

# The Arabian Gulf and Security Policy

## The Past as Present, the Present as Future

JSOU Report 09-4

The Arabian Gulf and Security Policy

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**On the cover.** Following the theme *past as present—present as future*, the cover depicts the unstable balance between prosperity and conflict in the Arabian Gulf. The flag of the Gulf Cooperation Council is imposed over the six flags of the Arab Gulf states (Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, and Kuwait). These are followed by images of a burning oil field in Kuwait, 2001, and the modern skyline of Doha, Qatar. The photographs rest on three flags that represent historical context of the Gulf Security System of the past 250 years: the British East India Company, the British Union Jack, and the United States.

Photo Credits. Burning oil field photo from AFP Photos, used by permission of Newscom. Doha skyline photo courtesy of Wikipedia Creative Commons (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.5/> on 12 March 2009).





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Roby C. Barrett

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## Foreword

In his first monograph for JSOU Press, Roby Barrett researched and wrote this paper on security perspectives on the Gulf region of the Middle East from the Arab perspective. In other words, how do the Arab's view security issues in their region. Are they similar to or divergent from the United States view? And most importantly, how will these views affect the long-term relationship between the United States and its regional partners.

Unless the world's economy is weaned from heavy reliance on petrochemicals, a highly unlikely possibility in the short- to medium-term time-frame, the Gulf region will remain a critical source of energy resources for the world economy. Access to these supplies will remain a critical, perhaps vital, security concern for the world's industrial economies. In a best-case scenario, the regional countries will establish an effective security regime to defuse regional competitions and prevent interstate conflict, as well as minimize the effectiveness of nonstate actors who might threaten regional trade. Unfortunately, if the past 30 years is any indicator of the future, the scenario is unlikely to be achieved and instability and tension will remain in some areas of the region.

This less-than-ideal perspective leads a security professional with even a passing interest in the region to ponder the regional countries' security strategy and capabilities, as well as the role of external security or military forces. How much external influence or presence is required or optimum? How will these forces interact with regional players? There is no single answer to these questions, and Roby Barrett's monograph is an attempt to framework the issues and perspectives. Although not specifically drafted as a paper for a SOF-only audience, any U.S. involvement within the region will have a SOF role or "flavor," especially if nonstate violent extremist or terror networks continue to operate within the region.

The monograph is also a new initiative for JSOU's Strategic Studies Department. This monograph is the first to focus on a regional-cultural topic. JSOU Press anticipates publishing additional papers on other Middle Eastern or South Asian topics this year, as well as topics from other regions in future years. Hopefully this paper will inform the reader about issues of

importance and enhance an understanding of a region of critical importance to the United States and its allies.

Michael C. McMahon, Lt Col USAF  
Director, JSOU Strategic Studies Department

## About the Author

**D**r. Roby Barrett is an associate fellow with the JSOU Strategic Studies Department. He has over 30 years of government, business, and academic experience in the Middle East and Africa. Dr. Barrett is the president of a consulting firm, specializing in technology applications and systems for national defense and security. He has extensive experience in policy and operational and technical integration related nuclear issues, police and security systems, command and control, and weapons and system acquisition. His research focuses on strategic and operational security issues in the Persian/Arabian Gulf including Iran and the Arabian Peninsula. A former Foreign Service officer in the Middle East, he has a strong background in the cultural and political dynamics of the region.



As a founding member of the National History Center within the American Historical Association, Dr. Barrett specializes in analyzing contemporary political, economic, and security issues and future trends within the context of the broader historical paradigm. He is a scholar with the Public Policy Center at the Middle East Institute in Washington, D.C. Dr. Barrett also serves as a Senior Fellow with Air Force Special Operations Command focusing on Gulf affairs, Iraq, and U.S. foreign policy. He has participated in numerous groups and conferences including Congressional Policy Forums at Johns Hopkins School for Advanced International Studies, the Global Strategy Group Middle East in Kuwait and as a guest speaker at the Bahrain Security Forum and Exposition, invited by the Bahrain Ministry of Interior and the Royal United Services Institute of the British Ministry of Defence. He is a senior advisor to the Board of Directors of the Bilateral Arab-U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

Dr. Barrett was an Eisenhower-Roberts Fellow of the Eisenhower Institute in Washington D.C., a Rotary International Fellow at the Russian and East European Institute at the University of Munich, and a Scottish Rite

Research Fellow at Oxford University. He holds a Ph.D. in Middle Eastern and South Asian History from the University of Texas-Austin. He also has an M.A. in Russian History and Political Science from Baylor University in addition to a B.A. in History and an M.A. in Political Science from Texas A&M University-Commerce. He is an alumnus of the Foreign Service Institute's intensive 2-year Arab language and Middle East Area Studies program, the Counterterrorism Tactics Course and the Special Operations course. He served in North Africa, the Levant, and Arabian Peninsula with extensive assignments across the region.

Dr. Barrett is the author of *The Greater Middle East and the Cold War: U.S. Foreign Policy under Eisenhower and Kennedy* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) and articles on intervention in Iraq 1958-1959, the Arab League, and digital research techniques. His commentary has also appeared in the U.S., Latin American, European, and Middle East Press including VOA and BBC Arabic Service as well other media outlets.

# The Arabian Gulf and Security Policy

## The Past as Present, the Present as Future

**O**n 9 June 2008, Henry Kissinger spoke about the need for a Middle East policy that was thought out “in detail” with “no vague ideas” at its core. He stated that there must be a “clear broad strategy so that we understand our strategic objectives.” The former Secretary of State made it clear that the U.S. had to deal with the region as it is, not as we want it to be—a reference to poorly conceived ideas about democracy and political transformation.<sup>1</sup> Given recent history, consistent policy development and a comprehensive strategy has been difficult because U.S. policy has consistently attempted to ignore the historical fundamentals. This study evaluates the policies of the Arab Gulf states, their contextual historical origins, and their thrust over the next decade. It is not a regurgitation of



U.S. foreign policy. The foundational premise is that the present and future must be understood within the context of the collective and individual historical paradigms of the Arab states of the region. The present cannot be understood nor the future predicted without a fundamental, detailed grasp of the past. The past establishes the paradigm for the present and that defines context for the possible developments for the future. This study is a history lesson defining the present and projecting into the future. Secondly, this effort provides a reference guide to the historical formation of the individual states of the Gulf. It is an informational aid that provides a concise but detailed explanation of the historical relationships and interactions, knowledge of which is consistently considered by Arab Gulf officials to be essential to understanding the region.

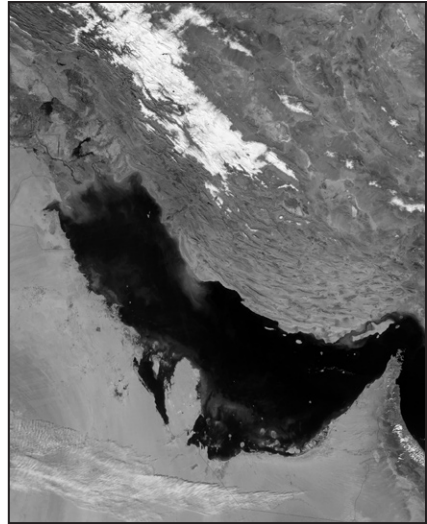
The historical political, cultural, and social construct dictates the constraints, opportunities, and risks inherent in any given geopolitical situation. Likewise, policy formulation and implementation occur within the same strategic context. When this context is misunderstood or ignored the consequences can be severe, as Iraq from 2003 to 2007 demonstrated. Without a firm grasp of the past, accurate policy planning and prognosticating about the future becomes virtually impossible. Important in any geopolitical environment, this in-depth understanding is essential in the Middle East. In the Arabian Gulf, centuries-old disputes and rivalries are today's and tomorrow's headlines. Gulf Arab government officials and military officers see this lack of in-depth insight into the historical paradigm as something that detracts from the overall effectiveness of U.S. officials.<sup>2</sup> Understanding regional historical modalities provides critical parameters for assessing policy risks—even those that lie outside the historical norm. It creates something akin to an *x/y* axis around which to evaluate tactical situations and understand complex issues.<sup>3</sup> The following is the 250-year perspective that defines the security environment of the Arabian Gulf.

## Introduction

The purpose of this study is as much pedagogical as informational. It is not a briefing paper. It is designed to present the region from a different, broader historical perspective and to provoke a different conceptual way of thinking about the Arab Gulf. It is an attempt to place the reader in a position to view the present and the future through Arab eyes. Optimally,

it will provide a framework around which to organize information that comes to senior officers through intelligence estimates, status briefings, and short-range status reports. The study is designed to provide a shortcut to an understanding of the historical paradigm of the Gulf and an intellectual backdrop for evaluating plans and policy. Ideally, it will also serve as a catalyst for acquiring a deeper understanding of the drivers behind the policy positions and initiatives in the Arab Gulf states. It would be difficult to identify an area of the world in which this view of the relationship between the strategic paradigm and tactical decision-making were more intimately related than the Arabian Gulf. The basic underlying problem in the U.S. government is that enormous amounts of information are complicated by a lack of in-depth framework for structuring knowledge. This knowledge can only be acquired by viewing the region through a more holistic historical social, cultural, and political prism. For the purposes of this study, the modern Gulf emerged in the mid-18th century. In the 19th century, under Pax Britannia, a comprehensive Gulf Security System (GSS) developed. This GSS remains the salient feature of Gulf security today.

This paper explores how the Gulf states have pursued their own security requirements within the framework of the British, now American, dominated GSS. *Great powers* established general rules, but within that framework, the states of the Arab Gulf pursued and are pursuing their own tribal and dynastic interests. The study also attempts to penetrate the screen created by conflicts in the Gulf and illuminate its unifying role as a highway for commercial, cultural, and political intercourse. Conflicts notwithstanding, the regional states have more in common with each other than with outside forces. Even today with elevated frictions, there is considerable cross-gulf



The Arabian Gulf. This Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectro-radiometer (MODIS) image from 31 January 2003 is from *The Visible Earth* ([visibleearth.nasa.gov](http://visibleearth.nasa.gov)), a catalog of NASA images and animations.



commerce and dialogue. The region is far more complicated than simple confrontation between Iran and its Arab neighbors. Finally, on a practical utilitarian level, the study will provide a compressed quick reference guide to historical and dynastic development.

The complexity of the region provides multiple examples of western assumptions based on tactical realities gone awry. These policy setbacks are more often than not the result of a failure to maintain a region-based historical perspective at a given point in time. Two major events in the last 50 years provide illustration: the Iraqi coup of 14 July 1958 and the collapse of the Iranian Pahlavi regime in 1979. Both were tactical surprises and yet, strategically, long-predicted. In both cases, the United States and Britain invested enormous political capital on regional anomalies and, at the same time, pressured these states to pursue policies that served to exacerbate their instability. In Baghdad 1958, the U.S. and the British lacked insight into the intentions of mid-level army officers allowing an obscure brigade commander, Abd-al-Karim al-Qasim, to utterly destroy the Hashemite regime in a single day. In the Shah's case, a failure to understand the likely outcome of pressures to liberalize or democratize the regime and to evaluate realistically whether "democracy" and "liberalization" was in fact a good idea paralyzed an already unstable regime. In addition, the U.S. succeeded in a strategy with Saudi Arabia to lower oil prices, undermining the Iranian economy and the Shah's development plans.<sup>4</sup> It left an unstable, insecure monarch unable to deal with another episode of civil unrest that became a revolution. No one in Washington understood the internal class and social dynamic afflicting relationships within the Iraqi army nor did they grasp the latent potential of civil and clerical unrest unleashed on the Shah. While the ultimate responsibility for collapse lay with both regimes, U.S. and British pressure on both regimes to pursue given policies played a significant role in undermining them.

These "intelligence failures" were in reality "failures of intelligence"; each resulted from the inability to grasp the broader historical context in which the regimes were attempting to survive. In the case of Iraq and Iran, the instability of broader historical political, social, and cultural context merely awaited the right catalyst for implosion. Viewed in this light, the "good idea" of 2003 held that the United States would, for a modest investment, rid the world of a dictator with weapons of mass destruction. This morphed into

the creation of a functioning democracy that would spread across the entire Middle East. Five years later in Iraq, the human and financial costs, and the damage to the U.S. economy and long-term interests illustrate the dangers of proceeding with little or no understanding of the real historical, social, and cultural context. If a policy idea is truly good, then without incurring significant risk, it cannot be taken with little or no regard for the deeper historical paradigm.

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In practical terms, the goal is to construct a more comprehensive approach in thinking about the Arab Gulf. First, the study redefines the states of the Arab Gulf into two elements.

- a. The Gulf emirates comprise the first element—Oman, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, Bahrain, and Kuwait. Each has its own unique historical narrative tied to the British GSS of the 19th century. Security systems predated British arrival in the Gulf including the Sassanian, Safavid, Portuguese, Ottoman, and other imperial systems, but none were as comprehensive as that of the British. Today's GSS essentially reflects the 19th century efforts of the British to secure their lines of communication and the trade between India and Britain.
- b. The nation states of the 20th century constitute the second element. Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Iran represent an entirely different dynamic. These three states function as regional powers with which smaller states alternate between wanting good relations or from which they seek protection. The interests of the large states often diverge from the perceived self-interests of the Gulf emirates. With this in mind, this study classifies and examines Saudi Arabia separately from the emirates. Brief summaries of Iraq and Yemen are also included; neither currently functions as a traditional state. The paper focuses on Arab perspectives on Iran and only tangentially Iranian policy.

## The Gulf Security System and the Gulf Cooperation Council

The first challenge is to provide a more precise definition of the Gulf Security System in terms of its historical and geopolitical context. The 200-year-old GSS is not to be confused with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The GCC represents a 1980s tactical adjustment to the instability in the Gulf. The revolutionary nature of the Iranian regime aggravated by Gulf Arab support for Saddam Hussein and Iraq resulted in active policies to destabilize the Arab states of the Gulf. The GCC represented the effort of those states to present a united front to Iran; while the GCC has served as a forum to solve problems between the Arab Gulf states and at least partially evolved toward commercial cooperation, its primary function is to coordinate diplomatic and security policy vis-à-vis Iran. The problems persist and so does the GCC, but it is a tactical response within the context of the historical GSS context.

Therefore, what is the Gulf Security System? For the purposes of this overview, the year 1501 provides a good preface for explaining the GSS. In the early 16th century, Shah Ismail of Persia embraced Twelver Shi'ism transforming the Safavid state from predominately Sunni to Shi'a.<sup>5</sup> In Mesopotamia, now Iraq, Safavid Shi'a Persia battled the Sunni Ottoman Empire for dominance. Lasting victory for the Ottomans came in the mid-17th century and established the geopolitical, cultural, and social system, "a 350-year-old applecart," that dominated Mesopotamia until it was upset in April 2003 by the destruction of Sunni-dominated Iraq. In the early 16th century, the decline of Safavid power and the arrival of the Portuguese altered the security situation. Prior to the Europeans, the tribal confederations of the Gulf depended on either the Ottomans or the Safavids for survival and protection. The Europeans had technological advantages in sea power and trade that overnight made them a power, if not the power in the Gulf. In alliance with the Portuguese, some tribal groupings asserted an unprecedented level of independence from the two empires. Alfonso De Albuquerque, the Portuguese commander in the Indian Ocean, viewed the Straits of Hormuz as a strategic passage and quickly took positions on both sides of the waterway.<sup>6</sup> Assisting one political or tribal grouping against another became the standard strategy of European intervention. As Christopher Bayly pointed out in examining the decline of the three great Muslim empires—the Ottoman, the Safavid, and the Mogul—in the 18th

century, emergence of regional centers of power to challenge the existing empires in the Muslim world coincided with the arrival of the Europeans.

