



FOREIGN POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE

The Philadelphia Papers, No. 6



THE GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL'S UNIFIED MILITARY COMMAND

By Brahim Saidy

October 2014





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Abbreviations

AWACS	Airborne Warning and Control System
C2	Command and Control
C3	Command, Control and Communications
C4I	Command, Control, Communications, Computer and Intelligence
DPPC	Defense Policy and Planning Committee
DSCA	United States Defense Security Cooperation Agency
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PSF	Peninsula Shield Force
RSAF	Royal Saudi Air Force
THAAD	Terminal High Altitude Area Defense
UAE	United Arabs Emirates
U.S. CENTCOM	United States Central Command

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Foreign Policy Research Institute (FPRI) for welcoming me as a visiting scholar during the summer of 2014 and for its intellectual support. I am also very grateful to Tally Helfont, Director of the Program on the Middle East at FPRI, for her support and her excellent comments and feedback on my work. I want to thank my assistants Seth Harrison and Andrew S. Iskander for their efforts in making the task of completing this project much easier, and for the information they supplied. I gratefully acknowledge the financial support of Qatar University. Finally, I want to thank my wife Mounia for her support as this project was under way, and my kids for their understanding and patience.

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INTRODUCTION

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which brings together the countries of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, took an unprecedented step during its 34th Summit (held in Kuwait City on December 10-11 2013) by setting up a unified military command structure for its member states. This move reflects the commitment of the GCC to establish a credible joint defense force able to advance the goal of collective security in the region. This military command will have a force of around 100,000, half of which would be contributed by Saudi Arabia, the main advocate of this initiative. GCC members will coordinate air, land, and marine forces under one common structure. In this regard, Bahrain's Foreign Minister, Sheikh Khalid Bin Ahmed Al-Khalifa, has stated: "We want to create a central command that coordinates between all sub-commands and makes them work under one umbrella. But, the new structure [the Unified Military Command] won't replace the Peninsula Shield forces."¹ In terms of collective defense, the core purposes of this command structure are to provide strategic and operational command for all GCC missions and prepare members for operational employment as interoperable multinational forces. This command is expected to have a minimum number of operational commands (land, air and maritime command) as well as joint intelligence system and integrated missile defense in order to execute essential operational and peacetime missions. The challenge for this plan is to be able to undertake command and control of the full range of the military missions, including command and control multinational and multiservice forces, but more importantly to be able to support operations under the political and strategic direction of the GCC. This means that the main goal is not limited to improving coordination between different parts of existing national defense systems, but rather to establishing a real joint operational command structure. The progress towards a fully integrated defense system would allow the GCC to become a real military alliance along the lines of NATO.

The creation of an integrated military command structure is an important reform, and can be considered a significant development towards deeper regional military integration. It can benefit from the various weapons systems in the Gulf, and create a new generation of Gulf officers. It can also take advantage of the broad similarity of the military systems and experiences of the GCC's countries. For that reason, it will be relatively simple to define steps

¹The Peninsula Shield Force is a joint military force of 10,000 soldiers established by the GCC in 1984 to deter and respond to military aggression directed against any of the GCC member states. "Stop meddling, Iran told" *Khaleej Times*, 26 December 2012, Accessed July 29, 2014.
http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticle08.asp?xfile=data/government/2012/December/government_December60.xml§ion=government

that will harmonize the programs in terms of interoperability, and define messaging standards for communicating between systems at a basic level. A more significant obstacle to effective cooperation, however, is the lack of agreement related to threat perceptions. Indeed, there is no strategic consensus about whom the GCC should guard against. The effectiveness of this command is therefore conditioned by political factors rather than purely military considerations.

That having been said, looking back over the history of the GCC's defense cooperation we see that the idea of a unified military command is not new. Since the GCC's inception in 1981, there have been efforts to establish a collective defense force capable of deterring external threats. This is also linked to repeated U.S. attempts to get GCC states to create a joint intelligence system and integrated missile defense. In 1982, the GCC established a Gulf self-defense force, called the Jezira (Peninsula) Shield force, which is commanded by a Saudi and is based in Saudi Arabia.² At the time the Peninsula Shield was created, Kuwait, Oman, and the UAE insisted on a proviso that "command and control would reside in Riyadh during normal periods; however, in times when the Peninsula Shield is called upon to support a member of the GCC, command and control would resort to the country in which the Peninsula Shield is to be utilized. This insistence made by the smaller GCC member-states is a clear indication that they feared Saudi interference in their internal affairs."³ This was in fact among the reasons that the Peninsula Shield was more of a symbolic testament to collective security than a strong military force. After the second Gulf War (1990-91), the idea of unified military command was revived, GCC members showed less interest, opting instead for strengthening the capabilities of the existing Peninsula Shield forces; signing individual defense pacts with Western powers, and acquiring arsenals of advanced high-tech conventional weapons. Christian Koch states that "Saudi Arabia circulated a proposal during the GCC summit meeting in Riyadh in December 2006 calling for the adoption of the principle of 'centralized command and de-centralized forces' and disbanding the Peninsula Shield force as a collective single military unit. What the kingdom proposed was that each GCC state should designate certain military units to be part of the new proposed military structure with those units stationed within each state's national territory and linked to a unified central command. While member states acknowledged the proposal and agreed to study it further, again there was no decision made. What instead emerged is the agreement at the 2009 GCC summit to create a joint force for quick intervention to address security threats."⁴

The new momentum provided by the decision of the 34th GCC summit to create a unified military command will no doubt raise anxiety and debate about the proper manner to establish command relationships within the military elements of the GCC. It will not be an easy process. The first point, which may appear self-evident, is that any proposal on command structure should take political realities into consideration due to the national interests and positions of each GCC member. In other words, national political interests, objectives, and

² This Force was officially created in 1982, but it became operational starting 1984.

³ Sami F. Al-Motairy, "The Gulf Cooperation Council and the Challenges of Establishing an Integrated Capability for Upholding Security" (Master's Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, California, June 2011), 44-45.

⁴ Christian Koch, "The GCC as a Regional Security Organization," *KAS International Reports* (November 2010): 27-28.

sensitivities could influence the development of a consensus on “unified military command” in the GCC. There is a need for a deep debate on how each state envisions placing its national forces under a common command, particularly in peacetime.

As this military structure started taking shape, understanding the model used by alliances such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which has clear structures of command, could provide useful lessons for the GCC. In the early 1950s, U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower “quickly discovered that the task of devising an organization that satisfies the nationalistic aspirations of twelve different countries or the personal ambitions of affected individuals is a very laborious and irksome business.”⁵ NATO’s experience teaches that:

Trying to devise a command structure that would satisfy the national interests of France, the United Kingdom, the United States, Italy, Greece, and Turkey in the southern area proved difficult. It took two years to integrate these countries into a NATO command structure that made sense only if viewed in political rather than military terms. The initial challenge was reconciling differences between the United Kingdom and the United States over command appointments, with the British determined to maintain their traditional dominance in the Mediterranean. [...] Given the conflicting views and interests, it was a major accomplishment that a command structure acceptable to all parties was developed at all. In the end, it was a temporary solution with problems of competing commands and overlapping responsibilities. However, despite its obvious flaws, no one wanted to disturb this laboriously achieved solution, at least for the moment. The process of creating the integrated command structure was not always easy, due to competing national interests, old rivalries and conflicts between some of the member states, as well as clashes of personalities. Nevertheless, compromises were ultimately reached and consensus was achieved.”⁶

Based on NATO’s experience, the GCC’s move to set up a command structure is therefore more than a technical issue. It is a significant sign of how the GCC is changing and moving towards a broader security alliance. The political complications notwithstanding, the adaptation of the GCC’s defense structures is a worthy military goal in of itself, driven by the concern to make the GCC more prepared to meet the rigors of the Gulf security environment.

This study seeks to examine the following questions: why did the GCC decide to establish this military command? How does the creation of this command advance the goal of encouraging greater Gulf defense cooperation? What are the intended characteristics of this military command? In strictly theoretical terms, this research seeks to analyze the relationship between the concept of *military command* as the exercise of authority by a properly designated commander over attached forces in the accomplishment of a military mission, and the concept of the *threat* as a key element in any defense system. This relationship helps us understand

⁵ NATO, *The Beginnings of NATO’s Military Structure: Birth of the Alliance to the Fall of the Berlin Wall*, NATO International Military Staff and NATO Public Diplomacy Division, MM1-ENG-0106, (Brussels: 2006), 6.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 3-10.

how to think about command structure in all its facets. On the practical side, this research aims, beyond the divergent individual member-state threat perceptions and national interests, to demonstrate the opportunities regional integration of the GCC's armed forces offers for the region (e.g., interoperability, unification of weapons systems, definition of a clear mission for the armed forces provided by the political leadership, creation of a new generation of Gulf officers...). The structure of this study reads as follows: The first part deals with the concept of unified military command. The second offers historical background on GCC defense cooperation, to understand the limits and the achievements in this field of regional integration. The third is devoted to the characteristics and structure of this command. Finally, the fourth part concludes by examining the political challenges and strategic impacts generated by the GCC's decision to establish a unified military command.

1. CONCEPTS AND THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

1.1. Unified military command and interrelated concepts

The first question is: how can a unified command be understood and evaluated as a military concept. The study of unified military command has been the subject of a great deal of theorizing, which tends to obscure the significant complications surrounding the subject. This concept is widely recognized as an important subject in defense studies, which provides a philosophical foundation for the many who practice it.⁷ Students of military affairs recognize the crucial relevance of command and control in effective military operations.⁸ Indeed, since the formation of NATO in 1949 and the emergence of Warsaw Pact in 1955, more attention was given to command and control problems. As a result, unified command has been recognized as a fundamental element by which armed forces conduct their operations and maximize their effectiveness.

It is worth remembering that the concept of military command was born in the age of high-intensity warfare,⁹ and its introduction into armed forces practice has evolved throughout history. The Napoleonic Wars (1792-1815)—a series of major conflicts that pitted France against shifting alliances of other European powers—were the first conflicts in which large bodies maneuvered separately and jointly at the same time, using the Army Corps as an administrative grouping within an armed force under unified military command.¹⁰

The formulation of theoretical models on military command also emerged from the Napoleonic Era. In his work *On War*, General Carl von Clausewitz used his experiences in those conflicts to develop his definition of the major characteristics of an effective military commander.¹¹ Arbuthnot states that the “Clausewitz’s distinction between the grand plans intended to achieve long-term and far-ranging objectives, i.e. the strategy and the methods used on the ground to achieve that strategy, i.e., the tactics. The middle tier was concerned with the ‘Operational art’ of organizing and supporting the Tactical efforts in furtherance of the grand plan.”¹² For Clausewitz “there is no factor in war that rivals the battle in importance, and the greatest strategic skill will be displayed in creating the right conditions for [battle], choosing the right place, time and line of advance, and making the fullest use of its

⁷ The academic specialized journals such *Defence Studies*, *Defense and Security Analysis*, *Intelligence and National Security*, *Strategic Analysis* and others had a significant contribution to enrich the debate about the theory of military command.

⁸ Gregory D. Foster, “Command and Control: An Editorial Overview,” *Defence Analysis* 4, no.3 (1988):198.

⁹ Major Jim Storr, “A command Philosophy for the Information age: The Continuing Relevance of Mission Command,” *Defence Studies* 3, No.3 (2003): 122.

¹⁰ Ibid.,120.

¹¹ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. and eds., Michael Howard and Peter Paret (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976).

¹² Kevin Arbuthnot, “A Command Gap? A Practitioner’s Analysis of the Value of Comparisons Between the UK’s Military and Emergency Services’ Command and Control Models in the Context of UK Resilience Operations,” *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management* 16. No.4 (2008): 187.

results.”¹³ Given all this, Anthony King points out that the “successful commander developed a unified campaign which coordinated his forces to produce maximum tactical effect.”¹⁴

The United States Department of Defense defines *command* as follows:

The exercise of authority and direction by a properly designated commander over assigned forces in the accomplishment of the mission. Command and control functions are performed through an arrangement of personnel, equipment, communications, facilities, and procedures which are employed by a commander in planning, directing, coordinating, and controlling forces and operations in the accomplishment of the mission.¹⁵

Among the key points of this definition is the supervision by a commander over troops that are being deployed and employed. The military command is intended to apply the *exercise of authority and direction* over forces of any size, composition or mission.

In the same vein, British Military Doctrine believes that the key elements of military command are “timely decision making, the importance of understanding the superior commander's intention and by applying this to one's own actions and a clear responsibility to fulfil that intention. The underlying requirement is the fundamental responsibility to act, or in certain circumstances to decide not to act, within the framework of the commander's intent.”¹⁶ From this definition, Major Jim Storr concludes that the key elements are those of responsibility, intent and trust. For him “the responsibility of commanders of all ranks is well understood and established. The responsibility to act as bid is not new either; it is, in effect, duty. The identification of the commander's intent per se is relatively new, and intent is perhaps an issue that still requires further analysis. However, put simply, commanders have long expressed their intent in the orders they give. What is perhaps novel is the identification of a contract of trust. The superior trusts his subordinate to act; to act within the commander's intent; and to act sensibly in the circumstances he find himself, which are not necessarily those the superior envisaged when composing his orders. [...] The existence of a contract of trust is important.”¹⁷

The literature on military command contains a proliferation of terms related to this concept including “command and control” (C2), “command, control and communications” (C3), and “command, control, communications, computer and intelligence” (C4I).” The use of these terms can be a source of confusion¹⁸ that highlights the need to clarify the jargon of military command. The third and fourth C reflect that military command should operate via communications technology and intelligence. In other words, these terms recognize “the

¹³ von Clausewitz, *On War*, 261.

¹⁴ Anthony King, “Military Command in the Last Decade,” *International Affairs* 87, no.2 (2011): 385.

¹⁵ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, Publication 1, (Washington, DC.: 1979), 74.

¹⁶ *Army Doctrine Publication*, Vol. 2, Command, Army Code 71564, (London: MoD, April 1995), Paragraph 0210.

¹⁷ Storr, “A Command Philosophy,” 119-120.

¹⁸ Philip S. Kronenberg, “Command and Control as a Theory of Interorganizational Design,” *Defence Analysis* 4, no.3 (1988): 230.

importance of providing commanders with certain specific capabilities, such as resources to obtain, communicate, process, analyze, synthesize, display and disseminate information, to communicate orders to subordinates, and to receive status reports as directives are implemented.”¹⁹

Policy documents such as the *British Defense Doctrine*,²⁰ the *Doctrine of the Armed Forces of the United States*²¹ and *NATO Glossary of Terms*²² provide key definitions of concepts related to military command. In NATO-agreed usage, there are four levels of command. These are: Operational Command (OPCOM); Operational Control (OPCON); Tactical Command (TACOM), and Tactical Control (TACON).²³ For British doctrine, command consists of three inter-related elements:

a. **Decision-Making.** Timely, accurate and effective decision-making enables adaptive command, the optimization of tempo and, ultimately, success on operations. Much of the art of command depends on recognizing when to decide and act, which, in turn, relies on good judgment and intuition, based on understanding and intelligent interpretation. However, fleeting opportunities need to be identified and sometimes exploited on the basis of incomplete information. Decisions should be communicated effectively and, where possible, personally to inspire confidence and promote cohesion between commanders and their subordinates....

b. **Leadership.** A commander has ultimate, sole responsibility for ensuring that his/her plan delivers the best chances of success. The way in which he/she exercises leadership is determined by his/her character, style and experience, as well as the mix of personalities within his/her force or organization. Furthermore, the intangible nature of the relationship between a commander and his/her subordinates may affect the way in which forces are employed and the enterprises they undertake. Consequently, different situations demand different styles of leadership, implying varying amounts of regulation and delegation, inspiration and coercion.

c. **Control.** Control is the co-ordination of activity, through processes and structures that enable a commander to manage risk and to deliver intent. The extent of military control over a particular situation is influenced by the balance

¹⁹ Stephen J. Andriole, “Leveraging Command and Control Via enhanced Command Decisionmaking: Prospects for a Behavioral Theory of Command and Control,” *Defense Analysis* 4, no.3 (1988): 253-254.

