



MIDDLE EAST MARITIME SECURITY

The Growing Role of Regional and Extraregional Navies

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IN THE PAST, the Great Powers were alone in establishing naval bases throughout the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) to protect sea lines of communication (SLOCs) and to project power. Today, by contrast, a number of leading regional states, including Iran, Israel, and several members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), are increasingly active in acquiring access and basing rights throughout MENA; furthermore, they have begun to flex their military muscle and are building logistics networks to support this growth. Meanwhile, Russia has returned to the Middle East, and the Chinese and Indian navies are playing a greater regional role. Together, these developments are transforming MENA's maritime security environment in ways that have profound implications for both the region and U.S. interests.



Historically, only the dominant naval powers—primarily Britain and the United States—maintained maritime logistical support in the region, providing it in the following ways:

- **UNDERWAY REPLENISHMENT** by combat support ships capable of refueling, rearming, and provisioning the fleet at sea. These support ships can compensate somewhat for the absence of an on-shore logistics infrastructure, but cannot operate far from a fueling port.
- **PORT ACCESS**, the least diplomatically intensive but also the least logistically supportive option, fills an important need. With access to a port, a ship can pull into safe harbor in times of heavy weather, meet food, water, and other supply requirements, and obtain medical, repair, or other assistance in case of emergency. Yet deploying to a region with port access only can be risky. Ports can be closed for diplomatic reasons, and fuel and food stores not guaranteed.
- **BUNKERING ARRANGEMENTS**, which are generally more flexible, allow transiting ships to plan their navigation and operations around guaranteed fuel stores located at the port.
- **OWNERSHIP OR LEASING OF A LOGISTICAL PORT OR BASE**, from which a nation can operate its ships, offers the best and most secure option. In such a case, access to land, food, aid, fuel, and—in some instances—ammunition is ensured, mitigating much of the risk associated with operating far from home. Upgrading a port into a logistics hub, the ultimate power-projection facilitator, requires established rail and air infrastructure as well as extensive regional vendor and industrial base support.

Networks of logistics ports are hard to acquire and expensive to maintain. Even at the height of their maritime strength, the Soviets faced challenges in building a periodic, or crisis-response, presence in the Mediterranean and MENA regions, forcing them to largely refuel at sea. Ultimately, given the high costs and complications of such force projection without any guarantee of long-term access, they abandoned those waters.¹ The British and subsequent U.S. presence in MENA, likewise, has

waned. Britain withdrew its forces to “east of the Suez” in 1968, leaving a vacuum that was filled in subsequent decades by the United States. But the U.S. presence has diminished over the past five years, offset by growing GCC naval basing, bunkering, and access to match a more assertive security role in the region. Either by building bases or by blocking rivals, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia have been the most successful actors, while Iran, Russia, China, and India are still struggling to establish a foothold for their forces.

Trade Trends and Maritime Security

The MENA strategic security environment is being transformed by tectonic shifts in global maritime trade. In broad terms, signs are plentiful that the extended downturn in maritime trade that accompanied the global financial crisis is over. For example, since the December 2015 completion of the \$143 million general cargo addition to Oman’s deepwater port at Salalah, container volume has risen 29 percent.² In Egypt, since the \$8 billion Suez Canal expansion³ was completed in August 2015, cargo traffic is growing despite slow global trade.⁴ In 2016, the critical Strait of Malacca and Singapore Strait saw a 3.4 percent increase to a record 83,740 transits in 2016.⁵ The Red Sea region, already supporting 10 percent of global maritime trade, is seeing explosive growth even as it is considered one of the world’s least exploited markets.^{6,7} The United Nations expects the basin’s population to double in thirty-five years, supporting a regional tripling of GDP and a fourfold growth in trade, 90 percent of which is expected to be over sea routes. Maritime trade between Africa and the rest of the world has increased 200 percent since 2000.⁸ A majority of remaining seaborne import/export trade growth in the region is tied to China. Today, more than 85 percent of crude oil through the Strait of Hormuz is exported to Asian markets.⁹ China’s One Belt One Road policy, dramatic demographic growth in India, and growing energy demands throughout the Far East will increase the traffic through MENA’s ports.