The various indigenous rulers also learned to use these great-power rivalries to advantage. It was this dynamic that accelerated the total collapse of the Mogul and Safavid empires and undermined the Ottomans.<sup>7</sup>

Local rulers invited the intervention of western powers in order to gain their assistance in furthering dynastic goals. The European powers shifted their support among the local rulers and groupings to attain commercial dominance. In the early 17th century, the British East India Company allied with the Safavids, and other local tribes drove the Portuguese from the Gulf and Oman. In 1602, the Shi'a Safavids with assistance from the British East India Company occupied and held Bahrain until 1782. For political and tribal groups in the Gulf, their views of British intervention were a matter of perspective. Groups that came to power as partners and allies of the British tended not to reflect the attitude of *grievance* about imperial intervention. Most of those political groupings still dominate the Gulf today. The Seven Years' War (1756–1763) was the key event that permanently altered the geopolitical importance of the Gulf, imperial British security requirements, and eventually created the modern GSS.<sup>8</sup>



Meeting of Gulf Cooperation Council leaders on 20 May 2008 to celebrate the 75th anniversary of Saudi oil company Aramco. Photo by Balkis Press/Abacapress.com used by permission of Newscom.

Why? Three enormous prizes were at stake in this struggle: the wealth of the Spanish empire in the Americas, the ultimate disposition of North America, and finally the trade of India and Asia. After a truly global struggle, the Treaty of Paris 1763 effectively removed the French from North America and India, handing both to the British. The disposition of India would be the determining factor in the history of the Arabian Gulf. The importance of India to the British crown cannot be overstated. It provided the wealth that gave Britain the highest standard of living in the world through the 19th and early 20th centuries. It gave security in the Arab Gulf global economic implications and provided a new expanded definition for "The Gulf."<sup>9</sup> *The Gulf became any geographic area west of India that the British East India Company, the British Secretary of State for India, or the British Viceroy in India defined as important or critical to the defense of British India and its trade.*

In the 19th century, this British obsession with India's security resulted in the creation of the modern GSS. In the 20th century, the discovery of oil, the shift from coal to oil by the Royal Navy, and the birth of a hydro-carbon-fired world ensured that this obsession would continue into the 21st. The motivations for the British-created GSS have evolved, but the fundamentals have remained remarkably unchanged. In the 1970s, after the British withdrawal East of Suez, the United States inherited the GSS and has since led western efforts to ensure that the system created by the British and the Gulf emirates continues. Gulf security, originally based on the ability to control the water, now extends to the water and the air. The continued independence of the Gulf emirates under friendly regimes is an overriding national security issue for the United States. Historically, the emirates provide the Great Powers with military bases that translate into the geopolitical leverage to project power and influence from Tehran to Baghdad to Riyadh. The survival and prosperity of the Gulf emirates and the fortunes of the various ruling groups have depended on the maintenance of this symbiotic relationship for over two centuries.

Conversely, given the overwhelming importance of the Gulf to the West, a clear strategic understanding of what is at stake is critical. From an Arab point of view, the U.S. needs to avoid the pitfalls of well-intentioned but misguided attempts to convert the Gulf states into clones of western societies. They are allies and the GSS has worked because of shared mutual interests, not because of a shared political, cultural, and social heritage. The

first priority for the United States is to protect its own interests by assisting pro-western rulers in the Gulf to protect theirs—not as some would have it by spreading liberal (in its 19th century definition, not the vague common 20th century usage) western-style democracy. Western-style democracy in some parts of the world is simply not conducive to stability or for that matter good governance. This does not mean that the Arab Gulf states do

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*Western-style democracy in some parts of the world is simply not conducive to stability or for that matter good governance.*

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not have representative forms of government where the competing interests of various groups are taken into account; instead, it points to the fact that western attempts to transplant its political system to the Middle East have in almost every case failed and created enormous difficulties in the process. In fact, in the post-World War II Middle East as a rule, monarchies have been both more stable and more benign in their rule than republics. Republics have been dominated by military officers, security apparatus officials, or religious ideologues. For naïve ideologues supporting western-style democracy, whether right-wing neoconservative or center-left activists, it might be suggested that they review the last 50 years and the records of various republics in the region—Iraq, Syria, and Iran. No matter how authoritarian, no monarchy comes close to the corruption, malevolent repression or plain body-count of these republics. The issues will become clearer as the historical context is explored. The Gulf states have replicated certain patterns of behavior time and again for political survival in an unstable region, and none of those replications reflect liberal, western political democracy.

First, to understand the context for the Gulf security system and how the various pieces fit together, it is necessary to examine the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and its relationship to the GSS. They are two separate entities. One is an organization, the focus of U.S. and, to a degree, Saudi hopes for regional collective security; and the other is the functioning historical system that has provided stability and security in the Arabian Gulf. This organization vs. system is often misunderstood. As one observer stated, “Without a doubt, the creation of the GCC represented a momentous step toward unity on the Arabian Peninsula.” Periodically, the U.S. has wasted considerable diplomatic energy on this misleading conceptualization and “experts” on the region from various think-tanks have wasted even more. Simply put, it is not a “momentous step toward unity.”<sup>10</sup> Sheikh Sultan bin

Zayid bin Sultan al-Nahyan hit the mark when he stated, “Undeniably, the member states held on to their cherished policies and only supported the GCC when it suited them, but on major foreign policy questions the GCC states agreed to preserve the alliance at all costs.”<sup>11</sup>

Encouraged by the United States in the aftermath of the collapse of Iran, the GCC serves useful purposes, but one of those purposes has not been collective military cooperation. Some Western political analysts, in explaining the origins of the GCC, have talked about Iran’s pre-1979 role as the principal pillar of U.S. foreign policy in the Gulf, “the stronger of America’s two pillars in the Gulf” and Saudi Arabia’s current role as a weak substitute.<sup>12</sup> Obviously, this judgment is fundamentally flawed. Apparently, Iran was not “the stronger of the two pillars.” Iran collapsed and, despite enormous pressure, Saudi Arabia did not. In any Cold War scenario, Iran and its armed forces were little more than a trip-wire that would have hardly delayed a concerted Soviet attack. Given the historical context, was it even a realistic expectation to see the GCC as a collective security organization in the conventional sense? The obvious answer is no.

So a series of questions arise: Have the collective security ambitions for the GCC been realistic? If not, is the GCC useful? How does it contribute to the security of the Arabian Gulf? There are several debates about the original conception and intent of the GCC. Two provide good points of reference for discussing the GCC within the overall GSS construct. The first model was a hub-and-spoke concept with the United States serving as the common hub. In contrast, the historical security construct developed by the British and taken over by the Americans is more of a shield. In its earliest conception, the U.S. foreign policy community had hopes that the GCC would transform itself into a collective security system for the Arab Gulf. Now almost 30 years later, elements of the community have accepted that in some distant future that may happen, but not anytime soon. Others still have hopes that it may develop into some kind of European Union-like arrangement. Even the concept of a loose EU-type arrangement has been severely complicated by the current global economic crisis.

The other model is attributed to the U.S. military and more specifically to a U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) conception of three progressive tiers. The goal was to achieve the first tier, a situation in which the Gulf states were capable of defending their own territory and thus potentially constituting a deterrent to Iraq and Iran. As the first Gulf War demonstrated, that is not

the case. The second tier concept was one in which the GCC states created a collective security arrangement. This approach was to include Egyptian, Syrian, and even Pakistani troops integrated into a joint command with Gulf forces and a regional command-and-control structure run by the U.S. The Damascus Declaration of 1991 outlined this non-Gulf participation.<sup>13</sup> The idea that the Gulf states, much less Saudi Arabia, would welcome the stationing of large numbers of Egyptian and Syrian troops in the Gulf is highly unlikely. U.S. planners may not know who the Mamluks were, but Gulf Arab leaders do.

The Arabs have an excellent grasp of their own history and dynastic issues. For three centuries, it was Egyptian and Syrian troops wearing the uniform of the Ottoman Empire against which the emirates of the Gulf and Saudi Arabia struggled to maintain their independence. Only a half-century ago, Egypt united with Syria in the United Arab Republic (UAR) and threatened to destroy the “feudal states” of the Arab Gulf. Egyptian troops did participate with Arab League forces in Kuwait in 1961 and again in Saudi Arabia in 1991; however, in both instances they were a part of a larger force with British or American troops participating as well. Saudi Arabia had a brigade of rented Pakistani troops stationed there as a security force during the 1970s and into the 1980s, but that was a temporary bilateral agreement. It is almost inconceivable that the Gulf states would agree to a system that integrated Egyptian and Syrian forces into a permanent Gulf security arrangement. Washington may not know who the Mamluks were (slave soldiers who took over Egypt in the 12th century), but the Saudis and Emiratis do. At one point, the GCC developed a modest joint security force, Peninsula Shield. It was based in northern Saudi Arabia in the aftermath of the expulsion of Saddam Hussein from Kuwait, but this was disbanded. There are ongoing discussions about the creation of a skeleton command structure that would in times of crisis have each of the Gulf states contribute combat units, but nothing along the lines of a standing, integrated force for collective security is likely to emerge in the foreseeable future.

From this concept, another more comprehensive idea for collective security integration emerged. Some security analysts in the West argued that the logical next step was for the Gulf states to integrate their forces into a cohesive military command structure. To the frustration of these experts, this concept has not materialized. Military analyst Anthony Cordesman complained, “The main threat that the GCC states now face is not Iran,



Yemen, or terrorism, but their own forces, an obsession with buying different and better ‘glitter factor’ weapons than their neighbors, and an unwillingness to come to grips with the details of creating effective joint forces.”<sup>14</sup> This frustration over the refusal of the Arab Gulf states to integrate their militaries reveals a failure to understand political and dynastic considerations that trump cooperation and integration. This U.S. obsession with integration and cooperation flies in the face of the historical security paradigm of the Gulf, as a discussion of the individual emirates will clarify this issue further.

The third tier approach is successful precisely because it fits well in the traditional GSS context. This approach consists of bilateral relationships and agreements for building U.S. military facilities, prepositioning equipment, and providing access.<sup>15</sup> It may not be what the large states of the Gulf or what some in the U.S. think they want to see, but the emirates are comfortable with it and it works. The idea of the Arab Gulf states integrating their militaries into a cohesive command is only slightly less palatable than the idea of Egypt and Syria based in the Gulf. As one senior Gulf military officer put it, “The GCC is useful and we participate in it, but in any given situation, our interests may not necessarily be those of the GCC.”<sup>16</sup> Historical experience has taught the Gulf Emirates that their next door neighbor does not necessarily have their best interests at heart. Collective security is an alien concept that occurs only in very unusual circumstances and is most likely orchestrated by an outside power—the Dhofar rebellion in Oman of 1970s and the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 fit this description. The emirates’ historical experience in dealing with the larger states in the region does not encourage trust.

The preferred model for Gulf security is a bilateral relationship with an outside power. Protection derived from inside the region is far more unreliable and potentially fatal to dynastic perpetuation. Viewed within the context, the current preferences and modalities of behavior are not only understandable, but they also make perfect sense. The current system has provided security and protected the independence of the Gulf emirates in a very volatile environment for 250 years. Why change it based on a tactical need? And, above all, why change it because someone outside the region including the U.S. thinks it is a good idea? Bad advice from well-meaning friends is still bad advice.

Short of military integration, the GCC structure provides other security benefits that are more suitable and more useful to the Arab Gulf

environment. In the critical area of internal and border security, the process that sets GCC citizens apart from other nationalities encourages more sophisticated systems for tracking that human element in the security equation. Information sharing on security issues within the Arab Gulf contributes to an improved security environment. This sharing has also led to another interesting development. The UAE, Qatar, and Oman now have closely coupled immigration and border security systems and an increased level of intelligence sharing and cooperation. Sharing also exists among the other states under the GCC umbrella but a much higher degree of integration between the emirates of the southern Gulf seems to be emerging. Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, with their tightly coupled security challenges, also appear to be achieving a significantly increased level of coordination and information sharing. Subversion and terrorism are the real dangers, and the GCC structure can provide the structure for enhancing police cooperation and intelligence sharing that will prove highly beneficial. The GCC also offers a mechanism for coordinating another critical element—petroleum security and policy.<sup>17</sup> The focus for increasing coordination under the GCC should be related to coordination and information sharing among regional security forces and organizations. In fact, involvement of the military establishments in the security mission in the individual emirates could very well be a back door to greater cooperation in the military sphere.

In addition, the GCC has negotiated a Unified Economic Agreement that has not been fully implemented.<sup>18</sup> The ability to conclude and implement this agreement would appear to be a simpler, and frankly more productive, task than trying to integrate military establishments. The difficulties in economic integration, now complicated by the global recession, further underscore that broader GCC cooperation and integration in nonsecurity-related fields lay most likely in an undefined distant future. In fact, petroleum policy makes the GCC a superpower capable of leaving Iranian and Iraqi, and for that matter the Russian and Venezuelan, national economies in tatters and placing a very high price on political and military adventurism. Low oil prices are problematic for the Gulf Arab states, but they are disastrous for larger states addicted to budgetary oil subsidies. It is this security and petroleum cooperation that likely offers the best route for increased Gulf Arab policy cooperation and integration as opposed to integration of military establishments.

## The Gulf Security System and the Emirates

The basic element to any understanding of Arab perspectives on Gulf security is the individual emirate. Under the British GSS, the emirates of the Gulf achieved a level of security that had eluded them. They achieved this not through an alliance among themselves or through the auspices of one of the larger states in the region, but rather through a bilateral relationship with the British Empire. The British provided a shield behind which the states of the Gulf developed. Now without most of the more onerous imperial trappings, the United States functions in that same role. The following consists of a brief case-by-case study of the unique historical development of the emirates and illustrates how that development determines current and influences future policy. The leadership of the emirates employed a combination of three strategies—representation, regulation, and repression—to maintain control. Each applies the strategies differently with one general exception; “Political liberalization is always a top-down affair, a calculated reaction by the ruler to secure support.”<sup>19</sup> It also provides some useful insight into how the United States might adapt its policies and advice so that U.S. interests are served by going with the flow rather than swimming against the historical current. Perhaps we can do a better job of anticipating where the states of the Arab Gulf are headed and tailoring our efforts to more realistic policy goals.

### Kuwait

While all of the emirates are geopolitically *strategic* in the current security framework, Kuwait arguably occupies the most strategic location in the Gulf. Kuwait is the cork in Iraq’s strategic security bottle. Kuwait severely limits Iraq’s access to the sea and can serve as a springboard for applying military and political pressure on any regime in Baghdad. Its oil production can also serve as leverage on Iraqi petroleum income by ratcheting up production and driving down prices. Iraq continues to be significantly indebted to Kuwait as a result of the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s. Every Iraqi regime since 1920 has at one point or another made an issue of Iraq’s claim to Kuwait. Kuwait also serves as a geopolitical leverage point against Iran, and in the last century it was a target of Saudi *Ikhwan* raids and a commercial embargo. Given this reality, the historical context in which Kuwait has survived and almost perished becomes very important because it strongly

influences by example Arab Gulf views of their own vulnerabilities in this volatile region.

