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GULF REGION SECURITY IN THE NEW CENTURY



By

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GULF REGION SECURITY IN THE NEW CENTURY

Over the past two decades, the Gulf region has witnessed several wars and disputes – the eight-year Iran-Iraq War that began in 1980, the Gulf War to liberate Kuwait in 1991 and the liberation of Iraq war, that ended with the removal of the Iraqi regime (Baath party) on 9 April 2003. These three wars and their consequences reflect the need for an effective, permanent security system in the region.



Introduction

While the regional presence of the United States was critical for the security of the Gulf region, due to a security vacuum created by the withdrawal of British forces in 1971, it has been argued that the Soviet Union could also move to fill this vacuum and jeopardize Western access to the region's oil resources¹. Moreover the collapse of the regime of the Shah in Iran, due to the Islamic revolution in 1979², made the vacuum

1 United States Army in World War II. The Middle East Theater.

2 Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment, Iran Nov 2004

wider, thus the concept of 'Gulf security' came visibly to the forefront during the 1980s.

To emphasize the importance of the security of the Gulf we should study the main instability factors. First of all is the oil and natural gas production of the Gulf countries that provides 19 million barrels a day of crude oil, representing about 30 percent of global production, and two-thirds of the worlds total reserve crude, as well as some 35 percent of proven natural gas. In addition, geographically, the Gulf region lies between east and west and is an intersection between Asia, Africa and Europe, allowing for easy distribution of its natural resources and its products.

Another factor is the political situation. Although the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) (*Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates*), has finally united the policy of the Arabs in the West bank of the Gulf, the eastern bank is home to Iran that has its own independent and aggressive policy. It is also highly likely that Iran owns weapons of mass destruction, a nuclear reactor and the capability of producing nuclear bombs. Moreover, in the northern Gulf region lies unstable Iraq (at least for time being) where the presence of multinational force is currently necessary.

Also the economy in the Gulf was heavily impacted after the Gulf wars. The eight years war (1980–88) left Iran's and Iraq's economies in an extremely crippled state (the war destroyed most of the petroleum equipment). Then the second war had a serious impact on Iraq and the GCC countries, especially Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Then finally came the third war with its severe ramifications on Iraq and the GCC.

Due to the large quantity of natural resources, wars and disagreement between the

regional countries, the presence of a super power (United States) was needed to protect the region from any hostile influences and yet this presence draws the criticism of key neighboring states. The aim of this paper is to examine the importance of security in the Gulf to both the regional states and to the industrialized world. The paper will highlight the problems associated with United States military presence in the region and suggest that an “over the horizon” or “off shore” posture by United States forces would better contribute to stability in the Gulf. To foster this stability, the GCC would need to preposition United States military equipment at selected Gulf bases. In essence, an appropriate security posture would see increased participation in Gulf stability by the European countries with the United States serving as an offshore balancer.

Background of the Gulf

The three traditional main players, and antagonists, in the region are Iran, Iraq and the GCC. (Although the GCC countries are not fully integrated, they can be considered as one player). Therefore we should study the players’ locations, politics, economy, population, religion, military and their relation, with the superpower (United States) in order to understand the conflicts and devise the best solutions.

1. Iran

Iran, slightly larger in landmass than Quebec (1.648 million sq km), is located between Iraq and Pakistan and opens onto the Gulf and the Gulf of Oman in the south and the Caspian Sea in the north.

People

More than half of Iran's 71 million people are Persian. Other ethnic groups include Azeri,

Gilaki, Mazandarani, Kurd, and Arab. The major language spoken in Iran is Persian (also known as Farsi). Shi'iah Islam is Iran's national religion, making up 89 percent of the population. Sunni Muslims comprise another 10 percent.

Government

A Shah, or king, ruled Iran from 1501 until 1979, before a yearlong popular revolution led by the Shi'ite clergy resulted in the overthrow of the monarchy and the establishment of an Islamic republic. This change in regime has been dubbed “the Islamic Revolution”. After Ayatollah Khomeini's³ death in 1989, the position of supreme ruler was assumed by another hard-line cleric, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Iran is a currently a theocratic republic. The unelected supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is the head of state. He heads Iran's power structure and dictates all matters of foreign and domestic security. He is commander-in-chief of Iran's armed forces and controls the republic's intelligence and security apparatuses.

The president is Iran's second-highest-ranking official who is elected every four years by popular vote. His power is limited by the constitution, which subordinates the entire executive branch to the supreme leader. Moderate reformist Mohammad Khatami was elected president in 1997 and has since initiated a series of attempts at normalizing relations with the Western world.

Iran's parliament drafts legislation, ratifies international treaties and approves the

³ Sayyed Ruhollah Khomeni (May, 1900 – June, 1989) was an Iranian Shia cleric and the political and spiritual leader of the 1979 revolution that overthrew Shah of Iran. He was considered a spiritual leader to many Shia Muslims and ruled Iran from the Shah's overthrow to his death in 1989.

country's budget. Nevertheless, parliament continues to be held in check by the Council of Guardians, The Guardian Council is a high office within the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran that has the authority to interpret the constitution and to determine if the laws passed by the parliament are in line with the constitution of Iran or not. As such, the Council itself is not a legislative body, but it has veto power over the Iranian parliament. Its members are composed of Islamic clerics and lawyers⁴.

In December 2003, Iran signed a historic accord that gave the United Nations full access to its nuclear facilities. A month prior to its signing, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the United Nations' nuclear regulation arm, passed a resolution deploring the country's 18-year-long cover up of its nuclear energy program.

Economy

Today Iran is the second-largest oil producer⁵ among the member nations of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), and oil is its leading export. Agricultural products make up about 30 percent of Iran's non-oil exports. Japan and China are Iran's leading export partners; Germany and Italy are its leading import partners.

