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## CHAPTER 6: GULF SECURITY AND GULF SELF-DEFENSE

It is frequently overlooked that external concerns over the security of the Arabian Peninsula are matched and even exceeded by the concerns of the governments of that area. When British security responsibility was paramount, only a few short decades ago, the entities of the Peninsula were not in a position to articulate their concern or preferred responses to security problems, let alone assume the military responsibility to defend themselves. But in the 1980s, there has been a far more fundamental change in security responsibility than the mere passing of the torch from London to Washington. In the interim, modern nation-states – or, in some cases, city-states – have emerged in Arabia. Just as they have taken charge of all domestic matters, they naturally claim responsibility for security affairs that affect their well-being and survival. It is this point that often seems difficult to grasp in Washington. What these states require from Washington is flexible cooperation in military assistance, not a return to a protected status.

There is no doubt that the military defense capabilities of all six GCC states is severely limited, even by comparison to their neighbors in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia and Oman, and the other amirates to a lesser extent, have all engaged in extensive, expensive, and sophisticated military modernization programs in the last decade or two. Once massive hardware purchases have been delivered and absorbed and indigenous personnel trained to operate sophisticated weaponry and support equipment, the GCC will be in a good position to defend itself against a wide variety of threats. Nevertheless, it is inescapable that the GCC will never have the manpower to allow it to face a frontal assault by Iraq or Iran, nor is it likely to achieve parity with Israel in either arms or skilled personnel. Countering a direct Soviet thrust is even farther beyond the means of these states.

All that this means, however, is that the GCC will always find itself dependent on external defense assistance – the same as every other country or group of countries in the world. At the same time, the threats mentioned above are not the only ones that the GCC faces, nor are they the most likely ones. The GCC also faces potential threats from spillover from the Iran-Iraq war, political pressures and low-level hostilities from regional actors designed to force policy changes, and even internal opposition (perhaps assisted by external actors). The GCC states have made considerable progress in acquiring the capability to deal with these types of potential threats.

Even more importantly, they have pursued a multi-layered strategy for self-defense, of which military strength is only one aspect. They have used oil income and quiet moral suasion to encourage moderation among regional actors and to seek consensus in pan-Arab affairs. They have sought to reconcile enemies and to contain hostilities, as in GCC peace-making efforts between

Oman and South Yemen and between Iran and Iraq. The challenges of oil wealth have been met by extensive policies of income distribution and evolving, albeit often reluctant, adaptation to necessary social and political transformation. The attitude taken by these state to these internal challenges and the progress made in adapting to them form the real security problem. Chances are that preparations made in non-military fields will be more important to the continued survival and security of the Arab Gulf states than the prowess and performance of their armed forces.

## THE EMERGENCE OF ARABIAN NATION-STATES

In the earlier days of British concern for the security of the Gulf, primary responsibility fell to the British by default. Iraq lay within the outlying provinces of the Ottoman Empire. The government in Qajar Iran exercised little control over its hinterland. Sole political authority along the Arabian littoral was embodied in the tribe. As a consequence, there was no alternative for the British but to provide their own security for their own interests and personnel in the area, as well as to gradually establish a pax Britannica over the Gulf.

But the increasing importance of the Gulf's security in the last half century has been paralleled by the emergence of national consciousness in the region and the creation of political institutions to represent and safeguard that consciousness. Because of its traditionalism and isolation, this consciousness emerged in the Arabian Peninsula later than elsewhere in the Middle East and the Gulf. At the same time, because of the newness of Arab Gulf nationalism and the very recent development of national political systems there, political change has been most rapid and striking in these states.

Until quite recently the tribe constituted the central political unit in most of the Arabian Peninsula; the traditional states of Yemen and Oman and areas under foreign domination formed notable exceptions. Traditionally, most daily concerns of the individual revolved around the tribe: family relationships, social standing and definition, economic welfare, the regime of daily life, and even physical well-being all were determined within the tribal framework. Islam constituted a broader allegiance but one that supplemented the corporate identity of the tribe rather than competed with it. Tribal confederations might contain larger political aggregations, but they were far more diffuse and passive, generally serving as temporary instruments for seeking protection from rival tribes or countering serious threats to the confederation as a whole.

Leadership of the tribe was vested in the *shaykh*. Far from serving as a "head of state," the *shaykh* was more of a manager or chairman, whose authority and powers generally were severely restricted. Only in a few tribes did he exercise real daily authority. Furthermore, while tribal territories were relatively clearly defined, the responsibility of the *shaykh* was limited to people and did not include territory. It can be seen that political power in the tribal system was clearly decentralized. As a consequence, the system proved to be exceedingly vulnerable to both the encroachment of European powers and the emerging ideology of nationalism. By the mid-point of the twentieth century, the supremacy of tribal politics had metamorphosed into states whose tribal origins became increasingly less important.

The most obvious exceptions to this generalization of a purely tribal political environment were the centuries-old traditional states in Yemen and Oman. In both countries, the presence of smaller Islamic sects had resulted in loosely organized states with elected *imams* exercising limited authority over the tribes. The physical isolation of the countries, sectarian uniqueness, and historical continuity also contributed to the sense of national community. Even though clearly defined "nations" existed, the traditional form of the state was unable to survive new challenges.

In Oman, the imamate degenerated into dynastic rule in the late eighteenth century and the country's capital relocated to the coast. The oft-repeated pattern of rebirth of a new imamate was interrupted by British support for the coastal rulers, who had been restyled *sultans*, and repeated attempts in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to recreate the imamate failed. Nevertheless, the continued survival of the newer sultanate did not seem assured until a palace *coup d'État* in 1970 replaced a traditionalist, reactionary ruler with his modernization-oriented son. Yemen's transformation has not been so complicated but perhaps less complete. By the early twentieth century, the tradition of elected *imams* had been superseded by the emergence of a dynasty and Yemen's traditionalist rulers also attempted to keep out the modern world. Despite a secular revolution in 1962 led by army officers, the authority of the republican government in Yemen is exceedingly fragile.

The creation of modern Saudi Arabia resulted from a more "orthodox" expansion of tribal power on to the national level. At various times in the past, energetic shaykhly families were able to establish their control over neighboring tribes and extensive areas. One such example was that of the central Arabian family of Al Sa'ud, who in the eighteenth century formed an alliance with an Islamic reformer named Muhammad 'Abd al-Wahhab. As a result of this fusion of political/military strength with moral leadership, Sa'udi power extended far beyond central Arabia on several occasions.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, 'Abd al-'Aziz Al Sa'ud (better known in the West as Ibn Sa'ud) regained control of the ancestral capital of Riyadh and gradually extended Saudi authority over central Arabia, east toward the Gulf, north through Jabal Shammar, west across the Hijaz, and south into 'Asir. By the early 1930s, the new state had filled its present boundaries – consisting of all of the Arabian Peninsula except those territories under British domination and the formidable mountains of Yemen – and adopted the name of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Nevertheless, additional decades passed before a rational administrative structure was implemented and the foundations of a socioeconomic infrastructure laid. It took the debacle of King Sa'ud's reign (r. 1953-1964) to reorganize the state and place its finances on a sounder footing. Finally, the permanency of the Saudi state seemed to be assured only with its weathering the challenge posed by the Arab radicals of the 1950s and 1960s: Saudi Arabia emerged after the June 1967 Arab-Israeli war not only intact but with a growing involvement and weight in inter-Arab affairs.

Elsewhere, the key impetus in state formation was provided by the British. They had encouraged the "Arab Revolt" during World War I and recognized the Hashimi state in Hijaz. Aden was seized in 1839 and transformed into a crown colony surrounded by a hinterland of British protectorates. The British also established political control over the Arab shores of the Gulf, entering into relations with certain *shaykhs* whom they endowed with recognition as the rulers of defined

territories and populations. The British-created domains of these *shaykhs* eventually evolved into statehood.

Kuwait and Bahrain were the first of these smaller states to emerge, in large part because they were the first countries in the Peninsula to enjoy substantial oil revenues. The roots of modern Kuwait date back to the consolidation of power by the Al Sabah family in the eighteenth century and the development of Kuwait as a seafaring town and entrepot for its Bedouin hinterland. The creation of an urban center with a relatively diversified economic base provided the Al Sabah with the nucleus of support necessary to establish a common political consciousness beyond the tribe. The influx of oil revenues after World War II dramatically transformed a small, impoverished town into a modern city and welfare state. As a consequence, Kuwait received complete independence in 1961 – the first of the shaykhdoms to acquire this status.

The background of Bahrain is similar to Kuwait, with a dominant tribal family – the Al Khalifa – also emerging in the eighteenth century. Agriculture, even more than commerce, was instrumental in creating a sedentary population and feeling of Bahraini identity. Oil production had begun even earlier than in Kuwait. But Bahrain's progress to statehood was hampered by two factors: the meagerness of its oil supplies and its small population size. As a consequence, Bahrain did not receive independence until 1971.

The emergence of states farther down the coast was delayed even more. Here the British influence was far more instrumental in the creation of "national" identities. Certain *shaykhs* were recognized as leaders and held responsible for the actions of their tribesmen: if members of their tribe attacked British vessels, then the *shaykh* and his settlement were open to reprisals. On the other side of the coin, Britain later gave subsidies to compliant *shaykhs* to ensure their cooperation, providing income which could be utilized to enhance their power. Eventually, this British policy resulted not only in the strengthening of the *shaykh's* control over his and allied tribes but also in the association of the *shaykh's* political authority with a delineated territory as well as people. Thus the basis for a territorial state was established. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, Britain entered into treaty relations with the *shaykhs* of Qatar, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, 'Ajman, Umm al-Qaywayn, Ra's al-Khayma, al-Fujayra, and Kalba (later withdrawn).

The continued existence of separate political entities in these very small settlements was due only to the treaty relationships of their *shaykhs* with the British. This situation not only protected them from absorption into the emerging Saudi state but also prevented their amalgamation into one entity under a strong leader. As a consequence, when it came time for Britain to withdraw, there remained the nagging question of what to do with these nine shaykhdoms, barely describable as "mini-states." Beginning in 1968, the nine rulers entered into federation talks but these negotiations foundered over the problem of unequal size between Bahrain and Qatar, on the one hand, and the seven tinier "Trucial States," on the other. Eventually, Bahrain and Qatar opted to go their separate ways with the other seven joining in the new United Arab Emirates (UAE).

With independence came full responsibility for both internal and external affairs, including national defense. In the few decades since they began receiving oil income, all of these states have created extensive administrative structures to carry out the vastly expanded functions expected of their governments, including most of the social welfare services found in the West. But the ability of these states to provide properly for their own defense is hampered by their small size and power potential, the short time in which they have begun to develop appropriate and viable military forces,

their being surrounded by larger and often hostile neighbors, and the growing spotlight placed on them due to their abundant supplies of the scarce resource of oil. The development of adequate defense forces provides the Peninsula states with one of their most difficult tasks.

The evolution of Arabian military establishments has been of even more recent vintage than most other economic and political changes evident in the Peninsula. Rulers remained dependent on traditional military forces and organization until quite recently and the transition to modern defense structures and equipment is still in a transitional stage. Furthermore, achievement of military potential of these states is limited by small populations, limited resources, and low level of economic development. The result is pervading weakness, even when compared to nearly all the Peninsular states' neighbors.

Just as central government was hardly a standard feature of the traditional Arabian scene, neither was the standing army. The power of a tribe was determined principally by the combined personal firepower of its tribesmen, who left their herds or crops whenever necessary to provide the defense for tribal territory, property, and honor. Major *shaykhs* employed retainers, drawn from their own and allied tribes, who were responsible for such functions as tax collection and guarding prisoners.