²⁰ Ministry of Defence, *The British Defense Doctrine*, 0-01, JDP 0-01, 4th ed., (Joint Doctrine Publication: November 2011)
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/33697/20111130jdp001_bdd_Ed4.pdf

²¹ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Department of Defense Dictionary*.

²² NATO, *AAP-6 Glossary of Terms* (1992), 2-0-2 and 2-T-1.

²³ John Whitford and Thomas-Durell Young, “Command Authorities and Multinationality in NATO: The Response of the Central Region’s Armies,” in *Command in NATO after the Cold War: Alliance, National, and Multinational Considerations*, ed. Thomas-Durell Young, (Pennsylvania: Strategic Studies Institute, 1997), 56.

between military and other actors' engagement, and contribution to relevant objectives. In purely military terms, control is frequently delegated to specialist staff or associated systems, except where a commander needs to intervene personally to ensure that his/her intent is achieved.²⁴

Command is more than mere supervision or having ideas and drafting plans. It's a system and an organizational phenomenon²⁵ that aims to "bring about the correct alignment of authority and responsibility among the various levels in a military hierarchy."²⁶ It can be established on two bases. The first and most common basis is geographical area. The second is functional, based on the missions or tasks assigned to the commander without respect to a specific area.²⁷

1.2. Military command and common political interests

Most authors assume that there is a set of requirements for successful military command. The major pre-requisites are the existence of common political interests and common perception of security threats. In this context, military command is not only a military act, but also an effective way for managing the complex dynamic of a political environment. Command is inextricable from the geopolitical context because military operations do not take place in vacuum. Military missions are defined by political agreements. Once a new structure is agreed upon, its effectiveness must be sustained by political support, funds, personnel and other resources.²⁸

Obviously, there is a correlation between the concept of *military command* as the exercise of authority by a properly designated commander over attached forces in the accomplishment of the mission and the concept of the threat as a key element in any defense system. In particular, this is true in the case of military alliances as an agreement between two or more states to work together on mutual security issues,²⁹ and also in the context of multinational operations. States enter into such cooperative security arrangements to protect themselves against a common threat.

On the topic of civil-military relations, there are clear lines between politicians and the commanders. In a democratic regime these relations are founded on civilian supremacy over the command of the armed forces.³⁰ The military is subordinate to the politicians who give orders that the military carries out. As a result, the military officer is neutral and professional and does not intervene in political affairs. However, dialogue is particularly important between the statesman and the commander who during military operations has to make many

²⁴ Ministry of Defence, *The British Defense Doctrine*, 5-2 and 5-3.

²⁵ Kronenberg, "Command and Control," 230.

²⁶ Geoffrey Sloan, "Military Doctrine, Command Philosophy and the Generation of Fighting Power: Genesis and Theory," *International Affairs* 88, no.2 (2012), 246.

²⁷ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Department of Defense Dictionary*, IV-1 and IV- 2.

²⁸ W. Bruce Weinrod and Charles L. Barry, *NATO Command Structure: Considerations for the Future* (Washington, DC: Center for Technology and National Security Policy, National Defense University, 2010), 5.

²⁹ Stephen Walt, "Why Alliances Endure or Collapse," *Survival* 39, no.1 (1997): 156-179.

³⁰ Edward N. Luttwak 'From Vietnam to Desert Fox: Civil-Military Relations in Modern Democracies', *Survival* 41, no.1 (Spring 1999): 99.

military decisions with political implications. The goal is to ensure balance between the political objective and the military strategy.

In this spirit, a joint military command founded by a group of states must be based on their common security challenges. By making the decision to act in concert, the command partners believe they have a mutual understanding. This contributes to enhanced political dialogue and practical cooperation in mutual interest. NATO's experience demonstrates that its essential purpose is to provide security to its members through political and military means. For this reason, its command structure should be at an appropriate level of size and readiness to achieve its core mission: defending NATO territory from armed attack. In this regard, the GCC's military command implies a balance between political and military responsibilities for the optimization of military operational efficiency. The GCC is a group of states conscious of certain common interests who consider themselves bound by a common set of rules in their relations, and who share in common economic, diplomatic, and military institutions.³¹ This permits the GCC to be considered a collective security system, or a form of cooperation in which members agree that an attack against one of them will be treated as an attack against all, resulting in a collective military response.

³¹ See Farah Dakhllallah, "The League of Arab States and Regional Security: Towards an Arab Security Community?" *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 39, no. 3 (December 2012):392–411.

2. GCC's DEFENSE COOPERATION: WHAT HAS BEEN DONE?

GCC is a multilateral regional organization of neighboring nations. For Joseph Nye, a regional organization is “a limited number of states linked by a geographical relationship and by a degree of mutual interdependence.”³² In the same vein, Mansfield and Milner note that “a region is often defined as a group of countries located in the same geographical specified area.”³³ So contiguity or proximity seems to be an important prerequisite for creating and maintaining a sense of regional integration. In the case of the GCC, there are also special mutual interests between these countries, in particular their common religion, origin, and the similar characteristics of their regimes. The GCC was formed in 1981 to achieve the following basic objectives contained in the article 4 of its constituent treaty:

- To effect coordination, integration and inter-connection between Member States in all fields in order to achieve unity between them.
- To deepen and strengthen relations, links and areas of cooperation now prevailing between their peoples in various fields.
- To formulate similar regulations in various fields including the following: economic and financial affairs; commerce; customs; communications; education and culture.
- To stimulate scientific and technological progress in the fields of industry, mining, agriculture, water and animal resources; to establish scientific research; to establish joint ventures and encourage cooperation by the private sector for the good of their peoples.³⁴

The initial treaty did not “include any formal defense commitment and, even though it was obvious to the rulers of these countries that a framework for defense cooperation was needed in order to cope with internal and external threats, the word ‘security’ is conspicuously absent from the treaty’s language.”³⁵ But, the final communiqué issued after the first GCC summit in May 1981 clearly affirmed their conviction about the connected nature of their security and the necessity to coordinate their policies in this domain. The fear of 1979’s Iranian Islamic Revolution and its call for the spread of its revolution to the neighboring countries, as well as the subsequent outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War in September 1980, encouraged the GCC’s creation, which has a large military headquarters in Riyadh. For these reasons, the timing of the GCC’s founding was seen as an “ad hoc reaction rather than a calculated rational initiative,”³⁶ a fact that raised concerns about its sustainability and efficiency. Yet, despite this skepticism the GCC collaborated on many common security and economic projects, consolidating its role as a political actor in this region.

³² Joseph S. Nye, ed., *International Regionalism* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1968), vii.

³³ Edward D. Mansfield and Helen V. Milner, “The New Wave of Regionalism,” *International Organization* 53, no. 3 (Summer 1999):590.

³⁴ “The GCC Charter,” accessed July 17, 2014, <http://www.gcc-sg.org/eng/indexfc7a.html?action=Sec-Show&ID=1>.

³⁵ Y. Guzansky, “Defence Cooperation in the Arabian Gulf: The Peninsula Shield Force Put to the Test,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 50, no.4 (2014): 640.

³⁶ Koch, “The GCC,” 23-24.

2.1. Beginnings

Defense cooperation between the Gulf States was a core concern even prior to the creation of the GCC. It goes back to the beginning of 1970s in the aftermath of British withdrawal from the region. Guzansky notes that “the need for military and security coordination, which preceded the GCC’s founding, was based on a lack of strategic depth, the nations’ small and untrained armed forces, as well as their feelings of mutual identification. As early as 1975, the Arab Gulf states attempted to establish an independent armament manufacturing capability and to coordinate joint military exercises and training. As stated by the UAE defense minister, the motive behind such cooperation was military weakness and a shortage of trained personnel. The events of the late 1970s and early 1980s accelerated these earlier processes, reflecting what was perceived to be a deteriorating geopolitical situation.”³⁷ In 1975, there was an attempt to reach a defense agreement,³⁸ as well as to establish an independent armament manufacturing capability and to coordinate joint military exercises and training,³⁹ but given that a common formula could not be agreed upon, as is underlined by Koch “the concept was shelved for the time being.”⁴⁰

Since its founding in 1981, the GCC has proposed a wide range of agreements and useful projects to improve military cooperation and collective self-defense capability. In a series of meetings, chiefs of staff and defense ministers of the Gulf States developed and launched plans for this purpose. Thus, the concept of *collective security*⁴¹ became a constant concern. For the first time, the Saudi Arabian Minister of the Interior declared after the outbreak of the Iran–Iraq war in 1980 that “the security of each Arab Gulf state is the security of Saudi Arabia.”⁴² In the wake of this war, Saudi Arabia, with encouragement from the United States, spurred fresh thinking on the future defense of the Gulf countries.⁴³ This led to several bilateral defense agreements between Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States:

In December 1981, a few days after Bahrain revealed an Iranian-supported attempt by Shi’ite citizens to overthrow its royal family, a defense pact was signed by Saudi Arabia and Bahrain under which Saudi Arabian soldiers were apparently stationed in Bahraini territory. Agreements concerning exchanges of information, border defense, and extradition were signed with the United Arab Emirates and Oman in early 1982. Saudi Arabia apparently also agreed to provide these two countries with airborne early warning systems through the American Airborne Warning and Control System planes that it purchased. Qatar followed suit by signing its own agreement with Saudi Arabia in April,

³⁷ Guzansky, “Defense Cooperation,” 140.

³⁸ Koch, “The GCC,” 25.

³⁹ Guzansky, “Defense Cooperation,” 640.

⁴⁰ Koch, “The GCC,” 25.

⁴¹ The basic principle behind this concept is that states share the view that peace is ‘indivisible’. It can be summed up in the phrase ‘one for all and all for one’. The first major attempt to implement a system of collective security took place at the end of the First World War, with the signing in 1919 of the League of Nations Covenant.

⁴² Quoted by Guzansky, “Defense Cooperation,” 141.

⁴³ Alan Munro, “Defense Issues in the Gulf,” *Asian Affairs* 28, no. 2 (June 1997): 202.

which left Kuwait as the only Arab Gulf state without some sort of defense pact with Saudi Arabia.⁴⁴

As a result, the GCC began to acquire a sense of common purpose and cooperation. The next crucial step was the 1982 creation of the Peninsula Shield Force which was the size of two brigades.

2.2. The components of the GCC defense strategy

The GCC's move toward defense cooperation was heavily influenced by recent wars in the Gulf. The threats generated by the Iran/Iraq war (1980-88), the Kuwait war (1990-91) and Iraq war in 2003 were serious enough to encourage the GCC members to move from a focus on economics to a focus on security and military affairs. In the other words, the GCC's defense cooperation was inspired by these conflicts.⁴⁵ Bahrain's Minister of Defense General Khalifa, recognized this relationship when he declared that these wars "made us speed up our military development."⁴⁶ Alan Munro argues that the GCC countries started to see essentially three concentric circles to the arrangement:

The innermost ring involved the GCC states themselves, acting in concert as a first line for mutual defence intended to offset any revival of militancy on the part of Iraq or Iran; next came a regional circle of alliance, the composition of which was less specific, and which had more the appearance of a non-aggression pact; and at the outer rim, acting as a recourse of last resort, came a system of international guarantees, possibly under United Nations auspices but certainly incorporating a Western umbrella.⁴⁷

Indeed, the formulation of the GCC's defense strategy is based on three strategic components, which reflects the primacy of national sovereignty before any process of regional integration:

The first component is building an adequate self-defense capability. This means that given the regional anarchy, the GCC countries recognized that it was in their overriding best interest to maximize their power. In terms of international relations, especially (neo)-realism, Waltz says that a state without enough power is a vulnerable state.⁴⁸ As the Gulf States watched Iran, Israel and Iraq, especially during the Saddam's era, trying to increase their power, this made them feel threatened, and they recognized that they too must increase their power.

⁴⁴ Guzansky, "Defense Cooperation," 141.

⁴⁵ See Abdul Khaleq Abdulla, "The Gulf Cooperation Council: Nature, Origin, and Process," in *Middle East Dilemma: The Politics and Economics of Arab Integration*, ed. Michael Hudson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 150–170; and Guazzone, Laura, "Gulf Cooperation Council; The Security Policies," *Survival* 30, no. 2 (1988): 134–148.

⁴⁶ "Bahrain Backs up GCC," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, March 31, 1990.

⁴⁷ Munro, "Defence Issues in the Gulf," 202.

⁴⁸ Cynthia Weber, *International Relations Theory: A Critical Introduction*, 3rd ed., (New York: Routledge, 2010), 20.

The defense strategy of each GCC state is first defined in “self-interested” terms. They believe that state power requires investments to build and maintain a national defense system capable of defensive and offensive activity. That is why all of the GCC countries allocate numerous resources to acquiring the equipment and services necessary to fulfill this goal. Procurement usually constitutes a significant portion of total defense expenditure of these countries. The GCC states have spent tens of billions of dollars on upgrading their defenses, particularly their air forces since the 1990-1 Gulf War. However, the Gulf wars demonstrated that despite massive arms procurement, the Gulf States cannot defend themselves.

The second component is the security and defense pacts with Western states: the GCC member states still rely heavily on the United States of America and the European Union for their security. This means that the GCC failed to guarantee security to its members due to the absence of real military integration, which led the GCC members to seek other security options through bilateral security agreements. The latter basically focuses on the containment of Iraq and Iran while ignoring other sources of danger. The credibility and efficiency of this second option was proven during the Gulf Wars, but “This overreliance on external security guarantees has created a laxity within the GCC regarding the development of independent functional coordination and cooperation.”⁴⁹ As a result, the defense policy of each state relies less on the GCC for its security, which led to a failure to develop interoperability and common Command, Control, Communications, and Intelligence (C4I). “In some respects this has the appearance of turning the clock back, with Kuwait, followed by the UAE and Qatar, signing fresh defense cooperation arrangements with the USA, the United Kingdom and France (and in Kuwait's case with Russia too). In this situation closer coordination of command and standardization of equipment among GCC forces has made disappointing progress, to the detriment of their deterrent capability.”⁵⁰ As Kostiner has succinctly noted:

The only formal security arrangements favored by at least some of the Arab Gulf states were bilateral pacts with several Western nations. Kuwait, in immediate need of an efficient defensive arrangement vis-à-vis Iraq after its liberation... paved the way for these bilateral pacts by demonstrating complete trust in Western forces, which had been the key to its liberation. [...] On 3 September 1991, Kuwait concluded a 10-year security pact with the US which stipulated stockpiling US military equipment on Kuwaiti soil (including aircraft and naval units), stationing a small number of permanent US troops, holding joint maneuvers, and training the new Kuwaiti army. Kuwait reached similar agreements with Britain and France in October 1991, which were formally concluded in February and September 1992 respectively [...]. Bahrain concluded a similar defense agreement with the US in October 1991[...]. Saudi Arabia, for its part, [...] encouraged other GCC states to follow suit and rely on Western armaments and defense arrangements. Saudi leaders repeatedly reiterated their gratitude for US assistance provided during the last Gulf crisis [...]. Nevertheless, the Saudis refused to sign a defense pact with the US, for several reasons. Riyadh feared that the presence of a US force would stir up the

⁴⁹ Al-Motairy, “The Gulf Cooperation Council,” 7.

⁵⁰ Munro, “Defense Issues in the Gulf,” 203.

growing Saudi fundamentalist opposition and ultimately lead to the undermining of the government's position. In summary, the quest by the GCC states for a comprehensive regional security arrangement in early 1992 met with only partial success. Kuwait and Bahrain chose to rely on security agreements with Western states, on a bilateral basis rather than seek and join a comprehensive regional arrangement policy.⁵¹

This exclusive reliance by the GCC countries on Western assistance has led to different reactions. For the ruling elite in the Gulf, the western presence provides major advantages. It served as useful deterrent against Iraq during the rule of Saddam Hussein, and still maintains balance with Iran. In addition, the ruling elites believe that this choice is essential to their national existence, and has positive impacts on their national armed forces in terms of training, interoperability and access to advanced military technology. However, Iran, Syria and nationalist movements in the Arab World argue that this strategy will not resolve the Gulf's security challenges. In contrast, it encourages western powers, in particular U.S, to act as regional hegemon and expose their regimes to high foreign penetration. Briefly, this choice does not correspond to the national interests of the GCC countries.

