



# RISING TO IRAN'S CHALLENGE

*GCC Military Capability  
and U.S. Security Cooperation*

Michael Knights  
Policy Focus 127 | June 2013





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Cover photo: UAE, Italian, Bahraini, and U.S. armed forces sight in on a mock target while performing a Visit, Board, Search, and Seizure demonstration at the Port of Zayed area in Abu Dhabi, UAE, as part of Exercise Leading Edge 13, January 2013. Leading Edge 13 military-to-military engagements are intended to sharpen capabilities among nations in an effort to foster relationships and build regional security. (USMC photo/MSgt. Salvatore Cardella)

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His recent publications for The Washington Institute include *The Iraqi Security Forces: Local Context and U.S. Assistance* (2011); *Iran's Influence in Iraq: Countering Tehran's Whole-of-Government Approach* (2011, with Michael Eisenstadt and Ahmed Ali); and *Kirkuk in Transition: Confidence Building in Northern Iraq* (with Ahmed Ali, 2010). His first book on Gulf security was *Troubled Waters: The Future of U.S. Security Assistance in the Gulf* (2005).



The opinions expressed in this Policy Focus are those of the author and not necessarily those of The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, its Board of Trustees, or its Board of Advisors.



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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**THE PEOPLE** of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states live in a rough neighborhood. In addition to the proximity of unstable, conflict-prone states like Iraq, Yemen, and now Syria, the GCC is threatened by Iran, an aspiring regional hegemon seeking nuclear weapons. Although the United States remains deeply committed to underwriting the stability of the GCC states and their vital role in exporting hydrocarbons to the global economy, declining defense spending and a rebalancing of U.S. global strategy toward Asia may result in a thinning of forward-deployed U.S. forces in the Gulf even if the Iranian threat continues to grow. What could fill the gap?

This paper focuses on security cooperation<sup>1</sup> with the GCC militaries as the most cost-effective and, thus, practical approach to maintaining regional stability in the Persian Gulf. No quick or simple fix for Gulf security exists; the GCC states cannot be protected with a declaratory extension of U.S. protection alone. Instead, the full range of military and diplomatic measures remains necessary to keep Iranian power in check. As maintenance of a large U.S. military forward presence is not a sustainable long-term solution, the United States should leverage and multiply the growing military capabilities of the GCC states. This paper argues that designing a new security architecture for the region is probably not the most promising avenue to pursue because the GCC states continue to prefer using the U.S. military as the “hub” of the wheel of their defense, which is a promising and potentially efficient model in terms of U.S. resources. Working with existing institutions—the individual GCC militaries—and recognizing their individual and collective potential is probably the best near-term option for U.S. theater strategy.

This paper will thus take a fresh look at the potential of GCC states as military partners to the United

States. In contrast to the static and outdated picture commonly portrayed, the Gulf Arab militaries are increasingly dynamic, driven by transformative technologies and evolving views on nationalism and education in the GCC. Comparing the GCC militaries to the U.S. armed forces is not helpful; very few nations emerge favorably when viewed through such a prism. More useful is to compare the capabilities of key GCC military powers—Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, and Oman—to those of Washington’s European and Asian military partners. Based upon a sample of military burden-sharing metrics reviewed in this study, we find that the GCC states compare favorably as partners to such U.S. allies as Turkey, Britain, Australia, South Korea, Taiwan, and Germany.

The GCC states may not be ideal military allies, but they are determined, and they invest heavily in defense. They are also increasingly capable, in part because of the growing maturity of their military institutions and in part because of technological changes that have magnified their strengths and downplayed their weaknesses. Most important, the Gulf states are vital allies because they have chosen to participate actively on America’s side in the effort to contain Iran militarily. Over the past decade, Gulf Arab leaders and officers have shifted their focus from avoiding conflict to deterring Iranian expansionism and, if necessary, actively defending the region in collaboration with international allies. Ongoing U.S. commitment to security cooperation is the most cost-effective way to maintain that resolve.

## **Security Cooperation Priorities**

This paper argues that developing robust niche military capabilities within the GCC states is eminently

possible if effort is focused on the missions most important for complementing U.S. capabilities and for deterring Iran. Development of these capabilities could be fostered across a range of GCC states, rather than narrowly focused on one or two military prodigies (for instance, the UAE). Doing so would reduce the likelihood of the U.S. military's becoming overly dependent on one regional ally that could choose to opt out of a future confrontation with Iran. The GCC has made strides in three defensive mission areas, which the United States can continue to support and shape:

- ***Internal security, civil defense, and critical infrastructure protection.*** GCC states are highly proficient in internal security tasks such as counterterrorism, border security and industrial security. Civil defense is an area where the GCC states require additional U.S. support.
- ***Shared early warning and integrated air and missile defense.*** The GCC states are providing more of the expensive missile and radar systems needed to protect the region, while the United States functions as a major provider of systems and the integrating hub at the center of GCC missile defense. Ongoing U.S. involvement is needed to guide GCC states toward complementary, integrated solutions and away from overambitious or competitive procurement.
- ***Exclusive Economic Zones, territorial water, and harbor defense.*** The GCC states need to move from coastal defense to policing the full extent of their territorial waters, including Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs). Building the confidence of GCC naval forces step by step could be key to U.S. security cooperation. Having already made a start with naval warfare coordination exercises, the United States should sustain and broaden this effort by developing large-scale naval training programs similar to the Office of the Program Manager–Saudi Arabian National Guard (OPM-SANG) Modernization Program, its long-running public-private partnership to train and develop the Saudi Arabian National Guard.

Outside the core defensive missions of the Gulf Arab militaries are a set of more sensitive missions the

GCC might also seek to fulfill in the coming decade. Although they pursue ostensibly defensive objectives—such as facilitating tanker traffic through the Strait of Hormuz—these missions involve taking the tactical offensive while playing defense on the strategic level. Clearing Hormuz in the face of Iranian obstructionism, for instance, may draw the GCC into actions against Iran's military forces that risk full-blown conflict with Tehran. Already the GCC is investing in offensive weapons systems, such as long-range, air-launched cruise missiles capable of striking Tehran as well as closer strategic targets, while other offensive systems like attack submarines are under consideration. For the United States, the overarching question is, how can Washington give the GCC the means to take the tactical offensive to defend the status quo without exacerbating military tensions or creating a less stable dynamic in the region?

The GCC will need reassurance in the turbulent years ahead, when Iran may approach or even publicly declare nuclear weapons capability. It will be critical to maintain a visible and well-publicized rotating U.S. military presence in the GCC homelands, including exercise programs with troops. The United States and GCC should also regularly undertake combined air and missile defense exercises to reinforce the U.S. commitment to the Gulf and build intra-GCC confidence and skills. An annual power projection exercise should be considered, akin to the NATO "Reforger" exercises through which participants practiced U.S. reinforcement of Europe from the continental United States during the Cold War. Indeed, the United States could seek to work GCC forces into as many multinational operations as they can productively participate in.

Also among critical components of a security cooperation effort in the GCC are ongoing U.S. government funding and support for the Foreign Military Sales (FMS), Foreign Military Financing (FMF), Excess Defense Articles (EDA), and International Military Education and Training (IMET) programs. All the GCC states have benefited from U.S. advice on sustainability issues like the resourcing of maintenance, spare parts, and weapons stockpiles. In the future, a guiding hand could ensure that the GCC states build

interoperability into their arms procurement policies wherever possible, which could reduce the likelihood of Gulf states entering into sprawling and costly force development programs that stand little chance of success. In general, the United States could support innovative thinking and progressive public-private relationships in the GCC defense sector. If harnessed correctly and matched to real operational requirements, technology could transform the military potential of the GCC states. The GCC could, for instance, emerge as an early leader in robotic warfare, leapfrogging a whole generation of unattainable manned capabilities—like mine countermeasures (MCM) vessels—by embracing remotely operated or semiautonomous systems to perform antisubmarine warfare, surveillance, or MCM roles. Private-sector interests could initially run such systems, transferring operations to GCC personnel over time.

In terms of specific focus areas for security assistance, one priority should be the continuation of U.S. support to critical infrastructure protection, civil defense, and cybersecurity in the region. Ongoing U.S. involvement in integrated air and missile defense is also needed to help plan the future adaptation of the GCC missile defense inventory and to ensure the readiness of interceptor missile arsenals through strong investment in maintenance and spare parts, which the U.S. FMS process and close military-to-military ties continue to

drive. U.S. involvement is also vital to preserving the all-important collaboration among GCC states in air and missile defense. U.S. involvement can guide the GCC states toward complementary, integrated solutions and away from overly ambitious or competitive procurement.

The United States could also consider developing a comprehensive security cooperation plan specifically to shape the development of GCC naval forces. This paper argues that the GCC navies can collectively represent a useful naval ally for the United States and the international community if they can be guided to the most efficient use of their resources. Furthermore, a strong argument can be made for a regional Mine-Countermeasures Center of Excellence. One might even consider the development of large-scale naval training programs similar to OPM-SANG, which built the Saudi Arabian National Guard into the kingdom's most capable military force.

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## Notes

1. Security cooperation, as defined by the U.S. Department of Defense, refers to “interactions with foreign defense establishments to build defense relationships that promote specific U.S. security interests, develop allied and friendly military capabilities for self-defense and multinational operations, and provide U.S. forces with peacetime and contingency access to a host nation.”



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# RISING TO IRAN'S CHALLENGE

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# 1 | INTRODUCTION

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THE NATIONS OF THE Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)—Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, and Bahrain—reside in one of the most dangerous neighborhoods in the world. Iran, the would-be regional hegemon, is seeking to become a nuclear-armed power of some description, either declared or undeclared, and the Sunni Arab GCC leaders fear a “Shiite crescent” or even a Shiite “full moon” that would extend from Iran to envelop their states. The broader region includes three nuclear-armed powers already: Israel, India, and Pakistan. Then to the north (Iraq) and south (Yemen) are weak or failing states wracked by internal violence. Syria and Lebanon could persist as arenas of conflict even after Bashar al-Assad’s regime collapses. The economies of the GCC are largely dependent on the free flow of oil and gas traffic through the Strait of Hormuz and other regional waterways that could be severely disrupted in future conflicts. In comparison to nearby powers, most of the individual GCC states are tiny; their combined citizenry adds up to just over half that of Iran.<sup>1</sup> Setting aside Saudi Arabia and Oman, the smaller GCC states are devoid of strategic depth and vulnerable to attack. For all these reasons, the GCC states have historically leaned heavily upon foreign security guarantors to underwrite their relatively short-lived existence as sovereign states.

Such strategic relationships tend to have a prescribed lifespan. The Portuguese came and went, followed by the British Empire, which itself abdicated the role of foreign balancer in 1971. The United States has led efforts to secure the Gulf since the British drawdown, but now the Gulf states are watchful for signs that America is also downscaling its commitment to the Arab oil monarchies. During the last decade, many developments have piqued Gulf Arab concerns about

the durability of the U.S. security umbrella. The 9/11 terrorist attacks strained U.S.-Gulf ties at the start of the decade. Grueling land wars in Afghanistan and Iraq sapped U.S. resources and strained U.S. tolerance for future military commitments. In particular, the post-2003 commitment in Iraq reduced U.S. focus on Gulf security and further strained relations with Arab states, in part due to the perception that Iran was gaining significant influence in Iraq. Episodes such as the dissonant 2007 National Intelligence Estimate on Iran’s nuclear weapons<sup>2</sup> and 2010’s embarrassing WikiLeaks releases of diplomatic cables<sup>3</sup> brought into question the competence of the U.S. government. Its hands-off role during the fall of Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak, a long-running U.S. ally, led the GCC leaders to question U.S. commitment to its Gulf allies.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the United States has had less and less direct reliance on Gulf oil and gas with each passing year, and this trend may accelerate as very significant shale resources are exploited in the continental United States.<sup>5</sup> With downward pressure on U.S. defense spending<sup>6</sup> and a much-publicized emphasis on America’s “Pacific Century,”<sup>7</sup> the Gulf states could be forgiven for wondering if the last decade had exposed deterioration in U.S. regional capabilities or even the beginning of strategic disengagement from the Gulf.

## Doing More with Less in the Gulf

The United States has, in fact, invested significant resources since 2007 in preventing U.S.-Gulf ties from atrophying and ensuring the GCC is not left exposed to the threat posed by Iran. The reason for such investment at a moment of military and economic overstretch is the ongoing mutual dependence that underpins the U.S.-GCC relationship. Although the quantities of U.S. energy supplies coming directly from

the Gulf are in decline, the United States is still the world's largest economy, with a presiding interest in the stability and growth of global markets. The United States will also continue to buy its imported oil on the global "spot markets," meaning that oil price stability may be as vital to its economic security in twenty years as it is today.

Furthermore, no alternative to U.S. military support of the GCC currently exists. Within the Gulf, Iraq will not reemerge as a credible counterweight to Iran until at least the mid-2020s—and any expectation of its reemergence even then assumes that Iranian influence no longer overshadows the Iraqi government. While Turkey may be a useful partner to the GCC in temporarily mitigating Iran's influence in Syria and the Levant, its reliability and benign intentions cannot be counted upon in the coming decade, and its military power is, arguably, ebbing due to the political hollowing-out of the officer class.<sup>8</sup> A post-Assad, Sunni-led Syria is a wild card and also cannot yet be counted toward the GCC's military alliances. In fact, a post-conflict Syria might be internally focused and recovering for most of the current decade, as has been the case with Iraq. And rising external powers—China and India—cannot be expected to take over the American role as regional policeman until well into the 2020s, assuming these security "free riders" even decide to commit military resources to the Gulf.<sup>9</sup>

Underlying U.S. policy has been a tacit recognition that no quick or simple fix for Gulf security exists. The GCC states cannot be protected with a declaratory extension of U.S. protection alone.<sup>10</sup> Although Iran's apparent desire to develop a nuclear arsenal might logically be countered by U.S. nuclear guarantees to the GCC states (guarantees that might keep U.S. allies below the nuclear threshold themselves), extended nuclear deterrence in the Gulf context presents problems. As Gulf security expert Emile Hokayem noted, an explicit nuclear guarantee to the GCC states would not be compatible with the strategic culture of the Gulf states, which stresses low-profile defense agreements and tries to minimize the alarm that discussion of the nuclear threat could cause among their citizens.<sup>11</sup> Not all regional states or their citizens may want to rely

openly on a U.S. nuclear guarantee. Indeed, some states have historically sought to distance themselves from open strategic reliance on the U.S. nuclear arsenal. Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak rejected U.S. secretary of state Hillary Clinton's allusions to extended nuclear deterrence in July 2009, stating that Egypt did not support "any American nuclear umbrella intended to protect the Gulf countries." Mubarak's objections hinged on the problematic elements of a nuclear guarantee: the tacit admission of Iran's nuclear threat and potential leverage; the dependence of Arab states on U.S. protection; and the contrast between Israel's nuclear capability and U.S. ambitions to keep the Arab world below the nuclear threshold.<sup>12</sup>

The credibility of extended nuclear deterrence is also limited. Aside from old Cold War-type quandaries—for instance, would the United States really swap Washington, DC, for Riyadh?—is the basic weakness of nuclear threats in deterring low-level conventional aggression. If, in the coming decade, Iran becomes a nuclear weapons power or gives regional states the strong impression that it has passed the nuclear threshold, a familiar challenge will present itself: the need to deter nuclear use by an adversary (arguably the easy part) as well as conventional security threats undertaken from beneath Iran's nuclear umbrella (the harder part). Any security guarantee that relies too heavily on extended nuclear deterrence is bound to be tested by Iran and may fail disastrously in the face of intelligent and persistent probing at the lower threshold of conflict.

Instead, the full range of military and diplomatic measures remains necessary to keep Iranian power in check, placing extended deterrence (if not necessarily extended nuclear deterrence) at the center of the U.S.-GCC strategic relationship. Extended deterrence, as Kathleen McKiness notes, "is not a hands-off strategy. It cannot be created from a distance through a submarine capability in the Persian Gulf or a troop deployment in another country such as Iraq. It is a real, tangible, physical commitment, to be palpably felt both by allies and adversaries."<sup>13</sup> As Bruno Tertrais writes, extended deterrence entails "a web of policy statements, consultation mechanisms,

joint exercises and planning, defense cooperation, port visits, and presence of foreign troops—varying from country to country.”<sup>14</sup> In the future, the formula used in the 1980s to deter Soviet incursions into the Gulf region—declaratory deterrent policy (then the Carter Doctrine) backed by a conventional military “tripwire” (then the Rapid Deployment Force) and well-armed allies—may be relevant. To use James Russell’s formulation, the U.S. nuclear guarantee to the Gulf states should not be “explicitly spelled out” and should remain “in the background.”<sup>15</sup>

The United States has a robust track record as a military partner to the GCC that stretches back twenty-five years. From the reflagging of Kuwaiti tankers and U.S. naval operations against Iran’s naval forces in the late 1980s to the massive military investment in evicting Iraq’s forces from Kuwait and deterring their return throughout the 1990s, the U.S. military has demonstrated its credentials as a superior military ally. This is the bedrock of the U.S.-GCC military alliance and the principal reason the Gulf states still look to the United States as their main strategic partner. Forward presence in the region has spoken louder than any other aspect of U.S. support to the GCC. Today the U.S. military remains firmly committed to forward deployment in the Gulf. Although the January 5, 2012, U.S. Defense Strategy Review was widely perceived as a pivot toward Asia, the document also confirmed a sustained U.S. focus on Gulf security. The review explicitly mentioned the Gulf as the only region where U.S. presence would probably increase in coming years, noting, “U.S. policy will emphasize Gulf security, in collaboration with Gulf Cooperation Council countries when appropriate, to prevent Iran’s development of a nuclear weapon capability and counter its destabilizing policies.” The Islamic Republic of Iran was mentioned prominently numerous times in the review and associated briefings.<sup>16</sup>

Yet while the reinforcement of U.S. naval forces has been a timely symbol of commitment to the Gulf Arab allies, continually reinforcing the forward presence is not a sustainable long-term solution. U.S. forward presence in the Gulf will have to evolve in the coming decade. U.S. carrier strike group presence in the region—a key

indicator of commitment to regional allies—is already strained by financial cutbacks. Although the U.S. Navy has strongly reinforced its minesweeping vessels and MH-53E Sea Dragon helicopters in the Gulf, routine aircraft carrier presence has been reduced from two carriers in the Gulf and Indian Ocean to one stationed in the Indian Ocean area, outside the Gulf.<sup>17</sup> U.S. military presence is intended to give way gradually to greater burden-sharing with regional allies. The U.S. Defense Strategy Review stressed economy of force, noting that “whenever possible, we will develop innovative, low-cost, and small-footprint approaches to achieve our security objectives, relying on exercises, rotational presence, and advisory capabilities” and warned that “with reduced resources, thoughtful choices will need to be made regarding the location and frequency of these operations.”<sup>18</sup> A greater GCC role in regional security could also reduce one of the enduring weaknesses of U.S. power projection into the Gulf: the potential for an opponent to mount many small provocations designed to force the United States repeatedly into expensive operations to augment forward-deployed forces—the so-called cheat-and-retreat tactic used so effectively by Saddam Hussein during the 1990s.