As *shaykhs* in treaty relationship with the British evolved into Rulers, the numbers of retainers increased while their functions remained essentially the same. The situation was similar for the imams of Yemen and Oman, who relied on larger groups of retainers in the imam's office, as well as in the offices of the imam's representatives and governors in the hinterland, and semi-permanent levies drawn from tribes which were particularly well known as supporters of the imamate and the imam. Only well into the twentieth century did the Yemeni, Omani, Hijazi and Saudi leaders begin to develop small, untrained standing armies. But it took until the 1950s and especially the 1960s for permanent military establishments – reasonably adequately trained and equipped, and dedicated to national defense rather than service as praetorian guards and minor functionaries – to take root.

## SAUDI MILITARY CAPABILITIES

Of all the armed forces of the Arabian Peninsula, that of Saudi Arabia is the most formidable, both in terms of size of personnel and extent and sophistication of its arms and equipment (see [Table 6.1](#)). With more than 51,000 men under arms (not including the National Guard) and defense expenditures of over \$22b, the kingdom is easily the dominant force within the GCC. Oman's armed forces, perhaps the most competent and certainly the most battle-hardened, are estimated at only 21,500. While the UAE ranks second in total numbers at 43,000, its armed forces were merged from a number of separate forces only a few years ago and some, particularly Dubai's, remain relatively autonomous. In addition, while Oman ranks second in defense expenditures at \$1.960b, that figure

amounts to about 9% of the Saudi total. At the same time, however, it should be kept in mind that the size of these armed forces pale beside those of their other Middle Eastern neighbors.<sup>1</sup>

Like the other GCC states (except for Oman), the development of Saudi Arabia's military capability has been quite recent and the enormous defense expenditures over the past decade will require considerable time to digest. Even the organizational structure is relatively new, and there exists wide disparity in the capability of the various components of the armed forces. Furthermore, the kingdom faces serious difficulties in recruiting and retaining competent personnel. For the foreseeable future, the Saudi armed forces will be heavily dependent on foreign assistance in training and the operation of equipment.<sup>2</sup>

Formally, the High Defense Council determines policy, although in practice the King's decisions are final. The council was established in 1961 with membership consisting of the King, the Ministers of Defense and Aviation, Finance and National Economy, Communications, and Foreign Affairs, and the Chief of Staff. The Minister of Defense and Aviation (the office has been occupied by Prince Sultan b. 'Abd al-'Aziz, second in line for the throne, since 1962) controls the army, air force and navy, while the National Guard (commanded by Crown Prince 'Abd Allah b. 'Abd al-'Aziz since 1963) theoretically falls under the control of the Minister of the Interior, along with the Frontier Force, the Coast Guard, and internal security forces. In practice, however, the National Guard is answerable only to Prince 'Abd Allah and, through him, the King.

In the early days of his rule, 'Abd al-'Aziz relied on three types of armed forces: regulars, generally drawn from the towns and used to staff garrisons; bedouin, drawn from tribal allies of the Al Sa'ud; and the Ikhwan.<sup>3</sup> The Ikhwan movement resulted from 'Abd al-'Aziz's encouragement of Islamic revival – with emphasis on Unitarian (Wahhabi) tenets – and settlement among the bedouin. By 1920, there were an estimated 150,000 fighting men in more than 200 settlements. They provided the Al Sa'ud with "a striking force that could mobilize in hours or days, depending on the size of the raid, a force that could travel great distances on almost uninterrupted Marches, endure in battle on the most meager of diets, and plunge into the battle seeking death and paradise.

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<sup>1</sup>For example, Iraq has 642,500 men under arms (1 million if the Popular Army is included) while Iran totals 555,000 regular troops and an additional 200-250,000 paramilitary forces. Of course, these figures represent countries at war, but even Israel maintains a standing army of 141,000, with an additional 500,000 reservists. These figures are from *The Military Balance, 1984-1985* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1984), pp. 59-73.

<sup>2</sup>On the Saudi armed forces, see J.C. Hurewitz, *Middle East Politics: The Military Dimension* (New York: Praeger, for the Council on Foreign Relations, 1969), esp. Ch. 13, "Saudi Arabia: The Peninsula Under Najdi Rule," pp. 241-252; John Keegan, *World Armies* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Detroit: Gale Research, 1983), pp. 506-513; Anthony H. Cordesman, *The Gulf and the Search for Strategic Stability* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1984), esp. chs. 3-10; Richard F. Nyrop, ed., *Saudi Arabia: A Country Study* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.; Washington: USGPO, 1984; American University, Foreign Area Studies); Thomas L. McNaugher, "Arms and Allies on the Arabian Peninsula," *Orbis*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (Fall 1984), pp. 489-526; Mordechai Abir, "Saudi Security and Military Endeavor," *Jerusalem Quarterly*, No. 33 (Fall 1984), pp. 79-94; and David E. Long, *The United States and Saudi Arabia: Ambivalent Allies* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press), esp. Ch. 3, "U.S.-Saudi Military Relations," pp. 33-72.

<sup>3</sup>Christine Moss Helms, *The Cohesion of Saudi Arabia: Evolution of Political Identity* (London: Croom Helm; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), p. 143, citing H.R.P. Dickson, the longtime British Political Agent in Kuwait.

No other ruler could match it!"<sup>4</sup> The military skills of the Ikhwan and the fear they inspired in their opponents were important elements in 'Abd al-'Aziz's capture of 'Asir in 1920, Ha'il in 1921, Jawf in 1922 and Hijaz in 1925. But the same religious fervor responsible for their creation ultimately made them uncontrollable by the ruler of a state. As a consequence, the Ikhwan directly confronted 'Abd al-'Aziz in battle in 1928; their power was permanently broken by their defeat at that time.

'Abd al-'Aziz's instrument for downing the Ikhwan was the new White Army, nucleus of the present National Guard. A lineal descendant of the traditional tribal levies, the Guard's personnel were recruited from the tribes of the Najd. These tribes long had been closely aligned with the Al Sa'ud and have formed the mainstay of Saudi power for several centuries. Consequently, it is not surprising that the National Guard's primary allegiance – as well as that of the smaller but similarly recruited Royal Guard – is to the Al Sa'ud dynasty even more than the state. Just as it served to protect the position of the Al Sa'ud at the time of the Ikhwan rebellion, the Guard continues to serve as a counterweight to the more recently created army. Only in recent years has the attempt been made to modernize the guard and expand its role from an essentially tribal levy into a well-equipped and trained fighting force on modern lines.

The kingdom's first attempt at military rationalization, undertaken after the 1934 Saudi-Yemeni war, resulted in the creation of the Royal Saudi Army. While its mission was defense against external threats, the army remained smaller and less important than the National Guard until well into the 1960s. Although the army has benefited from American training teams and modest arms transfers since the late 1940s, its emergence as the principal military force in the kingdom dates only from the reorganization under newly crowned King Faysal in the mid-1960s, when the Royal Guards were incorporated in the army and oil income provided the means for major arms purchases and expansion costs.<sup>5</sup> The 1930s were also notable for the purchase of a few British aircraft and the training of some Saudi pilots by Italy, but similarly these putative efforts at an air force capability really had no impact until the massive expansion programs begun three decades later.

Further efforts at modernization included the establishment of the Office of the Minister of Defense in 1944, and creation of the present Ministry of Defense and Aviation as part of the first Council of Ministers in 1953. Several British training teams worked in the country in the 1930s and US assistance began as a consequence of the emergence of American strategic interest in the Gulf at the time of World War II. Nevertheless, the fruits from these efforts were extremely limited and compounded by the accession of Sa'ud b. 'Abd al-'Aziz to the throne in 1953. The overspending, corruption, lack of clear organization, and flirtation with Egypt's Jamal 'Abd al-Nasir (to the detriment of burgeoning military/security ties with the United States), all hampered efforts at the development of a viable military establishment.

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<sup>4</sup>John S. Habib, *Ibn Sa'ud's Warriors of Islam: The Ikhwan of Najd and Their Role in the Creation of the Sa'udi Kingdom, 1910-1930* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978), p. 67.

<sup>5</sup>Between 1950 and 1964, total sales agreements between Saudi Arabia and its principal supplier, the US, totalled \$87m. In 1965 alone, they equalled \$342m. A decade later, the total was over \$2b and by 1980 reached \$35b. U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East, *Saudi Arabia and the United States: The New Context in an Evolving "Special Relationship"*; Report (Washington: USGPO, 1981), p. 54.

It was not until the return of Sa'ud's brother Faysal as Prime Minister in October 1962, that high priority was given to the reform and modernization of the Saudi armed forces, as well as to a more efficient bureaucratic structure and development program in general. The lessening isolation of Saudi Arabia from the outside world, the spreading appeal of radical Arab nationalism, the specter of revolution and Egyptian aggressiveness in neighboring Yemen, British retreat from Aden and the emergence of a Marxist republic in South Yemen, the rebellion in Oman's Dhufar province, and then British withdrawal from the Gulf all played their part in provoking greatly increased concern about the defensive capabilities of the kingdom's armed forces during the mid-1960s and early 1970s. Saudi Arabia's massive deposits of oil provided both the income with which to purchase an expensive arsenal and the willingness of the United States to join in partnership with Saudi Arabia in its modernization schemes. As a consequence, the last two decades have seen dramatic changes in the structure and capabilities of all components of the Saudi armed forces.

The air force has undergone perhaps the most spectacular transformation. The improvement of air defense capability has been given top priority for a variety of reasons. One of these is geography: the fact that the kingdom is bordered by the Gulf, the Red Sea, and wide deserts to the north and south mean that attacks on the kingdom would necessarily have to come through the air. This logical assumption is confirmed by the experience of Egyptian air maneuvers during the Yemen civil war, the separation of Saudi Arabia and South Yemen by the Rub' al-Khali desert, Israeli overflights of Saudi territory, and most recently by an Iranian-Saudi dogfight in June 1984. The sheer size of the country and its long frontiers makes reliance on land-based defense nearly impossible, even if it were not for the severe manpower restrictions faced by the kingdom. The Saudis cannot hope to match the armies of Israel, Jordan, Syria, Egypt, Iraq or Iran in either personnel or firepower. But these disparities can be offset to a large degree by an air force with highly trained personnel and highly sophisticated equipment.

As with the other Saudi services – and to an even greater degree than the army – US guidance and assistance has shaped the development of the Royal Saudi Air Force (RSAF). With the outbreak of the Yemen civil war, a USAF fighter squadron was stationed temporarily along the Yemen border and a comprehensive air defense survey made. The first in a long series of major equipment purchases took place in the mid-1960s, when Britain, at American urging, provided a dozen Lightnings and Hunter fighters and a number of Thunderbird surface-to-air missiles, along with the services of ex-RAF pilots to operate them. The basis for a close working relationship between the US and the RSAF had begun in 1957 with the provision of a dozen F-86 fighters. In 1965, the Saudis purchased four C-130 transports, which provided the RSAF with airlift capability, and the US Corps of Engineers undertook the responsibility of constructing Saudi bases and installations. The next major step involved the acquisition of a basic fighter aircraft. In the early 1970s, the Saudis turned to the US for several variations of the F-5, eventually putting over 100 in operation. This has been followed by the installation of the Hawk SAM air defense system, under a contract to Raytheon.