**The Historical Context.** The establishment of the ruling dynasties in Kuwait, Bahrain, and Qatar stems from the migration of the Utub tribes, part of the “great Anaizah tribal confederation” that also includes the Saudi royal family. In 1756, the Al-Sabah clan defeated the Banu Khalid, the tribe dominating what is now Kuwait, and established themselves as rulers in the area under Sheikh Sabah bin Jabar. From this same migration would spring the al-Khalifa clan’s rule in Bahrain.<sup>20</sup> This same period of foment in Arabia produced the first Saudi Dynasty under Muhammad ibn Saud who, in 1744, offered protection to Muhammad ibn Abd-al-Wahhab wedded the Saudi dynasty to Wahhabi Islam. All of these events coincided with the global war fought between the Europeans between 1754 and 1763 for control of global trade.<sup>21</sup>

Threats ebbed and flowed into the 19th century as Kuwait and the Sabahs increasingly turned to security arrangements with the Ottomans. In the 1890s, separate Russian and German initiatives to build a railroad to the Gulf provoked British hand-wringing. This provided the new ruler of Kuwait, Mubarak bin Sabah—also known as Mubarak the Great—an opportunity to find a new powerful sponsor. In 1899, the British pressured Istanbul to recognize Kuwait as a separate entity under British protection. In 1913, the British once again pressured the Ottomans to recognize the Sabah as the independent governors of Kuwait. In 1914, Kuwait declared itself an independent sheikdom with British support. The Sabah would rule Kuwait but the British would conduct Kuwaiti foreign policy, oversee defense, and approve all major commercial arrangements. In the post-1918 world, it solved the Sabah search for security including protection from the Saudi *Ikhwan*.

Because of British oil discoveries and exploration in Iraq and Iran, stability in Kuwait became increasingly important. In 1921, unrest led Sheikh Ahmad al-Jabar to approve election of Majlis, a National Legislative Council, and then to ignore the agreement.<sup>22</sup> In 1936, the general strike in Palestine against British support for Zionism spawned pan-Arab policies in Iraq and statements by King Ghazi about the historical connection between Iraq and Kuwait. Many Kuwaitis sent their children to Iraq for education. Understanding this, the British political agent cautioned Sheikh Ahmad to avoid the politics of Palestine and to ignore Iraqi pan-Arab entreaties.<sup>23</sup>

Angered, the Kuwaiti opposition gave money to the Palestinians anyway and, in 1938, forced the Sheikh Ahmad to establish a Majlis. On paper, the Majlis greatly reduced the power of the ruler. The Amir used the resentment among the Bedouin, the poorer classes, and the Shi'a to dissolve it. Three outside events also reinforced Sabah power and reduced the pressure on the Sabah: the British "White Paper" on Palestine that recommended an end to Zionist emigration, the death of radical nationalist, expansionist-minded King Ghazi in Iraq, and the outbreak of World War II.<sup>24</sup>

Post-war al-Sabah stability and control flowed literally from the well-head. In 1938, the British discovered oil. Shipments began in 1946 and revenues grew rapidly, providing the Sabah with financial stability.<sup>25</sup> Kuwait also became economically strategic to the British. In the early 1950s, the rise of Gamal Abdul Nasser and his campaign against "feudal regimes" exposed Kuwait to radical Arab nationalism. Under propaganda attack from Nasser and pressured by Iraq to enter into a defense arrangement against Nasser, sovereignty issues reemerged. Successive Iraqi governments made it clear that they viewed Kuwait as part of Iraq. Within days of Kuwait achieving independence in 1961, Iraq—now under President Abd-al-Karim al-Qasim—revived the Ottoman claim to declare Kuwait a historical part of Iraq and moved troops to the border.<sup>26</sup> Sheikh Abdullah al-Sabah immediately requested and received British military support under the new treaty of friendship. The episode had four repercussions for the Sabah: first, the general population rallied around the Amir creating a political consensus that made the promulgation of a constitution possible in 1962; second, the antagonism between Iraq and Egypt brought formal recognition from Nasser and membership in the Arab League; third, the incident reinforced the need for outside security guarantees; and finally, it demonstrated western willingness to defend its interests in the Gulf.<sup>27</sup>

In 1973, the oil embargo stemming from the October War and the rise in oil prices made the Kuwaitis fabulously wealthy. Kuwaiti oil was nationalized in 1975. Then in 1977, Sheikh Jabir al-Ahmad became Amir. The Iranian revolution and Iran-Iraq war posed immediate threats to Kuwait. In 1981, elections for a new Majlis found politics divided along sectarian lines as Shi'a-Sunni differences heightened. Then, in 1982, the Suq al-Manakh, a private stock market, collapsed implicating members of the royal family in corruption. The crash of oil prices further complicated matters affecting

all aspects of the economy. As the 1980s progressed, growing political unrest manifested itself in bombings of U.S. and French interests, attempts to assassinate the Amir, the bombing of restaurants, and attacks on oil installations. Because of political disputes, the Amir dissolved the assembly, suspended the constitution, and clamped down on the press.<sup>28</sup> The tanker war in the Gulf threatened Kuwait's oil lifeline and the U.S. re-flagged Kuwaiti tankers providing them with U.S. Navy escorts. When the Iran-Iraq conflict ended, it appeared that the region in general and Kuwait in particular would get a long-deserved respite from tension and conflict.

It was in this context that the Iraqi invasion occurred.

Following the Iraqi invasion, the Amir promised political liberalization and unsuccessfully attempted to placate the opposition with various half measures that failed. Kuwait became an issue in the U.S. election of 1992. Under pressure, the Amir called elections in 1992 and a Majlis dominated by the opposition came into power. The resulting turmoil appeared to foreshadow the dissolution of the Assembly but court rulings against the Majlis averted a confrontation, and the election of 1996 brought pro-government deputies back to power. In 2003, based on their experience in 1990, the Sabah agreed to support Operation Iraqi Freedom. Some have speculated that fear of a perceived internal "Salafist threat" was the driving factor. This is unlikely given that the Salafist opposition in Kuwait with a few exceptions reflects a conservative religious tradition, not a radical jihadist agenda. Quite simply



Modern Kuwait. In this November 2007 photo of the Kuwait Towers, a Chili's restaurant can be seen in the lower left. Used by permission of Newscom.

Kuwait still feared Iraq, and U.S. assurances were enough to persuade them that Saddam and Iraq had to be dealt with once and for all.

The Kuwaiti government's support for the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq ultimately led to "unprecedented levels of resentment" across Kuwaiti society. This was further aggravated by the Arab-Israeli conflict. Despite Kuwaiti disillusionment with Yasir Arafat and Palestinian support for Saddam Hussein in 1990, Kuwaitis none the less simmered over the U.S.-perceived *carte blanche* to Israel in dealing with the Palestinians. Young Kuwaiti volunteers headed for Iraq to fight the Americans. Khalid Sheikh Muhammad and Suleiman Abu Ghayth, both Kuwaitis, were already senior leaders in Al Qaeda. The invasion also complicated internal security; "Since the beginning of the military buildup in autumn 2002, Kuwait's involvement with the U.S. military presence in Iraq has been the primary driver of insurgent activity originating with Kuwait." In 2005, Kuwait experienced its own version of September 11. Security discovered cells in Kuwait planning to attack U.S. and foreign targets.<sup>29</sup> The surrounding regional chaos clearly demonstrated the potential to spread to Kuwait.

Then, Sheikh Jabir died in January 2006; the Crown Prince, Sheikh Sa'ad Abdullah al-Sabah, suffered from debilitating dementia. The National Assembly intervened and vetoed an attempt to have Sa'ad rule in name only. Following the two-week crisis, Sheikh Sabah al-Sabah, the brother of Sheikh Jabir, became the Amir. This violated precedence because the Amir's position rotated between the Jabir and Salim branches of the family, now two Jabirs ruled in succession creating a potential rift in the ruling family that may be an issue in the future. According to one U.S. official, these factors combined created a "case of pessimism" about the future.<sup>30</sup>

**The Future in Context.** The optimism of the 1970s morphed into the anxieties created by the Suq al-Manakh economic crisis, Iran-Iraq war, and tanker war in the 1980s and collapsed in 1990 when Kuwaiti generosity to the Palestinians, the Jordanians, the Yemenis, and most important to Saddam Hussein bought from their point of view nothing but treachery. 1990 demonstrated conclusively the need for a strong ally. The U.S. invasion of Iraq created a hotbed of Islamic resentment toward the Sabah. It intensified the social and political divisions between the settled Bedouins and the largely pro-government urban population. It intensified political religious identity. It complicated serious internal security problems. It destroyed the

Sunni buffer that Saddam's Iraq provided against Iran while increasing the influence of Iran, and it shook Kuwaiti faith in Washington's judgment. As one senior military official put it, "How could the United States have been so ignorant of the nature of Iraq and its role as a counterbalance to Iran?" Now the Kuwaitis find themselves tied to an ally whose judgment they do not trust. In addition, the population is increasingly hostile to the government's relationship with the U.S.<sup>31</sup> The Kuwaitis believe that the coming U.S. drawdown will bring Iranian and Shi'a dominance to Iraq and a scenario more destabilizing than post-1991 Saddam. Looking for leverage, the Kuwaitis are refusing to forgive Iraq's pre-1990 debts. The Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammad al-Salim al-Sabah stated, "Iraq's debt to Kuwait is an old debt . . . It has to be paid or Iraq has to pay its interest. These are the rights of the Kuwaiti people."<sup>32</sup>

Given this situation, undertaking fundamental reforms in educational, infrastructure, health care, and other areas would likely put more pressure on the government. During the next 3 years, the Kuwaiti government will likely avoid moves that might exacerbate the domestic, political, and security situation. In short, the government may address specific problems but eschew any new comprehensive initiatives. There will be a second corollary to this domestic approach—namely, that the advice from allies who do not live in region needs sharper scrutiny.

Kuwaiti officials have made it very clear that they view the prospects of another war in the Gulf as an unmitigated disaster. A nuclear armed Iran is preferable to the consequences of another war. In a recent interview, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammad al-Salim al-Sabah urged Iran to "resolve tensions" with the West over the nuclear issue and categorically stated that Kuwait would not allow the U.S. to launch an attack against Iran from its soil. He restated Kuwait's position that Iran had a right to nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.<sup>33</sup> The Kuwaitis clearly prefer a nonmilitary approach to the challenge posed by Iran, but they are decidedly leery of any U.S.-Iranian rapprochement at their expense. The policies of the second Bush in the region are viewed as almost total failures; this has left the Obama administration with the difficult task of engaging Iran without further eroding official Kuwait's already shaken faith in U.S. judgment. The short-term view is fundamentally conflicted. Kuwaitis, including most in the government, fundamentally oppose military action against Iran but strongly support a hard-line policy against any Iranian nuclear weapons



program. For this reason, the Kuwaitis by-and-large see the development by Iran of a nuclear weapons capability as inevitable. Whether this capability will include actual assembly and test of a weapon is the only real topic of speculation and debate.

As for the opposition in Kuwait, if the post-withdrawal situation in Iraq improves, it will be good for Kuwait. Sporadic domestic unrest may occur, but it is difficult to foresee a strategic threat to the Sabah. The Kuwaitis face a period of muddling through. The educational and health-care systems will continue to limp along and the periodic brownouts will continue as comprehensive infrastructure improvement plans lag. Despite problems, the relationship with the U.S. continues to be the best current source of strategic security. Financially, the Kuwaitis will seek to further diversify their sovereign wealth holdings. U.S. protectionist paranoia and risks associated with the recent financial crash make these investments less attractive. Diversification will take new forms. As a hedge against the next catastrophe, Kuwait is actively looking at alternatives for storing oil in Asia, Vietnam, and China, should the Iranians block the straits of Hormuz.<sup>34</sup> A U.S. official agreed that right now if the Kuwaitis could move their oil they would.<sup>35</sup>

In the next 5 to 10 years, there is an argument to be made for radical political change, but it is an argument in a vacuum that does not reflect the historical cycle of events in Kuwait. For 250 years, the Sabah have overcome significant obstacles to survival and mastered the political give and take of statecraft. Western officials may be frustrated with what they view as political stagnation and failure to address much needed institution reforms, but quite frankly, their knowledge of the inner workings of the royal family and the government is limited. In any event as Sir Charles Johnston pointed out in the 1950s, "The Americans should not allow any infantile anti-Monarchist prejudices to blind them to this fact. Monarchy is a very ancient and tenacious principle in the Arab world."<sup>36</sup> In fact, monarchies have been far more politically stable than republics in the region.

Kuwait has been through a particularly traumatic quarter century—the Iranian revolution, the Iran-Iraq war with its attendant "tanker war," the Iraqi invasion, and now the U.S. invasion of Iraq with its unintended fallout of domestic terrorism and increased influence for Iran. Given this situation, the Amir knows his country better than outsiders and is unlikely to undertake major reforms or transformations. He may well believe that Kuwaiti

tolerance for social, political, and economic shocks is at its limit. Lack of action now on pressing domestic issues most likely reflects an unwillingness to run the risk, making a complex, highly charged domestic environment even more volatile. The recurring theme from Kuwaiti officials is that despite the dangers of the region and the threats posed by Iraq and Iran, a period of extended stability is needed far more than any attempt to “solve” the various issues plaguing the region. In other words, the region as a whole and Kuwait in particular needs a respite.

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This interpretation fits well within the historical paradigm for rule in Kuwait. Kuwait’s survival has been linked to the ability of the Sabah to find an internal political and an external security equilibrium and maintain it within acceptable limits. This approach has paid off even in the most extreme of crises. By letting the current situation in Iraq play itself out and using the U.S. security shield to guarantee their rule, the Sabah may have a much better vantage point from which to move forward in the near future. At the same time, they are balancing this wait-and-see policy with clear opposition to another war in the Gulf. These policies should allow Kuwait to transition to a new generation of al-Sabah leaders who, in a more stable environment, can push for comprehensive institutional and infrastructure investment. The Kuwaitis have the resources to regain their place as a model for the region. Politically, lightning could strike, but it is difficult to discern the process through which al-Sabah rule might collapse. Historically, the ruling family has done a good job of reinventing itself, and they have also been lucky. Cold analysis from foreign officials argues that there is really no group that could provide the leadership required and that no significant political group is pushing for an end to al-Sabah rule. Recent events further underscore both the importance and the prerogatives of the Sabah rulers. Frustrated with parliamentary “irresponsibility,” the Amir dissolved the Majlis (Parliament) on 18 March calling for new elections. There are indications that if the next Majlis is not more “responsible,” it too may be dissolved with an extended hiatus, perhaps as much as 2 years, before the next election is called. This is a clear reminder that the Sabah family and its allies are the guarantors of Kuwaiti political stability and not the fractious political groupings.

