a unified force to participate in this and other conflicts, enduring the associated costs and risks.

The GCC includes, as one of its members, one of the major regional powers, as well as smaller states of varying economic development and defense capability. The evolution of the GCC from its current treaty structure to something resembling NATO during the Cold War would seem to be a fundamental shift, in order to provide weight to the region. If it would evolve the GCC to the sort of integrated force NATO had, the members of the GCC would face this decision. If Saudi Arabia is part of the alliance system, this would create a much stronger regional power than it would be otherwise. But this in turn would lead to a system of first among equals, given the relative strength of Saudi Arabia. It would also bind the alliance to a single power rather than give it room for maneuvering. If, on the other hand, the relationship with Saudi Arabia was defined in a more limited way, then the remaining countries would be both weaker and possibly more fragmented.

Defining the GCC in this very new era we have entered into seems to me the first task. As an American, I am not always clear on how decisions are made in the GCC and what is automatic and what is not. Others may see clearer, of course. But clarity of purpose is the essential path to manage the current situation.

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GCC Security Amid Regional Crises

Overview

by David Des Roches, Theme Editor

The Gulf is in a dead heat with the Korean peninsula for the title of most likely flashpoint in the world. No other region has the same volatile mixture of ethnic and religious enmity, under-developed political systems, modern weaponry, high levels of natural resources, and active great power interests. Every security analysis subject area—irregular warfare, weapons of mass destruction, weapons sales, military professionalization, military intervention, asymmetric warfare, missile defense—is present in the Gulf.

The study of security issues in the Gulf is thus rewarding to students and professionals alike. The field is constantly evolving as the Arab nations of the Gulf continue to top the list of arms importers and Iran continues to develop new weapons such as missiles, naval mines and possibly—probably—nuclear weapons.

The last year alone has seen major security developments in the Gulf. The most prominent was the Iranian nuclear deal and the continued geopolitical confrontation between Iran and her neighbors. The Iranian nuclear deal remains nascent at the time of writing, with all sides hoping for more than they are likely to get. Tehran hopes for an immediate lifting of all sanctions, irrespective of other Iranian transgressions such as the continuing development of missiles; calling for and supporting regime change in neighboring states such as Bahrain; deploying officers and backing militias in Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq; and regularly menacing commercial shipping in the Gulf.

The West, on the other hand, hopes that the Iranian nuclear deal will lead to a cessation of the Iranian nuclear program, an increase in democratic participation in Iran, better international behavior by the Iranian regime, and an opening of the large Iranian market to Western firms.

The Arab states of the Gulf, who were not parties to this agreement, fear their interests are being compromised. They worry that Western governments are either woefully ignorant of the true nature of the Iranian regime, or downright treacherous in their desire to swap Arab chess pieces for Persian ones.

Predicting the outcome of Iran’s nuclear deal with the P5+1 is perilous. Each concerned party—Iran, the West and the GCC states—will realize benefits and drawbacks. The West will probably see a reduction in Iranian nuclear capability. But it will not likely see Iran evolve from a state dedicated to exporting its revolution. Iran will experience considerable economic benefits but will still remain sanctioned for Revolutionary Guard activity, terrorism, and WMD development. The Arab states of the Gulf will reap the benefits of enhanced Western interests in keeping them secure—most notably in the export of military equipment such as long-range stand-off missiles, which had been denied in the past—but view every Western underreaction to Iranian violations as betrayal. They also view any Iranian-Western détente as an erosion of their own ‘protected’ status with the West and their geopolitical influence in Europe and the United States.

A peripheral but vital aspect of the Arab-Iranian confrontation is the war in Yemen. The Houthi overthrow of the Yemeni government, enabled by former president Ali Abdullah Saleh’s treachery, was a local issue. However, the GCC states (excepting Oman) have regarded it as another Iranian threat. This view is probably mistaken—the Iranians did not create this situation, but they are certainly exploiting it.
The Saudi-led coalition in Yemen—which includes significant Emirati and Bahraini elements as well as forces from all the other GCC nations (save Oman) plus Moroccans, Sudanese, Eritreans and others—has impressed observers accustomed to viewing the Arab monarchies as weapons collectors who don’t build true defense capacity. The Saudi-led force has displayed impressive operational capability in deploying and conducting military operations simultaneously on three fronts (Aden, Marib and the Saudi-Yemeni border). Two of these operational fronts require significant lift capacity together with deployable and sustainable logistical capability which many had thought was beyond the reach of the GCC states.

The air campaign is notably more effective and discriminate than in the last Saudi-Houthi war in 2009. While the Saudi Air Forces have reached back to the United States and Britain for resupply of precision guided munitions, they have not run through their stocks with the rapidity and ineffectiveness seen in 2009. The support that the United States provides to the Saudis may be critical—it is not improbable that the vital American logistical and intelligence support to the Saudis would not be provided without the desire to buy Saudi agreement (or at least begrudging acquiescence) to the Iranian nuclear deal.

Unfortunately (and in common with recent American and British military actions in the region), this impressive GCC operational acumen has not translated to political success in Yemen. The Houthis and Ali Abdullah Saleh remain in control of Sanaa and much of the country north of Taiz; the erstwhile Yemeni President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi could accurately be described as the Mayor of Aden if only he were to spend more time in Aden than in exile. Indeed, it appears the Saudi-led alliance’s military action, particularly the blockade of rebel-controlled areas, may have backfired and caused a conflict between Saudis and Houthis to metastasize into one between Saudis and Yemenis.

The Gulf remains the largest arms importing region in the world. Iran seems to finally have collected its long-delayed Russian S-300 Air Defense system, while the ongoing Saudi F-15 upgrade remains the largest US Foreign Military Sales case in history. Britain continues to build on the controversial Al-Yamamah arms deal with Saudi Arabia by selling Typhoon and Hawk jets. France has found its first overseas customer for Rafale jets in Qatar (reports of a UAE buy are probably planted to extract American technology release).

In spite of the recent decline in oil prices, the export of Gulf oil is still vital for the smooth running of the global economy. Manufacturing and exporting nations, such as China, Japan, and increasingly India all have a stake in the security of the Gulf. It would be surprising if this economic interest does not someday translate into a security presence.

There is a paradox in Western—particularly American—thinking on this matter. Many Western analysts routinely scoff at Chinese “free-riders” who benefit from the American naval presence keeping Gulf sea lanes open. These same scoffers would probably have an aneurysm if the Chinese “free-riders” were to step up and deploy an aircraft carrier off the Strait of Hormuz.

The articles in this magazine are by distinguished scholars, practitioners, and policymakers of security in the Gulf. They represent a broad range of opinions and perspectives. One of the most entertaining aspects of Gulf studies is that time will likely prove everyone both right and wrong in their analyses and predictions. It is my most sincere hope that you find this issue as illuminating as I did.

David Des Roches is Associate Professor at the Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies at the National Defense University in Washington DC. His opinions are his own and do not reflect the views of any agency or branch of the United States Government.
II. Analysis
As the only coherent and cohesive entente of states in the Arab world, the six-member Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is now seriously reevaluating its response to regional conflict and instability. Long gone are the days when it had the luxury of avoiding entanglements and trusting others to address festering problems. In the current state of affairs, GCC countries have discovered that they cannot rest idly or nonchalantly, but must be proactive, effective, and assertive—all characteristics of mature and responsible states.

Though Oman remains entrenched in a non-confrontational position, the other five GCC states have, to differing degrees, become more self-reliant and assertive in defense of their common interests domestically, around the Gulf, and in the wider region.

Several concerns have forced the five GCC states to adopt a more proactive and assertive posture, especially the regional activity of Iran and the conflicts in Iraq, Syria and Yemen.
Iran the existential threat

Iran continues to be the GCC’s greatest external challenge. From the question of Iran’s nuclear ambitions to its immersion in Syria’s civil war, Iraq’s uneasy political order, Lebanon’s dysfunctional politics, and Yemen’s sectarian instability, the GCC views Iranian actions with suspicion and hostility.

But at a more essential level, it is the character of the Islamic Revolution and its ideology, as laid down by the founder of the Islamic Republic, the late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, that is the source of great trepidation. The revolution combines the Shia interpretation of Islamic politics and a resounding accusation of Gulf monarchies as corrupt with what the Gulf states view as an ever-continuing effort to foment rebellion and discord in the Middle East and the Islamic world. As long as there is revolution or a pretext of it in Iran, the five states’ leaders will always feel threatened and will thus behave accordingly.

In trying to ameliorate their fears of Iran’s policies over the last few years, the five GCC states have shown an interesting array of responses that suggested independence and firmness. Over the nuclear standoff, they took an unusually oppositional stance given their historical reliance on the United States for their security needs. As Syria imploded and Iran embraced its repressive regime, most GCC leaders vocally supported the opposition politically and militarily and led an unprecedented active policy of demanding regime departure. And as Iraq veered ever so precipitously into a sectarian alliance with Iran, the states held their support and decided to stay away from Baghdad despite active coaxing by Washington to engage it.

Yemen: The overdue affair

There are many examples of the GCC’s new direction toward relying on its own forces to address nascent threats to peninsular and regional security. For example, several of the GCC states took part in the American-led international coalition to fight the so-called Islamic State. Additionally, the Saudi-led Operation ‘Decisive Storm’ sets a new precedent. No other regional nor international party was legitimately willing to or operationally capable of addressing what GCC states understood to be an ideological and strategic threat to their stability, peace and wellbeing. As the Houthis and loyalists to former President Ali Abdullah Saleh came close to overrunning the entire country and establishing a new state and administration, Saudi Arabia led a GCC-Arab coalition on an unprecedented, yet so far unfinished, military mission to restore Yemen’s legitimate government and assure strategic supremacy.

But the Yemeni conflict has exposed some serious shortcomings in GCC responses that should impact how the organization reacts to future challenges. First, Saudi Arabia and other states seem to have let the Yemen conflict fester for far too long before intervening, making a simultaneously quick, decisive and acceptable outcome impossible. Second, the GCC showed less unanimity of purpose and policy than required by such an important challenge to regional security, as Oman sat on the sidelines and Kuwait provided tepid support. Operationally, there was, and remains, a large degree of arbitrariness in operations, exposing poor planning and rushed decision-making. It also has become even clearer that air power alone has limited utility, has caused unacceptable losses among civilians, has invited international criticism, and has made the deployment of ground troops and subsequent casualties unavoidable.
II. Analysis

Syria: The bloodbath

Five years ago, no one in the GCC collective thought it was possible that cordial relations with the Syrian regime in Damascus would experience the kind of cathartic collapse that it has seen after the start of Syria’s revolution in March 2011. Despite Bashar Al-Assad’s close relations with Iran, his alleged complicity in the 2005 assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Al-Hariri, and his disparaging of GCC leaders’ manliness after the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war in Lebanon, he remained an acceptable friend and ally to the GCC states. Saudi Arabia and its allies even allowed Al-Assad a few months in 2011 to peacefully address Syria’s version of the Arab Spring. He instead resorted to violent repression against the country’s Sunni majority that had naturally spearheaded the protests against his regime and thus forced the GCC to turn against him.

GCC self-confidence and assertiveness are rather new policy determinants necessitated by the regional strategic environment in which the Gulf collective finds itself. Today, Saudi Arabia holds fast to the demand of ousting the Syrian president, American cautionary warnings and Russian and Iranian commitment to his survival notwithstanding. Saudi Arabia and Qatar have taken it upon themselves to arm the Syrian rebels, including Islamic jihadists, and to promote the opposition’s demands in the international arena. In September, Saudi Foreign Minister Adel Al-Jubeir floated the idea that military intervention in Syria was possible, to be followed by Qatari Foreign Minister Khalid Al-Attiyah repeating the same assertion. Everyone knows that this could all be posturing, but the mere mention of such a possibility is a novelty in itself, reflecting an unprecedented assertiveness and confidence that characterizes GCC actions nowadays.