But the US-RSAF relationship has been plagued increasingly in the last decade by complications arising from the close ties between the US and Israel, and the latter's ability to influence and even prevent many US arms sales to Arab states. The Saudis had long been interested in the F-4 as a front-line fighter but were discouraged from asking for it because of its offensive potential *vis-à-vis* Israel; later, they were turned away from the F-14 and the F-16 at least partially for the same reason (in addition, the RSAF is wary of single-engined aircraft). Instead, the Saudis



purchased 60 F-15 aircraft. While the F-15 is principally an air-superiority fighter and not an attack aircraft, it was deemed suitable for Saudi needs and the sale could not be effectively opposed by Israel which was also receiving it.<sup>6</sup> The US also had a prominent role in the development of Saudi Arabia's Peace Shield program, a \$4b project to create the most technologically advanced integrated air defense system outside of NATO and the Soviet bloc. The first major contract for the Peace Shield system, scheduled to become operational in 1992, was awarded to Boeing in early 1985.<sup>7</sup>

The 1981 request for five E-3A Airborne Warning and Control Systems (AWACS) aircraft was a logical follow-on to the acquisition of the interceptor force. The US had briefly operated an AWACS watch out of Riyadh during the two Yemen's border war in early 1979 and they returned to Saudi Arabia after the Iranian seizure of the US hostages. The permanent stationing of the E-3As over Saudi skies meant that the sale of the new AWACS to Saudi Arabia would have little effect beyond the change in ownership. But the furor and negative publicity over Congressional approval of the AWACS sale, and the close vote, proved to be far more important (as well as troublesome for both parties) for its political ramifications than for its military implications. The Saudi AWACS were scheduled for delivery in 1986. The bruising battle over the AWACS sale contributed strongly to the Reagan Administration's reluctance to push further aircraft sales through Congress. The 60 F-15s in the Saudi inventory as a result of the earlier sale were too few to allow the RSAF to maintain a 24-hour combat watch over all vital installations and, as expected, Riyadh formally requested the purchase of an additional 40-48 F-15s at the beginning of 1985. But the US government continued to prevaricate through the first half of the year and in September, Saudi Arabia, apparently with US approval, announced that it would purchase 48 Tornado interdiction/strike aircraft from the British-German-Italian Panavia consortium instead and finance the sale at least partly through an oil barter arrangement.<sup>8</sup>

Of all the components of the Saudi armed forces, the air force is generally regarded as the most advanced and capable. Service with the RSAF carries more prestige than the other branches, as reflected in the number of Al Sa'ud who have made their careers in the air force. Some have charged that US assistance has been steadier and more professional than elsewhere, and RSAF personnel reflect a higher degree of professionalism. In the air force, as throughout the Saudi armed forces, reliance on expatriates for training on equipment and support services is likely to continue indefinitely. Nevertheless, the RSAF undoubtedly is better placed to carry out its assigned mission than the other branches, as well as to provide cover for other GCC states.

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<sup>6</sup>Cordesman, *The Gulf*, pp. 205-217.

<sup>7</sup>*New York Times*, 19 May 1985. See also the *Middle East Economic Digest*, 11 May 1984, 14 Dec. 1984, and 1 Feb. 1985.

<sup>8</sup>There had long been speculation that the Saudis might purchase either the Tornado or the French Mirage 2000 if it could not get the F-15. The first shipment of 20 Tornados was promised by the beginning of 1987 and the sale also included spare parts, training, and 20 Hawk trainer-fighters. There was also speculation that the sale was a setback for the Israeli lobby in the US, since the Europeans were unlikely to impose any restrictions on the basing of the Tornados, unlike US prohibition of F-15 basing at Tabuk airbase. It would also mean the loss of a considerable amount of export sales for US manufacturers and could possibly lead to other non-US arms purchases by the Saudis. *Washington Post*, 15 and 17 Sept. 1985; *New York Times*, 16 Sept. 1985; *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 28 Sept. 1985.

While the emphasis, both in Saudi planning and the American military connection, has been on strengthening the air force, considerable effort and expense has been devoted to modernization of the other Saudi services, particularly the Saudi Arabian Land Forces (SALF). Expansion and modernization of the army also began in the 1960s, with one of the first steps being the incorporation of the hitherto-autonomous Royal Guard battalion into the army in 1964. The modernization process in the army has been more problematic than the air force for several reasons. One early problem involved the predominance of Najdis, particularly in the officer corps, at the expense of personnel from other areas of the country, especially Hijaz (this was even more acute for the air force where technical skills are at a premium). It was not until after a number of military personnel were arrested in 1969 that steps were taken to improve discipline and eliminate corruption and incompetence. A second complicating factor arose out of the decision to divide the army into two parts, one equipped and trained by the US and the other by France. Prominent among French purchases have been 300 AMX-30 light tanks, as well as armored cars, infantry carriers, and anti-aircraft guns.<sup>9</sup>

Since the late 1970s, the US has stepped up its assistance to the RSA, with the provision of 150 M-60 tanks, 16 Improved Hawk SAM batteries, TOW missiles, and various other items. At the same time, the Corps of Engineers has been heavily involved in army construction, particularly in the building of major facilities at Khamis al-Mushayt, Tabuk, and Sharura, and the King Khalid and Asad military cities. These bases have helped to expand RSA strength from its older bases at Jidda, Dammam and al-Ta'if to strategic points closer to potential threats.<sup>10</sup>

The higher priorities given to the air force, its smaller size and prestige status inevitably mean that the army will lag behind the RSAF in modernization and competence for some time to come. It faces problems in recruitment and training, in coordinating brigades that have received either American or French equipment, and an inability to cover all sections of the expansive kingdom. Perhaps most severe in the long run is the small population base of the kingdom and the manpower crunch. Not only will it be impossible for the Saudis to field anywhere the number of men that Iraq or Iran can, employment opportunities elsewhere within the kingdom make recruitment for even a smaller army particularly difficult without turning to expatriates whose loyalty and professionalism may be suspect.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>The government has sought to redress the problem of incompatible equipment and training by concentrating the French-supplied units at Tabuk in the northwest, a move that may also strengthen Saudi request for future arms purchases from the US by reducing the chances for their use against Israel. See Cordesman, *The Gulf*, pp. 170-173. The subsequent purchase of British arms added another layer of complications to the army's effectiveness.

<sup>10</sup>Khamis al-Mushayt is located in the southwestern province of 'Asir, just north of Yemen; Tabuk is situated just south of the Jordanian border and near the Gulf of 'Aqaba; Sharura is on the edge of the Rub' al-Khali desert near the intersection of Saudi borders with both North and South Yemen; King Khalid Military City is located at Hafr al-Batin, just south of the Iraq-Saudi Arabian Neutral Zone; and Asad Military City is at al-Kharj, south of Riyadh.

<sup>11</sup>Mordechai Abir contends that the Saudi "armed forces have been reduced to recruiting volunteers among the most peripheral and traditional tribes and villages and among elements of questionable nationality," as well as training young teenagers in technical schools. He estimates that thousands of Arab and other Muslim officers, NCOs and technicians now serve in the Saudi armed forces on direct contract, compared to a few hundred in 1970. "Saudi Security," p. 88.

Modernization of the National Guard has involved even more problems than the army. This has been largely due to the traditional mission of the Guard: internal security as opposed to the army's task of defending the kingdom from external threats. As the security of the state has been inseparable from the security of the royal family, composition of the Guard has always been based on loyalty to the family. Consequently, it has been a tribal force, drawing on the Al Sa'ud's Najdi allies, with some personnel classified as "regulars" and the other as "reserves." The estimated total figure of 25,000 men is misleading, since many guardsmen are either part-time or pensioners from the earlier days of 'Abd al-'Aziz's expansionary moves, and "phantom guardsmen" are enrolled by *shaykhs* to receive additional payments.

While the Guard served well as the instrument of the king's power in the first half of this century, it has become increasingly clear that its orientation is unsuitable to such newer tasks as preventing sabotage in the oilfields, countering terrorism, handling civil disturbances, and backing up the army in matters of national defense. In addition, the overall effectiveness of the Guard has been limited in the past by its role as a counterweight to potential opposition within the other military branches and as a power base for Crown Prince 'Abd Allah within the ranks of the Al Sa'ud (and particularly in balancing the power of the so-called "Sudayri Seven" whose ranks include King Fahd and Prince Sultan, the Minister of Defense and Aviation).<sup>12</sup> Anthony Cordesman contends that the Guard is "more a means through which the royal family allocates funds to tribal and Bedouin leaders than a modern combat or internal security force. ... The Guard is politically vital but it has not found a clear military mission."<sup>13</sup> Other assessments note that the National Guard has undergone extensive modernization and professionalization in recent years.

While the army and the guard were roughly co-equal in strength until the early 1960s, the subsequent emphasis on modernization of the army and the air force weakened the guard's position. In order to redress the imbalance, a National Guard modernization program was initiated in 1972 with the goal of converting the tribal basis of the guard into a more professional/modern light infantry force with several mechanized battalions. Once again, considerable US input was solicited and provided for the Saudi Arabian National Guard Program (SANG).<sup>14</sup> In true Saudi style, an ambitious armament program was undertaken, which included the acquisition of over 700 Commando APCs, large numbers of self-propelled Vulcan anti-aircraft guns, M-102 howitzers, TOW anti-tank guided missiles, and possibly several hundred tanks. In addition, the guard has built its own military cities at al-Hasa in the Eastern Province and at Qasim in the central Najd, along with a new headquarters and academy in Riyadh.

This program, however, has encountered greater difficulties than its equivalent for the army. On the one hand, the bedouin background, widespread illiteracy, and lack of discipline and training

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<sup>12</sup>David Long also notes the role played by the National Guard in facing King Sa'ud's supporters in 1964 and helping to ensure a peaceful abdication. *The United States and Saudi Arabia*, p. 52.

<sup>13</sup>Cordesman, *The Gulf*, p. 365.

<sup>14</sup>A British training team had been brought in to work with the guard soon after Prince 'Abd Allah took over command in the early 1960s but it operated on a far smaller scale than the SANG program. Long, *The United States and Saudi Arabia*, p. 52.

endemic to the majority of the guard's personnel inevitably has meant that training efforts must be more basic and slower. On the other hand, external assistance to the army has been better in terms of quantity and quality, and has had more time in which to show positive results. Other problems have arisen from differences between Prince 'Abd Allah and the contractor, the Vinnell Corporation.<sup>15</sup> Despite a decade of modernization, questions still remain about the guard's ability to handle new, sensitive, and complicated tasks. The National Guard's effectiveness is of particular concern because it has the assigned role of defending Saudi oilfields, and there have been allegations that the kingdom is quite vulnerable to infiltration and sabotage of its oil installations. Thomas L. McNaugher charges that "provisions for the protection of oilfields have apparently changed little since 1979. There are no additional barriers, no hardening of key technologies or port facilities, and no electronic surveillance technologies to scan for intruders. Indeed, U.S. personnel knowledgeable about the oilfields suggest that rigs, pumping stations, and other equipment have deteriorated somewhat since 1973 and that the fields lie fairly open to attack."<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, a US Senate staff delegation in July 1984 reported that "ARAMCO has already taken many precautions to stop saboteurs and is currently spending millions more to enhance internal security...."<sup>17</sup> Their report went on to note that, because it is impossible to protect all the oil facilities from sabotage, the Saudi government relies on harsh punishment and redundancy within the oil sector to protect the flow of oil.

The Royal Saudi Navy (RSN) is the last of the Saudi armed forces to emerge – and consequently it remains the least developed. Formed as an adjunct of the army in 1957, it received its first naval officer as commander in 1963 and only began functioning as a separate force in 1969. In conjunction with the bold schemes advanced for the other services, the Saudi Naval Expansion Program (SNEP) was launched in 1972, again with American assistance and with overly ambitious plans for a 20-30 ship navy that included major bases at Jubayl on the Gulf and Jidda on the Red Sea, a repair facility at Dammam on the Gulf, and a naval headquarters complex in Riyadh. Even though plans were scaled back several times, serious problems continued to arise due to the lack of Saudi manpower and the US Navy's inability to provide the proper supervision and training personnel. One result was Riyadh's appeal to France for help, thus once again complicating the picture with competing and often-incompatible equipment, concepts, and training methods. Nevertheless, SNEP's disappointing progress has been ameliorated by the weakness of potential naval threats from Saudi Arabia's neighbors in the Red Sea and Gulf, especially since the Iranian revolution severely crippled the navy built up by the Shah.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>On problems in the Guard's modernization, see Abir, "Saudi Security," pp. 91-93.

<sup>16</sup>*Arms and Oil: U.S. Military Strategy and the Persian Gulf* (Washington: Brookings, 1985), p. 131.

<sup>17</sup>U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *War in the Gulf*; a Staff Report (Washington: USGPO, 1984), p. 29.