2. Iraq

The country has a history of political oppression and instability that has been exacerbated by its ethnic and religious divisions and regional rivalries. Iraq, slightly smaller than Yukon (437072 sq Km), borders the Gulf, between Iran and Kuwait. Other neighboring

⁴ Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment Iran, internal affairs Nov 2004

⁵ Eia energy information administration US government 2005 <http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/iran.html>
may 16/ 2005

countries include Jordan, Syria and Turkey.

It is strategically located on the Shatt al Arab waterway and is the head of the Gulf. In the south the territories consist mainly of reedy marshes along the Iranian border with large flooded areas; and mountains along the borders with Iran and Turkey.

People

More than 80 percent of the 24.5 million population are Arab; others include Kurdish, Turkoman and Assyrian ethnic groups. The major languages spoken in Iraq include Arabic, Kurdish (official in Kurdish regions), Assyrian, and Armenian. Islam is the predominant national religion with 97 percent, 62 percent are Shi'a Muslim and 35 percent Sunni. Christian and other religions are present.

Government

After the ouster of Saddam Hussein's regime in April 2003, Iraq fell under the American administration that helped establish an Iraqi Governing Council.

Elections on 30 January 2005 resulted in a 275 member Transitional National Assembly based on a nationwide party list. The Assembly will then select a President and two deputies, who will in turn appoint a Prime Minister from among the members of the elected Assembly. The main task of the Assembly is to write a draft constitution before a deadline of 15 August 2005. This draft in turn must be submitted to a national referendum⁶ by 15 October 2005. Assuming the constitution is approved, elections will

⁶ **referendum** or **plebiscite** is a direct vote in which an entire electorate is asked to either accept or reject a particular proposal. This may be the adoption of a new constitution, a constitutional amendment, a law, the recall of an elected official or simply a specific government policy.

be held by 15 December 2005 and a fully constitutional government will be formed by the end of the year⁷. In the main time Coalition (US, UK and others) forces remain in Iraq, helping to restore the degraded infrastructure and facilitating the establishment of a freely elected government, while simultaneously dealing with a robust insurgency. The Coalition Provisional Authority has recently transferred sovereignty to the Iraqi Interim Government.

Economy

The Iraqi economy has suffered from more than 14 years of conflict and economic sanctions since the Iraqi army was defeated in 1991. Because of this, the structure of the Iraqi economy has experienced profound changes. In real terms, the economy has probably shrunk to around less than half of its 1989 potential. The production and export of oil has remained the most important economic activities and Iraq's primary means of conducting trade with the outside world. But it has been constrained by international sanctions.

Iraq's proven oil reserves have dramatically increased in recent years. The country is now estimated to have 2.4 percent of the world's supplies of natural gas and 10.8 percent of the world's oil, second in (oil reserves) only to Saudi Arabia⁸. In 1997, an industry study estimated these oil reserves to be only a small portion of Iraq's real reserves, which in reality could amount to as much as 200 billion barrels.

However Saddam Hussein's regime signed a number of contracts with foreign oil companies (including Russian, French and Turkish companies) that an Iraqi government

⁷ Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment, Gulf State, Iraq, Mar 2005.

⁸ Jane's Information Group 2004

freed from international sanctions may be reluctant to recognize. It is not clear how much of the initial reconstruction can be financed from oil revenue. Iraq's oil infrastructure is badly depleted and much of the proceeds from oil sales will go toward repairing the industry and meeting emergency humanitarian needs. Iraq faces very heavy debt and reparations costs, with foreign debt estimated at around US\$90 billion and reparations of at least US\$160 billion, making it one of the most highly indebted countries in the world⁹.

3. The GCC countries

Geographically, the GCC is located in the Arabian Peninsula bounded by three bodies of water with the Gulf of Aqaba and the Red Sea to the west. The Arabian Sea lies at the south and southeast corner, and in the East coast lies the Arabian Gulf and Gulf of Oman. On the other side of the gulf lies Iran. Along the northern border is Iraq and Jordan. As we consider the GCC as one player (2,673,106 sq Km) we shall merge the descriptions and point out the major differences.

To understand the GCC we must look at some of its objectives. “The GCC charter states that the basic objectives are to effect coordination, integration and inter-connection between member states in all fields, strengthening ties between their peoples, formulating similar regulations in various areas including: economy, finance, trade, customs, tourism, legislation, administration, as well as fostering scientific and technical progress in industry, mining, agriculture, water and animal resources, establishing scientific research centres, setting up joint ventures, and encouraging cooperation of the private sector¹⁰”.

Military cooperation

Based on their conviction about the nature of their security allegiance and that any act of

⁹ Mark Baker Global security 2003

¹⁰ Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf secretariat General 2003

aggression against any one of them is deemed an aggression against all of them, cooperation in the military field has received the attention of the GCC states. Such conviction stems from the facts of geopolitics and faith in one destiny. Moreover, the security challenges in an unstable regional environment, like the Gulf area, imposes on the GCC States the need for the coordination of their policies and the mobilization of all their capabilities.

The GCC States seek to build up their defence forces according to a common conception. In this context, they have unified operational procedures, training, and military curricula. They also endeavour to accomplish compatibility of their military systems. Moreover, the armed forces of the GCC States carried out joint and combined military exercises with the Peninsula Shield Force in 1982, which incorporates the credibility of the GCC will. In addition GCC policy makers decided to link the GCC Member States with a military communication system for early warning.

Security Cooperation

Security cooperation aims at enhancing coordination among the Member States to reach an integrated state within their security institutions that help tracing the criminals and terrorist . In 1987 GCC States approved the Comprehensive Security Strategy as a general framework for security cooperation and coordination.

People

More than 90 percent of the 32 million inhabitants of the region are Arab. Others are a mix of laborers of various nationalities. The major language spoken is Arabic. Islam is the national religion with 97 percent; Christian and other religions make up only three

percent of the population.

GCC countries	Population¹¹
BAHRAIN	650,604
KUWAIT	2,243,080
OMAN	2,477,687
QATAR	597,025
SAUDI ARABIA	22,689,903
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES	3,488,000
TOTAL	32,020,403

Governments

In the GCC different types of governments are evident: These include a Monarchy with Council of Ministers and Consultative Council, a Constitutional Emirate, a Constitutional Monarchy, a Monarchical System and a Federation of Emirates.

