

U.S.-ARAB COOPERATION IN THE GULF: ARE BOTH SIDES WORKING FROM THE SAME SCRIPT?

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The primary thesis of this paper is ironic and perhaps tragic: as U.S. power and predominance have risen in the Gulf, to the point that the region is mainly dependent on the United States for its security needs, the differences between the United States and regional actors in political outlook, purported national and international interests, and threat assessments have multiplied and undermined mutual trust. As the United States has become more important to the region, the region has become more suspicious of U.S. goals and critical of U.S. influence.

These differences have arisen over several issues: overall diplomatic and economic relations with Iran, the parameters of peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians, counterproliferation efforts vis-à-vis Iraq and Iran, and domestic political developments within Gulf societies. However, one key factor underlies all of these divisions: whereas before 9/11 the United States viewed regional threats as emanating from divisions between states

within the region – as seen in the threats by Iraqi and Iranian governments toward their neighbors – now the United States has adopted an existential view of threats that pictures every state and society within the region as a potential long-term challenge to U.S. security and U.S. values. The very character of Gulf states themselves, including their domestic political practices, is now being seen as a target of U.S. policy. Instead of deterring regional aggressors on behalf of status quo states, the United States is now trying to transform political practices throughout the Gulf, even those of friends and allies.

I briefly describe below the complex history of security and diplomatic interactions between the United States and Gulf countries, from roughly 1970 to the present. After analyzing the growing rift in U.S.-Gulf relations, I argue that unless the United States returns to a more traditional conception of (inter)national security – in which the regulating relations between states is the primary target of U.S. policies, rather than changing the very character of

regional regimes – current disagreements are only likely to grow and fester over time, possibly undermining the new-found U.S. role as sole guarantor of Gulf security.

WMDs AND MISSILE PROLIFERATION

Arab Gulf states have been concerned about proliferation of ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction (WMD) ever since they were first used in the region in the Iran-Iraq War. It was this war that prompted these states to come together in an alliance that was later known as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Iraq's extensive use of chemical weapons in the war opened the eyes of many to the spread of WMD in the Middle East. The psychological and destructive effect of ballistic missiles was a major cause of concern.¹ These missiles proved successful in penetrating air defenses and inflicting damage to the rear lines, especially population centers. Thus, the United States was not alone in its strong concern about the future of WMD and missile proliferation in the Gulf; regional Arab states have also accorded this issue a high priority, if not always with equally strong rhetoric.

In the eighties, the GCC supported Iraq in the war with Iran, as did the United States. This common focus was galvanized by the avowed policy of the Islamic Iranian government to export its theocratic revolution to neighboring states and to give support to Shiite communities there as well. But in 1990, the GCC found itself on the receiving end of its former ally, Iraq. Shortly after Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait, GCC members Bahrain and Saudi Arabia came under attack by Iraqi Scud missiles, making GCC fears of ballistic missile attacks a reality.

Washington provided the means for the GCC to defend itself against Iraqi Scuds. The United States had by 1991 rooted itself strongly in the region, following years of close military cooperation with the armed forces of GCC states. The close military cooperation between the two sides had started at the time of the tanker war in the Iran-Iraq War, when Arab Gulf states sought America's help to protect their oil tankers and keep shipping lines open in the Arabian Sea and Gulf basin. GCC militaries, most of them less than a decade old, started very costly armament programs in the early 1980s to boost their defenses. The defense spending of GCC states in the five-year period 1976-80 was \$71.73 billion, while in the period 1981-85 their combined defense spending went up to \$146.44 billion, more than twice the amount spent in the previous five years.² GCC states spent about \$101.63 billion on defense during 1985-90, the period that witnessed the extensive use of Scud missiles by Iran and Iraq.

MILITARY TIES

Joint exercises, procurement programs and offsets-based businesses have brought GCC military officials very close to the U.S. armed forces. The Gulf War experience of 1990-91 only served to strengthen these ties and increase GCC's confidence in the United States as a reliable ally, especially after an Arab neighbor, Iraq, had turned against them and invaded Kuwait. The improvement in military and political relationships led to the signing of defense pacts between GCC states and the United States as well as with other Western countries such as France and Britain.