Given that the Sabah will likely be in charge of Kuwait in 10 years, perhaps the more important question is what will their policies look like? It is conceivable that Kuwait might modify its relationship with the U.S. given the missteps of the past. During the 1970s, relations between the U.S. and Kuwait were severely strained because Washington's uncritical support for Israel. Prior to 1990, Kuwait had a very large Palestinian population and at that time, it was a political problem for the Sabah. The Palestinians were ejected for supporting Saddam, but the issue of Israel remains. From the street to the palace, Kuwaitis believe that the U.S. misunderstood or misrepresented the situation in Iraq dragging them into a poorly thought out, incompetent effort to "democratize" the region. If U.S. actions continue to create problems, the Kuwaitis will examine other security options. The Russians have made a huge investment in Dubai and the French are building a military base in Abu Dhabi.<sup>37</sup> The next decade will see Chinese power expand. The Kuwaitis will be living in a Gulf in which Iran has nuclear weapons and Iraq's instability continues. Kuwait may seek additional security guarantees.

Sovereign wealth is another security issue. Kuwait will focus more on Asia. The perceived opportunity is greater and there is less political resistance. Barriers to recycling of petro-dollars in the U.S. will lead to more U.S. wealth finding its way into Asian coffers. If past relationships with the U.S. recede, the new generation with their Harvard MBAs will look elsewhere for the secure economic investments that Kuwait views as essential. In an area where every emirate occupies important strategic territory, Kuwait is the key to the northern Gulf. The more sophisticated policies would be to maintain the U.S. shield, expand the number of outside security alliances, and diversify economic investment strategies.

## **Bahrain**

The physical location of Bahrain makes it key to control of the central Gulf, but its significance extends well beyond just geography. Bahrain's complex demographics make its internal and external security policies critically important to the Arab Gulf and potentially to stability in the oil-rich eastern provinces of Saudi Arabia. The revived Iranian claim to the island Kingdom serves as a warning to others about the fickle nature of regional relations—old disputes are rarely forgotten. In addition, Bahrain is the first emirate of the Gulf to face the challenge of transitioning to a post-oil economy. For

Bahrain, the historical paradigm determines the current and future security policies to a greater degree than perhaps any other Arab Gulf state.

**The Historical Context.** Like Kuwait, the origins of Al-Khalifa rule in Bahrain lie in the Utub migrations of the mid-18th century. In addition, Bahrain has played a significant role in Islamic history from the 7th century. During the 10th century, the Bahraini Qarmati Shi'a dominated the Arabian pilgrimage routes, threatened the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad, and sacked Mecca during the Hajj. The regime was so radical that even its titular overlords, the Fatamid dynasty in Cairo, repudiated their activities. In the early 16th century Bahraini Shi'a missionaries converted the Safavid Persian Shah Ismail to Twelver Shi'a Islam. After a Portuguese interlude, the Safavids ruled Bahrain for two centuries until the mid-18th century.<sup>38</sup>

In 1766 an Utub clan, the Khalifa, left Kuwait and migrated to Qatar. Then in 1783, with al-Sabah assistance, the al-Khalifa supported by Najdi tribes and Hawala Arabs from Persia displaced crumbling Safavid rule in Bahrain.<sup>39</sup> With their political center in Bahrain, the Khalifa ruled Bahrain and Qatar into the 19th century. The triumph of the Khalifa coincided with the British victory in the Seven Years' War. The situation was tailor-made for the preferred method of British imperial expansion—namely, indirect rule and influence. It was beneficial for the new regimes because the British conditionally supported their quest for security and survival, in effect creating the political structure of the modern Arabian Gulf.

To protect its trade routes with India, the British East India Company imposed control over the Gulf in 1820. The General Treaty of 1820, sometimes referred to as the Treaty of Peace, actually focused on the Qawasim and the emirates of the so-called "Pirate Coast," but to avoid maritime tolls the Khalifa requested to be admitted to the treaty. This limited al-Khalifa activities but provided a security guarantee for the regime.<sup>40</sup> Subsequent treaties served to increase British involvement. In 1867, the Khalifa, still occupying western Qatar, and Abu Dhabi moved to eliminate al-Thani control in eastern Qatar. The Thani had emerged as the leading tribal clan in eastern Qatar and a rival both to the Khalifa and the Bani Yas in Abu Dhabi. British intervention recognized the Thani and ultimately the independence of Qatar.<sup>41</sup> In 1892 the Khalifa signed an agreement with the British specifying that Bahrain would not enter into any agreement with a foreign power without British consent and in return London confirmed al-Khalifa

rule. By 1923 British concerns about Persian claims to Bahrain brought internal political friction to a head. The British wanted a compromise that would simplify their policy situation in the Gulf, particularly in reference to their interests in Iranian oil. Part of this effort was to pressure the Bahraini ruler, Sheikh Isa bin Ali, into reforms and greater political integration of the Bahraini Shi'a. Sheikh Isa resisted. The British replaced him with his son, Sheikh Hamad bin Isa (1923–1942), and introduced a series of reforms. When Bahraini Sunnis formed the Bahrain National Council and protested, the British simply arrested and exiled them to India.<sup>42</sup> Sir Charles Dalrymple Belgrave became the permanent resident and over the next 30 years he graduated from “advisor” to “secretary” to the ruler.<sup>43</sup>

In addition to physical protection of the emirate, the British facilitated the development of a sophisticated civil service and infrastructure, making Bahrain the first modern state in the Gulf. The first discovery of oil on the Arab side of the Gulf in 1930 further enhanced Bahrain's position. In 1938 the Arab revolt in Palestine brought unrest in Bahrain as it had in Kuwait. Britain suppressed the revolt but was forced to create a national labor committee to placate workers and introduced other reforms in education, the media, and the bureaucracy.<sup>44</sup> In the 1950s the Suez Crisis and Nasser's pan-Arab propaganda on *Sawt al-Arab* radio brought riots and unrest. Like other rulers in the Gulf, the Khalifa were trapped between the British and the Bahraini Arab nationalism. In the end, the British suppressed the political groups and forced the opposition underground.<sup>45</sup> In 1957 the members of the Committee for National Unity were arrested and exiled to St. Helena Island. The British declared a state of emergency that lasted for a decade.<sup>46</sup> In 1968 the British Labour government announced the withdrawal of British



Bahrain's Foreign Minister Sheikh Khaled bin Ahmad al-Khalifa upon his return from Tehran 27 February 2009. Bahrain and Iran said they will maintain good relations. The week before, Bahrain strongly protested after a member of Iran's Expediency Council was reported to have said the Kingdom used to be Iran's 14th province. AFP photo, used by permission of Newscom.

forces east of Suez by 1971. The announcement shocked the Khalifa and its supporters. The Shah of Iran immediately laid claim to Bahrain on the basis of the Safavid occupation two centuries before, increasing its insecurity.

Immediately after the announcement, it appeared that Bahrain, Qatar, and the seven Trucial States, of which Abu Dhabi and Dubai were the most prominent, would federate, but agreements could not be reached between Bahrain and Qatar.<sup>47</sup> Bahrain became an independent state. Sheikh Isa bin Salman al-Khalifa (1961–1999) wanted political life to be “an expression of royal benevolence.” A Constitutional Assembly composed of two political groupings, the People’s Bloc, viewed as leftists, and the Religious Bloc, largely rural Shi’a, emerged. The Assembly met twice between 1973 and 1975. It opposed the security bill that allowed 3 years imprisonment without charge, sought an end to absolute al-Khalifa control, and opposed the Jufair Agreement granting the U.S. Navy port facilities. In 1975 the Amir dissolved the Assembly; the Iranian revolution, the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war, and an Iranian-backed coup attempt in 1981 effectively ended discussions of reinstating the Assembly.<sup>48</sup>

The attempted coup and revived Iranian claims to Bahrain confirmed the course of politics and governance for almost two decades. The subsequent investigation revealed the existence of the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain and resulted in the arrest of 73 people including Bahrainis, Saudis, Kuwaitis, and Omanis. Shaken by the discovery, Bahrain immediately turned to Saudi Arabia and signed a mutual defense pact.<sup>49</sup> To bolster Bahrain, the Saudis helped establish Bahrain’s banking industry, shared some offshore oil fields, and used the Bahraini oil refinery. Saudi Arabia generated a Bahraini economic base that allowed the Sunni and Shi’a lower classes to move into a middle class existence. This development has left Bahrain much more vulnerable to normal economic cycles and associated unrest. The attempted coup also institutionalized a very strong security service and tight control over people and groupings that had any potential as an opposition.<sup>50</sup>

In 1999 Amir Sheikh Isa bin Salman died, and domestic security policy began to change. Several factors influenced this shift. During the first Gulf war, western politicians and media were far less interested in Bahrain’s security issues than in naïve views about democracy. In response, Sheikh Isa formed a Consultative Council in late 1992. In 1994 a declining economy

brought confrontations and repression of opposition Shi'a groups. Not comprehending the security or geopolitical implications, outside elements increased calls for liberalization.<sup>51</sup> The new ruler, Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa, and Prime Minister Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman al-Khalifa initiated a series of reforms under a National Charter. Political prisoners including Sheikh Abdul-Amir Al-Jamri, a Shi'a opposition leader, were freed and a bicameral national assembly was created. Bahrain became a kingdom. The king retained much of his power; he appoints the upper house which approves the laws put forward by the lower house. While Islamic groups, including the Al-Wifaq Islamic Society, demand further reforms, that appears most unlikely.

**The Future in Context.** The official Bahraini government view is highly pragmatic. With the obligatory preamble that the U.S. is a close and trusted ally, officials then point to fluctuating U.S. policy. As one official put it, "in the 1990s, we were being pushed to liberalize and in 1999 we did. Then 9/11 happened and we were being told that we needed to clamp down to assist in the 'Global War on Terror.'" In their view, Bahrain will pursue its own security interests. The Khalifa view the new National Assembly as a major concession and an experiment in democracy, but the fractious delegates' propensity to follow narrow sectarian interests is viewed as being indicative of chronic political irresponsibility. Without a curb on the lower house of the Assembly, the rulers believe that anarchy would result.<sup>52</sup> The Bahraini bicameral approach has even sparked some discussion in Kuwait about the possibility of adopting a similar arrangement versus the unicameral system.<sup>53</sup> Also unspoken is the sure knowledge that the lower house would repeat the performance of the 1973–1975 Assembly—a political nonstarter.

What are the options in the next 3 to 5 years? Some non-Bahraini officials have suggested that opening up parts of the bureaucracy and even the security services and military to the Shi'a might reduce tensions.<sup>54</sup> While suggestions about the bureaucracy and business might well help, it is highly unlikely that the Khalifa will consider putting weapons in the hands of any group that might turn on the ruling regime. It could happen at a very low level but even that is doubtful given the continuing fear of subversion. Currently no weapons are in the hands of any individual of any group, political or sectarian, that might be considered potentially disloyal to the

regime. This proscription shows every sign of continuing. The ruling elite have no intention of committing political suicide. They also have a fairly strong argument that the instability that would result from their relinquishing power would create a political and economic crisis beside which the problems of the current situation would pale in comparison.

In the near term, the Bahraini government may experiment with additional controlled reforms. Given the fiasco of Palestinian and Iraqi democracy, the U.S. has toned down its enthusiasm; nevertheless the Bahrainis are watching for another change of mind. In addition, Bahraini officials believe that what “some friends” want is often mutually exclusive. They want allies, military facilities, security cooperation, and political support against Iran and its nuclear program, but they want “democracy” without even understanding the historical context of what that would mean for U.S. interests and Bahrain.<sup>55</sup> The Khalifa are looking for ways to mute pressure from the United States without increasing security problems. In this regard, Huda Nonoo, a Bahraini woman of Jewish-Iraqi heritage, became ambassador to the U.S. and “a symbolic figure of reform politics in Bahrain.”<sup>56</sup> Substituting symbols for risky liberalization is a shrewd approach.

With regard to Iran, al-Khalifa detests the Iranian regime and the idea of Tehran with nuclear weapons. In February 2009, senior officials in Tehran once again made public statements about Iran’s historical claims to Bahrain. It provoked a firestorm of Arab indignation and a surprisingly quick official retreat by Tehran.<sup>57</sup> The Iranians also sent their Minister of the Interior Sadeq Mahsouli to a regional security conference in Bahrain to deny that Iran had any designs on the island Kingdom.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, as one official put it, the Iranians have the ability to display the “worst traits of arrogance to hide a deep insecurity.” The Bahrainis, at the official level, believe that much of Iran’s posturing is about respect. The Iranians are attempting to assure the Bahrainis that the situation with the U.S. is really not as dangerous as it appears.<sup>59</sup> They view Iraq as a major victory for Iran and for Iran’s broader Shi’a aspirations. The installation of what they see as a pro-Iranian government in Baghdad is just one issue. U.S. efforts have failed in Lebanon. Hezbollah has emerged as the most powerful political force. Syria is dominated by a minority Shi’a group. “For states like Bahrain and Saudi Arabia this is a very threatening environment caused by U.S. policy.” They assert that Iran causes unrest without overtly doing anything. Their propaganda



attacks and successes embolden other Shi'a groups undermining the stability of the region. These factors make substantial political reform high risk and it will not happen.<sup>60</sup>

In the 5-to-10-year environment, it is unlikely that the position of the Khalifa and its supporters will change. Their goal will be to continue to exercise ultimate authority over the political process and levers of power in Bahrain. The viability of al-Khalifa rule in Bahrain is a key security issue for Saudi Arabia given the sectarian composition of the eastern provinces. Riyadh will go to great lengths to assure their survival, including increased economic and defense support. Bahrain will also maintain close ties with the United States for strategic security. Now despite concerns, the Bahrainis absolutely oppose military action against Iran. Bahrain will continue to attempt escaping what one senior official referred to as the *rentier* petroleum-based economy—namely, an economy artificially propped up either directly or indirectly by oil. To some degree the economic approach may have shielded Bahrain from some of the effects of the global recession, but as the economic crisis deepens, it is difficult to see how the spreading downturn cannot help but affect the island Kingdom. Bahrain and the Khalifa have mastered this centuries-old balancing act and used it to maintain their independence. Their geopolitical position is so strategic for U.S. and for Saudi interests that it is almost inconceivable that either would not do whatever is necessary to support the current political order in Bahrain. While there is always cause for concern, the Khalifa believe this, and they are in all probability right.

## **Qatar**

With the smallest population of all the emirates, Qatar has emerged as a real force in Gulf politics. This transformation is all the more remarkable given Foreign Office pessimism about Doha's ability to survive in a post-British world. Qatar has not only survived but developed a regional and foreign policy that some consider the most creative in the region. With its long-term security interests and dynastic survival foremost in mind, al-Thani policies fostered relations and security agreements that balance the potential threats in the region and provide a strategic relationship that likely assures Qatar's security well into the future. This unique approach flows directly from the historical experience of the state and al-Thani dynasty.