Economy

The six member states (GCC) continue to hold global strategic importance since they have crude oil reserves of over 478 billion barrels (84 years for Saudi Arabia, 97 years for Iraq, 113 years for the United Arab Emirates and 127 years for Kuwait)¹², natural gas reserves of about 29,323 billion cubic meters, and a combined annual income of about US\$325 billion. What is more, the Gulf States represent a vital center of trade and transit services, linking several continents with their volume of foreign trade exceeding \$176 billion.

In 2003, GCC countries had estimated net oil exports of 14.5 million barrels per day. Saudi Arabia exported more oil than any other Gulf country, with an estimated

¹¹ Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf secretariat General 2003

¹² US Energy Information Agency 2001

8.40million barrels per day. The United Arab Emirates followed (with 2.4 million barrels per day), then Kuwait (2.0 million barrels per day), Qatar (0.9 million barrels per day), Oman (0.8 million barrels per day) and Bahrain (0.01 million barrels per day).

Comparing military capabilities in the region

The action/reaction race cycle in the Gulf area in particular currently (the GCC proposal to build missile defense system as a reaction to the Iranian ballistic missile Shahab-3) represents the world's largest market for arms. With the decline in defence expenditures in the industrial countries that produce weapons and defence equipment, their focus is now on marketing and exporting products to areas that are still a field for ongoing clashes, regional confrontations or conflicting strategic interest. With these criteria, the Gulf finds itself at the top of the list.

Since the GCC countries became integrated it will be considered as one player, and the other two in the region are Iraq and Iran. The arms race of the three players' in the Gulf represents an important phase in the history of the region. This may lead to new confrontations or may act as an effective deterrent convincing political leaderships of the futility of launching wars.

Defence expenditures comprise more than 10 per cent of the national income (During the period 1999-2002 the UAE ranked second only to China among developing nations with arms transfer agreements worth 9 billion United States Dollar . Saudi Arabia spent 22 billion United States Dollar on its military in 2003. The value of Russia's arms transfer agreements with Iran 400 million United States dollar in 1993-96 and 100 million United States dollar 1999-2000. The main distinguishing factor in this regard is to

note the intention of the political leaderships in the region to maintain and augment their weapons systems - especially given the increasing pressure from the industrial nations that market arms.

Military power in Iran

Since the Islamic revolution in 1979, the pattern of Iran's procurement of military hardware has changed considerably¹³. The former Soviet states, China and North Korea, have become the main import partners, replacing both United Kingdom and the United States. It is estimated that Iran spent US\$7.9 billion on its military forces in 1985, or roughly 7.7 per cent of its GDP. It spent US\$3.128 billion in 2001 (2.7 per cent of GDP) and US\$4.9 billion in 2002¹⁴.

Moreover, Iran has constructed five nuclear reactors and has two power reactors under construction at Bushehr. This has prompted much concern regarding its intention of developing nuclear weapons. The United States and Western countries believe that nuclear energy is redundant in a country with such a large oil supply.

Although Iran ratified the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) in November 1997, the United States believes that Iran has sponsored a chemical and biological program since 1984, including the production of Sarin, mustard (gas), phosgene, and hydrocyanic acid. According to United States government estimates, Iran can produce 1,000 metric tons of these destructive agents per year and may have a stockpile of at least several thousand metric tons of weaponized and bulk agent. Iran strongly denies acquiring or producing chemical weapons¹⁵.

¹³ Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment Iran, procurement Nov 2004

¹⁴ Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment, Iran Nov 2004

Meanwhile there is no evidence to support or deny that Iran owns non-conventional weapons. So we shall examine the conventional weaponry.

Iran is clearly trying to achieve a self-sufficient armaments capability (assembly lines) and is doing quite well in some sectors. Some of the projects currently undertaken by local industries like the Iran Aircraft Manufacturing Industries (IAMI) and the local aviation industry perform upgrades and overhaul programs on a high technical level on the complete fleet of fixed wing aircraft and helicopters.

Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)

Established under a decree issued by Khomeini on May 5, 1979, the IRGC was intended to guard the Revolution and to assist the ruling clerics in the day-to-day enforcement of the government's Islamic codes and morality. The Revolution also needed to rely on a force of its own rather than borrowing the previous regime's tainted units.

By 1986 the IRGC consisted of 350,000 personnel organized in battalion-size units that operated either independently or with units of the regular armed forces. In 1986 the IRGC acquired small naval and air elements. By 1996 the ground and naval forces were reported to number 100,000 and 20,000, respectively¹⁶.

Iranian Army¹⁷

Strength	345000
Main battle tank	1425
Light tank	50
Reconnaissance	130
Infantry Fighting Vehicle (IFV)	340
Armored Personnel Carrier (APC)	780
Gun	255

¹⁵ Global security .org/ wmd /world/Iran

¹⁶ <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/iran/qods/>

¹⁷ Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment, Gulf states 2004

In addition to the army there is the (IRGC). The current manpower totals 120,000. It was originally formed as a counterweight to the regular force and it was initially subordinate to the ruling religious leader. Both the army and the corps are capable of deploying the Iranian medium and long-range ballistic missiles. Moreover, the Basij, also known as the Popular mobilization Army, is a volunteer force aimed at providing the bulk of the land force personnel in the event of mobilization. It consists of about a million men and women at the ready in the event of a national emergency, but they are only equipped with small arms.

Iranian Air Force

The Iranian Air Force consists of 18,000 personal and includes over 260 combat aircraft as well as a small reconnaissance squadron with three to eight RF-4Es. It also operates five C-130 H MB maritime reconnaissance aircraft, one RC-130 and other intelligence/reconnaissance aircraft, together with large numbers of transporter aircraft and helicopters. But the readiness and quality of the forces remains a major issue. The Iranian air force still has many qualitative weaknesses, and it is far from clear that its current rate of modernisation can offset the aging of its Western-supplied aircraft (Due to the US embargo, the operational status of the western equipment deteriorated quickly). The air force also faces serious problems (Western equipment) in terms of sustainment, command and control, as well as training.