While the eastern routes will remain the most important, Saudi Arabia is making the Red Sea region a key maritime transit zone by expanding port facilities there. Significant Saudi investment in the Port of Jizan, King Abdullah Economic City and Port, and al-Muajjiz oil terminal will help diversify the kingdom’s oil transport away from a Strait of Hormuz threatened by Iran but increases

the security pressures in the Bab al-Mandab (BAM) Strait, a chokepoint threatened by Iranian pseudo-proxies. Egyptian and Moroccan port facilities, along with heavy Chinese investment in inland transit infrastructure, including railways, roads, and airports, will also accelerate waterborne traffic through the BAM as Africa potentially replaces Asia¹⁰ as the region with the highest demographic and economic growth rates past 2040. To be sure, as the world's economic powers are positioning themselves for a share of growing Asian and emerging MENA markets, the security of regional chokepoints, including the critical Strait of Hormuz, the important BAM, and areas throughout the Red Sea, will rise in importance.

The growth of maritime shipping will increase security requirements in and around these critical SLOCs. Regional nations that heretofore have provided periodic coastal protection may find they must expand patrols from the Strait of Hormuz to Egypt's Suez Canal, transiting between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean and down the east coast of Africa to secure the waterways. Underscoring the need for a robust naval presence are attacks by Yemeni Houthis on both naval and merchant vessels, using rockets, cruise missiles, and remote-controlled boat bombs.¹¹ Regional navies are responding. Egypt, seeing threats to the Suez Canal and its Red Sea trade routes, has invested heavily in its navy and positioned many newer units in the Southern Fleet Command, which was created in January 2017 with the goal of offering "safety, security and rescue assistance to Arab brothers in the Gulf."¹² In the Horn of Africa, counterpiracy operations have brought scores of regional and extraregional naval ships together as part of the U.S.-led Combined Maritime Forces. Finally, Saudi Arabian and Emirati naval forces maintain a continuous presence in the Red Sea as their coalition persists in its fight against the Houthis.

Further, the May 2017 visit by U.S. president Donald Trump to Saudi Arabia signaled a new era in expanded GCC capabilities, not only through U.S. arms sales but also through the growth of indigenous maritime-defense enterprises. Between the UAE's Abu Dhabi Ship Building company and the birth of Saudi Arabia Military Industries, these two GCC states have laid long-range plans for their maritime fleet, from littoral to blue-water projection.

Western navies, for their part, are smaller than at any time since the Second World War, and they have been

stretched by rising global threats, notably in the South China Sea and around the Korean Peninsula. While Adm. John M. Richardson, the current U.S. Navy chief of naval operations, does not explicitly outline force-structure goals for the Middle East in "A Design for Maintaining Maritime Superiority,"¹³ the Navy remains on track to marginally increase its presence in the Gulf region, as outlined in *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Sea Power*.¹⁴ This temporary bump in forces steaming into the Red Sea, along with others assigned to the area by the Combined Maritime Forces, still leaves a security gap, which will need to be filled by regional forces.

Basing and Bunkering Strategies

Military logistics for Arab navies is growing in importance as these nations begin taking a more active role in securing the region and a more assertive role in projecting power. The ability of Arab navies to build bases outside their international maritime boundary constitutes the geopolitical entrance fee for military operations far removed from coastal waters and littoral regions. While information sharing, bilateral and multilateral exercises, and search-and-rescue plus interdiction operations help build interoperability at the most basic levels, all require beans, bullets, and fuel to usefully support military effort. Regional navies—including Israel's—are investing in all these areas.