## Leading Through Security Cooperation

The U.S. government has taken a number of steps in the last decade to sustain U.S.-Gulf defense ties with a security cooperation–led approach. Most visibly, the United States has proved itself a dedicated security cooperation partner without equal through its delivery of arms and support services. Over \$75 billion in arms sales have been commissioned by the GCC states from U.S. vendors since 2007, including the most technologically advanced versions of weaponry whose export is allowed under U.S. law.<sup>19</sup> According to the State Department website, on December 30, 2011, after the announcement of one \$29.4 billion tranche of sales to Saudi Arabia, Pentagon policy chief James Miller told reporters the sale demonstrated that “the United States is firmly committed to the security of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as we have been for nearly seven decades, and that more broadly, the United States and Saudi

Arabia have a strong mutual interest in the security and stability of the Gulf.” Such deals should ensure significant interaction between the U.S. and Gulf defense establishments for over a decade and build GCC confidence that such states can contribute meaningfully to their own defense.

While much good thinking has been developed on the kinds of regional security architecture that might provide a “value add” to GCC military capabilities<sup>20</sup> (what might be called a “1+1=3 arrangement”), the GCC states have demonstrated a deeply ingrained preference for bilateral ties with the United States on substantive defense issues. In comparison, multilateral defense cooperation among the United States and the GCC states has been largely symbolic. Since 2006, the Gulf Security Dialogue (GSD) has served as the principal coordination mechanism allowing the GCC states to work with the United States on commonly perceived security problems, including interoperability of GCC armed forces, counterterrorism, critical infrastructure protection, and missile defense. Though initially conceived as six bilateral arrangements (with the United States as the “hub” and the GCC states as separate “spokes”), the GSD has occasionally strayed into “bilateral multilateralism.” In September 2011, for instance, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta led an unprecedented Gulf Strategic Cooperation Forum meeting at the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly with military officials from all the GCC states.

Yet despite this encouraging outlier, the GCC continues to prefer to use the U.S. military as the “hub” of the wheel of GCC defense. Is this necessarily a bad thing? Bilateral relationships have been the strong preference of America’s regional allies, expressed in one form or another, for well over two decades. While this continuity lacks the pizzazz of new security architectures, creating new institutions may not be the best answer to the question of securing the GCC. This paper argues that working with existing institutions—the individual GCC militaries—and recognizing their potential is probably the best and the only option for U.S. theater engagement strategy.

Arab militaries have historically struggled to develop effective military institutions or highly effective armed forces. But plenty of evidence shows they can produce pockets of highly capable forces, especially when force development reflects their strengths and/or traditions. Examples have included Syrian and Egyptian commando units since 1973; Iraq’s Republican Guard forces and naval aviation and interceptor pilots during the Iran-Iraq War and the Republican Guard during the 1991 Gulf War; the Jordanian Special Forces; and Iraqi Scud missile and concealment units during the 1991 Gulf War.<sup>21</sup> More recently, Gulf militaries have given indications of having niche capabilities—for instance, the strong performance of UAE and Qatari special forces deployed to Libya using national airlift assets in 2011.<sup>22</sup> This paper argues that the development of robust niche military capabilities is eminently possible within the GCC states if effort is focused on a subset of mission areas that are most critical for complementing U.S. capabilities and for deterring Iran. Such development should be fostered across a range of GCC states, not narrowly focused on one or two military prodigies (for instance, the UAE). This could reduce the likelihood of the U.S. military’s becoming overly dependent on one regional ally that might choose to opt out of a future confrontation with Iran.

This paper will thus take a fresh look at the potential of GCC states to be U.S. military partners. While nonspecialists tend to maintain a static and outdated picture of GCC military development, it is, in fact, increasingly dynamic, driven by transformative military technologies and evolving views on nationalism and education in the GCC. As will be outlined, the GCC may be able to make a strong contribution to mission areas such as missile defense, critical infrastructure protection, coastal patrolling, and, perhaps, precision strike. The United States can also encourage greater multilateralism and should remain the key enabler of such cooperation, once again within a limited range of GCC militaries and in limited types of missions. To make this argument, this report will open with a “SWOT” analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats facing GCC militaries as

U.S. allies. It will then identify the core missions and capabilities GCC forces are capable of shouldering and on which they should be encouraged to focus. The paper will conclude with recommendations concerning future U.S. security cooperation in the Gulf.

## Notes

1. The combined GCC citizenry was estimated in 2012 at just under 41 million, compared to nearly 79 million in Iran. See Central Intelligence Agency, "World Population Comparison," in *The World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2119rank.html?countryName=Bahrain&countryCode=ba&regionCode=mde&rank=157#ba>.
2. National Intelligence Council (NIC), "National Intelligence Estimate: Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities," October 31, 2007, available at [http://graphics8.nytimes.com/packages/pdf/international/20071203\\_release.pdf](http://graphics8.nytimes.com/packages/pdf/international/20071203_release.pdf).
3. See the archive of WikiLeaks cable materials at <http://wikileaks.org/cablegate.html>.
4. Washington Institute scholar Michael Eisenstadt argued in a January 6, 2012, analysis of the review that "Washington currently operates in the region under a credibility deficit. As a result of the perceived U.S. abandonment of longstanding allies (particularly Hosni Mubarak in Egypt), many of America's friends in the region no longer trust it, and some of its enemies no longer fear it. Reestablishing U.S. credibility is perhaps Washington's most important challenge." Michael Eisenstadt, "The Pentagon's New Defense Strategic Guidance: Pivoting to Asia, but Still Stuck in the Middle East," Policy Alert (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, January 6, 2012), <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-pentagons-new-defense-strategic-guidance-pivoting-to-asia-but-still-stu>.
5. International Energy Agency, "North America Leads Shift in Global Energy Balance, IEA Says in Latest World Energy Outlook," International Energy Agency website, November 12, 2012, <http://www.iea.org/newsroomandevents/pressreleases/2012/november/name,33015,en.html>.
6. The January 2012 U.S. Defense Strategy Review envisaged an 8 percent reduction in the defense budget over a ten-year period—a fairly gradual reduction expected to shave around \$50 billion off the defense budget each year. The driver behind this well-planned effort appears to be a deep-seated belief within President Obama's circle that the economic base of U.S. power must be recognized as the most urgent security challenge facing the United States. This is reminiscent of President Dwight Eisenhower's view that out-of-control defense spending—a reference to the much-cited "military industrial complex"—could undermine America's strategic position. Indeed, on January 5, 2012, Obama quoted Eisenhower's exhortation to "maintain balance in and among national programs." U.S. Department of Defense, "Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense" (Washington DC: U.S. Department of Defense, January 6, 2012), [http://www.defense.gov/news/defense\\_strategic\\_guidance.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/news/defense_strategic_guidance.pdf).
7. Ibid.
8. A good early article on the effects of military purges on Turkish military effectiveness is Janine Zacharia, "In Turkey, Military's Power over Secular Democracy Slips," *Washington Post*, April 11, 2010.
9. Chinese military activism in the region has been minimal, meaning no GCC state has confidence in Beijing's security role. The first Chinese naval flotilla—a single frigate and a supply vessel—sailed into the Gulf in March 2010. See James Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara, "India's 'Monroe Doctrine' in the Gulf," and Ben Simpfendorfer, "China's Historic Return to the Gulf," both in *Imperial Crossroads: The Great Powers and the Persian Gulf*, ed. Jeffrey Macris and Saul Kelly (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2012), pp. 147–184. Also see Christina Y. Lin, "China's 'Silk Road' Energy Strategy towards the Greater Middle East: Strategic Implications for U.S. and Allies in the Four Seas Region," Institute for Strategic, Political, Security and Economic Consultancy (ISPSW) Strategy Series: Focus on Defense and International Security, no. 165 (October 2011), pp. 6–8.
10. See Glenn Kessler, "Analysts Divided on Clinton's Arab Defense Plan," *Washington Post*, May 4, 2008.
11. Peter Kenyon, "Gulf States Stuck between U.S., Iran on Nuclear Issue," National Public Radio, August 27, 2009.
12. Discussed in Bruno Tertrais, "Security Guarantees and Extended Deterrence in the Gulf Region: A European Perspective," *Strategic Insights* 8, no. 5 (December 2009), p. 12.
13. Kathleen McKiness, "Extended Deterrence: The U.S. Credibility Gap in the Middle East," *Washington Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (2005), p. 180.
14. Tertrais, "Security Guarantees and Extended Deterrence in the Gulf Region," p. 12.
15. James A. Russell, "Extended Deterrence, Security Guarantees, and Nuclear Weapons: U.S. Strategic and Policy Conundrums in the Gulf," *Strategic Insights* 8, no. 5 (December 2009), p. 7.
16. Discussing a two-front war, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta stated that "if we have to confront a land war in Korea, we can do that. If we have to, at the same time, confront a threat where Iran decides to close the Strait of Hormuz, we can confront that." The review adds that "states such as China and Iran will continue to pursue asymmetric means to counter our power projection capabilities."

- “Preventing Iran’s pursuit of a nuclear weapons capability” is the sole example given in the section on developing capabilities to counter weapons of mass destruction. See U.S. Department of Defense, “Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership.”
17. Joshua Stewart and Sam Fellman, “Pentagon: Carrier Fleet Cut to One in Gulf,” in *Navy Times*, February 6, 2013.
  18. U.S. Department of Defense, “Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership.”
  19. Mark Landler and Steven Lee Myers, “With \$30 Billion Arms Deal, U.S. Bolsters Saudi Ties,” *New York Times*, December 29, 2011. Also see “Saudi-American Arms Deal: It’s a Big Deal,” *Economist* online, September 15, 2010, [http://www.economist.com/blogs/newsbook/2010/09/saudi-american\\_arms\\_deal](http://www.economist.com/blogs/newsbook/2010/09/saudi-american_arms_deal).
  20. For a very good overview of various security architecture models and their suitability to the Gulf, see Kenneth M. Pollack, “Security in the Gulf: New Frameworks for the Twenty-first Century,” Middle East Memo no. 24 (Brookings Institution, June 2012), <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2012/6/middle%20east%20pollack/middle%20east%20pollack>.
  21. Kenneth Pollack, *Arabs at War: Military Effectiveness, 1948–1991* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2002). For additional detailed examples of Iraqi military performance between 1991 and 2002, see Michael Knights, *Cradle of Conflict: Iraq and the Birth of the Modern U.S. Military* (Annapolis, MD: U.S. Naval Institute Press, 2005).
  22. An excellent detailed piece on the Qatari and UAE roles in Libya is Tim Ripley, “Power Brokers: Qatar and the UAE Take Centre Stage,” *Jane’s Defence Weekly* 24, no. 2 (February 2012).

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## 2 | SWOT ANALYSIS of the GULF MILITARIES

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STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis is a structured analytical method used to evaluate internal and external factors that are favorable and unfavorable toward the pursuit of an objective, in this case creating improved GCC military capacity. In this chapter, this objective will be assessed through two lenses:

- **Strengths and weaknesses:** the positive and negative characteristics of the government and military environment in the Gulf states that shape military power.
- **Opportunities and threats:** emerging drivers that could positively or negatively shape the capabilities of GCC militaries.

### Strengths

The following sections list the collective strengths of the GCC militaries, focusing on the characteristics of the government and military environment that shape military power.

**Alignment with U.S. threat perception.** The GCC states have had extensive experience with Iranian aggression, both before the Islamic Revolution (when the Shah’s Iran seized Abu Musa and the Tunb Islands from the UAE) and through three subsequent decades of regional “cold war” between the GCC and the Islamic Republic of Iran. The northern GCC states—Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Bahrain—have suffered direct attacks from Iran, including missile attacks, naval mining, and clandestine terrorism and

#### STRENGTHS

- **Alignment with U.S. threat perception**
- **Extensive prior investment/experience in supporting U.S. power projection**
- **Strong ongoing investment in defense**
- **Strong internal security capabilities**
- **Strategic depth in Saudi Arabia and Oman**

#### WEAKNESSES

- **Geography favoring adversary**
- **Manpower limitations**
- **Staying power and readiness**

#### OPPORTUNITIES

- **Growing military professionalism**
- **Technological trends toward fewer, smarter platforms and reduced manpower/ maintenance burdens**
- **Openness to international partnerships and expertise**
- **Air and missile defense as integration driver**

#### THREATS

- **Loss of confidence in U.S. security partnership**
- **Iranian nuclear breakout and declaration**
- **Instability in a large GCC state**
- **Oil price collapse**
- **Overreach in GCC procurement to attain unrealistic goals (e.g., blue water navies)**

sedition.<sup>1</sup> Iran has repeatedly and publicly threatened to attack the GCC homelands and interdict traffick- ing in the Strait of Hormuz, the economic jugular vein of the GCC.<sup>2</sup> Qatar and Kuwait have experienced vio- lence and espionage in offshore gas fields that are also exploited by Iran.<sup>3</sup>

Since the exposure of Iran's nuclear program in 2003, GCC leaders have become increasingly robust in their criticism of the Islamic Republic. At least as far back as 2008, GCC leaders were privately expressing their support for military action to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.<sup>4</sup> In fact, the views of most GCC leaders on the prevention of Iranian nuclear breakout were closer to those of Israel than to the U.S. and European position. King Abdullah of Saudi Ara- bia took the hardest line against Iranian power, calling for the United States to "cut off the head of the snake," which was interpreted as a call for a strike on Iran's nuclear facilities. King Hamad of Bahrain encouraged the United States to "take action to terminate [Iran's] nuclear program, by whatever means necessary," saying, "That program must be stopped. The danger of letting it go on is greater than the danger of stopping it."<sup>5</sup>

The southern Gulf nations have increasingly mir- rored the northern states' wariness. Sheikh Muham- mad bin Zayed al-Nahyan, Abu Dhabi crown prince and deputy supreme commander of the UAE armed forces, has emerged as a third force alongside the Saudi Arabian and Bahraini monarchs in the struggle against Iran. Muhammad bin Zayed has said war was a more likely outcome than a diplomatic solution and told U.S. diplomats Iran would present a security challenge that would threaten his grandchildren's generation unless checked.<sup>6</sup> UAE and Omani military officials have sug- gested that their nations hold responsibility or custodi- anship for security in the Strait of Hormuz, the world's most significant economic artery.<sup>7</sup> Less vocal Qatar has allowed its actions to do the talking, maintaining large U.S. military facilities to ward off Iranian pressure and playing an active role in the efforts to unseat Iran's key regional ally, the Assad regime in Syria.<sup>8</sup> While not uniform in its views, the GCC leadership is now more united on the threat posed by Iran, with fewer differ- ences and greater solidarity.

The GCC leadership's growing alacrity to chal- lenge Iran has been translated into actions, not just words. Defensively, the GCC has begun a significant strategic effort to reduce dependence on the Strait of Hormuz as a chokepoint for GCC oil exports.<sup>9</sup> Mili- tary procurement in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait, and Oman has been expanded and expedited, particu- larly in the field of missile defense, on the assumption that a major war involving Iran is a matter of "when," not "if."<sup>10</sup> In January 2009, Gen. Khaled Abdal- lah al-Buainan, retired commander of the UAE Air Force and Air Defence (UAEAFAD), candidly told reporters, "Our rulers have been acutely sensitive to these realities and are in the process [of] building up a robust air-defense system for the Emirates."<sup>11</sup> The GCC has ramped up its involvement in multinational naval flotillas and exercises, including such provoca- tive war games as the GCC-wide "Islands of Loyalty" series in May 2012, a clear statement of opposition to Iran's occupation of Abu Musa and the Tunbs. In a further prod, the defense analysis organization Jane's noted, the combined GCC task force was "named after Saad ibn Abi Waqqas, an early follower of the Prophet Muhammad who commanded Arab forces in success- ful battles against the Sassanid Persian Empire."<sup>12</sup> The UAE and Saudi Arabia are actively preparing offensive war plans against Iran, including aerial counterstrikes against Iranian territory.<sup>13</sup>

**Strong investment in defense sector and support for U.S. power projection.** The GCC states have strongly supported U.S. power projection in the Gulf region since the 1970s, purpose-building reception facilities (such as world-class military airfields and ports) to allow rapid reinforcement by U.S. forces and the protection of those forces from air and missile attacks.<sup>14</sup> The GCC also invested in a range of expen- sive assets, such as aerial refueling tankers, Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft, and land-based missile defenses and radar that have con- tributed materially to the defense of the Gulf states. While the United States could ask for greater burden- sharing in the future, the historic GCC investment in its own defense has not been inconsiderable and,

in fact, compares very favorably with that of other U.S. allies in Europe and East Asia. Taking one recent year of statistics as a snapshot, consider that spending on defense programs as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) in the GCC averaged 7.38 percent in 2009.<sup>15</sup> By comparison, the United States spent 4 percent; Australia 3 percent; Britain and South Korea each 2.7 percent; Taiwan 2.1 percent; and Germany 1.5 percent. Most of the Gulf states spend more on defense than key U.S. allies like Israel (7.3 percent) and Turkey (5.3 percent). Far from being free riders on the U.S. security effort in the region—as such powers as China, Japan, and India most certainly are—the GCC is already a significant contributor to regional peace and security.

Regional defense spending is shaped by the price of oil, which has lent GCC expenditures a “boom and bust” character. Yet even taking this into account, the GCC states are powerful investors at a time when many leading global economies are facing retrenchment in their defense budgets. Energy consultancy IHS Global Insight expects strong GDP growth in the GCC of around 19 percent in 2012–2016, in part based on a systematic, long-term upward readjustment in the typical oil price range.<sup>16</sup> In 2009–2012, the GCC spent \$235 billion on defense (including internal security and external defense), and, according to Jane’s, this figure is expected to rise to \$277 billion in 2013–2016.<sup>17</sup> This projected 14 percent growth compares to a projected reduction in defense spending of 7.5 percent in Britain and 10 percent in Germany and declining spending in the United States, Europe, and East Asia due to austerity and deficit reduction measures in the wake of the global financial and economic crisis.<sup>18</sup>

For the foreseeable future, Saudi Arabia will remain the region’s most significant investor in defense. The U.S.-Saudi security relationship stretches back to the meeting between King Abdulaziz and U.S. president Franklin D. Roosevelt on February 14, 1945. Events such as the “tanker war” of the 1980s—notably the 1988 trouncing of Iran’s fleet by the U.S. Navy—or the 1990–1991 Gulf crisis, when the United States deployed almost half a million Americans to protect Saudi Arabia, have clearly demonstrated America’s

commitment to the kingdom. Against the backdrop of a rising Iranian threat, King Abdullah remains firmly committed to the U.S.-Saudi defense relationship. U.S.-run security assistance commands such as the Office of Program Management–Saudi Arabian National Guard (OPM-SANG) and now the Office of Program Management–Facilities Protection Force (OPM-FPF) are proven mechanisms for security cooperation.

Another mechanism is arms sales. The scale of the U.S.-Saudi arms deal announced in October 2010 is staggering, even by Saudi Arabia’s standards. According to the U.S. Congressional Research Service, U.S. sales to Saudi Arabia amounted to \$79.5 billion from 1950 to 2009. The deal struck in October 2010 alone will initially be worth \$60 billion and will likely flower into between \$100 billion and \$150 billion of total procurement and service contracts for the United States in the next two decades when support services and follow-on sales are included. In contrast, the Yamamah megadeals struck by Britain in the 1980s netted \$43 billion in direct sales and perhaps \$40 billion of additional work, making the present U.S.-Saudi deal roughly twice the size of the largest arms package to date. In the face of Iran’s threat and in the shadow of 9/11, the continuity in U.S.-Saudi defense relationships is an important aspect of the enduring strategic partnership between the world’s greatest energy producer and the world’s preeminent military power.