In mid -1991, during the 2nd Gulf War, a lot of Iraq Air Force pilots fled to Iran, supplying the IRIAF with a large number of aircraft including Mirage F1BQ, Su-24MK, MiG-29, Su-20s, Su-22M, Su-25, MiG-23s in several configurations and a number of

II- 76s. At least the Mirages and the Su-24MKs gained operational status.

Type ¹⁸	In Service
Strength	18000
Fighter	176
Attack	124
Attack Helicopter	60
Utility Helicopter	~50

Air Defence Systems

Type ¹⁹	Role	Quantity	In Service
I-HAWK	SAM System	150	150
Rapier	Low Altitude SAM	30	30
HQ-7 (FM-80)	Mobile ultra-low-altitude surface-to-air missile system	N/A	
HQ-2J	Low-High-Altitude SAM	60	45
HQ-23/2B	Low-High-Altitude SAM	N/A	
Antey (SA-5)	Medium-Altitude SAM	N/A	
Shahab Thaqeb	Low-Medium SAM	N/A	
57 mm SZ-60	Automatic Anti-Aircraft Gun	50	35
40 mm M1	Automatic Anti-Aircraft Gun	40	20
40 mm L/70	Automatic Anti-Aircraft Gun	100	95
23 mm ZU-23-2	Twin Anti-Aircraft Gun	250	250

Iranian navy

The role of the navy has expanded as Iran recognized the need to defend the region's vital sea-lanes for its commerce since the Gulf is the primary route for all of Iran's oil exports and most of its trade. Therefore the navy has assumed the role of the most important military branch.

Iran's navy has 20,000 men, but they are young and inexperienced, and most of them are riflemen and marines based on Gulf islands. And at higher levels, there is fierce rivalry

¹⁸ Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment, Gulf states Iran, 2004

¹⁹ Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment, Gulf states Iran, 2004

between the IRGC and regular navies for scarce resources. Iran's naval fleet suffered major losses since the beginning of the war with Iraq, when it was made up of American- and British-made destroyers and frigates²⁰.

Type²¹	In Service
Submarine	3
Frigate	3
Corvette	2
Fast Attack Craft - Missile	21

Iranian ballistic missile

Iran's efforts to acquire ballistic missiles began at the start of the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war. Iran's ultimate goal is the establishment of an indigenous Tactical Ballistic Missile (TBM) manufacturing capability. There is no doubt that it has the ability to assemble complete TBMs from imported kits, and can also build certain major structural and mechanical components. These efforts are concentrated at the Chinese-built plant near Semnan, which began building the Oghab artillery rocket in 1987 and later began assembly of the Mushak 120. The North Korean-built plants at Isfahan and Sirjan, which can produce liquid fuels and certain structural components. Another Chinese-built facility near Bandar Abbas produces the Silkworm ASCM, and is at the center of efforts to extend the Silkworm's range to 400 km. Iran's missile test facilities are situated in the North East of the country near Shahroud. Some 100 other facilities produce other kinds of missile components.

²⁰ Globalsecurity, Iran navy March 23, 2005

²¹ Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment, Gulf states Iran, 2004

Type ²²	Role	Quantity
Frog 7	Battlefield Rocket System	250
Oghab	Battlefield Missile	200
Shahin-2	Battlefield Missile	250
Nazeat/Iran 130	Battlefield Missile	500
Fateh A-110	Ballistic Missile	10
Shahab-1 (SS-1c Scud B)	Ballistic Missile	200
Shahab-2 (SS-1c Scud c)	Ballistic Missile	150
Shahab-3 (No-dong 2)	Ballistic Missile	20

Iraqi Arm Forces

The Pre-war Iraqi military equipment was largely destroyed by Coalition forces during combat operations in early 2003 or subsequently looted or scrapped.

Since the military infrastructure has to be rebuilt and reconstruction of the oil equipments will take the priority, the Iraqi forces will represent no threat in the region for the time being, due to the lack of weapons, training and experience.

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Army²³

	Bahrain	Kuwait	Oman	Qatar	Saudi Arabia	United Arab Emirates	Total
Strength	8500	11000	31000	8500	75000	59000	193000
Main battle tank	140	385	150	44	1155	567	2341
Light tank						76	76
Reconnaissance	8	31	50	60	200	194	543
Infantry Fighting Vehicle (IFV)	24	450	175	40	970	496	2655
Armored Personnel Carrier (APC)	420	140	80	160	1850	430	3080
Gun	82	110	90	40	420	172	914

²² Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment, Gulf states Iran, 2004

²³ Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment, Gulf states 2004

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Air Force

	Bahrain	Kuwait	Oman	Qatar	Saudi Arabia	United Arab Emirates	Total
Strength	1500	2500	4100	2100	18000	4000	32200
Fighter	22	20	12	8	193	180	435
Attack	12	20	22	7	139	66	266
Attack Helicopter	30	32	16	12	12	42	144
Utility Helicopter	15	12	16	12	40	32	127

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Navy

	Bahrain	Kuwait	Oman	Qatar	Saudi Arabia	United Arab Emirates	Total
Strength	1000	2700	4200	1800	15000	2500	27200
Submarine							
Frigate	1				7	2	10
Corvette	2		2		4	2	10
Fast Attack Craft - Missile	4	10	4	7	9	8	42

Relations between Iran and GCC

Iran was the hegemonic power in the Middle East and Gulf region under the Shah. Arabs saw in Iran a threat based mostly on a Persian desire to dominate the region. Arabs also perceived Iran's alliance with Israel as an attempt to suppress pan-Arabism. Iran's sovereignty over the three islands of the Lesser and Greater Tunbs and Abu Musa is among the controversial issues which are often being debated by GCC countries.

However, the common goal between Iran and its Arab neighbors was the Organization of Oil-Producing Countries (OPEC), which the Shah used as a tool to increase oil prices and occasionally to pressure Washington to achieve political gains.