UAE

The UAE has invested heavily in naval logistics, amplifying the effect of its small navy in the region. In the Horn of Africa, Yemen, and the Bab al-Mandab, Abu Dhabi has invested in projecting a strong naval presence. Specifically, the UAE has

- used the roll-on/roll-off terminal at Little Aden (Yemen) as a beachhead,¹⁵ providing amphibious and naval access to the mainland from the Gulf of Aden;
- liberated and subsequently gained access to the port of Mokha (Yemen);
- seized, occupied, and begun building an airstrip on Yemen's Perim Island, located in the BAM;
- completed construction of full port-support facilities, air basing, deepwater piers, and personnel accommodations in Assab (Eritrea);

- established hangar and ramp space and refueling facilities in Benghazi (Libya);¹⁶
- completed an agreement in 2016 to build a naval and air base in the port of Berbera (Somaliland).¹⁷

Finally, the UAE runs a large infantry-training facility¹⁸ on Socotra island in Yemen.¹⁹ The UAE also enjoys preferred treatment in Seychelles, where Abu Dhabi helped fund the island nation's coast guard base. Although located far from the Gulf of Aden, such assets may serve the UAE in the future.²⁰ Overall, Emirates maritime strategy seeks to protect SLOCs from piracy and to interdict illicit trafficking, along with counterbalancing Iran, helping distinguish it as one of the region's more forward-thinking navies.

SAUDI ARABIA

The UAE is not alone in seeking to enlarge its military footprint in the Horn of Africa. Saudi Arabia's Western Fleet, based out of Jeddah's King Faisal Naval Base, shares its port facilities with the UAE in the Red Sea. Bunkering arrangements help both navies operate together, especially out of Socotra and other Yemeni ports for antimining operations. But Saudi Arabia has a larger focus: as the kingdom's ports on the Red Sea side grow in number and capacity, Riyadh is eyeing Djibouti as a potential African base from which to exercise greater influence across the maritime expanse. Such a move is aimed at supporting expected shipping increases under Saudi Vision 2030, the ambitious economic program being guided by Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman. Saudi Arabia thus joins China and France in seeking to build a naval base in the small, strategically located nation.

Saudi Arabia's growing security relationship with Djibouti dovetails with Riyadh's efforts to unite a growing number of Muslim-majority countries in the kingdom's ambitious Islamic Military Alliance to Fight Terrorism. Simultaneously, the kingdom is striving to distance these states from Iran, which, until several years ago, was pursuing an enhanced presence in Eritrea, Sudan, and Zimbabwe, among other African nations. In the short term, Saudi-Djibouti ties factor as well into the Yemeni crisis. Situated across the BAM from Yemen, Djibouti can play a significant role in helping the Saudis defeat, or severely weaken, the Houthi rebellion.

OTHER GCC NATIONS

Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, and Qatar only deploy on extranational missions under Combined Task Force (CTF) 152, which operates in the Persian Gulf, where it coordinates theater security cooperation (TSC) activities with regional partners and conducts maritime security operations (MSOs). Other than their own naval bases, these forces all dock at port facilities shared with the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet in Bahrain, typically limiting their missions to regional and coastal protection. Outside the Gulf, Egypt is making an attempt at foreign naval basing, allegedly working out a secret deal to secure a base on Nora, a strategically placed Eritrean island in the Red Sea.²¹

ISRAEL

Following its decision in the 1960s to downsize from World War II-era destroyers to smaller but more capable missile boats, Israel's potent navy stayed focused on national defense through coastal protection and limited force projection. While hostilities dating from the 1950s through the 1973 war drove Israel Navy ships to transit around the southern tip of Africa to move between the nation's Mediterranean and Red Sea ports, the 1979 peace treaty ended that requirement by permitting transit through the Suez Canal. Since then, Israel's navy has, with a few notable exceptions, remained close to home. Modernization of the small but effective fleet is under way, driven by a need to secure the nation's exclusive economic zone. While naval logistics basing in Cyprus or Greece could boost such an effort, political considerations have impeded such arrangements other than in times of crisis. Outside its waters, Israel maintains a naval logistics footprint only in Eritrea's Dahlak Archipelago, from which it operates ships and submarines out of old Soviet docks.²² This minor presence may facilitate submarine patrols in the Persian Gulf region, near Iran, enabling a significant land-attack capability.