The third component is the recourse to certain Arab countries as providers of security forces in time of need. The GCC states cannot rely on the Arab League as a regional organization, which introduced the Treaty of Joint Defense and Economic Cooperation in 1950,⁵² because the League has made little progress in establishing mechanisms to provide collective security for all Arab states. In past instances in which the GCC states perceived growing threats against them, however, they requested the assistance of some Arab states, in particular Egypt, Syria before the Arab Spring, as well as Morocco and Jordan.

In 1991, the GCC states concluded an agreement with Syria and Egypt, referred to as the "Declaration of Damascus," a plan whereby Egypt and Syria would provide ground forces for the defense of the Gulf countries in exchange for Gulf financial aid. This declaration was considered a new version of pan-Arab collective security, but it failed before it was applied. Both Saudis and Kuwaitis felt that security pacts with Western powers would provide greater assurance than the presence of Egyptians and Syrians, since the performance of their armies was considered less impressive than those of the West. The failure of this initiative was also due to Syria and Egypt's inflated financial demands as well as to the political price of this military presence in terms of outside involvement in Gulf security affairs.

Morocco has long been committed to positively responding to calls from Gulf monarchies. The Moroccan army took part in the Gulf War in 1991 by dispatching over 1500 Moroccan soldiers to Saudi Arabia on the basis of a bilateral arrangement. The Jordanian military has

⁵¹ Joseph Kostiner, "The Search for Gulf Security; The Politics of Collective Defense," *Middle East Contemporary Survey* 166 (1992): 234.

⁵² Also known as the Arab Collective Security Pact (ACSP). The article 2 of this Pact says that "the Contracting States consider any (act of) armed aggression made against any one or more of them or their armed forces, to be directed against them all (...)". It's similar the NATO's article 5 about the collective defense. But, Arabs states never implemented the conditions of this pact.

also been involved in security training operations in many of the GCC countries, and has a long history of cooperation. In March 2011, the GCC suggested it would consider membership for Morocco and Jordan even though they are not Gulf states and do not have economic resources similar to existing member states. In 2012, the GCC presented Morocco and Jordan with a US \$5 billion aid package to help sustain the two countries' economies. The goal is to form a military alliance to resolve the bloc's manpower issues by receiving the assistance of a total of 300,000 troops from Morocco and Jordan.

The GCC suffers from a structural weakness: its very small population when compared with other regions, totaling nearly 45 million people in 2011.⁵³ This fact has a significant impact on issues of military recruiting and conscription, and pushes these countries to recruit foreign military personnel to compensate their deficit to conscript local population. Once again, this leads to other major challenges in managing multinational diversity in their military structure.

2.3. Achievements

The GCC states have persistently sought to build up their defense forces according to a common conception. They have also worked toward creating compatible military systems. Their most important achievements are the creation of the Peninsula Shield Force in 1982, the conclusion of GCC Joint Defense Agreement in 2000, and carrying out frequent multilateral exercises.

Peninsula Shield Force

In 1982 the GCC defense ministers agreed on the creation of a two-brigade Peninsula Shield Force (PSF). This move was “one of the oldest decisions in the field of military cooperation.”⁵⁴ The PSF, based in Saudi Arabia near King Khalid Military City at Hafar al Batin and commanded by a Saudi officer, currently consists of a Saudi brigade and a composite brigade made up of about 10,000 personnel contributed by other GCC member states. Over the years the modernization of PSF has continued to develop more mechanized infantry with full fire and fighting logistics. Although its mission is not clearly defined publicly, the PSF should be activated in time of threat to territorial integrity of GCC states and would have the authority to intervene in the case of internal unrest.

But, what is the PSF's response and performance in specific cases? The occupation of Kuwait, a GCC state by Iraqi forces in 1990 was the PSF's first real challenge, and it failed. During Saddam's invasion of Kuwait the force, positioned in northern Saudi Arabia, was inadequate for any serious response to Iraqi aggression.⁵⁵ In the same year the “Doha Declaration” issued

⁵³ The most populated country is Saudi Arabia with 28 million which represents 65 percent of the total, followed by UAE with nearly 8 million. See, “GCC Demographic Shift,” Kuwait Financial Centre Markaz, June 2012, Accessed August 13, 2014, <http://www.markaz.com/DesktopModules/CRD/Attachments/DemographicsResearch-MarkazResearch-June%202012.pdf>

⁵⁴ See GCC website, Accessed August 13, 2014, <http://www.gcc-sg.org/eng/index8409.html?action=Sec-Show&ID=49>

⁵⁵ Malcolm C. Peck, *Historical Dictionary of the Gulf Arab States* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2008), 113.

by a GCC summit recognized the ineffectiveness and the inadequacy of its security arrangements and the need to establish a new mechanism capable of ensuring the security of every GCC state. In this context, Oman recommended at the Kuwait summit that the 10,000-large Peninsula Shield Force located at Hafar Al-Batin in Saudi Arabia be expanded to 100,000 troops and that the force's command be rotated among the member countries. Oman rationalized the proposed tenfold increase in the force's size based on the concept of creating an army equivalent in number to the Iraqi Republican Guard. What's more, Oman argued that a rotating command "would enhance the level of commitment among the member countries and underscore, politically and symbolically, the collective security aspects of their respective defense efforts."⁵⁶ However, the Omani proposal failed due to problems of cost-sharing and command and control.⁵⁷

The second test for the PSF was the popular uprising in Bahrain in the wake of the Arab Spring. Due to the country's vulnerability, Bahrain requested the deployment of the PSF to insure its integrity and territorial borders. As Colombo relates:

The cause of regime survival and regional stability was taken a step further in the case of Bahrain. On 14 March 2011, soldiers from Saudi Arabia and police forces from the UAE entered the country to protect the ruling Al-Khalifa family, which follows the Sunni version of Islam, against a pro-democracy movement made up mostly of the disgruntled Shia majority. The move was officially presented as an act to defend a GCC member against "external threats," meaning Iran. After years of stressing the purely symbolic nature of the GCC's joint Peninsula Shield Force ... also with a view to not provoking Iran, its deployment during the Bahraini crisis confirmed that preoccupations about a 'snowball effect' from Bahrain to the other GCC members had reached the alarm level. This was the first GCC deployment in relation to an internal threat.⁵⁸

This military intervention was limited to providing assistance to the Bahrain Defense Force (BDF) in securing key infrastructure and installations in the country. The PSF was not engaged in any direct confrontations with Bahraini civilians. It maintained a low profile with the political goal of guaranteeing the regime's survival and its monarchical character. This was a clear demonstration of a symbolic or the modest achievement in the field of defense integration. In fact, the GCC still does not have a true army. The question of establishing a GCC army is discussed as a part of Gulf security, but there is no consensus about it due the priority given by each state to develop its own army along with enhancing bilateral security and defense agreements with Western states.

⁵⁶ John Duke Anthony, *The Dynamics of GCC Summitry Since the Kuwait Crisis*, U.S.-GCC, (Washington, DC: Cooperate Cooperation Committee, 1992), 3.

⁵⁷ Robert Mason, "The Omani Pursuit of a Large Peninsula Shield Force: A Case Study of a Small State's Search for Security," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* (2014): 12

⁵⁸ Silvia Colombo, "The GCC and the Arab Spring: A Tale of Double Standards," *The International Spectator: Italian Journal of International Affairs* 47, no. 4 (2012):116

GCC Joint Defense Agreement

The second most significant achievement in the field of military cooperation was the conclusion of the GCC Joint Defense Agreement in December 2000. The agreement provided a framework for collective defense based on the concept that an attack on any member State meant an attack against all of them. On this subject, the agreement obliged all six states to provide military assistance to help each other. It also established a Joint Defense Council and a Military Committee to supervise cooperation and promote collaboration in joint military exercises and coordination of military industries.

The move was considered a sign that the GCC states intended to build an integrated defense structure after years of prevarication and delay, instead of remaining dependent on U.S. and other Western forces for protection.⁵⁹ Bahraini Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Mubarak, declared: “this is the most important agreement signed by the GCC because for the first time it puts a legal framework to this type of co-operation.”⁶⁰ However, it was not clear whether this defense agreement signaled an effort by the GCC states to coordinate arms purchases. “The USA, which is the region's main arms supplier, has long complained of the diversity of weapons systems the GCC members have acquired and of the differences between the states that have blocked meaningful defense coordination.”⁶¹ Commenting on the agreement, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Hamid-Reza Assefi asserted: “A joint defense pact by the regional states is welcomed by us as it covers our standpoint on maintaining regional security through regional potentials ... but the role of other regional players should not be ignored.”⁶²

Limits

Defense cooperation has been a persistent strategic concern for the GCC since 1981, but has not been matched by sufficient progress on bringing about integrated defense policy. This is apparent, for instance, in the limited capability of PSF; the lack of an integrated arms procurement policy; and the failure to deter the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait or to remove the threat to the world’s largest oil fields in north-eastern Saudi Arabia. In his assessment of this cooperation, Cordesman emphasizes the following limits:

- GCC members have resisted the standardization of weapons and equipment throughout the GCC’s existence. Nothing is changing;
- There is little or no focus on developing truly effective, interoperable forces that are integrated or shaped around common missions;
- An air defense integration contract offers some hope for the future, but has few of the features needed to actually integrate land-based and fighter aid defense operations in a real-world combat environment; [and]

⁵⁹ *Jane's Defence Weekly*, April 12, 2001.

⁶⁰ “GCC States Sign Defense Pact,” *Jane's Defence Weekly*, May 1st, 2001.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

- Some cooperation has developed in naval exercises, and in areas like mine warfare, but Gulf navies and naval air operations would have little real-world effectiveness without US or British support.⁶³

Even after more than 30 years, the GCC has remained unable to provide deterrence and security against external threats to any of the GCC members, even though the region faces imminent threats and despite its large wealth. This failure was in part due to the reluctance of several GCC states, in particular their huge disparity in political positions. They agree about security and defense pacts with the Western countries, but have been unable to reconcile their regional and individual interests.

Another practical disappointment in the GCC's search for the collective security was the "Declaration of Damascus." This declaration called for a security structure that ensured pan-Arab cooperation, and was signed by the foreign ministers of the GCC and those of Syria and Egypt in March 1991. "The expressed purpose of the March 6, 1991 Damascus Declaration was to define a workable collective security structure involving the GCC states, Syria and Egypt." The background of this agreement was the situation at the end of the Second Gulf War in 1991, of which Syria and Egypt were a part. Syria and Egypt had had an important and strategic role in the coalition created to defend Saudi Arabian territory and liberate Kuwait. The strong performance of the Syrian and Egyptian troops in the ground campaign against Iraq and the battle to liberate Kuwait, however, encouraged the GCC to reach an agreement to deploy Syrian and Egyptian troops in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait to defend them against Iraq. This agreement, known as the "Declaration of Damascus," emphasized that this force would be the nucleus of a pan-Arab force that could guarantee future collective Arab peninsula security. However, this arrangement was neglected and never applied, and few months later, Egyptian and Syrian troops withdrew from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. The retraction of the Declaration of Damascus can be traced to the differences between Egypt's and Syria's views of security priorities regarding Iran, and the three different views prevalent among the GCC member-states. Kuwait was primarily concerned for its self-survival after liberation, while Saudi Arabia wanted to create a pan-Arab security regime in order to achieve Arab collective security. Once again, the self-security and self-interest of the smaller GCC member-states negatively impacted decision-making procedures that were supposed to strengthen the GCC as a whole and prevented any further progress on this new project. As a result, the small GCC states saw that the GCC was too weak as a regime to achieve the goal of collective security, pushing the GCC to seek alternative security options.

⁶³ Anthony H. Cordesman, "The Gulf Military Balance in 2010," CSIS (April 22, 2010), 3.

3. GCC'S MILITARY COMMAND: STRATEGY, MISSIONS AND STRUCTURE

This section examines the range of options for establishing an effective command strategy, and suggests specific ideas that deserve priority. A successful strategy will depend upon both innovative thinking, and the GCC's commitment to adapt and harmonize their force structure and multinational planning to conduct continuous collaboration, training, education, and interaction with the national militaries of the GCC's six nations. For these purposes, the command strategy needs the capacity to bring together forces at the land, air, naval and intelligence levels. It should also deal with non-traditional security issues, in particular in terms of coordinating assets. Everything should be assessed and judged on the utility of this military command vis-à-vis regional security, and to ensure that each nation in the Gulf could benefit from creating more interoperable forces.

The primary missions of this command should include:

- Defense of the territorial integrity
- Providing protection of political and economic sites, including oil and gas fields and pipelines
- Ensuring security against non-traditional threats
- Exercising maritime surveillance
- Establishment of an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) for air defense and air space control
- Improvements in interoperability and undertaking common defense planning.

3.1. Improvements in interoperability

The evolution of defense cooperation between the GCC countries—from the creation of the Peninsula Shield Force in 1982 to the decision to establish a unified military command at the Kuwait summit in December 2013—shows that the GCC is moving towards a military alliance. However, the members of a military alliance can only effectively work together in joint operations if there is a certain level of interoperability to ensure smooth cooperation.

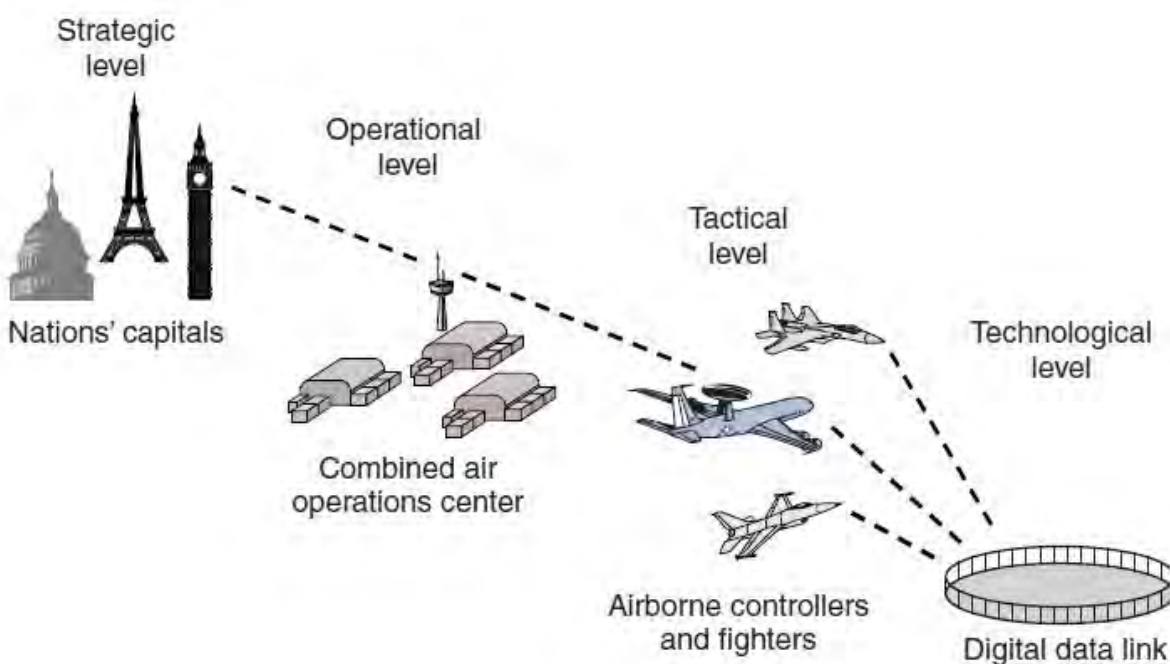
For NATO, the concept of interoperability refers to:

[...] the ability of different military organizations to conduct joint operations. These organizations can be of different nationalities or different armed services (ground, naval and air forces) or both. Interoperability allows forces, units or systems to operate together. It requires them to share common doctrine and procedures, each other's infrastructure and bases, and to be able to communicate with each other. [...] Interoperability does not necessarily require common military equipment. What is important is that this equipment can share common facilities and is able to communicate with other equipment.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ NATO, *Interoperability for Joint Operations*, NATO Public Diplomacy Division, (Brussels: July 2006), 1

However, RAND argues that a broad definition of interoperability encompasses several areas: “(1) the ability of forces from different nations to work effectively together given the nature of the forces and the combined military organizational structure; (2) the effectiveness of the combined military organizational structure (e.g., how well can the C2 structure allocate combined assets to achieve military goals); and (3) the degree of similarity of technical capabilities of the forces from different nations [...]” Thus, this broad definition [has] four levels - strategic, operational, tactical, and technological⁶⁵ as designed in the following figure:

Figure 1 - The four Levels of the interoperability



Source: RAND, *Interoperability: A Continuing Challenge in Coalition Air Operations*, MR-1235-AF, 2000, p.7.