The UAE—dubbed “little Sparta” by U.S. Central Command officers—is another stalwart U.S. ally.<sup>19</sup> Jane’s projects a 23 percent increase in UAE defense spending from 2012 to 2016, rising from \$8.9 billion to \$11 billion. The UAE is currently the source of close to \$38 billion worth of U.S. arms sales, either in the payment stages (\$22 billion) or various stages of procurement (\$16 billion). Furthermore, the emirates are much more than a cash cow to the U.S. defense industry. The UAE has also woven itself into the U.S. research, design, and procurement processes to a level not seen since the Shah of Iran’s days, when U.S. aircraft manufacturers worked to imperial Iran’s designs. In the last decade

the UAE has fed over \$2 billion of investment into the Northrop Grumman AN/APG-80 active electronically scanned array radar, which equips not only the UAE's eighty Lockheed Martin Block 60 F-16 aircraft but also the next generation of U.S. Air Force fighters. The case of the stalled sale of the French Rafale aircraft—where the UAE stopped a multiyear procurement process because France would not provide the right technologies at the right price—is an indicator of the UAE's steely negotiation skills and its determination to build a world-class military.<sup>20</sup> Little wonder the U.S. State Department calls the UAE “one of our closest partners in the Middle East and one of our most useful friends worldwide.”<sup>21</sup>

While all the smaller GCC states provide some basing, access, or support to the U.S. military, Oman deserves an important mention as a committed and capable military ally of the United States. Like Saudi Arabia, Oman provides extensive space and strategic depth to U.S. operations in the Gulf. Charged with the custodianship of the deepwater channels in the Strait of Hormuz (which pass through Omani waters), the Omani state has, over the last decade, invested a very significant proportion of its modest national budget in defense. Spending has been rising since Oman shocked observers in 2001 by announcing a soaring 38 percent hike in defense expenditure, eventually reaching a whopping 44 percent of GDP in 2005. Although the figure has stabilized since then, Jane's estimates that top-line defense spending will remain at the high level of \$4.8 billion per year throughout 2012–2016, bolstered by GCC financial support and U.S. foreign sales credits and training assistance. Stretching funding tightly for the foreseeable future are modernization plans being pursued in all the branches of the Omani armed forces. The Royal Navy of Oman is undertaking a modernization plan to operate new Offshore Patrol Vessels (OPVs) and mine countermeasures, amphibious, and coast guard ships. The Royal Air Force has rapidly absorbed a squadron of twelve Lockheed Martin F-16C/D Block 50/52 aircraft in under three years, reflecting an unprecedented investment of \$400 million in a single Omani deal (plus a further \$600 million in munitions and support services).<sup>22</sup> As with the

UAE, Oman's careful selection of top-quality military equipment demonstrates that the sultanate is a responsible, determined, and serious player in the regional defense environment. Where it makes sense—to fulfill Oman's requirements to contribute to the security of Hormuz—the country is willing to dig deep into its financial reserves to buy real military capabilities, including three top-of-the-line fighter squadrons.<sup>23</sup>

**Very strong internal security capabilities.** The GCC countries are, to a significant extent, security states. The ruling monarchies see security risks in the large expatriate populations of these countries (mainly Asian “guest workers”), their sizable Shiite communities, and the constant churn of international visitors moving through. Terrorist campaigns launched by postrevolution Iran and, later, by al-Qaeda spurred the development of expansive internal security agencies and centralized collation of information on citizens and residents. In the strongest of the security states, Saudi Arabia, internal security spending topped \$12 billion each year by 2009.<sup>24</sup>

In addition to having large, well-staffed interior ministries and intelligence agencies, the GCC states have embraced international security standards, such as the Customs Trade Partnership Against Terrorism (C-TPAT), the U.S. SAFE Port Act of 2006, and the International Ship and Port Facility Security Code (ISPS Code). International best practice is being applied with gusto to the critical infrastructures within the GCC, aided by advice from the U.S. government-backed Sandia Laboratories and from private security consultancies.<sup>25</sup> New, well-funded critical infrastructure protection agencies have emerged and are functioning effectively in Saudi Arabia and the UAE. In addition to regular Saudi Arabian internal security spending, for instance, \$14 billion of new investment has been set aside for use by the Higher Commission for Industrial Security.<sup>26</sup>

Their openness to new standards and new technologies, bolstered by strong spending, has allowed the GCC states to emerge as front-runners in the adoption of “secure cities” and border security technologies. In urban areas such as Mecca's Grand Mosque district,

cutting-edge street surveillance and number-plate scanning technologies are in use, feeding into mammoth national security databases. In secure industrial cities like Qatar's Ras Laffin Industrial City, the world's most significant gas facility, state-of-the-art perimeter security systems are already in place. New or expanded infrastructure, such as alternative export pipelines via the Red Sea or Fujairah, have advanced security features incorporated at the front-end engineering design (FEED) stage.<sup>27</sup>

The GCC states are also world leaders in e-borders technology and intelligence-sharing with the United States.<sup>28</sup> A significant proportion of their effort is focused on mitigating the intelligence and subversion threat posed by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Qods Force, its Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS), and its international proxies. This and all the other factors mentioned above are significant because they mean the United States is working with allies that are determined to invest resources and effort into securing their homelands—which provide the bases for U.S. power projection in the region—against Iran's well-practiced, asymmetric tactics of subversion and terrorism.

A new element of the GCC's strong investment in homeland security is cybersecurity. Although it is widely appreciated that the GCC has long studied the possibilities of censoring the internet, it has also maintained lower-profile efforts to defend the networked elements of its critical infrastructure. Between 2010 and 2012, the use of malignant software (malware) to attack Iran's nuclear program (Olympic Games/Stuxnet) and the National Iranian Oil Company (the W32 Flame virus) intensified regional interest in cyberwarfare. The GCC's focus was sharpened in 2011, when Iran formed a cybersecurity organization with both a defensive and offensive mandate. The Shamoon virus was used to attack Saudi Arabia's ARAMCO in August and Qatar's RasGas in September 2012. These attacks were largely ineffective because Saudi Arabia and Qatar had already placed their key systems behind defensive firewalls and disconnected them from the internet (the 40,000 or so computers damaged by the virus were located in general administrative offices—so-called

business computer networks—that were not involved in critical control functions).<sup>29</sup> As international consultancy Oxford Analytica reported in a December 2012 report, "Saudi Arabia was concerned enough about potential computer breaches to double spending on homeland security in the early summer of 2012 from 7.8 billion dollars to 15.4 billion." Qatar and the UAE have maintained dedicated cybersecurity units since 2004 and 2000, respectively.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, the UAE's long history with network security has led to its being rated as having the best-protected critical national information infrastructure in the region, and the fourth globally on cybersecurity.<sup>31</sup>

## Weaknesses

The following section lists the collective weaknesses of the GCC militaries, focusing on the characteristics of the government and military environment that shape military power.

**Geography of the Gulf.** The geography of the GCC littoral is generally favorable to Iran in conflict scenarios: the Gulf is narrow and thus vulnerable to antishipping and missile warfare. The rugged Iranian coastline is well-suited to hiding antishipping batteries and gunboats. Key economic and political nodes are exposed on the GCC side of the Gulf, as are vital shipping arteries, foremost the Strait of Hormuz. They will be even more exposed if Iran deploys more accurate long-range tactical ballistic missiles.<sup>32</sup> The GCC can take steps to mitigate the vulnerability of some of its military capabilities. In the UAE, for example, the military has developed hardened aircraft shelters and underground weapon storage sites at its new al-Safran Airbase, eighty miles to the southwest of Abu Dhabi, specifically to increase its stand-off from Iranian missiles.<sup>33</sup> Saudi Arabia and Oman have extensive strategic depth, and if their resources are factored into a united approach, the vulnerability of GCC military forces could be somewhat reduced. But the all-important trading cities of Kuwait, Bahrain, the UAE, and Qatar—which cannot simply be moved—will remain well within the threat ellipses of Iranian missiles.

**Manpower limitations.** The small manpower pool of local nationals available to many of the GCC states is a key limitation on their capabilities as military allies. While the GCC does not necessarily need to focus on manpower-centric forms of conflict (such as mechanized land warfare), its small populations are still less capable of providing sufficient numbers of high-quality recruits for technical services, such as air and naval forces require. The GCC is proficient at using the international manpower pool to fill manning gaps (see “Opportunities” section), but it prefers to use Arabic-speaking local nationals, and these are in short supply. Naval operations are particularly constrained by the limited manpower base, with frigates requiring between 110 and 190 personnel each and smaller mine-countermeasures and offshore patrol ships 40 to 80 sailors. For the region’s largest and most mature navy—the sixteen thousand–strong Royal Saudi Naval Forces (RSNF)—the manpower problem is slowly being mastered. In a 2011 recruitment drive, RSNF received 24,000 applications for 4,000 positions.<sup>34</sup> In the younger and smaller GCC navies, however, the manpower shortfall remains an acute limiting factor. In the UAE, for instance, only half of the navy’s most capable surface combatants, the four Baynunah-class corvettes, can be manned at any one time.<sup>35</sup> Due to manpower shortfalls, GCC naval and aviation orders of battle must be scrutinized carefully to ascertain the real wartime strength of the Gulf militaries, with manpower rather than platforms being the critical factor and a bottleneck on building military capacity.

**Duplication and failure to coordinate.** The GCC is not like NATO; its member states still distrust one another and are generally unwilling to pool resources to achieve better results. Although the majority of the intra-GCC border disputes have been solved or at least shelved, rivalries continue among the states. In some cases they still revolve around geography; Qatar and the UAE dispute their maritime border with Saudi Arabia, which has upset much-needed gas pipeline development and even led to a UAE-Saudi naval clash in March 2010.<sup>36</sup> Such resuscitation of old border disputes reflects sharpening nationalistic and economic

rivalries.<sup>37</sup> Saudi Arabia and the UAE are active rivals for U.S. attention, each seeking to provide military leadership within the GCC and to be a front-running U.S. military ally in the region. In a clear example of such rivalry undermining the most efficient development of GCC military resources, both the UAE and Saudi Arabia have developed missile defense “centers of excellence.”<sup>38</sup> The result is duplication—in this case, the oxymoronic creation of multiple regional hubs responsible for integrating a vital area of military activity. In other areas, such as the creation of shared aerial refueling or AWACS fleets, the GCC states miss the opportunity to pool their limited manpower and resources to share the cost and burden of building expensive military capabilities. It is, instead, left to the United States to encourage equipment standardization and collaborative force development through the instrument of security cooperation—in effect, by acting, as previously suggested, as the hub of the wheel, with the GCC states as separate spokes. This “multilateral bilateralism” complicates every aspect of defending the GCC.

**Readiness and staying power.** If tension continues to increase between the Gulf states and Iran, the GCC may face difficult military challenges that will test its readiness and staying power. Gulf states may need to react to Iranian threats with little warning at short ranges, and may also need to sustain an alert military posture over long periods of time. These twin challenges would be a stern test of any military, and the GCC suffers from some particular weaknesses that exacerbate the strain. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have overly large inventories of complex and expensive-to-maintain air and naval platforms procured during the Cold War era or in the 1990s. Such systems are maintenance intensive, particularly in demanding desert and maritime settings. This phenomenon was most visible during the dramatic collapse in readiness within the Royal Saudi Air Force (RSAF) in the late 1990s and the early years of the current millennium, as maintenance requirements overwhelmed maintenance spending and engineering capacity.<sup>39</sup> Another example was the escalating maintenance crisis during the last decade

in 1990s-vintage Saudi Arabian and Kuwaiti Patriot missile systems.<sup>40</sup> Saudi Arabian, Kuwaiti, and, to a lesser extent, UAE naval readiness also face severe challenges due to a heavy maintenance burden relative to allocated resources.<sup>41</sup>

A shortfall in weapons stocks was, historically, another weakness of the GCC militaries, though it has been partially remedied in recent years as a result of mammoth U.S. munitions sales to Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and even Oman. In October 2009, Saudi Arabia committed to the purchase of nearly 800 air-to-air missiles (AAMs), 1,000 antishipping and suppression-of-enemy-air-defense missiles, and 4,000 guided bombs.<sup>42</sup> The last need was prompted by Saudi Arabia's rapid expenditure of its entire guided bomb arsenal in fighting against the Houthi rebels on the Saudi-Yemeni border in the summer of 2009, requiring emergency resupply from U.S. operational reserves. Between 2007 and 2011, the UAE likewise purchased over 400 U.S.-delivered AAMs and 2,800 guided bombs.<sup>43</sup> Oman has purchased 150 AAMs, 100 antishipping missiles, and just under 1,000 guided bombs since 2002.<sup>44</sup>

## Opportunities

The following section lists the emerging drivers that could positively shape the capabilities of GCC militaries if exploited to the full.

**Growing professionalism.** The growing professionalism of the GCC armed forces, supported by their ambitious investments in professional military education, training, and real-world operational experience, is often underestimated by casual observers. Both Saudi Arabia and the UAE have plowed significant resources into increasing the quality and quantity of recruits entering the service. In the emirates, for instance, the armed forces make an extensive effort to interest young people in enlisting, presenting military displays and seminars and exhibitions at schools and streaming students to service-run schools, such as the large UAE Air Force and Air Defence high school at al-Ain. Students enroll in the tenth grade and spend their last three years of high school in the military. Qualifying graduates of the air force high school join the Khalifa bin Zayed

Air College.<sup>45</sup> Brig. Gen. Omar al-Bitar, who has run the college since 2002, told reporters, "We are training people to protect our country and to win wars."<sup>46</sup>

Training and exercises are more rigorous than they were in the previous decade, reflecting the transformation of the GCC armed forces into more professional institutions. Military aviators receive significantly more flying hours and better quality training each year than they did in the 1990s as a result of strong investment in training aircraft and academies.<sup>47</sup> With major air force academies and training areas now present in all of the GCC states except Kuwait and Qatar, basic and primary flight training is increasingly carried out in the GCC. This decreases the amount of time lost to foreign training and allows for extensive refresher training at home. In addition to world-class training facilities and curricula, most of the GCC states have invested heavily in advanced training aircraft with digitized "glass cockpits," better preparing pilots for the increasingly complicated and capable aircraft the GCC is absorbing into its arsenals. In Saudi Arabia, for instance, where a large training fleet is required, a \$2.5 billion training package was signed with BAE Systems in May 2012.

GCC air forces also take part in more multilateral and bilateral training exercises than ever before. The United States leads an annual Eagle Resolve field training exercise with all the GCC air forces, followed by a GCC-wide command post exercise later in the year called "Gulf Spears." GCC air forces periodically participate in the annual Red Flag exercises in the United States.<sup>48</sup> The Gulf Air Warfare Center at al-Dhafra, established in 2003, is due to become a hub for regional training between GCC and Western air forces; it uses NATO's Tactical Leadership Programme as the model for its advanced tactical leadership course. Iron Falcon, an exercise held by the UAE since 2004, periodically gathers together Western, GCC, Jordanian, and Pakistani air forces at the al-Dhafra center. Major bilateral exercises involving individual GCC air forces and their foreign partners include but are not limited to Green Flag (Britain–Saudi Arabia), Magic Carpet (Britain–Oman), Air Khanjar (Britain–UAE), Green Shield (France–Saudi Arabia), and al-Saqoor (Pakistan–Saudi Arabia).<sup>49</sup>

The GCC states are also starting to contribute air assets to international operations. In NATO's Operation Unified Protector in Libya, the UAE deployed six F-16s and six Mirage 2000s, plus special forces aircraft, to take part in numerous combat missions and weapons drops. Qatar contributed Dassault Mirage 2000 fighter aircraft and air-delivered special forces to the Libya operation. The GCC special forces self-deployed to bases in Malta and even Libya directly from the Gulf using their own military transport aircraft and commercial leased aircraft.<sup>50</sup>

The GCC navies are also receiving training that is more frequent and more useful. Each GCC nation has contributed forces and held the rotating leadership of Combined Task Force (CTF) 158 in the northern Gulf (policing Iraq's coast) and CTF-152 (maritime security operations in the entire Gulf). All the GCC states have contributed as well to CTF-150 (counterterrorism) and CTF-151 (counterpiracy) in the Red Sea. The CTF-152 exercises have involved the GCC in increasingly complex and useful training scenarios. The biennial Arabian Shark exercises bring together Western and GCC navies to undertake anti-submarine warfare training, giving Gulf navies the chance to practice ASW techniques against U.S. and British submarines.<sup>51</sup> The Stakenet and Stakenet Plus exercises held since 2010 have focused on coordinating the actions of Western and GCC navies to protect offshore oil and gas infrastructure and tanker traffic.<sup>52</sup> The week-long International Mine Counter-Measures Exercise (IMCMEX) held in the Gulf in September 2012 included representatives from all of the GCC nations and twenty-four other contributing nations and is likely to be repeated in the coming year.

In addition to bilateral exercises with nonregional navies (Western, Indian, and Pakistani), some GCC states have held naval exercises with visiting NATO-flagged task forces.<sup>53</sup> The GCC also holds small battalion-sized air-land forces exercises under the rubric of the GCC's Peninsula Shield Force. The annual Solidarity exercise series aims to develop cooperation among GCC navies and coast guards. The Islands of Loyalty exercises undertaken by the GCC navies in May 2012 appear to have been specifically focused on

sending a message of support to the UAE in its dispute with Tehran over Abu Musa and the Tunb Islands.<sup>54</sup> As a result of their numerous commitments, the GCC navies are now practicing not only their seamanship skills in practical settings but are also learning advanced command and control, close maneuvering, and defensive skills that could increase their confidence and their utility as U.S. allies in regional conflict scenarios.

**Openness to international partnerships.** The manpower shortages faced by GCC armed forces (combined with the extensive maintenance and manning requirements of modern aerial and naval forces) have led the Gulf militaries to rely extensively on expatriate personnel. This is often presented as a weakness of the GCC militaries as well as proof of the Gulf Arab desire to rely on foreign states, or even foreign mercenaries, for protection. The author has frequently heard defense analysts make reference to the GCC states' desire to "outsource" their defense to foreign parties, or even to "mercenary it out" to private companies if foreign security guarantors such as the United States are unwilling to protect the GCC. Others refer to the "Flying Tiger" model, hinting at a potential for private military companies to fill a vacuum left by overstretched Western militaries.<sup>55</sup> While these views have some basis in regional military history and in current GCC defense relationships with private companies, any expectation that GCC states should not make extensive use of contractors is somewhat unrealistic. What Western military does not do so nowadays? Building every facet of world-class military institutions from scratch is arguably too much to expect of the young GCC states at this point in their development. Openness to international expertise is arguably an opportunity for, if not a strength of, the GCC militaries.

The case of foreign nationals serving in the GCC armed forces is a case in point. Though it may appear unusual to Western eyes to see Baluchis, Filipinos, and North African Arabs filling out the GCC's ranks, this model of support is deeply traditional in the region. Indeed, some communities, notably the Baluchis, have such long-running ties to the Gulf militaries that their members are formally recognized as quasi-citizens.<sup>56</sup> In

navies around the world, in fact, use of foreign nationals has been for hundreds of years a response to the need for skilled manpower, a history reflected still in the GCC's use of seafaring peoples (like the Filipinos) alongside local national officers and Western expatriate technicians. Indeed, even the U.S. military needs to utilize noncitizens to fill its ranks, and the British military depends on recruits from a range of Commonwealth states to keep up manning levels. For these reasons, it is worth reassessing whether the GCC's extensive use of contractor and loan service personnel is, in fact, a weakness.