IRAN

Iranian naval forces, like the other segments of the Iranian military, consist of two branches: the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy (IRGCN), assigned to the Persian Gulf area of responsibility, and the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy (IRIN), the prerevolution entity, assigned to waters outside the Gulf. The IRIN, composed largely of older, larger surface combatants and

marginally newer submarines, has had success in operating far from Iran's shores. Meanwhile, several developments have signaled Iran's evidently growing naval reach, including years of sustained counterpiracy operations around the Horn of Africa; a series of port calls and nascent logistical agreements with Eritrea, Djibouti, and Sudan; a highly publicized 2011 trip to and from the Mediterranean through the Suez Canal for a port call in Latakia, during which Iran signed a key training agreement with Syria; another trip through the Suez with unrealized plans to hold a maritime exercise with Syria in 2012;²³ and a 2016 attempt to enter the Atlantic Ocean by navigating around South Africa.²⁴ These developments provide an object lesson concerning the degree to which naval power projection depends on diplomacy and logistics. Despite repeated efforts to extend its nautical reach, Iranian maritime forces have yet to secure the logistics hub necessary to turn their rhetoric into reality.

Also stymying IRIN's maritime aspirations have been the departure of Egypt's short-lived Islamist president, Mohamed Morsi, in summer 2013, and the Saudi-coalition conflict against Iran-backed forces in Yemen. Whereas IRIN vessels passed through the Suez Canal to the Mediterranean in 2011 and 2012, future attempts could be complicated by Saudi and UAE pressure on Egypt to deny Iranian access. Qatar, embroiled in a diplomatic crisis with the GCC bloc, has run into similar difficulties. While the Suez Canal remains open to Qatari ships, these vessels are finding closed Egyptian ports along the way, and thus facing logistical troubles.²⁵ Whereas IRIN's "flotilla" that reached South Africa last year appeared to embody a new operational reach, it more probably represented the high-water mark of Iranian capabilities. In this attempt—perhaps aimed at scouting an alternative route to the Atlantic should Suez Canal transit be denied—Iran's 44th flotilla, upon reaching Durban, was stranded for months with mechanical problems. The country's other aging ships will surely face a similar prospect.²⁶ The diplomatic hurdles, for their part, have defined the composition of IRIN flotillas. Much like the Soviet navy during the Cold War, an Iranian flotilla typically consists of a frigate and a replenishment ship, since the flotilla cannot consistently count on outside support to accomplish its mission.

To be sure, Saudi diplomacy has worked to deny Iran access throughout the Red Sea littoral. Although news reports may show Iranian ships on port visits, the

Saudis' reach in Sudan, Djibouti, and Eritrea, along with Omani sensitivities to GCC concerns, makes it very unlikely Tehran will have a pier to continuously call its own between the Strait of Hormuz and the Suez Canal. As recently as 2013, Iran was improving military facilities in Port Sudan, but the work stopped when Sudan threw its support behind the Saudi military effort in Yemen's civil war. Iran was ultimately expelled from the port following accusations that it was spreading Shiism through cultural centers in the North African nation and as a result of Saudi pressure on Sudan to do so.²⁷

For Iran, a near-term lack of regional logistics support paired with possibly rising medium-term maritime security budgets—facilitated by sanctions relief—likely heralds a strengthened navy without the logistics network necessary to support operations outside local waters. Given faltering Iranian relations with Egypt following Morsi's fall, the IRIN 2011 and 2012 trips through the Suez Canal appear unlikely to be repeated, making Iran's maritime training agreements with Syria null and void—at least for now. As a result, the IRIN may increase local patrols in the "near abroad" while looking east to Pakistani, Chinese, or Sri Lankan logistics²⁸ networks for longer deployments. In continuing its attempts to project power and influence in the region, Iran will act asymmetrically, using smuggling networks and proxies to threaten rivals while seeking traditional naval alliances with the earlier-mentioned countries to the east. To this end, Iran will attempt to build on a warming relationship with the Pakistani navy and develop a similar relationship with China through exercises and regional cooperation. A Pakistan-Iran 2014 naval exercise near the Strait of Hormuz was followed in 2017 by a China-Iran exercise in the same area.