Conclusion

GCC self-confidence and assertiveness are rather new policy determinants necessitated by the regional strategic environment in which the Gulf collective finds itself. As the Obama Administration preaches self-reliance and burden-sharing, and as the Gulf region and the Arab world experience an array of armed conflicts and regional instability, GCC states find themselves becoming more involved actors. But what the new era of state maturity and responsibility necessitates is a needed degree of modesty about possible achievements, a commitment to finishing missions, and, above all, more unity of purpose and action. The current state of affairs points to myriad threats and innumerable challenges and the GCC must be ready for the road ahead.

Dr. Imad Harb is an adjunct professor with the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies at Georgetown University.

1 For the ideological underpinnings of this trepidation, see Ray Takeyh, Guardians of the Revolution: Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009), passim.
2 See, for example, “The Middle East After the Iran Nuclear Deal,” Expert Roundup, Council on Foreign Relations, September 7, 2015.
4 For a comprehensive look, see Frank Gardner, “Yemen conflict: No end in sight, six months on,” BBC News, September 25, 2015.


“Qatar says could intervene militarily in Syria but prefers political solution,” Reuters, October 21, 2015.
The phrase ‘paradigm shift’ entered the academic and popular lexicon with Thomas Kuhn’s 1962 book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Kuhn challenges the orthodox approach to scientific discovery which presupposed a linear evolution of scientific thought with one theorist building upon the work of others. Instead of this orderly process, Kuhn argues that progress was made when the established paradigms that framed a “common body of beliefs and assumptions” of a given discipline broke down when existing “methods won’t solve new problems.” Kuhn used this idiom elastically in his book and subsequently it came to be, according to Kuhn’s New York Times obituary, “the great intellectual cliché of our age.”

II. Analysis

A New Era for Gulf Military Forces

by David B. Roberts

The militaries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) tend to be dismissed as largely operationally ineffective patronage networks unable to meaningfully defend the six member states. But the emergence of a new set of leaders and metastasizing regional challenges have prompted Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in particular to confound expectations and adopt an assertive, interventionist military-led posture. Though the ultimate efficacy of their new found military strategies is still open to question, that these (and other) states are engaging so aggressively suggests that existing conceptions of the role, efficacy and utility of the GCC military forces need to be reevaluated.

UAE squadron of F-16 fighter jets arrive in Jordan to support strikes against Islamic State. Photo released by Jordan News Agency on 8 February, 2015.
A hoary cliché it may be, but it seems uniquely apt to describe recent shifts in understanding the utility of military forces for the Gulf monarchies and the effectiveness of the militaries in the first place.

The literature examining the efficacy of Arab Gulf militaries is underdeveloped. But what there is tends to be relentlessly damning, ultimately pointing to incompatibilities between the modern cultural and socio-political models of the GCC states and the demands of effectively training and maintaining a modern armed force. Aside from issues of efficacy, as opposed to the traditional raison d’être of a state’s military force being created and trained to defend the nation or used to prosecute wars, other rationales dominate the discussion. The structure and financing of the Gulf militaries has instead been explained as a direct by-product of internal familial politics, a result of the importance of patronage, or as a means to effectively buy (or rent) external protection.

**Low expectations**

Such perspectives on the role and utility of the military forces of the Gulf states meant that there has traditionally been little expectation that Gulf elites would seek to actively deploy their forces, the assumption being that they are not really up to the task and that it is not what they are meant for.

There have always been exceptions that have tested this rule, even from the smaller Gulf states. For example, since 1977 Emirati troops have been deployed in one form or another to Lebanon, Somalia, Rwanda, Mozambique, Bosnia and Afghanistan. Though important at the time, these deployments were small, overtly non-kinetic, and usually coalition-dependent. The larger-scale Saudi Arabian deployment against the Houthis in 2009 was different. This was the first time in its history that the state had so kinetically and unilaterally waged war. However, the poor showing of the Saudi forces that resulted in no visible victory, over 100 deaths of their own soldiers, and ultimately the sacking of the Minister of Defense concurred with the ‘expected’ results of such an operation.

The Saudis’ Arab Spring deployment to Bahrain was unusually large; the UAE’s participation in the bombing campaign against Daesh forces in Iraq and its unilateral bombing of Islamist positions in Libya were also unusually kinetic. These deployments challenged traditional understandings of the limited utility of Arab Gulf state militaries, but, as per Kuhn’s argument, the broader parameters of the debate had not yet changed until the paradigm shifted entirely with the Saudi and UAE-led coalition war in Yemen in 2015.

Never before have the Gulf states deployed so many troops and so much kit without a broader international coalition, nor have they ever put their military force behind such lofty regime-change, guerrilla-war-defeating goals. And never before have they evidenced such a willingness to absorb risk and suffer significant casualties or, indeed, so directly cause such civilian suffering.
Conclusion

It is too early to assess issues of military force efficacy in the ongoing operations in Yemen, though the sheer scale of the operation indicates a not insignificant degree of competency. Ultimately, now that at least two militaries in the Gulf states have been used as kinetic policy tools the utility and role of Gulf military forces needs to be reconciled with existing understandings, which argue that the Gulf militaries are more about patronage, prestige, alliance-building, and rent distribution. For example, the stresses and strains caused by the dilution of the necessarily meritocratic nature of military hierarchies with patrimonial or familial pressures is problematic in peace time, but in war-time such complications become profoundly more impactful and potentially deadly.

In terms of utilizing and deploying military force, key leaders in the GCC have clearly shifted their expectations of the art of the possible. It remains to be seen how this new reality chimes with the training regimes, doctrines, and expectations of the military forces themselves.

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10 Qatar and Bahrain also joined the UAE and Saudi Arabia in the operation in Yemen, but the role—both in terms of leading the wider campaign and in terms of forces committed—appears to be significantly greater from the UAE and Saudi Arabia.
The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), or P5+1 nuclear agreement, as its signatories emphasize, is a single issue agreement. It is not necessarily a signal that Iran is opening politically, nor does it indicate that the US has forgotten Iran’s history of supporting terrorist groups. There is a growing suspicion among Arab Gulf states, however, that the US is pursuing a managed diplomatic opening with Iran that will begin with the nuclear issue and spread to commercial and political ties. Iran’s efforts to engage diplomatically with its Gulf neighbors in July of 2015, specifically with Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif’s visit to Kuwait, demonstrated the tension in changing regional dynamics. In fact, the commercial rapprochement with Iran is a fait accompli, as the international will to continue economic sanctions has withered. The lifting of most economic sanctions on Iran has cemented the Arab Gulf states’ perception that the US is less engaged with its Sunni Arab allies, thus exposing them to more risk from an emboldened Iran.

Many Gulf analysts and diplomats expressed the disengagement theme again this year at the Manama Dialogue, held 30 October to 1 November 2015 in Bahrain. In his remarks, US Deputy Secretary of State Antony Blinken twice emphasized the “humility” of American leadership in the region, reinforcing the awkward tension between America’s military capacity in the Gulf and its attempts to renegotiate the
The Obama Administration has been at pains to reject the American hubris embodied in the mistakes of the Iraq war. While not retreating from the Middle East, there is a sense in American domestic politics that a lighter footprint is necessary. As a recent opinion survey from the Chicago Council on Global Affairs reveals, there is not wide bi-partisan support for an increased American military presence, in bases or troops, in the region. Meanwhile, Gulf allies read this domestic sentiment, along with policies focused on American strategic relations with Asia, as a potential threat to the American military assets currently stationed in the Gulf.

These assets include a “brigade plus” of 7,000-13,500 US Army soldiers in Kuwait, the Al-Udeid Air base outside of Doha (home to 120 aircraft and the US Air Force Central Command forward headquarters, the US Central Command Special Operations Command forward and the Central Command forward HQ), Al-Dhafra Air Base in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) utilized by the US Air Force 380th Air Expeditionary Wing and other units, and the US Fifth Fleet based in Bahrain, along with a number of other shared and contingency bases. The question for the Gulf Arabs is this: Are these assets perhaps too mobile—and therefore less reliable?

The US – Gulf states relationship and the importance of Iran

For the US, this tension is essentially a public relations problem. The Obama Administration wants to put some distance between America’s military might and the reality of how it physically stations that hardware in the Gulf states. The US administration is treating the Gulf states as distant cousins, but not favored friends. That is, America doesn’t really want to be seen on the world’s stage with traditional Sunni Arab monarchies, especially Saudi Arabia. Regardless of continued US military presence and engagement, even to the point of collaborating with the Saudi and Emirati-led war in Yemen, the messaging suggests a change.

The change includes a de facto American commitment to a future Middle East that at least acknowledges the economic and demographic potential of Iran. The limited follow-up from the May 2015 Camp David Summit demonstrates the diminished interest, perhaps from both sides, in the integration of the Gulf states in the diplomatic process vis-à-vis Iran. The US is moving forward with implementation of the JCPOA, bargaining that Iran is firmly at the center of future Middle East security and economic growth.

And Iran does have economic growth potential. While Saudi Arabia and most of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states struggle with the challenge of economic diversification (only the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain have 50 percent or more of their gross domestic product composed of non-carbon resources), Iran has made compelling progress in the last 20 years to increase its non-carbon exports and reduce its share of gas imports. In fact, sanctions may have encouraged Iran’s diversification. Iran is a country of young people, like most of the MENA region, with as much as 60 percent of the population under 30. Iran has 17 percent of the world’s proven gas reserves and nearly 10 percent of its oil reserves. Iran is a young consumer society; Iranian imports are expected to increase from $75 billion to $115 billion over the next five years.
Perhaps more importantly, Iran has a political culture that includes mass political mobilization and party identification. While the West may not like the political organizations active in Iran, the latter is much more active than bodies of electoral participation, civil society organizations and traditions of political activism in the Gulf states. The process of building action-based political groups will take decades in most of the Gulf states, if it is allowed at all.

There is sharp contrast between Iran and the Gulf states in terms of economic diversification and demography. Trade, real estate, banking, and infrastructure firms in the Gulf countries could capitalize on these linkages, especially as the Dubai port system can serve (and does serve) as proxy access to Iran. As the IMF reports, $12 billion worth of UAE exports to Iran in 2013 accounted for 12 percent of the total nonoil exports, making Iran the UAE’s second most important export destination after India. The report cites models in which a reversal of sanctions could add one percentage point to UAE real GDP growth over the next two years through higher non-hydrocarbon exports alone. Compared to the Gulf states with their concentrated economies and inflexible political systems, Iran begins to look like a geopolitically and economically viable partner in the region.

For many of the Gulf states, the possibility of a politically and economically resurgent Iran represents an existential threat. For others, like Oman, Iran is a useful neighbor. For the UAE, the balance of political and economic reform in Iran will be essential. As long as a military threat is contained, or at least countered with symmetrical defense, an economically powerful Iran could be mutually beneficial. For all of the Gulf states, the pressing challenge is developing a common defense strategy to confront an ascendant Iran. As the Gulf states differentiate their foreign policy objectives—subject to very different domestic priorities in terms of economic growth, building cohesive national identity, and eliminating sources of dissent—we are unlikely to see a comprehensive GCC defense strategy emerge. What we can expect is a continuation of military expenditure. For Gulf states, writing checks may continue to be easier than cooperating with each other.

**GCC threat perception**

The perception of the Iranian threat varies widely among the GCC states. The lack of cohesion on a shared GCC defense posture, which would be most easily and productively demonstrated by a shared missile defense system, is striking. Though no defense cooperation treaty is effective until tested in battle, there have been opportunities for shared military operations recently among the GCC states. The campaign in Libya suggests that while GCC states are willing to go to war together, they are only willing to operate in a war zone separately, with distinct command and control systems.