<sup>18</sup>Brief mention may be made of two other auxiliary forces. The Frontier Force and the Coast Guard, with 8500 men, both fall under the purview of the Ministry of the Interior (as does a helicopter-equipped counter-terrorist unit). Their duties include policing the bedouin, civil defense duties, and maintaining border and port security.

The effectiveness of the Saudi armed forces forms the key to the GCC's defensive capabilities. The kingdom is the largest and most powerful of the six GCC states and its oil reserves vastly dwarf those of its neighbors. Its wealth makes it an important actor in Arab, Islamic and Third World arenas. More importantly, its geographic sprawl places it in potential confrontation with many possible enemies.

To the south, Saudi Arabia is the only GCC state that borders both Yemens and a major focus of Saudi security concern has centered on threats from this corner of the Arabian Peninsula since Egypt became involved in the North Yemen civil war of the 1960s. In part, Riyadh has responded to the Yemeni threat by building major bases at Khamis al-Mushayt in 'Asir and at Sharura deep in the Rub' al-Khali desert, as well as maintaining large numbers of troops there. In terms of total troops, the two Yemens have more military personnel on paper than Saudi Arabia but the quality of many of their troops, particularly in the YAR, is questionable, and neither North or South Yemen has been able to acquire weaponry of the level of Saudi Arabia. The ability of both Yemeni states to act in concert against Saudi Arabia is even more doubtful. The long distance between the Yemeni borders and Saudi Arabia's centers of population, capital, and oilfields reduces the impact of even a direct, combined Yemeni attack against the kingdom to relatively localized hostilities in the southern province of 'Asir.

Such a direct Yemeni threat is unlikely, and military engagement between Saudi Arabia and its southern neighbors more probably will be limited to the kinds of border skirmishes that have occurred periodically for a number of years. Ever since the 1960s, Saudi Arabia has sought to minimize the Yemeni threat through non-military means. Riyadh has maintained heavy influence, if not control, over the North Yemeni government through such techniques as extensive budget subsidies, heavyhanded pressure on its rulers, intrigues with both military officers and civilian politicians in Sanaa, and subsidies to the northern Yemeni tribes and *shaykhs*. While the nearly one-half-million Yemeni workers in Saudi Arabia are often cited as a potential security threat to the kingdom, the loss of their remittances would cripple the YAR's economy.

At the same time, Riyadh generally has sought to isolate the Marxist government in Aden and has in the past supported dissident movements against South Yemen. While the Saudis displayed considerable reluctance to pursue rapprochement when favorable occasions presented themselves in 1978 and 1980, they apparently have approved of Kuwaiti and UAE development assistance and reconciliation efforts between South Yemen and its North Yemen and Omani neighbors. From the vantage point of mid-1985, the surprising stability of the 'Ali 'Abdullah Salih regime in Sanaa has meant that YAR-Saudi relations have remained on an even keel, even if sometimes strained. Furthermore, South Yemen's relations with the GCC and the YAR have steadily improved since 'Ali Nasir Muhammad's consolidation of power in 1980. As a result, the Saudi policy of diplomacy, rather than military confrontation, has paid off in the case of the Yemens.

In the case of potential threats to the kingdom from the northwest (Israel) and the northeast (Iran or Iraq), Saudi Arabia once again must rely basically on non-military means to deter attack. No amount of military build-up would put the Saudis on an equal footing with any of these countries. At the same time, it is unlikely that any of the three would try to invade the kingdom. Despite the protestations of Israel's supporters in the United States, Saudi Arabia is not and never will be a military threat to Israel and confrontation between them will continue to be played out politically through third parties, particularly the United States. At most, Saudi Arabia can hope through its

military build-up to deter Israeli aerial and naval violations of Saudi territory without provoking the kind of raids Israel has carried out against Baghdad and Tunis.

As far as the Gulf is concerned, the threat is far greater to Kuwait than to Saudi Arabia, which once again benefits from its strategic depth.<sup>19</sup> Saudi military options are largely limited to its air defense capabilities, as demonstrated in June 1984, although completion of the King Khalid Military City at Hafr al-Batin, near the Iraqi and Kuwaiti borders, will provide a base for modest ground forces capability. Still, a build-up of SALF forces at Hafr al-Batin inevitably will mean starving the other frontline bases at Tabuk and Sharura. As long the war between Iran and Iraq lasts – and that may be a very long time – a direct Iranian attack on the Arab side will have only nuisance value.

The Iraqi threat continues to recede. Because of the war, the Saddam Husayn regime has become dependent on Saudi and other GCC financial assistance, Saudi willingness to transship Iraqi oil across the kingdom, and, especially at the beginning of the war, the Saudi role as a middleman between Baghdad and Washington. Iraq's oil reserves are second only to Saudi Arabia in the Middle East and it has no reason to covet Saudi fields. Rather than military confrontation (or even Ba'ath-sponsored subversion), the potential Iraqi threat to Saudi Arabia in the future would appear to consist of disputes over oil pricing and production quotas due to competition in a stagnant world oil market.

Assuming a worst-case scenario, that Iran emerges victorious against Iraq, rearms and still desires to carry the war forward into the GCC, Saudi Arabia's only option is virtually the same as it would be in the case of a direct Soviet attack. It can use its early warning system and interceptor aircraft to delay an enemy attack until help arrives from outside. Militarily, Saudi Arabia is and will remain vitally dependent on outside assistance. In direct terms, Saudi Arabia depends on the approximately 1700 American military personnel now stationed in the kingdom, as well as the several thousand personnel employed by more than 40 US military contractors.<sup>20</sup> Over 4000 French and 2000 British expatriates work in similar capacities and more than 10,000 Pakistanis serve in the Saudi armed forces.<sup>21</sup> Pakistanis are particularly conspicuous in the officer and enlisted ranks of all the GCC naval forces.

While the Saudis have relied heavily on arms purchases from the US, they have also bought from other Western European countries, as well as Brazil and South Korea. The January 1984 agreement with France for the \$4b Shahine ground-to-air missile system represented France's biggest arms sale ever. The French have also been highly prominent in the development of the Saudi navy and the Mirage 2000 reportedly was being considered along with the F-15 and the Tornado for the 1985 Saudi interceptor purchase. The Tornado sale announced in September 1985 could not have

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<sup>19</sup>Thomas L. McNaugher acknowledges Saudi Arabia's "geographic buffers" and postulates that they encourage "'two-stage' attacks in which external antagonists acquire a position anywhere on the Peninsula and then seek to exploit it in ways unhampered by geography." "Arms and Allies," p. 497. He goes on to point out that Nasir employed such a strategy in the 1960s and speculates that the Soviet foothold in Aden may have a similar effect.

<sup>20</sup>*New York Times*, 19 May 1985.

<sup>21</sup>Abir, "Saudi Security," pp. 89-90. Some estimates put the number of Pakistani troops in Saudi Arabia as high as 20,000 and it is conjectured that entire Pakistani units have been loaned to the Saudi armed forces. Some Pakistanis were alleged to have been captured by YAR troops during a 1984 border incident. *Washington Post*, 25 Nov. 1984.

come at a more propitious time for Britain, given the aircraft's enormous development costs. The purchase may also represent a deepening Saudi desire to diversify arms purchases to lessen dependence on any one country, particularly given the widespread opposition to Saudi Arabia in the US Congress.

At a more indirect but even more important level, the ultimate Saudi defense – and therefore the defense of all the GCC nations – must come from the United States. While the Saudis consistently refuse to allow the stationing of American military forces the kingdom and do not cooperate with the US in any military exercises, the overstocking built into their weapons and equipment purchases strongly indicates that they recognize that full cooperation with a prompt deployment of USCENTCOM forces is necessary in the case of severe threats, as from the Soviet Union.<sup>22</sup> At same time, however, it should be remembered that the effectiveness of US military support applies to only a few, relatively unlikely situations. Saudi Arabia's security is most dependent on the skillfulness of its foreign policy and the astuteness of its leaders in adapting to and complying with the demands of its citizenry.

## OTHER GCC DEFENSE CAPABILITIES

### Oman

Oman's armed forces have perhaps the longest history of any of the Peninsula states.<sup>23</sup> The Muscat Levy Corps, established in 1921 with a British commander and Indian ranks, served as the nucleus and the sole element of Oman's military establishment until the 1950s. Expansion during that decade was prompted by two factors: the search for oil and tribal rebellion (further complicated by tinges of Arab nationalist sentiment and Saudi intrigues). The Batinah Force was raised in 1952 for the purpose of expelling Saudi troops from al-Buraimi oasis, although the Sultan was dissuaded from taking this action. Several years later, Petroleum Development (Oman) (PDO) sponsored the creation of the Muscat and Oman Field Force (MOFF) which accompanied PDO representatives on a March into the interior and raised the flag of the sultanate over the interior for the first time in half a century.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>In this vein, a secret Reagan administration policy study provided to Congress in mid-1985 announced that "Although the Saudis have steadfastly resisted formal access agreements, they have stated that access will be forthcoming for United States forces as necessary to counter Soviet aggression or in regional crises they cannot manage on their own." Quoted in the *New York Times*, 5 Sept. 1985.

<sup>23</sup>For background on the military in Oman, see J.E. Peterson, *Oman in the Twentieth Century: Political Foundations of an Emerging State* (London: Croom Helm; New York: Barnes & Noble, 1978), pp. 90-96; idem, "American Policy in the Gulf and the Sultanate of Oman," *American-Arab Affairs*, No. 8 (1984), pp. 117-130.

<sup>24</sup>The force was subsequently attacked and routed by tribal dissidents and disbanded; its remaining troops were thereupon incorporated into a new regiment.

As a consequence of this modest expansion, the government found itself with three ill-trained, under-equipped and separately administered units. As a result of British prodding and assistance (including both financial aid and secondment of personnel), these groups were reorganized into the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) in 1958. A headquarters was established, a training camp built, arms purchased, and the lingering al-Jabal al-Akhdar rebellion in the interior put down. Subsequently, the foundations of the Sultan of Oman's Air Force (SOAF) and the Sultan of Oman's Navy (SON) were also laid.

The rebellion in Dhufar provided perhaps the major spur to the extensive buildup and modernization that Oman's armed forces have undergone since the late 1960s. The ineffectiveness of the ragtag forces formed in Dhufar to fight the rebels in the mid- and late-1960s was in large part due to Sultan Sa'id's insistence that the province be kept as administratively separate from the rest of the country as it was geographically isolated. But the inability of his Dhufar forces to deal with the rebels (as well as the attempt on his life made by his own soldiers in 1966) led to the assumption of SAF responsibility for military affairs in Dhufar following the 1970 *coup d'État*. It was SAF units, combined with considerable external assistance and ex-rebel irregulars, that fought the rebellion and brought it to its end.<sup>25</sup>

The need to deal with a deadly serious security threat, the removal of the British umbrella for regional security, the accession of a Sandhurst-trained sultan, and the opportunity provided by oil income all played parts in the development of the Sultan's Armed Forces into probably the most professional and capable military organization in the Peninsula. Without doubt, the major factor in the SAF's modernization was the guidance and manifold assistance provided by Britain. Not only had London prodded Sultan Sa'id into taking the first steps to move his armed forces into the twentieth century, but it also provided financial assistance and arms. Just as importantly, the SAF benefitted from a considerable number of seconded officers and even more contract personnel, both civilian and ex-military. The commander of SAF, the commanders of the land forces, air force, and navy, remained British through the mid-1980s. In addition to the British, seconded Jordanian and Pakistani administrative personnel, engineers, and noncommissioned officers have all been a feature of the SAF's past.

As a result of these efforts, considerable progress was made in the early 1970s to add capability in such specialized areas as training facilities, artillery units, engineering, and air and coastal patrols. In addition, the heavy preponderance of Baluch soldiers in the ranks, many of whom had been recruited from Oman's former possession of Gwadur in Pakistan, was gradually reversed in favor of an Arab majority among the more than 20,000 troops in the military today.<sup>26</sup> Since the great majority of recruits were illiterate, sophisticated training had to await implementation of basic educational programs. Over the past decade, though, the infusion of more educated Omanis – both

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<sup>25</sup>See Ch. 3 for a discussion of the Dhufar rebellion.