Iran increasingly acquired a special status in United States foreign and defense policies due to its Geographic location on the borders of the former Soviet Union.

The Iranian Islamic Revolution changed the entire geopolitical situation in 1979. For many Arab states and United States, the threat of Persian nationalism was replaced by radical Shiism. The attempts by Tehran's new Islamic government to export the revolution to neighboring countries caused many predominantly Sunni Arab states, including GCC members, to worry about the Shiite communities within their own polities.

Ballistic missiles and WMD have been major concern in the Gulf region were they were used extensively in the Iran-Iraq war. Furthermore the procurement of Shehab-3 missiles with 1,300-kilometer range and the nuclear programs increased the sources of threat.

Overall, there is still substantial mistrust on both sides about the other's intentions. Iran is perceived by the GCC states as wanting to cement its regional hegemony, while Iran argues that GCC states have invited a hostile power (the United States) into the region. Some Iranian officials believe that the heavy United States military presence in GCC states constitutes an existential threat to the Islamic government in Tehran. Further, Iranian officials and experts believe that the GCC states are using far superior United States military technology to threaten Iran needlessly. In the Iranian view, there is nothing to deter, since Iran only wants to exercise its natural leadership role in the region; in the Gulf Arab view, Iran seeks dominance²⁴.

Reasons for United States presence in region

While the presence of the Americans in the Gulf has been perceived differently by the

²⁴ Riad Kahwaji "US-ARAB cooperation in the Gilf" Middle East Policy 2004

GCC states, on the one hand, and by Iran on the other, the GCC countries argue that the US serves as an agent of stability and a necessary security umbrella to protect them from Iranian and Iraqi regional policies. But Iran and Iraq (prior to 2003) previously view the American presence as a destabilizing factor.

The Gulf is a critical region for the United States and the West for a number of reasons. The most important United States interests include continued access by the industrialized world to the region's vast resources. In addition, the United States has an interest in preventing, or at least managing, the spread of WMD. It also seeks to ensure the security of friendly regimes. Finally, it seeks to engender democratization and spread human rights to the region.

For the first seven decades of the last century, the United Kingdom extended its security umbrella over the region. With a combination of proxy regimes, troops in well-chosen bases, seconded officers in key places, and offshore naval forces, Britain created, supported, and propped up friendly governments. Nonetheless, the rise of Arab nationalism and a declining economy forced Britain to give ground, first in Aden and then in a wholesale withdrawal from the region in 1971.

The United States filled this vacuum and assumed the role of security manager of the Gulf. From the outset, the United States sought to avoid at that time a costly and unwelcome forward presence in the region, instead relying on regional allies to police the security system and lend its support to forces in the region in the event that they themselves could not. In the 1970s, the United States, therefore, went from a role of

supporting the British to a major player in power responsibility in the Gulf)²⁵.

Early United States policy was predicated upon the Nixon Doctrine, which specified,

(That the United States would furnish military and economic assistance to nations whose freedom was threatened, but would look to these nations to assume primary responsibility for their own defense)²⁶.

Continued regional instability and the real possibility that it could spill over to the Gulf area were constant reminders to the governments of the United States, Western Europe, and Japan of the fragility of their dependence on that region's energy resources. If the United States were to play the role of a peacemaker, any attempt to achieve a peace agreement and regional stability had to consider first and foremost the impact that such an agreement would have on the flow of oil. With that thought in mind and the desire to establish and maintain a regional balance, the United States transfer of arms to the Middle East increased dramatically, with Iran, Israel, and Saudi Arabia the principal recipients. Additionally, arms shipments by France, Great Britain, and other nations also contributed to the Middle East's growing stockpile of weapons.²⁷

However, the Nixon Doctrine did not rule out possible United States intervention. It added that the United States would provide naval and air support if the local countries could not protect themselves against any potential external threat, and, as a last resort, American ground forces would be committed to guarantee preservation of regional stability.

²⁵ Andrew Rathmell "Anew Persian Gulf security System" RAND 2003

²⁶ Richard Nixon July 25 1969

²⁷ The Management of Security Assistance 21st Edition - Jun 2001
Defense Institute of Security Assistance Management

United States used the twin pillars policy²⁸ to assist in the modernization of the armed forces of Iran and Saudi Arabia (considered the pillars) to enable them to provide effectively for their own security and to foster security in the region. Both Saudi Arabia and Iran shared American anxieties regarding future Soviet expansion in the region. The Nixon administration recognized that Iran's growing military power combined with Saudi Arabia's financial assets, enhanced by rising oil prices, constituted a formidable, if indirect, instrument of American policy in the Gulf.

But for United States to depend on Iran and Saudi Arabia it tied its fortunes to regimes of dubious legitimacy. The United States supported Iranian and Saudi autocrats out of strategic expedience and fear of radical alternatives.

This policy ended badly for the United States in Iran. A strategy based on structures of power without regard to internal governance proved to be only as stable as its least stable pillar. Learning that stability demands legitimacy is crucial for building a new Gulf security order. Similarly, United States dependence on local powers to spare the costs and risks of a major presence of its own can be self-deluding if the local powers are prone to fail or change.

The Arab oil embargo, levied as a result of the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, caused a major readjustment of United States policy priorities in the Gulf. United States and Western Europe economic vulnerability to the oil embargo underscored the strategic importance of the region²⁹.

²⁸ Kenneth M, Pollack – Securing the Gulf, Foreign Affairs July 2003

²⁹ Major Randy Bell, USMC “Expansion of American Persian Gulf Policy. By Three Presidents” 1990

The sudden and total collapse of the Shah's regime effectively in 1979 demolished a decade of United States strategy in the Gulf region. Without the Shah, the Nixon Doctrine was invalidated, as Saudi Arabia was not able to assume that role by itself. Additionally, the Carter Administration saw the Iranian revolution, itself, as being a threat to Gulf security.