The Saudi and Emirati operations in Yemen have demonstrated that the Gulf states can mobilize quickly and in coordination. However, the strategic goals in Yemen have been different for the UAE and Saudi Arabia. Both lament an Iranian-backed Houthi insurgency, but their long-term goals range from building national identity, to port access and trade routes, to the control of land routes into Saudi territory (and religious symbols). Threat perception varies according to domestic politics and the ways in which economic and political goals overlap. For the UAE and Saudi Arabia, there is considerable divergence.

The Gulf states’ threat perception of Iran is based on two types of infiltration: one is ideological, via a Shia domestic opposition, the other is unconventional, in the form of cyber and non-state actor terrorism.
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A conventional military threat can be discounted: barring a massive new order of airplanes, Iran’s air force is hardly a concern, as it is widely assessed as to be outdated and inadequate.\(^7\)

Iran’s collection of ballistic missiles, however, is one of the few areas in which the Gulf states and their American allies agree on a threat assessment, and there has been some progress in joint missile defense. Problematically, this mechanism of defense cooperation remains commercially driven.\(^8\) The US, via its considerable private defense industry, is pleased to sell its advanced drones (from General Atomics,\(^9\) and others), Patriot, Javelin and Sidewinder missiles (from Raytheon) and anti-ballistic missile system (from Lockheed Martin).\(^10\) In 2011 Lockheed Martin had sold one anti-ballistic missile system, worth $1.9 billion, to the UAE and this year the company completed similar deals with Qatar and Saudi Arabia.\(^21\) Had there been a shared defense system in place, one order might have sufficed.

Conclusion

The United States is preparing for a changed Middle East in terms of its regional security architecture by factoring in an economically powerful Iran. This is strategically sound but politically difficult to maneuver. The continued American military presence in the Gulf is substantial, but American political messaging has not displayed commitment to Sunni Arab allies. The constant sideshow of American (and European) arms sales has taken precedence over communicating shared interests and shared threats.

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1. For an edited commentary, see Hussein Ibish, “Confrontation or Conciliation: How the Nuclear Agreement is Reshaping GCC-Iran Relations,” Arab Gulf States Institute, August 2015.


5. “The Administration’s Pivot to Asia: A conversation with Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell,” Foreign Policy Initiative, December 2011. Campbell said, “(W)e recognize at a fundamental level that most of the history of the 21st Century is going to be written in the Asian Pacific region, and anyone who doesn’t really understand that just needs to look at trade dynamics and educational issues, population issues, climate change, anything. This is the dominant arena of strategic interaction.”


7. Micah Zenko “Make no Mistake: The U.S. is at War in Yemen,” Foreign Policy, 30 March 2015.

8. “Joint Communique Following the Fifth Ministerial Meeting of the GCC-U.S. Strategic Cooperation Forum” on 30 September 2015, revealed the continued interest in defense cooperation, specifically in transactions, between the GCC and the US, but gave little detail of increased diplomatic cooperation towards Iran. [accessed 9 January 2016]
II. Analysis

18 Paul McLeary, “Iran’s missiles are a windfall for U.S. defense contractors,” Foreign Policy, 26 June 2015.
21 Ibid.
II. Analysis

Pivoting East? Sino-Saudi Relations Amid Regional Crises

by Geoffrey F. Gresh

The prolonged period of revolutionary change and spread of violence in the Middle East following the Arab uprisings of 2011 raises important questions about the future of the US military basing presence and sustained influence in the Arabian Peninsula and across the region. The US military may indeed maintain its strategic regional basing presence for many years to come, but in the past several years there has also been a growing trend of Gulf monarchies bolstering their ties with the emerging powers of Eurasia to the east. China, in particular, is on the hunt to secure greater regional natural resources while many Gulf monarchies, especially Saudi Arabia, welcome the increased presence of China as a way to offset US influence in the region due to its widespread and domestic unpopularity. Amid the spread of regional violence and religious extremism, the United States should seek to leverage the increased Chinese presence and its regional interests to assist in seeking solutions for greater regional stability and security.

China’s motives

China’s increased focus on the Gulf is predicated on securing energy resources for its expanding economy. In 2015, China finally surpassed the US as the world’s biggest oil importer at an average of 7.4 million bpd compared to the US at 7.2 million bpd. Despite aggressive pursuit of supply diversity, as much as 70 to 80 percent of China’s future oil imports will have to come from the Middle East and North Africa.
To meet this growing demand, over the past 10 years China has actively courted the Gulf monarchies through a variety of economic and political inducements. In 2004, for example, the China-Arab Cooperation Forum was established to promote greater trade, energy cooperation, information sharing and other political exchanges. Recently, the 2013 proposal to establish the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) as part of China’s “One Belt, One Road” initiative was also seen as an important inducement for closer alignment with China. China’s relations to Gulf monarchies is likely to deepen significantly in coming years.

The impact of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as the events of the recent Arab uprisings and spread of violence in Syria and Yemen, have placed the traditional great power regional alliance structures in significant flux. Saudi Arabia and China’s seemingly intensified diplomatic outreach in the wake of US support for President Hosni Mubarak’s ouster in Egypt and for the protests in Bahrain symbolizes regional alignment shifts currently underway across the region amidst an ever-changing security landscape. The Saudi monarchy, as well as other GCC members, has grown frustrated with US inaction in Syria since it believes that Iran has gained an upper hand in the conflict and that it now possesses a greater capacity to promote Shia militia groups and to increase its regional influence. Beijing has welcomed this emerging tilt away from the United States and seized upon the events of the past several years to enhance its ties to and support for Saudi Arabia. Moreover, China has become an increasingly attractive partner for the kingdom as it offers improved economic relations without insisting on political reforms. Indeed, China’s model of rapid economic development within an autocratic framework is cited by many in the Al-Saud royal family as a template for Saudi Arabia’s transformation to a modern knowledge economy. The model offers economic growth without democratization, an attractive formula as autocratic regimes have been destabilized in the region.

China’s increased focus on the Gulf became more apparent during the 2000s as it sought to secure strategic natural resources for its growing economy. In fact, by 2009 Saudi Arabia had become the leading supplier of crude oil to China. China is also the top importer of oil and gas from Oman, while it is the second-largest trading partner with the United Arab Emirates behind India. In 2013 Sino-Saudi trade was estimated at $73 billion, up from $40 billion in 2008. This compares to US-Saudi bilateral trade at $43 billion in 2010. In February 2009, China’s President Hu Jintao and King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia concluded a $1.8 billion contract to build a railway line between the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, to be completed in 2016.

**Military cooperation**

The strengthening of economic ties between Saudi Arabia and China has increasingly corresponded with greater political and security cooperation. From 2008 to 2011, China sold $700 million worth of armaments to Saudi Arabia. It has also been reported that China has sold weapons systems that could assist Saudi Arabia in a possible Iranian attack, including Chinese DF-21 intermediate range ballistic missiles. This trend of Chinese weapons and arms sales to Saudi Arabia is likely to continue and grow in the future.

Certainly, the United States continues to dominate arms sales to Saudi Arabia by comparison. In 2011, for example, US arms sales topped $33 billion, including 84 Boeing F-15 fighters and dozens of Apache and Blackhawk helicopters. In 2012, Saudi Arabia struck another multi-billion dollar deal with the
United States for 25 Lockheed C-130J and KC-130 transport and refueling planes. Nevertheless, China’s relationship with the Gulf, and Saudi Arabia in particular, is in its relative infancy, with great potential for a Chinese bilateral security partnership to grow. In fact, China is already becoming more competitive in the Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) or drone market. China reportedly concluded a recent agreement with Saudi Arabia, and possibly the United Arab Emirates as well, for the sale of drones. According to one report, “Saudi Arabia has signed an agreement to purchase China’s Wing Loong medium-altitude long-endurance unmanned aerial vehicle.” China’s sale of drones to Saudi Arabia also aligns with its greater ambitions of competing in the global drone market against the United States.

The growth in arms sales aligns with the heightened political rhetoric and bilateral cooperation between China and Saudi Arabia. During a bilateral summit in June 2011 between Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao and Saudi Arabia’s Speaker of the Majlis Al-Shura Council Abdullah Bin Mohammed Bin Ibrahim Al-Sheikh, Premier Wen said that “China and Saudi Arabia hold wide consensus and identical interest on such major issues as coping with the international financial crisis, maintaining regional peace and stability, and respecting civilization diversification.” In the same statement, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted, “Saudi Arabia expects to join hands with China to lift the bilateral relations to a higher level.” Months before this meeting; it is also interesting to note, China’s sixth naval escort flotilla arrived in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia for the first time on a goodwill visit in November 2010. The symbolism of this naval visit is significant considering that the United States ended its basing presence in 2003 and now maintains only military training missions and other technical advising teams. In a similar vein, China was also reportedly pleased to see that following the recent death of King Abdullah, King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud vowed to uphold the kingdom’s strong ties and other foreign policy initiatives with China.

Conclusion

China’s security engagement with Saudi Arabia matches with its ratcheting up of economic and political ties throughout the region. China is an important emerging power and it would make sense that the Gulf monarchies such as Saudi Arabia would want to attach to the growing power, strength, and influence of China. China is a more popular alternative to the widely unpopular United States. Possible positive spillover for China from its new regional role could include assuming, willingly or not, the responsibility of becoming a go-to regional power broker. The United States should try to leverage this emerging dynamic for the future security and stability of an increasingly volatile Middle East.

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Acknowledgements: The author would like to thank Mojtaba Mahdavi, Juan Cole, Wai-Yip Ho, Lenore Martin, and Sean Foley for their valuable comments during the “China in the Middle East” Conference hosted by Peking University and Indiana University, March 17-18, 2015.

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Since many firms are unable to contract in Mecca due to the restriction on the entrance of non-Muslims, one recent Economist article described how Chinese firms are even converting hundreds of its workers to Islam to secure the contractual work. “Looking East,” The Economist, December 9, 2010; “China and the GCC Join Forces to Tackle Economic Crisis,” Middle East News, May 4, 2009; Deema Almashabi, “Saudi High Speed Rail Project in Construction Phase After Delays,” Bloomberg News, January 6, 2014.

19 Lin and Singer, “Conventional Arms Transfers to Developing Nations.”


In contrast, Emirati Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al-Nahyan denounced the Brotherhood as “an organization which encroaches upon the sovereignty and integrity of nations” and called on Gulf governments to work against its expanding influence. Kuwait, the only Gulf state with a Muslim Brotherhood affiliate that participates in parliamentary elections and remains a major political force, largely remained out of the fray, helping to negotiate between the Qatari and Emirati authorities. That such otherwise similar small and wealthy Gulf states adopted such strikingly different policies toward Brotherhood affiliates is in itself noteworthy. Beyond that, however, we see that their foreign policies in fact mirror their domestic policies toward such groups.

The Muslim Brotherhood’s Post-Arab Spring Legacy in the Smaller Gulf States

by Courtney Freer

As Muslim Brotherhood affiliates came to power in Egypt and Tunisia during the Arab Spring, the smaller Sunni-majority Gulf states were surprisingly outspoken about their different approaches to handling potential Islamist challenges to their own rule. The Qatari leadership encouraged dialogue with and, in some places, provided material support to various Islamist groups throughout the region. Former Prime Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim Al-Thani said in a December 2011 interview that Islamists were likely to win elections in several countries that experienced political upheaval and that “we shouldn’t fear them, let’s cooperate with them.”

In contrast, Emirati Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al-Nahyan denounced the Brotherhood as “an organization which encroaches upon the sovereignty and integrity of nations” and called on Gulf governments to work against its expanding influence. Kuwait, the only Gulf state with a Muslim Brotherhood affiliate that participates in parliamentary elections and remains a major political force, largely remained out of the fray, helping to negotiate between the Qatari and Emirati authorities. That such otherwise similar small and wealthy Gulf states adopted such strikingly different policies toward Brotherhood affiliates is in itself noteworthy. Beyond that, however, we see that their foreign policies in fact mirror their domestic policies toward such groups.
While the wealthy super-rentier governments of Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are able to deliver resources and services to their citizens, they do not offer a compelling ideological justification for their rule beyond the occasional use of symbols appealing to religion or shared heritage. Islam, on the other hand, offers a common and indigenous language for political ideas and thus becomes the central ideological pillar for independent movements in such states. This is not to say, however, that Brotherhood-linked Islamist groups are necessarily threatening to the Gulf states; lacking means of political mobilization outside of Kuwait, they tend to focus on social issues ahead of broader concerns about government reform.