U.S. forces maintained a strong presence at various bases in the Gulf

region as well. The majority of defense contracts went to American-based companies. To a large extent, however, it was not purely financial capital but rather the human factor that helped consolidate military ties with the United States. New weapons from U.S. firms necessitated more training by the supplying country, which meant more Gulf officers and troops had to live for long periods in the United States. At the same time, many GCC troops were trained by American officers in the region. Regular joint exercises helped the U.S. forces transfer their expertise to GCC forces. U.S. weapons imports meant that GCC countries needed more support products – and thus a steady lucrative business for the U.S. military-industrial complex – leading to the establishment of local representatives of U.S. defense industries within the region. Therefore, a strong bond was established, and continues to exist, between the GCC armed forces and their American counterparts. This professional, technical and material cooperation is likely to withstand the strongly negative political winds now blowing throughout the region in regard to U.S. cultural and diplomatic influence.

CHANGING TIMES

Throughout the 1990s, Iran and Iraq were portrayed in regional media and conferences as the main sources of threat to the GCC. The United States and its Arab Gulf allies seemed to be reading from the same script most of the time when responding to threats from Iran or Iraq. Most threats were perceived as coming from Iraq, given the conflict over weapons inspections and doubts over whether the Iraqi regime was complying with the U.N. resolutions on disarmament. Operation

Desert Fox in 1998, which had strong GCC backing, only reflects the unity of the two, although the outcome of the operation was much less than what some Arab Gulf leaders had expected or hoped for.

The attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, had a huge impact on GCC-U.S. relations. Almost all the 19 hijackers who carried out the suicide attacks were from GCC states. Criticism by many American officials and scholars directed at the Gulf countries, and Saudi Arabia in particular, undermined the ties between the two sides. The alliance that was established in the Gulf War and strengthened over ten years was severely shaken but did not collapse. The prevailing perception in the region is that a new America has been wounded in its heart, culturally and socially as well as in pure security terms, and is therefore seeking vengeance under the leadership of an administration with a new unilateralist approach. Moreover, this image of a wounded America assumes that for the foreseeable future, the United States will largely be seeking only its own interests.

Feeling the pressure from the United States, GCC countries went on the defensive by assuring the U.S. administration and the American people that they were good allies. But this time the cost of the alliance was different. Based on President George W. Bush's speech talking about America's war on terrorism: "You're either with us or against us," GCC states, like many friends of the United States worldwide, found no middle ground to safeguard their interests. GCC states felt they were being dragged into a conflict with their own people, who were outraged by the Western media campaign against Islam and also by what was going on in the occupied territo-

ries of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In the popular perception of Gulf societies, Israel has been increasingly guilty of atrocities against the Palestinians with the flagrant support of the Bush White House. Israel has managed to equate its war with the Palestinians with the U.S. war on terrorism, and thus Palestinians – regarded by Arab countries for decades as freedom fighters – were being suddenly branded as terrorists.³

Despite the public opposition to the United States, GCC states joined the American alliance in the war on terrorism. GCC states provided considerable military support to the United States in its Afghanistan and Iraq military campaigns, most of it behind the scenes: Bahrain sent a frigate to take part in maritime operations in the Indian Ocean during the U.S. campaign in Afghanistan;⁴ the UAE and Oman opened their air bases for U.S. warplanes conducting operations in Afghanistan; and Saudi Arabia's Prince Sultan airbase served as the command and control center for war operations. GCC states even amended their procurement programs to deal with the new threat: terrorism.⁵ Special Forces training, equipping and cooperation have been particularly accelerated since 9/11. Despite occasional heated exchanges between Arab Gulf officials and the United States over the issue of Arab responsibility for the 9/11 attacks, as well as differences over the definition of terrorism, cooperation on the military level between the two sides never stopped. It could be argued that the strong military relationships between GCC countries and the United States were the main reason that policy dialogue and cooperation persisted. This helped the coalition survive a very serious crisis. The question is, how long can this largely

apolitical, professional military cooperation persist in the face of disagreements over threat assessments, including differing perceptions of the threat from Iran, Israel and transnational terrorism?