**The Historical Context.** When the Khalifa migrated to Zubarah on the west coast of Qatar, its development as a trading and pearling center provoked an attack from Safavid-dominated Bahrain in the 1760s. With al-Sabah support, the Khalifa occupied Bahrain and moved their seat of rule there. Gradually during the 19th century, another rival political center began to emerge in eastern Qatar. The al-Thani clan consolidated influence and control, and in 1867 the Khalifa allied with the Bani Yas of Abu Dhabi to attack the east coast of Qatar.<sup>61</sup> As previously noted, the British intervened and recognized Muhammad bin Thani as the representative of the eastern Qatari community. The Treaty of 1868 ended the conflict and Qatar emerged as a separate entity.<sup>62</sup> In 1871 Muhammad al-Thani's son, Qasim, accepted Ottoman troops in return for recognition of him as governor of Qatar. In 1893 the al-Thani ejected Ottoman troops from Qatar.<sup>63</sup> As a hedge against the Ottoman's, Amir Qasim paid tribute to Ibn Saud and embraced Wahhabi Islam.<sup>64</sup> In 1913 al-Thani obtained a security guarantee from the British against the Saudi *Ikhwan* when the Anglo-Turkish Convention on the Gulf ended Istanbul's claims to Qatar and recognized British interests there. In 1916 Percy Cox, the ubiquitous British political agent in the Gulf, signed an agreement with Abdullah bin Qasim Al-Thani.<sup>65</sup> The al-Thani received protection in return for British control of foreign relations, defense policy, and significant commercial agreements.<sup>66</sup>



Qatar Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) Plant. Photo courtesy of Emerson Process Management.

Al-Thani rule in Qatar was difficult in 1930s due to the collapse of the pearling industry and the Great Depression. Since there was no clear succession in Qatar, several branches of the family refused to recognize the Amir and a chaotic, even lawless, period ensued. In 1935 payment from the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company and formal British protection finally solidified Amir Abdullah's rule.<sup>67</sup> The British discovered oil in 1940. In 1949 unrest caused Amir Abdullah, in his 80s, to abdicate in favor of Sheikh Ali bin Abdullah (1949–1960). The British resident presided over the transition. In 1960 Sheikh Ali abdicated in favor of his son Ahmad bin Ali, and at the same time his cousin Khalifah bin Hamad was officially recognized as the heir apparent. Developments in Qatar tended to follow the same pattern as those in the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait—namely, consolidation of al-Thani power, the emergence of a welfare state, and development of a large, complex bureaucracy to oversee the functions of government.<sup>68</sup>

Here again, the British decision to withdraw east of Suez confronted Qatar with a critical decision. Qatar proposed that the nine states of the lower Gulf—the Trucial States, Qatar, and Bahrain—unite, but lingering friction between Bahrain and Qatar became a stumbling block. Bahrain's decision to go it alone caused Qatar to move toward independence as well. The Qatari constitution of 1971 required that the ruler be al-Thani. It established a Council of Ministers to advise the Amir and a special Consultative Council that never materialized. The Amir appointed an Advisory Council that reflected the various Qatari constituencies.

In 1971 it became apparent that Sheikh Ahmad could not run the country; the al-Thani replaced him with Sheikh Khalifah. In the mid-1980s Sheikh Khalifah handed over much of the governing responsibility to his son, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifah al-Thani, who in turn unseated his father in June 1995.<sup>69</sup> In 1996 scores of arrests were made to head off a coup to put Sheikh Khalifa back on the throne. In 2002 another attempted coup by mid-level army officers was quashed.<sup>70</sup> There was considerable speculation about the source of the coup, and some suggested that Saudi Arabia backed or encouraged it because they feared liberalization under Sheikh Hamad.<sup>71</sup> Most U.S. officials discount Saudi involvement, saying that Riyadh may have had a preference but direct or indirect involvement was “most unlikely.”<sup>72</sup> In 2004 Amir Hamad stated that for Qatar, “reform” was the path to “modernity.” The reforms included the election of Municipal Councils in 1999, an

increased role for the Consultative Council first set up in 1960, and finally the election of two thirds of the Consultative Assembly in 2007.<sup>73</sup>

Whatever the truth about outside involvement in the coup attempts, al-Thani historical concerns about Saudi Arabia have resulted in an interesting foreign policy that shows every sign of continuing. First, when the Khobar Towers attack brought a rethinking in Riyadh and Washington of the deployment of U.S. military in the Kingdom, Qatar quickly offered to serve as the replacement for Saudi Arabia and built to specification an alternate command post for CENTCOM. In 1992 Qatar signed a bilateral Defense Cooperation Agreement with the U.S. and in 1995 agreed to the propositioning of heavy military equipment for a mechanized brigade. It has also conducted joint exercises with the U.S. and French in the Gulf.<sup>74</sup> Frictions emerge from time to time, as in the case of resent Palestinian meetings held in Qatar, but the strategic interests of the U.S. and Qatar are so closely aligned that it is difficult to imagine that strategic issues will not supersede any tactical problems.

**The Future in Context.** In many ways, Qatar needs the long-term bilateral security relationship with the U.S. as much as any state in the region. At the same time, Qatar has pursued a policy of cooperation with Iran. Both share gas and offshore oil fields in the Gulf and have good relations. Qatar sees Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons as an unfortunate problem but officials do not seem to be overly concerned even in the event that Iran acquires them. There is far more concern about another war in the Gulf that they see as catastrophic for the region. As one senior Qatari official put it, "We have to live in the region. Maybe the United States will still be here and maybe not, so we have to think about 40 years from now." Qatar obviously sees the CENTCOM installation as a hedge against any potential threats from Iran or Saudi pressure.

As one UAE official commented, Qatar was pursuing its own set of policies vis-à-vis Iran partially as a hedge against Saudi Arabia. The Kingdom and Qatar have finally agreed upon a delineated border after decades of claims and counterclaims. Despite good relations with both Tehran and Riyadh, Doha recognizes that the best chance of Qatar maintaining its independence and freedom of action is the U.S. security guarantee.<sup>75</sup> As former U.S. Ambassador Chase Untermeyer explained it, "Because Qatar maintained good relations with Iran, HAMAS, Hezbollah, and Syria many viewed

it as unfriendly, but to the contrary, events have demonstrated that Qatar's policies constitute an informed strategic approach to a volatile region. From a security point of view, Qatar is a key U.S. ally in the region."<sup>76</sup>

There is also the issue of the succession. Given the history of succession problems, U.S. officials have raised concerns about how the selection of a ruler in the future might affect Qatar. Privately, officials believe that any outside meddling would be in the form of moral, as opposed to materiel, support for one group or another, but they are concerned about a family struggle that might change al-Thani policies.<sup>77</sup> No matter how future political power might shift, it is difficult to see why Qatar's balancing act in foreign policy would change. There are less than 200,000 Qataris, and they are sitting on enormous petroleum wealth. The only way to lose this wealth is to be subsumed into a larger state; therefore, the aim of any Qatari government will be the same—to maintain its independence and its wealth. The only way to assure that this will happen is to continue the balancing act and keep open multiple options for support, but the surest way to maintain independence is with the current bilateral security assurances.

### **The United Arab Emirates**

The UAE is the only successful experiment in political unification in the Arab Gulf. While the seven emirates of the Trucial Coast existed under essentially the same administration, there were considerable differences between them. These differences continue to be muted by mutual self-interest in a sometimes uneasy political compact between the two largest states, Abu Dhabi and Dubai. The context in which the UAE developed and continues to exist is more complicated than that of the other states of the Gulf; it is a union of distinct individual emirates within a community of independent emirates. An understanding of the behavioral modalities between the emirates within the UAE is critical for a real understanding of its current and future security policies and challenges.

**The Historical Context.** The UAE is a federation of emirates that adds an additional level of complexity to analyzing security issues within its historical context. As with the other states of the region, this study begins in the mid-18th century. Prior to the arrival of the British, the seaborne emirates of Sharjah and Ras al-Kaimah, led by separate branches of the Qawasim tribe, dominated the southern coast of the Gulf. Various land-based tribes, including the Bani Yas in Abu Dhabi, were poorer with less political clout.

The Qawasim were basically seafaring and focused on trade, pearling, fishing, and a livelihood as corsairs. The fractured power structure in the Gulf created an environment ideally suited for entrepreneurs with “scores of ships, sailing principally from Ras al-Khaimah (and Sharjah) and manned by thousands of ferocious fighters who ravaged commerce of the Gulf and the northern Indian Ocean.”<sup>78</sup> Then in the mid-18th century, the British—worried about its trade with India—made freelancing in the Arabian Gulf and the Indian Ocean unacceptable. At the same time, Bani Yas led by the Nahyan clan expanded its control of Abu Dhabi. In 1761 potable water was discovered on Abu Dhabi Island, and the leading sheikhs established it as the center for political rule on the Gulf.

In the early 19th century the Royal Navy neutralized the threat that the naval power of the Qawasim posed to Indian trade. In 1819 the British created the Trucial Coast or Trucial States, placing British agents in each of the emirates. This new arrangement reduced the influence and power of Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah and increased the influence of Abu Dhabi. In the mid-1800s, Sheikh Zayid bin Khalifa (1855–1909), also known as Zayid the Great, created a ruling framework that would form the foundation for the modern political structure.<sup>79</sup> In effect, British influence and control in the southern Gulf developed along lines that were complimentary to Abu Dhabi’s emergence as an independent emirate largely without imperial versus local frictions. In 1853 the British negotiated the Perpetual Maritime Peace with the emirates and changed the official designation from the “Pirate Coast” to the “Trucial Coast.” In reaction to potential European encroachment, the British concluded the Exclusive Treaty of 1892. What ensued was a dozen years of thrust and counterthrust as the British aggressively protected their interests against the European interlopers. For Dubai the 1892 agreement was particularly onerous because it inhibited their commercial expansion and ended their lucrative gun-running into Pashtun areas of India with other European powers.<sup>80</sup> When Zayid the Great died, Khalifa, the eldest of seven sons, declined the position of Amir. Sheikh Tahnun bin Zayid succeeded his father but died of natural causes within 3 years. The next three rulers, Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayid (1912–1922), his successor Sheikh Sultan bin Zayid (1922–1926), and Sheikh Saqr bin Zayid were assassinated in disputes over commercial differences, family subsidies, and blood feuds. At this point Sheikh Khalifa engineered the appointment of his nephew Shakhbut (1926–1966).<sup>81</sup>

Shakhbut's rule brought four decades of political stability to Abu Dhabi, and his stature even allowed him periodically to challenge the British. In 1937 he called British demands for Abu Dhabi to sign an oil concession with a subsidiary of the Iraq Petroleum Company *hawa* or hot air and stonewalled London for 2 years because the Americans paid higher royalties.<sup>82</sup> He insisted on Abu Dhabi's ownership of Buraimi Oasis in the face of a Saudi claim and reaped the benefits of the British-led confrontation of the Trucial Scout and Omani troops with Saudi irregulars in the 1950s.<sup>83</sup> In an environment where British support brought London's meddling, the Sheikh doggedly maneuvered between maintaining their backing and establishing his independence. The discovery of oil in 1958 would ultimately be the old Sheikh's political undoing. Fearing the demise of Abu Dhabi's traditional culture, Shakhbut refused to use the new oil wealth to modernize the state. In 1966 with British support, a family gathering replaced Shakhbut as Amir with his younger brother, Sheikh Zayid bin Sultan. Sheikh Zayid had been the governor of the Buraimi area and brought with him considerable experience in administration and in negotiating with tribal groups. These skills would place him in good stead when the British announced their intention to withdraw from east of Suez in 1971.<sup>84</sup>

As discussed earlier, friction between Bahrain and Qatar effectively thwarted unification of the nine southern emirates. Abu Dhabi and Dubai now faced the challenge of unifying the Trucial Coast. The challenges were



A day at the beach in Abu Dhabi, 29 January 2007. AFP Photo used by permission of Newscom.

not inconsequential. The Maktoum clan of Dubai under the leadership of Sheikh Maktoum bin Butti seceded from the Abu Dhabi branch of the Bani Yas in 1833. By 1852 and bin Butti's death, the Maktoum had managed to carve out an independent sheikhdom based on Dubai as a city-state. Although Dubai had been independent for 60 years, it was the rule of Sheikh Maktoum bin Hashar (1894–1906) that set Dubai on a course to prominence—albeit one significantly different from that of his cousins in Abu Dhabi. During the 19th century, the Qawasim clan of the emirate of Sharjah, Dubai's immediate neighbor, had administered the Persian port of Lingah. In 1887, for political reasons, the Persian Qajjar government replaced the Qawasim administration with Persian officials. Due to Qajjar incompetence and corruption, business in Lingah and the port went into decline. In 1902 the Persian Qajjar imposed prohibitive high customs duties on imports and exports in an effort to increase government revenues. Recognizing an opportunity, Maktoum bin Hashar encouraged the Persian merchants of Lingah to move across the Gulf to Dubai. As a result, Dubai became the cosmopolitan commercial center and *entrepot* of the southern Gulf and the main base of operations for the British military in the region.<sup>85</sup> In 1958 Sheikh Said bin Maktoum (1912–1958) died, and his son Sheikh Rashid bin Said (1958–1990) became Amir. Rashid's mother, Sheikha Hussa bint Murr or Umm Rashid—a formidable business woman and astute politician in her own right—had groomed Sheikh Rashid well to lead the emirate. Sheikh Rashid organized and ran Dubai's government like a business with a council that served as a virtual board of directors. He included major business leaders as well as key government officials and members of the Maktoum.

The British withdrawal particularly shocked Dubai. Alignment with more conservative Abu Dhabi was a necessity but, at the time, not particularly appealing. Territorial disputes and differences occurred between the tribal-based culture of Abu Dhabi and the urban, town-based culture of Dubai.<sup>86</sup> Because of oil, population, and physical size, it was apparent that conservative Abu Dhabi would be the most influential emirate. In contrast, Dubai had close ties with Iran and a cosmopolitan, more liberal, commercial culture. To allay concerns, Sheikh Zayid went to Dubai and settled the territorial disputes. Nevertheless, Sheikh Rashid pressed for a loose federal arrangement as opposed to the strongly centralized administration supported by Abu Dhabi. A political standoff endured until 1979 when popular demonstrations, Saudi pressure, and Kuwaiti facilitation resulted in an



agreement in which Amir Rashid became the prime minister of the UAE and Amir Zayid became president.<sup>87</sup>

In the UAE government the Nahyan and the Maktoum clans serve together at the most senior levels of the security and defense establishments. Still differences between Abu Dhabi and Dubai persist. The other emirates—Sharjah, Ras al-Khaimah, Umm al-Qaiwain, Ajman, and Fujairah—are to one degree or another dependent on their share of Abu Dhabi's petroleum wealth for support. Sharjah has established itself as a center of educational excellence and with some modest oil and gas discoveries has its own source of wealth. Sharjah's dispute with Iran over the status of Abu Musa Island in the Gulf is a major irritant for UAE relations with Tehran while Dubai provides the largest transshipment point for Iranian goods in the Gulf. The union is a work in progress, but the accomplishment of the UAE in terms of federal governance and integration of diverse political, economic, and even cultural interests is remarkable. It is against the backdrop of this framework of UAE, regional and global politics, and economics that future security policy must be evaluated.