The value of the GCC's openness to international support is demonstrated by the comprehensive maintenance packages that are finally in place to support its military equipment inventories. In Saudi Arabia, for instance, programs delivered by the United States and Britain to support military logistics are cutting edge. Through better structured and resourced efforts, the challenge of maintaining the kingdom's enormous and complex military machine is slowly being mastered. The RSAF's EMDAD (Arabic for "logistics") project has involved a complete redesign of the force's logistics network, including the supply and maintenance of armaments, flight simulators, and components.<sup>57</sup> The Saudi-British Defence Cooperation Program, which replaced the al-Yamamah program, includes extensive BAE-run services that are producing a training pipeline of skilled Saudi Arabian ground-crew technicians who will progressively replace foreign contractors.<sup>58</sup> The Royal Saudi Air Defence Forces (RSADF) Maintenance and Technical Support Depot, an air defense missile inspection facility supported by Raytheon, enables the RSADF to check the status of Patriot missiles in the kingdom without sending them back to the United States, saving costs and improving readiness.<sup>59</sup> Very large maintenance and logistics contracts have now been established for aviation, air defense, and naval forces in the UAE, Kuwait, Oman, and even Qatar.<sup>60</sup>

One difference between these programs and their historical antecedents is that they attempt to seriously address the issue of skills and technology transfer to the GCC defense industrial base. Although so-called

offset programs have linked arms procurement to technology transfer, local training, and indigenous production for decades, the GCC is now learning how to extract greater value from such deals. Local training and production are shifting to higher-value maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) services (that is, of electronic, not just mechanical, systems). GCC states, particularly the UAE, are getting involved in the development of advanced materials<sup>61</sup> and command and control systems, and are slowly beginning to produce more complicated indigenous military platforms, such as remotely piloted vehicles.<sup>62</sup> The UAE, in particular, is weaving itself into the U.S. research, design, and procurement processes to a level not seen since the Shah of Iran's days, when U.S. military aircraft manufacturers designed major U.S. weapons systems, including the F-14 and F-16 aircraft, around Iranian requirements. In the last decade, the UAE fed over \$2 billion of investment into the Northrop Grumman AN/APG-80 active electronically scanned array radar, which equips not only the UAE's eighty Lockheed Martin Block 60 F-16 aircraft but also the next generation of U.S. Air Force fighters.<sup>63</sup> If such advances are built upon, greater integration between the region's defense industrial base and Western arms vendors could result in a step increase in the indigenous educational, technological, and defense industrial base supporting the Gulf militaries.

**Technology trends.** The newer platforms and systems being procured by the GCC states are built to be easier to maintain and are already reducing the maintenance burden on the Gulf militaries, one of a number of technological trends that could boost military capabilities in the region. Some beneficial aspects of modern military technology are obvious, including the precision of targeting and guided weapons, which allows smaller forces to achieve the same results as larger forces have in the past. The qualitative leveling allowed by high technology has also shifted the military balance between Iran and the Gulf states. Now, for instance, the UAE has the capacity to damage Iran's oil export infrastructure severely through its investment in advanced air-launched cruise missiles and other guided weapons that can be launched

from outside the range of Iran's air defenses and strike with great precision and destructiveness. Such leveling of the military playing field would have been unthinkable in the 1980s, when only the global and regional superpowers operated this kind of deterrent strike capability. Now the opposite is true: Iran, the main adversary of the GCC states, has less access to advanced weaponry than the Gulf Arab monarchies. Technology has partially shifted the military balance.

Other, less obvious technological trends should also have clear beneficial effects on GCC military capacity in the coming years. Smarter avionics systems may begin to reduce the in-flight workload of GCC combat aviators.<sup>64</sup> The aforementioned AN/APG-80 active electronically scanned array radar on the UAE's Block 60 F-16 aircraft is a case in point, with built-in resource management systems designed to make it easier for the UAE to train pilots on and employ this advanced combat aircraft.<sup>65</sup> New naval platforms being sold to the GCC states are also optimized to reduce the need for manpower through automation. The very capable new generation of corvettes and offshore patrol vessels being deployed by the UAE and Oman are designed to deliver tremendous striking power for such small and lightly manned vessels—quite literally, more bang for the buck.<sup>66</sup>

Robotic engineering also holds significant promise for the manpower-depleted GCC states, particularly in the aerial and naval environments where conflict with Iran would most likely be played out. At the simplest level, patrol boats in the GCC are increasingly employing robotic weapons mounts that can track and engage targets at high speeds and reduce the size and manpower requirements of vessels. Counter-mine warfare is on the cusp of being revolutionized by autonomous underwater vehicles (AUVs), including larger unmanned underwater vehicles (UUVs) and smaller tethered remotely operated vehicles (ROVs).<sup>67</sup> Modular networked AUVs carrying advanced sonar are already operational in the Gulf, with Western and GCC navies using them to map the subsea topography and undertake port security missions.<sup>68</sup> The IMCMEX counter-mine exercises held in the Gulf in September 2012 saw the first extensive use of newly

deployed AUVs in major coordinated mine clearance scenarios.<sup>69</sup> In naval missions—as in homeland security, border security, and air defense—automation and smart analytics software is amplifying the capabilities of the small GCC militaries. The opportunities offered by advanced technology could play a role in transforming GCC military potential, and numerous signs indicate the Gulf states will strongly embrace such change.

**Air and missile defense as a door opener for integration.** As the next chapter will note, Integrated Air and Missile Defense (IAMD), an intrinsically collaborative form of military activity, is a priority for the GCC nations. If they cooperate, states gain better individual pictures of the threat, improved warning time, and more opportunities to intercept inbound aircraft and missiles. Shared radar data and advanced command, control, and communications are a necessity if IAMD is to be optimized. So pressing is the threat from Iran in the view of GCC leaders that the multilateralism of the approach may overcome their instinct for developing stove-piped military capabilities in parallel. The strong U.S. role as the hub of the wheel has even begun to introduce efficiencies and interoperability into GCC procurement. A degree of standardization is emerging in IAMD, based on U.S. air and missile defense radars, data links, combat aircraft, and interceptor missiles. The opportunity is significant because successful GCC-wide collaboration on IAMD could become the thin end of the wedge in a broader effort to develop efficiencies, economies of scale, and coordinated operations between GCC militaries and Western allies. What works in the air and missile defense sphere could one day work for a regional approach to counter-mine warfare, anti-submarine warfare, or tanker escort.

## Threats

The following section lists the emerging restraining factors that could negatively shape the capabilities of GCC militaries.

**Loss of confidence in the United States.** A loss of confidence in the U.S.-GCC security relationship is

probably the single greatest threat to the future development of the Gulf militaries, potentially sending the Gulf states down the path of accommodation with Iran or, alternatively, the development or acquisition of weapons of mass destruction of their own. Fears associated with reduced U.S. reliance on Middle Eastern oil, the potential for U.S. accommodation of a nuclear-armed Iran, and U.S. economic decline are probably all overstated, but they contribute to GCC paranoia about the future. Washington should take care to avoid a repeat of the 2007 U.S. National Intelligence Estimate of Iran's nuclear weaponization plans, which took pressure off Iran at an inopportune moment and caused consternation in the Gulf states about U.S. commitment to preventing Iran's nuclear progress. The GCC monarchies also need ongoing reassurance that the United States is balancing its support for democracy in the region against its strategic relationships with the nonelected leaderships in the Gulf Arab states—a delicate balancing act for which there may be no perfect solution. Most important, the United States should provide unswerving military backup to the GCC states during crises.

**Iranian nuclear breakout.** Visible symbols of U.S. commitment—most obviously U.S. forward military presence and particularly aircraft carriers—would be especially important to reassuring the Gulf states in the event Iran demonstrates a nuclear weapons capability in some way, either through a declaration, a test, or hints that it has crossed the nuclear threshold. Such a change in the regional nuclear environment could shift GCC decisionmaking in one of two directions already mentioned, both dangerous to the United States. First, the GCC could suffer a major loss of confidence and turn back toward appeasement or accommodation of Iran as a new regional hegemon. Alternatively, and possibly more credibly, Saudi Arabia and perhaps the UAE could seek out their own weapons of mass destruction.

**Instability in a large GCC state.** The GCC monarchies have outlasted the Soviet-backed Nasserist Arab Republics, the neighboring dictatorships, and, more recently, Usama bin Laden's centralized al-Qaeda

senior leadership. Yet while all of these movements threatened the internal stability of GCC states, newer threats—Shiite militancy, youth-based protests, and Islamist efforts to effect change through the ballot box or uprisings—are arguably at least as significant. The loosening of state power in the GCC states, necessary and legal though this may be in some cases, could threaten the military potential of the GCC as a U.S. ally. In Bahrain and Kuwait, where representative parliaments challenge government decisions, political discord has increased, pointing to the difficult and disruptive process of making a transition to democracy. In Kuwait, the parliament has become a major complicating factor in military procurement processes; in Bahrain, sectarian tensions have also disrupted U.S. arms sales.<sup>70</sup> More significant societal tensions in Saudi Arabia or Kuwait could constrain the ability of those states to support U.S. operations, act as U.S. bases, or receive U.S. defense equipment and training. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, for example, Saudi Arabia became increasingly leery of basing U.S. forces or allowing them to undertake military operations from the kingdom. Whether raised regional awareness of the threat from Iran has made Gulf populations less sensitive to U.S. military presence remains to be seen.

**Retrenchment in defense spending.** The GCC states could rein in their defense spending for a range of reasons, one possibly being reaction to Arab Spring-type pressures from elements of their populations. Already the GCC has responded to the Arab Spring by upping its pledges of aid to other monarchies, such as Jordan and Morocco;<sup>71</sup> and populist measures such as salary increases for the public sector and other benefits and subsidies are on the rise.<sup>72</sup> Oil price dynamics may also play a role. The overwhelming reliance of the GCC economies on oil receipts renders their militaries vulnerable to lowered prices. The Gulf states suffered a period of canceled and postponed military procurements and inadequate maintenance funding when the price of oil dropped as low as \$9.80 per barrel in 1998. While a steady upward resetting makes a new collapse to these levels unlikely, reduced per-barrel prices might in the future cause some retrenchment of military

development plans, particularly in the less committed or less wealthy states such as Kuwait, Bahrain, and even Oman. In Saudi Arabia, where the state's massive resources face the burdens of an equally mammoth infrastructure and social security, longer-term retrenchment in defense spending may also occur if social pressures rise.

**Overreach in GCC force design.** Overstretch of GCC defense budgets may be exacerbated by overly expansive military development plans. In the early 1990s, immediately after Operation Desert Storm, both Saudi Arabia and Kuwait embarked on crash procurement programs. These efforts were ultimately curtailed partway through their execution. In Saudi Arabia, the arms-buying splurge resulted in the country's being weighed down for two decades by a bloated military that could not be adequately manned or maintained. Illusory force design objectives—such as the development of a large oceangoing “blue water navy”—took Saudi Arabia down the wrong path, wasting billions of dollars and many years in the process.<sup>73</sup> Now that the GCC states are increasingly committed to opposing Iran's hegemonic aspirations, a new overreach into nonproductive areas of force design (e.g., blue water naval capabilities) could result.

## Conclusions

The GCC militaries are not the U.S. military; but, then, who is? A comparison of the key GCC military powers—Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait, and Oman—to Washington's European and Asian military partners is instructive. Looking at a sample of military burden-sharing metrics (i.e., defense spending as a percentage of GDP), we find the GCC compares very favorably with such U.S. allies as Israel, Turkey, Britain, Australia, South Korea, Taiwan, and Germany. In fact, the so-called burden gap (the differential between the U.S. military burden and that of the GCC) actually favors the GCC states, four out of six of which spend a larger proportion of their GDP on defense than the United States does.<sup>74</sup> In terms of the military participation ratio (the ratio of citizens serving in the military), the GCC states outstrip the United States and most

NATO and East Asian U.S. allies that employ professional forces (as opposed to conscription systems). GCC participation rates average 1.1 percent of the citizenry, compared to 0.4 percent in the United States and 0.2 percent in Britain and Germany.<sup>75</sup>

GCC military capabilities are improving, in part because of the growing maturity of the GCC's military institutions and in part as a result of technological changes that have magnified its strengths and downplayed its weaknesses. As important, Gulf Arab leaders and officers have made a mental transition over the last decade from a focus on conflict avoidance to a determination to deter Iranian expansionism and, if necessary, actively defend the region in collaboration with international allies. A similar dynamic existed in Europe for well over a decade before the Second World War, as unprepared and war-weary nations sought to avoid conflict and only slowly armed themselves to meet aggression. What is important now is that the GCC states may not be ideal military allies, but they are determined and increasingly capable, and they invest heavily in defense. Most important, they are actually there, on the ground in the region and at risk from Iranian weapons, and they have chosen to participate actively on America's side in the effort to contain Iran militarily.

## Notes

1. Bahrain aside, the state with the most experience of Iranian operations is Kuwait. During the Iran-Iraq War, Kuwait was subjected to Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) operations that included attempts to assassinate the emir, the bombing of both the U.S. and French embassies, and the hijacking of two Kuwaiti planes. In addition, terrorists struck Kuwaiti port and oil storage facilities that were handling Iraqi oil exports, while other ports were hit by Iranian-launched Silkworm missiles. Kuwait's state security service views the latter incidents as particularly relevant because they coincided with Kuwait's alignment with the U.S. military (through its reflagging of Kuwaiti tankers). For a good historical treatment of these events, see David Crist, *The Twilight War: The Secret History of America's Thirty-Year Conflict with Iran* (New York: Penguin, 2012), pp. 239–241, 282, 301, 304, 310.
2. Michael Knights, “Political-Military Challenges of Demining the Strait of Hormuz,” PolicyWatch 1987 (Washington

- Institute for Near East Policy, September 28, 2012), <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/political-military-challenges-of-demining-the-strait-of-hormuz>.
3. Michael Knights, *Troubled Waters: Future U.S. Security Assistance in the Persian Gulf* (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2006), p. 151.
  4. Glenn Kessler, "Analysts Divided on Clinton's Arab Defense Plan," *Washington Post*, May 4, 2008."
  5. Quotes from Ian Black and Simon Tisdall, "Saudi Arabia Urges U.S. Attack on Iran to Stop Nuclear Programme," *Guardian*, November 28, 2010.
  6. *Gulf States Newsletter*, "UAE Plants Both Feet Firmly in Anti-Iranian Camp," no. 912, November 11, 2011.
  7. For a good example, see the interview with (then) commander of the UAE Air Force and Air Defence, Maj. Gen. Khalid Al By-Ainnain in Eric Hehs, "UAE Air Force/F-16 Block 60," *Lockheed Martin Aeronautics Company Code One* 18, no. 4 (October 2003). Omani officials have consistently stressed to the author that the Strait of Hormuz shipping channels, which run through Omani territorial waters, are their "responsibility."
  8. Qatar's prominent role in backing and even arming the Syrian opposition is drawing increasing comment. See Elizabeth Dickinson, "Qatar's Role as Peace Broker at Risk in Syria," *National*, September 24, 2012, <http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/middle-east/qatars-role-as-peace-broker-at-risk-in-syria#sthash.xrKlzoDR.dpuf>.
  9. *Gulf States Newsletter*, "Abu Dhabi Pipeline to Start Exports," no. 923, May 10, 2012. The Fujairah pipeline will carry 1.5 million barrels per day and will terminate at a 12 million-barrel storage facility on the Indian Ocean.
  10. For hawks like Sheikh Muhammad bin Zayed al-Nahyan, Abu Dhabi crown prince and deputy supreme commander of the UAE armed forces, the only question is whether war will come before or after the UAE has raised its defenses. See *Gulf States Newsletter*, "UAE Plants Both Feet Firmly."
  11. *Gulf States Newsletter*, "UAE Talks Tough on Missile Defence," no. 847, February 13, 2009.
  12. Jeremy Binnie, "GCC Completes Amphibious Exercise," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, May 7, 2012.
  13. Author's interviews with Gulf-based security consultants and think tank analysts, all names and details withheld at interviewees' request. While Saudi Arabia and the UAE have not prepared precise plans, they have assembled target lists for "countervalue" strikes on port facilities, refineries, and power stations.
  14. An excellent and still largely up-to-date study of GCC reception and basing facilities is William O'Malley, *Evaluating Possible Airfield Deployment Options: Middle East Contingencies* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2001).
  15. Spending on defense programs as a percentage of GDP was 11.4 percent in Oman; 10 percent each in Qatar and Saudi Arabia; 5.3 percent in Kuwait; 4.5 percent in Bahrain; and 3.1 percent in the UAE. See Central Intelligence Agency, "World Population Comparison," in *The World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2119rank.html?countryName=Bahrain&countryCode=ba&regionCode=mde&rank=157#ba>.
  16. Guy Anderson, "Jane's Defence Weekly Briefing: Shifting Sands," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, April 25, 2012.
  17. Ibid.
  18. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), "Recent Trends in Military Expenditure," February 27, 2013, <http://www.sipri.org/research/armaments/milex/resultoutput/trends>.
  19. For U.S. military planners, the UAE also hosts a number of valuable bases, including Dubai and Fujairah ports, the logistics backbone for the U.S. Fifth Fleet and the most heavily trafficked liberty ports for U.S. sailors worldwide. If the Strait of Hormuz were closed, Fujairah would become the lifeline for U.S. supply lines within the GCC. Airbases in the UAE are the hub for all high-altitude U-2 and Northrop Grumman Global Hawk unmanned aerial vehicle operations and support most of the aerial refueling for U.S. aircraft from Afghanistan to the Mediterranean. The Regional Integrated Air and Missile Defense Center of Excellence, a U.S.-UAE joint venture, will play a critical role in air and missile defense integration within the GCC.
  20. Abu Dhabi crown prince Sheikh Muhammad bin Zayed told reporters, "Regrettably Dassault seems unaware that all the diplomatic and political will in the world cannot overcome uncompetitive and unworkable commercial terms." Quoted in Shane McGinley, "UAE Royal Blasts Dassault over Fighter Jet Deal," *Arabianbusiness.com*, November 16, 2011, <http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rcr=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=4&ved=0CE8QFjAD&url=http%3A%2F%2Fm.arabianbusiness.com%2Fuae-royal-blasts-dassault-over-fighter-jet-deal-430278.html&ei=z2EuUcekDfLj0AG9yoHgBQ&usg=AFQjCNHbACmRdSBEdHulCQ'Tbhrg-y7ogIQ&bvm=bv.42965579,d.dmQ&cad=rjt>.
  21. *Gulf States Newsletter*, "UAE Plants Both Feet Firmly."
  22. The adroit handling of the procurement built the credibility of Royal Air Force of Oman's procurement capability, as did a follow-on \$2.2 billion deal for two squadrons of Eurofighter Typhoons, considered a well-negotiated bargain in defense circles. Author's interviews with defense industry contacts in major defense contractors, names and details withheld at interviewees' request.
  23. Oman is set to deploy three twelve-aircraft squadrons of newly built combat aircraft: two squadrons of F-16s and one of Eurofighter Typhoons. It should be noted that in addition to some subsidization of Omani procurement through the