Political threat or social club?

At first glance, the Gulf, particularly its wealthiest states of Kuwait, Qatar, and the UAE, appears to be a strange site of Muslim Brotherhood influence. Indeed, these governments benefit from oil rent that allows them to grant generous social welfare packages for all nationals, obviating the need for Islamist social and political organizations to provide such services.

The smaller states of the Gulf also differ from the rest of the region in the prevailing importance of tribal social structures. Because these emirates have only existed as independent states for the past four to five decades, they have retained their tribal sub-structures. The presence of such a strong social network reduces the need for an organization like the Muslim Brotherhood to provide a sense of belonging and an arena for social gathering. Further constricting the space for the Muslim Brotherhood is government co-optation of the Islamic sphere through the Ministries of Endowments (or Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs, which often monitor mosques, imams, and sermons. Further, outside of Kuwait, there is no institutionalized political space for Brotherhood affiliates to influence government policy.

Despite a seemingly incompatible environment for Islamist activity, Muslim Brotherhood branches have existed in the Gulf for decades, dating back to the Nasser era, when many Islamists moved to the Gulf to escape persecution in Egypt and to take jobs in the understaffed region. Large numbers of Egyptian immigrants worked in the Gulf states’ newly established educational and judicial systems, beginning in the 1950s. The Emirati, Kuwaiti and Qatari governments, under British protection at that time, initially welcomed Islamism as a counterbalance to the rising tide of Arab nationalism, even granting Brotherhood groups funds for social activities.

Today, due to the limited space for political action in these states, with the exception of Kuwait, Brotherhood affiliates are most able to influence the government where social policies are concerned. This is all the more important as expatriate populations grow, especially in Qatar and the UAE. In all three states, the Brotherhood—in cooperation with Islamist Salafist groups—has led the charge in demands for restricting the sale of alcohol and pork products, the institution of a dress code, and the censorship of Western media deemed inappropriate.

The Muslim Brotherhood affiliates in Kuwait, Qatar, and the UAE do not have the potential to challenge regime authority in the short to medium term. This does not mean, however, that they are not ideologically influential. Certainly, the Brotherhood’s conservative ideology and social values appeal to many citizens in the GCC’s traditional societies. Due to this popular appeal, regimes may, with varying levels of severity, continue to consider the movement a political threat.

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Despite a seemingly incompatible environment for Islamist activity, Muslim Brotherhood branches have existed in the Gulf for decades. Meanwhile, Kuwait and Qatar have proven hesitant to clamp down on the Islamist sector, belatedly instituting terrorist financing laws and regulating, though not restricting, the Islamic sector. Because they do not see the *Ikhwan* as a security threat and recognize its popularity domestically, these governments are willing to appease its members to a certain extent.

**Kuwait: Institutionalized Brotherhood influence**

Kuwait’s Muslim Brotherhood, the oldest of the three under analysis, is the country’s most organized political group, having competed in parliamentary elections as a bloc since the 1980s. The *Ikhwan* enjoyed good relations with the government in its first decades and has generally faced few limitations on its activities. In recent years, though, the Brotherhood has become part of a broad-based opposition movement agitating for the implementation of constitutional monarchy. The government appears to consider the Brotherhood as a part of the broader opposition rather than as a specific Islamist threat. Indeed, it has tried to resist reform through the revision of electoral laws to favor traditionally loyalist candidates, the protection of ministers from questioning by parliament, and dissolutions of parliament (twice in 2012). Rather than specifically targeting the *Ikhwan*, then, the Kuwaiti government has endeavored to stem the tide of the reformist movement more generally. Such measures, however, have been limited, and political blocs, including Salafi groups, continue to function with few restrictions.

**Qatar: Informal influence**

Despite Qatar’s outspoken support for Islamists abroad, the Brotherhood domestically has only a weak presence, having chosen to dissolve itself in 1999. Nonetheless, the Brotherhood’s ideology retains at least limited appeal to a largely conservative local population, and the ruling family appears to have attempted to co-opt rather than crack down upon the *Ikhwan*.

Most Islamist influence remains in the implementation of traditional social policies, yet it is uncertain whether it is strictly of the Brotherhood strand. Certainly, some changes represent gains for conservative Qataris, like the banning of the sale of alcohol in restaurants in the Pearl Qatar development in 2011, the removal of statues considered religiously offensive from public spaces, the restrictions on when alcohol can be consumed in licensed hotels, and the backing of campaigns for moderate dress; advocating for such policies is also traditionally the purview of *Ikhwan* movements. In the realm of foreign policy, the apparent preference for Islamist movements abroad during the Arab Spring was due primarily to their ability to enhance Qatar’s global standing as an influential Arab and Muslim state on the world stage; it was not reflective of an ideological commitment on the part of the government or a reflection of agitation for such policies by the local population.
United Arab Emirates: Revolutionary influence?

The UAE has taken a security-centered approach to the Muslim Brotherhood's presence, from the beginning treating the organization as an existential threat. This stance is surprising, given that the Emirati Brotherhood functioned in a rather disjointed manner, in light of the state's federal structure. While Dubai, Fujairah and Ras Al-Khaimah housed Brotherhood affiliates, Abu Dhabi, the capital, never allowed a branch to open. While limited crackdowns occurred in 1994 and 2001-2002, the Emirati Brotherhood was effectively dismantled in 2012 following its labelling as a terrorist organization and the imprisonment of more than 100 of its members.

Such a strict policy seems to reflect government fears of Brotherhood seizure of political power, as Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan was “recorded in a 2006 US diplomatic cable referencing a meeting with US diplomats as stating that ‘if there were an election [in the UAE] tomorrow, the Muslim Brotherhood would take over.’” There is little evidence to demonstrate that Islah, the Emirati Brotherhood affiliate, held substantial political capital or even widespread popular support. Nonetheless, its backing of conservative policies clashed with the moderate image that the ruling families of Abu Dhabi and Dubai aim to portray. Islah’s agenda also came to extend beyond revising social policies and touched on political reform more broadly, making it more threatening to the UAE’s ruling families.

Conclusions

That the presence of local Muslim Brotherhood affiliates sparked such disagreement amongst states with otherwise strikingly similar demographic, economic, and political profiles demonstrates the degree to which these governments consider political Islam a threat. While the Emirati government has determined the Ikhwan to be fundamentally challenging to its authority, the Kuwaiti and Qatari authorities have permitted the Brotherhood to exist—in an institutionalized form in Kuwait and more loosely in Qatar where it holds less appeal in the Wahhabi state. Kuwaiti and Qatari Brotherhood supporters, having been integrated into the state to a limited degree, then, are unlikely to challenge those regimes. If the UAE continues its policy of crackdown, it may incite broader political opposition in the longer term; yet, at present, the Emirati Brotherhood remains underground inside the country, along with other pro-reform movements.

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1 “Qatari Premier Says the West Should Embrace ‘Arab Spring’ Islamists,” Al Arabiya, December 1, 2011.
4 Ibid., 275.
5 *Awqaf* is the plural form of *waqf*, which in the religious context, is a voluntary endowment collected from among Muslims to be used for charitable or religious purposes. A ministry of *awqaf* oversees the collection of and possible uses for such funds.
6 Imams are those who lead prayers and give sermons in mosques.
7 F. Gregory Gause III, Political Opposition in the Gulf Monarchies (San Domenico di Fiesole: European University Institute, 2000), 15.
III. Commentary
Changing geopolitical realities spur shift in Saudi regional role

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has long faced threats to its security, justifying our government’s increasingly robust intelligence services and growing military capacity. These threats are both conventional and unconventional; serious risks and threats as a result of the pervasive and corrosive influence of Iran in our region—and in particular on Saudi Arabia—amount to a conventional threat and present a clear danger to our national security. Terrorist movements such as Al-Qaeda and Daesh and their affiliated groups amount to threats deemed to be unconventional and every bit as serious as Iran. Indeed, Iran’s support for the Houthis, a Zaydi Shia movement in Yemen, is at the exact intersection of the conventional and unconventional threats that face the kingdom and our partners in the broader region. The fall of Yemen’s legitimate government earlier this year at the hands of Houthis was the realization of this threat and the actualization of a clear and present danger to the national security of Saudi Arabia, requiring direct action to support the legitimate government in Yemen and shore up our border.

Between crisis and instability

In the short history since the modern Yemeni state was founded (1990), it has moved between crisis and superficial stability as the government grapples with the challenge of unity and a highly complex tribal puzzle. With the support of Saudi Arabia, successive governments have managed to achieve and maintain periods of stable calm. However, the fall of the government earlier this year at the hands of Iranian-backed Houthis undoubtedly represents the country’s biggest crisis yet, leading to the request by the fallen government for Saudi intervention to re-instate President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi. A coalition led by the Kingdom subsequently launched an air campaign to reinstate Yemen’s internationally recognized government, a government that Saudi Arabia and its GCC partners worked hard to support and form in the wake of the Arab Spring by initiating the process for a national referendum and elections that resulted in a freely elected government.

A modern Bay of Pigs

As we enter 2016, the military campaign is ongoing, with the inclusion of a ground offensive. Such is the importance of a stable Yemen to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the broader GCC region, and such is the depth of the threat to the region from Iran. A solely regional military coalition (UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Sudan) involved in active operations represents a new era in the
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Saudi Arabia’s current involvement in Yemen highlights our emerging doctrine for defending our homeland (Saudi Defense Doctrine or SDD).

**Saudi Defense Doctrine**

Saudi Arabia’s current involvement in Yemen highlights our emerging doctrine for defending our homeland (Saudi Defense Doctrine or SDD). The SDD has five main components, focused on our commitment to the kingdom and its people, all of which mirror the approach of any responsible government: (1) defend the homeland; (2) protect Saudi citizens; (3) secure national security and interests; (4) bolster the defense of partner states; and (5) strengthen inter-agency partnerships. Saudi-led coalition operations and the ongoing rationale for our engagement in Yemen are driven by this very doctrine. Many are asking, what is the end point? This is clear: the reinstatement of the legitimate Yemeni government by whatever means necessary, creating stability in Yemen, a roadmap for a sustainable future, and a peaceful border between our two countries.

The crisis in Yemen comes at a time of immense volatility and risk in our region, meanwhile also at a time when our western partners continue with a process of passive disengagement from active roles in regional conflicts. In addition, the combined agendas of non-state actors post-Arab Spring are far from neutralized, adding risk to established states and making failing states all the more vulnerable. The backdrop to this—rapprochement with Iran by our friends in the west—further exposes our region and heightens risks across all our borders from Yemen to the south, Iraq to the North, and Syria just beyond, where in all locations, Iran directly sponsors turmoil and conflict. This increasing Iranian incursion into other states’ affairs directly threatens our own national security and its on-going influence has no positive ending. That said, we must always remain open to engagement and peaceful resolutions where possible. However, where this is not possible, as a regional power, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia must lead the way in repelling this influence and protecting its interests and supporting its partners. This drives our logic and objectives in Yemen and we will stay the course until we achieve short-term stability and an agreed roadmap for the future.

HRH Prince Sultan Bin Khalid Al-Faisal Al-Saud was a Navy Captain (R) and Commander of the Royal Saudi Naval Forces Counter-Insurgency Special Operations Task Force.
It at Odds With West

by Michael Stephens

Concerns for Iranian ambitions take precedence over fears of Islamic State

Since the Arab Spring revolutions began to radically overhaul the established order of regimes, opening up the space for conflict and instability, the Gulf states have become increasingly shaken from their quietist security doctrines. Asserting their interests through direct military intervention has become a tool in the arsenal of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states’ foreign policies, including in Libya and Bahrain in 2011 and most recently Yemen following the enforced exile of it GCC-backed President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi.