Looking forward to the next 5 years, internal security, defense alliances, petroleum development and technology, sovereign wealth issues, trade and commerce, and development of a post petroleum-based economy are all critical security-related policy issues. Internal security is an increasingly important issue including demographic security. There are roughly one million UAE citizens and between four and five million foreign nationals. Of those foreign nationals, most are foreign guest workers. The police chief of Dubai, Lt. General Dhahi Khalfan Tamim, in 2008 addressed this very issue. Because of inflation, real wages have declined causing unrest. While nothing unmanageable occurred, there is growing concern.<sup>88</sup> In addition, the UAE has a very long coast facing the Arabian Gulf. The emirates have a long history of sanctioned and unsanctioned trade—smuggling—throughout the Gulf. Iran occupied islands belonging to Sharjah and consistently in the event of hostilities with the U.S. threatens those states with close relations to the U.S. While the UAE has bolstered its maritime patrolling, more security measures are critical. Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayid al-Nahyan confirmed this stating, "A completely integrated security system in place to keep pace with developments is the foundation of our country's security and stability."<sup>89</sup>

There are additional internal security issues. The U.S. provides great training, technology, and support for internal security organizations. Nevertheless, the question arises: in the event of an internal emergency how useful is the U.S.? The U.S. track record of internal intervention on behalf of friendly regimes is spotty. Unlike the 19th century British, the U.S. is reluctant to intervene internally. The UAE may look to additional relationships as further support to the regime. In part, this explains the recent announcement that the French will build a military base in Abu Dhabi.<sup>90</sup> The UAE government appears to recognize the utility of French ground-force presence and the historical willingness of Paris to support its friends against internal turmoil. French analysts are quick to argue, “The GCC states need the help of trusted allies [France] in order to set up mechanisms for collective security.”<sup>91</sup> Whether this is a sustained idea that will come to fruition remains to be seen, but the UAE is very interested in entertaining the option.

**The Future in Context.** The UAE choice of U.S. hardware for its strategic needs is shrewd. Capabilities and technologies aside, the UAE has placed itself squarely in the mainstream of development and support of the largest, most advanced military in the world. The relationship and the presence of U.S. military personnel virtually guarantee that an attack on the UAE by an adversary like Iran would generate a devastating, potentially regime-ending response in retaliation. The relationship also falls within the comfortable historical paradigm—namely, a great power security guarantee. It allows the UAE to choose on a case-by-case basis independent policies or regional cooperation. In describing the preference for a U.S. security guarantee, one senior former U.S. official stated, “The emirates are not comfortable with a security guarantee under the wing a GCC dominated by Saudi Arabia—they prefer the security under an American wing.”<sup>92</sup>

With regard to Iran, a nuclear-armed Iran would be a serious security issue, and the UAE wants to prevent it. However, dealing with that eventuality is more palatable than another war in the Gulf. Recently in Dubai, Abdul Rahman al-Attiyah, General Secretary of the GCC, called for Iran to arbitrate the dispute over Abu Musa, Greater Tunb, and Lesser Tunb islands in the Gulf. At the same time he “rejected the military option” vis-à-vis Iran’s nuclear program.<sup>93</sup> Attiyah stated that the GCC fully support the UAE in the dispute over Abu Musa calling the Iranian move, “a striking violation and illegitimate procedure on an inseparable part of a sovereign

nation.”<sup>94</sup> The Iranian response was blunt; “they basically warned the GCC to stay out of Iranian affairs and defended their stance on Abu Musa.”<sup>95</sup> Another senior UAE official stated that Iran’s refusal to negotiate or submit the matter to international arbitration was a matter of “respect or the lack thereof exhibited by Iran for international law and the sovereignty of a neighboring state.”<sup>96</sup> Much of this anxiety over another war in the Gulf results from what UAE officials view as the negative consequences of Iraq. They do not want to pay for another miscalculation. They are also unhappy with what U.S. officials in the region admit privately was “enormous pressure” on the UAE to open an embassy in Baghdad.<sup>97</sup> They feel that they are being pressured to legitimize an Iranian-backed Iraqi regime.

In the Gulf, security and economics are intertwined. The UAE survives on a “rentier oil economy”—stability flows directly from the profits of the petroleum industry and on the “sovereign wealth funds” created. To date, Abu Dhabi has channeled these funds into western investments. That is beginning to change. Recently, political hysteria in the U.S. prevented Dubai’s purchase of a company managing U.S. ports. This paranoia, coupled with the U.S. mismanagement in the financial sector, makes U.S. investment increasingly unattractive. As a result, sovereign wealth funds are evaluating friendlier environments particularly in Asia.<sup>98</sup> In addition, the emirates are trying to develop a viable economic infrastructure independent of oil. By most measures, Dubai is leading the way focusing on establishing a global banking and commercial center. It is investing heavily in ship repair, aircraft maintenance and repair, and air and sea transportation facilities.

Anticipating an eventual end of petroleum resources, the UAE has also decided to pursue a nuclear energy program. Nuclear energy for power generation and desalinization is also viewed as a means of extending oil and gas reserves. UAE analysis indicates a shortfall in electrical power beginning in the next 5 years. They make a persuasive argument that the UAE must go to a power program that relies equally on natural gas, renewable sources, and nuclear if growth and petroleum exports are to be maintained.<sup>99</sup> The program also serves another political purpose. The UAE wants to make its program the “model, transparent” civilian nuclear program for the region. It is thinly veiled to show the UAE’s respect for international law,

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*Nuclear energy for power generation and desalinization is also viewed as a means of extending oil and gas reserves.*

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the environment, and political maturity in direct contrast to what they view as the bellicose insecurity currently exhibited by Iran.<sup>100</sup>

Dubai's approach has raised concerns. With the largest Iranian ex-patriot community in the Arab world, its trade with Iran has been described as "massive." Many feel that requests to crackdown on dual use technology for Iran are ignored. Abu Dhabi has expressed its concerns in this regard, although there is speculation that Abu Dhabi's concern is moderated by a desire to see Dubai's economy flourish independent of UAE subsidies.<sup>101</sup> Dubai's wide-open financial industry is attractive to legitimate and criminal organizations. Lack of oversight has attracted Al Qaeda and large Russian investments from questionable sources. Dubai is also rumored to be a center for ex-patriot Somalis funding and coordinating the pirating trade along the African coast.<sup>102</sup> A Middle East specialist described Dubai as "the region's premiere free port. For many years the emirate has also attracted the attention of both criminal and terrorist international organizations, many of which have exploited Dubai's geographic location, laissez-faire attitudes, and impressive infrastructure to set up various smuggling, gunrunning, human-trafficking, money-laundering, and terror-funding operations."<sup>103</sup> Increased oversight has implications for this freewheeling environment. On a related issue, the Dubai real estate and stock markets are overheated. Corruption allegations including a Minister of State and falling real estate prices will likely reduce profits. Some speculate that Amir Muhammad bin Rashid al-Maktoum will need to take advantage of his good relations with Abu Dhabi's Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayid al-Nahyan for additional financial support.<sup>104</sup> While any losses will be covered by oil revenues, the strategic economic goals could suffer long-term damage to the confidence that has been driving growth.<sup>105</sup> The global economic crisis may actually contribute to further UAE political integration. Dubai's quid pro quo for an economic bailout by Abu Dhabi may well be closer cooperation and integration with Abu Dhabi and federation. *The Economist* speculated that Dubai would have to end its "independent foreign policy" vis-à-vis Iran and "lose its ambitions to become the Monaco of the Gulf."<sup>106</sup> As a result, the economic crisis could prove to be a boost to long-term political stability and cohesion in the UAE.

Sharjah, smaller and more dependent on federal subsidies than Dubai, is attempting to emerge as an educational center for excellence. Abu Dhabi is focused on building a center of educational excellence that includes Johns

Hopkins, the Sorbonne, New York University (NYU), and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Dubai has plans to create “a world-class” center for knowledge.<sup>107</sup> Strategic think tanks have also emerged; the Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research and the Gulf Research Council are developing solid reputations. The education initiatives also have some interesting social implications. Increasing numbers of women in higher education are opening up new opportunities. In a striking example, three women just graduated from Khalifa Aviation College with pilots wings and will fly in the UAE Air Force. Given the shortage of qualified male pilots, the UAE has taken a bold step by bringing women into the military into roles that were the exclusive domain of males.<sup>108</sup>

In the 10-year time frame, Saad al-Barrak, CEO of Kuwaiti-based Zain mobile telephone, stated the region purchased “the hardware of modernization” but not the “software”—that is, “transparent legal systems, regulatory environments, and free elections.”<sup>109</sup> The relationship between free elections and stability can be debated but certainly transparent regulatory and legal systems are central. The UAE will continue to expand its commercial and banking efforts, diversify its investment portfolios, and be more creative with sovereign wealth. In this regard, financial and commercial ties with China and Southeast Asia will become more of the norm. In addition, food security will emerge as another issue. Inflation in basic commodities will increasingly drive investment in offshore agricultural output to support the UAE economy. Asia and Africa have the greatest potential in this regard. Dubai is betting that through Emirates Air it can become the air bridge between Europe and Asia, a hub of communications and transport. Finally, in energy, U.S. and western firms will face increasing pressure from Asian competitors. The emirates are evaluating oil and gas facilities in China and Southeast Asia where environmental and labor laws create attractive conditions for cooperation. Security concerns in the Gulf have intensified pipeline construction, linking the UAE directly to the Arabian Sea.<sup>110</sup>

Projecting 10 years out, Henry Azzam, chief of Deutsche Bank’s Middle East operations pointed out, “We’re becoming the epicenter of the global economy, [but] political and military problems could destabilize the whole region.”<sup>111</sup> Barring some unforeseeable radical shift, the UAE understands that its external security lies in powerful protection from a state outside the region. The UAE will continue to rely on the U.S. security guarantees. Nevertheless, should U.S. policy further shake UAE confidence in

Washington's judgment, they will seek additional security guarantees. With regard to internal security, additional security relationships should well have a priority. The overall historical security paradigm for the UAE will not change in the next 10 years. The question is how security concerns will be satisfied. The Anglo-American system of the last 200 years is preferable; however, if doubts and uncertainties arise, the UAE would be remiss in not examining additional options. Now with the advent of competent centers for strategic studies, it is hard to imagine that these evaluations will not become an ongoing process.

### Oman

Oman has a legitimate claim to being the historical cornerstone of the GSS. The predominately Ibadi or Kharajite state, historically separated from the Arab Gulf by geography and a unique cultural and sectarian identity, is critically important to control access to the Gulf. Cultural and sectarian differences with the other emirates create a unique set of parameters for Oman's interaction in the region. The ability of Oman and the Al Bu Said dynasty to not only survive but also unite Muscat and the Oman Imamate into a state whose alliance with the West is more important today and for the foreseeable future than it has ever been. By what path did Oman arrive at this juncture and what might the future hold?

**The Historical Context.** The rulers of Muscat and Oman have played a powerful regional and global role in trade and sea power. In the 8th century, the Omani interior came under the control of the smallest Islamic religious grouping known as the Kharajites or Ibadis. In the mid-8th century, Oman fell under Abbasid rule from Baghdad. During this prolonged struggle against the Abbasids, the Ibadi Imam became a spiritual and a temporal leader.<sup>112</sup> Late in the 10th century, the Imamate took control with its seat of power at Nizwa Oasis.<sup>113</sup> It collapsed in the 12th century only to reemerge in the 15th century.<sup>114</sup> The Portuguese arrived to dominate the Omani coast in 1507.<sup>115</sup> In 1650 the Ya'ariba dynasty supplanted the Portuguese and extended Omani power and influence in Africa, Persia, and the Arabian Gulf.

In the mid-18th century, civil war and collapse of the Imamate brought a realignment of Omani tribes into the Hinawi and Ghafiri tribal groupings. The Hinawi of the southeast were strict conservative Ibadis, while the Ghafirirs of the northwest were somewhat "more receptive to outside

influences.”<sup>116</sup> These two groups continue as the basic tribal alignments today. A new dynasty, the Al Bu Said, to which Sultan Qaboos belongs, focused on building Omani sea power and commerce. During the late 17th century, Oman’s naval power in the Indian Ocean was second only to the English. By the mid-19th century, Ras al-Khaimah’s naval power, the influence of Saudi Arabia, and family quarrels sent Muscat into decline. British support blunted these threats, but as Al Bu Said power declined, the Imamate reemerged and threatened the state. In 1913 British Indian troops intervened to prevent an Al Bu Said collapse, and in 1920 the British negotiated the Treaty of Sib that effectively gave control of Muscat and the coastal areas to the Sultan and control of the interior to the Imamate.<sup>117</sup>

In the 1950s a series of events led to the collapse of the Imamate. In 1955, in a dispute over the Buraimi Oasis, British-led Trucial and Oman Scouts drove Saudi forces from the area. The British believed that the Saudi claim had been “fathered by ARAMCO to enlarge its concession area.”<sup>118</sup> In 1937 Said bin Taymur (1932–1970) signed an agreement with the Iraqi Petroleum Group, granting a concession that was clearly within the boundaries of the Imamate.<sup>119</sup> Then in the late 1950s, Petroleum Development Oman created the Muscat and Oman Field Force and eliminated the Imamate.<sup>120</sup>

Imam Ghalib and his followers found refuge in Saudi Arabia and raided the Sultanate. The Saudis also helped organize the Oman Liberation Movement with hopes of annexing western Oman and regaining Buraimi Oasis. The final act in this drama occurred in January 1959 when British Special Air Service (SAS) units captured the last Imamate stronghold of Jabal al-Akhdar, removing the threat.<sup>121</sup>

During the next decade, Sultan Said ignored development and modernization and did little to systematically counter Saudi and Egyptian subversion. In the late 1960s the British withdrawal from Aden complicated the situation. The rise of the Peoples’ Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) with Soviet, Chinese, and Iraqi support transformed the Dhofari rebellion in Oman into the Marxist-dominated movement, the Peoples’ Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arab Gulf (PFLOAG). The crisis actually benefited the Al Bu Said because the Communist role brought a shift in Saudi policy. Second, the Oman military, populace, and the British decided that a change in leadership was necessary.<sup>122</sup> In July 1970 these forces coalesced to remove Sultan Said bin Taymur and replace him with his son, Sultan Qaboos. At the same time, the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman changed its

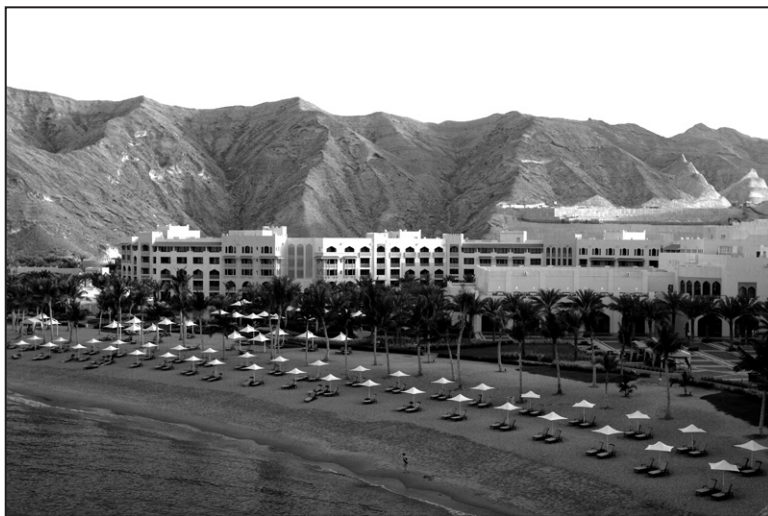
name to the Sultanate of Oman. The immediate focus of the new Sultanate was the insurgency. With support from Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Iran, and the British, Qaboos used a combination of development funding and military force to pacify Dhofar. By 1976 the revolt had effectively ended.<sup>123</sup>

As in the other Arab Gulf states, the Iranian Revolution and the Iran-Iraq war brought Omani security policy in line with the U.S. This relationship now includes military facilities, prepositioning of supplies, joint exercises, and military hardware. Exerting its independence, Muscat refused to break relations with Egypt over Camp David, normalized relations with the PDRY, and established relations with the Soviet Union and China. In addition, Oman maintained good relations with Iran and criticized Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war.<sup>124</sup> At the same time, Muscat settled its historical territorial disputes with Saudi Arabia.<sup>125</sup> Within the GCC community, a southern tier community of Oman, Qatar, and UAE has emerged with cooperation on a series of issues including customs and border control that link the Sultanate even more tightly to the southern emirates.