Impact of Extraregional Navies

The Russian, Chinese, Indian, and Pakistani navies are among the extraregional forces seeking to establish a presence in the Middle East, as outlined below.

RUSSIA

In 2016, NATO demonstrated how difficult power projection could be without ensured supply support when it pressured local states to block Russian naval access in the Mediterranean. Specifically, that October, Russia's sole aircraft carrier, *Admiral Kuznetsov*, was denied access to Malta and to Ceuta, a Spanish city on the North Afri-

can coast,²⁹ en route to supporting military operations in Syria. To counter such developments, Moscow is steadily rebuilding a network of berthing and port agreements around the MENA core, a version of the extensive naval-support infrastructure it developed during the Cold War. Exemplifying Russia's interest in maritime basing was the January 2017 signing of a forty-nine-year lease of port facilities in Tartus, Syria, that includes port-refurbishment plans, including for deeper dredging. Such upgrades will give the Kremlin full-time heavy maintenance and supply support in the Mediterranean. Meanwhile, deepwater anchorage access in Cyprus for the *Kuznetsov*, available to the Russians since 2015, will fill a critical logistics gap until Tartus is properly dredged.³⁰

The Kremlin also negotiated access to two new berths in Alexandria (Egypt), one in Aqaba (Jordan), and one in Fujairah (UAE) as part of its initial plans to buy two to four French-made Mistral-class Landing Helicopter Dock (LHD) amphibious assault ships from France.³¹ Although Paris ultimately backed out of the plans to sell the ships over Russia's incursion into Crimea, instead selling two of them to Egypt, Russia retains access to those piers.³² In addition, the Egyptian Mistrals are being equipped with Russian Ka-52 attack helicopters.³³ According to several high-level GCC sources, the remaining two will be sold to Jordan and the UAE. Altogether, Russia is gaining a valuable medium-term presence in these key MENA core SLOCs.

Moscow has been trying to cultivate closer ties with a host of MENA states in order to secure its naval-projection capabilities throughout the region. Arab-state-based facilities will be critical if Russia is to continue projecting power in the region. Russia is also eyeing Tobruk, Libya, as a potential hub. While berthing agreements will magnify existing Russian naval power-projection capabilities, an established port facility will be required to cement Moscow as a long-term change agent in the region.

CHINA

China's role in the Middle East has expanded in recent years. To this effect, a February 2011 announcement by Chinese military officials represented a historic first for the country: Beijing had redirected the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) frigate *Xuzhou*, previously deployed to the Gulf of Aden for antipiracy operations, to Libya to support the evacuation of 35,000 Chinese nationals fleeing the war there.³⁴ This represented Chi-

na's first major "out of area" naval operation in modern times and, separately, its first use of long-range military transport aircraft—flying from Sudan—for humanitarian purposes.³⁵

The Suez Canal has long been Beijing's primary shipping route for goods bound for Europe. Now, the Chinese, through their ambitious One Belt One Road (OBOR) project to establish a transregional supply chain, are seeking to build an integrated logistics system in MENA that uses rail-to-port throughput. The GCC knows that China views these sea-lanes as critical to OBOR's success. Consequently, the GCC and China have an incentive to work together to keep the lanes free of threats.³⁶ In Israel, China has expressed an interest in investing in a proposed railway connecting the Red Sea with the Mediterranean—known as the "Red-Med" railway—that could serve as an alternative route for cargo normally traveling through the Suez Canal.³⁷ China is presenting other joint China–Middle East projects in the region, such as Kuwait's "Silk City," as part of OBOR as well.³⁸

In seeking to secure China's expansion into the region, PLAN activity is likewise growing. China's new naval base in Djibouti is being developed to sustain these efforts. Simultaneously, China has invested heavily in Djiboutian infrastructure, purchasing a 25 percent stake in the Port of Djibouti and promising to build a \$322 million water pipeline, a \$490 million railway to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and a \$450 million international airport in Bicidley, located south of the capital, Djibouti City. China's Djiboutian base will house 2,400 men while facilitating PLAN counterpiracy, search-and-rescue, and humanitarian-aid and direct-relief missions.³⁹ The base, furthermore, will provide PLAN ships with the maintenance, food, and logistical support essential to a sustained presence in the Horn of Africa. More important still, China's significant investment will turn a new base into a world-class logistics hub.