Where they deploy

The retrenchment of US hegemonic influence in the Middle East has also forced the Gulf states into a more active stance. This is the result of inevitable competition between rival regional players to fill power vacuums and also a consequence of years-long conversations in which the West paternalistically encouraged GCC countries to take more control of their own security affairs. These discussions focused on the confines of security in the Gulf itself, and very little attention was paid to the potential for the Gulf states to operate extra-territorially.

Gulf states’ military deployments are determined by their understanding of the triggers of regional disorder in the Levant and the Gulf, along with the accordant rise of Sunni extremism across the region. The current paradigm espoused by thinkers in Abu Dhabi, Manama, and Riyadh views the rise of Sunni extremism as a reaction to the policies of Iranian-backed allies, notably Bashar Al-Assad in Syria; Shia militias in Iraq, Lebanon and Syria; and the Houthis in Yemen.

Iran’s influence

The belief is that (1) Iranian allies actively seek to monopolize political power; and (2) that Iran encourages its proxies to feed off the instability and dysfunctionalism of the states within which they operate in order to solidify Tehran’s control of the security sector. Under this paradigm, the emergence of a radically violent anti-Shia grouping like the Islamic State (IS) is seen as a natural reaction to attempted Iranian subversion and domination of the security space.

This logic explains why the Gulf states have largely refrained from directing their energies toward destroying IS in Syria and Iraq, because this is seen as avoiding the root cause of region-wide instability. Both the Emiratis and Saudis ran successful bombing missions against IS target in Syria. But then Yemen’s descent into chaos in late 2014 quickly refocused region-
al military priorities. Almost all Gulf military capacity was moved down south to launch Operation Decisive Storm, a hard-hitting campaign against the Houthi militias and their backer, former President Ali Abdullah Saleh. As a result, the number of GCC airstrikes in support of the anti-IS coalition dropped to a trickle.

### The Yemen question

This refocus of military efforts is partly due to Saudi Arabia’s historical involvement in the political matters of its southern neighbor. But it also reflects Saudi fears of regional instability being exploited by Tehran. Riyadh could ill afford expanded Iranian influence on yet another of its borders. Both the kingdom and its Emirati partners have paid a price in blood in their attempts to blunt Iranian ambitions in Yemen. It is a high price, but one which the GCC leaders appear willing to pay, and which for the most part their citizens appear willing to accept.

On 30 November 2015, UAE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Dr. Anwar Gargash noted that the Saudi-led coalition’s actions in Yemen presented “an alternative model” to the US-led war on terror, which he deemed insufficient to deal with the regional security challenges of the day. The question for Western states is now whether to back this “alternative model” across all potential spheres of conflict in the region, and there appears a curious paradox whereby Western states signal support through continued arms sales while simultaneously shying away from offering political support to Gulf military activity, as it does not fit with Western priorities for the region. Certainly the alignment of interests between the West and the Gulf does not neatly overlap, given that in Yemen Saudi-led military operations have exacerbated the scale of the humanitarian suffering—which is a deeply uncomfortable for the west—and the relative lack of GCC military action in Syria against IS or against Al-Qaeda in Yemen, when defeating both organizations is the number one goal for Western policy makers at the current time.

The West was unsurprisingly caught off guard by the shift in GCC military action in recent years. Although tensions within the Gulf itself are high, they are largely offset by sizeable Western military deployments. As a result, the cold war between the Gulf states and Iran is now playing out in proxy conflicts in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. That the US, France, and Britain will do little to insert themselves into these conflicts outside of the need to focus on IS and Al-Qaeda leaves the field open for direct military conflict between Gulf states and Iranian proxies.

Despite pressure placed on the Gulf states to deploy more military assets across Syria to face IS, it is unlikely that they will be swayed from their focus on the war in Yemen. The recent announcement by Saudi Arabia of a 34 nation anti-terror coalition was designed to correct the impression that the Gulf has not been doing enough. But the omission of Iran and Iraq from the coalition only underlines the notion that Iran and terrorism are intertwined in the Saudi mindset. And so tensions between the GCC and the West over Middle Eastern priorities are likely to continue. The GCC continues to view Iranian ambitions in the region as a priority threat while the West would prefer a focus on defeating IS—a disconnect that might present an opportunity for Tehran to exploit to strengthen its own position with the West.

Michael Stephens is head of the Royal United Services Institute in Qatar.
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Islamic State vs the Gulf
by Hassan Hassan

IS fails at recruitment drive in conservative Gulf states

In the last two speeches delivered by Islamic State’s (IS) leader, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, the Gulf states, especially Saudi Arabia, were a central theme. On May 14 last year, Al-Baghdadi attacked the Saudi-led campaign in Yemen as a “storm of illusion” and a “desperate move to turn people away from the Islamic State.” During his recent audio message on December 26, he also attacked the “Islamic Coalition,” an alliance of around 34 countries formed in Riyadh with a stated objective of fighting terrorist organizations.

Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states joined the United States’ air campaign against IS in the summer of 2014 after the group swept through large swathes of Iraq and Syria and threatened the Iraqi Kurdish capital of Erbil. But they substantially scaled back their involvement in the fight, particularly since the announcement of Operation Decisive Storm in Yemen to strike against Houthi strongholds in support of President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi. So, why does IS’s leader seem to focus on the Gulf states in his rare speeches?

IS’ interest in the Gulf

Although the Gulf states are frequently criticized for failing to adequately fight IS, there is a constant tug of war between the two sides that deserves a closer look. After Iraq and Syria, IS views the Gulf as its most important battlefield, but it has so far failed to make much progress in this region. Aside from the recruitment of Gulf nationals as fighters in its heartlands in Iraq and Syria or as suicide attackers in their own countries, as happened last year in the bombing of mosques in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, IS’s inability to establish itself as a powerful mobilizer in the Gulf region is a spectacular failure.

The number of Gulf citizens who have joined IS remains lower than those coming from other countries: according to the Soufan Group, 2,275 Saudi citizens are fighting with IS, compared to nearly 5,000 from Tunisia. These figures show a dismal performance for IS when it comes to infiltrating the Gulf region, especially if seen against the potential opportunities it has within these nations: the flow of funds to support Islamists in Syria since 2011, the polarized sectarian landscape, and the widespread culture of martyrdom relative to other areas.

However, infiltration of the Gulf region is an unfinished business for IS. The group seeks to appeal to current and former jihadists or jihadist sympathizers and to Islamist-leaning citizens who have seen the involvement of their countries, namely Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, in the crackdown on Islamist movements in the region in the wake of the Arab uprisings.
New wave of jihadists

IS also seeks to lead a new wave of jihadists in the Gulf region after Saudi Arabia succeeded in suppressing a former one, an Al Qaeda-led insurrection from 2003 to 2005. Many of those who fought with or rhetorically supported jihadists against the Saudi government remain in prison, and IS has tried to appeal to them and similar-minded clerics.

Winning over such individuals is not just an issue of manpower. Many of those IS seeks to recruit were part of the so-called Islamic Awakening that existed in Saudi Arabia and, to a lesser degree, in the wider neighborhood from the 1960-1990s, an era that helped formulate much of the thinking and discourse of modern jihadism in the region. IS portrays itself as a continuation of this trend, especially as conveyed by extremist leaders such as Osama bin Laden, Abdullah Azzam and Abu Muhammed Al-Maqdisi, who either influenced or were influenced by this movement.

The religious weight of Saudi Arabia, as the site of Islam’s holy sites in Mecca and Medina, is also key for the legitimacy of IS as a self-styled caliphate, particularly if combined with the seats of former Islamic Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties. IS’s failure to even project power and strength in the Gulf region is a major flaw in its narrative, but one that it hopes to overcome.

For now, the Gulf states have been spared IS’s infiltration despite the multitude of opportunities that the organization has had in this region. But the war is not over, and the question remains whether IS will manage to ride a new wave of disruptive extremist insurrection in the Gulf. The Gulf states should build on their success so far to preempt any such scenario, especially as sectarian tensions in the region appear to be spiraling out of control.

Hassan Hassan is Resident Fellow at the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, a think-tank in Washington DC., and Associate Fellow at the Chatham House’s Middle East and North Africa Programme. He is co-author of ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror.
GCC Military Spending: High but to What Purpose?

by Pieter Wezeman

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

<table>
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<td>1320</td>
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<td>2193</td>
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<td>1913</td>
<td>NA</td>
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<td>34762</td>
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<td>45613</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Military Spending in US$ millions</th>
<th>GDP in US$ billions</th>
<th>% of GDP</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
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<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
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<td>United Arab Emirates</td>
<td>22755</td>
<td>399.5</td>
<td>5.1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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

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

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

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 unilaterally 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.

Pieter Wezeman is a Senior Researcher at the SIPRI Arms and Military Expenditure Programme.
IV. Interviews
H.E. Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs
State of Kuwait

Gulf Affairs: How is the State of Kuwait using its diplomatic power in regional and global security?

Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah: Kuwait is proud of its strategically steadfast diplomacy and balanced foreign policy that is based on fostering ties with regional and global partners. Kuwait takes an active role in regional and international cooperation on issues of common concern, participating in international forums and agreements that aim to enhance global peace and security, sustainable development and the protection of human rights.

Based on a firm belief that achieving stability, peace, security and justice among nations of the world cannot be reached without fulfilling the basic needs of living, Kuwait took it upon itself since its independence in 1961 to help countries in need. Kuwait has carried out this policy by focusing much of its attention on international cooperation and initiatives that assist developing and least developed countries. This desire has been reflected by the establishment of the Kuwait Fund, which for over 55 years has helped more than 105 developing countries around the world to combat poverty by supporting developmental projects. It has contributed 897 loans, valued at $18.679 billion.

1 The interview was translated from Arabic.
Kuwait pursues a humanitarian approach in its foreign policy, which continuously makes it among the first to aid nations suffering from poverty and conflict. For example, it hosted three international donor conferences to support the people of Syria in 2013, 2014 and 2015. Through these conferences, we were able to raise more than $7.6 billion in order to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people, who are devastated by the consequences of war. These three conferences were the largest international forums held in response to any disaster in modern history. Kuwait alone contributed $1.3 billion, which was donated to United Nations agencies that work with refugees and displaced people.

Kuwait has also donated to the hosting nations, who opened their doors to the Syrian people fleeing the destruction of war, and whose generosity in hosting large numbers of refugees has certainly strained their resources. Kuwait donated $500 million to each of Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, to help with hosting refugees.

Perhaps the United Nations’ invitation for Kuwait to host three international donor conferences is in itself proof of how the international community holds Kuwait in high regard, respecting its neutral and balanced foreign policy which is founded on a deep-rooted belief in making available its capabilities for the purpose of alleviating human suffering for all peoples through contributions to intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations.

Additionally, Kuwait has hosted several summits in the past three years, including the Third Africa-Arab Summit, the 25th Arab League Summit, the 34th Gulf Cooperation Council Summit, the first Asia Cooperation Dialogue Summit, and the 42nd Session of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation’s Council of Foreign Ministers. These are added to a long list of successes achieved through Kuwait’s foreign policy, especially when keeping in mind the current situation and challenges of the region.

Kuwait is also one of the largest humanitarian aid donors and was ranked first in 2014, as its humanitarian assistance amounted to 0.24% percent of the country’s gross national income—the highest among all donor countries that year—according to the “Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2015,” a report issued by Development Initiatives.