- U.S. Foreign Military Financing facility, Oman may also have benefited from financial assistance from other GCC states, notably the UAE and Saudi Arabia.
24. *Gulf States Newsletter*, "Iranian Threat Focuses Minds of GCC Leaders," no. 888, January 24, 2010.
  25. Author's interviews with security consultants in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar, names and details withheld at interviewees' request.
  26. Ibid.
  27. Ibid.
  28. For some illustrative thinking from the Emirates Identity Authority, see Ali M. Al-Khouri and Malik Bechlaghem, "Towards Federated e-Identity Management across GCC—A Solution's Framework," *Journal of Strategies & Governance* 4, no. 1 (2011), pp. 39–40.
  29. Ellen Nakashima, "Cyberwar Poses Dilemma for U.S. Defence Exporters," *Washington Post*, November 23, 2012, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/cyberwar-poses-dilemma-for-us-defence-exporters-8346311.html>.
  30. Oxford Analytica, "Cyber Warfare Threat in the Gulf Grows," December 11, 2012, <https://www.oxan.com/display.aspx?ItemID=DB180162>.
  31. The UAE condensed its lone police program on cybersecurity into a broader national defense project called the National Electronic Security Authority in September 2010. See *ibid.*
  32. An early but useful study is John Stillion and David Orletsky, *Airbase Vulnerability to Conventional Cruise Missile and Ballistic Missile Attacks* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1999). For a new study on the issue of whether the United States should withdraw naval units from the Gulf, see Mark Gunzinger and Christopher Dougherty, *Outside-In: Operating from Range to Defeat Iran's Anti-Access and Area-Denial Threats* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, January 17, 2012).
  33. *Gulf States Newsletter*, "The Range of Military Bases in the UAE," no. 912, November 11, 2011. To survive a surprise attack, a new base has been established at Al Safran, some 130 kilometers to the southwest of Abu Dhabi. Construction has taken several years and is understood to have cost more than \$1 billion, with the first Mirage 2000 squadron reported to have moved to the new base in early 2007. Al Safran has dual runways, hardened aircraft shelters, and underground weapon storage sites. The rest of the F-16 and Mirage 2000 force is expected to move there permanently when work is completed.
  34. Author's interview with advisor to the Saudi Arabian military, name and details withheld at interviewee's request.
  35. Author's interview with defense contractor in the UAE, name and details withheld at interviewee's request.
  36. *Gulf States Newsletter*, "Saudi-UAE Naval Clash over Dolphin Pipeline Points to Brittle GCC Relations," no. 874, April 9, 2010. Naval vessels of the UAE and Saudi Arabia have reportedly clashed in disputed waters close to the route of the Dolphin gas supply pipeline between Qatar and Abu Dhabi.
  37. The Dolphin pipeline route between Qatar and the UAE looked uncontroversial given the current delineation of oil fields in the offshore area, suggesting that Saudi Arabia used the pipeline route to gain leverage over the UAE in the ongoing dispute over other contested onshore areas, such as Shaybah oil field and Khawr al-Udayd.
  38. Author's interview with U.S. military officer, name and details withheld at interviewee's request.
  39. *Gulf States Newsletter*, "The RSAF Maintenance Crisis," no. 667, August 6, 2001.
  40. Author's interview with U.S. military officer, name and details withheld at interviewee's request.
  41. Author's interview with U.S. Navy officer, name and details withheld at interviewee's request.
  42. For an updated list of U.S. weapons sales notifications involving GCC states, see the Defense Security Cooperation Agency's search engine at <http://www.dsca.mil/samm/Search.htm>.
  43. Ibid.
  44. Ibid. Also see *Gulf States Newsletter*, "After the F-16, Oman Garners Power of Typhoon," no. 859, August 7, 2009.
  45. Gen. Khalid Al By-Ainnain, former commander, UAE Air Force & Air Defence, "UAE Air Force and the 21st Century's Challenges," *PLAF* 22, Centre d'études stratégiques aérospatiales, [http://www.cesa.air.defense.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/PLAF\\_No22\\_Al\\_By\\_Ainnain.pdf](http://www.cesa.air.defense.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/PLAF_No22_Al_By_Ainnain.pdf).
  46. Quoted in Lockheed Martin, "F-16 Block 60 for UAE Makes First Flight," December 8 2003, <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/lockheed-martin-enters-new-era-of-advanced-f-16-capability-with-successful-f-16-block-60-first-flight-73229587.html>.
  47. In the 1990s, Western advisors with GCC air forces generally accorded GCC combat aviators around 120–180 flying hours per year, according to the author's notes. In recent years, since the improvement of maintenance and training regimens in the Gulf states, GCC air forces have consistently been described as providing their aviators with 200–220 flying hours a year. Author's interviews with U.S. and British air force personnel and defense contractors, names and details withheld at interviewees' request.
  48. John Tirpak, "U.S. Air Force and the Gulf," *Air Force Magazine* 94, no. 3 (March 2011), <http://www.airforce-magazine.com/MagazineArchive/Pages/2011/March%202011/0311gulf.aspx>.
  49. Ibid.

50. See Tim Ripley, "Power Brokers: Qatar and the UAE Take Centre Stage," *Jane's Defence Weekly* 24, no. 2 (February 2012).
51. For news from the latest Arabian Shark exercise in 2012, see Royal Navy, "Westminster Gets Her Teeth into International Submarine Hunt," May 3, 2012, <http://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/News-and-Events/Latest-News/2012/May/03/120503-WestminsterSubmarines>.
52. See *Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment: The Gulf States 2012* (Alexandria, VA: Jane's IHS, 2012), pp. 304–305, <http://www.janes.com/products/janes/security/country-risk/assessments.aspx#gulf-states> (subscription based).
53. Ibid.
54. *World Politics Review*, "With Gulf Tensions High, GCC Naval Capabilities Remain Limited," May 1, 2012, <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/trend-lines/11905/global-insider-with-gulf-tensions-high-gcc-naval-capabilities-remain-limited>.
55. In some cases private-sector involvement has literally reached the level of supplying armed forces for the use of Gulf states. These are typically the more problematic cases. Examples include the creation of a short-lived regime security force for the Abu Dhabi royal family and the UAE's troubled attempt to build antipiracy protection forces in Somalia using private contractors. See Mark Mazzetti and Emily Hager, "Secret Desert Force Set Up by Blackwater's Founder," *New York Times*, May 14, 2011, p. A1.
56. This occurs in Oman and, in a more sectarian, politicized manner, in Bahrain.
57. Bill Burchell, "Modernizing Maintenance IT: Royal Saudi Air Force Replaces Its Aging Maintenance and Logistics System," *Aviation Week*, March 2010, <http://www.mirotechnologies.com/images/pdf/modernizingmaintenanceit.pdf>.
58. Andrew Chuter, "Senior RAF Officer to Lead Saudi Arms Sales Program," *Defense News*, November 4, 2012, <http://www.defensenews.com/article/20121104/DEFREG01/311040002/Senior-RAF-Officer-Lead-Saudi-Arms-Sales-Program>.
59. Anthony H. Cordesman, *Saudi Arabia: National Security in a Troubled Region* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2009), p. 234.
60. In the UAE, DynCorp maintains the U.S.-supplied combat fleets. Global Aerospace Logistics, Lockheed Martin, and Raytheon jointly provide logistics and sustainment services for the UAE's air and defense missile systems. Gulf Logistics and Naval Support provides support services to the UAE navy. In Kuwait, the U.S.-administered Foreign Military Sales program has assisted with the establishment of very large Boeing and DynCorp maintenance and logistics packages. Even within Qatar, where the armed forces are not generally well maintained, the ship repair and conversion company Nakilat-Keppel Offshore & Marine has been contracted to provide maintenance services and program logistical support to the Qatar Emiri Naval Forces.
61. Advanced materials outperform conventional materials with superior properties such as toughness, hardness, durability, and elasticity. For instance, smart alloys and memory metals "remember" their shape and can easily be returned to it after being deformed. The manufacture of lightweight armor is another common use of advanced materials.
62. The UAE defense sector is developing rapidly and is actively guided by the government. Tawazun, a strategic investment organization, is tasked by the Abu Dhabi royal family with developing the emirates' defense industry. An example of the UAE's diversification into military remotely piloted vehicles is the collaboration of the Malaysian company Unmanned System Technology (UST) with the UAE defense firm Adcom Systems to produce medium-altitude long-endurance drones.
63. Hehs, "UAE Air Force/F-16 Block 60."
64. Despite automated flight control and electronic cockpits, the combat mission in-flight workload of aviators has increased due to the greater complexity of aircraft and the numerous added sensor, data link, and weapons systems. New cockpit systems in use in the GCC attempt to reduce pilot workload by using larger instrument panel displays, wide-angle head-up displays (HUD), helmet-mounted displays, and color multifunction displays to improve visualization of vital data. Other workload-reducing systems include cockpit ergonomics and direct voice input for some functions. Precision weapons also reduce the workload and stress on a pilot. As one aviation commentator noted, "Many times with [a satellite-guided] JDAM you can drop it ten or more miles away from high altitude where [enemy air defenses] can't touch you, and put a three-meter [Circular Error of Probability] on a fixed target in any weather. A lot less stressful on the pilot." See Kadircan Kottas, *USAF Pilot Perceptions of Workload Assessment in a Combat or High-Threat Environment* (Dayton, OH: BiblioScholar, U.S. Air Force Institute of Technology, 2012), pp. 2-1–2-3, 38–43, 78–88.
65. *Defense Update*, "U.S. Fighters Mature with AESA Radars," no. 1-07 (March 2007), [http://defense-update.com/features/du-1-07/aesaradar\\_US.htm](http://defense-update.com/features/du-1-07/aesaradar_US.htm).
66. Richard Scott, "Packing a Bigger Punch," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, May 2, 2012.
67. Guy Anderson, "Jane's Defence Weekly Briefing: Rolling in the Deep," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, June 3, 2011.
68. Ibid.
69. Michael Knights, "Political-Military Challenges of Demining the Strait of Hormuz," *PolicyWatch 1987* (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 28, 2012), <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/political-military-challenges-of-demining-the-strait-of-hormuz>.

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70. Raymond Barrett, "New Trends in Arab Defense Spending," *Al Akhbar English*, August 9, 2012.
71. Stuart Diamond, "To Stave Off Arab Spring Revolts, Saudi Arabia and Fellow Gulf Countries Spend \$150 Billion," Wharton University, PA, September 21, 2011, <http://knowledgetoday.wharton.upenn.edu/2011/09/to-stave-off-arab-spring-revolts-saudi-arabia-and-fellow-gulf-countries-spend-150-billion/>.
72. Andrew Torchia, "Analysis: Arab Spring Diverts Part of Gulf Petrodollar Flows," Reuters, January 30 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/01/30/us-gulf-petrodollars-idUSBRE90T0QG20130130>.
73. *Gulf States Newsletter*, "Saudi Navy Edges towards Major Procurements," no. 926, June 2012.
74. Jordan Becker notes that "Military Burden is the most common metric used to measure military expenditures and their economic significance and impact. It is defined as the ratio of military expenditures to Gross Domestic Product. The Burden Gap with the United States is a variant of the Military Burden, specifically using the United States as a point of reference with which to compare other [U.S. allies] and groups of members. It is simply the difference between the Military Burden of the U.S. and the member or group of members considered." See Jordan Becker's Marshall Prize-winning essay, "Pillar or Pole? NATO, European Security and Defense Initiatives, and the Transatlantic Relationship," May 2011, [http://www.sipa.columbia.edu/news\\_events/announcements/documents/NATO\\_CSDP\\_Becker\\_19MAY.pdf](http://www.sipa.columbia.edu/news_events/announcements/documents/NATO_CSDP_Becker_19MAY.pdf).
75. Ibid.

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## 3 | KEY MISSIONS for GCC ALLIES

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THE GCC MILITARIES cannot replace U.S. military forces in all the mission areas required to ensure Gulf security, but they can lead in some areas and provide most of the forces for their own defense in others. A further subset of missions requires the GCC militaries to play a strictly supporting role and may even comprise areas from which U.S. security cooperation planners seek to guide them away. The following sections separate out these two categories: the “core missions” where the GCC can strongly contribute and the “potential missions” where GCC capabilities are less pivotal but might make important contributions in the future.

### Core Missions

The core missions of the Gulf Arab militaries are defensive in nature, focusing almost entirely on the homelands and territorial waters and airspace of the GCC nations. A focus on defensive missions is highly palatable to GCC leaders, many of whom instinctively shy away from openly confrontational or aggressive public stances and actions. Yet defensive missions are also militarily difficult and entail special challenges; they call for open-ended vigilance, military readiness, and tight coordination.

**Internal security and critical infrastructure protection.** The Gulf states own some of the most economically significant critical infrastructure in the world. The Ras Tanura oil export terminals and Abqaiq refinery in Saudi Arabia and Qatar’s Ras Laffin Industrial City are some of the better known of over a dozen major industrial cities that are of vital importance to the global economy. The Strait of Hormuz shipping lanes are located inside Oman’s territorial waters. More than a third of the world’s seaborne oil exports, plus

the Gulf’s significant liquefied natural gas exports, pass through this artery.<sup>1</sup> In addition to existing infrastructure, the GCC states are adding vital new infrastructure every year. In addition to major new desalination facilities and nuclear power facilities, the GCC is developing a range of alternate export routes to reduce global dependence on Hormuz. These include Saudi Arabia’s reopening of the Iraqi Pipeline in Saudi Arabia (IPSA),<sup>2</sup> developed during the 1980s tanker war in the Gulf, which allows 1.65 million barrels per day of oil to be sent to storage facilities at Muajjiz near Yanbu on the Red Sea. Another Saudi pipeline called Petroline has the capability to send up to 5 million barrels per day of oil to the Red Sea, though it is currently used mainly to carry natural gas from the east to industrial centers in western Saudi Arabia. The 1.5-million-barrel-per-day Abu Dhabi Crude Oil Pipeline to the Indian Ocean port of Fujairah is another new piece of infrastructure designed to reduce Hormuz’s criticality.

The GCC states are well aware of the global significance of the economic assets they control and protect. Gen. Khaled al-Buainan, former commander of the UAE’s Air Force and Air Defence, summed up this responsibility: “Our strategic location demands responsibility from us and from our military. Around 40 percent of the world’s crude oil passes through the UAE and our oil production facilities. We felt this responsibility during the Iran/Iraq war. Later, we were part of the international coalition for the liberation of Kuwait.”<sup>3</sup> GCC leaders are also very focused on their responsibility to their citizens and expatriate guests. As Qatari prime minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim al-Thani noted, a war in the Gulf would result in mayhem equivalent to “our own Katrina.”

Although much work remains to be done, civil defense and protection of civilian infrastructure now

enjoy a higher profile and better resources than in previous decades (the same can, of course, be said for many threatened nations). In 1991, Iraqi Scud missile attacks found the northern Gulf states hesitant to advise their populations effectively regarding the extent of the missile threat for fear of causing panic or undermining the perception that the monarchies could protect the people.<sup>4</sup> By 2003, after a decade of general improvement in civil defense preparedness for civilian emergencies (Hajj crowd management, flooding, tall building fire safety), the GCC response to Iraq's missile threat was better developed. Civil defense forces held mock chemical attacks and evacuation drills, with clearer civil defense command structures and crisis management legislation in place.<sup>5</sup>

Since then, the general civil defense infrastructure and practices in the Gulf have continued to evolve, driven by the adoption of global safety standards within the GCC.<sup>6</sup> Megaterrorism—the 9/11 attacks in particular—prompted the GCC to consider the threat of manned aircraft strikes and, now, of missiles on large buildings. As a result, the construction and use of tall buildings in the GCC states have for the last decade included extensive assessment and management measures that take into account the risk of missile strikes—a threat routinely considered and calculated alongside more conventional risks, such as earthquakes and accidental fires. Likewise, consideration of hazardous chemical risks has strengthened GCC planning against the effects of airborne toxins in urban areas, including the use of detection, evacuation, and decontamination drills.<sup>7</sup> Oman's responses to Cyclone Gonu in 2007 and Cyclone Phet in 2010 provide recent case studies of society-wide civil defense successes in the Gulf.<sup>8</sup>

In a future conflict with Iran, a baseline improvement in civil defense tools (civil defense plans, joint control centers, warning systems, and rescue services) will be useful. More needs to be done, including the development of dedicated or prepared civilian shelters (such as underground car parks and tunnels), distribution schemes for gas masks, and education about domestic household preparedness and evacuation. One problem is that instead of tackling these potentially alarming issues, a tendency remains within

the GCC to reduce fear of Iran's missiles by painting missile defense as a panacea. This has positive sides, such as bolstering the GCC leaders' determination to oppose Iran, which might be undermined by a higher level of societal nervousness. The downside could be shock and discontent if missile defenses underperform, particularly if other civil defense measures (e.g., distribution of gas masks or safety information) also disappoint. For these reasons, the U.S. government needs to continue pressing for robust and continually improving civil defense preparations in the GCC. This includes conditioning populations to the likelihood that missile defense would only reduce damage, not prevent it entirely.

Protection of the Gulf's civilian infrastructure has also improved, with important positive results for the U.S. military posture in the region, a posture highly reliant on local ports. For instance, when the Mesaieed Industrial City port complex in Qatar was isolated by mismanaged road works in 2007, U.S. air forces in the Gulf suffered a monthlong fuel crisis affecting U.S. airpower across the entire Middle East.<sup>9</sup> U.S. and GCC leaders share a determination to keep vital GCC infrastructure secure, forming the basis for long-lasting bilateral security cooperation programs. In Saudi Arabia, the U.S.-supported Joint Commission on Critical Infrastructure Protection and Border Security<sup>10</sup> undertook U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) vulnerability assessments of key Saudi facilities and established the Office of the Program Manager—Facilities Security Force (OPM-FSF), the first major post-9/11 U.S. security program in Saudi Arabia, responsible for the development of an entirely new, 37,000-strong security force for critical infrastructure. An estimated 20 percent of the Saudi Ministry of Interior's \$12 billion annual budget is currently slated to support critical infrastructure protection, according to private security consultants working in Saudi Arabia. Interior Minister Prince Muhammad bin Nayef inaugurated the OPM-FSF program by telling U.S. officials, "We built ARAMCO together. We must protect it together."<sup>11</sup> DOE and the Sandia Laboratories also provide critical infrastructure protection support to Qatar and the UAE, working with agencies such as

the U.S.-backed Qatar Petroleum Industrial Security Directorate and National Security Shield (NSS) project<sup>12</sup> plus the UAE's Critical National Infrastructure Agency. The continuation of U.S. support to critical infrastructure protection in the region is a vital pillar of U.S. security cooperation.