<sup>26</sup>Several units in Dhufar are still Baluch-manned and are likely to remain that way.



male and female – has helped to raise standards and enable Omanis to move into slots as regimental commanders and pilots.<sup>27</sup>

The SOAF has received the lion's share of arms and equipment purchases over the past decade or two, and currently boasts nearly two-dozen Jaguars and a dozen aging Hunters among its combat aircraft, as well as a helicopter squadron equipped mainly with Augusta Bells and a Rapier SAM system. In June 1985, Oman purchased a half-dozen Tornado air defense variant (ADV) aircraft, choosing the West European consortium's aircraft over the US F-20a Tigershark, and it was speculated that it would soon buy another 4-8 planes. In addition to its headquarters, adjacent to al-Sib International Airport (outside of Muscat), the SOAF operates out of the former RAF bases on al-Masira Island and at Salala, as well as from a dozen other airstrips.

The Sultanate of Oman Land Forces (SOLF), with approximately 20,000 men (or 80% of the total armed forces), utilizes Chieftain tanks, Saladin armored cars, TOW anti-tank missiles, and Blowpipe SAMs. Considerable progress has been made by the SON, which now has eight fast attack craft (six equipped with Exocet missiles), a half-dozen smaller patrol boats and various support craft, and has beefed up its presence in the Omani territorial waters around the Strait of Hormuz. Al-Ghanam Island (on the Gulf side of the strait) has been made into a naval base, thus complementing the main base at Muscat, the naval training center at Sur, and facilities at the Dhufar port of Raysut; a new base is under construction at Wudam 'Alwa along the Batinah Coast. In addition, the Royal Oman Police has been built up as a major gendarmerie and frontier force, and several thousand Dhufaris irregulars belong to the *firqas* units formed from surrendering rebels. While the *firqas* have been regrouped into regular army units, they still have not been assigned a mission, presumably because of questions of their loyalty and military suitability.

The traditional lines between the predominantly US tutelage of the Saudi armed forces and British guidance of the Omani military have broken down in recent years, in large part because of British economic decline and military retrenchment. While Oman may still lie within a "British sphere of influence" through the organization, armament, and expatriate personnel in its armed forces, recent American perceptions of a deteriorating security situation in the Gulf and emphasis on developing a "go-it-alone" military capability have led Washington to upgrade its ties to Muscat significantly. The sultanate's apparent willingness to cooperate more fully with the US than its neighbors would like is in part based on its perceptions of vulnerability to external threats and in part on its financial needs. As a consequence, the US has provided development assistance and some military grants in return for the use of Omani military facilities in emergency and some routine situations, and has even undertaken the physical improvement of these facilities. US military spending in Oman has totalled more than \$300m, with half of that on the strategic air base on Masira

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<sup>27</sup>Because of the large numbers of expatriates at all levels of the armed forces, considerable emphasis has been placed on Omanization. By 1985, the percentage of Omanis in the armed forces had risen to 62%, while the army was 85% Omani. Continued progress in this field was hampered by new purchases of high-tech weaponry for the air force and the rapid expansion of the navy. Dale F. Eickelman, oral presentation at the Middle East Institute's annual conference, 28 Sept. 1985.

Island.<sup>28</sup> By 1984, however, the Omanis had become noticeably less enthusiastic about the emerging relationship with the US government.<sup>29</sup>

Despite their professionalism and combat experience, the Omani armed forces remain too small and underequipped for the multitude of security tasks they face. While the navy has beefed up its surveillance activities in the Strait of Hormuz (the shipping lanes in the strait run through Omani territorial waters), its ability to handle threats to shipping remains limited to minor hit-and-run attacks using speedboats. Even in the case of mining, Oman would have to call on NATO assistance. The SAF has proven its ability to deal with internal threats of subversion and rebellion on various occasions in the last quarter-century. With considerable outside help, the SAF was successful in putting down the rebellion in Dhufar and it could probably hold its own against a South Yemeni attack, since the PDRY superiority in tanks would be negated by the rugged terrain. Oman is more vulnerable to an Iranian attack, since its air force is very small and its ground forces basically consist of light infantry. It faces the same manpower problems as the other GCC states and is further constrained by the lack of funds for defense expenditure.

Given these limitations and its extreme exposure, it is not unexpected that the Omani government, of all the GCC states, has displayed the most military cooperation with the West. Similarly, it is not surprising that the Omanis have placed considerable emphasis on diplomacy as a tool to enhance their security. Diplomatic relations with the PDRY were established for the first time in 1984, with the help of Kuwaiti and UAE mediation, and ambassadors were exchanged in 1985. Relations with revolutionary Iran have been superficially good, especially in light of the close ties between the Shah and Sultan Qabus. Despite China's involvement in the early stages of the Dhufar rebellion, Oman recognized the PRC in 1975. A similar pragmatic strategy may have been at work when the intention to establish diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union was announced in September 1985.<sup>30</sup> In sum, Oman is capable of providing for its own security in most threat scenarios but must call for outside assistance in case of an all-out Soviet or Iranian attack. Only Oman can join Saudi Arabia in providing out-of-area assistance to the GCC, but its capabilities in this regard are far less than the Saudi armed forces.

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<sup>28</sup>For a recent overview of the Omani armed forces, the extensive Ra'd exercises carried out in early 1985, and the US military role in Oman, see Jean-Loup R. Combemale, "Oman: Defending the Sultanate," *Journal of Defense and Diplomacy*, Vol. 3, No. 6 (June 1985), pp. 42-45.

<sup>29</sup>Oman's attitude toward continued US Central Command use of Omani facilities was noticeably tougher during the early 1985 negotiations to renew the 1980 agreement. Omani pique over American demands in these negotiations and US media reports of CIA influence in the sultanate may have contributed to the decision in Sept. 1985 to open talks with the Soviets.

<sup>30</sup>In November 1985, a third GCC state, the UAE, announced its intentions of establishing relations with Moscow.

## The Amirates

The other four GCC members have little of the military potential of Saudi Arabia and Oman, and – for the most part – began to build armed forces at a far later date and for more modest purposes.<sup>31</sup> These smaller states exhibit basically identical problems in self-defense, largely differentiated only by minor details. At the northern end of the Arab littoral, Kuwait is confronted by the inescapable fact that its power inherently is limited by its small population and territorial size, even as its central location and long exploitation of oil makes it a desirable and highly visible target. At the same time, it faces a number of serious threats, externally from its larger neighbors of Iran, Iraq and possibly Saudi Arabia (in the form of pressure rather than aggression), and internally from a population composed in the majority by non-Kuwaitis, as well as from its Shi'a and Persian minorities.

The ruling Al Sabah family has sought to deal with these threats with diplomacy and an even more viable means: money. An extremely large proportion of the oil income has been long distributed as foreign aid, regardless of the recipient's politics. Well before the Iran-Iraq war, Kuwait provided Iraq with generous "loans" and the Palestinian cause has been the recipient of both financial and verbal support for decades. Internally, oil income has been evenly distributed among the native population, although the country faces a major dilemma regarding expatriates: they are not covered under most benefits of the extensive state welfare system and with few exceptions are not eligible for citizenship, particularly rankling to many Palestinians who have spent most or all of their lives in Kuwait.

Kuwait's armed forces have been capable of little more than border protection and internal security. Between independence in 1961 and British withdrawal from the Gulf in 1971, Kuwait could rely on British protection through a treaty negotiated at independence. Since 1971, however, Kuwait has sought to expand its defense capability, increasing the number of men under arms by about 50%. Not surprisingly, the bulk of the armed forces is found in the army, with about 10,000 men, largely drawn from the bedouin tribes of the area shared by Kuwait, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia. In the years since 1971, it has been equipped with Chieftain tanks, Saladin armored vehicles, Saracen APCs, Ferret scout cars, AMX self-propelled howitzers, and TOW anti-tank missiles. The air force boasts 49 combat aircraft, mostly A-4 Skyhawks but also some Mirage interceptors. In addition, there are three helicopter squadrons equipped with Gazelles and Pumas and a several batteries of I-Hawk SAMs. The navy is the least developed of the services, essentially consisting of a coast guard with a few armed patrol craft and some Exocet missiles.

Traditionally, Kuwait has looked to Britain as its principal military supplier but the amirate has turned increasingly to the US and France in recent years. For political reasons, Kuwait

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<sup>31</sup>On the military background to the four states of Kuwait, UAE, Bahrain and Qatar, see Richard F. Nyrop, ed., *Area Handbook for the Persian Gulf States* (Washington: USGPO, 1977; American University, Foreign Area Studies); Alvin J. Cottrell, Robert J. Hanks, and Frank T. Bray, "Military Affairs in the Persian Gulf," in Alvin J. Cottrell, gen. ed., *The Persian Gulf States: A General Survey* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), pp. 140-171; Keegan, *World Armies*; Cordesman, *The Gulf*; U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on International Relations, *United States Arms Policies in the Persian Gulf and Red Sea Areas: Past, Present and Future*; Report (Washington: USGPO, 1977); and U.S. Senate, *War in the Gulf*, pp. 28-33.

concluded a highly publicized deal with the Soviet Union in 1977 for SA-7 missiles, purchasing more missiles the following year, and then turned again to Moscow in 1984. It should be emphasized that these token transactions underscore Kuwait's long striving for neutrality, as well as policy differences with the US, rather than any fundamental shift in foreign policy. For example, the 1984 arms deal with the Soviet Union was initiated only after rejection of the Kuwaiti request to the US for Stinger missiles to defend Kuwaiti oil tankers against Iranian air attacks. The amirate continues to rely upon Britain, the US, Pakistan, Jordan, and Egypt for military assistance and training, and that orientation is unlikely to change.

Despite its expansion program, Kuwait's defense situation is not much changed from the 1960s, when British troops and a symbolic Arab League presence was felt necessary to deter Iraqi encroachment. As a small state surrounded by much larger ones, Kuwait's basic strategy necessarily entails keeping on good terms with its neighbors and relying on the collective capabilities of the GCC for protection. The Kuwaiti armed forces suffer from severe manpower problems, both because of its small population and because of most young Kuwaitis' disdain for a military career; as a consequence, expatriates are ubiquitous in the armed forces and a national draft is less than effective. The quality and professionalism of the bedouin recruits is suspect and the Shi'a in the armed forces pose a potential problem. The amirate has sought to ameliorate the potentially dangerous effects of this situation by reserving the occupation of pilot for native Kuwaitis and by keeping command positions in the hands of the Al Sabah.

Because of its proximity to Iraq and Iran, Kuwait is the GCC state most vulnerable to attack. It lived under the shadow of Iraqi claims to the entire emirate in the 1960s and, despite its contributions to the Iraqi war effort, still must be on its guard against Iraqi efforts to seize the islands of Warba and Bubiyan, which dominate the approaches to the Iraqi naval base at Umm Qasr. The amirate's hold on the islands was strengthened by the construction of a bridge from the mainland to Bubiyan in the early 1980s. Several Iranian airstrikes on Kuwaiti installations during the war, Iranian attacks on Kuwaiti shipping, and Iranian support of the terrorist attacks inside the amirate all contribute to Kuwaiti insecurity. Although the prospect of an Iranian breakthrough on the Shatt al-'Arab front seemed to subside after the 1982, 1983, 1984 and february 1985 offensives stalled, it is painfully obvious to the Kuwaitis that a hostile Iranian army is poised less than 30 miles from Kuwaiti borders and that both the Iranian air force and navy are well within striking distance. The smaller GCC states have emphasized their determination to send ground forces to help Kuwait in case of attack, and the Kuwaitis may also call for Jordanian help. However, there is no way around the stark conclusion that both the GCC and the US may have to consider Kuwait expendable in the the event of either an Iranian attack or a Soviet assault.