Similarly, China is spending \$46 billion on Pakistan's Gwadar Port in an attempt to anchor the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor portion of the OBOR initiative. Through this investment, the Chinese will gain a free trade zone and ownership of the harbor, which they plan to turn into a strategically important maritime logistics hub just northeast of the critical Strait of Hormuz.⁴⁰ Beijing, from an Arab perspective, likely registers a net plus because it is one of the few external powers to invest in building first-rate port facilities as opposed to bunkering facilities. This exceptional Chi-

nese role represents a major development in the maritime security picture in the critical BAM supply-chain node. Finally, Beijing's blue-water navy reflects how an emerging actor can use naval forces and bases to achieve impressive power projection.

INDIA

India's "Look West" maritime strategy has been driven primarily by two considerations. The first is that the waterways of the northern Indian Ocean are among the most important in the world, facilitating the export of large volumes of goods, oil, and natural gas from the Arabian Peninsula to East Asia. India is likewise a principal beneficiary of the trade and energy flows through West Asian littorals. The second consideration is that the Middle East is home to some seven million Indians, whose remittances contribute significantly to India's economy.⁴¹

This context explains why India is a major stakeholder in the security of the Strait of Hormuz, Gulf of Oman, and Arabian Sea. For now, with respect to India's naval presence in the MENA core region, Oman serves as a key ally. Naval cooperation between Oman and India, always aimed at safeguarding the waterways separating the two countries, began in the 1990s. Former Indian prime minister Manmohan Singh's historic visit to the sultanate in 2008 spawned a "strategic partnership" and institutionalized biennial naval exercises, known as *Naseem al-Bahr*, between the two states.

As part of bilateral ties, India provides naval training and hydrographic support to Oman, while Omani ships make regular visits to Indian ports. More significant, Oman has helped sustain India's security efforts in the Gulf of Aden by offering berthing and replenishment facilities to naval ships. It also hosts a crucial listening post in the western Indian Ocean aimed at detecting any maritime threat that might close or severely constrain shipping in the Strait of Hormuz or Gulf of Aden. In the larger picture, Oman, with a new superport project at Duqm nearing completion, is poised to transform the maritime geopolitics of the Arabian Sea.⁴²

New Delhi's overall approach to the Middle East has shifted since Narendra Modi's ascension to power in 2014, with the country now more focused on engagement in matters beyond oil. In pursuing stronger regional relationships in the region, India is now looking to secure its long-term geopolitical, security, and commercial interests. India conducts MENA diplo-

macy through naval visits but at the moment has no other basing or bunkering agreements beyond that with Oman. Such a limitation was partially mitigated through a 2016 India-U.S. military-logistics servicing agreement that will facilitate the joint use of air, land, and sea bases for exercises, repair, and resupply worldwide. The landmark deal is a strong sign of tightening military-to-military relations and an attempt to counter China's growing maritime assertiveness. With India being a major stakeholder in the security of the Strait of Hormuz, Gulf of Oman, and Arabian Sea, the Indian Navy will likely rise from being a diplomatic tool to a U.S. and GCC partner in protecting maritime shipping.

PAKISTAN

Pakistan's maritime doctrine focuses solely on the security of the country's close-in SLOCs. Exercises—especially those held in conjunction with PLAN or the Russian navy—are often conducted to rehearse operations to keep sea-lanes open in the Gulf of Oman and Arabian Sea and, more importantly for Pakistan, to contest Indian maritime strategy. Islamabad is focused on its immediate nuclear neighbor, India—which has a submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) capability—and thus Pakistan does not currently espouse a basing and bunkering concept. From the Indian point of view, as discussed earlier, access to Omani ports clearly puts Pakistan's maritime operational area in a box.⁴³

Lessons for the United States

Maritime security in MENA's critical sea lines of communication requires a network of basing and bunkering options for not only regional navies but also those outside the region. The current distribution of these nodes is dedicated to effectively countering Iranian influence, and the entrance of China, Russia, and India complicates the naval horizon.