**Shared early warning and integrated air and missile defense.** Aside from critical infrastructure protection, Integrated Air and Missile Defense (IAMD) is probably the mission area in which the GCC has demonstrated the strongest commitment in recent years. GCC leaders appear to be seized, perhaps even transfixed, by the missile threat posed by Iran. In 2006, the Saudi Arabian deputy minister of Defense and Aviation, Prince Khaled bin Sultan, laid out Riyadh's thinking that Iran's missiles were the key threat facing his country, noting that the threat "won't be the Iranian Air Force, or Navy. It won't be ships or boats. It will be missiles."<sup>13</sup> In addition to receiving strong support from King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, missile defense has the firm backing of the other key U.S. ally in the Gulf, Abu Dhabi crown prince and deputy supreme commander of the UAE armed forces, Sheikh Muhammad bin Zayed al-Nahyan. He reportedly views war with Iran as inevitable, describing it as "a matter of when, not if," according to an unnamed U.S. diplomat.<sup>14</sup> The only question for many GCC leaders is whether war will come after they have raised their defenses or will happen before, sparking a scramble to develop missile defense capabilities.

Since 2007, the United States has stepped up to the challenge of covering the GCC with augmented missile defenses, providing reassurance for the Gulf states until their own missile defenses are modernized and integrated. In September 2009, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates unveiled U.S. commitment to erecting antimissile defenses that would cover specific trouble spots around the world, such as the Taiwan Straits and the Gulf. In January 2010, the U.S. government announced plans to supplement its screen of U.S. Navy Aegis-class missile defense cruisers with eight batteries of U.S.-operated Patriot Advanced Capability (PAC-3) systems deployed in GCC countries. On January

30, 2010, the *New York Times* quoted an unnamed official who stated, "Our first goal is to deter the Iranians. A second is to reassure the Arab states, so they don't feel they have to go nuclear themselves."<sup>15</sup>

As U.S. Central Command's Regional Integrated Air and Missile Defense effort has matured, the Saudis have come firmly on board. The U.S. military has spent the years since 2008 demonstrating the growing sophistication of networked U.S. anti-missile sensors in the Gulf. The U.S. Air Force Combined Air Operations Center in al-Udeid, Qatar, regularly fuses early warning data from many sources. These include U.S. satellites watching for missile launches; U.S. carrier-based aircraft; U.S. Navy Aegis vessels; land-based U.S. and GCC radars; and shorter-ranged radars collocated with U.S. shore-based Patriot missile batteries. The system put into place by the United States facing Iran also includes three levels of interception systems:

- *high-altitude systems*, such as the Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system, which are held in reserve in the United States in readiness for deployment to the Gulf;
- *mid-altitude systems*, such as the Standard Missile (SM-3) systems located on Aegis cruisers in the Gulf and Mediterranean;
- *low-altitude PAC-3 and other Patriot missile units* located close to potential targets in the GCC, Israel, and Turkey.

Via data links provided by the United States, GCC states are receiving such combined warning data and beginning to see the benefit of closer collaboration. The next step will be for U.S. Central Command to integrate a range of GCC missile defense systems into its regional array. Though not all the hype is justified, clarity on the way forward does seem to have increased. The GCC is investing significant resources into missile defense, allowing the potential integration of the following elements:

- *Saudi Arabian systems.* Saudi Arabia has a relatively long history in the field of missile defense and was

on the receiving end of Iraqi missile attacks during the Gulf War in 1991. In addition to its dense deployment of RSAF air defense squadrons facing Iran,<sup>16</sup> Saudi Arabia is one of the world's most significant operators of Patriot missile systems, with at least 1,200 missiles received into Saudi arsenals. The United States will work to integrate large numbers of aging Saudi Arabian Patriot and Hawk systems into the overall missile defense network and upgrade a portion of these to PAC-3 standard. Saudi Arabia may also purchase THAAD systems and even SM-2 Block IIIA or SM-3s.<sup>17</sup>

- ***Kuwaiti systems.*** Another country with wartime experience of missile attacks and successful interceptions, Kuwait has operated significant numbers of aging Patriot missile systems and decided in December 2007 to order a further sixty PAC-2 missiles, eighty PAC-3 missiles, and upgrades to radar and communications equipment supporting the missiles. In the interim, the U.S. military will maintain two U.S.-operated PAC-3 batteries in Kuwait, continuing the current deployment of the units.
- ***UAE systems.*** Two U.S.-operated PAC-3 batteries will be deployed to the UAE until the emirates can complete their purchase of \$3.6 billion worth of PAC-3 systems, comprising 288 missiles and spare parts. The UAE will also be the first export customer for the U.S.-produced THAAD system, buying two AN/TPY-2 high-altitude radar systems,<sup>18</sup> three fire units, and 96 missiles in a long-awaited \$7 billion thirty-year deal.
- ***Qatari systems.*** Qatar already hosts two U.S.-operated PAC-3 batteries sited to protect the U.S. Central Command headquarters at Camp As Sayliyah and al-Udeid Airbase. These two missile systems will be maintained there until and possibly beyond Qatar's own mooted purchase of PAC-3 systems and THAAD. (Qatar is already installing an AN/TPY-2 radar purchased from the United States.)
- ***Bahraini systems.*** Since the U.S. Navy base at Manama would be a priority target in any crisis

involving Iran, Central Command deploys two U.S.-operated PAC-3 systems to Bahrain to bolster existing Bahraini I-Hawk missile defenses and ensure coverage for the entire island.

- ***Oman.*** Until 2013 Oman was the only GCC state to eschew added missile defenses, reflecting the Sultanate's sense of geographic distance from Iran and the Omani government's desire to maintain its relatively good relations with Tehran. Oman is currently negotiating a \$2.1 billion purchase of missile defense systems (probably Patriot missile batteries) from the United States.<sup>19</sup>

The GCC states are thus fielding more of the expensive missile and radar systems needed to protect the region than they were in the past, and the United States is a key provider of these systems and the integrating hub at the center of GCC missile defense. Ongoing U.S. involvement is vital, not least because air and missile defense is neither a simple nor static challenge. Maintaining a defense system has many components, and an adversary like Iran may be expected to adapt its offensive capabilities constantly. The sensor and communications part of missile defense needs to be carefully maintained to ensure serviceability in tough desert and littoral climates. As U.S. advisors stress to the GCC, expensive assets like radars and fiber-optic networks need to be protected and, in the case of radar, kept as mobile as possible to prevent blinding attacks during a conflict.<sup>20</sup> The GCC's "look-down" airborne sensor platforms need to evolve to handle the growing risk of long-range Iranian cruise missiles.<sup>21</sup> Sensor networks also need to cope with massed salvos of missiles in the event Iran increases its current inadequate inventory of launcher vehicles, thus enabling it to throw more missiles simultaneously.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, the GCC needs the United States to help plan the future adaptation of its missile defense inventory in the face of possible Iranian escalation. If Iran does go down the route of greater numbers of missiles or the use of decoys and multiple missile warheads, the GCC states will face the defender's dilemma of the spiraling costs of missile defense. U.S. planners may be of inestimable value in helping

the GCC think through the cost-benefit calculus of increasing missile defense inventories versus maintaining passive defenses and conditioning the Gulf populations for the reality of imperfect missile defense.<sup>23</sup>

The guiding presence of the U.S. military is also needed to prevent the GCC states from repeating some mistakes of the past. The readiness of interceptor missile arsenals needs to be higher than in previous years, with adequate numbers of well-maintained missiles kept on alert. This will require ongoing strong investment in maintenance and spare parts, which the U.S. Foreign Military Sales process and close military-to-military ties continue to drive. U.S. involvement is also vital to preserve the all-important collaboration among GCC states in air and missile defense. In its role as the hub of the wheel, the United States facilitates trusted relationships among the Gulf nations and prevents or resolves intra-GCC problems. For instance, Washington will need to handle the potentially disruptive influence of rivalry over missile defense that has developed between the UAE and Saudi Arabia. The Saudi Arabian government has sought to establish a missile defense center of excellence, even though one already exists in the UAE. Similarly, the United States can provide a valuable second opinion on major missile defense procurement decisions in the event, for example, that Saudi Arabia seeks to duplicate the emirate's purchase of THAAD, or Riyadh wants to mount ballistic missile defense capabilities on its Arleigh Burke-class Aegis destroyers or new Surface Combatant Ship (SCS).<sup>24</sup> If not properly thought through, such purchases could distract GCC attention, might not be the best use of resources, and might not necessarily serve common U.S.-GCC interests in the long term. Although all contributions to regional missile defense are welcome, the United States can try to guide the GCC states toward complementary, integrated solutions and away from overambitious or competitive procurement that has been insufficiently considered.

**Exclusive Economic Zone, territorial water, and harbor defense.** The Gulf states have demonstrated a commitment to state-of-the-art harbor defenses and critical infrastructure protection. Economic key

points like Ras Laffin Industrial City's port approaches or similar sites in Jebel Ali, Fujairah, and Ras Tanura are protected by dense sensor networks and patrolling forces. Swimmer detection, aerial drone, radar, and acoustic technologies have been deployed in these and other locations. GCC mine-countermeasures forces are also focused on harbor approaches.<sup>25</sup> While no harbor is impenetrable, the GCC states have been proactive in taking many of the steps required to minimize the risks posed by sabotage, terrorism, and military special operations.

The next step for GCC littoral capabilities is to develop naval and border protection agency forces that can effectively police the full extent of the Gulf states' territorial waters, including Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs). To achieve this, the GCC states need to be able to perform roles ranging from the policing of fisheries and environmental and marine wealth to extended surveillance patrols and maritime presence operations around offshore oil and gas infrastructure. The component parts of strong coastal security forces are already in place in most of the GCC states, and sensor networks are starting to be developed to extend situational awareness into the EEZs. In Qatar, for instance, Project National Security Shield will extend radar coverage into offshore gas fields; elsewhere, Saudi Arabia and the UAE are experimenting with unmanned surveillance drones within their offshore EEZs.<sup>26</sup> All the GCC states have developed naval special forces with either ultra-high-speed interceptor boats or helicopter transport to patrol their EEZs and sensitive maritime borders. Saudi Arabian, Kuwaiti, and Bahraini naval special forces are well developed and act fairly aggressively to prohibit violations of shared maritime borders.<sup>27</sup> Even Qatar, a relatively acquiescent Gulf state that has long been bullied by Iran in the offshore gas fields, is investing in a mother ship for command and control in the EEZs and sharpening its aerial and naval special forces response options.

All the GCC states have also invested heavily in the last decade in well-armed, fast attack craft with day and night sensors. A new generation of powerful offshore patrol vessels coming into service in the GCC combines good seaworthiness (for extended

patrolling) with very effective offensive weapons systems, such as lightweight precision missiles and robotic stabilized cannons. Such vessels can outsee and outshoot any Iranian counterpart within adjacent Saudi-Kuwaiti-Iranian EEZs in the northern Gulf or in the North Field/South Pars gas field exploited by Qatar and Iran.<sup>28</sup> In addition to surface vessels, all of the GCC states have procured aviation assets that are capable of providing strong over-water support to GCC naval forces. Attack helicopters and combat aircraft are procured and exercised in such a way as to ensure they can be used in an anti-surface-warfare role within the challenging Persian Gulf littoral environment, where the climate and salinity takes a heavy toll on aircraft. Large, dedicated antishipping missiles (such as AGM-184 Harpoon) and smaller guided missiles (such as AGM-65 Maverick and AGM-114 Hellfire) carried by GCC aircraft and helicopters provide Gulf coastal defense forces with extensive added firepower in the EEZs.<sup>29</sup>

The United States can play an important role in the shaping of these nascent coastal defense forces. Such naval units are critical to holding the line against Iranian probing and aggression in strategic areas such as the northern Gulf (around the offshore gas fields and oil loading facilities used by Iraq and Kuwait) and in the Iranian-Qatari offshore gas fields. Building the confidence of GCC naval forces in a step-by-step manner—first in harbor defense, then in EEZ patrolling—can be a key U.S. security cooperation objective. Increased patrolling and exercising, preferably in partnership with Western navies, could build GCC confidence, and useful first steps have been taken in this direction in the Stakenet exercises. Such operations should be gradually extended farther away from GCC coastlines to encompass the extent of the Gulf states' territorial waters. U.S. support to GCC navies could also encourage greater intelligence-sharing and improved mutual support by GCC navies<sup>30</sup> and, ultimately, bolster resolve to face down Iranian naval probes of GCC territory. Repeated practice of skills and rules of engagement could produce more assertive behavior by GCC naval forces within their territorial waters. This, in turn, could raise the threshold

at which U.S. intervention and presence is necessary, allowing the GCC to “hold the line” on more occasions and reserving U.S. naval commitment for more serious scenarios.

### Potential Missions

Outside the core defensive missions of the Gulf Arab militaries are a set of offensive missions the GCC might seek to fulfill in the coming decade. These potential missions are more risky than the short-ranged defensive missions reviewed in the previous sections. Although they include ostensibly defensive objectives—such as facilitating tanker traffic through Hormuz—they are largely offensive in nature. Clearing Hormuz in the face of Iranian obstructionism, for instance, may draw the GCC into actions against Iran's military forces, risking full-blown conflict with Tehran. Likewise, optimizing missile defenses may necessitate striking Iranian missiles on Iran's southern coast, drawing the GCC into warlike conditions on Iranian territory. Other contingencies—GCC deterrent strikes on Iranian cities and economic infrastructure, or seizure of Abu Musa island—are undeniably offensive in nature. The GCC also continues to demonstrate some willingness to become involved in the internal conflicts of regional states—notably Lebanon, Yemen, Afghanistan, Libya, and now Syria, pointing to another mission area in which the GCC may become more active: sponsoring foreign internal defense in aid of Gulf allies or backing unconventional warfare by proxies operating against enemies of the GCC. For the United States, the overarching question is, exactly how forceful does Washington wish the GCC to become? Aside from the obvious undesirability of GCC adoption of weapons of mass destruction, are there any conventional military capabilities the GCC should be actively discouraged from developing because they may make the region less stable?

**Supporting freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz.** As noted in previous sections, despite manpower limitations and relatively short naval traditions, some potentially formidable air-sea capabilities are being developed in the GCC. Well-resourced naval

modernization plans and imaginative solutions to manpower shortfalls may allow Saudi Arabia, Oman, and the UAE to field a range of very capable surface combatants supported by extensive airpower. Within GCC territorial waters, the combined forces of the GCC have the potential to function as a credible naval partner aligned with the United States and the international community. Outside the GCC territorial waters—or where GCC territory draws close to areas of Iranian military strength, such as Hormuz, Fujairah, and Abu Musa—the capabilities of GCC naval forces are still in question.

While missions beyond their territorial waters have not historically been the priority of GCC navies, the Gulf states are increasingly thinking about such roles. The GCC relies on international maritime trade for its economic survival, and the Iranian navy is increasingly venturing farther afield in ways that might threaten its sea lanes of communication in the Indian Ocean and Red Sea.<sup>31</sup> Hormuz is also a concern. Although the GCC has traditionally left the security of Hormuz to the international community—the “demand side” of the petroleum market—some states are becoming more directly involved in securing the strait. The main shipping lanes pass through Omani territorial waters, and the sultanate considers itself legally and ethically responsible for ensuring transit in the strait.<sup>32</sup> The UAE, with its territorial waters wrapping around Hormuz and with Jebel Ali port dependent on Hormuz traffic, is also seized by the need to maintain international freedom of navigation there. The UAE is focused as well on the security of its new port and oil loading facilities in Fujairah, which faces Iran’s coastline on the Indian Ocean side of the strait. Recently, some GCC states (notably Saudi Arabia) have also recognized the necessity of maritime security operations outside their territorial waters to protect tanker traffic and coastal security from threats such as Red Sea piracy and uncontrolled migration by Horn of Africa refugees and terrorists. The operational horizon of GCC navies is slowly extending beyond their shallow coastal belts to encompass their broader sea lanes of communication.

Could the GCC navies contribute meaningfully to a coalition effort to escort commercial traffic in the

Gulf, Hormuz, and the Indian Ocean? GCC planners have considered the possibility of longer-ranged naval missions for many years now.<sup>33</sup> In the 1990s, the Saudi Arabian navy planned a major procurement of ocean-going frigates and longer-ranged vessels. Over twenty years after that unsuccessful effort, the incoming generation of well-armed GCC frigates, corvettes, and off-shore patrol vessels could, in theory, make a significant contribution to international maritime operations in the region.<sup>34</sup> Increasing involvement in international maritime task forces like CTF-152 and exercises like the September 2012 International Mine Counter-Measures Exercise (IMCMEX) point to GCC willingness to play a role in protecting international commerce.

Becoming a useful “blue water” naval partner to the United States and other navies will take more than good intentions, however. The challenges of operating in close proximity to Iran’s sea denial capabilities—i.e., its missiles, attack boats, and naval mines—are daunting for the best-prepared navies, let alone those of the relatively unprepared GCC states. The U.S. Navy is only belatedly reviewing the threat posed by the new generation of Iranian forces and their ability to undertake “swarm tactics.” On March 17, 2012, Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Jonathan Greenert told the Senate Armed Services Committee about a range of force protection measures that would facilitate ongoing U.S. naval presence in the Gulf. Small U.S. patrol vessels that escort larger ships and minesweepers would see their numbers doubled from five to ten by 2013. All U.S. naval vessels (including the patrol boats) would undergo an up-arming with a range of specialized weapons designed to destroy Iran’s “small-boat swarms.” All would also receive extra electro-optical and night vision sensors to allow early detection of such attackers in an environment where many small civilian craft are present.<sup>35</sup> Besides the use of swarm tactics, other hard-to-counter threats include anti-shiping missiles, advanced naval mines, and midget submarines with heavy torpedoes capable of demolishing any ship in the GCC’s arsenal. For GCC forces to become a military asset rather than a liability in any future multinational operation in the Gulf—a force capable of mitigating the potential impact of Iranian

tactics and weaponry—they will require significant practice in realistic multinational exercises as well as a degree of reequipping. While the Gulf militaries have fought in high-threat environments before—notably during the Battle of Khafji and Operation Desert Storm in 1991—involvement in a naval war against Iran could take them well outside their comfort zones and into an unprecedentedly challenging environment.

Antisubmarine warfare (ASW) is another aspect of “blue water” naval missions that could prove challenging for the GCC. The Gulf navies have very little practical experience of ASW and have traditionally left this demanding field to their Western partners. The Royal Saudi Naval Forces, the GCC’s largest navy, does not field any effective ASW vessels or maritime patrol aircraft, leaving the kingdom entirely dependent on foreign navies to protect its maritime trade routes. In the future, submarine warfare could pose a critical threat to GCC economic security.<sup>36</sup> In the Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz, the GCC could face a growing risk of encountering Iranian Yono-class 100-ton displacement Qadir midget submarines, which are designed for operations in shallow coastal waters and are difficult to detect.<sup>37</sup> In the Indian Ocean entrance to the strait, off the Fujairah port complex, and on Saudi Arabia’s Red Sea coast, the deeper waters allow Iran to utilize larger submarines as well, including its Russian-built 877EKM Kilo-class 3,900-ton displacement diesel submarines and its planned 500- to 1,000-ton displacement Qaem-class indigenous submarines.<sup>38</sup>

The GCC states might continue relying on foreign ASW support to guard their sea lanes. If they instead choose to adopt the ASW mission, they could pursue a number of alternative approaches. One solution would be to develop conventional ASW capabilities, such as capable ASW frigates and maritime patrol aircraft, and to operate these aggressively during peacetime and slot them into international task forces during crisis periods.<sup>39</sup> Another option would be to invest in next-generation ASW technologies, such as Large Displacement Unmanned Underwater Vehicles, as the U.S. Navy is considering. Harnessing new unmanned technologies may allow the GCC countries to rapidly

attain ASW capabilities that they would otherwise struggle to develop and maintain. Finally, some GCC states might seek to develop their own deterrent forces, either involving miniature submarines for use in Iran’s shallow coastal waters or more flexible, larger Dolphin-class vessels, similar to those in Israel’s submarine fleet, for open-ocean operations. Some decisionmakers within the GCC approve of the idea of putting Iran’s own ports and fleets at risk of submarine attack, while others are lured by the prestige of operating submarine forces akin to those of Israel and other advanced military powers.<sup>40</sup> The question for the United States is whether such ambitious offensive schemes are both a blind alley for the GCC—a wasteful diversion of resources—and a potentially destabilizing capability that could increase regional tensions.