**The Future in Context.** Iran is the most important near-term issue. Oman has chosen to deal with it through dialogue. There are regular meetings between Omani and Iranian senior officials and military officers as well as naval port visits. Oman pursues a policy of “constructive engagement,” a belief that will “prove to be a more practical method” than attempts to isolate the Tehran regime. For Oman, Iran is a major concern. They blame Iran for a 1994 plot against Qaboos and for supporting religious extremists.<sup>126</sup> Oman sees Iran as a threat that may well have to be confronted with force but only as a last resort. Sultan Qaboos argued, “if the [Iranian] government can bring itself to take a different approach to the West, one that produces benefits, then the third faction (whose views are unknown) might support pragmatism. But there is no easy solution. Time will tell.”<sup>127</sup> Increasing bellicosity from Tehran has made Oman even more important to the Gulf emirates, reviving pipeline projects from the UAE across Oman to the Indian Ocean.<sup>128</sup> Gas pipelines run from Qatar via Abu Dhabi to Sohar on the Omani coast. Other internal UAE routes are under consideration.<sup>129</sup> The Abu Dhabi-Oman route appears more secure.

The Omani-Yemeni border is another security issue. The Republic of Yemen has limited control in tribal areas. The addition of the former PDRY complicated the problem. The “Yemenis” of the Hadramut have more in





The Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah Hotel and Spa Resort, near Muscat, Oman, June 2007. Used by permission of Newscom.

common with the Omanis of Dhofar than with the government in Sanaa. The growing inability of Yemeni government in Sanaa to control the Hadramutis could pose a potential security threat to Oman. The area is a known breeding ground for violent, radical Islamic elements. In addition, given the history of issues between the Dhofaris and the government in Muscat, aspirations for local autonomy or even independence in eastern Yemen could conceivably spread into western Oman. Good relations with Yemen are helpful, but cannot replace aggressive border security.

The two greatest stability issues for Oman's future are declining petroleum resources and the leadership succession. Politically, succession is the key issue. Sultan Qaboos appears to be in good health but has no heirs.<sup>130</sup> The Sultan knows that succession problems have brought revivals of the Imamate, outside political intervention, and division to Oman. To prevent this cycle from recurring, Sultan Qaboos promulgated the Basic Law in October 1996 after he was almost killed in a traffic accident. Article 5 states, "The system of government is a hereditary Sultanate in which succession passes to a male descendant of Sayyid Turki bin Said bin Sultan." The claimant must be an adult, born of legitimate Muslim parents and "of sound mind." Article 6 states that when the position of Sultan becomes vacant the Ruling Family Council will within 3 days pick a new Sultan. If the Council

cannot agree, “the Defense Council shall confirm the appointment of the person designated by the Sultan in his letter to the Family Council.” The Defense Council was created shortly after the Basic Law and is composed of eight senior officials and military officers appointed by the Sultan to oversee the defense of Oman.<sup>131</sup> Sultan Qaboos explained that he had written down two names in descending order and placed them in two separate envelopes to be opened in the event that the Family Council could not come to agreement.<sup>132</sup> While the wishes of the Sultan initially will be honored, there are no guarantees. The competence of the Omani government and security services will likely maintain stability. However, Sultan Qaboos’ shoes will be very difficult to fill. Outside meddling and internal issues could emerge well after the initial event.

The second long-term issue is the dwindling oil reserves. Estimates of Oman’s reserves were modest to begin with and in 2004 these estimates were revised downward by 40 percent. Oman’s gas is largely mixed with the oil and will likely also be revised downward. Without major new discoveries, Oman will deplete its petroleum resources in less than 15 years. Despite attempts to boost other economic areas, oil continues to account for 40 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This potential drop in oil production is occurring in the face of a precipitous rise in population. Since only 10 percent of the private sector jobs are occupied by Omanis, the government will face increased pressure for additional government outlays in an environment where the prospect of funding is rapidly nearing an end. “It appears that the sultanate will face a serious economic crisis in the next 10 to 15 years, or even sooner if oil prices plummet.”<sup>133</sup> The timing of these serious economic problems could very well coincide with the succession issues.

Undoubtedly Oman will press forward over the next 10 years with programs aimed at creating a non-*rentier* oil economy. In recognition of these challenges, there will be an increased focus on security and defense issues. The Basic Law notwithstanding, senior officers in the security services and military will position themselves as the power behind the throne no matter who rules as Sultan. In this regard, there will be an increasing effort to maintain alliances that guarantee the security of the Sultanate. Current policies likely foreshadow the strategy to come—namely, defense links with the United States and its western allies, expanding economic ties with the oil rich states of the Gulf, an increasing security role vis-à-vis Hormuz, and an alternate petroleum export path to the open sea.

Finally, the Omanis will maintain a dialogue with the Iranians just in case. Like the other Gulf states, Oman views U.S. policy of late as erratic and counterproductive. While pursuing an external security policy that places the Sultanate under the umbrella of the U.S., Oman will increasingly focus its resources on internal security. Given the potential for economic and succession problems, subversion, and even a resurgent Imamate, the government will no doubt conclude that the real potential for instability is internal. It is no doubt clear to the Sultan that the Al Bu Said dynasty should not count on direct U.S. assistance in an internal power struggle. With this in mind, there will be increasing focus on upgrading internal security to include border and coastal security and internal intelligence operations. If the potential for economic and succession problems is never realized, no harm will have been done; however, if it happens, increasing vigilance over the next 10 years will provide an extra edge in the struggle to survive.

## **The Future and the Large Arab States of the Gulf**

Although interests often intersect, Saudi Arabia—as the largest cohesive Arab state in the Gulf—arrives at that intersection from a position based on an outlook that fundamentally differs from that of the Arab emirates. Perhaps the differences are blurred by a lack of historical understanding, Saudi Arabia and the Arab emirates emerged simultaneously from very different traditions. Defined by population, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Yemen meet the large regional Arab state criteria. Of these, only Saudi Arabia is a conventional functioning state. As a result, Saudi Arabia will be the primary focus of this section followed by more cursory examinations of future security issues for Iraq and Yemen.

### **Saudi Arabia**

In describing Saudi Arabia's frustration in attempting to take a leadership role in the Middle East, the *Economist* cited mistrust stemming from it being a "bastion of arch-conservative Sunnism." The article argued that "the tiny Gulf state of Qatar" has had better luck negotiating between political groups in Lebanon than Riyadh. It stated that the Iraqis mistrusted Riyadh because its "forebears, 200 years ago, led ferocious Sunni raids on the Shi'a holy cities of Najaf and Karbala." In addition, the *Economist* stated that Iraqi Sunnis believe that "the Saudi-influenced version of Sunnism espoused

by Al Qaeda” had wreaked havoc on its community over the last 5 years. While pessimistic about the Saudi role within the Arab world, the article added that outside the Arab World, the Kingdom may well be in a unique position to initiate if not broker a compromise between warring factions in Afghanistan because of its fundamentalist credentials.<sup>134</sup> What does this analysis mean and how is it linked to the historical context of Gulf security? While one might argue that these issues are overstated, this evaluation of Saudi Arabia underscores the Kingdom’s separate and distinct place in the historical and contemporary geopolitical structure of the Arabian Gulf. The tendency to lump Saudi Arabia with the Arab emirates is not only an historical error but also represents a fundamental misunderstanding of the current political paradigm in the region. Saudi Arabia is not like the Gulf emirates, but rather it has all the attributes of a large state including the historical ambition to lead the Arab Gulf. The interests of Saudi Arabia and the other states of the Arab Gulf intersect, but their strategic interests are substantially different. To understand, these distinctions one must examine the historical development of the Saudi state. Saudi Arabia’s historical experience occurs in three phases, often referred to as the three Saudi states. Expansionist policies buttressed by a distinct ideology drove each, and the regional ambitions of all three states were checked by an outside power whose interests it threatened. The remarkable attribute is that the third state that transformed itself into modern Saudi Arabia has produced leaders at each critical historical juncture, which has enabled the Kingdom successfully to transform itself to meet revolutionary challenges under very difficult circumstances since its founding by Abd-al-Aziz ibn Saud at the turn of the last century. It is from within this historical context that one must seek an understanding of modern Saudi Arabia and a window on its future.

**The Historical Context.** The First Saudi State (1744–1818) established the dynastic, political, and ideological model. In 1744 Muhammad bin Saud (d. 1765) linked his political fortunes to the ideological fortunes of Muhammad ibn Abd-al-Wahhab (1703–1792). In 1727 Muhammad bin Saud became ruler of a small village, Dir’iyyah, in the Najd Desert. Simultaneously, Muhammad ibn Abd-al-Wahhab—an aspiring religious scholar whose father was a judge in the Najd—pursued a religious education in Medina, Basra, and Hasa. Abd-al-Wahhab returned the Najd with a new interpretation of Islam.<sup>135</sup> Simply put, he had rediscovered Ahmad

ibn Hanbal's traditionalist teachings of the 9th century and revived the Hanbali School of Islamic thought in the form of Wahhabi Islam. Ibn Abd-al-Wahhab's teachings focused on the absolute oneness of God, the strict adherence to the Koran, and the Sunna for religious and temporal guidance.<sup>136</sup> In 1744, in return for strict adherence to Wahhabi interpretation, the Saudis received ideological and financial support in the form of the zakat or Muslim tithe. Ibn Abd-al-Wahhab received protection. The Saudi-Wahhabi alliance transcended issues of tribal affiliation and wealth. "Preaching and raids progressed simultaneously," allowing the Saudi leadership rapidly to dominate the region.<sup>137</sup> In the early 19th century, Saudi raiders took Karbala, the Shi'a holy city, threatened Damascus, and captured Mecca and Medina. Irritated, the Ottoman Empire asked its viceroy in Egypt, Muhammad Ali, to eliminate the Saudi threat. In 1818 Muhammad Ali's son, Ibrahim Pasha, invaded the Najd, captured al-Dir'iyah, and sent Abdullah ibn Saud, the Saudi ruler, to Istanbul where he was beheaded ending the first Saudi state.<sup>138</sup>

From its inception, the exceptionalist ideology and expansionist goals of Saudi Arabia resembled the empires of the region more than the emirates. Only when it overreached was its expansion stopped and ultimately the state destroyed. This was a valuable lesson learned. In 1824, as the Turks withdrew from the Najd, Turki ibn Abdullah, son of the beheaded ruler of the first Saudi state, reestablished Saudi rule. In 1837 Faisal bin Turki refused to pay the annual tribute to the Egyptians, was removed, and sent to Cairo. His son Abdullah replaced him. What ensued was a half century of internal family strife in which various factions sought aid from outsiders to defeat their family rivals. In 1887 Muhammad ibn Rashid, the leader of a rival tribal clan, intervened on behalf one of the claimants, occupying Riyadh; eventually, in 1891, Rashid defeated the Saudis and their allies forcing the Saudi claimant, Abd-al-Rahman ibn Abdullah, to seek refuge in Kuwait. The instability of the second Saudi state taught yet another valuable lesson about internal competition and the dangers of rival claims to the throne.<sup>139</sup>

In 1902 the third Saudi state reemerged when Abd-al-Aziz ibn Saud launched a campaign from Kuwait with the backing of the Sabah of Kuwait to recapture Riyadh from the Rashids, now aligned with the Ottomans. The Sabahs were safe behind their 1899 British treaty and wanted to undermine potential Ottoman and Rashid commercial competition.<sup>140</sup> When World War

I broke out, the British needed an ally in eastern Arabia, and in December 1915 an Anglo-Saudi Treaty granted Ibn Saud a subsidy, weapons, and support. It also stipulated that other agreements required British approval and prohibited raiding against Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, the Trucial States, and Oman.<sup>141</sup> When Ibn Saud made his move against Sharif Hussein in the Hijaz, the British did not intervene despite promises of support for the Hashemites. Mecca fell to Saudi forces in December 1924 and Jidda in January 1925. The British now made it clear that Trans-Jordan and Iraq was off limits to Saudi raiding. In November 1925 Ibn Saud agreed to these conditions.

The agreement angered many of the *Ikhwan*, or Muslim brothers—the most ardent followers of Abd-al-Wahhab—who saw it as a repudiation of the Wahhabi mandate for jihad and a curb on their nomadic lives. It was also accompanied by a decree from Ibn Saud that abolished tribal lands and claimed them for the state. In 1927 the British recognized Ibn Saud as the ruler of the Najd, Hijaz, and Asir and in turn provided him Royal Air Force (RAF) support as required against his rivals; Saud recognized British interests in the Gulf.<sup>142</sup> Tribal unrest notwithstanding, in compromising with the British Ibn Saud demonstrated that he understood the error of the first Saudi state—namely, overreaching in the face of power that was capable of destroying the Kingdom. In the post-1932 period he showed that he understood the problem with the second Saudi state. Ibn Saud moved to marginalize the other branches of the Saudi family to make certain that any heir to the Saudi throne would be one of his direct descendants. He made it clear that he expected to be succeeded by Saud ibn Abd-al-Aziz, his senior son with Faisal ibn Abd-al-Aziz as the next in line.

Twenty years after its formation, the Saudi state faced the succession crisis that Ibn Saud had anticipated. He died in 1953 and the crown passed to Saud ibn Abd-al-Aziz ibn Saud (1953–1964), the senior son. In Egypt, Gamal Abdul Nasser called for an end to “feudal regimes” and pan-Arab unification was wildly popular even in conservative Saudi Arabia. Saud was simply incapable of formulating a political or economic strategy for the Kingdom. Nasser was more popular in Saudi Arabia than was King Saud. Nasser was openly described by many in the West and particularly the U.S. as “the wave of the future.” As Sir Charles Johnston, British ambassador to Jordan, pointed out, “The Americans should not allow any infantile anti-Monarchist prejudices to blind them to this fact. Monarchy is a very ancient and

tenacious principle, in the Arab world. It would be naïve to think that, after living with it for millennia, the Arab world is suddenly going to drop it.”<sup>143</sup> The attitude Johnston described continues in varied forms even today—that is, the preoccupation with democratizing the region much to the irritation of the Saudi government. From their vantage point, neither their role as an ally nor their considerable accomplishments in surviving in a volatile, unstable region are adequately understood or appreciated.