THE IRAQ WAR

The GCC was strongly opposed to the war on Iraq. All efforts by the U.S. administration in 2002 to talk Arab Gulf officials into supporting the war failed. Until 2002, Arab officials were under the impression that the United States wanted to wage the war because of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. Thus, most statements made by Arab Gulf officials stressed one fact: Iraq was no longer a real existential threat to any of them.⁶ However, by the start of 2003, it had become quite clear to GCC states that the coming war with Iraq was no longer their war, as was the case in 1991, but America's war for purely American interests. The GCC desperately tried to prevent this war by all political means, but without success.⁷ Despite repeated statements by Arab Gulf officials about the possible impact of the conflict on the future security and stability of the region, the United States went to war. Washington was now openly working from its own script in the Gulf region without much regard to GCC views.

Nevertheless, to preserve the alliance, GCC states eventually gave limited support to the United States in the Iraq War. The invasion was as swift as expected, but consequences have also been thus far as bad as predicted. The situation in Iraq continues to be unstable, and the future unity of the country remains uncertain. Fundamentalist groups became more active in Iraq and the area surrounding it, including GCC states. Most important, no WMD

have thus far been uncovered in Iraq, which further undermined the already low credibility of the United States in Arab public opinion. The “axis of evil” speech by President George W. Bush, the invasion of Iraq and the failure to find WMD there have led many Arabs – both officials and ordinary people – to create theories about the real U.S. intentions. Most of these theories centered around Washington’s desire to control Arab oil wealth. All other U.S. rhetoric about threat assessments, national security and long-term goals has been discarded as mere window dressing for patently imperial goals.

IRAN-GCC RELATIONS

Iran under the shah was the hegemonic power in the Middle East and Gulf region. It possessed the largest and best-equipped standing army and was an ally of the Arabs’ arch foe, Israel. Arabs saw in Iran a threat based mostly on a Persian desire to dominate the region. Arabs also perceived Iran’s alliance with Israel as an attempt to suppress pan-Arabism.

These interests were not seen as totally incongruous, however. The common goal between Iran and its Arab neighbors was the Organization of Oil-Producing Countries (OPEC), which the shah used as a tool to increase oil prices and occasionally to pressure Washington to achieve political gains. The United States saw in Iran’s geographic location on the borders of the former Soviet Union a great strategic asset. Due to Cold War geopolitics, Iran increasingly acquired a special status in U.S. foreign and defense policies.

The rise of the Islamic Republic changed the entire geopolitical scene. For many Arab states, the Iranian Revolution replaced the threat of Persian nationalism

with that of radical Shiism. Attempts by Tehran’s new Islamic government to export the revolution to neighboring countries has caused many predominantly Sunni Arab states, including the GCC, to worry about the Shiite communities within their own polities.⁸

In response to the rise of a theocratic and ideologically expansionist Iran, GCC states aided Iraq’s war effort in the 1980s. Additionally, in the past two decades, the United States has built up a “containment” strategy toward Iran based on harsh economic sanctions as well as forward military deployments in the region, including an explicit deterrence policy based upon military threats. Soon after the 1991 Gulf War, the “dual containment” of Iran and Iraq became the basis of U.S. policy. While this term is no longer used officially, and while Iraq has now dropped off the list of powers needing containing, U.S. policies toward Iran are still based on the philosophy of containment through diplomatic isolation, economic pressure and military threats.

While U.S.-Iran enmity has grown or remained constant, the start of the twenty-first century saw a steady improvement in Iran’s relationship with the GCC. Growing trade ties between Iran and the Arab Gulf states helped improve political relations. The rise of the reformist movement in Iran, which eased the rhetoric about the export of the revolution to neighboring countries, helped calm the fears of many officials in the Gulf. Iran, strained by the U.S. containment policy, needed its neighbors more than at any time before.