While national defense may be assured only under the GCC umbrella (if then), Kuwait does have a real need for effective internal security forces. In recent years, the amirate has suffered through a number of acts of violence. In the late 1970s, there was a spate of bombings attributed to inter-Palestinian feuding. The Iraqi underground Da'wa movement, apparently with assistance from the Iranian government and Lebanese radical Shi'is, carried out bomb attacks on the US embassy and Kuwaiti installations in December 1983. A Kuwait Airways plane was hijacked to Tehran in December 1984 and two passengers killed and several Kuwaitis wounded. In May 1985, an assassination attempt barely missed killing Kuwait's ruler and in July 56 people were killed by bombs thrown at seaside cafes. These attacks were also attributed to the radical international Shi'i

underground taking credit under the *nom de guerre* of Islamic Jihad. If these attacks by outside forces were not enough, Kuwait has also faced a growing tide of Islamic fundamentalist sentiment and increasingly visible Sunni-Shi'i strife within the amirate. Kuwait's salvation from internal disruption may be the healthiness and vitality of its elected National Assembly, the only one in the GCC.

The United Arab Emirates has generally ranked second in GCC defense spending in recent years. This can be attributed to: the UAE's very late start in all aspects of development; the abundance of oil, particularly in Abu Dhabi, which provides the financial wherewithal; and the long competition – and even strong rivalry – between the UAE's member amirates.<sup>32</sup>

The origins of armed forces in the UAE date back to the early 1950s and the British decision to exercise more influence in internal affairs along the Trucial Coast, a decision motivated by the growing suspicion of oil deposits in the region. The Trucial Oman Levies, later Trucial Oman Scouts (TOS), was formed in 1951 under British supervision and with British officers and Jordanian NCOs. The Scouts soon exhibited their usefulness in keeping the peace between rival shaykhdoms in addition to more fundamental policing functions. They were also instrumental in evicting the Saudi garrison occupying Buraimi oasis in 1955 and then played a supporting role in ending the 1955-1959 rebellion in central Oman.

Upon independence, the Scouts were the logical choice for conversion into the armed forces of the new UAE state. They had grown in size from 500 in 1955 to 2500 in 1971. But the Union Defense Force (UDF), as the Scouts were rechristened, was not the only armed force in the new UAE nor was it even the largest. Over the decade of the 1960s, the continuing competition between the seven shaykhdoms had evolved a new form: the development of competing military units. Thus in 1971, the Abu Dhabi Defense Force (ADDF) far eclipsed the UDF with over 9500 men, including a small naval force and developing air wing. In addition, there were also the Dubai Defense Force (DDF, with 500 men, a patrol vessel and small air wing), the Ra's al-Khayma Mobile Force, the Sharjah National Guard, and the 'Ajman Defense Force (in the process of formation). Rather than serving as the armed forces for the entire state, the UDF merely existed as a somewhat neutral element among competing forces, which were lineal descendants of the *shaykhs'* traditional armed retinues.

While logic dictated the merger of all these units, politics mitigated against it. Abu Dhabi and Dubai had fought a border war as recently as 1948, and all the shaykhdoms – especially the aristocratic and once powerful Qasimi statelets of Ra's al-Khayma and, to a lesser extent, Sharjah – resented Abu Dhabi's newfound wealth and muscle. As modern versions of shaykhly guards, these individual forces not only performed police duties but protected the rulers and their families from attempted coups (more often than not deriving from within the ruler's family), as well as from threats from their neighbors. The infusion of new wealth into traditional rivalries resulted in arms races within the UAE. By 1975, the ADDF had grown to 15,000, equipped with 135 armored vehicles, two squadrons of Mirage IIIs and Vs, some Hawker Hunters and helicopters, Rapier and Crotale

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<sup>32</sup>In addition to a above sources, see Frauke Heard-Bey, *From Trucial States to United Arab Emirates: A Society in Transition* (London: Longman, 1982); and Ali Mohammed Khalifa, *The United Arab Emirates: Unity in Fragmentation* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1979).

SAMs, Vigilant ATGWs, and Vosper Thornycroft and Fairey Marine Spear class patrol craft. The DDF had also expanded to rival the UDF in size, with 3000 men, Ferret and Saladin armored cars, several kinds of helicopters and patrol craft. Only the UDF had tanks, however.

Despite the creation of a federal Ministry of Defense and the existence of the UDF, merger of the armed forces lagged behind federal integration in other sectors. It was not until mid-1975 that the first serious discussions on merger took place and formal unification was delayed until the constitutional crisis of 1976. At the end of the year, the UAE Armed Forces formally came into being: the ADDF became the Western Command, the DDF the Central Command, and the Ra's al-Khayma Mobile Force the Northern Command; the UDF was renamed the Yarmuk Brigade, and the Sharjah National Guard was merged with the federal police force. Nevertheless, the merger was still only on paper: the shaykhdoms continued separate arms purchasing policies and each force was commanded by the appropriate ruler's son. The Chief of Staff was able to function effectively only because he was a seconded Jordanian. Important steps were made in subsequent years to strengthen the UAE's military unity by unifying expenditures, upgrading the central headquarters, and redirecting lines of command to federal authorities.

Nevertheless, manifold problems still remain. While the UAE has a modest air defense capability, they lack the early warning or tactical air capability to defeat an air attack. UAE officials do not consider themselves covered by a GCC or Saudi defense umbrella and therefore argue within the GCC for a conciliatory, rather than a confrontational, attitude to Iran (Iran also remains Dubai's largest trading partner and a number of Iranians reside in the UAE). As in the other GCC states, the UAE armed forces are still heavily dependent on expatriate officers and trainers, and require more time to digest the flood of new arms and equipment. Approximately 85% of the ranks, as well as some officers, are Omanis. Finally, the successful integration of the armed forces depends directly on the success of the federation experiment. While a UAE lifespan of well over a decade seemingly augurs well for the future, much depends on the personalities of Abu Dhabi's ruler Zayid and Dubai's Rashid, who has been in poor health in recent years. The newness of the UAE armed forces, its fragmentation, and the complicated political situation all work to its disadvantage as a factor in pan-GCC considerations.

The other two GCC states, Bahrain and Qatar, have very modest armed forces, hardly more than internal security units. The Bahrain Defense Force grew out of the Bahrain Levy Corps, established as a model on the Muscat Levies in the 1920s, but it was utilized primarily as a police force until independence. Indeed, the few patrol craft and helicopters possessed by the emirate belong to the police, which are used to control immigration and smuggling. In the last several years, Bahrain has ordered a few F-5 fighters from the US, presumably for reasons of prestige. The 2300-strong army is equipped with a few armored cars, TOW anti-tank missiles and the RBS-70 SAM system. Because of the British presence in Bahrain before 1971, the country boasts well-developed military facilities, however, including a large airfield and a naval base, where the US Navy's small Mideastforce was formerly homeported and still uses on a regular basis.

Qatar is only slightly better armed. Since Britain was responsible for the emirate's defense before 1971, Qatar's armed forces have emerged out of the small Public Security Department only since independence. In addition to the 5000-strong army, which operates several dozen AMX-30 tanks and the usual mix of armored cars, Qatar boasts eight large patrol craft, several equipped with Exocets, and eleven combat aircraft, with more on order. Not surprisingly, both states suffer even

more than their neighbors from manpower problems and rely heavily on expatriates. Qatar's situation is complicated further by its close relationship to Saudi Arabia (both ruling families are Wahhabi) and the ruling Al Thani's traditional reliance on Saudi tribes as armed retainers. Neither state provides more than a symbolic contribution to GCC military strength, and they are covered by Saudi combat air patrol and the US AWACS against an Iranian air threat. Indeed, the military capability of all four amirates (Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and the UAE) is essentially limited to policing functions and internal security. It falls to Saudi Arabia, and to a far lesser extent Oman and even less to Kuwait, to provide the backbone of GCC defense forces.

## **THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION AND THE FORMATION OF THE GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL**

The Iranian revolution posed the most serious security threat to the other states of the Gulf since British withdrawal nearly a decade before. For the Arab states of the Gulf, the 1970s were a turbulent and apprehensive period. The situation prior to 1971 had appeared relatively benign. The British political and military presence provided a regional security umbrella, much as it had for the previous century or more. The smaller states not only benefitted from the British umbrella in terms of their external security but received British supervision and tutelage in such internal matters as dampening endemic quarrels within the ruling families and laying the foundations for modern government and economic infrastructures. Iran, the Gulf state with the greatest power potential, was kept in check first by direct British pressure and then by American influence.

The real threat to the Arab littoral came not from potential invasion but from the ideology of radical Arab nationalism. The 1950s and 1960s were a period of ideological and nationalist ferment in the Arab world, where new military-led revolutionary republics waged aggressive campaigns aimed at the elimination of existing "reactionary" monarchies. The Arab cold war spread to the Arabian Peninsula in the 1960s when Yemen became a battlefield by proxy for the two sides. Bahrain, with a head start in development and education, witnessed demonstrations in its streets during the 1956 and 1967 Arab-Israeli wars, colored with a strong anti-British and anti-regime tone.

But the most serious source of the radical nationalist threat came from Iraq after its revolutions in 1958, 1963 and 1968. The new regime and its like-minded successors were concerned not only with transforming the politics and society of Iraq, but those of their neighbors in the Gulf as well. After 1968, financial assistance, arms, and training were provided to underground Ba'athist cells in all these states but particularly in Bahrain. The warriors of the Oman Revolutionary Movement (ORM), once they had been driven from Oman, took up residence in Iraq where they remained until after the 1970 change of government in Muscat. Iraq also provided some assistance to the Dhufar Liberation Front fighting in Oman's southern province, and to the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf (PFLOAG), which took control of the Dhufar rebellion in 1965.

As long as the British remained in the Gulf, the Arab monarchies seemed to have little reason to fear external threats. Kuwait provides a good example of the effect of the British presence in deterring Iraq from pressing its claims to the emirate: Baghdad's threatened use of military force to

press its claims occurred only after Kuwait received full independence in 1961 and was deterred, at least initially by the dispatch of British forces to the emirate.<sup>33</sup>

But of course the British umbrella was removed at the end of 1971. Still, the security situation did not seem to deteriorate significantly for a number of reasons. Announcement of withdrawal had occurred three years prior to its implementation, providing time for the development of institutions and frameworks for independent states. The radical Arab threat had seemed to ebb. After the successes of military *coups d'État* in the 1950s and 1960s, only Libya fell in 1969. The monarchies had held their own, aided in part by the desperate straits in which Egypt and Syria found themselves after the 1967 war.

Because of Iraq's growing preoccupation with internal affairs, its emerging conflict with Iran, and then political stabilization after 1973, Baghdad came to be as interested in bettering relations with the more-permanent appearing states in the Gulf as in toppling them. Even the rebellion in Dhufar was blunted and gradually defeated by 1975. Perhaps most importantly, credible internal threats to the states of the Arab littoral never really materialized, partly because of the evolutionary nature of the states (as opposed to the European colonial legacies in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and elsewhere) and partly because the black gold rush provided financial opportunities and skyrocketing standards of living for nearly every citizen.

Only a few clouds intruded on the bright security horizons of the conservative Peninsula states. Traditional suspicions of Iranian intentions were heightened by the Shah's grandiose plans for economic development and military expansion, and his arrogant attitude toward the other Gulf rulers. Nevertheless, these fears were moderated by their monarchical bond, a shared reliance on the West as the source of technology, education, and military assistance, and a common anti-Soviet outlook. Iraq's Ba'athists were still there but they seemed reasonable: with the termination of the Dhufar rebellion, diplomatic relations were even established between Iraq and Oman – and the last gap between the Arab Gulf states was bridged. Farther afield, there still remained the problem of Israel and radicalized Palestinians. The outbreak of the October 1973 war forced the Gulf states to act against what would otherwise be their principal interests and engage in an oil embargo directed against the United States.