All these generous contributions led to the recognition of His Highness the Emir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah as a Humanitarian Leader, and Kuwait as a center for humanitarian work by the UN Secretary General. This recognition is a translation of a humanitarian philosophy founded by His Highness, based on the principle of prioritizing moderation in an effort to contain disputes and crises before they expand and leave a disastrous impact on civil society in the region and around the world. These principles and values are derived from the emphasis of philanthropy displayed by the leadership of the country throughout its history and have become a cornerstone of Kuwait’s policy, which focuses on helping those in need and giving support to nations that suffer from war and displacement, regardless of their religious, racial, geographical and political affiliations.

Gulf Affairs: What are the security challenges facing Kuwait? How does Kuwait’s foreign policy handle these challenges?

Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled: We are watching with grave concern the growing phenomenon of terrorism
and the risks it carries for all nations across the globe, as it is no longer restricted to one region. Terrorism has become the most prominent security challenge that we face as separate states and as a region, and it requires that we mobilize all our efforts as an international community to defeat it in all its forms and manifestations, in addition to curtailing its financing.

Therefore, Kuwait has ratified all international counter-terrorism resolutions and pacts. We also call on other nations to abide by these pacts, most notably UN Security Council resolutions 2170 and 2178, in addition to spreading the values of tolerance, coexistence, mutual respect, and to rejecting extremism, hatred, and violence in all their forms.

Kuwait takes this issue seriously and is an active participant in the global anti-Daesh coalition, reiterating its stance in supporting international efforts toward this end.

**Gulf Affairs:** Kuwait was targeted by an Islamic State-affiliated group on 26 June 2015. A suicide bomber attacked a Shia mosque in Kuwait City, killing 26 people. This was the worst security breach for Kuwait since the Gulf War. What effect did this attack have on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ agenda?

**Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled:** Kuwait was struck, as were other countries around the world, with a major terrorist operation. This attack was especially devastating as it took place during the holy month of Ramadan and during Friday prayer. HH the Emir immediately visited the site of the bombing and united Kuwaitis behind him. This is proof of our firm belief in national unity and our unwillingness to compromise this united, solid and deep-rooted faith in our national cohesiveness.

**Gulf Affairs:** The United States has reached an agreement with Iran on its nuclear program. How does Kuwait view this agreement?

**Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled:** What has been agreed upon between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the P5+1 group is good news, not only for Kuwait but also for the international community as a whole. This is because it is in everyone’s interest that the Iranian nuclear issue no longer remains one of the sources of tension facing the region.

**Gulf Affairs:** How would you describe Kuwaiti-Iraqi relations since the fall of the Baathist regime? What are the obstacles that stand in the way of full cooperation between the two nations?

**Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled:** Both Kuwait and Iraq have a sincere desire to start a new page and strengthen bilateral relations to fulfil the aspirations of the two nations’ peoples. We were able to achieve significant progress in many areas of cooperation.

In December 2015, Kuwait hosted the fifth round of the Kuwaiti-Iraqi Joint Supreme Ministerial Committee which was an opportunity to enhance bilateral relations, and where several memorandums of understanding and agreements were signed. This, in addition to bilateral high-level visits, is proof of our joint hope of reaching the level aspired to, which is also reflected in the volume of the committee’s work and the diversity of its terms of reference and its distinguished results.
Kuwait is also supportive of the reform measures carried out by Iraqi Prime Minister Haider Al-Abadi. We strongly encourage and emphasize the importance of inclusive dialogue between all parties and factions, without exclusion. We also stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the Iraqi government in its efforts to combat Daesh and other terrorist activities.

**Gulf Affairs: In your opinion, what role will the Gulf Cooperation Council have to ensure the security of the region? What are the priorities that you wish to be discussed by the Gulf Cooperation Council in terms of security?**

**Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled:** The Gulf Cooperation Council states are surrounded by exceptional and complicated circumstances, which require that we unite and double our efforts to stop the unrest plaguing the region.

We in Kuwait are very keen on utilizing cooperation in the region, particularly in the area of security cooperation. This was affirmed in the recent 36th GCC Summit held in Riyadh on December 2015. Leaders of the GCC states have all agreed on the importance of fortifying joint military action, as well as activating a unified military command in addition to a comprehensive security strategy between member states. The council also agreed on establishing a police headquarters in Abu Dhabi.

The leaders of the GCC states also emphasized their utter rejection of terrorism and extremism in all their forms and the importance of firmly dealing with this perilous phenomenon.

All of these decisions are certainly of great benefit to all GCC states, including Kuwait. We are certainly keen on preserving Gulf unity in order to follow up the implementation of these decisions and the advancement of GCC security cooperation.
Gulf Affairs: What role does the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) play in facilitating collaboration among member states on security matters?

Abdullatif bin Rashid Al-Zayani: This is a good first question because it serves to remind our readers that the GCC is made up of six active, dynamic, and independent states with a common geographical, historical, religious, and cultural heritage. Strengthened by these traditional ties, and fully aware of the challenges that abound within the region at this time, our member states consider regional security to be their number one priority and understand that national security is fatally compromised without GCC security. This is borne out by the very first of the GCC’s strategic goals which is to protect ourselves against all threats, and as you shall see in answers to later questions, this is not something that we take for granted lightly.

On all important strategic matters, but particularly on security, our leaders speak with one voice and have shown the political will to rise above the national level. As an example, the GCC Supreme Council in its most recent meetings has given important strategic direction on how to facilitate collaboration on security matters.
This has been done to ensure that all agencies involved in security—military, police, intelligence, diplomatic and so on—fully understand that close intra-GCC cooperation is essential. In addition, funds have been made available to emplace institutions, systems and mechanisms at the GCC level to enhance interoperability and the coordination of member states operations. As a result, our ability to fight as an alliance is moving from words to reality. Not only will this substantially improve both our capabilities and force multiplication, but it will also send a very clear message to would-be aggressors of our credibility and intent, thus hopefully acting as a deterrent.

**Gulf Affairs:** What are the main security challenges facing the GCC states? How is the GCC responding to these challenges? Can you give specific examples?

**Al-Zayani:** Our main security challenges can be summed up as:

- **Globally:** Threats from international terrorism and serious organized crime (including cyber and narcotics).

- **Regionally:** The challenges of which your readers will be only too aware: Daesh and linked to this, extremism and the radicalization of some of our citizens; the unstable situation in some countries particularly Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya; Iranian interferences in the internal affairs of GCC member states as well as other Arab states, and manipulation of sectarianism to further its own ambitions; and last, but not least, the stalemate in the Middle East Peace Process.

- **Internally:** The processes of political change.

In addition to these, changes are taking place on the international level and within the Middle East. The major consequence of this is that the GCC as a whole must be prepared to act on its own or ideally form a wider coalition with regional allies. Our strategic collaboration with our international allies remains indispensable.

In terms of responding to these challenges, our member states play an important role in all aspects of cooperation and coordination of activities between ourselves and with our regional and international allies. Some specific examples of which are:

- **Saudi Arabia’s recent funding of a United Nations center for countering terrorism.** This will act as a much needed international focal point, which in addition to its more operational roles, I hope will act as a center for research, exchange of knowledge, and coordination of efforts into disrupting the whole process of global radicalization. No such focal point currently exists.

- **In addition, our nations play an active role within the international coalition that is fighting Daesh.**

- **We also participate in the whole spectrum of diplomacy and funding activities that hopefully will enhance the way to global and regional stability.** In this respect our funds contribute massively to relieving the huge humanitarian challenges that have arisen.
IV. Interviews

- As you are aware, the GCC states together with regional allies are working as a coalition on operations to restore Yemen’s legitimate government.

- Importantly, in terms of internal challenges, each of our nations is very aware of the aspirations of their citizens and other human factors which can cause instability. At the top of this is the priority we give to our youth. Here the GCC Supreme Council has directed the emplacement of programs and initiatives which will improve employment prospects and enable other activities to take place. This will make better use of leisure time, improve their transition from school to adulthood, prepare them for the challenges of economic diversification, and also very importantly, we hope, go some way to neutralize the effects of radicalization.

With regard to the Middle East Peace Process, this is a cause of huge discontent and a solution must be found. The GCC supports any strategy that leads to a two-state solution. Although this appears a long way from fruition, we must remember that if a nuclear deal can be agreed with Iran by the 5+1 powers, despite the antagonism of Israel and the skepticism of many Arab nations, the same political will and sense of priority should be able to ease the current deadlock.

Gulf Affairs: In 2008, the GCC instituted the High Level Strategic Dialogue with Turkey. What are the shared Turkey-GCC security concerns and how are they cooperating on them?

Al-Zayani: As a member of NATO and the G20, Turkey is an important regional and global power. It is a major player in the regional balance of power. We share with Turkey multiple interests and a rich heritage. Our relationship has grown immensely during the last decade and we look forward to strengthening it further for the benefit of our peoples. During the course of our strategic dialogue, we have concluded three rounds, covering a wide range of topics such as politics, commerce, culture, etc. Our positions on the Syrian crisis are almost identical and we share an interest in reaching a political settlement that meets the aspirations of the brotherly Syrian people. On the economic level, our trade has been increasing steadily and has a potential of further growth.

Gulf Affairs: The GCC recently announced a coordination center for maritime security and a joint police force. What is the progress of these initiatives and how will they contribute to the collective security of the GCC region?

Al-Zayani: This question is linked to my answer to your first question. I mentioned that our leaders had directed that the GCC should have institutions, systems and mechanisms in place to enhance all forms of cooperation, coordination and communication between our security forces. The maritime center and closer police cooperation are a follow-up to those directions. I think it would be useful to list such initiatives:

- The establishment of a GCC Unified Headquarters. This will ensure that all operations and preparation for operations are carried out in a manner that aligns national policies to GCC policy, and supports the action of GCC nations when they operate as an alliance. Responsibilities will include command and control, training, doctrine, communications, and logistics amongst others.

- Strengthening of GCC Joint capabilities in areas such as maritime activity coordination; regional integrated air and missile defense system; consideration of a joint response to Chemical Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) threats and others.
• Improving the state of readiness and capabilities of the GCC’s Joint Reaction Force: the Peninsular Shield Force.

• Establishing a GCC Academy with the aim of training senior officers and government officials as well as selected individuals from the private sector to consider and prepare for all major threats facing the GCC member states. The Academy will improve the GCC’s resilience as well as foster closer cooperation and trust between member states as well as other friendly nations which will be invited to send representatives.

• Establish a GCCPOL which will boost the GCC fight against serious organized crime (including cyber and narcotics), and enhance international counter-terrorist cooperation and coordination.

• All the above will be underpinned by the recently established GCC Emergency Management Center, which has the primary role of identifying and prioritizing the most serious threats and hazards facing the GCC member states. Once identified and documented in the “GCC Risk Register”, the center becomes the focal point for ensuring that prevention measures are taken and preparations are made in the form of contingency plans which will complement national preparations.

I hope that readers will agree that these measures will not only enhance our preparations considerably, but will be the backbone to our claim that we will be able to respond appropriately to an attack or threat on any GCC member state, which by the GCC constitution is considered an attack or threat on all.

**Gulf Affairs: How does the GCC view the nuclear agreement reached between Iran and the Western powers? What is the GCC strategy for dealing with this concern?**

**Al-Zayani:** You mean the P5+1-Iran Agreement concluded on July 2015. The first thing I would like to say is that the GCC has welcomed the agreement as this hopefully brings us one stage closer to a region free of weapons of mass destruction. What is critically important is that Iran fulfills its obligations accurately and in good faith. We also acknowledge and support Iran’s right to the peaceful use of nuclear energy.

Also we wonder, if Iran fails to comply with the requirements it has undertaken under the terms of the nuclear agreement, will sanctions be “snapped back” promptly? Or, will there be a certain reluctance to do so by the international community due to vested interests and the benefits of newly developed trading links? There are many questions that remain unanswered that only time will reveal; however, the nations that signed the agreement are morally bound to stand up to Iran in the event that it defaults.