Iran's new regime, under Ayatollah Khomeini, started antagonizing Arab countries, mostly Iraq, and called for Shi'ite minorities in the Gulf to revolt. Furthermore, on November 4, 1979, Iranian militants stormed the United States Embassy in Tehran and took approximately seventy Americans captive. This terrorist act triggered the most profound crisis of the Carter presidency and began a personal ordeal for Jimmy Carter and the American people that lasted 444 days.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in late December 1979 made a new policy inevitable. The images of a Soviet drive to the Gulf and the Indian Ocean was widely perceived as an initial step to more gainfull targets at a time when United States power and influence were severely impaired by loss of United States influence in the region by the downfall of the Shah and the Iranian revolution.

The new policy was articulated by President Carter, which became known as the Carter Doctrine³⁰. In a definitive statement of American policy to meet the threat posed by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, President Carter stated:

Let our position be absolutely clear: An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.

³⁰ President Jimmy Carter Jan 23, 1980.

The United States took measures to increase military power in the region. Moreover, the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force (RDJTF) was established, access agreements were signed with Oman and talks were initiated with Pakistan on countering the Soviet intervention. An Amphibious Ready Group was sent to the Arabian Sea and AWACS aircraft were deployed to Saudi Arabia to enhance air defense in the Gulf after the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war.

The Reagan Administration saw the Soviet Union as the most significant threat to the Gulf region. Regional and domestic concerns, however, were far more interesting to the Gulf States than external Soviet threats. They had formed the Gulf Cooperation Council in 1981 to enhance prospects for security cooperation and to contend with economic and political concerns of the region. Though the GCC states recognized the need for United States diplomatic support, and for the guarantee of American intervention, they were reluctant to become more overtly aligned with the United States.

In the 1980s, the United States tried to create a balance of power between Iraq and Iran during the war. This included United States intelligence and financial aid to Iraq in its war with Iran, which kept both countries from growing too powerful and thereby provided immediate security to neighboring Arab regimes.

Then the United States moved to a policy that included strengthening its relations with the regional states and improving the RDJTF. Saudi Arabia appeared to be regarded as the primary instrument of United States policy in the Gulf as the result of the new policy. Additional arms sales, including five AWACS aircraft, to the Saudis reflected the change. Saudi policy preferred to keep the United States forces over the horizon or

offshore so as not to cause antagonism with other Gulf states and possible disruptions within its own traditional society. Joint training and possible stockpiling of United States equipment were acceptable, but basing the RDJTF on Saudi soil was not.

Indeed, the first major American military deployment in the area occurred in 1987, during the Tanker War, by reflagging the Kuwaiti tankers. In 1990, Iraq accused Kuwait of over-producing its oil, thus causing low oil prices and stealing oil from the Rumailia Oil Field. Using this as an excuse, Iraq invaded Kuwait and thus gained control of about one-fifth of the world's oil supply. On November 29, 1990, the United Nations Security Council approved the use of force if Iraq refused to remove its troops from Kuwait.

Therefore, in August 1990, the United States strategy of relying on Iraq and the Gulf states came to a spectacular end when the former attacked the latter. Lacking confidence in the capability of the GCC states to contribute to their own defense, the United States shifted from reliance on regional friends to an even more muscular forward presence. This involved a large-scale build up of United States forces in the region, as well as basing, pre-positioning, and implementing exercises to support reinforcement in crises. This forward presence was accompanied by even larger arms sales to the GCC states in an attempt to provide some pro- United States indigenous military capability to complement United States forces.

The Gulf became the central theater in United States strategic thinking and force planning. From then on, the requirement to conduct large-scale expeditionary warfare in the Gulf, spurred on by both Iran and Iraq's use of asymmetric military strategies, has accounted for a large share of total United States military force-structure, and investment

costs.

In September 2003, the United States shifted its presence in the Gulf by pulling out forces from Saudi Arabia and intensifying its presence in Qatar's Al-Udeid base and raising Kuwait to the level of strategic ally. This underscores that the United States intends to maintain its presence in the region, however it might be deployed, as it considers this the main mechanism for the protection of its strategic interests there. It would be difficult for the United States to return to its previous policy of finding a regional policeman or ally to carry out its work.

The United States and GCC countries considers Iran a possible threat to Gulf waters – whether via missiles, mines, warships or submarines – capable of wreaking havoc in world energy markets The United States also fears that Iran might own nuclear weapons (WMD) that could directly threaten its interests.

It is clear then that the United States intends to remain in the Gulf area indefinitely, and this is certainly supported by its record of interference in the region three times during the past 16 years – either indirectly, as during the Iran-Iraq War, or directly, as in the Gulf and Iraq wars.

The problems with United States presence

The three main Gulf security problems that remain after the liberation of Iraq are Iran's nuclear weapons program, terrorism, and potential internal unrest in the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). If Iraq's power after reconstruction becomes strong enough to balance and contain Iran, it will inevitably be capable of overrunning Kuwait

and Saudi Arabia. This was the problem the region faced at the end of the Iran-Iraq War at the end of the 1980s.

Like postwar Germany and Japan, post-Saddam Iraq will almost certainly be forbidden from developing weapons of mass destruction (WMD) ever again. But it will still have to find some way of protecting itself from a real threat like Iran. If Iraq is not going to be allowed to possess WMD, then it will have to obtain some other credible external security guarantee or maintain substantial -- and threatening -- conventional military capabilities.

As for Iran, its nuclear program has gone into overdrive, and unless stopped -- from inside or outside it is likely to produce nuclear weapons soon. "In February 2004, it was revealed that Highly Enriched Uranium (HEU) traces detected by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors 12 months previously - in at least two different sites - were pure enough to produce nuclear weaponry. In March 2004, the revelation, combined with IAEA evidence that nuclear activities had been pursued on Iranian military bases, led to a first-ever acknowledgment by Defence Minister Ali Shamkhani that the Iranian military had produced centrifuges to enrich uranium"³¹.

Iran's population is three times the size of Iraq's, its landmass is four times the size, its terrain is difficult and would make military operations a logistical nightmare.