So the past five years have witnessed high-level visits by officials from Iran to individual Arab Gulf monarchies on a bilateral basis, including the signing of many trade and security pacts. Oman took

the lead in improving relations with Iran in the late eighties and later helped mediate re-establishment of ties between Tehran and Arab Gulf states. Iranian and Omani officials have been exchanging frequent visits, further improving their relations. Saudi Arabia moved ahead in 2000 with a series of trade and mutual-cooperation pacts with Iran. Ties continued to improve between the two countries in the following years, especially with the signing of a security agreement in April 2001 and a judicial-cooperation memorandum of understanding in July 2003. Another security-cooperation agreement was signed between Iran and Qatar in October 2002, covering cooperation on various aspects of border security, including measures to counteract drug running and money laundering.⁹

Nevertheless, the dispute with the UAE over the Abu Musa and Tunb islands continued to affect the ties between the GCC and Iran. While Saudi Arabia has used its leadership position within the GCC to carry out an agenda of steadily improved relations with Iran, the UAE (and other small Gulf states such as Kuwait) have remained highly critical of the Iranian moves since 1997 to consolidate military control over the three strategically placed islands. Iran has created naval facilities and other active military bases on at least one of the islands, and it has made statements to the effect that if any power attacked Iran, Tehran would use its military presence on the islands to deny oil shipments through the Strait of Hormuz as a punitive measure. However, at the same time, the UAE and the GCC have always maintained that they would seek a political settlement to the disputed Tunb Islands, and UAE and Iranian officials have had a

few positive diplomatic exchanges in the past three years to improve ties.

Overall, the picture is one of protracted stalemate. Iran sees the islands as critical to its deterrence and defense posture (especially with the peaking of U.S. deployments and influence in the region in the past 10 years), while the UAE views the islands' final status as a central issue of sovereignty. Although the GCC has a common stance that is critical of Iran and strongly in favor of good-faith negotiations, the political reality is that the UAE's GCC partners have a strong desire to improve relations with Iran even as Tehran has cut off concrete bilateral and multilateral negotiations over the status of the islands. In particular, Saudi Arabia has not let UAE concerns (and those of other small Gulf states) stop its ongoing rapprochement with Iran, which is based squarely on realist foreign-policy tenets.

Furthermore, the sensitive issue of Shiite political status in Arab Gulf countries continues to cause friction with Iran. The most recent example was Kuwait's tough reaction to meetings held at the Iranian embassy in Kuwait with Kuwaiti Shiite figures. Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammad Al-Sabah criticized the meetings as interference in Kuwait's internal affairs and called Iran "a strategic threat to the Gulf."¹⁰

Overall, there is still substantial mistrust on both sides about the other's intentions. Iran is perceived by the GCC states as wanting to cement its regional hegemony, while Iran argues that GCC states have invited a hostile power (the United States) into the region. Some Iranian officials believe that the heavy U.S. military presence in GCC states constitutes an existential threat to the Islamic govern-

ment in Tehran. Further, Iranian officials and experts believe that the GCC states are using far superior U.S. military technology to threaten Iran needlessly. In the Iranian view, there is nothing to deter, since Iran only wants to exercise its natural leadership role in the region; in the Gulf Arab view, Iran seeks dominance.

This does not mean, however, that Arab countries and the United States share the same threat assessments. Recall that bilateral relations between Iran and individual Arab monarchies have been dramatically improving in areas such as cultural exchanges, economic trade and finance, and naval security. Military confidence-building measures (CBMs) and trade pacts have proliferated between Iran and its Arab neighbors. Thus, it would be accurate to characterize the overall situation as one of managed competition based on long-held tenets of *Realpolitik*, much like the bilateral relationship between the United States and China. As with the U.S.-China relationship, trust and mistrust coexist equally in a complex web of economic and military ties. Threats exist in the background alongside public assurances; power balancing and deterrence exist alongside friendly diplomacy and lucrative trade pacts. Neither side sees the other as completely “enemy” or “friend.” Rather, GCC states believe that they share strong regional interests with Iran in creating prosperity and stability, even though they disagree on the best methods of guaranteeing that stability.

This is where differences between the GCC states and the United States continue to increase. Shortly after the invasion of Iraq, the story of a well-developed Iranian nuclear program started to resurface in the Western media. Negative comments about

Iranian nuclear intentions soon emanated from strong Bush administration personalities such as John Bolton, head of arms control and disarmament issues in the State Department. Most Arabs jumped to the conclusion that “it was Iran’s turn” to complete the list of the so-called “axis of evil” states. Revelations by the IAEA in November 2003 about the scope and maturity of an 18-year-old secret Iranian nuclear program have surprised many people worldwide, including Arabs. But the reaction as to how to deal with it has been greatly mixed and changing almost by the day.¹¹ While the United States has repeatedly urged the IAEA to declare Iran in violation of the treaty, which would pave the way for the U.N. Security Council to impose sanctions on Iran, European countries have preferred a more subtle approach based on dialogue and political persuasion. The foreign ministers of France, Britain and Germany reached a deal with Iranian officials in October 2003 under which Tehran pledged to voluntarily halt the enrichment of uranium and to forgo the pursuit of nuclear weapons. However, the IAEA issued a resolution in March 2004 censuring Tehran for continuing to hide suspect activities and has been pressing Iran to give a full and comprehensive report on its nuclear activities to avoid future U.N. sanctions.