Our issues with Iran are not only confined to its nuclear program but extend to what we see as its ongoing interference in the domestic affairs of GCC member states as well as regional nations and its selective support for terrorism. We hope that when it receives a multi-billion dollar windfall following the end of sanctions, that it will use its newfound wealth for the benefit of its people. If so, it will have our full approval for we wholeheartedly support the aspiration of Iranians to become more prosperous. What we will resist, of course, is any use of the funds to continue and possibly increase further mischief and interference in our societies.
IV. Interviews

We sincerely hope that Iran uses any newfound wealth for the benefit of its people and the region, but our skepticism is founded on facts such as these. You ask what our strategy is for dealing with these concerns. Quite simply we will wait and see what happens. We will assist, cooperate and encourage in any way we can—hoping for the best, while at the same time, united with our friends, being prepared for the worst.

In addition to its proxy adventures around the region, there is one issue which causes concern and perhaps better than any other illustrates Iran’s contempt for international law—namely its continued illegal occupation of the three strategically located islands, which belong to the UAE and were seized by force in 1971. Despite all efforts to end the conflict peacefully, diplomatically and legally, including the UAE’s willingness to submit to and be bound by a judgment rendered by the International Court of Justice at The Hague, we are no further forward. Instead, Iran has fortified the islands.

Gulf Affairs: Over the past few years, some innovative ideas, such as the possible accession of Jordan and Morocco to the GCC as well as a possible transition to a full political union, have been proposed. What do you believe will be the next innovative development for the GCC in the coming years?

Al-Zayani: We in the GCC work tirelessly to maintain our organization, resilience, stability and prosperity. We have succeeded in transforming our societies, in one generation, from a state of poverty, illiteracy and backwardness to modernity. We believe that our developmental achievements are linked intrinsically to our integration within the international economic system. We will continue to modernize our economies and strengthen our integration within the global economies sparing no efforts to equip our citizens in general, and our youth in particular with what it takes to become responsible global citizens. In short, we will continue to explore all avenues which lead to our vision of increased prosperity for all.

Gulf Affairs: The GCC is often compared (unfavorably) to the European Union and many GCC initiatives have failed to be fully realized (the monetary union, for instance). How is the GCC as a collective political, security and economic body still relevant to the region today and does it foresee a stronger role similar to that of the EU in Europe?

Al-Zayani: I do not agree with the statement that the GCC is “often compared (unfavorably) to the European Union and many GCC initiatives have failed to be fully realized (the monetary union, for instance)”! I believe the two blocks have many similarities and an equal amount of differences. To say that we have failed because we have not matched the EU in terms of monetary union, I would say was actually a success (!) when we consider the problems that the EU is undergoing on that particular issue. I feel if anything, that our policy of taking every step in a measured and calculated fashion is the right approach. It has given us the flexibility to test changes before we are committed, and has enabled us to learn from the successes, the complexities and the failures of others.

We are happy with the way we are proceeding and I believe that as a bloc, we are extremely relevant in the region as a collective political, security and economic body.

• “Politically,” as in security, our leaders speak with one voice on all major issues and find in each other a sustaining strength which enables us to meet the many and varied challenges we encounter. Indeed we consider ourselves as a “Rock of Stability”, around which the regional turbulence flows.
• With regard to “Security,” you will have seen from my answers how much we depend on each other and how this interdependence is underpinned by our tangible joint arrangements. Our member states, together with like-minded nations, are doing much to restore stability and improve resilience within the region. As we look to the future, our collective strength will be a force with the potential to ensure that stability is sustained.

• “Economically,” all our member states have their own plans for creating and sustaining wealth. Nevertheless as a bloc we are pursuing initiatives such as integrated energy grids, a trans-GCC railway and sharing of water, all of which will add additional flexibility and security to our infrastructure. These together with encouraging an ethos of economic innovation, internal investment and providing for easier cross flow of labor and closer customs integration make our relevance all too obvious.

None of this, surely, points to political, security or economic weakness or irrelevance. With regard to the future and further integration, we shall continue to be balanced in our approach; we will follow our instincts and above all the wishes of our citizens.
Gulf Affairs: What are the main security challenges facing Saudi Arabia today?

HRH Prince Turki Al-Faisal Al-Saud: In terms of external problems, it is of course the continuing conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Palestine and Lebanon and the driving and inimical policy of Iran that instigates these instabilities and helps to keep these areas in turmoil. If you look at Iraq, the Iranian influence there has been to establish sectarian militias that compete with and play a dual role as the national armed forces in Iraq, which of course weakens the central government and allows these militias to operate independently of government sovereignty. In Syria, Iran has been supporting the brutal regime of Bashar Al-Assad against the Syrian people and in the process they have not only established militias in Syria, based on sectarian lines, but also invited fighters from other countries to come and help Bashar Al-Assad like Hezbollah from Lebanon; Asaib Ahl Al-Haq from Iraq; and Shia volunteers from Afghanistan, Pakistan and elsewhere. In Yemen we see an Iranian hand in supporting the Houthi rebels against the legitimate government of Yemen. On a lesser scale, but equally dangerous, of course, is their interference in Palestine. In the press recently, I read an article about Gaza, where all of a sudden there is a Shia militia.

1 HRH Prince Turki Al-Faisal Al-Saud was the Director of the Saudi Intelligence Agency from 1977 until 2001 and was the Saudi Ambassador to the United Kingdom from 2003 to 2005 and then to the United States from July 2005 to February 2007.
 Obviously, the members of that militia were recruited by Iran through Lebanon and taken to Iran where they were indoctrinated in Wilayat al-Faqih, which is the basic ideology of Iran and has become an Iranian tool. Of course, I mentioned Hezbollah in Lebanon, which is equally a militia that operates outside the sovereign government of Lebanon. In Bahrain, Iranian support for the Shia dissidents, also based on sectarian lines, is flagrant. Not only in terms of economic and military support but also considerable media backing. We saw this past year an attempt by Iran to infiltrate Kuwait, where a whole cache of military hardware was uncovered by the arrest of an Iranian-supported cell of Kuwaitis. So, this is what Saudi Arabia is facing in the areas around it.

Unfortunately the international community, and more importantly our traditional friends in the United States and Europe have turned a blind eye to the Iranian interference in the affairs of these countries with the hope of signing this so-called nuclear deal that they have done. President Obama said that this would open the door for Iran to become a constructive player in the area, bringing peace and harmony to the region. So far, since the signing of the deal we have seen absolutely no diminishing of Iran’s insidious and subversive activity.

Gulf Affairs: Over the past few years, Saudi Arabia has suffered from terrorist attacks at the hands of Daesh. What can the kingdom offer that the other combatants against Daesh cannot?

Prince Turki Al-Faisal: First of all, I think the kingdom can show that it is more appropriate to call them Fahesh rather than Daesh. Daesh, in Arabic as you know, stands for the Islamic State of the Levant. Whereas Fahesh, which is a more appropriate name for them, means obscene, and they are an obscenity. Not only in their actions, but also in their ideology. The kingdom has been fighting that kind of cancerous growth for many years, beginning with Al-Qaeda. Against Al-Qaeda, the kingdom succeeded in putting them down and arresting whatever leadership they had, disbanding their cells and hopefully rehabilitating the youths that had been attracted to that ideology but had not committed crimes, this of course through the Prince Mohammed Bin Naif Center for Rehabilitation. This is a program that aims to reconstitute the religious, political, and social attitudes of some of these young people so that they become constructive members of society rather than destructive ones. It has been a model for other countries to similarly pursue and learn from. Fahesh particularly, of course, has conducted attacks inside the kingdom, and the government is confronting them the same way that it did Al-Qaeda, getting to the route of their ideology and conduct and arresting adherents and supporters, financial or military or otherwise and preventing the dissemination of literature they want to export to young people. The rehabilitation center shows Fahesh supporters for what they are, basically a deviant offshoot of Al-Qaeda that espouses Karijite ideology that has been condemned historically, since they first started in the days of Sayydina Ali, May Allah Bless Him. The kingdom is participating in the international coalition to eradicate Daesh from Syria. More recently, the establishment of the Islamic coalition to fight terror shows how, in the broader context, the kingdom has taken the lead in grouping 34 countries to fight together against these groups, whatever their names are and wherever they may operate.

Gulf Affairs: In March 2015, Saudi Arabia led a military intervention in Yemen which continues to the present day. What are the objectives of this intervention and what would be an acceptable compromise to the Yemeni civil war?

Prince Turki Al-Faisal: In September 2014 the Houthi religious-cum-political militia in Yemen, decided to take matters into their own hands and invaded Sanaa and overpowered the government, arrested the
President and the Prime Minister, various ministers, and declared that Yemen had become an Islamic state following the Shia sect. They allied themselves with supporters of the former President of Yemen, Ali Abdullah Saleh, who had resigned his post as a result of a political program initiated by the GCC countries, led by Saudi Arabia, to bring stability and political coherence to Yemen after the uprisings that took place in 2011/2012. From September 2014 and until members of the coalition that the kingdom established began to operate in Yemen, the Houthis and the supporters of Ali Abdullah Saleh extended their writ over most of north Yemen. In the meantime the imprisoned legitimate President of Yemen managed to escape from where he was held and escaped to Aden, the second city of Yemen. From there he issued an international appeal for help given that he had been overthrown by this militia and supporters of the former president. In response to the appeal, Saudi Arabia and other Arab and non-Arab allies joined together to form the coalition to return the legitimate government to Sanaa—this has been the aim of the exercise. As you said, in March the coalition began operating with various means, not only militarily but also political, social and diplomatic. Since then, the legitimate government has regained ground that had been overtaken by Houthis and supporters of Ali Abdullah Saleh. It is now in the process of expanding its return to other cities and areas in northern Yemen with the aim of returning to Sanaa and establishing the president and his government in the capital.

We are supporting the government of Yemen as it is recognized in the international sphere. The international community recognizes Yemen; this is the sovereign Yemeni government that we support, extending from the border with Saudi Arabia to the borders with Oman.

Gulf Affairs: The US and other powers have recently reached an agreement with Iran on its nuclear program. How does Saudi Arabia view this agreement and how is it reacting to it?

Prince Turki Al-Faisal: The kingdom publically expressed its support for the agreement, with the view that it will prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons during the terms of the agreement. The P5+1 have reached this procedural agreement with Iran, to prevent it over the next 10 to 15 years. There are commitments on Iran as well as the P5+1 on that issue. The kingdom probably, I don’t speak for the government as you know, holds the view that Iran’s extraterritorial ambitions continue despite the signing of the agreement. Hence the kingdom has taken the leading role in opposing Iran’s extraterritorial activity, wherever it may be.

In my view, Saudi Arabia and the GCC countries are duty-bound to prepare themselves for the time that the terms of that agreement end. By establishing the wherewithal, human or otherwise, to meet any challenges that might come from Iran on the nuclear issue once the agreement comes to an end. The GCC, as I said many times in public before, has to consider all options to meet that challenge and not deny itself any of the options to meet it.

Gulf Affairs: In Syria, Saudi Arabia is reportedly providing military and financial assistance to rebel groups fighting the Al-Assad regime. What is the Saudi government's position on a solution to the conflict?

Prince Turki Al-Faisal: The kingdom has played a role in the Vienna talks that have led to the United Nations-sponsored political process, with certain conditions on the ground. To that end, the kingdom hosted meetings for the Syrian opposition groups in Riyadh and there is a meeting being held here as we speak.
to formulate the opposition’s position toward various issues that have been raised in the Vienna and Geneva communiqués. The kingdom has always sought a political solution to the conflict in Syria. The kingdom has also always maintained, that in order for a political solution to be had, the balance of military forces in Syria has to be equalized, between the opposition and the government.