Obviously, the primary tasks of the GCC command is to see how to develop interoperability at these four strategic levels in the light of a model tailored to the key missions necessary to meet the security needs of all the GCC countries. This is of course complicated because, on one hand, the countries preserve sovereign decision making authority; on the other their armed forces have a very diverse mix of equipment, command and control systems, munitions, support facilities, and power projection capabilities. In this regard, Cordesman proposes a method, already used by NATO, whereby members “set up a Committee that would meet regularly to focus on ways to develop immediate interoperability, provide common support and sustainability for power projection and redeployment capability, and set common standards for stockpiling and sharing munitions and key supplies. This could be supported by

⁶⁵ “Interoperability: A Continuing Challenge in Coalition Air Operations,” RAND, MR-1235-AF (2000), 8, http://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR1235.html

a staff at GCC headquarters and by designating centers of excellence in the defense colleges and centers in member states.”⁶⁶

In the past, this regional organization has tried to develop initiatives to advance common defense priorities, but with little regard on developing truly effective, interoperable forces⁶⁷ or common doctrine and organization. Guzansky notes that “the joint maneuvers, which gradually came to include naval and air forces, became routine in the subsequent years and led to increased cooperation between the GCC countries [see table.1]. The exercises, however, have not been conducted regularly, nor have they taken place in all of the GCC countries.”⁶⁸

Table 1. Joint Maneuvers Over Two Decades⁶⁹

Exercise No.	Year	Host country
1	1983	United Arab Emirates
2	1984	Saudi Arabia
3	1987	Oman
4	1990	Kuwait
5	1996	Kuwait
6	1998	United Arab Emirates
7	1999	Saudi Arabia (the exercise was not held as planned)

In addition, a wide range of US advisory, training, and exercise activities take place with the GCC countries, as well as NATO, British and sometimes French forces, at the multilateral level. For example, the joint US-GCC “Gulf Spears” air exercises and the annual operation “Eagle Resolve” that takes place in different GCC countries in response to a variety of threats, including a biological attack.⁷⁰ This means that they have more consistent access to the most advanced western combat material than other Arab states.

However, the ability of GCC militaries to work together remains limited. This failure continues to “[rob] the smaller Gulf States of much of their potential military effectiveness.”⁷¹ They are still facing a real challenge of joint communications in terms of developing common military languages. This issue is a vital element of every unified military command. Of course, the language used for basic communication among the components of the GCC forces is Arabic, but when it comes to coordination with US or UK advisors the language problem becomes serious, especially when there is an unexpected requirement for a doctrine or a piece of equipment.

⁶⁶ Anthony H. Cordesman, “The Gulf Military Balance in 2012,” CSIS (May 22, 2012), 139.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 6

⁶⁸ Guzansky, “Defense Cooperation,” 644.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 644

⁷⁰ Lauren Gelfand, “Exercise highlights Gulf states' air ambitions,” *Jane's Defence Weekly*, October 30, 2009.

⁷¹ Cordesman, “The Gulf Military Balance in 2010,” 6.

In addition, the lack of interoperability clearly appears in weapons systems as well. In its strategic comments, the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) writes that:

There are no projects to enable GCC forces to deploy rapidly, no common logistics network so that Bahraini F-16s can operate from UAE bases, and no networking or coordination capacity. Saudi Arabia has made a major investment in F-15S aircraft, AWACS, refuelling tankers and sophisticated air defence radars, as well as an assortment of surface-to-air missiles including Patriot, I- Hawk and Shahine. They also have M1A2 tanks, advanced French frigates, US attack helicopters and multiple launch rocket systems. Yet their ability to move their forces within and outside the Kingdom is limited, as are their surveillance capabilities, especially at sea.⁷²

GCC countries have an advantage over Iran in terms of high quality aircraft, and the range of different aircraft types, but they still suffer from the lack of standardization and interoperability. When asked to what extent equipment integration and standardization is a policy of the six GCC nations, Bahrain's former Minister of Defense, Gen Khalifa Bin Ahmed Al-Khalifa replied: "It depends on the definition of standardization. If country A has one tank and country B another, the ammunition can be the same. We have Lurssen boats, other countries may have different boats, but all the guns are OTO Melara. So they can go in to battle together using the same ammunition. The hulls may be different, but the engines are the same. Standardization is not a policy of the GCC countries."⁷³ The Bahraini Defense Minister's optimism about the lack of a need to standardize may, however, be unfounded.

3.2. Common defense planning system

For a unified military command, defense planning is an essential element in its strategy to provide, without any compromise of sovereignty, a common framework to harmonize national defense policies and to meet objectives in a functionally integrated manner. In concrete terms, the concept of defense planning comprises various forms of defense cooperation: procurement, training and education, force structure, standardization, intelligence, medical support and research and technology. In this sense, the GCC needs to create a *Defense Policy and Planning Committee (DPPC)* similar to that in NATO that could bring together civilian and military experts to support decision-making. There are three areas that should be given priority for the next five years by the GCC:

- Procurement or armaments planning to focus on the development of common armaments programs
- Training and education
- Cooperation with the foreign partners

⁷²"The GCC and Gulf security," *Strategic Comments*, 11, no. 9, (November 2005), 2.

⁷³ "Bahrain Backs up GCC," 1.

Procurement

The most apparent problem in the GCC is that its members have procured major platforms and weapons systems without regard for interoperability. This prevents them from leveraging their spending or their arms imports into forces whose effectiveness is proportionate to their cost. Each country still pursues “its own path in creating military forces, often emphasizing the purchase of modern major weapons systems that were perceived to provide prestige and a *glitter factor* in terms of regional status.”⁷⁴ In practice, their weapons systems are Western with great dependence on US, British and French, but some are Russian (Kuwaiti M84 tanks, which are Yugoslav built T72s, and UAE BMPs, for example). The result is that all GCC countries must rely on foreign technicians to keep their materials operational, and they are under the Western umbrella by providing the initial deterrent forces, equipment and bases for over the horizon reinforcement in any serious crisis. For example, Saudi purchases to modernize its air force after the Gulf War (1990-91, totaling some US\$16.5 billion, made the Royal Saudi Air Force more dependent than ever on US and UK technical support.⁷⁵

During the last two decades, the GCC countries have continued to invest in their armed forces. The recent surge in oil and natural gas prices is expected to make more money available for future defense spending. In fact, they are buying themselves security with their spending in the international arms bazaar. In a strategic context, this defense spending serves to accelerate the regional arms race. Saudi Arabia spends massively on advanced military systems and infrastructure. With historically considerable military budgets and arms imports, Saudi Arabia is considered one of the most profligate military spenders in the world. David Sorenson summarizes its current military spending and recent arms purchases by saying that:

Saudi Arabia ranked fifth in the world (behind Oman, Qatar, Afghanistan, and Jordan) in the percentage of GDP invested in defense, at 9.1 per cent. Saudi Arabian defense spending grew in the 1980s and 1990s to somewhere between 27–39 per cent of the total state budget. For 2013, Riyadh spent 9.1 per cent of its GDP on defense, ranking it fifth in the world on this measure. Saudi Arabia’s 2012 defense budget exceeded US\$57 billion, seventh in the world, and the only Middle East country in the list of the top 15 of military spenders. Between the years 2004–2011, Saudi Arabia led arms purchases globally with over US\$75.7 billion. In 2010 Saudi Arabia signed agreements for almost US\$60 billion in American weapons, and for 2011 alone, the Saudi Arabian arms purchased US\$33.7 billion in weapons.⁷⁶

At the same time, training and logistic support are now high on the United Arab Emirates (UAE) procurement agenda to enhance the ability of its armed forces to sustain operations with their recently purchased military equipment. Defense spending by the UAE more than doubled between 1996 and 2000, from US\$1.8 billion to a budgeted figure of US\$3.9 billion. Over the last decade, the UAE was ranked among all developing world recipients in the value

⁷⁴ Cordesman, “The Gulf Military Balance” in 2010, 9.

⁷⁵ “Saudi Arabia’s Military Building an Extravagant Error?” *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, November 1, 1994, 2-4.

⁷⁶ David Sorenson, “Why the Saudi Arabian Defence Binge?” *Contemporary Security Policy* 35, no.1 (2014), 116.

of arms-transfer agreements.⁷⁷ For Kuwait, Qatar and the other GCC countries, military modernization remains high priority and growing defense spending reflects the importance that they place on improving their capabilities. Overall, it has to be noted that “until the mid-1980s, military spending concentrated on developing the infrastructure and basic capabilities. Although spending was high, an unusually large proportion went on construction compared to weaponry. Over the last decade, with this infrastructure in place, the priority has shifted towards acquiring modern weaponry.”⁷⁸ This region has been fertile ground for defense exporters, with a military strategy that relies on allies, particularly the US. In other words, the GCC procurement programs reflect the strategic preference to be under foreign protectors rather than build a joint defense capability, in particular one that would entail sharing rational allocation of security responsibilities. In the case of Saudi Arabia, Sorenson states that “while Saudi Arabia does seek to improve its military capability through increased defense spending, and gain prestige and internal support, the most significant reason for the increased investment for arms sales is to gain political support in the United States, as Saudi military money preserves some defense sector jobs in the American defense industry.”⁷⁹ Yet despite this military investment, the GCC countries are still too weak to accomplish their security objectives relying on their own capabilities.

Furthermore, defense procurement practices for major equipment programs of the GCC countries are largely driven by the royal senior leadership in each country rather than by defined practices and rules. In other words, procurement in these countries is an opaque process, and program requirements are typically poorly defined. As a result, the strategy to negotiate a contract or to win a business requires contact with diplomatic issues surrounding relationships and influence among the members of royal circle. So, many major arms purchases require gaining access to decision-making bodies as well as cordial diplomatic ties between the country of a supplier and local governments.

Based on these considerations, how could the GCC’s unified military command adopt a beneficial procurement policy? It would be best to create a Committee that meets regularly to analyze procurement needs in order to define common approaches to acquiring weapons systems and technology with the primary focus on following goals:

- Secure access to cutting-edge military technology at more affordable prices. This requires a common strategy that could influence the behavior of the GCC countries’ suppliers as a part of the political bargain. This is particularly important as many Western suppliers are dependent on contracts and income generated through arms sales in this region.
- Moving steadily towards building and reinforcing a domestic defense industry in the GCC. This means planning to improve self-sufficiency to meet more of their own defense requirements and cut back on imported weapon systems. This will was expressed by Saudi Defense Minister Prince Sultan when he said

⁷⁷“BAE Reveals Saudi Orders for Vehicles, NCW System,” *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, May 4, 2007.

⁷⁸“Saudi Arabia’s Military Building,”2.

⁷⁹ Sorenson, “Saudi Arabian Defence Binge,” 116.

in April 1997 that “The kingdom will be able in the near future to manufacture what its forces need, either the National Guard or internal divisions or the armed forces. [...] We hope to cooperate with GCC states in purchases and expanding military factories in the Gulf States.”⁸⁰ He also declared, however: “the GCC industrial capability is limited. We do not have the infrastructure for sophisticated equipment, although, for example, Saudi Arabia has started a program for military industrialization. We are talking of establishing joint industrial capabilities. This is purely the GCC and not part of the AOI (Arab Organization for Industrialization). We have yet to identify what we want to do. It will not be very sophisticated, probably ammunition and spare parts.”⁸¹

Training and education

Any command must draft plans and give orders, but “there is no point in giving subordinates freedom of operation when they simply do not know what to.”⁸² Training and education have an additional positive impact in any defense system by contributing to the production of professional officers. This would be translatable to higher self-confidence in their skills and help to enhance their image in the eyes of the society.

In this regard, the GCC’s unified military command requires a minimum standard of training and education. It can only go so far towards fulfilling its own regional defense requirements without a common approach in this domain. There are at least three reasons that justify a special interest in this issue:

- Some of the GCC members, especially Saudi Arabia, lack modern infrastructure and an educated populace.
- The GCC armed forces are facing great challenges relative to their performance and professionalism. They have not experienced extensive conflict, contrary to some regional militaries that have gained experience and lessons through combat (Turkey, Egypt, Israel, Syria, Jordan, and Iran, as examples).
- During the NATO’s military intervention in Libya, Gulf support demonstrated that Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) still have a limited power projection capability and critically dependent on Western logistical support: Qatar provided six *Mirage* 2000 aircraft plus C-17 rotations; the UAE deployed six F-16s and six *Mirage* 2000s.⁸³

However, there are efforts underway to improve both the qualitative and quantitative aspects of military performance, in particular through bilateral cooperation for military training and education with foreign patterns, including practical cooperation with NATO. Recalling that

⁸⁰ *Jane's Defence Weekly*, April 9, 1997.

⁸¹ “Bahrain Backs up GCC,” 1. See also, “Saudi Arabia Plans to Improve Self Sufficiency,” *Jane's Defence Weekly* July 8, 1998.

⁸² Storr, “A Command Philosophy for the Information Age,” 127.

⁸³ “Arab militaries and the Arab Awakening; Combat and capability: military trends since 9/11; The war in Afghanistan,” *The Military Balance* 112, no. 1, (2012), 11

after the wars of 1967 and 1973, Saudi Arabia was engaged in programs to build forces that would be “strong enough to act as a deterrent to any regional power with its eyes on Saudi wealth. Huge sums were spent on ministry buildings, on air and naval bases, on military schools and on military cities. On the whole, the modernization effort has been successful. Within one generation, the Saudi forces have progressed from rifle armed camel cavalry to a modern military establishment.”⁸⁴ Cordesman notes that “the GCC states already have some exceptional training facilities at the national level, and do cooperate in military exercises, but there are gaps. Many states do relatively little large-scale training that simulates real combat, and member states still have limited cross and common training.”⁸⁵

Obviously, a central education and training authority would be needed in order to enforce a common program within the GCC. NATO’s military schools could be a useful example to consider. Of course, the GCC could create a committee composed of civilian staff and senior military officers to oversee educational and training facilities, operate as a facilitator for the harmonization of programs, and provide advice to a variety of national military audiences in the Arabian Gulf. This could be the major task of the *Gulf Academy for Strategic and Security Studies* created by the 34th GCC’s annual summit.⁸⁶

Cooperation with foreign partners

How could the GCC’s military command help build the right defense partnerships for the future? This question should be a core preoccupation of this new structure, in order to provide direction, control, co-ordination, support and assessment of military cooperation activities across the Arabian Gulf. The GCC needs to establish a much clearer base for mid and long-term planning regarding the involvement of different actors in bilateral or multilateral military partnerships.