U.S.-ARAB HARMONY?

The GCC reaction to Iran’s nuclear program has not been clear or straightforward. It has focused primarily on one standing policy: that Arab Gulf States would like to see the entire region, including Israel, free of WMD.¹² The continued existence of Israel’s nuclear arsenal – and, indeed, its recent expansion through

deployed German submarines with a nuclear-missile capability – will always make it very hard for Arab officials to openly criticize Iran or any other state in the Middle East for having a nuclear program. In fact, many Arab officials blame Israel's nuclear program for causing other countries to seek WMD. Most Arabs have been openly critical of the policy pursued by the United States and the West, which has turned a blind eye to Israel's nuclear arsenal and prevented other Arab or Islamic countries from developing their own nuclear capabilities.

Behind the scenes, however, there has been an ongoing dialogue on whether an Iranian nuclear bomb would be a threat to the region. GCC reaction to Iran's nuclear program has been mainly split into two camps. The first camp, mainly in Saudi Arabia, has looked at Iran suspiciously and raised old fears about "Persian domination" or a "Shiite quest" for control of Islam. The second camp appears to be indifferent about an Iranian nuclear program and does not see a threat to GCC states. This second camp seems now to be getting support from Egypt, which has not openly criticized the Iranian nuclear agenda.¹³ The Egyptian media found in the Iranian nuclear quest and the recent Libyan decision to give up WMD programs an opportunity to revive the international debate over Israel's nuclear arsenal. Egypt and other Arab states, including some GCC officials, seem to be trying to move closer to absorbing Iran instead of distancing themselves from it, probably in the hope that if Iran ever got the nuclear bomb, Tehran would be on their side and not the other way around.

On the military level, there seems to be a serious revival of older plans to deploy a

regional missile-defense system – revealing yet again the penchant of GCC states to hedge their bets by pursuing simultaneously deterrence and defense options and diplomacy based on assurances. The objective, however, is not just to defend against a potential Iranian threat. It actually goes beyond this to include possible threats from the eastern front, mainly India and China. According to Commander of the UAE Air Force and Air Defense Major-General Khaled Al Bu-Ainain, the GCC states are hoping to finalize this year a plan for the deployment of a fully integrated missile-defense system capable of intercepting ballistic missiles at high and low altitudes. In an interview with *Defense News*, Al Bu-Ainain said the missile shield will be implemented in two phases. The first phase will see the deployment of missile-defense systems on the national level, while the second phase will see the integration of these systems in one regional defense network.¹⁴

Al Bu-Ainain's views were reiterated recently by the Bahrain defense minister, who told *Defense News* that the United States must play a lead role in a future Gulf missile-defense system. He said the GCC needs U.S. operational expertise and technology to have an effective defense system.¹⁵ Currently, only Kuwait and Saudi Arabia have a missile-defense system based on Patriot missiles. Both countries are engaged in negotiations with the Patriot's manufacturer, Raytheon, to upgrade their batteries to the PAC-3 model.

In contrast with dire U.S. threat pronouncements since 9/11, however, Arab officials and media do not seem to show a strong sense of threat from a potentially imminent nuclear attack by Iran or any-

body else. None of the civil-defense services in the GCC have taken any measures or even called for dedicated planning in the short or long term to prepare for a strike from Iran. So the GCC military is preparing active defensive measures for what they see as a possible, but highly unlikely, threat from Iran. There do not seem to be any intentions by the GCC, on both the political and military level, to take any preemptive or preventive military measures to stop the Iranian nuclear program.