The UAE’s growing amphibious warfare capabilities pose a similar quandary. In the last five years, the UAE has accepted into service fifteen modern amphibious landing craft plus vessels designed specifically for reinforcing amphibious beachheads.<sup>41</sup> Simultaneously, it has developed a battalion-sized landing force mounted in amphibious infantry fighting vehicles<sup>42</sup> supported by amphibious nuclear, biological, and chemical reconnaissance vehicles.<sup>43</sup> A use for these forces that does not involve the Iranian-occupied islands in the Gulf, even if only as an implied threat to ongoing Iranian control of these outposts, is difficult to envisage. Although the landing force is probably too small to unilaterally occupy Abu Musa, a well-garrisoned Iranian base, the UAE may be signaling its willingness to take part in multinational operations against Iranian-held islands in the Gulf. Even conceivable is that the UAE could undertake landings on Abu Musa under the cover of a major regional war involving Iran or otherwise exploit a period of Iranian weakness. For the United States, the question is once again whether such a capability in the UAE’s hands is useful, providing a coalition partner in regional amphibious operations against dangerous Iranian missile launch bases, or whether it also represents a blind alley or a potentially destabilizing factor. Does the fostering of offensive capabilities in the hands of U.S. allies add to regional deterrence or create new potential for “wild card” events and unilateral actions

by U.S. allies? Or should the United States take a less fussy view and welcome any increase in the strength of regional allies?

**Supporting offensive aerial operations.** In the past, the GCC was largely content to play a supporting role in offensive air operations in the region, providing basing and aerial refueling support to U.S.-led campaigns.<sup>44</sup> More recently, the development of offensive GCC air and missile capabilities has been enthusiastically embraced by the Gulf leaderships.<sup>45</sup> The impetus behind the procurement of conventional air-launched standoff missiles (CASOMs)<sup>46</sup> and long-range strike aircraft seems to have been a desire on the part of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and even Qatar to maintain an independent deterrent force capable of mounting strikes on Iran's population and economic centers. The UAE, in particular, seems to have adopted a similar approach to South Korea in its deterrent strategy (that is, based on the assumption that the only deterrent is to be able to strike deeply at a potential aggressor's cities and infrastructure, so-called "countervalue" strikes). UAE offensive war planning is progressing, including extensive target set development on Iran's ports and oil and gas infrastructure.<sup>47</sup> Given the strength of its offensive air forces and employment of standoff missiles that can be launched well outside the threat radii of patchy Iranian air defenses,<sup>48</sup> the GCC probably already has the capability to mount damaging attacks on key economic targets in Iran. States such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia already maintain target lists on Iran and have operational plans to undertake retaliatory strikes against such targets under certain strategic circumstances.<sup>49</sup>

Offensive GCC air and missile forces could also have considerable utility in supporting other defensive military missions targeted on Iran's military. Safely undertaking mine countermeasures and convoy escort work in the face of a determined Iranian effort to close the Strait of Hormuz could necessitate weeks of attacks on Iranian naval and coastal defense forces, either to disarm Iran or compel Tehran to cease its disruption of the waterway.<sup>50</sup> Likewise, an optimized IAMD campaign to protect the Gulf states could include invasive operations within Iranian airspace<sup>51</sup>

and potentially offensive counterforce attacks against Iranian launchers—"killing the archer, not the arrows," as one report termed the practice.<sup>52</sup> Although such an effort would have been deemed too risky for the GCC states in the past, the UAE and Saudi Arabia appear interested in procuring weapons systems to undertake "deep counterforce" strikes on Iranian missiles. As with CASOM weapons being procured by the Gulf states, the GCC has expressed a preference for systems that might allow very accurate and destructive strikes without being exposed to Iranian air defenses. Bahrain and the UAE already operate the U.S.-built Army Tactical Missile System (ATACMS), which has a range of up to 300 kilometers. Other GCC states could also adopt land-based surface-to-surface missile systems to mount timely counterforce strikes at ranges of up to 300 kilometers *within less than ten minutes' flight time*.<sup>53</sup> If folded within a U.S. campaign plan, such systems (and other assets, such as fighter aircraft, refuelers, and AWACS aircraft) could significantly lighten the strain on U.S. forces during a future air campaign.

**Foreign internal defense and unconventional warfare.** External security assistance to states and substate groups can be divided into two broad categories: foreign internal defense (FID) and unconventional warfare.<sup>54</sup> GCC states have a significant track record in FID and are quickly gaining experience in unconventional warfare missions. Both types of missions accentuate funding, technology, airpower, and special forces—attributes possessed by the Gulf Arab monarchies. Likewise, factors that have traditionally hindered GCC military effectiveness—such as limited manpower and inability to field large numbers of high-quality units—are deemphasized. Provision of equipment, which the GCC holds in excessive quantities, plays a significant role in Gulf security cooperation programs with allied Arab states.<sup>55</sup> The partial deniability afforded by the use of militant proxies is also attractive to the cautious Gulf monarchies.

Saudi Arabia can claim a significant pedigree in terms of unconventional warfare campaigns: the kingdom was centrally involved in both the 1962–1970 North Yemen civil war and the decade-long anti-Soviet jihad

in Afghanistan. In the Yemeni conflict, Riyadh orchestrated a long-running aerial program of armament supply; in Afghanistan, it provided hundreds of millions of dollars in support (peaking at \$630 million in 1987). More recently, GCC involvement in FID and unconventional warfare missions has involved more states:

- *In Lebanon*, the UAE has provisioned the government with several hundred vehicles, shipments of small arms and ammunition, body armor, and anti-riot gear for paramilitary police forces, as well as armed helicopters for the military.<sup>56</sup>
- *In Yemen*, Saudi Arabia has become directly involved in supporting government counterinsurgency operations and (along with the UAE) has provided salaries, training, armored vehicles, and weapons to pro-government forces.<sup>57</sup>
- *In Afghanistan*, the UAE has provided extensive support to Afghan Security Forces via security assistance and the deployment of a reinforced battalion of ground forces serving under the NATO International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).<sup>58</sup>
- *In Libya*, Qatar and the UAE have deployed special forces inside the country, placing them in the thick of the fighting.<sup>59</sup> Since the fall of Qadhafi's regime, they have provided security assistance to the new government and individual militias, using Jordanian and Turkish training academies to deliver the training packages.
- *In Bahrain* in 2011, the Saudi Arabian and UAE armed forces moved in to back up the monarchy during antigovernment demonstrations.
- *In Syria*, the Gulf states (particularly Qatar) have been providing arms and funding to the opposition Free Syrian Army.<sup>60</sup>

This review demonstrates that most recent episodes of GCC military intervention have been conservative or defensive in nature, as exemplified by FID support to Afghanistan, Lebanon, Yemen, Bahrain, and post-Qadhafi Libya. Yet while cases of unconventional

warfare against a target state have been less prevalent, Saudi support was central to two of the region's longest running insurgent campaigns, and the overt Qatari and UAE intervention in Libya has marked a watershed in the offensive military confidence shown by these states. The formula that seems to facilitate GCC involvement in unconventional warfare against regional states comprises three elements: a preexisting grudge or interest in unseating the regime; a strong international mandate or a major allied power underpinning the operation; and the cooperation of a trusted regional partner with strong military capacity (such as Pakistan, Jordan, or Turkey). Libya showed that the Gulf states could act boldly when they had an international mandate and faced an unpopular and isolated regime. This suggests the GCC could also play important covert or low-profile roles in a future conflict involving Iran, either shielding vulnerable states against Iranian influence or fomenting uprisings within disgruntled groups such as the Iranian Arabs, Baluchis, or Kurds.

In the technological sphere, the Gulf states could also emerge as powerful players in the field of offensive cyberwarfare. Computer network attacks are typically deniable, nonlethal, and nonkinetic, which makes them unlikely to trigger a conventional military response. Cyberwarfare also plays to the strengths of the GCC—specifically, its economic ability to discreetly procure and maintain the services of foreign contractors who are adept at such tactics. While Iran's relatively low level of networked infrastructure may limit the extent of the damage caused, these factors make cyberattacks an attractive form of unconventional warfare. The Gulf states might also use less offensive measures to harass Iran during crises, such as the defacement of Iranian government websites and promulgation of anti-Tehran propaganda through internet-based media and conventional news media. Some attempts to develop such capabilities have surfaced in the public sphere. In 2010, for example, Qatar reportedly sought to purchase an “off-the-shelf” offensive cyberwarfare capability from a U.S. defense contractor. Although this effort failed due to attempts to employ U.S. citizens as operational hackers, other U.S. firms seem to be supporting the development of

offensive cyberwarfare capabilities in Qatar and the UAE. One avenue the GCC states may consider is the use of experts from Russia and other countries of the former Soviet Union.<sup>61</sup>

## Notes

1. U.S. Energy Information Administration, “World Oil Transit Chokepoints,” August 22, 2012, [http://www.eia.gov/countries/analysisbriefs/World\\_Oil\\_Transit\\_Chokepoints/wotc.pdf](http://www.eia.gov/countries/analysisbriefs/World_Oil_Transit_Chokepoints/wotc.pdf).
2. Saudi Arabia confiscated the pipeline in 2001 to compensate for debts owed by Baghdad and in the last few years has used it to transport gas to power plants in the west of the country.
3. Eric Hehs, “UAE Air Force/F-16 Block 60,” *Lockheed Martin Aeronautics Company Code One* 18, no. 4 (October 2003).
4. Philip Shenon, “Confrontation in the Gulf; Saudis Step Up Civil-Defense Effort,” *New York Times*, January 2, 1991, <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/01/02/world/confrontation-in-the-gulf-saudis-step-up-civil-defense-effort.html>.
5. *Gulf States Newsletter*, “Civil Defence Forces Hold Mock Chemical Attacks and Evacuation Drills,” no. 706, March 2003.
6. Yassar A. al-Amri, “Emergency Management in Saudi Arabia: Past, Present and Future,” in *Comparative Emergency Management: Understanding Disaster Policies, Organizations, and Initiatives from Around the World*, ed. David McEntire (Denton, TX: University of North Texas, 2007).
7. Author’s interviews with security consultants in Saudi Arabia, UAE and Qatar, names and details withheld at interviewees’ request.
8. Sultan Z. al-Shaqsi, “Emergency Management in the Arabian Peninsula: A Case Study from the Sultanate of Oman,” in *Comparative Emergency Management: Understanding Disaster Policies, Organizations, and Initiatives from Around the World*, ed. David McEntire (Denton, TX: University of North Texas, 2007).
9. Author’s interviews with U.S. military officer based in the GCC, name and details withheld at interviewee’s request.
10. The U.S. and Saudi Arabian governments also established a joint working group for the FSF and another for industrial security that covers the oil industry and all other industries that support the oil sector, such as electricity and water utilities. Another joint working group will cover internal security, including, in part, the most unique of all Saudi Arabia’s critical infrastructure—the Mecca and Medina shrines, visited by millions of religious pilgrims each year and historically a focal point for Iranian agitation. Author’s interviews with security consultants in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar, names and details withheld at interviewees’ request.
11. Quoted in *Gulf States Newsletter*, “As Sultan Leaves the Stage, the U.S.-Saudi Military Relationship Is Set to Grow Closer,” no. 911, October 28, 2011.
12. National Security Shield (NSS) is a border and coastal security system. It aims to create a dense web of sensors and command and control and response capabilities to support frontier security and EEZ surveillance in Qatar. At present, NSS has developed fastest on the land border with Saudi Arabia, moving ahead with the construction of eighteen eighty-meter towers mounting EADS ground-facing radars. Also under development is a complementary radar network and response capability for the EEZ facing Iran, the vital offshore gas platforms of the giant North Field. Author’s interviews with security consultants in Qatar, names and details withheld at interviewees’ request.
13. Quoted in *Gulf States Newsletter*, “As Sultan Leaves the Stage.”
14. *Gulf States Newsletter*, “UAE Talks Tough on Missile Defence,” no. 847, February 13, 2009
15. Quoted in David Sanger and Eric Schmitt, “U.S. Speeding Up Missile Defenses in Persian Gulf,” *New York Times*, January 30, 2010.
16. Five air defense fighter squadrons and six batteries of Patriot missile systems protect the Dhahran air defense sector alone, covering Saudi Arabia’s key economic infrastructure.
17. Raytheon announced on June 21, 2011, that it had been awarded a \$1.7 billion contract to upgrade Saudi Arabia’s existing Patriot air and missile defense systems. The contract covers the upgrade of Saudi Arabian Patriot systems to the latest version, Patriot Advanced Capability 3 (PAC-3 or Configuration-3).
18. AN/TPY-2 is a mobile, solid-state, phased-array X-band radar intended to detect and track threats and then supply targeting data to THAAD’s fire control systems for engagement by an interceptor missile.
19. Until 2013 Oman procured only lower-altitude missile defenses, such as Stinger and AIM-120C-7 surface-launched Advanced Medium Range Air-to-Air Missiles (SL-AMRAAMs). In May 2013, Oman requested a \$2.1 billion package of medium-altitude air defenses for the first time. See Reuters, “Kerry Hails Tentative Raytheon Arms Sale to Oman,” May 22, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/05/22/us-oman-kerry-idUSBRE94L09M20130522>.
20. One concern, for instance, is that TPY-2 and other radar systems in the GCC are easy to locate and might be targeted by Iranian missiles or by asymmetric means (that is, terrorism and special operations). Author’s interviews with U.S. military officers, names and details withheld at interviewees’ request.
21. These include Saudi AWACS and Erieye aircraft, plus UAE Bombardier Dash-8 Q300 maritime patrol aircraft.

22. See Joshua R. Itzkowitz Shifrinson and Miranda Priebe, "A Crude Threat: The Limits of an Iranian Missile Campaign against Saudi Arabian Oil," *International Security* 36, no. 1 (Summer 2011), pp. 167–201.
23. As discussed earlier, missile defenses, described by Gulf leaders as a panacea against the Iranian missile threat, have been hastily reinforced since 2007. A feeling among Gulf populations that they are protected and that their leaders are fulfilling this sacred responsibility is important for GCC morale. Gulf leaders and publics will, however, eventually have to face the prospect of missile defense becoming prohibitively expensive, with missiles costing from around \$3.3 million for a PAC-3 to \$15 million for an SM-3. Gulf stakeholders may also need to adopt a more pragmatic view of missile defense as, at best, a partial solution to the missile threat, with effort also required in the fields of civil defense and public awareness and fortitude. This kind of pre-crisis preparation will be important in reducing the shock of realization that a missile defense campaign can be drawn-out and costly and able only to ameliorate the effects of strikes, not hermetically seal off targeted areas. See Mark Gunzinger and Christopher Dougherty, *Outside-In: Operating from Range to Defeat Iran's Anti-Access and Area-Denial Threats* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, January 17, 2012).
24. SCS could be equipped with the AEGIS SPY-1F combat system and either the SM-2 Block IIIA missile or the SM-3 if the United States released this technology. Lockheed Martin may offer Saudi Arabia eight SCS ships in a \$5 billion deal. Saudi Arabia may buy such systems to demonstrate leadership on IAMD and to allow the Royal Saudi Naval Forces to get in on the missile defense mission.
25. Author's interviews with security consultants in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar, names and details withheld at interviewees' request.
26. A number of Gulf navies seem to have identified the MQ-8B FireScout unmanned helicopter as an early procurement. See *Defense Update*, "FireScout MQ-8B Complete Demonstration Flights in the UAE," July 14, 2010, [http://www.defence-update.net/wordpress/20100714\\_rq8b\\_firescout\\_uae.html](http://www.defence-update.net/wordpress/20100714_rq8b_firescout_uae.html).
27. Well-resourced Royal Saudi Naval Forces Maritime Security Units (naval special forces) are deployed with the Eastern and Western fleets. The Kuwaiti navy and Royal Bahraini Navy operate Mk. 5 Special Operations Craft (high-speed interceptors) supplied by the United States.
28. Richard Scott, "Packing a Bigger Punch," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, May 2, 2012.
29. GCC helicopter fleets include optimized naval attack helicopters, such as Oman's very capable sixteen Super Sea Lynx helicopters, and also conventional attack helicopters whose crews are trained to operate over water, such as Bahrain's AH-1 Super Cobras and AH-64 Apache variants operated by Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE.
30. U.S. involvement also lowers the risk of escalation in border clashes between GCC naval and coast guard forces (as in, for example, the Saudi versus UAE naval clash in 2010). *Gulf States Newsletter*, "Saudi-UAE Naval Clash over Dolphin Pipeline Points."
31. Jamsheed K. Choksy, "Why Iran's Blue-Water Naval Ambition Matters," *American Interest*, August 5, 2011, <http://www.the-american-interest.com/article.cfm?piece=1025>.
32. Author's interview with Omani government official, name and details withheld at interviewee's request.
33. This is particularly true for the two-coast navies of the Gulf. Saudi Arabia has long been aware of the risk of submarine or mine warfare against its Red Sea ports, particularly if they were to be used as alternative oil-loading points to Hormuz. The UAE now may need to consider the defense of Fujairah—also an alternative oil-loading site that skirts Hormuz—when it undertakes naval planning.
34. The aforementioned UAE Baynunah-class corvettes, the formidable OPVs procured by Oman under Project Khareef, might also contribute. The project called for the design, construction, and support of three well-armed OPVs with an embarked helicopter capability. All vessels were delivered between 2003 and 2011.
35. Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Jonathan Greenert Delivers Remarks at the Senate Armed Services Committee Hearing on the Proposed Fiscal 2013 Defense Authorization as It Relates to the U.S. Navy, U.S. Navy website, March 16, 2012, <http://www.navy.mil/navydata/people/cno/Greenert/Testimony/120315%20SASC%20Hearing%202013%20Defense%20Authorization.pdf>.
36. Sabahat Khan, "Iranian Mining of the Strait of Hormuz—Plausibility and Key Considerations," Institute of Near East and Gulf Military Analysis (INEGMA) Special Report No. 4, January 2010, <http://www.inegma.com/reports/special%20report%204/Iranian%20Mining%20of%20the%20Strait%20of%20Hormuz.pdf>.
37. Author's interviews with U.S. Navy officers, names and details withheld at interviewees' request.
38. On August 25, 2008, Tehran announced the start of a new submarine program dubbed "Qaaem." See Geoffrey F. Gresh, "Traversing the Persian Gauntlet: U.S. Naval Projection and the Strait of Hormuz," *Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 34, no. 1 (Winter 2010), pp. 47–48.
39. The UAE is drafting requirements for a new class of light frigate under the auspices of the UAE Armed Forces Project Yas, which has identified a need for at least two multirole vessels up to 100 meters in length that boast significant anti-submarine warfare capability. The type would utilize crews from the two mothballed Kortenaer-class frigates purchased secondhand from the Netherlands in 1996.
40. Author's interviews with Gulf-based security consultants and