President Trump has signaled that his administration will pick MENA allies and support them—a principle that should likewise guide U.S. maritime strategy in the region. Washington should consider several initiatives to promote this goal. In particular:

- ***U.S. efforts should mirror Saudi Arabia's financial and diplomatic moves to block Iranian access in the Gulf of Oman and Red Sea, which have successfully constrained Iranian maritime influence.***

Such efforts, conducted in parallel with the Saudis and Emiratis, would further limit Iranian activities, restrict their options, and mitigate risk to the Bab al-Mandab Strait. Moreover, intensifying interdiction efforts against Iran's supply of mines and antiship cruise missiles to the Houthis would hinder the Iran-supported BAM Threat Network (BMTN).⁴⁴ Indeed, in 2015, an Iranian weapons flotilla headed to resupply the Houthi rebels in Yemen was thwarted by the American carrier USS *Theodore Roosevelt* and its escort, the cruiser USS *Normandy*. Clearly, the activities of the IRIN and the BMTN represent a major security concern for Washington and its Arab maritime partners.

- ***The United States, Britain, and the GCC states should deepen maritime cooperation to enhance their combined capability.*** A multimillion-dollar joint Oman-Britain investment in the Duqm Port complex will provide expanded capacity to support new British aircraft carriers.⁴⁵ A joint Oman-U.S. naval logistics facility currently under construction will similarly enhance the maritime security capabilities of both parties. Oman has long been considered a natural future U.S. Navy basing option outside the Strait of Hormuz. Indeed, Vice Adm. John W. Miller noted that Duqm may become an alternative U.S. naval port if the Fifth Fleet, now based in Bahrain, ever needs to move owing to local politics or a deteriorating threat environment in the Persian Gulf. Progress can be perceived in steps similar to those already taken, such as the first U.S. Navy aircraft carrier visit to Duqm, in 2014.⁴⁶ Given the current GCC infighting centered on Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE are likely to encourage Duqm's future use as a GCC maritime base, with the goal of loosening Muscat's strong bilateral maritime-security relations with Tehran.
- ***Washington should work to enhance the ability of the GCC navies to provide security in the Bab al-Mandab and Hormuz Straits—by helping them develop an underway replenishment capability.*** The United States should likewise push for logistical cross-servicing agreements involv-

ing itself, the GCC nations, Egypt, and Britain that would enable coalition members to share the new logistical Emirati- and Saudi-built logistical networks to support regional security operations. Further, the creation of a region-wide supply-chain network for naval maintenance and repair operations could spur leaner and more cost-effective supply of port facilities, further enabling friendly regional navies to protect SLOCs and project power.

- ***Soft power, like that employed by Riyadh to coax Sudan away from Iran, should be used more liberally.*** Permanent maritime access to a region is ensured through long-term leasing of port facilities, or bunkering or access agreements. The GCC, perhaps with U.S. assistance, could move more strategically to block or frustrate access to competitors. In one possible example, the Gulf states could convince Cyprus to restrict Russian use of Limassol, reducing Moscow's access to the Mediterranean.
- ***The United States should lead efforts to establish a combined maritime operations center (MOC) that pulls in surveillance feeds from GCC and Combined Maritime Forces assets throughout the Red Sea region.*** U.S. Naval Forces Central Command used Shared Awareness and Deconfliction (SHADE)—an entity comprising government and industry representatives from 120 nations and built to share best practices in the fight against maritime piracy—to counter pirates off the coast of Somalia. Development of a marine operations center, aligned with an information-sharing organization like SHADE, would improve the effectiveness of smaller regional navies by boosting maritime domain awareness and internavy communication.

The rapidly changing MENA maritime environment is characterized by local, regional, and international actors positioning themselves to secure, or potentially control, the region's vital SLOCs and thereby project power. By helping shape emerging logistics networks, the United States can influence the future maritime landscape and, in the process, advance its own regional interests.

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