Its population has generally rallied around the regime in the face of foreign threats especially after the Iraqi occupation by United States invading Iran to eliminate its WMD/nuclear capability would be such a major undertaking that the option is essentially

³¹ Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment - The Gulf States Nov 2004

unthinkable in all but the most extraordinary circumstances.

Iran is likely to acquire nuclear weapons while its hard-line clerics are still in power, and so the United States must be prepared for this contingency. But the very actions that might be indicated in such circumstances continued diplomatic and economic pressure, an aggressive military posture on Iran's borders (Iraq, Afghanistan), even threats to use force could easily backfire in the maelstrom of Iranian domestic politics in ways that undermine or forestall the prospects for a "velvet revolution" in Tehran. Iran's hard-liners maintain power in part by stoking popular fears that the United States seeks to rule the country and control its policies, and so aggressive containment or active counterproliferation measures could play right into their hands³².

Iran appears to want nuclear weapons principally to deter an American attack. Once it gets them, however, its strategic calculus might change and it might be emboldened to pursue a more aggressive foreign policy. Iran's armed forces are still too weak to contemplate either a ground advance through Iraq into the Arabian Peninsula or an amphibious operation across the Gulf, and they will remain so for a while. So the risk is not so much conventional military invasion as attempts to shut down tanker traffic in the Strait of Hormuz as a method of blackmail or fomenting insurrections in neighboring countries.

The other major security problems are terrorism and internal instability in the states of the GCC. This instability is ultimately fueled by the United States presence in the Gulf region, and the political, economic, and social stagnation of the local Arab states. It is

³² Kenneth M. Pollack, *Securing the Gulf*, *Foreign Affairs*, July 2003

true that American policies with respect to the Palestinian issue are a matter of great popular concern. United States policies contributed to that discontent and anger through its support for Israel and for autocratic Arab regimes.

In most GCC countries, the deeper cause of political discontent is the socioeconomic malaise that grips the region. At a more philosophical level, discontent reflects the Arab and Islamic world's struggle to adapt to modernity and the divisive debate within Islam about its response to the modern world. Al-Qaida is the most extreme expression of this discontent, encompassing a minority of Muslims.

Moreover, the terrorist attacks of 9/11 (2001), the USS Cole attack (2000), and the US embassy bombings in Africa (1998) were all attributed to bin Laden's Al-Qaida terrorists who were attempting to remove US influence from the Middle East so that they might then conquer the corrupt regimes of the region and replace them with Islamic government. Their rationale for wanting to replace certain Arab leaders ties back to rejection by those very regimes that had supported them during their time as Mujahedeen warriors (Afghan Freedom Fighters) in Afghanistan. After beating the Soviets, the core al-Qaida veterans expected to be welcomed home as heroes; but instead, Middle Eastern governments became suspicious of their religious fervor. Many Freedom Fighters feared trials and reprisals back home, which prompted some of them to stay in Afghanistan. Several of their colleagues were convicted in military trials in their own countries for alleged plots against their home governments.³³

Al-Qaida and bin Laden's aim are to continue fighting until Islamic rule is established in

³³ <http://archives.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/meast/12/19/arabs.in.afghanistan>

all Arab and Islamic countries, which they want to unite into one nation. On their way to establishing this new “caliphate”³⁴, they would end all foreign presence in the Gulf region, where United States military bases are located and would get rid of all secular and Arab regimes. Above all, they want to defeat the United States, perceived as the source of immorality and anti-Muslim policies throughout the world.³⁵

Many Islamic countries and the GCC have begun to perceive the United States as a superpower that wants to change and create a new world order according to its own views. This perception might lead to the fall of friendly regimes in the Islamic world and jeopardize energy resources for the Western world³⁶.

Since September 2001, it is apparent that the ballooning costs of the United States posture in the Gulf are now accompanied by mortal dangers. The United States is relying on an increasingly costly and risky direct military strategy combined with support for and reliance on the weakest of the three local powers. Even if the United States removes one unfriendly regime (Saddam’s), it faces another (Iran), which is also flirting with nuclear weapons. This is hardly a comforting situation. Yet the United States does not have the option of withdrawing from the Gulf as the British did 30 years ago. Therefore, it is an important U.S. interest to support a more favorable, affordable, and durable Gulf security system, one that takes advantage of and promotes political change rather than resists it³⁷.

Despite the benefits the United States and the GCC states derive from their longstanding bilateral arrangements, this system is now lacking in some significant ways. The system

³⁴ Caliph: the spiritual head and temporal ruler of the Islamic state.

³⁵ <http://news.ncmonline.com/news/>

³⁶ Rob de Wijk “The limits of military power” the Washington Quarterly 25 no 1

³⁷ Andrew Rathmell “A new Persian Gulf security System” RAND 2003

is not as stable as the United States would want. Saudi Arabia, in response to domestic political pressures, ended America's troop presence and limited access to its Air Bases in 2002, a move that resulted in the United States seeking multiple alternative basing agreements in order to reduce reliance on any particular Gulf state. In general, the United States needs to be more concerned about domestic factors within Gulf States becoming a stronger determinant in the shaping of future collective security arrangements. Public dissatisfaction with the United States is increasing, spurred on by the Iraq War and its aftermath. United States support for Israel, and the alleged propping up of authoritarian Gulf regimes makes anti-Americanism at an unprecedented level. Moreover, as the threat from Iraq recedes, the GCC states may, over time, reconsider their heavy reliance on the United States for security.

The United States-Gulf-state alliances need to adapt to changing security relations in the Gulf. Although GCC members have differing views about getting too engaged with Iraq and Iran, relations are moving from outright hostility to peaceful adjustment. There is now a hesitant engagement with both Iraq and Iran³⁸. Nevertheless, Iraq and Iran lack any formal mechanism to engage with the GCC or its individual member states on a regular basis.