The GCC states have close real-world military cooperation with the US, along with Britain and France. Military links with Russia, while not negligible, remain limited. The individual Gulf monarchies have looked primarily to the US for security guarantees. Except for Saudi Arabia, they have entered into bilateral defense pacts with the US, and privilege that relationship in contrast to their own multilateral GCC obligations. Nevertheless, there are broad similarities in these arrangements. As the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) illustrates:

These agreements are bilateral, although when they were negotiated by the individual countries there was substantial collusion among them: negotiators for the GCC countries shared information about what the US side was offering – and requiring in return – in supposedly secret talks. Unsurprisingly, the

⁸⁴“Moving Along, But Not Yet in Step Southern Gulf States are Trying to Improve their Defenses and Operate,” *International Defence Review*, December, 1994.

⁸⁵ Cordesman, “The Gulf Military Balance in 2012,” 139-140

⁸⁶ See, Theodore Karasik, “The GCC summit and its aftermath: a moment to remember,” Alarabiya.net, Sunday, 22 December 2013, accessed July 8, 2014, <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/views/news/middle-east/2013/12/22/The-GCC-summit-and-its-aftermath-a-moment-to-remember.html>

resulting Defense Cooperation Agreements look broadly similar. Ironically, swapping intelligence about the US position in delicate negotiations represented the high water mark of practical GCC cooperation. Each country proceeded to seek the security of an external security guarantor in the form of the United States, rather than in the enhancement of the collective capabilities of the GCC itself.⁸⁷

This cooperation is not limited to hosting US forces. A wide range of exercise activities, advice, and training are conducted between the U.S. and the GCC countries.⁸⁸ These ties have steadily improved following Gulf War (1990-91) and after the events of 9-11. For instance, Bahrain hosts US Fifth Fleet headquarters, and Qatar hosts the forward headquarters of the American Central Command (CENTCOM). The UAE hosts a significant US presence, in particular Al Dhafra airbase, which serves as a major intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance hub for an air expeditionary forces, and the ports of Jebel Ali and Fujaira, which supply the US navy and air force units deployed to the UAE. Meanwhile, Oman provides sites for the storage of US war materiel.⁸⁹ However, this trend toward deeper bilateral ties with the US has been a disappointment following the designation of Bahrain (2002) and Kuwait (2004) as a “US Major Non-NATO Ally”. Prince Saud al-Faisal, the foreign minister of Saudi Arabia, described this trend as “alarming, lamenting that such ‘separate arrangements are not compatible with the spirit and charter of the Gulf Cooperation Council’, and adding that they ‘weaken not only the solidarity of the GCC ... but also each of its members. ‘In the military sphere’, he warned, ‘any agreement with a third party cannot ... substitute for the necessity of developing the indigenous resources of the GCC.’”⁹⁰ The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Syrian war, the Iraq War, and the war on terrorism are also sources of disappointment, but this has not yet pushed the GCC countries to look for an effective collective alternative to dependence on the US.

In addition, some of the GCC states are also linked with NATO through the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) launched at the Alliance's Summit in the Turkish city in June 2004. The ICI aims at creating a security cooperation relationship with the broader Middle East, including the Arab Gulf states. By 2006, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and the UAE joined the ICI. Saudi Arabia has not yet joined, nor has Oman, despite NATO encouragement. The ICI offers a menu of bilateral rather than multilateral activities, which comprises “military-to-military cooperation to contribute to interoperability through participation in selected military exercises,” education and training activities, cooperation in the fight against terrorism, arms control, and consulting on transformation, defense budgeting, defense planning and civil-military relations. Once again, ICI is essentially a bilateral program applied individually to the GCC countries which do not have any common approach to cooperation with NATO.⁹¹

⁸⁷ “The GCC and Gulf security,” 2.

⁸⁸ Cordesman, “The Gulf Military Balance in 2012,” 4.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Quoted in “The GCC and Gulf security,” 2.

⁹¹ Brahim Saïdy, *Prevention and Crisis Management in the Mediterranean and Middle East What Role for Nato?* (Rome: Nato Defense College, 2010), 68.

Finally, it should be emphasized that beyond the traditional role of Western foreign actors – the US, UK, France – Turkey, as a perimeter state, is acting to enhance its relationship with the GCC states in all fields. It has the capabilities to provide a security partnership that could promote strong regional balance in the Arabian Gulf. In this regard, Lenore Martin argues that “Turkey may help maintain the power balance in the Gulf. Increasing diplomatic exchanges between Turkey and the GCC states and continuing discussions of their common concerns is compatible with Ankara’s activities in Middle East foreign policy and will be effective in achieving that goal.”⁹² In the field of military partnership, *Jane’s Defence Weekly* has reported:

“Qatar has ordered a number of tactical unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) from Turkey in a USD25 million deal. The sale, which represents the first time that Qatar has sought to introduce an unmanned capability into its inventory, covers 10 Bayraktar UAVs produced by Baykar Makina. [...] This sale is significant for two reasons: from Turkey’s perspective it represents a boost in its efforts to increase defense exports to other Muslim countries; while for Qatar the deal marks an enhancement of its military capabilities as it looks to play a more prominent international role. [...] Although Saudi Arabia was Turkey’s largest defense customer in 2011, accounting for 26 per cent of its defense industrial exports of USD414.8 million, other destinations (in the Arabian Gulf) of Turkish military equipment and services during the year were the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain.”⁹³

Under these circumstances, the GCC states might be expected to review their policy about military cooperation with foreign actors more tightly than they have in the past. If it is in the interest of every GCC state to continue to explore its bilateral military cooperation, it is equally important to do so according to an integrated and effective common GCC approach seeking to diversify suppliers and partners.

3.3. Integrated Defense Systems and Intelligence

In order to build robust unified military command and rapidly deployable military capabilities, the GCC needs to create an integrated command, control, communications and intelligence (C3I) system in several key areas. This should include one static air command, one static maritime command and one static land command headquarters. This sort of command structure could enable the GCC to react in real time to multiple linked threats to its internal and external security. It is vital for the GCC states’ small geographical size to be integrated into one command.

⁹² Lenore G. Martin, “Turkey and Gulf Cooperation Council Security,” *Turkish Studies*, 10, no. 1, (2009):89.

⁹³ “Qatar set to buy Turkish UAVs,” *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, March 15, 2012.

Land Command

This command is the appropriate structure with the responsibility of generating and preparing forces for contingency operations, and to ensure the interoperability of the GCC land forces. It should be the leading voice on land issues within the GCC. The current political crises in Iraq and Yemen highlight the fact that the primary land threat to the GCC comes through the Iraqi and Yemeni borders. This command should prepare plan to deal with asymmetric or irregular warfare. In general, the GCC states have developed good military capabilities with tanks and other armored vehicles, but once again with little regard to interoperability, because there are some difference in terms of their capability for combined arm, joint, and night warfare, and in battle management and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capability.

Saudi Arabia dominates the level of manpower, experience, and effectiveness of land forces, compared with the small size of most other Gulf forces. The *Military Balance 2012* states that “contingents of the Saudi Land Forces were deployed during the Arab–Israeli wars of 1948, 1967 and 1973, but played no combat role at least in the last two. Elements of all forces, including the National Guard, took part in Coalition operations during the 1991 Gulf War to expel Iraqi troops from Kuwait (and from Khafji in the Eastern Province). More recently, the RSLF and RSAF took part in operations against Houthi militias straddling the Yemeni–Saudi border in 2009-10.”⁹⁴ Saudi Arabia dominates the regional situation with 150,000 men, compared to 8,500 for Qatar, 6,000 for Bahrain, 25,000 for Oman and 44,000 for the UAE. The most important common operational test of combat capability of the GCC countries came during the Gulf War (1990-91), and in March 2011 when troops from the GCC’s Peninsula Shield force, comprising Saudi, UAE and Qatari contingents, were deployed to Bahrain after the Bahraini government requested support from the GCC in suppressing Bahrain’s protest movement.

Air Command

Air command must be a fundamental component of the GCC defense system to facilitate air defense cooperation and provide a consolidated air picture of the Gulf region. To date, the GCC does not have a regional approach for its air defense to deliver effective Air C2 across the full range of the GCC operations. The responsibility to protect citizens from air-based threats requires a common capability to conduct air operations and integrated air missile defense operations. In a word: GCC air policing. The contribution of its members could be through the use of national aerial surveillance systems, air traffic management, interceptor aircraft and all other air defense measures. Noting that the protection of the GCC airspace from any air threats is of course a 24/7 mission.

For such a purpose, the GCC could, like NATO, create a common air defense office and keep it away from national tensions and differences. In his analysis of the GCC air forces, Cordesman suggests that:

⁹⁴ “Middle East and North Africa,” *The Military Balance*, 112, no.1, (2012): 312.

Such a system would integrate sensors like the Saudi E-3A AWACs, other GCC airborne warning and intelligence platforms, ground based radars, and fighter and major surface to-air missile systems into a Gulf wide, secure mix of C3I, BM (Battle Management), IS&R (intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance) capabilities. This could be based on expanding the existing Saudi air control and command facility near Riyadh and links between each GCC country and the US Combat Air Operations Center (CAOC) in Qatar.⁹⁵

In fact the GCC air forces, in terms of equipment, all have modern and advanced aircraft and considerable capability to use BM and IS&R systems. They have an advantage over Iran in terms quality and new technology, but once again they purchase with little attention to standardization and interoperability.

The Saudi air force composed of about 18,000 men and around 300 combat aircraft is the best in the region with the most modern mix of advanced land-based air defenses. Saudi Arabia has a monopoly on airborne warning and control systems. According to *Jane's Defence Weekly* "it was announced in September 2007 that Saudi Arabia had reached an agreement with the United Kingdom to purchase 72 Eurofighter Typhoon aircraft under Project Salam. [...] Meanwhile, the United States announced on 29 December 2011 that an agreement with Saudi Arabia for the supply of 84 new Boeing F-15SA (Saudi Advanced) Eagle combat aircraft worth USD29.4 billion had been finalised."⁹⁶

At the same time, the UAE has become one of the best-equipped air forces in the region over the last ten years. The UAE Air Force totals nearly 4,000 men, and operates approximately 368 fixed and rotary wing aircraft. *Jane's Defence Weekly* reports that:

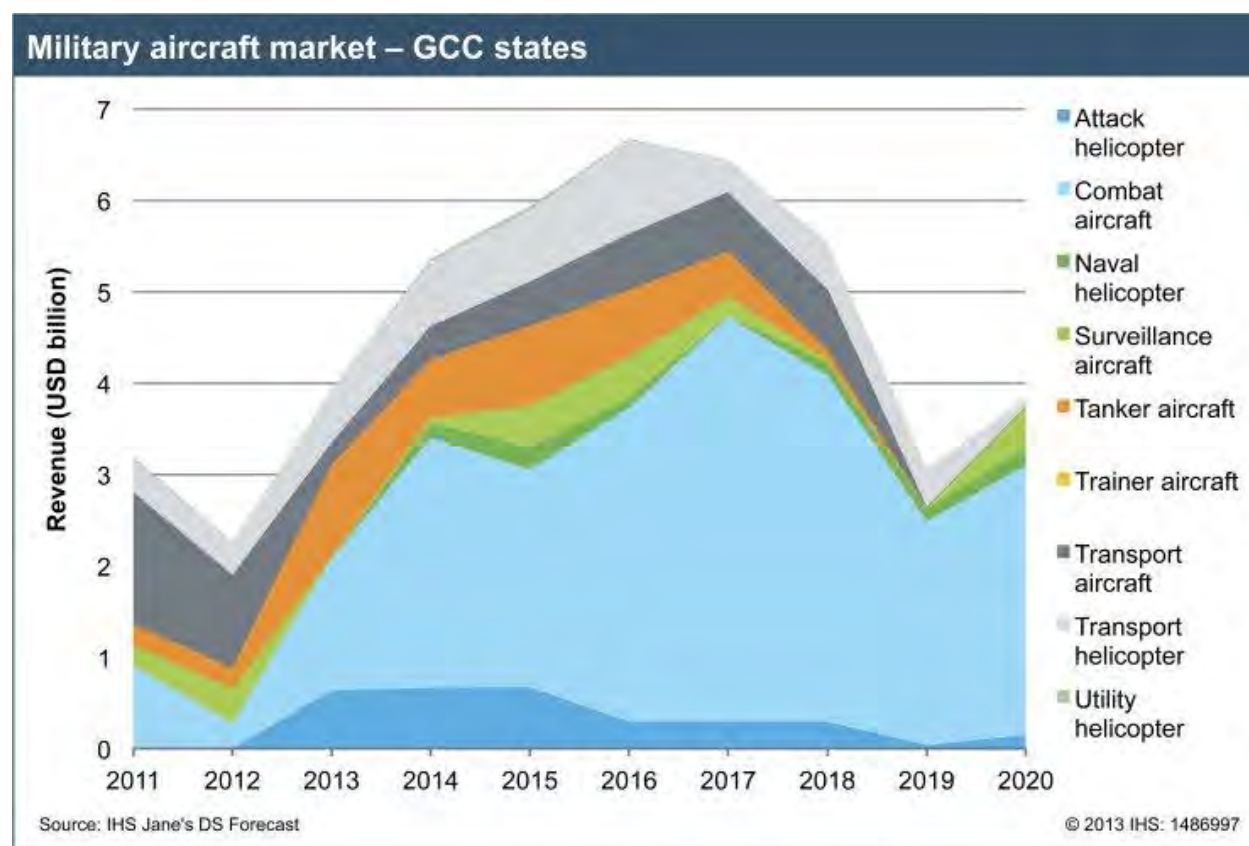
Its most significant current procurement initiative, however - for the acquisition of 60 fighters and a training package for 90 pilots to be in place by 2017 - has threatened to derail political relations between the UAE and France at the highest levels. The problem came when, after years of the UAE bargaining with France's Dassault to acquire 60 Rafale fighters as well as a sizeable weapons package, the talks stalled. Then, in November 2011, a request for proposals (RfP) for the fighter package was issued to Eurofighter for the Typhoon, while talks have also been held with Boeing in relation to the F-15 Eagle and F/A-18E/F Super Hornet and Lockheed Martin is waiting in the wings to bid the F-35 Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter (JSF). Meanwhile, it was announced by the United States in April 2013 that, in a deal worth up to USD5 billion, the UAE is to order a further 25 F-16 Block 60 Desert Falcon multirole fighters, adding to an order for 55 F-16E and 25 F-16F Desert Falcons that was announced in May 1998 and fulfilled from 2004 to 2007 (a 56th F-16E was later received as an attrition replacement).⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Cordesman, "The Gulf Military Balance in 2012," 140.

⁹⁶ "Briefing: Gulf Air Rising," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, November 5, 2013, 2.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

Regarding the smaller Gulf States, the Omani air force has some 4,100 men, with 40 combat aircraft and no armed helicopters, the Kuwaiti air force consists of some 2,500 men, 49 combat aircraft, and 16 armed helicopters, the Qatar has a small 2,100-man air force with 18 combat aircraft and 19 armed helicopters, and the Bahraini air force has 1,500 men, 54 combat aircraft, and 40 armed helicopters. The following graphic summarizes the rapid growth of the GCC states spending on aircraft since late 2011:



As a result, the challenge of the GCC unified military command in the domain of air defense is to find the way to improve readiness, training, and capability for joint operations of its air forces. These countries do not immediately need to replace or continue to purchase new materials. Rather, they need to create a single effective air force and correct the defects in their air defense. The modernization of their air fleets requires that they integrate what they have, to develop a common battle management system and common capacity secure communications, and to improve the role of sensor, electronic warfare, and intelligence aircraft to support joint warfare missions.

Maritime Command

It is crucial for the GCC states to define a structured maritime command. Therefore, the process of forming this command requires careful analysis of the competitive maritime security environment in the region. The maritime domain poses perhaps the most defense challenges for the GCC. The maritime command should be responsible for all GCC maritime operations

in terms of planning and defense capability. It has to operate in a maritime-littoral environment, to project power from the sea to land, and has also to do with the navy's interest in non-traditional security issues in this region such counter piracy operation and counterterrorism.

