

Gulf Security:

The Qatari View

Jan 25, 1994



Brief Analysis

On January 25, 1994, His Excellency Sheikh bin Jassim bin Jabr al-Thani, foreign minister of Qatar, addressed an off the record session of The Washington Institute's Policy Forum on regional security in the Persian Gulf. The following is a rapporteur's summary of his remarks.

Security Arrangements in the Gulf and Regional Cooperation

Persian Gulf security is a very difficult and delicate issue. The primary bone of contention between the Gulf Cooperation Council's (GCC) members is the precise delineation of each nation's respective borders. Resolving these outstanding border issues is the essential prerequisite for meaningful security cooperation among the Gulf countries. When Iraq invaded Kuwait in the summer of 1990, Qatar realized that a large void existed in its security and the security of the region as a whole, due not to a lack of equipment, but a lack of cooperation among the Gulf states.

The Gulf countries' level of armaments ought to be determined by their defensive needs. When one nation expands its military capabilities beyond its defensive requirements, it diminishes regional security as a whole. The driving principle behind regional security for both large and small nations in the Gulf should be mutual cooperation and respect for each nation's sovereignty and culture.

Communication, Not Isolation

Regional security arrangements must include all regional actors, not only U.S. allies. Qatar supports open dialogues with both Iran and Iraq. Indeed, by working with moderate elements of both regimes, we may succeed in normalizing relations and bringing peace to the region. Continuing to seal off these nations with sanctions and embargoes may unwillingly feed the forces of extremism and hate, the very forces that draw these nations into conflict.

Despite international embargoes, Baghdad has, in just three years, already fully rebuilt practically every building, bridge, and road destroyed during the Gulf War. While the infrastructure and military equipment is quickly repaired and replaced, children, the elderly, and the sick suffer heavily under sanctions. While Qatar strongly supports all United Nations resolutions concerning Iraq and is proud of the role its soldiers played in the Gulf War, it also supports the idea of engaging one's adversaries in meaningful negotiations aimed at ending animosities.

Similarly, we believe that the international community must open a dialogue with the Iranian government of President Rafsanjani. Muslims throughout the Arab world resent American interference in what they consider to be Muslim affairs, most visible in the Clinton administration's stated policy of "containing" Iran. While the Rafsanjani government's seeming moderation may be a tactic to gain international acceptance, we must nonetheless accept its overtures at face value and see if we can build on them. The global community has little to lose by opening a dialogue with President Rafsanjani, at least until Iran responds negatively or makes no progress on controlling international terrorism and the violent tendencies of militant Islam as a whole.

The GCC and the Gulf Army

The idea of a GCC-wide force deserves more serious and sustained discussion than it has received up to now. The nations of the GCC need to study and identify the military weaknesses made evident by the Gulf War in order to best determine both the requisite size and the nature of any potential regional force. Specifically, technical study involving regional and international military experts could best determine how to equip, train, and man any potential force. The GCC has already approved a doubling of the existing 10,000-man Peninsula Shield; this is not enough. A GCC force should be at least 50,000 men.

America's Role in Gulf Security

Qatar's security arrangements depend on outside assistance, primarily from the United States. Qatar seeks a full partnership with the United States on security matters and welcomes any amount of military prepositioning the United States may propose. At the same time, the United States must keep us informed of any regional military. The thorny issue of outside forces acting without the informed and wholehearted support of the countries in the region may not only erode support for any further American involvement in the Gulf, but also destabilize the region as a whole.

During tense periods, the United States for its part can benefit from consulting with its regional partners in the Gulf before undertaking military action against its enemies, especially Iraq. While Qatar and its neighbors may lack the sophisticated surveillance capabilities of other countries, it nonetheless understands complex internal Gulf issues, and is willing to provide its information and good offices in helping the United States in making informed policy decisions in the Gulf.

Lifting the Arab Boycott: Qatar Could Lead

Qatar supports the Israel-PLO Gaza-Jericho agreement. It is time to end the bloodshed in the occupied territories and find a way to bring real peace to the Middle East. While lifting the Arab boycott can be an element of that process, it must be done in stages. Qatar would like to present to the United States a phased plan for the eventual lifting of the boycott. At the same time, Qatar does not rule out the possibility of lifting its boycott before other Arab countries. To this end, Qatar, while waiting for a resolution to the Israeli-Syrian impasse has discussed with Israel the potential for cooperation in the energy sector.

This Special Policy Forum Report was prepared by Daniel Seligson. ❖

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