- think tank analysts, names and details withheld at interviewees' request.
41. The UAE navy's troop-landing capability is based on three UAE-built 64-meter al-Munassir-class landing craft and twelve UAE-built 24-meter Ghannatha-class high-speed troop carriers. The UAE has also produced four 26-meter Fast Supply Vessels, which are multirole amphibious warfare support vessels designed for the fast transport of vehicles, troops, and military equipment. Use of UAE shipyards has allowed for very fast construction and buildup of a potent amphibious force that Tehran will find increasingly difficult to ignore.
  42. The UAE armed forces operate the Armored Modular Vehicle (AMV), which includes an improved amphibious capability and has already been through trials on the UAE littoral. UAE purchase of so-called wading vehicles would prove particularly important in the event that UAE forces were called upon to launch an amphibious operation on the islands.
  43. UAE planners are also taking seriously Iran's previous statements (in the 1996 timeframe) concerning the storage of chemical weapons on Abu Musa, although these statements probably referred to CS (tear) gas. Any landing force would likely be accompanied by Rheinmetall Landsysteme Fuchs 2 6 x 6 NBC (nuclear, biological, and chemical) reconnaissance system vehicles. These vehicles have also been provided with full amphibious capability.
  44. For instance, Saudi Arabia's fleet of five Boeing KE-3A and seven Lockheed C-130 Hercules tankers has long provided tanker services to U.S. air forces in the Gulf. Now Saudi Arabia is purchasing an additional five Lockheed Martin C-130J Super Hercules and six Airbus A330 tanker aircraft. The UAE is purchasing three Airbus A330 MRIT tankers, and Kuwait is buying three Lockheed Martin C-130J Super Hercules tankers. GCC tanker support is thus due to increase as a potential force multiplier for Western air forces operating in the region.
  45. The longest running offensive missile capability in the Gulf belongs to Saudi Arabia's conventionally armed CSS-2 (Dongfeng East Wind 3) intermediate-range ballistic missiles, originally procured in the 1980s. Saudi Arabia maintains a force of between fifty and sixty East Wind missiles that are deployed at up to three bases. The majority of missiles, and a commensurate share of Saudi Arabia's eight to fifteen fixed-site launchers, are likely to be deployed at Sulayyil. Other missiles may be deployed at al-Juafa (near al-Kharj), or within the King Khaled Military City. These accident-prone liquid-fueled missiles are likely to be replaced in the coming decade. Possible candidate systems include the Chinese CSS-5 Mod-1 or 2, or the 2,300-kilometer Pakistani Ghauri II/Hatf-6 missiles.
  46. The UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar procured an advanced export version of the Storm Shadow air-launched cruise missile, with a range of up to 250 kilometers, and Kuwait may also push to procure the weapon. Such weapons have been integrated into advanced European platforms, such as the Eurofighter Typhoon, Dassault Mirage 2000-9, and Dassault Rafale, all of which would have high survivability in Iranian airspace. The Gulf states are pressing for long-ranged air-launched cruise missiles to be integrated on Lockheed Martin Block 60 F-16 and Boeing F/A-18E/F Super Hornet aircraft types.
  47. Author's interviews with Gulf-based security consultants and think tank analysts, names and details withheld at interviewees' request.
  48. Iran does not employ an integrated air defense system akin to Soviet or Soviet-patterned (for instance Iraqi) designs. Instead, Iran's air defenses are characterized by strategic defended zones (with missile defenses and interceptor squadrons), small numbers of roving mobile missile batteries, and large patches of lightly defended airspace. If supplied with good intelligence on the structure of the system, GCC air forces could penetrate Iranian airspace and strike deep targets as far away as Tehran.
  49. Author's interviews with Gulf-based security consultants and think tank analysts, all names and details withheld at interviewees' request.
  50. Some estimates suggest the need for thirty or more days of preparatory air operations and perhaps also amphibious landing operations to take control of antishipping missile launch areas. The requirements of an operation to control Hormuz could spiral, with each new escalation requiring the United States and its allies to roll back Iranian air defenses and naval forces yet farther. Author's interviews with U.S. and British naval officers, names and details withheld at interviewees' request.
  51. Such operations might include the use of air-launched "hit-to-kill" missiles being developed by the United States and its allies for carriage on multirole combat aircraft.
  52. See Gunzinger and Dougherty, *Outside-In: Operating from Range to Defeat Iran's Anti-Access and Area-Denial Threats*, p. 68.
  53. An ATACMS missile can strike targets 200 kilometers away, the typical distance between GCC and Iranian missile launch areas, in less than six minutes' flight time. Such a capability, linked to advanced sensors, would greatly reduce the need for manned aircraft to loiter near Iranian airspace during an operation to protect shipping. See Henry Rogers, *Army Tactical Missile System and Fixed-Wing Aircraft Capabilities in the Joint Time-Sensitive Targeting Process: A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College* (Colorado Springs, CO: United States Air Force Academy, 2006).
  54. FID support comprises security assistance provided to a government for the purpose of overcoming insurgent or terrorist groups, while unconventional warfare refers to support provided by external actors to the insurgents. In either case, foreign support may include provision of training, equipment, or operations, in some cases via direct involvement of foreign combat forces.

55. The GCC states hold large quantities of stored equipment and can usually also divert new equipment to allies because the GCC armed forces are rarely deployed. GCC states are also starting to build simple but much needed systems like wheeled armored vehicles, a key capability for security forces in fragile states. See Christopher Foss, "Saudi Arabia to Acquire 200 Aravis Vehicles," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, April 19, 2012.
56. The outbreak of fighting between the Fatah al-Islam militant group and Lebanese units at Tripoli's Nahr al-Bared refugee camp in May 2007 prompted the UAE to supply nine SA-342L Gazelle helicopters from its own stores, deployed within two weeks of the outbreak of fighting and armed with machine guns, unguided rocket pods, sensors, and self-defense systems. *Gulf States Newsletter*, "UAE Joins Military Struggle in Lebanon," no. 811, August 3, 2007.
57. *Gulf States Newsletter*, "Long History of Covert Activity," no. 920, March 2012.
58. Alex Gardiner, "On the Frontline with UAE Forces in Helmand," *National*, July 22, 2011.
59. Qatari and UAE aircraft were used to shuttle arms and armored vehicles to the Libyan rebels in Benghazi and the Nafusa Mountains south of Tripoli. Both countries were directly involved in organizing the resistance and coordinating airstrikes with NATO air forces. As Maj. Gen. Hamad bin Ali al-Attiyah, Qatari armed forces chief of staff, noted in October 2011, "The numbers of Qataris on the ground were hundreds in every region [and focused on] running the training and communications operations . . . and planning the battles." Quoted in *Gulf States Newsletter*, "Campaign Raised Qatari, UAE Operations to New Level," no. 920, March 22, 2012.
60. Rania Abouzeid, "Syria's Secular and Islamist Rebels: Who Are the Saudis and the Qataris Arming?" *Time*, September 18, 2012.
61. Ellen Nakashima, "Cyberwar Poses Dilemma for U.S. Defence Exporters," *Washington Post*, November 23, 2012, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/cyberwar-poses-dilemma-for-us-defence-exporters-8346311.html>.

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# 4 | IMPLICATIONS for U.S. SECURITY COOPERATION

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THIS PAPER HAS ARGUED that a number of assumptions could shape U.S. security cooperation in the Gulf in the coming years.

First, the United States remains strongly committed to Gulf security, and no “peer competitor” is presently capable of replicating its unique role in the region. Even if the United States imports less of its energy supply from the Gulf, the U.S. economy will likely remain dependent on price stability in the oil markets. The United States enjoys a commanding position in the Gulf precisely because it has established its credibility as the most potent military partner in the world and a reliable ally to the Gulf monarchies. Neither China nor India is likely to step into the role of security guarantor, and both will instead probably continue to be “free riders” on U.S. and Western security support to the GCC in the coming decades.<sup>1</sup>

Second, a clear role exists for the United States that stresses relatively cheap security cooperation with the Gulf states rather than major forward-deployed forces. While a great deal of useful thought has gone into the creation of NATO-like security architectures in the Gulf, the only real option may be the “hub and spoke” system in which the U.S. military is the glue that holds the GCC militaries together. The United States can create and sustain communities of interest among subsets of GCC states. In integrated air and missile defense, for instance, the United States may be able to pull together most of the GCC into a shared effort. On Hormuz security, the key maritime powers—Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Oman—form another subset. Northern Gulf security also involving Iraq might represent a third. The United States can, at relatively little cost, function as a valuable strategic guide and force multiplier in all these areas.

Third, the prospects for successful U.S. security

cooperation and GCC burden-sharing have arguably never been better. As outlined in the SWOT analysis of the GCC militaries, strengths and opportunities are starting to outweigh weaknesses and threats. The costs and risks associated with U.S. military support to the GCC may decline significantly in the future if the United States and its Gulf allies can grasp the many opportunities and avoid the unprofitable blind alleys in GCC force development. A reduction in U.S. presence in the region does not have to be a rerun of the British departure in 1971; appropriately resourced and well-planned U.S. security cooperation can gradually fill the gap and is likely to be matched by increased burden-sharing taken on by more mature and ambitious GCC militaries.

Looking ahead, U.S. security cooperation with the GCC states should be focused in the following ways:

- The time is right for the United States to guide and support the development of robust niche military capabilities within the GCC states in critical mission areas aimed at deterring Iran.
- The United States can continue to support and guide GCC internal security and critical infrastructure protection efforts, especially within the evolving realm of cybersecurity.
- Maritime powers such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Oman can be encouraged to strengthen their naval patrolling and aviation capabilities so that they can police the full extent of their territorial waters and Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs).
- Ongoing efforts can be made to support Qatar, Bahrain, and Kuwait in monitoring their territorial waters and EEZs.

- Across the Gulf states, air and missile defense is one of the most promising areas of U.S.-GCC cooperation and could function as an encouraging test run for broader intra-GCC military synergy and pooling of resources.
- If carefully considered, GCC precision strike capabilities could add appreciably to the credibility of a U.S.-led coalition to deter Iranian use of antishipping or theater ballistic missiles.

### Prioritizing U.S. Security Cooperation Options

The United States has a number of options for focusing its security cooperation with the GCC states. The following table lays out a range of steps that could be taken, characterizing them as either fast- or slow-acting and as easier or harder for the United States to implement. It follows that those in the left-hand cells are near-term priorities and those in the right-hand cells are slower-burning steps (including some that may need to be kicked off in the near term to reach fruition within a meaningful timeframe).

**Near-term priorities.** Above all else, the United States should maintain its efforts to cultivate bilateral multilateralism with itself as the “hub” of the wheel of Gulf defense arrangements, a meeting point for the “spokes” of the individual Gulf states. As mentioned earlier, subsets of GCC states share defense priorities, and these communities of interest can be drawn into closer collaboration by the United States—and probably *only* by the United States. The United States can act as an honest broker among rival GCC states and even among rival services within the same states (for instance, between naval and coast guard establishments, which often feud over responsibilities).

Ongoing care needs to be invested in the continuity of senior U.S. government relations with the GCC states and their militaries. The Gulf leaders prefer to work with interlocutors like themselves: long of tenure and empowered to make decisions. While meeting this expectation in full will not always be possible due to the rotation of U.S. leaders through electoral changes and career progression, all possible efforts should be made to maximize continuity among those managing

	FASTER	SLOWER
EASIER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Keep up bilateral multilateralism with the United States as the “hub.”</li> <li>▪ Maximize continuity of contact between senior U.S. government interlocutors and the GCC.</li> <li>▪ Maintain visible and well-publicized rotating U.S. military presence in the GCC homelands, including exercise programs with troops.</li> <li>▪ Support IAMD as a driver for integration among GCC states.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Continue to fund FMS, FMF, and EDA support to the GCC to guide procurement and force design.</li> <li>▪ Keep up military to military integration through IMET exchanges.</li> <li>▪ Create a regional Mine-Countermeasures Center of Excellence.</li> <li>▪ Implement a major increase in loan services personnel for GCC navies (or an OPM-SANG for naval forces).</li> </ul>
HARDER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Maximize publicity associated with episodic U.S. carrier strike group presence in the Gulf.</li> <li>▪ Practice the surging of U.S. air, land, and sea forces to the Gulf.</li> <li>▪ Work GCC forces into as many multinational operations as they can handle.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Develop major naval warfare coordination and exercise program.</li> <li>▪ Continue and deepen collaborative technology development in the defense sector.</li> <li>▪ Support innovative thinking in the GCC about unmanned warfare and the use of private sector solutions to reduce manpower shortfalls.</li> </ul>

the GCC security sector relationships. Where possible, the good offices of particularly successful U.S. interlocutors could be tapped after retirement or career transitions.

In the turbulent years ahead, when Iran may approach or even publicly declare nuclear weapons capability, the GCC will need reassurance. Maintaining a visible and well-publicized rotating U.S. military presence in the GCC homelands, including exercise programs with troops, will therefore be critical. The United States should continue to avail itself of any opportunity to undertake land and air exercises in Saudi Arabia<sup>2</sup> and other GCC states. The regular undertaking of U.S.-GCC air and missile defense exercises may also reinforce the U.S. commitment to the Gulf and build intra-GCC confidence and exercise skills. An annual power projection exercise should be considered, akin to the NATO Reforger exercises, through which participants practiced U.S. reinforcement of Europe from the continental United States during the Cold War. In addition to demonstrating commitment, the exercise would force the United States and GCC to jointly consider the evolving Iranian antiaccess and area-denial threat and ways to counter it. The U.S. military should also publicize carrier battle group presence in and near the Gulf, which remains an indispensable symbol of U.S. commitment and shared risk in the eyes of GCC partners.

A final short-term option may be to work GCC forces into as many multinational operations as they can productively participate in. The UAE, Qatar, and even Bahrain appear eager to develop their special forces, select air and naval combat forces, engineering capabilities, and strategic airlift capabilities through participation in multinational operations. As with the UAE's involvement in Afghanistan, Lebanon, Somalia, and the Balkans, a defensive or humanitarian "spin" can usually be put on such operations to make the participation of Gulf states more likely. Saudi Arabia, Kuwaiti, and Omani forces might be similarly tempted to open up their international exposure in future years if regularly invited to contribute forces and are drawn into planning. Already these nations

have involved themselves in multinational naval flotillas, like CTF-152.

**Longer-Term Opportunities.** Ongoing U.S. government funding and support to the Foreign Military Sales (FMS), Foreign Military Financing (FMF), and Excess Defense Articles (EDA) programs are all critical components of a security cooperation effort in the GCC. These programs provide a vital means of monitoring and guiding GCC defense spending toward effective ends. Through the FMS and EDA programs, for instance, the United States reconstructed Kuwait's armed forces after 1991, building them into a compact and effective force that was "fit-for-purpose" to the tasks of national defense. In Oman and Bahrain, the FMF and EDA programs have helped plucky but underfunded U.S.-aligned states to "punch above their weight" in arms procurement. All the GCC states have benefited from U.S. advice on sustainability issues, like the resourcing of maintenance, spare parts, and weapons stockpiles. In the future, a guiding hand will be vital to ensure the GCC states build interoperability into their arms procurement policies wherever possible, or to reduce the likelihood of Gulf states entering into sprawling and costly force development programs that stand little chance of success.<sup>3</sup> The U.S. government should also ensure that significant numbers of GCC military officers continue to undergo professional military education in the United States through the U.S. International Military Education and Training (IMET) program. While increasing numbers of service academies are springing up in the Gulf, the IMET experience allows for deeper cultural exchange, as Gulf officers live and study in the United States. This experience produces longer-lasting ties and greater mutual respect than can be afforded through joint exercises and in-theater cooperation.

The U.S. military should develop a comprehensive security cooperation plan specifically to shape the development of GCC naval forces. As this paper has argued, if GCC navies can be guided away from unprofitable blind alleys, they would collectively represent a useful naval ally for the United States and the

international community. But realizing the potential of GCC navies will not be quick or easy. A major naval warfare coordination and exercise program will be necessary, the leading edge of which is already visible in exercises like Arabian Shark and IMCMEX and in the operations undertaken under CTF-152 and the Proliferation Security Initiative. These efforts should be sustained and deepened, focusing eventually on realistic fleet defense tactics that could allow GCC naval forces to play a reliable role in multinational operations in high-threat environments. Supplementing air defense and special forces centers of excellence could be a regional Mine-Countermeasures Center of Excellence, for which a state like Oman might be a prime location. As GCC navies develop, the United States might also look at the possibilities of developing a system akin to the British and Australian government programs of providing loan services personnel who are able to serve on GCC naval vessels, even during combat operations. It might even consider the development of large-scale naval training programs similar to the long-running OPM-SANG and the newer OPM-FSE, both successful U.S.-administered public-private partnerships that bring together U.S. government and private-sector contractor personnel to design, train, and equip large components of Saudi Arabia's security forces.

In general, the United States should support innovative thinking and progressive public-private relationships in the GCC defense sector. If harnessed correctly and matched to real operational requirements, technology could transform the military potential of the GCC states. Many technological and procurement trends—notably those associated with unmanned warfare and precision engagement—play to the strengths of the GCC and negate its disadvantages. Collaborative technological development in partnership with the United States can continue to be a win-win. The next stage may be major GCC investments in unmanned aerial vehicles. The UAE looks set to receive Predator systems, and both the UAE and Saudi Arabia are seeking to

buy Global Hawk platforms. Although the enormous investment required to support such systems presents a significant challenge to the relatively inexperienced military establishments of the GCC, gradually building up such a capability in the Gulf states may be worthwhile if it allows regional nations to buy, maintain, and eventually take over the operation of such expensive platforms. Likewise, the GCC could, if guided in such a direction by the United States, emerge as an early leader in robotic warfare, leapfrogging a whole generation of unattainable manned capabilities—like mine countermeasures (MCM) vessels—by embracing remotely operated or semiautonomous systems to perform antisubmarine warfare, surveillance, or MCM roles.<sup>4</sup> Private-sector interests could initially operate such systems, transferring operatorship to GCC personnel over time, much in the same way maintenance contracts on combat aircraft fleets are gradually being handed over to trained GCC personnel.

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## Notes

1. See Introduction (chap. 1), note 9.
2. U.S. forces returned to the kingdom to undertake exercises after an interregnum of nearly seven years, from 2002 to 2009. In addition to the Earnest Leader division-level joint/combined arms command post exercise carried out by Royal Saudi Land Forces (RSLF) and U.S. Army personnel, the biennial Friendship One field training exercises commenced in 2009 and 2011 on the battalion scale. Larger land forces exercises could follow.
3. One such blind alley may be the Saudi Naval Expansion Program II (SNEP-II), which could eventually involve up to \$23 billion in procurement. If mid-sized, it could involve replacing up to eight frigate-sized medium surface combatants. At its most grand, the program could also incorporate the procurement of Saudi Arabia's first large surface combatants, ballistic missile defense vessels, and submarines. The Naval Forces Division of the U.S.-Saudi Joint Advisory Division (JAD) could act as a vital check on an overly ambitious program.
4. Mark Gunzinger and Christopher Dougherty, *Outside-In: Operating from Range to Defeat Iran's Anti-Access and Area-Denial Threats* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, January 17, 2012).





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