In broader strategic context, this command is needed for several reasons. First, the maritime façade of the GCC countries is open to one of the most important and contested waterways in the world. Second, given that the Middle East remains the biggest player in oil, these waterways which include Strait of Hormuz as well the Red Sea and Suez Canal, facilitate the export of large volumes of oil and natural gas from this region, constituting a critical node of international trade. The GCC states have invested heavily in Gulf-based processing plants and export terminals for oil and liquefied natural gas, which further highlights the importance of the Gulf littoral. Third, these waterways are exposed to both conventional and non-conventional threats posed by states and non-states actors in the MENA region. The number of maritime manoeuvres taking place each year in these waterways, particularly those conducted in conjunction with the US Fifth Fleet, the naval component of the US Central Command (US CENTCOM) is worrying Iran,⁹⁸ which has threatened on several occasions to interdict tanker traffic in the Strait of Hormuz. This could have important negative effects on global oil markets, and could impose serious direct financial costs and loss for the GCC states.⁹⁹

The GCC needs to be able to secure its vital oil installations; to counter the Iranian submarine threat; and to keep shipping lanes open in the Gulf and the Red Sea.¹⁰⁰ The GCC states have not neglected maritime security: indeed, it has been in the core of their strategic thinking. For that reason they have taken steps in recent years to develop an advanced fleet, and have stepped up procurement efforts. Again, however, they have done so individually with little attention to interoperability, and maritime priorities still diverge sharply with respect to the threats assessed by each country. During the first meeting of naval commanders in Abu Dhabi in July 2008, the GCC worked to develop a policy for maritime cooperation to create and sustain the regional stability needed for trade, oil exports, piracy deterrence and maritime anti-terrorism, as well as sharing communications links among themselves. IHS Jane's outline that:

Gulf navy fleets have traditionally been centered around fast attack craft (FACs) with anti-ship missiles and small and poorly armed coastal patrol boats. This trend appears to be shifting, with more types of vessels being introduced, including fast interceptors; coastal patrol boats (which are slower and less well-armed than FACs but have a lower price tag and offer increased endurance that is integral to persistent surveillance); and offshore patrol vessels or corvettes and mini-frigates that can, theoretically, operate out of area.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Hossein Aryan, "Iranian Naval Modernisation: The Strategic Implications," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, August 29, 2000, 1.

⁹⁹ "Deterrence by Punishment Could Offer Last Resort options for Iran," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, March 17, 2006, 4.

¹⁰⁰ "Moving Along, But Not Yet in Step," 2.

¹⁰¹ "Cash Machines: Middle East Procurement Trends," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, February 4, 2011, 3.

Saudi Arabia is the only GCC navy that possesses capabilities and bases in both the Gulf and Red Sea theaters. It is looking to replace its vessels with a mix of large and medium surface combatants such as corvettes under a new procurement program guided by efforts to transition the existing navy from a coastal force to a strong blue-water force.¹⁰² At the same time, its capabilities have been enhanced by the acquisition of three stealth frigates from France in the mid-2000s, and it is interested in the French- and Italian-built FREMM design.¹⁰³ According to IHS Jane's, Saudi Arabia is looking "to replace ships built in the 1970s and 1980s. In a deal worth more than USD4 billion, as many as 10 vessels could be purchased, divided between the Saudi Gulf and Red Sea fleets. DCNS' FREMM frigate is a reported front-runner for this tender, but modified variants of Lockheed Martin and Austal USA's respective Littoral Combat Ship designs—recently chosen by the US Navy—could cover the downwind end. [...] An official procurement request issued in December 2010 outlined a requirement for 30 fast patrol boats (35-45 m craft) fitted with weapon systems designed to defend against small fast surface craft. The cost of the program, which calls for compact and rapid craft with extensive capabilities and equipped with sophisticated hardware, could top USD2 billion."¹⁰⁴

The UAE is also working on the development of a fleet of fast naval interceptors to achieve the "transition away from the relatively localized posture of the smaller GCC navies to a force with an offshore presence."¹⁰⁵ IHS Jane's reports that recently "the UAE Navy, in a contract valued at more than USD1 billion, has commissioned six Baynunah-class corvettes; an additional contract with Abu Dhabi Ship Building covers 12 25-m fast troop carriers; four 26-m fast supply vessels; 66 9.5-m assault boats; as well as three 64 m and two 42 m landing craft."¹⁰⁶ The recent procurement programs will allow the UAE Naval Forces to conduct sustained operations throughout the Gulf region, including the Arabian Sea, and, in the wider GCC context.

This policy to get new materials is also followed by the Omani navy, which recently ordered "three 100 m patrol frigates equipped with helicopter landing pads from the UK's VT Group Ship Building in a contract worth some USD715 million. The sultanate will also acquire a 62 m troop-drop ship from Abu Dhabi Ship Building."¹⁰⁷ At the same time, the Kuwaiti navy is currently implementing a plan to acquire "two large missiles boats and has ordered 12 high-speed MKV-C boats."¹⁰⁸ Qatar's navy has not been offshore oriented, but currently operates "three attack craft and has an additional two equipped with Exocet MM40 anti-ship missiles."¹⁰⁹ Like Qatar, Bahrain's navy has traditionally lacked adequate mine and anti-

¹⁰² "Procure and Protect: Middle East Procurement," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, February 6, 2009, 5.

¹⁰³ "United Arab Emirates Builds Armed Forces Against a Volatile Backdrop," *International Defence Review*, January 11, 2005.

¹⁰⁴ "Cash Machines," 3.

¹⁰⁵ Cordesman, "The Gulf Military Balance in 2012," 140.

¹⁰⁶ "Procure and Protect," 5.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

submarine warfare assets. But, it will acquire “three frigates in 2009-10 to replace the ex-US Oliver Hazard Perry class frigate Sabha.”¹¹⁰

All of these potential naval procurements were not discussed within the GCC platforms. All member states needed to maintain sufficient frigate and corvette capabilities, but each has followed its own distinct path. Based on these considerations, the creation of a maritime command will meet the following purposes in the short term:

- Integrate command and control data, and IS&R sensors and systems, for naval operations;
- Monitor and react to threats;
- Expand maritime operations to cover Strait of Hormuz, Gulf of Oman, and Red Sea;
- Connect the GCC maritime command to the US fleet command in Bahrain, British forces in Oman, and the French navy facility in the UAE.

Joint Intelligence System

Needless to say, intelligence plays a crucial role in the defense planning process. “Intelligence assessments meet different needs and anticipate different threats. Intelligence has become an indispensable element of state security and authority.”¹¹¹ For military purpose, R. Jones argues that the ultimate object of intelligence is to enable action to be optimized. He emphasizes that:

The individual or body which has to decide on action needs information about its opponent as an ingredient likely to be vital in determining its decision; and this information may suggest that action should be taken on a larger or smaller scale than that which would otherwise be taken, or even that a completely different course of action would be better. It therefore follows that an intelligence officer has two tasks: first to ascertain an opponent's dispositions, intentions and potentials, and then to ensure that the relevant knowledge and its inevitable uncertainties are presented to the commanding entity in the form that it can best assimilate.¹¹²

Improved intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, and assessment capacity for the GCC states are essential to enabling them to face multidirectional and multidimensional hard and soft security challenges. Information exchange is a broad topic that comprises various issues, including intelligence-sharing policies, and the exchange and analysis of all sources of political, economic, security and military intelligence. Developing a plan and policy guidance on military intelligence based on the closer coordination of the intelligence producers within GCC is one of the major challenges and difficult aspects of the regional defense cooperation.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 5.

¹¹¹ Len Scott & R. Gerald Hughes, “Intelligence, crises and security: Lessons from history?,” *Intelligence and National Security* 21, no. 5 (2006):654.

¹¹² R. V. Jones, “Intelligence and Command,” *Intelligence and National Security* 3, no.3 (1988): 288.

Some of the most important achievements of the GCC are the signing of an intelligence-sharing pact in 2004 and the establishment of a police Gulf GCC (Interpol GCC). The Gulf States meet regularly to share information and address issues about cooperation in counterterrorism and on the most sensitive areas of intelligence. It's recommended to continue to schedule meeting of national intelligence, and produce an agreed annual threat assessment in the region. The right way to proceed is to create a GCC joint intelligence center for more trust, and common collection and analysis capability. This center should be responsible for the coordination of intelligence and for producing the strategic priorities for secret intelligence coverage, which may be reviewed on an annual basis. The intelligence collection and analysis and operational preparation that will occur in this Centre will place the GCC in a better position to act. In this regard, Abdullatif Al Zayani, the GCC Secretary General, voiced the same concern and demanded that "GCC countries have to be able to be integrated to share intelligence and information and be ready to work together at a higher and more complete level."¹¹³

In the sphere of intelligence collection, there are two key areas where improvement is necessary. First, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan demonstrated that the single most important source of intelligence to counter terrorism and sabotage is the local population. This requires GCC countries to use human intelligence teams to cultivate and exploit informants. Second is to continue to procure advanced sensors and communications, surveillance and reconnaissance assets. *Jane's Defence Weekly* reported that:

Qatar has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Thales to develop an optionally-manned aircraft for its armed forces, the company announced on 27 March, 2014. The Optionally Piloted Vehicle - Aircraft (OPV-A), as the project is dubbed, is for a high performance intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance (ISTAR) system, and includes the delivery of a full training solution. [In addition] Qatar will select a host platform, which will then have the necessary flight and mission systems integrated by the company Thales to give it an optionally manned capability. The thinking behind this is to give the aircraft a greater endurance and the ability to operate in harsher weather conditions, while still being able to operate in controlled airspace when required. In looking to field an optionally-manned platform, Qatar is building on its recent acquisition of 10 Bayraktar tactical unmanned aerial vehicles (TUAVs) from Turkey. This was the first time that the emirate had procured UAVs.¹¹⁴

At the same time, all of the other GCC countries are looking to acquire an intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) system. For example, *Jane's Defence Weekly* reported that:

¹¹³ "Share intelligence to strengthen GCC," *The National*, June 20, 2013, accessed July 31, 2014, <http://www.thenational.ae/thenationalconversation/editorial/share-intelligence-to-strengthen-gcc>

¹¹⁴ Gareth Jennings, "Qatar Looks to Develop and Field Optionally-Piloted Aircraft," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, March 28, 2014.

The United States Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) revealed that one of the Saudi's top-secret RE-3 electronic intelligence (ELINT) aircraft is currently undergoing a major upgrade. The DSCA said Saudi Arabia had requested four ISR suites with unidentified electro-optic (EO) sensors, signals intelligence systems and synthetic aperture radars, as well as an option to acquire another four to equip King Air 350ER aircraft. The primary contractor in a deal estimated to be worth USD257 million [...]. The DSCA indicated the Royal Saudi Air Force (RSAF) would use the new aircraft primarily to track militant infiltration across the Kingdom's borders, as well as to monitor oil infrastructure and support naval operations. Currently, the RSAF's RE-3 aircraft is in depot maintenance and will not be available until after 2015. In the interim, the King Air 3050ER ISR aircraft will allow the RSAF to perform a portion of the RE-3 mission.¹¹⁵

Integrated missile defense

The GCC unified command could not be effective without an integrated missile defense attached to its air defense system. These countries share the goal of building an effective regional defense against the threat of ballistic missiles. For Lt. Col. Eddie Boxx, this system has become achievable in recent months amid a series of important improvements in technology and doctrine. For him, its successes to date include:

- Agreement on the importance of the Iranian threat;
- "Bilateral multilateralism," in which each GCC state coordinates with Washington individually, and Washington then coordinates with the others ...;
- Adoption of a common missile defense doctrine and progress on a nascent regional missile defense plan;
- Procurement of interoperable missile technology that can be more readily forged into a common shield.¹¹⁶

However, the GCC still has a multilayered approach to missile defense. The GCC countries share Patriot systems and Pantsir-S1 Russian anti-aircraft missile-gun systems. The recent massive investment was carried out individually with once again little attention to interoperability. Since December 2011, the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Qatar have expressed interest in purchasing Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) systems at a combined cost of over \$10 billion. Frank A. Rose, US Deputy Assistant Secretary for Space and Defense Policy, revealed that:

... the United Arab Emirates has contracted to buy two THAAD batteries that, when operational, will enhance the U.A.E.'s security as well as regional

¹¹⁵ "Saudis Request King Air ISR Aircraft," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, August 17, 2012.

¹¹⁶ Lt. Col. Eddie Boxx, "Building Gulf Missile Defenses One Small Win at a Time," *Policy Analysis*, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, March 28, 2013, accessed July 18, 2014, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/building-gulf-missile-defenses-one-small-win-at-a-time>

stability. The U.A.E. also has taken delivery of its Patriot PAC-3 batteries, which provide a lower-tier, point defense of critical national assets. Saudi Arabia is in the process of upgrading its existing Patriot PAC-2 batteries to the PAC-3 configuration. Kuwait also is upgrading its existing batteries to PAC-3, and in December 2013 signed an offer for two additional PAC-3 batteries.¹¹⁷

The UAE, in particular, has advocated for the creation of a missile shield able to intercept Iran's Shahab-3s and is planning to procure a surveillance satellite to monitor the entire region. At the same time, in order to publicize its ballistic missile capability, Saudi Arabia publicly displayed its Dong Feng-3 (DF-3) ballistic missiles for the first time in a 29 April 2014.¹¹⁸

The prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran with Shehab-3 intermediate range ballistic missiles (IRBMs) dismays the GCC states. Overall, the proliferation of ballistic missiles and WMD are an imminent threat to Gulf States because they've been used before in the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war, and twice by Iraq against them: in 1991 Iraq fired Scud missiles at Saudi Arabia and Bahrain as well as Israel, and in 2003 Iraqi forces fired up to 12 short-range tactical ballistic missiles at Kuwait.¹¹⁹ It is worth noting that after spending billions in US anti-missile technologies, the GCC failed to deploy a joint missile shield due to mistrust amongst them, lack of modern combat experience and minuscule forces. Therefore, it could be useful for the GCC to create a committee that combine civilian and military staff to examine the anti-missile technologies, the question of arms control, and to pursue the diplomatic activity for weapons of mass destruction free zone in the Middle East.

4. THE POLITICAL CHALLENGES OF THE GCC COMMAND STRUCTURE

This chapter highlights the political challenges related to the existing threat perceptions and their impact on the GCC command structures. It also examines the attitude of three most influential players concerned by this development in the region: the United States, Israel and Iran.

4.1. Divergent threat perceptions

The lack of consensus

It is obvious that the building and maintaining a unified military command requires careful consideration of the threat profile facing a state. Effective threat assessment, focusing on the

¹¹⁷Frank A. Rose, "Gulf Cooperation Council and Ballistic Missile Defense," accessed <http://www.state.gov/t/avc/rls/2014/226073.htm>

¹¹⁸"The DF-3 (US designation: CSS-2) is a single-stage, liquid-fuel ballistic missile that was developed by China in the 1960s. It is estimated to have a range of 2,500 km with a 2,000 kg warhead, but suffers from poor accuracy. It was confirmed in March 1988 that China had transferred an unspecified number of DF-3 missiles with conventional warheads to Saudi Arabia. The estimates of the number of missiles delivered to the kingdom range between 30 and 120". See Jeremy Binnie, "Saudi Arabia Displays Ballistic Missiles for the First Time," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 30 Apr 2014.

¹¹⁹Riad Kahwagi, "Gulf Cooperation Council Threat Perceptions and Deterrence Objectives," *Comparative Strategy*, 22, no. 515–520 (2003):518.

national, regional and international strategic environment, is vital to the development of this command. Despite this, common threat perception has not always been an integral part of the GCC defense cooperation. So the effectiveness of the GCC command will ultimately be determined by a number of political challenges. Cooperative steps must be made at the political level among the GCC states to adopt a common command structure, and minimize the differences in foreign and security policy between members. The lack of common threat perceptions is the major reason the GCC states have made only limited progress in organizing themselves into an overarching security construct. Divergent state interests pose a real challenge for further steps toward a unified command. “Each country has a different perspective regarding existing threats against it and, as a result, has its own considerations and is linked through bilateral agreements with external forces for its defense. Divergent security agendas, distrust, a lack of confidence, Iranian attempts to drive a wedge between the GCC countries, concerns about Saudi Arabian dominance, as well as the convenience of the American defense umbrella have contributed to a lack of desire to participate in a joint security venture.”¹²⁰

The lack of consensus on security threats constrain the ability to work together effectively. As we have defined military command, effectiveness is its key metric. If this condition is not met, a number of possible consequences may result. For instance, because of political sensitivities, the delegation of decision-making authority to subordinate commanders may not occur. Military missions are defined by political agreements, and usually political leaders ask the military what is needed – in terms of funds, personnel and other resources - to achieve command missions. The ability of the GCC armed forces to work together through this unified command depends in great measure on continuous common threat assessment.