There are solid geopolitical rationales for this moderate stance. Taking part in any U.S. hostile action against Iran would have diverse consequences for the GCC. In particular, Iran could retaliate by

- Ceasing vital trade ties and commercial deals with the important Iranian market;
- Inciting GCC Shiite communities, mostly of Iranian descent, to rise against the regimes;
- Firing ballistic missiles on U.S. bases in the region or laying mines to interrupt trade in the Arabian Sea;
- Further complicating GCC efforts to combat fundamentalist groups through covert, cross-border aid to these groups.

Finally, Arab Gulf governments are worried about the implications for future ties with Iran if a regime change occurred and a pro-U.S. government were to take control in Tehran. Many GCC officials fear Iran might want to regain the hegemonic role it enjoyed during the shah's time and could seek revenge for previous actions by Arab Gulf states. Thus, while U.S. leaders seem to dream of the halcyon days of U.S.-Iranian security cooperation under the shah's system, Iran's neighbors fear a return to this type of regional

security system, which involved subjugation to the foreign-policy whims of a hegemonic Iran rather than a balance of interests between equal sovereign states.

In stark contrast to the more passive GCC stance, the United States has been very vocal in its opposition to the Iranian nuclear program and in its calls for preventive measures to bring it to an end. However, statements by American political and military officials have been mostly focused on the current Iranian regime rather than Iran itself. In other words, it is inconceivable to allow the current Islamic regime in Iran to have nuclear weapons; but, if there were a secular pro-U.S. regime in Tehran, it might very well be seen as acceptable.¹⁶ In fact, the nascent nuclear program in Iran was first started in the early 1970s under the shah, with strong U.S. technical, financial and diplomatic support.

For now, the European Union and the IAEA seem to have succeeded in talking Iran into halting or at least slowing down its nuclear program. However, many U.S. and Israeli officials are convinced that Iran is either close to reaching, or actually has reached, the point of no return in the process of building a nuclear weapon. Both Israel and the United States have spoken about possible military preemptive measures to halt the program.¹⁷ But many experts believe the military options are limited and would entail heavy collateral damage and serious consequences for the U.S. military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan, in part due to Iranian retaliation and in part due to the political fallout with Arab regimes and their increasingly anti-American populations.

Because a preemptive U.S. or Israeli strike could have disastrous political (and hence, military) consequences for U.S. ties

in the region, some analysts would go as far as to say that the U.S. administration does not have a clear script on how to deal with the Iranian nuclear program. Washington seems now to be weighing many options, including one on how to coexist with a nuclear Iran. Thus, for now, the United States has chosen a diplomatic course to resolve the Iranian nuclear issue and succeeded in avoiding any symbolic or military linkage with Israel's nuclear program.

CONCLUSION

The good news is that the GCC and the United States agree that WMD and missile proliferation is a dangerous trend. If Iran is not singled out, and WMD proliferation is spoken of in general terms, the GCC and the United States seem to be of one mind. But the unilateralist approach of the current U.S. administration toward Iraq and its hard-line stance toward Iran makes it very hard for the GCC to work from the same script on many issues that specifically include Iran. Washington must take GCC interests and concerns into consideration to have a more coordinated and effective effort in dealing with Iran on a regional level. In part due to concerns over domestic Arab politics, which have been radicalized by the U.S. invasion of Iraq and the news coverage of Israeli actions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, GCC states would be unlikely to allow the United States to use military bases on their soil (or even their air space) to launch "counterproliferation" attacks on Iran.

However, many defense experts and officials in the Gulf believe that with U.S. forces deployed in Iraq, the United States might not actually need to use its bases in GCC countries to attack Iran. Iraq has a

long and porous border with Iran and would be more suitable for launching air and ground attacks, provided that the interim Iraqi government gives the permission required for U.S. military operations against a key Iraqi neighbor. Nevertheless, a U.S. attack on Iran could still place all American bases in GCC states under threat of Iranian retaliation and hence undermine the safety and security of all these countries. Therefore, a unilateralist military action would likely seriously undermine future GCC-U.S. relations. Furthermore, unless there is a change in U.S. policy regarding the existence of Israel's nuclear arsenal, GCC states will likely continue to avoid criticizing Iran's nuclear program and will maintain their desire to see a WMD-free zone in the whole Middle East, including not just Iran but also Israel.