There are no mechanisms for bringing Iraq into the fold of GCC security partnerships. Joining Iraq into the GCC can be important for helping Iraq make the transition from a state with hegemonic ambitions in the Gulf to a status quo power. This is especially important to Kuwait, given the long-unresolved territorial issues between the two sides.

³⁸ Judith S. Yaphe, "Arabian Gulf Impressions," Institute for National Strategic Studies, January 12, 2004.

Currently there is no consensus within the GCC monarchies for offering membership in the GCC to an embryonic, democratic Iraq. Reasons for opposing membership vary from one state to another. Some oppose opening the Sunni-dominated organization to a Shiite-dominated Iraq. Others fear expanding the GCC just when cooperation among current members is taking off. It is uncertain how immutable these views may be, especially once Iraq has a stable government.

The strong reliance on the United States for security has become an impediment to the development of long-term strategic planning by the GCC, despite continued American urging that the regional states need to enhance their security arrangements. Only recently have we seen the GCC states resolve some of their differences and increase bilateral security interactions. The Twenty-fourth summit of the GCC, held in December 2003, displayed a new era of cooperation, particularly in the area of counter terrorism. GCC members agreed to undertake efforts to strengthen security coordination, information and intelligence exchanges. The summit also reached an accord to implement significant educational reforms, including the removal of radical rhetoric from academic textbooks³⁹.

It should be pointed out that while some in the Gulf do not feel their security situation has changed significantly, five events would help define a dramatic onset of a new security order: a just and comprehensive settlement of the Israeli- Palestinian (West Bank, Gaza Strip) and the Israel-Syria conflicts (Golan Heights); the elimination of Israel's "unsafe guarded" nuclear program; Iranian compliance with its nonproliferation agreements and improved relations with the United States; Iran's return of the three disputed islands to the United Arab Emirates ; and the establishment in Iraq

³⁹ Eurasia Security Watch, No. 12, December 31, 2003.

of a stable, moderate regime.

The best way for the United States to address the rise of terrorism and the threat of internal instability in Saudi Arabia and the other GCC states would be to reduce its military presence in the region to the absolute minimum, or even to withdraw entirely.

The presence of American troops fuels the terrorists' propaganda claims that the United States seeks to prop up the hated local tyrants and control the Middle East. And it is a source of humiliation and resentment for pretty much all locals -- a constant reminder that the descendants of the great Islamic empires can no longer defend themselves and must answer to heretic powers. So pulling back would diminish the internal pressure on the Gulf regimes and give them the political space they need to enact the painful reforms that are vital to their long-term stability. But such a withdrawal, in turn, would be detrimental from the perspective of deterring and containing Iran.

How can the security system be improved?

To address the above problems, a new security order should be created in the Gulf by building additional methods to the current security system, with a greater emphasis on multilateral cooperation. United States-Gulf-state bilateral cooperation and the GCC would serve as the base brick. But these relations should be strengthened in the new order for tighter coalition-based military integration, fully institutionalized by the time the United States moves to an over-the-horizon posture (offshore). With a smaller United States troop presence, regular command-post exercises and military exercises using pre-positioned equipment will become more important to Gulf security. The GCC should enhance efforts for joint operations through a better command, control and communications infrastructure and facilitate greater information and intelligence sharing

for early warning of potential threats. This enhanced capability should also be leveraged to address a broad range of transition threats. Enhancement of the GCC collective security system will aid the interoperability of individual Gulf military forces with those of the United States.

The next brick should comprise a formal arrangement between the GCC and Iraq that someday might lead to the incorporation of Iraq into the GCC, perhaps akin to NATO's Partnership for Peace for the states of the former Warsaw Pact and Soviet Union. This GCC-plus-one layer is an important innovation as it could provide a mechanism for engaging Iraq as a prospective equal in the GCC, thereby enmeshing the new Iraqi government in a stable collective defense regime. At the same time, the special relationships already forged between the GCC and Yemen, Egypt and Jordan should continue to the degree that these states contribute to the security and stability of the Gulf. Involving extra-regional states with a stake in a peaceful and stable Gulf – most notably the United States, Europe, South Asia and China – will be important for obtaining long-term stability. Their geographical proximity to the Gulf, growing dependence on Gulf oil, importance to counter terrorism and nonproliferation, and abiding proclivities to be a partner with the United States on global problems all point to the need for including them in a stable structure in that subregion⁴⁰.

The Europeans can be particularly instrumental in fostering multilateral cooperation as a new brick to the Gulf security system. Such cooperation could cover a broad range of initiatives, ranging from the military to the economic and diplomatic. On the ground, these could include patrolling the Gulf as part of the Global War on Terrorism and the

⁴⁰ Michael Yaffe “The Gulf and a new Middle East Security System” Middle East Policy 2004

Proliferation Security Initiative, nation-building assistance to Iraq, outreach to Iran, and promotion of free trade and investment.

The Conclusion

The security of the Gulf region is the top priority for the Gulf countries, Europe and the United States. While a balance of military power among Iran, new Iraq, and the GCC is highly desirable, an unstable regional balance of power is likely to force the United States to remain militarily active and could accelerate Iran's pursuit of weapons of mass destruction. Iran is an important player in the Gulf and because United States has committed itself to the security of its Arab allies, it is also important that these two countries (Iran and the United States) do not remain adversarial.

The Arabs Gulf countries may face pressure to decrease ties to the United States, particularly to the United States military. The United States presence may grow unpopular in conjunction with other United States policies that are viewed with disfavor in the region (particularly with regard to the Arab-Israeli conflict, establishing a WMD-free zone and the military activity in Iraq), United States support for Gulf regimes that are increasingly at odds with their populations, social crises that lead to criticism of Westernizing influences, or other, unanticipated problems like terrorism.

With the replacement of the Saddam regime with a stable and domestically oriented government, the United States and Europe need to work together to construct a more durable Gulf security system based on a combination of balance and human progress, promoting good governance, including free market reforms; institution building; modernized education; an active media; the rule of law; and, brick by brick, democracy

together with reducing of United States forces in the Gulf (over the horizon, off shore).

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