The political sensitivities

Like most rhetoric about Arab unity, the reality is very different. Competition and rivalry have been a regular phenomenon in the Gulf region, and a degree of suspicion and lack of trust still characterizes the relationship among the GCC states. The political disagreements that have negative impacts on the GCC’s rules and decision-making processes have also spilled over into areas of military cooperation. Several examples could be taken into consideration to understand the present state of affairs in the region and the divergent threat perceptions. They disagree on a whole host of issues, including the relations with Iran, the approach towards Iraq, the support for the Sunni opposition in Syria, the attitude towards the Muslim Brotherhood, and the ouster of Morsi in Egypt.

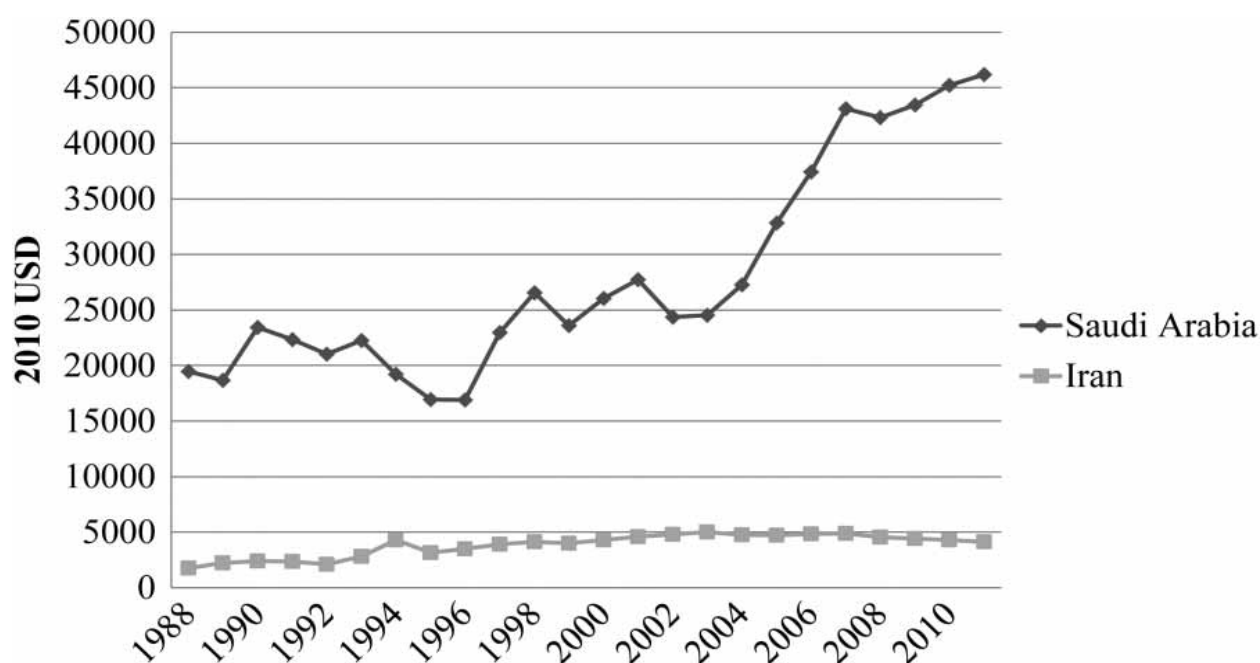
Obviously, *the major issue is the perception of the Iranian threat*. The GCC countries have a troubled relationship with Iran. This relationship is essentially shaped by sectarian and ideological differences, disagreements over the military presence of the US in the region, concerns over the Iranian nuclear program, Iranian territorial claim to Bahrain, and territorial disputes between Iran and the UAE.¹²¹ Many in the Gulf remain wary of Tehran's intentions to

¹²⁰ Guzansky, “Defense Cooperation,” 651.

¹²¹ These tensions are not new. Iranian territorial claim to Bahrain goes back to the 1970s and it was renewed recently as of February 2009. For more than three decades, the UAE and Iran have disputed control over three

acquire long-range missiles, and its movement towards acquiring nuclear weapons. Saudi Arabia in particular sees a nuclear-armed Iran as a threat to its own influence in the region. It consistently justifies its large defense procurement by pointing to the Iranian threat across the Gulf (see Figure 2). In his study on the Saudi military expenditures, David Sorenson notes that:

While defense spending levels are imprecise indicators of military capability, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Arab countries overwhelmed Iran on military spending levels in 2008, the last year that Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) reports Iranian defense spending. SIPRI calculated that Iran spent roughly US\$7.4 billion, while Saudi Arabia invested over US\$43 billion, and the UAE spent close to US\$16 billion. And this does not count Israeli or American defense spending. Moreover, a longer-term picture reveals that between 1990 and 2011, Iran spent about US\$84 billion on national defense while, during the same period Saudi Arabia invested over US\$612 billion in constant 2010 dollars.¹²²



Source: Stockholm International Peace Institute Military Expenditure Database, 2012.

However, not all Gulf States consider Iran a common menace, because each state has nuanced foreign policy based on its political philosophy and its security alliances. Oman, Kuwait and

strategically placed Gulf islands: Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunbs. Kuwait has long blamed the Iranians for terrorist attacks on its soil during the Iran–Iraq War (1980–88). Regarding the problematic relations with Saudi Arabia, a violent clash has occurred between Shia pilgrims and the Saudi security forces during the Hajj in Mecca on 31 July 1987, which led to the deaths of over 400 people, many of them Iranians. Finally, the ideological rivalry started with Islamic Iranian Revolution in 1979, when Ayatollah Khomeini openly declared his intention to export the ideology of this revolution and support the Shias in other countries of the region. Prasanta Kumar Pradhan, “The GCC–Iran Conflict and its Strategic Implications for the Gulf Region,” *Strategic Analysis*, 35, no. 2 (March 2011): 265–276.

¹²² Sorenson, “Why the Saudi Arabian Defence Binge?,” 118.

Qatar maintain relatively good relations with Iran, while Saudi Arabia's, the UAE's and Bahrain's dealings with Tehran are marked by tension, and even hostility. In other words, there are two trends: one group sees Iran as the most important threat, the second considers Iran a permanent neighbor that should be contained through trade and confidence measures, and considers it unwise to exclude Iran from the regional security architecture. Oman and Qatar, in particular, believe that security in the Gulf cannot be maintained by intensifying hostilities towards Iran. Rather they argue that engagement would enhance security by turning hostility into harmony and cooperation.

There are good reasons for these differences that prevent the GCC from defining a common threat perception towards Iran. For instance, Iran's nuclear program illustrates the dichotomy of Gulf thinking. GCC states do not want to see Iran as a regional nuclear power, but at the same time, they do not have a common position regarding a possible strike against Iranian nuclear targets. While some GCC states are inclined to adopt a hard position, others firmly refuse any aggressive or violent action, such as the Kuwaiti Foreign Minister, Sheikh Mohammad al-Sabah, who said, on December 15 2009, that "We do not accept any military action against Iran [...]. Any tension in the region will reflect on our situation. We have many problems already and we do not want any more."¹²³

The divergent threat perception also appears in the absence of a common policy on Iraq. The GCC members disagreed over the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. While some opposed the action, others served as a launch pad for the military campaign. If the elimination of Iraq as a military threat with the fall of Saddam's regime is an indisputably favorable development for all of the GCC countries, the new situation generated division about the future of the country. The general animosity toward Iraq is not fully shared by Qatar and Oman, who have opposed any disintegration in Iraq.

The *GCC's attitude towards Arab Spring* is another significant issue that illustrates their disagreement. While the GCC has played an important role in supporting the Arab Spring in Libya, Yemen and Syria, the popular uprising in Egypt increased competition for influence between Saudi Arabia and Qatar. After the collapse of Mubarak's regime in Egypt, Qatar had been a firm backer of the Muslim Brotherhood and lent Egypt \$ 7.5 billion during the year that Muhammad Morsi was president. Saudi Arabia, however, which in the past had backed the Brotherhood, called it a terrorist organization and supported Morsi's ouster. This caused a diplomatic rift among the GCC countries culminating in the decision of Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain to withdraw their ambassadors from Qatar on March 5, 2014.¹²⁴

Finally, the GCC's failure to adopt a common threat perception could be explained by *concern about Saudi dominance and hegemonic intentions in the region*, expressed by the smaller member states. This continues to hamper progress toward security cooperation, because Saudi Arabia has always regarded the Gulf region as its sphere of influence and acted as local hegemon. A simmering border dispute with Qatar led to a minor armed clash in 1992. On its side, Oman, which has consistently taken an independent line, is not always happy with Saudi

¹²³ "Regional Threats Fuel Gulf Plan for Rapid-Reaction Force," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, December 17, 2009.

¹²⁴ See Tally Helfont, "Can the U.S. Help End the Intra-GCC Rift?", *The American Interest*, June 6, 2014.

domination and claims more equality within the GCC structures. These considerations, along with the plethora of border disputes between the Gulf States, also fuel the divergent threat perceptions. Nevertheless, “while the weak Gulf States tend to view Saudi Arabia with suspicion, they do not regard it as threatening as Iran or as Iraq was. During the twentieth century each of these two regional powers was seen as a greater threat at different times.”¹²⁵

4.2. Strategic impacts

The foundation of a unified military command by the GCC would not pass without notice by outsiders given its strategic impact on the balance of power in the region. How has the GCC’s decision been received by some key actors strategically concerned by this development?

Iran: reduce dependence to the Western countries

There has not been an official statement made by leaders or officials of the Islamic Republic of Iran directly regarding the GCC’s decision to create a unified military command. This could be explained by the fact that Iran does not object to the enhancement of the GCC’s defense cooperation. Its major concern is the presence of Western (notably American) forces¹²⁶ in several bases in GCC states and in Gulf waters. For that reason, “Iran’s military modernization and operations are focused on acquiring and developing asymmetric, unconventional and power projection capabilities designed to [...] defend against perceived U.S. military strengths. [...] Iranian endeavors specifically associated with anti-access naval operations, ballistic missile employment and the pursuit of a viable nuclear weapons program, as well as unconventional warfare efforts.”¹²⁷ Based on this, if the GCC’s defense cooperation reduces dependence on Western countries and builds a regional capability, the establishment of this military command is not seen as a threat by Iran.

Secondly, the fact that Iran has not taken a negative position on the GCC military command fits with Tehran’s efforts to improve relations with the GCC states. Speaking on security in the Gulf, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani stated that “security [in this region] can only be ensured through the assistance and cooperation of all regional countries; and Iran pursues a policy of establishing peace, stability and assistance to the fleet of other countries in the sea.”¹²⁸ This means that the new approach of the Iranian leadership is moving toward developing a pragmatic relationship with neighbors in the Gulf. The GCC welcomes this pragmatism, but also declared at the 34th GCC Summit on December 2013 that this should be followed “concrete steps in order to reflect positively on peace, security and stability of the region.” For the GCC, strengthening relations with Iran should be founded on “good neighborliness, non-interference in internal affairs, respect of sovereignty of regional countries

¹²⁵ Elisheva Rosman-Stollman, “Balancing Acts: The Gulf States and Israel,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 40, no. 4 (2004): 189.

¹²⁶ Sun Degang, “The US Military Bases in the Gulf Cooperation Council States: Dynamics of Readjustment,” *Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia)* 4, no. 4 (2010): 44-53

¹²⁷ Andrew T. Steele, “Mirage or Reality: Enabling Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Collective Defense,” (Naval War College, U. S. Navy, May 2011), 3.

¹²⁸ “Persian Gulf security requires regional cooperation: Rouhani,” PressTV (Iran), accessed July 30, <http://www.presstv.ir/detail/352617.html>

and refraining from the use or threat of the use of force.”¹²⁹ In fact, the conceptualization of pragmatic GCC-Iranian relations is not new. When he was invited to the GCC annual summit held at Doha in December 2007, the former Iranian president, Ahmed Ahmadiyeh, proposed this new approach seeking to enhance peace and security in the region, but without any external interference. For setting up of a mutual security agreement, Iran offered a 10-point proposal for regional stability:

1. Establishment of a Persian Gulf Security and Cooperation Organization comprising the six member states of the GCC as well as Iran and Iraq in accordance with Clause 8 of Resolution 598 of the United Nations Security Council.
2. Preparing common ground for fighting terrorism, organized crime and drug smuggling, as well as other joint security concerns.
3. Gradual removal of all restrictions in political, security, economic and cultural fields.
4. Development of trade ties by taking the countries’ potentials into consideration and conducting joint investment in economic projects to achieve a regional free-trade mechanism.
5. Guaranteeing the security and energy export of regional countries to secure their interests and achieving a sustainable mechanism for energy needed by the world.
6. Building confidence among regional countries in the nuclear field.
7. Setting up a joint consortium for uranium enrichment among regional countries to procure nuclear fuel and other peaceful nuclear activities under the supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency.
8. Forging serious cooperation among regional countries for having a Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction.
9. Putting an end to arms races in the region by providing resources for the purpose of economic development and fighting poverty.
10. Making foreign military personnel exit the region and establishing full security by the regional countries.¹³⁰

It appears that Iranian strategic thinking favors the introduction of new regional defense and security arrangements seeking to limit if not end the presence and interfering role of foreign powers in Gulf politics. Accordingly, Iran’s attitude toward the GCC’s military command is part of its new approach based on the abandonment of confrontational security mindset in its relations with Arab Gulf states.

Israel: balancing act towards Iranian threat

On its side, Israel appears superficially receptive to the formation of the GCC Unified Military Command if it is conceived as a balancing act towards Iranian threat. There is a clear agreement within Israeli military ranks and the political leadership that the greatest threat to Israeli national security emanates from Iran and its intentions to build nuclear weapons. In terms of military balance in the region, the GCC’s command is not a threat, since Israel

¹²⁹ “The Final Communiqué of The 34th GCC Session,” accessed July 30, 2014, <http://www.gcc-sg.org/index156b.html?action=Sec-Show&ID=644> [in Arabic].

¹³⁰ Kaveh L. Afrasiabi, “Iran Unveils a Persian Gulf Security Plan,” *Asia Times*, April 14, 2007, accessed July 31 2014, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/ID14Ak04.html

remains the dominant non-Arab military power in the region, with weapons programs that range from new tanks to a multilayered missile defense shield. In this regards, *Jane's Defence Weekly* states that:

Though dwarfed in size, population and capital by its Gulf neighbors, Israel dominates the Middle East in terms of indigenous development of arms technology and remains the most formidable fighting force in the region. Well trained, well equipped and technologically superior, the Israel Defense Force is years ahead of the region in terms of activating its 'electronic battlefield' technology, including electro-optical targeting equipment, tactical intelligence and combat communications. While many of the systems have been developed by the Israeli defense industry, the close ties between Washington and Tel Aviv have also produced innovative defense solutions including unmanned aerial vehicles, light automatic assault weapons and missile detection systems, largely funded by the average USD1.8 billion annual US military aid to Israel for the purchase of US-made defense equipment. [...] The country has invested in the Arrow-2 anti-tactical ballistic missile and has purchased Patriot missiles for anti-missile defense. It has also invested in modernizing its air force [...].¹³¹

Compared to the Iranian threat, "Israel itself is not a central factor in the foreign policy agenda of the [...] Gulf states."¹³² Except for Qatar, the Israeli-Arab conflict is a secondary consideration, the primary one being the tension with Iran, and the regional implications of insecurity in Iraq and Yemen. Israel also has no formal relations with any of the six GCC member states. In terms of digital diplomacy,¹³³ Israel in July 2013 opened a "virtual embassy"¹³⁴ with the Gulf Cooperation Council, and a Twitter account targeted toward Gulf States, with the intention of opening new channels of communications. Last August, Ambassador Rafi Barak, the Director General of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, hosted a question and answer session on this Twitter account. In it, he made Israel's desire for warmer relations with Gulf States clear. Barak "would like to see a common future of cooperation" with GCC members.¹³⁵ Responding to a question about Israel's perception of the Gulf, Barak said, "Despite the absence of diplomatic relations between Israel and the Gulf states, we do

¹³¹"Procure and Protect," 7.