As long as U.S. enmity toward Iran and U.S. counterproliferation efforts are based on an anti-regime political calculus – as opposed to more universal nonproliferation norms that incorporate Israel's nuclear status – it is unlikely that GCC states will agree on strong cooperative actions to stem WMD proliferation in the region. Arab monarchies continue to base their security on a balance-of-power logic that seeks to prevent any growth of hegemonic power within the larger Middle East. This includes Israeli military capabilities and doctrine as well as Iranian. Further, Arab monarchies base their security on a traditional respect for national sovereignty and thus do not see deterrence, defense and counterproliferation actions from the standpoint of regime change, preemptive strikes or preventive war. Moreover, this nuanced view of regional security allows and even mandates increased economic

cooperation, diplomatic ties and cultural exchanges with Iran alongside defensive military preparations. In stark contrast, U.S. diplomacy, economic sanctions and military efforts (including the December 2002 preemptive U.S. nuclear doctrine) seem intent on even starker isolation and coercion of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

For the Arabs, the security problem is one of partially conflicting national interests among states with great imbalances among them in wealth, domestic stability, population resources, natural resources and territory. Therefore, their primary security goal is to provide the space necessary for states with different power potentials and different domestic systems to develop and prosper without undermining any one state's efforts to defend itself. The

solution is to create a balance of power and balance of interests based on a complex mix of military measures, friendly diplomacy and economic transactions.

To the extent that the United States seeks an imbalance of interests and coercive transformation of Gulf regimes such as the Islamic Republic of Iran, therefore, disagreements between the United States and GCC countries are only likely to grow. For the time being, long-standing ties between the United States military-industrial complex and the Gulf monarchies have allowed for strong security cooperation between the two sides. Eventually, however, the growing disconnect between Arab and U.S. threat assessments is likely to harm collective security measures in the Gulf.

¹ For more on effect of WMD and ballistic missiles proliferation in the Middle East, see Anthony H. Cordesman, *Perilous Prospects: The Peace Process and the Arab-Israeli Military Balance* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1996); and David Tanks, "Key Proliferation Trends and Their Likely Impact on the Balance of Power in the Gulf: A Focused Evaluation," *Air/Missile Defense, Counter-proliferation and Security Policy Planning* eds. Jacquelyn David, Charles Perry and Jamal Al-Suwaidi, (Abu Dhabi: The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 1999), pp. 17-39.

² Yazid Sayegh, *Arab Defense Industry* in Arabic, (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 1992), p. 122.

³ The Bush administration did not condemn the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, a faction of the Fatah movement led by Yassir Arafat, until March 2002 following strong campaigning by Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Jewish organizations in Washington. The Palestinian faction had emerged strongly during the Palestinian uprising that started in September 2000.

⁴ Riad Kahwaji, "Interview with Bahraini Defense Minister General Sheikh Khalifah Bin Ahmad Al-Khalifah," *Defense News*, April 26, 2004.

⁵ Riad Kahwaji, "For Arabs, Spec-Ops are the Front Lines," *Defense News*, April 26, 2004.

⁶ Riad Kahwaji, "Qatar Remains Wary of Campaign Against Iraq," *Defense News*, July 8, 2002.

⁷ Riad Kahwaji, "Gulf Support for Iraq War Rise," *Defense News*, January 6, 2003.

⁸ For more on Iran-Gulf relations, see Jamal Al-Suwaidi, ed., *Iran and the Gulf: A Search for Stability* (Abu Dhabi: The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 1996).

⁹ *U.S.-Qatar Journal*, No. 33, December 6, 2002, online at: www.qatarbusinesscouncil.org.

¹⁰ Hamad Jasser, "Mohammad Al-Sabah Considers Iran a Strategic threat to the Gulf," *Al-Hayat* (Arabic), No. 15021, May 13, 2004.

¹¹ Riad Kahwaji, "Nuclear Iran Unsettles Friends, Foes," *Defense News*, January 12, 2004.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Riad Kahwaji, "Iraq War Stalls GC Missile Defense Plans," *Defense News*, December 1, 2003.

¹⁵ Riad Kahwaji, "Bahraini Minister Underscores Region's Missile Defense Needs," *Defense News*, January 19, 2004.

¹⁶ Kahwaji, "Nuclear Iran Unsettles Friends, Foes."

¹⁷ Ibid.