On the ground, of course what we see is that the government in Syria has direct support from Iran, with troops and military equipment and intelligence support and financial support. The Al-Assad regime also has support from Russia, which has been conducting an aerial bombardment of positions of the opposition and it has the support of various militias that, as I mentioned before, Iran has brought into Syria. On the other hand, the Syrian opposition, which the kingdom supports, is the genuine representative of the Syrian people encompassing all its factions and ethnic and religious makeup, whether Sunni, Alawite, Druze, Christian or Kurdish. However, it has not been provided by the international community with the defensive means that could allow it to balance the other side's overwhelming military superiority. Also this opposition, which is genuine and Syrian and so on, has been on the frontline of opposing the terrorist groups who have appeared in Syria as a result of Bashar Al-Assad's policies. So the opposition are fighting on both sides, and the fact that it remains in the fight is testimony to the support that it is getting from the Syrian people in general.

It is a pity that the world community continues to simply just look on at this situation, and I think that by doing that they are criminally negligent in allowing Bashar Al-Assad and his Iranian and Russian supporters to allow the continuing massacre of the Syrian people. We are seeing that the number of those killed has reached half a million, with more than half of the population—a huge 11 million Syrians—displaced, and now 4 or 5 million of them have become refugees around the world. This is unacceptable and this is why the kingdom continues to support the Free Syrian Army and the Syrian National Coalition not only against Bashar Al-Assad, but against the terrorist groups who are in collusion with him against the genuine Syrian opposition.

Gulf Affairs: In the past few years, Saudi-US relations have been described by observers as uneasy due to a divergence on policies and approaches in Arab countries affected by popular uprisings. How would you describe current Saudi-US relations? What have been the main areas of disagreement since the upheavals that we have seen in the Arab world?

Prince Turki Al-Faisal: In September of last year King Salman visited Washington and a joint statement was issued by the king and US President Barack Obama in which they expressed agreement on various issues, one of which was the P5+1 agreement with Iran, and the king’s statement mentioned that he accepted President Obama’s assurances that this deal would curtail Iran’s capability of developing nuclear weapons. But they also agreed that they would cooperate and coordinate in opposing Iran’s extraterritorial activities. If you look at the statement you will see exactly how that was worded, alongside the expansion of the economic relationship between the two countries, a continuation of the scholarship program sending Saudi students to the US and other agreements that have to do with social and economic issues. That for me is a reflection of where the Saudi-American relationship stands today. Previous to that of course, there was and continues to be a disagreement on how to best deal with the situation in Syria.

The kingdom supports the calls of the Geneva talks to provide continual support to the Free Syrian Army and the other nationalist opposition groups that are fighting both Fahesh and Al-Qaeda on one side and
the Al-Assad regime on the other. America has not come around to that, but we have seen more proactive American engagement in supporting what are called the Syrian Democratic Forces which are composed of Kurdish and some Arab tribal groups in the north of Syria. Hopefully, we can bring the two sides more closely together in widening the support for the opposition to balance the assistance that Iran and Russia are giving Al-Assad.

Gulf Affairs: Saudi Arabia notably led an Arab Peace Initiative in 2002, and sponsored a reconciliation agreement between Fatah and Hamas in 2007. Have the uprisings that engulfed the Arab world since 2010 eclipsed the Palestinian issue in the Saudi foreign policy agenda?

Prince Turki Al-Faisal: Not from Saudi Arabia’s point of view; the kingdom remains a consistent and constant supporter of Palestinian rights and demands. As you’ve seen in the recent speech that the king gave to the Shura Council, the king expressed Saudi support for the Palestinian people. What can be taken from that is the understanding for Saudis that Palestine is the kernel of the issues in our part of the world, and we will continue to support the establishment of a Palestinian state according to the Arab Peace Initiative.

Interviewed by Zaid M. Belbagi on 4 January 2016, Riyadh.
# Select Developments in GCC Security Since the 2011 Arab Uprisings

## 2011

**March 14:** Peninsula Shield forces—the joint GCC military organization—enter Bahrain at the request of the Bahraini government via Saudi Arabia after nearly a month of popular protests. Saudi Arabia contribute 1000 troops while the UAE send 500 policemen.

**March 15:** King Hamad of Bahrain declares a state of emergency after thousands of protesters march to the Saudi embassy to denounce the GCC intervention.

**March 25:** Qatar becomes the first Arab nation to participate in NATO air combat missions over Libya.

**May:** GCC reaches out to Jordan and Morocco to join the council in an attempt to boost security.

**June 29:** Bahrain's government names a five person “Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry” as a gesture to the political opposition to investigate the government’s response to the unrest of the previous spring. The commission sets a ‘National Dialogue’ on reform. In July, the commission makes recommendations, including an elected parliament.

**August 8:** King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia gives a speech criticizing Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad. Later this same month, Saudi Arabia withdraws its ambassador from Syria and pressures the Arab League to suspend Syria’s membership and impose sanctions.

**October 26:** Qatar discloses that it sent hundreds of soldiers to Libya to support the Libyan rebels who overthrew Muammar Gaddafi’s regime.

**November 21:** The GCC releases an agreement that becomes known as the ‘GCC Initiative’ that sets the terms of transition in Yemen, including the establishment of the Council for National Dialogue. The deal is backed by all GCC member states with the exception of Qatar.

## 2012

**May 3:** Bahrain’s National Assembly approves constitutional amendments, including limiting the powers of the king to appoint members to the Shura Council and allowing the National Assembly to draft legislation. The measures are ratified by King Hamad.

**November 12:** The Gulf Cooperation Council recognizes the Syrian National Coalition as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people, ceasing recognition of the Syrian government led by Bashar Al-Assad.

**December 2012:** During GCC Summit in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia calls for a strong union and a common defense system.

## 2013

**July 3:** Saudi Arabia publicly endorses the Egyptian military coup led by Gen. Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi that deposed Egyptian President and Muslim Brotherhood figure Mohammed Morsi. Bahrain, Kuwait, and the UAE each separately voice support.

**October 18:** Saudi Arabia rejects a seat at the UN Security Council citing “double-standards.” Saudi officials singled out the inability of the council to intervene in Syria despite “irrefutable proof” of the use of chemical weapons by the...
Syrian regime against its people.

December 11: Leaders of the GCC announce the formation of a joint military command during the summit in Kuwait.

### 2014

March 5: Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the UAE withdraw their ambassadors from Qatar, citing Doha’s unwillingness to cooperate with the GCC on regional security matters.

March 7: Saudi Arabia designates the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization. The decision comes a month after the kingdom issued a royal decree stating that it will jail for three and 20 years any citizen found guilty of fighting in conflicts abroad.

August 25: Along with Egypt, the United Arab Emirates launch airstrikes in Libya against Islamist-allied militias. These militias, including Libya Dawn, are backed by GCC member Qatar and ally Turkey.

October 14: Saudi Arabia’s Minister of Foreign Affairs Saud Al-Faisal criticizes Iran’s alleged support of the Houthi movement in Yemen, saying that Tehran should withdraw its force from the country.

October 15: Influential Saudi Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr Al-Nimr is sentenced to death by Saudi Arabia’s Specialized Criminal Court for “seeking ‘foreign meddling’ in [Saudi Arabia], ‘disobeying’ its rulers and taking up arms against the security forces.”

November 16: Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates return their ambassadors to Qatar, ending their rift.

December 9: Qatar declares its support to Egypt and “the political program of President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi.”

December 9: At GCC Summit in Doha, plans for a regional police force based in Abu Dhabi and a naval force based out of Bahrain were announced.

### 2015

February 15: The GCC affirms its support for Yemeni president Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi as the legitimate leader of the Yemeni government. Hadi recently escaped house arrest in Sanaa and found refuge in the southern port city of Aden.

February 19: The GCC voices support for Qatar after Egypt’s envoy to the Arab League, Tariq Adel, accused Qatar of supporting terrorism in Libya after Doha expressed concerns over Egyptian air strikes on ISIL targets in Libya.

March 25: A Saudi-led coalition wages ‘Operation Decisive Storm’ in an effort to wrestle control from Yemen’s Houthi movement and reinstate Yemeni President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi.

April 22: Saudi Arabia announces it has achieved its military goals in Yemen—bringing ‘Operation Decisive Storm’ to a close—and announces a new operation, ‘Renewal of Hope,’ with the aim of combatting terrorism and protecting civilians in Yemen.

May 2015: US President Obama meets with GCC leaders at a Camp David Summit. In a statement, the President Obama declared a commitment to deter and confront external threats to the territorial integrity of GCC member states.
V. Timeline

June 17: Qatar expresses deep concern over the death sentence handed to former Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi and calls for his immediate release.

June 26: An Islamic State-affiliated suicide bomber attacks a Shia mosque in Kuwait City, killing 26 people. The attack represents the worst security breach for Kuwait since the First Gulf War.

August 3: The UAE sends a military brigade to Yemen to assist fighters battling the Houthi rebel movement and their supporters. The UAE has been participating in the Saudi-led air offensive in Yemen that began in late March of 2015.

September 4: 45 soldiers from the UAE and five soldiers from Bahrain were killed in Yemen when a rebel missile struck an ammunition depot.

September 7: Qatar deploys ground soldiers to Yemen after 60 soldiers from Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE were killed in an attack near the city of Marib.

December 15: Saudi Arabia forms 34-Muslim nation coalition to fight terrorism. The coalition excludes Iran, Iraq, and Syria.

December 29: Kuwait announces that it will send ground forces to support Saudi border posts to resist Houthi rebel attacks from Yemen.

2016

January 2: Saudi Arabia executes prominent Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr Al-Nimr along with 46 other people on terrorism charges.

January 3: Saudi Arabia severs diplomatic relations with Iran following attacks on its embassy in Tehran. The following day, Bahrain severs ties with Iran while the UAE downgrades its relations.
Call for Articles

Energy and the State: The Impact of Low Oil Prices
Submission due date: Friday, March 4, 2016
Word limit: 800 – 1,300 words

_Gulf Affairs_ invites scholars to submit original analytical articles for its upcoming issue entitled

“Energy and the State: The Impact of Low Oil Prices.”

_Gulf Affairs_ is a journal founded by OxGAPS | Oxford Gulf & Arabian Peninsula Studies Forum, a University of Oxford-based platform. The journal is exclusively dedicated to furthering knowledge and dialogue on the pressing issues and challenges facing the six member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council—Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. Each issue is dedicated to a particular theme, allowing for a comprehensive coverage from various analytical perspectives and fields of study. Accepted articles are submitted to reviewers for comment prior to publication.

To capture the complexity of the various issues and challenges around Gulf Energy Producers, articles are encouraged from a wide range of disciplinary lenses including: Economics, Politics/Political Economy, International Relations, Law, Psychology, Sociology, Geography, Area Studies, and History. Balanced articles supported by sufficient and credible sources which offer a unique perspective on the theme will likely be accepted for publication. ¹

_Gulf Affairs_ welcomes analytical articles shedding light on one or more (though not limited to) of the following areas:

- How have different energy producers in the Gulf reacted, in terms of their fiscal situations, to the precipitous drop in oil prices since mid-2014?
- What schisms can be identified within OPEC among GCC and non-GCC producers?
- Will Iran ramping up production further exacerbate regional tensions in other areas?
- How have energy relations with countries importing hydrocarbons from the Gulf developed since mid-2014 (especially but not limited to South and South East Asia)?
- Has the Shale revolution really “changed the game” for energy producers in the Gulf?
- What is the state of the NOC-IOC relationship at this current juncture?
- What are the lessons of previous oil price drops? And how relevant are they this time around?
- How are the role of energy subsidies and reforms evolving in the GCC?
- Do the new “price realities” call for a renegotiation of the social contract in GCC states?
- How is domestic energy consumption developing among GCC states? What can be done to alter this trajectory?
- To cut or not to cut? That is the question—for Saudi Arabia? for others?
- Do current prices relegate renewable energy projects in the short to mid-term?

Submission Guidelines: Please send articles to gulfaffairs@oxgaps.org by Friday, March 4, 2016. Authors whose articles have been accepted for review will be notified within two weeks after the submission deadline.

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¹ For citing and referencing, use Chicago Manual of Style endnotes.