But from a different direction, a gathering storm began to attract worried concern in Riyadh and neighboring capitals. The Soviet menace seemingly had abated earlier in the decade, with the reverses in Egypt and Sudan and Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy following the 1973 war. Differences had even cropped up between Baghdad and Moscow. But events in Africa, particularly the revolution in Ethiopia and subsequent fighting in the Ogaden, and the increasingly radical party core in Aden all increased the wariness of the Gulf rulers. Finally, the downfall of the Shah seemed to remove the most important section of the bulwark between Soviet expansion and the Gulf. The period from 1979 through the mid-1980s was an era of heightened concern for the security of the Arab littoral states from external, regional, and internal threats. While the specter of the Soviet Union has been an Arab concern, though not as looming as in the United States, it has been overshadowed by developments in Iran, which seemed to present a more immediate and insidious danger.

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<sup>33</sup>See Ch. 3 for a discussion of the British deployment to Kuwait in 1961.



The Iranian revolution has presented the Arab states with three causes for worry. First, it removed one of the Gulf's most stalwart opponents of Moscow, and probably the most formidable regional deterrent to a Soviet advance on the Gulf. The vulnerability of the new and intolerant successor regime, potentially at least, seemed to create fertile ground for Soviet intrigue. Second, the upheaval excited passions on both sides of the Gulf and raised the possibility of political agitation and even revolutionary sentiment among the population – especially the Shi'a elements – of the Arab littoral. Third, it seemed likely that the new Iranian regime would act aggressively against the other states of the Gulf, either in directly engaging in subversive acts, as in fact occurred in Iraq and later in Kuwait, or by supporting indigenous dissidents, as demonstrated in Bahrain in late 1981. There was a parallel to the Russian revolution of 1917 in that the goal of Tehran's new leaders was the overthrow of all governments in Islamic countries and not just Iran.

The outbreak of war between Iran and Iraq seemed to confirm these fears. For the first time in modern history, two of the Gulf's states were engaged in a full-scale war which threatened to involve the remaining littoral governments. The potential Soviet threat from over the horizon had been superseded by a more immediate regional threat, requiring caution and diplomacy as an appropriate response rather than activation of armed forces and reliance on outside military assistance. Somewhat ironically, the war produced the conditions enabling the creation of the long-discussed Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).<sup>34</sup>

Talk of a Gulf security pact among the Gulf's eight littoral states had been circulating since the early 1970s. Such a pact, it was argued, would provide a joint defense network against external threats, help prevent disputes from flaring into hostilities, and possibly constitute an initial step toward turning the Gulf into a zone of peace. Despite the expressed approval of such a pact by all eight states, putting words into action proved impossible. The attempt to write a security pact at the Gulf foreign ministers' meeting in Muscat in December 1976 came to an abrupt end when it was realized that all eight states could not agree on a common formula.

Essentially, the problem was Iraq and Iran: without these two states, the other six formed a very compatible group. Iraq, however, was a source of grave mistrust because of its radical, pan-Arab socialist ideology and history of attempted subversion in the other Gulf states. In addition, it was the only Gulf state armed by the Soviet Union. Iran was suspect because it was non-Arab and suspicions lingered of centuries-old perceived goals of Persian hegemony in the Gulf. Furthermore, the other seven Gulf leaders were particularly wary of the goals and personal ambitions of Muhammad Reza Shah. It was not until the Iran-Iraq war removed these two countries from consideration for participation in a Gulf security pact that the foundations of the GCC could be laid.

The remaining six states formed a cohesive group. Not only did they share a common mistrust of both Iran and Iraq and evidenced close ties to the West, but they exhibited considerable

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<sup>34</sup>For background on the GCC, see Valerie Yorke, "Bid for GulfUnity," *The World Today*, Vol. 37, Nos. 7-8 (July-Aug. 1981), pp. 246-249; Emile A. Nakhleh, *The Persian Gulf and American Policy* (New York: Praeger, 1982), pp. 43-61; 'Abdullah Fahd al-Nafisi, *Majlis al-ta'awun al-khaliji: al-itar al-siyasi wal-istratiji* (London: Taha Publishers, 1982); Abdulla Yacoub Bishara, "The GCC: Achievements and Challenges," *American-Arab Affairs*, No. 7 (Winter 1983-1984), pp. 40-44; Anthony H. Cordesman, *The Gulf*, pp. 620-636; and John Duke Anthony, "The Gulf Cooperation Council," in Robert G. Darius, John W. Amos, II, and Ralph H. Magnus, eds., *Gulf Security into the 1980s* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1984), pp. 82-92.

similarities in their political, economic, and social systems. It was not unreasonable to assume that any organization built around these six states conceivably could entail far more cooperation than a security pact to which all eight might adhere. There were, after all, antecedents for cooperation in the political, economic, and security spheres.

All six had maintained close ties since the early 1970s – and far earlier in most cases – and a number of the ruling families were interrelated. Federation talks had taken place between the UAE's seven members as well as Bahrain and Qatar in the late 1960s. While an abundance of needless competition seemed to outweigh cooperation in the economic arena, a number of joint projects had been initiated under the aegis of the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC; to which all but Oman belonged), not to mention the tradition of bilateral aid provided by the richer (and earlier oil producers) to the poorer states. Saudi Arabia had contributed forces to the defense of Kuwait during the 1961 and 1963 Iraqi threats. The Saudis also provided financial aid and possibly transferred some small arms to Oman during the Dhufar rebellion; the UAE's contribution to that effort included money and border patrols in northern Oman to release SAF forces for duty in Dhufar. In addition, there has long existed an informal intelligence-sharing network among the smaller Gulf states, originally because of ties among the states' British intelligence officers.

It is not surprising then that the leaders of the six states should have entertained hopes of building a formal structure on these bases. In May 1976, Shaykh Jabir Al Ahmad Al Sabah (then Prime Minister of Kuwait and the Amir since 1978) formally called for "the establishment of a Gulf Union with the object of realizing cooperation in all economic, political, educational and informational fields...."<sup>35</sup> This sentiment was stymied by the inconclusive results of the Muscat conference later that year and the issue remained moot until the war provided a welcome opportunity and galvanized the remaining six into action.

On 4 February 1981, the six foreign ministers met in Riyadh to set down the text of the GCC charter and the document was signed by all the heads of state at Abu Dhabi on 25 May 1981, thus bringing the Cooperation Council of the Arab States of the Gulf into formal existence. The stated objectives of the council are:

- a. To effect coordination, integration and interconnection between member states in all fields in order to achieve unity between them.
- b. Deepen and strengthen relations, links and scopes of cooperation now prevailing between their peoples in various fields.
- c. Formulate similar regulations in various fields including the following:
  - i. Economic and financial affairs
  - ii. Commerce, customs and communications
  - iii. Education and culture
  - iv. Social and health affairs
  - v. Media and tourism

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<sup>35</sup>*Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf: On the Occasion of the Second Anniversary, May 25, 1981 – May 25, 1983* (London: Gulf Information and Research Centre, 1983). [Hereafter cited as "Cooperation Council"]

- vi. Legislative and administrative affairs;
- ✓ Stimulate scientific and technological progress in the fields of industry, mineralogy, agriculture, water and animal resources;
- ✓ The establishment of scientific research centres, implementation of common projects, and encouragement of cooperation by the private sector for the good of their peoples.<sup>36</sup>

The charter also defines the structure of the new organization. The Supreme Council is the highest authority, and is composed of the six heads of state meeting annually in November or in emergency session at the request of any member; each of the members has one vote and the presidency rotates among them. It appoints the secretary-general, who serves for a term of three years. A Commission for the Settlement of Disputes Among the Members is attached to the Supreme Council. The Ministerial Council provides the working basis of cooperation between the member states. It is comprised of the six foreign ministers, who rotate as president every three months. The Ministerial Council, which meets every three months or oftener in extraordinary session, is responsible for hammering out the outlines of proposed GCC policies and making arrangements for the Supreme Council summits.

The Secretariat-General forms the GCC's permanent body and carries out such functions as preparing for council meetings, setting out the budget, and carrying out assigned studies. 'Abdullah Bishara, formerly Kuwait's ambassador to the UN, has been the Secretary-General since the GCC's inception, and he presides over a staff of about 200. Under him are Assistant Secretaries-General for Political and Economic Affairs and a Chairman of the GCC Military Committee. Recent studies prepared by the Secretariat have focused on a joint agricultural policy, the feasibility of an oil export refinery in Oman, a pipeline network linking member states' gas fields, and a look at economic development in the GCC in the year 2000.<sup>37</sup>

Despite its short history, the GCC has undertaken significant economic, political, and security initiatives. In the economic sphere, a "Unified Economic Agreement" was drawn up in June 1981 and partly implemented in 1983. The agreement eliminated customs duties between GCC states and established a common external tariff. It also provided for the free movement of labor and capital between member states, for the coordination of oil policies, for the standardization of industrial laws, and for the establishment of a unified investment strategy. The latter was realized in November 1982 when the Gulf Investment Corporation was created with \$2.1 billion capital for investment in regional projects and on the international level.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Charter of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Article 3. The text of the charter is contained in "Cooperation Council," and *American-Arab Affairs*, No. 7 (Winter 1983-1984), pp. 157-176.

<sup>37</sup>Manama WAKH in Arabic, 8 Nov. 1983 (FBIS, 9 Nov. 1983).

<sup>38</sup>The text of the agreement is in "Cooperation Council," and *American-Arab Affairs*, No. 7 (Winter 1983-1984), pp. 177-197. See also *MEED*, 28 Oct. 1983, pp. 22-23. Not surprisingly, problems remain in the agreement's implementation, notably in the UAE's apparent resistance to unified customs duties and Oman's continuing requirement for non-objection certificates for GCC nationals. *The Middle East*, No. 110 (December 1983), p. 14. The goals of a Gulf currency and common market clearly remain utopian at this point.

In political terms (and beyond the intangible benefit of regular meetings and consultation by the leaders and top officials of the member states), the principal effort has been directed toward mediation in the Iran-Iraq war. Beginning with the third GCC summit in November 1982, Kuwaiti and UAE representatives have visited both Tehran and Baghdad, as well as other capitals, in an effort to seek a peaceful solution to the end of the war. While this was not the first mediation effort, it has been the longest serving one and, because of the vital interests of the mediators and their close ties to the combatants, probably stands the best chance of succeeding. GCC efforts have been more successful in prompting the establishment of diplomatic relations between Oman and the PDRY. Efforts have also been made to settle the Hawar Islands dispute between Bahrain and Qatar.<sup>39</sup>

Not surprisingly, collective security efforts, with emphasis on military aspects, have figured high on the GCC's list of priorities. While Oman has urged attention to planning in this area since the GCC was formed, the fear of antagonizing Iran and Iraq prevented any serious discussion of security affairs until the November 1982 meeting of the Supreme Council. Bilateral security agreements, a collective air defense system, joint military exercises, a joint strike force, a joint military command, and an indigenous arms industry have all been considered.

Not all of these self-defense schemes lend themselves to easy implementation and some should be considered mere pipe dreams. Nevertheless, the council's genuine security accomplishments should not be overlooked. Bilateral security arrangements were signed between Saudi Arabia and all the other states (with the exception of Kuwait) in early 1982, prompted by the scare over the abortive Bahrain coup attempt in December 1981 (not to mention the earlier Mecca incident and Iran's bombing of Kuwait). These agreements called for joint action against security offenders, for the exchange of information, training and equipment, and for the extradition of criminals.<sup>40</sup> Efforts to forge a more comprehensive internal security agreement failed to win approval at the November 1982 summit and have continued to languish. The escalation of Iraqi attacks against Kharg Island in mid-1985 and the attempt to assassinate Kuwait's amir in that same year led to an increased emphasis on security concerns and a reaffirmation of the GCC's readiness to mediate between Iran and Iraq at the November 1985 GCC summit in Muscat.<sup>41</sup>

Establishment of a collective air defense system is more ambitious but seemingly within the range of GCC capabilities in the near future. Planning for an integrated system began in January 1982 and the go-ahead was received at the November 1982 summit. It is based on Saudi Arabia's AWACS radar and C3 capabilities, linked to anti-aircraft missiles and interceptor aircraft. Ideally,

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<sup>39</sup>In addition to these activities within the Gulf region, the GCC Supreme Council sent Kuwait's deputy prime minister and Qatar's minister of state for foreign affairs to Syria in late 1983 to try to end the infighting within the PLO at that time. Attempts were also made to mediate between Baghdad and Damascus, and Rabat and Algiers.