¹³² Rosman-Stollman, "Balancing Acts," 204.

¹³³ "The term digital diplomacy, which has recently gained popularity along with such terms as Internet diplomacy, social networks diplomacy, and Web 2.0 diplomacy, was initially used in the context of U.S. foreign policy. It denoted broad use of information and telecommunication technologies (IT), including the new media, social networks, blogs, and other media platforms on the Internet. At present, several other countries besides the United States are pursuing digital diplomacy programs. A case in point is the NATO countries, which are currently considering their own digital diplomacy programs". Elena Zinovyeva, "U.S. Digital Diplomacy: Impact on International Security and Opportunities for Russia," *Security Index: A Russian Journal on International Security*, 19, no. 2 (2013): 33.

¹³⁴ Israel in the GCC (@IsraelintheGCC), Twitter Post, July 17, 2013, accessed July 17, 2014, <https://twitter.com/IsraelintheGCC/status/357739965435744257>

¹³⁵ Israel in the GCC (@IsraelintheGCC), Twitter Post, July 17, 2013, accessed July 17, 2014, <https://twitter.com/IsraelintheGCC/status/364684196872069121>

not see ourselves as enemies.”¹³⁶ This would indicate that the Israelis do not view the GCC Unified Military Command as a threatening development. Further, it is likely that the Israelis would welcome the GCC Unified Military Command as an added deterrent to the Iranian threat.

U.S. response: move to enhance GCC defense capability

Understanding the US reaction to the GCC’s Military Command is particularly important. It is important to remember that after the British withdrawal from the region, the US became the principal guarantor of security in the Gulf. Since all American administrations have regarded the stability of the Gulf Region as a vital national interest. “Former Defense Secretary Richard Cheney therefore insisted that the American commitment to the Gulf area will last as long as it is the world’s focus and added: ‘*We have to build long-term, close, solid ... relationship.*’ Assistant Secretary of State for Middle Eastern Affairs Robert Pelletreau summarized that the basic strategic principle of the US in the Gulf is *to protect critical American interest ... the security of its friends and ... the free flow of oil at stable prices.*”¹³⁷ Beyond its large oil and gas reserves, the security of the Gulf is uniquely important for other military and non-military considerations. As the leading global military power, the US has a large presence in the Gulf through, for instance, USCENTCOM, the US 5th Fleet in Bahrain,¹³⁸ air and naval staging facilities in UAE and Oman, and the US commands in Kuwait and Qatar. The U.S. is cooperating in depth for the modernization of the GCC’s armed forces, including a wide range of advisory, training, and exercise activities. This relationship had reached “full maturity with Operation Desert Storm and led afterwards to a series of defense cooperation agreements with GCC members. The Gulf War convinced the GCC rulers that their security was primarily threatened by invaders outside the Arabian peninsula, namely Iran and Iraq. With this experience in mind, coping with prospective aggression of any kind would mean leaning more heavily on the United States as the—now proven—guarantor of their security.”¹³⁹ U.S. military sales to the GCC are also very significant: “between 1950 and 2011 Washington transferred more than US\$85 billion in arms under Foreign Military Sales alone to Saudi Arabia, the most valuable customer by far; Egypt and Israel were a distant second and third, both with a bit more than US\$35 billion. American arms sales to Saudi Arabia mushroomed after the 1973 oil embargo, US\$5 billion worth in 1975, and, as Bronson notes, [...] Saudi contracts became integral to the welfare of the United States arms industry.”¹⁴⁰ In recent years, according to the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), “the U.S. sold a total of \$66.3 billion in weapons system in 2013 (75 percent of the global market) and a large chunk of it went to GCC countries. In 2012, Saudi Arabia alone purchased helicopters and fighter jets worth \$33.4 billion.”¹⁴¹ In addition, excluding arms and military equipment, Washington also has a booming non-military business relationship with the GCC countries. The US goods

¹³⁶ Israel in the GCC (@IsraelintheGCC). Twitter Post, July 17 2013, accessed July 17, 2014, <https://twitter.com/IsraelintheGCC/status/364678532699402241>

¹³⁷ Henner Furtig, “GCC-EU Political Cooperation: Myth or Reality?,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 31, no. 1 (May 2004): 28

¹³⁸ Bahrain as the home of the 5th Fleet now ranks among the US Navy’s largest overseas facilities.

¹³⁹ Furtig, “GCC-EU Political Cooperation,” 28

¹⁴⁰ Sorenson, “Why the Saudi Arabian Defence Binge?,” 125.

¹⁴¹ “Equipment purchases boost Gulf Defences,” *Strategic Comments* 19, no. 34 (November 2013).

exports to GCC countries jumped from US\$10 billion in 2003 to over US\$31 billion in 2010. US imports from the GCC countries also made a similar jump from US\$33 billion in 2005 to approximately US\$40 billion in 2010 (US International Trade Commission 2011).”¹⁴²

Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that U.S. was the first actor to respond to the GCC’s decision to create a military command. The White House’s most direct response came in the form of a statement made by President Obama. In it, he declared the GCC to be an eligible partner for foreign military sales.¹⁴³ This bodes well for the new Command’s procurement strategy and is best viewed as a sign of support for its development. Susan Rice, the President’s National Security Advisor, indicated that the GCC’s Unified Military Command would help “to cooperate on missile defense and develop other critical deterrence capabilities, including in the spheres of counter-piracy, maritime security, counterterrorism and counter-proliferation.”¹⁴⁴ Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel declared in parallel with the U.S. - GCC Defense Dialogue meeting held on May 2014 in Jeddah that “the most pressing security challenges threaten this region as a whole [...] and demand a collective response.”¹⁴⁵ Accordingly, he identified three areas where the U.S. could assist the Unified Military Command: air and missile defense, maritime security, and cyber security.¹⁴⁶ It was also made clear that U.S. support for the GCC would not come at the expense of maintaining strong bilateral relations with its individual member states.¹⁴⁷ In the same vein, the Deputy Assistant Secretary for the State Department’s Bureau of Arms Control, Verification and Compliance, Frank A. Rose announced that “a top U.S. – GCC priority would continue to be enhancing ballistic missile defense cooperation, including the eventual development of Gulf-wide coordinated missile defense architecture.”¹⁴⁸ For Rose, the overarching policy is “to see the Gulf become a stronger, more capable partner in confronting the many challenges to our shared interests in the region.”¹⁴⁹ The Unified Military Command serves as a direct step toward this vision.

On its side, House members in the Congress stated their views on the GCC’s military command during a hearing on May 22nd, 2014 that was held by the Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa. The subcommittee’s chairwoman, Ilena Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL) directly supported the GCC’s Unified Military Command, stating, “It would be in the best security interest for the United States as well as the GCC members to develop and advance an

¹⁴² Mohammed Nuruzzaman, “Politics, Economics and Saudi Military Intervention in Bahrain,” *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 43, no. 2 (2013): 372.

¹⁴³ “Presidential Determination – Gulf Cooperation Council,” The White House, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/12/16/presidential-determination-gulf-cooperation-council>.

¹⁴⁴ Susan Rice., “The Strength of American Leadership, the Power of Collective Action” (speech, Washington, DC, June 11, 2014), Center for a New American Security, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/06/11/remarks-national-security-advisor-susan-e-rice-keynote-address-center-ne>

¹⁴⁵ Chuck Hagel., “Introductory Remarks at the U.S. – GCC Defense Dialogue” (speech, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, May 14, 2014), U.S. Department of Defense, <http://www.defense.gov/Speeches/Speech.aspx?SpeechID=1847>

¹⁴⁶ Chuck Hagel., “Remarks to the Press at the U.S. – GCC Defense Dialogue” (speech, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, May 14, 2014), U.S. Department of Defense, <http://www.defense.gov/Speeches/Speech.aspx?SpeechID=1848>

¹⁴⁷ Hagel. “Introductory Remarks”.

¹⁴⁸ Frank A. Rose, “Gulf Cooperation Council and Ballistic Missile Defense” (speech, Washington, DC, May 14, 2014), Capitol Hill Club, <http://www.state.gov/t/avc/rls/2014/226073.htm>

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

integrated defense capability so that we can counter any threats in the region.”¹⁵⁰ Although there were some concerns, David Cicilline (D-RI) commented that the GCC members’ “lack of a unified approach to address this threat [Iran] is particularly disturbing.”¹⁵¹ The Senate shared the House’s commitment to the Gulf but viewed the announcement of the Unified Military Command differently, arguing that the GCC formed the Military Command in response to President’s shortcomings in foreign policy. The Ranking Member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Bob Corker (R-TN) commented, “What I do view as a problem is other countries viewing us as not being reliable. And I think that’s where we are today.”¹⁵² John McCain (R-AZ) viewed the development from a wide angle and remarked, “It is the result of a diminution of US leadership, which is the direct responsibility of the president of the United States.”¹⁵³ Democrats hold similar sentiments as well. Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman, Carl Levin (D-MI) said in reference to relations with the GCC countries that, “Things certainly have hit a dry patch — or maybe an oil slick.”¹⁵⁴ In summary, while Senators are not opposed to the GCC’s formation of the Unified Military Command, they are concerned about how it reflects U.S. international leadership. Overall, U.S. leaders consider it a potential enabler for building partner capacity and improving the GCC’s military capabilities as a force multiplier against an Iranian threat.

¹⁵⁰ House Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa, *The Gulf Cooperation Council: Deepening Rifts and Emerging Challenges*, 113th Cong., 2nd sess., May 22, 2014.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Marcus Weisgerber et al., "Despite Tensions, US-GCC Military Relations Strong," Defense News, accessed July 10, 2014, <http://www.defensenews.com/article/20131110/DEFREG02/311100004/Despite-Tensions-US-GCC-Military-Relations-Strong>

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

Conclusion

The ambitions of the GCC member-states to achieve a collective defense mechanism were substantial, given a several number of initiatives started by the foundation of Peninsula Shield force in 1982 and culminating in the establishment of a Unified Military Command in 2013. These achievements are supposed to enable GCC to establish itself as a full-fledged regional security organization. For that reason, the missions of this new structure – Unified Military Command – should be carefully analyzed for applicability to the future. GCC leaders must decide on the priorities among the missions that should be assigned to this Command. Briefly, in this design phase of the process, the considerations to be drawn from the above and given priority in future plans are as follows:

- Ensuring that this military command is not a hollow force. The great challenge is to ensure that each of the GCC member benefits from its creation, because its performance will be assessed and judged on its utility vis-à-vis regional security. In other words, this new structure should effectively and successfully carry out security and defense tasks.
- Understanding that a military command consists of coordinating all national armed forces commands in order to make them work under one umbrella. For that reason, each of the GCC members should be committed, according to its capacities, to provide military and civilian capabilities as well as the necessary resources in support of this new structure. Gaining firm commitments from members to achieve agreed missions is not always an easy process for any command structure.
- Maintaining a sufficient military capability to ensure the effectiveness of this Military Command in dealing with potential security challenges and threats. This Command should pave the way for the GCC's armed forces to be transformed and innovated in order to fight twenty-first century conflicts effectively.
- Demonstrating that the GCC following its decision to create a unified military command is evolving towards a viable military alliance, which is able to deliver more capable forces and deep interoperability.

Obviously, this command is a great step towards a stronger defense system in the Gulf region, because the small geographical size of most Gulf countries implies that it is vital for them to integrate their armies under one joint command. Achieving this aim, however, requires avoiding the dichotomy of the individual vs. the collective by endorsing a common threat perception. In this regard, the GCC countries should begin serious efforts to bridge conflicting political interests, and eliminate political rivalries that constitute a barrier to vital cooperation. Meanwhile, they can agree to focus on practical/military issues and set aside divisive political differences. In the first phase, the goal is increasing dialogue and cooperation on the areas where GCC's military command can add value primarily on defense and security matters. In the second phase, the success of the practical cooperation could open the door to more interaction at the political level.

Furthermore, the implementation of this Command should be accompanied by a new approach regarding defense planning. First of all, the procurement policy of GCC countries needs to be entirely reviewed to set a minimum level of cooperation on the purchase of weapons. Over the last 20 years, the GCC countries have spent massively on advanced military systems and infrastructure, but too often have gone beyond the operational capacity of the national forces. The current procurement strategy reflects each country pursuing its own path in acquisition of military materiel. This is a practice of buying both influence and protection through relying primarily on Western (especially U.S.) forces, rather than building a joint defense capability. A new approach also requires new ways of thinking, especially in the field of education, training and doctrine to facilitate the fulfillment of the tasks of this unified command. Finally, the GCC states might be expected to review their policy about military cooperation with foreign actors more tightly than they have done in the past.

Resources

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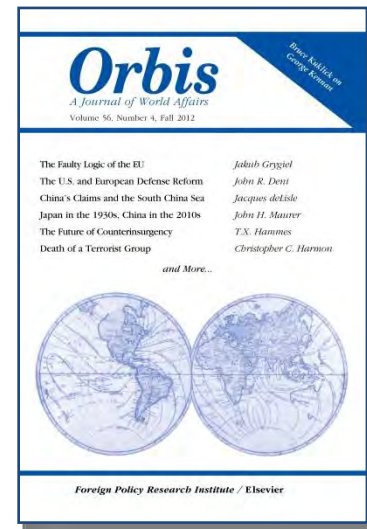
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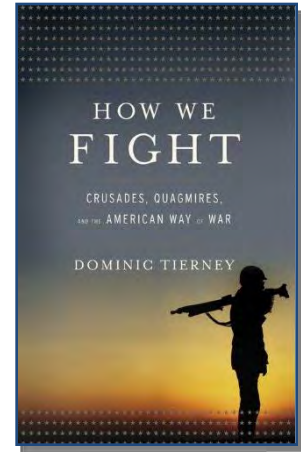
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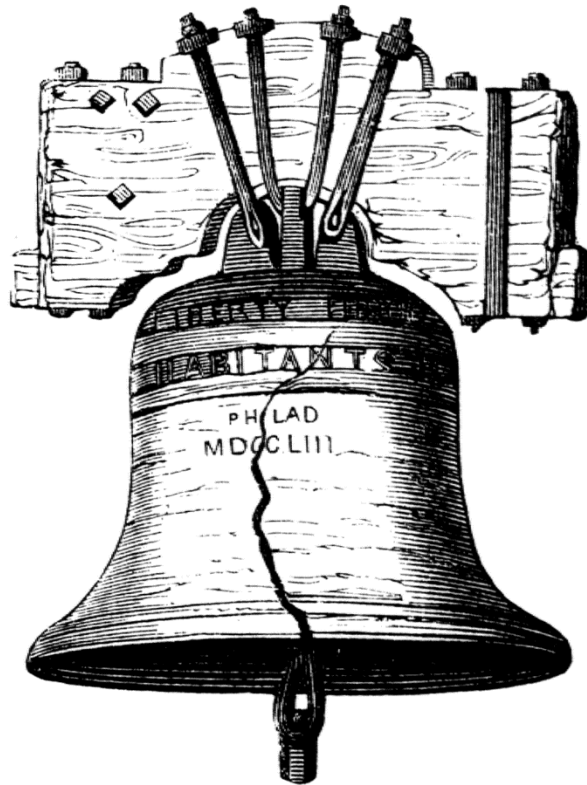
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