<sup>40</sup>*An-Nahar Arab Report and MEMO*, 1 Mar. 1982. Kuwait's desire to keep a healthy distance from more powerful Saudi Arabia appeared to be at the root of its reticence to sign the bilateral agreement. Similar concerns over Saudi hegemony have delayed, if not prevented, the signing of a GCC collective security agreement.

<sup>41</sup>*New York Times*, 7 Nov. 1985; *Washington Post*, 7 Nov. 1985.

the UAE's projected Lambda air-defense and electronic warfare system and Kuwait's Thomson radars and upgraded Hawk missiles eventually would be plugged into the GCC-cum-Saudi system.<sup>42</sup>

Another area in which cooperation has already been evident is joint military exercises, largely bilateral in nature. Saudi F-15s and F-5s were joined by Kuwaiti Skyhawks in eleven-day maneuvers in November 1983, covering training in air bombardment, air interception operations, fast transfer and takeoff, and other exercises. This followed a Saudi-Bahraini air exercise in land-and-sea search and rescue. Then in 1984, Oman and the UAE held joint air force exercises in February and April; Saudi, Qatari, Kuwaiti, and Bahraini units participated in air mobilization exercises in Bahrain in April; Thamarit Air Base in Dhufar was the scene of Saudi-Omani exercises in August; Bahrain and Qatar conducted a naval exercise also in August; and additional maneuvers were held in Saudi Arabia in October. During 1985, Qatar hosted a joint naval exercise with Kuwait in January; the Kuwaiti and Omani air forces carried out joint maneuvers near the Strait of Hormuz in March; Abu Dhabi was the site of a UAE/Kuwaiti exercise in March; and the Kuwait navy participated in joint maneuvers with the Saudi navy in April. Another potential area of cooperation lies in joint naval patrols through the Strait of Hormuz (although only Oman and Saudi Arabia possess the necessary capability at present to contribute to this function).<sup>43</sup>

Ambitious plans for military coordination within the GCC framework go far beyond bilateral exercises. A Military Committee was established within the GCC Secretariat, the six Chiefs of Staff first met in September 1981, and regular discussions between ranking military officials from all the member states on the ways and means of developing joint military coordination began in mid-1983. As a first step, the GCC has sought to create a joint strike force, and the "Peninsula Shield" joint exercises held in western Abu Dhabi in October 1983 were meant to demonstrate the feasibility of developing the GCC's own RDF. Infantry, tank, and artillery forces from all six states, along with Mirages and Ghazal helicopters from the UAE's air force, participated in a mock attack on an "enemy-held" hilltop position, with the final assault performed before an audience of the six rulers.<sup>44</sup> "Peninsula Shield II," held one year later at Hafar al-Batin in northeastern Saudi Arabia, was the second annual exercise of troops earmarked for the GCC RDF. The two weeks of maneuvers, involving 10,000 men from all six states, included parachute drops of men and equipment, air support and intercept mission, night-time offensives, and anti-aircraft demonstrations.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>*The Middle East*, No. 119 (Sept. 1984), pp. 15-18.

<sup>43</sup>Riyadh SPA in Arabic, 30 Nov. 1983 (FBIS, 1 Dec. 1983); *MEED*, 20 Apr. 1984; Manama WAKH in Arabic, 12 Apr. 1984 (FBIS, 12 April 1984); Muscat Domestic Service in Arabic, 16 Aug. 1984 (FBIS, 17 Aug. 1984); Manama WAKH in Arabic, 29 Aug. 1984 (FBIS, 30 Aug. 1984); *al-Qabas* (Kuwait), 3 Sept. 1984 (FBIS, 5 Sept. 1984); Kuwait KUNA in Arabic, 14 Jan. 1985 (FBIS, 15 Jan. 85); Manama WAKH in English, 1 Mar. 1985 (FBIS, 5 Mar. 1985); Doha QNA in Arabic, 21 Mar. 1985 (FBIS, 21 Mar. 1985); and Abu Dhabi WAM in Arabic, 27 Mar. 1985 (FBIS, 28 Mar. 1985).

<sup>44</sup>Manama WAKH in Arabic, 13 Oct. 1983 (FBIS, 14 Oct. 1983); *New York Times*, 16 Oct. 1983; and *The Middle East*, No. 109 (Nov. 1983), p. 17.

<sup>45</sup>Manama WAKH in Arabic, 10 Oct. 1984 (FBIS, 11 Oct. 1984); Riyadh Domestic Service in Arabic, 15 Oct. 1984 (FBIS, 15 Oct. 1984); *Washington Post*, 30 Nov. 1984.

The Council remains far away from realizing its RDF objective – not to mention the goal of a unified military command – despite the growing numbers of joint exercises. The difficulties encountered by the UAE in unifying its myriad of armed forces stands as a sobering example of the distance that the GCC has to go. There are more than enough obstacles with the proposed RDF alone:

Formation of a Gulf strike force, for instance, is certain to face manpower problems and will have to rely mainly on the Saudi army and will most likely have a Saudi commander. Even then, the use of other Arab troops or Pakistani forces will probably have to be considered if the force is to be capable of handling anything other than the most minor local disturbances. There will also be logistical problems arising from the lack of roads suitable for the movement of troops across state borders.<sup>46</sup>

Nevertheless, an announcement was made at the Fifth Supreme Council Meeting, held in Kuwait in November 1984, that it had been decided to create a joint GCC strike force under the command of a Saudi general, even though the GCC's Secretary-General was candid enough to say that force would be largely "symbolic." Approval for the RDF appeared to be for a limited period, and it was not intended not be a permanent force but would be drawn from units of all six states in an emergency and then disbanded at the end of the crisis. The units participating in the "Peninsula Shield II" exercises in October 1984 were expected to be earmarked for the RDF.<sup>47</sup>

A final area of proposed cooperation lies in arms acquisition. At present, the GCC states are equipped with American, Brazilian, British, Chinese, French, German, Italian, Swiss, and even Soviet arms (in Kuwait), which seriously handicaps joint operations, prevents the transfer of spare parts and ammunition, and hampers effective use of C<sup>3</sup> systems. Given the huge amounts of arms already delivered or on order, full coordination of military forces may be unattainable. On the other hand, efforts to implement a unified procurement program, particularly where relevant to the collective air defense system, cannot help but be beneficial if put into operation immediately. Despite the immense size of their previous purchases, the GCC states' defense spending, at about \$40 billion annually, continues to account for approximately half of the total amount for the Third World.<sup>48</sup> Even Saudi Arabia, running budget deficits on the order of \$1 billion per month in 1984 and 1985, continued to spend over 25% of its budget on defense; the Omani figure is closer to 40%. One effect of such a unified procurement policy may be a shift away from heavy reliance on purchases from the US (particularly on the part of Saudi Arabia) because of the political difficulties in Arab purchases of sophisticated US arms.

An even more difficult task would be the establishment of an indigenous arms industry, given the level of economic development in these states. Although \$1.4 billion has been allocated for this purpose, cooperation with one or more non-GCC states appears necessary along the lines of the earlier Arab Military Industrialization Organization based in Egypt. Jordan, Egypt, Turkey, and

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<sup>46</sup>*The Middle East*, No. 119 (Sept. 1984), pp. 15-18.

<sup>47</sup>*New York Times*, 30 Nov. 1984; *Washington Post*, 30 Nov. 1984; *The Middle East*, No. 123 (Jan. 1985), p. 6.

<sup>48</sup>*The Economist*, 21 Jan. 1984, p. 31.

Pakistan have all been mentioned as possible partners, although there are drawbacks to consideration of each of these countries.<sup>49</sup> Speculation has also centered on Iraq as potential partner.

The potential combined military capability of the six GCC states is not entirely negligible, representing 190,000 men, 900 main battle tanks, more than 3,500 other armored vehicles, over 425 interceptor and ground-attack aircraft, between 500 and 800 helicopters, and 36 fast-attack naval vessels, and of course the highly sophisticated air defense and communications system.<sup>50</sup> GCC ground forces capability to rest an overland attack rests principally on the Saudi armored brigades, supported by Kuwait's Chieftain tanks. There is greater variety in strike aircraft, although Saudi Arabia's 100 F-5s form the heart of GCC capabilities, to which the recently purchased Tornado ground-attack fighters can be added along with Kuwait's A-4 Skyhawks and Oman's Hunters and Jaguars. Most of the GCC states have invested heavily in air defense capabilities, and the Saudi E-3A AWACS will provide the basis for an integrated C3I package, to which the Saudi F-15s, the Kuwaiti Mirage 1s, the UAE's Mirage 5s, and Qatar's Mirage 1s and Omani Tornados (both on order) can be linked, along with a wide variety of surface-to-air missile systems.<sup>51</sup>

The absorption of large numbers of highly sophisticated weapons, the complex mix of various types of weapons from a wide variety of suppliers, the small base of indigenous manpower and serious training problems, the intensive competition for skilled manpower, and the lack of combat experience, and above all different outlooks and policy goals among the six member states continue to plague GCC attempts at self-defense. One observer notes,

the GCC can be expected at best to police the Peninsula – to deal with various threats from the Yemens, and hopefully to settle disputes among themselves amicably. But they cannot hope to defend the Peninsula against external attack ... [where] they can hope at best to deter by promising some damage to the attack, to limit damage initially, and thus to buy time until reinforcements arrive.<sup>52</sup>

But the GCC states have taken significant steps to acquire the ability to buy time until outside help arrives, and they have done very well in protecting themselves from more likely, if more limited, internal and regional threats. As an American military analyst has noted, "To achieve regional stability [the West] must create strong, stable, and friendly Gulf states that can maintain their own internal security and eventually absorb most of the burden of their local defense."<sup>53</sup> In the last analysis, it is of course these states who bear the principal burden for their own security. As the Secretary-General of the GCC has put it, "The world may laugh at us when we say that the Gulf

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<sup>49</sup>*The Middle East*, No. 119 (Sept. 1984), pp. 15-18.

<sup>50</sup>*The Economist*, 21 Jan. 1984, p. 31; *Middle East Economic Digest*, 28 Oct. 1983, p. 24.

<sup>51</sup>McNaugher, "Arms and Allies," pp. 505-513.

<sup>52</sup>McNaugher, "Arms and Allies," p. 517.

<sup>53</sup>Cordesman, *The Gulf*, p. 62.

countries alone are authorized to defend the region, but whatever our capabilities may be, we insist that this is the basic principle for achieving security and peace for our peoples."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>Abdulla Bishara, quoted in the Kuwaiti newspaper *al-Qabas*, 26 Aug. 1983 (FBIS, 31 Aug. 1983).



**Table 6.1. Arabian Peninsula States: Military Capabilities**

	<b>Pop. (millions)</b>	<b>Total No. of GDP (\$ billions)</b>	<b>Expenditures (\$ billions)</b>	<b>Country Armed Forces</b>
<u>GCC Members:</u>				
Bahrain	.40	2,800	4.617	.253
Kuwait	1.75	12,500	19.903	1.360
Oman	1.00	21,500	7.600	1.960
Qatar	.27	6,000	7.903	.165
Saudi Arabia	8-12	51,500	119.967	22.731
UAE	1.30	43,000	34.978	1.867
<u>The Yemens:</u>				
YAR (North)	7.50	36,550	3.208	.526
PDRY (South)	2.20	27,500	.923	.159
Source: <i>The Military Balance, 1984-1985</i> (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1984), pp. 59-73.				