Between 1958 and 1963 the royal family found a formula of reform and political restructuring that allowed the state to survive and thrive. King Saud and his supporters struggled for control against Crown Prince Faisal ibn Abd-al-Aziz—who was supported most prominently by the seven full brothers (known as the Sudayri Seven)—and created the modern Saudi state. The surviving Sudayri brothers, now in their late 70s, still control the key ministries of aviation and defense and interior. In 1973 King Faisal initiated an oil embargo in reaction to U.S. support for Israel that flexed the Kingdom’s economic muscle.<sup>144</sup> The state that many believed was on the verge of collapse only a few years before had metamorphosed into a global economic power. For 50 years, the modern state constructed by Faisal has provided a political core around which the sons of Ibn Saud have exercised global, political, and economic power. As one senior Saudi prince put it when asked about the ability of the Kingdom to survive current crises, “In the fifties, they said we were finished and that Nasser was the wave of the future—where is Nasserism now and where are we?”<sup>145</sup>

Saudi Arabia views itself as the leader of the Arab Gulf, particularly following the Iranian revolution in 1979 and the formation of the Gulf Cooperation Council in 1980. Prior to the collapse of the Shah, U.S. policy had an ambiguous tenor. Iran and Saudi Arabia were viewed as key components of the so-called U.S. “pillar policy, but Washington viewed Iran as the potential military power in the Gulf and Saudi Arabia as the economic component.”<sup>146</sup> In 1979 the Carter Doctrine committed the U.S. to defend the Gulf states against outside aggression and subversion. Both Riyadh and Washington saw the GCC as a vehicle for regional collective security with Saudi Arabia as the senior partner. More recently the Bush Administration pushed this view of collective Gulf security. This goal has not been realized for numerous reasons but foremost because it does not align with the historical Gulf security paradigm.

**The Future in Context.** During the next 5 years, the GCC issue and the role of the U.S. in the Gulf may contribute to increased Saudi disenchantment. There is an increasing feeling that “the United States is no longer a reliable ally.”<sup>147</sup> More accurately, official Saudi Arabia’s faith in U.S. policy judgment has been shaken to its core. The outcome of the first Gulf war, the Saudi view that criticism for 9/11 was unfair, resentment over “irresponsible” pressure for political liberalization, and the *carte blanche* given to Israel to subjugate the Palestinians contributed to the view that U.S. judgment was fundamentally flawed. Then from Riyadh’s point of view, the 2003 invasion of Iraq created a potential security disaster. The removal of a Sunni-dominated government with no plan or forethought and the rise of what many Saudis viewed as “the Iranian government in Baghdad” shocked Riyadh.<sup>148</sup> Public expressions of concern about Iranian influence in Baghdad have moderated somewhat, but privately there is little abatement. Having created a “disaster” for the interests of the Kingdom and the Gulf emirates, the problems associated with Iraq brought calls in the U.S. for the withdrawal of U.S. troops leaving Iraq under the control of a pro-Iranian and anti-Saudi government and political chaos on its doorstep. From a Saudi point of view, the best outcome given the current situation would be a unified Iraq with a staunchly Arab nationalist government.<sup>149</sup> From Riyadh’s point of view, this would also include the caveat that any unified Iraqi state would not threaten its Arab neighbors. This represents the optimum state of affairs with regard to Iraq; given the current state of affairs, at least in the foreseeable future, it is a highly unlikely outcome. As a result, Riyadh is undoubtedly evaluating its alternatives in the more likely event that Iraq faces more instability and a political future in which Iran will work assiduously for increased influence and leverage.

For good measure, the Bush administration chose to ignore Saudi, Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and even Israeli advice to delay elections in the Palestinian territories, and Hamas won. To compound the problem, the U.S. has then looked the other way while Israel attempts to crush Hamas and in the process kills hundreds of Palestinian civilians, further radicalizing an already inflamed Middle East. Riyadh also viewed Washington’s policies as partially responsible for Hezbollah’s success in Lebanon. U.S. miscues were extending Iran’s influence and Shi’a clout from Iran through Iraq to Syria and Lebanon. The level of apprehension



is further illustrated by Saudi concerns at some level that U.S. plans for a rapprochement with Iran might be intended to replace Saudi Arabia as the U.S. primary ally in the Gulf.<sup>150</sup> As unimaginable as this may seem in any foreseeable future, it illustrates the degree of mistrust that has crept into the relationship between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia as a result of the events of the last 8 years.

Added to these issues, U.S. policy in the Arabian Gulf thwarted the Saudi vision of the GCC. The U.S. bilateral relationships around the Gulf encouraged the policy independence of the emirates. Since Saudi Arabia would clearly be the dominant partner in GCC collective security, Riyadh viewed this as a critical policy goal both from the standpoint of Gulf security and because it fit the Kingdom's image of its role in the region. If indeed that was the desired policy goal of the United States, then rather than expanding its bilateral ties in the region, Washington needed to be pulling back and pressing the emirates to fully embrace the GCC as the collective security arrangement. The current situation in which the U.S. embraced the idea of collective security through the GCC but continued to expand its bilateral relations with the emirates encouraging bilateral security arrangements fundamentally conflicted. One of two things was occurring. Either the U.S. was being duplicitous in its approach to Gulf security and the Saudi role in



King Abdullah bin Abdul al-Saud meets with Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates at the king's hunting lodge in Saudi Arabia, 17 January 2007. DoD photo by Cherie A. Thurlby.

it, or Washington was simply unaware. Riyadh does not want to see an end, by any stretch of the imagination, to U.S. involvement in the Gulf; however, it would prefer to see U.S. policy first aligned with that of the Kingdom and then pursued in the region. No matter what the reason, the U.S. 21st century policy mirrored that of the British in the early 20th century by providing a shield behind which the Gulf emirates maintain their independence and offering an alternative to Saudi leadership of the Arab Gulf.

Looking forward no matter what the problems, U.S. security guarantees are more critical than ever to Saudi Arabia given the Iranian gains in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon and the Iranian nuclear program. The Kingdom will pursue bilateral agreements that tie the U.S. to the Saudi defense and pressure Washington to maintain pressure on Iran. Recently, the U.S. and Saudi Arabia concluded a security agreement that commits Washington to provide security for Saudi oil infrastructure. It seems to guarantee that an attack on the Kingdom's source of wealth will result in a counterstrike by the U.S. More important is the implication that an attack on Saudi facilities is tantamount to an attack on the United States. Behind such a shield, the Saudis can develop their border security efforts utilizing an aggressive in-depth approach. Through payments to Sunni tribal and political elements in Iraq, Saudi security services may attempt to create a *de facto* Iraqi Sunni buffer against Shi'a expansion. The possibility that pro-Saudi and pro-Iranian proxies will clash in Iraq could produce direct retaliation and lead to a direct confrontation with obvious implications for the U.S.

With regard to the Gulf states, the Kingdom will press for collective security agreements and close Arab coordination under the GCC umbrella. Because of the last 8 years, the Saudis are justifiably concerned that the Obama administration, or any U.S. administration for that matter, has the capability to make significant misjudgments that compound Arab Gulf security problems. Such misjudgments could come in the form of pushing for internal political liberalization or a new U.S. relationship with Iran that sacrificed the security interests and stability of the Arab Gulf states. The issue of liberalization potentially poses a twin threat to the Kingdom. The U.S. might actually influence one or more of the emirates to take actions that ultimately undermine its leadership. In particular, problems in Bahrain with its large Shi'a population and history of Iranian claims have direct implications for the eastern provinces of Saudi Arabia and their own large Shi'a population, and some U.S. officials and members of Congress have

demonstrated a real lack of understanding of the implications of this issue. Kuwait is another example of what the Saudis view as the U.S. propensity to lead the emirates astray. The Saudi view is that they opposed the invasion of Iraq as did Turkey and that bilateral U.S. pressure on Kuwait drew it into a strategically problematic and tactically ill-conceived adventure that created significant problems for the emirate. A more Saudi-integrated GCC would provide support for resisting U.S. pressure and bad advice. In effect, U.S. bilateral relations with the smaller Gulf states encouraged and supported their ability to pursue independent policies with which the Saudis disagree.

Despite criticism of Iran and its policies, Qatar, Dubai, and Oman maintain reasonable-to-good relations with Iran. In addition, liberalization in the Gulf emirates has put significant pressure on the Saudi government to follow suit. In this regard, the free-wheeling *al-Jazira* news operating from Qatar has become a real aggravation for Saudi Arabia. The government in Riyadh believes that, given the expansion of Iranian influence, the Arab Gulf states need to speak with a single voice. That voice could be any individual from any of the Gulf states as long as the policy positions agree with those held in Riyadh. Some have compared Qatar's independent attitudes and policies to those of Kuwait during the 1970s and early 1980s and speculate that the realities of the region will ultimately bring policy shifts that will be more in line with those shared by the other states of the Gulf. In addition, Saudi Arabia and all of the Arab Gulf states will be monitoring very closely the new U.S. opening to Iran to ensure their interests are not sacrificed by either a misstep or a conscious decision by Washington.

The issue of internal security is intrinsically related to Gulf security. There is a tendency in the region to understate or hide internal problems. Saudi authorities underestimated the depth and breadth of the internal radical movement and its potential for causing political, economic, and social instability while undermining Saudi influence and relationships abroad. Wanting to avoid mistakes of the past, Saudi Arabia is upgrading border security, port security, petroleum infrastructure security, security training, and internal security operations. The Saudi government is being very innovative in its approach to terrorism by utilizing a PRAC strategy (Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare). Within the Ministry of Interior (MOI), the PRAC reports through Prince Muhammad ibn Nayef, the son of the Minister of Interior Prince Nayef ibn Abd-al-Aziz. The campaign targets

the “ideological infrastructure that supports and breeds violent Islamic extremists.”<sup>151</sup> Saudi officials claim an “80 to 90 percent success rate” with only a few dozen being rearrested for security-related offenses.<sup>152</sup> As with any rehabilitation program, there has been some recidivism, but the focus and support of the most senior levels of government has made a real difference not only in the successful prosecution of both coercive and persuasive approaches but also in the creativity being applied to a very complex problem.

Succession represents the greatest potential threat to the Saudi monarchy. The sons of Abd-al-Aziz have reached their 70s and 80s. At some point in the near future the crown will pass to a grandson. Sheer numbers and ambitions make this a most complicated problem. In late 2007, King Abdullah addressed the issue directly. On 8 October, he added bylaws to the 25-article “Allegiance Law of Succession.” In a *majlis* that included every surviving son and many of the grandsons of Ibn Saud, he named an Allegiance Council. It has 35 members represented by each of the surviving sons of Ibn Saud or if deceased, by a grandson chosen by that branch of the family. There were 16 sons and 19 grandsons. The King named Mish’al ibn Abd-al-Aziz, the former Deputy Defense Minister and Governor of Mecca, as the chairman of this commission empowered to select future kings.<sup>153</sup> Although the bylaws left certain questions unanswered, Abdullah’s declaration was a significant step forward in transparency. It also admonished all “to work for the unity of the ruling family.” How it will play out remains to be seen. Clearly, King Abdullah understands the risks and wants to rationalize the process.<sup>154</sup> In more than 100 years, one succession threatened the Saudi dynasty. The critical struggle between Saud and Faisal established a structure around which new monarchs have been chosen for over half a century. King Abdullah is now attempting to address the next 50 years.

In the future, security and stability require a nonpetroleum-based economy. With a growing focus on the use of sovereign wealth to invest for the long-term, moves are underway to offshore agricultural production as a hedge against commodity inflation and numerous other projects to move the Kingdom to a self-sustaining economy. Progress has been spotty, and it remains to be seen how this will work out. The Saudi leadership knows that long-sought population growth has created dangerous under- and unemployment among the young and a transformation of the economy will be critical. The second issue is reform. Political, economic, and social

challenges have created escalating calls for reform. King Abdullah supports change and may even support Talal ibn Abd-al-Aziz's recent call for the creation of political parties. In the coming years, there will be attempts to find the balance between reform and the preservation of the Saudi state. King Abdullah and his successors, like Ibn Saud and Faisal before them, must find the middle passage between tradition, stagnation, and liberalization run amok without threatening the stability of the state.<sup>155</sup> Historically, the Saudi tradition of statecraft and family consensus has demonstrated the ability to innovate without compromising Saudi rule. Ibn Saud radically altered the relationship between the *Ikhwan*, the *mutawwa*—that is, enforcers of religious law and himself. Faisal instituted reforms that at the time were considered radical, including a complete overhaul of the financial system with accountability levied on the King and education for women. The monarchy will experiment, albeit conservatively, on reforms and accountability in an effort to find equilibrium. Finding this equilibrium allowed Ibn Saud to create the state; it allowed Faisal to construct a modern state, and finding it will allow the next generation of Saudi rulers to address the challenges of the 21st century.

When taken in context, all of these initiatives are interlinked. Combined they constitute the Gordian Knot of Saudi Arabia's future. There is broad concern about the "fragility" of the Saudi state.<sup>156</sup> In point of fact, the monarchy has proved itself to be far more adaptive than anyone gives them credit for being. The lesson of the late 1950s and early 1960s is an excellent case-on-point. In 1963 Sir Charles Johnston, during a period of extreme instability, commented on U.S. concerns about Saudi "fragility":

The Saudi regime is unstable at all times and could blow up tomorrow. But Faisal is after all not a fool and is capable of judging his own interest. ... The State Department are [*sic*] assuming a heavy responsibility in claiming to understand Faisal's interests ... better than [he]. The American theory that an Arab Republic has something inherently more stable about it than an Arab monarchy seems to me to be more derived from ideology than fact.<sup>157</sup>

As things turned out, Faisal was far more capable of judging his interests than other leaders in the region like Nasser. Through his reforms and policies, Faisal created a state in which, no matter what the problems, there is no apparent political alternative to the Saud family.<sup>158</sup> Sir Charles was

right and would no doubt have the same view of King Abdullah and rightly so. The Kingdom has certainly proven more stable than Republican Iraq. Stability over the last three decades in Syria and Egypt may rival that of the Kingdom but only after the installation of the Assad dynasty in Damascus and what may be a Mubarak one in Cairo. No republic can boast of a century of relatively stable rule and more than 250 years of either political power or influence in the region. Could lightning strike? Perhaps, but it is highly unlikely. Nevertheless, official U.S. concern and speculation will no doubt continue. One thing is certain, given the current U.S. track record in the region: it will be a long time before Saudi Arabia follows any advice from Washington with which they do not already agree.

## The Dysfunctional States

Two other Arab states, or perhaps would-be states, have an impact on the future of the Gulf. Yemen and Iraq are too unstable to have influence through conventional policy on the Gulf states, but their very instability has a clear effect on states in the region. A cursory examination of their potential paths and impact on the stability of the region is useful.

### Yemen

Instability in Yemen caused by tribal and political factionalism and a lack of government control has been a chronic condition since the inception of the Yemen Arab Republic in 1962. The compromises necessary to end the civil war, 1962–1970, simply do not lend themselves to strong central government. As a result, control from the center ebbs and flows. In the mid-1990s, attempts to imbue the current government with the trappings of a centralized functioning modern state were largely wishful thinking. This is a misunderstanding; a united Yemeni state did not emerge from the triumph of Ali Abdullah Salih's northern government. There is now a crisis-like atmosphere with U.S. officials worrying about Yemen "becoming a failed state." In a conventional sense, Yemen has always been a failed state, but not necessarily a failed society. Yemen is a coalition of armed tribal and clan interest groups that coalesce around a government dominated by a tribal and clan grouping. The degree to which the central government has authority is largely determined by co-opting tribal and clan elements to support a given policy. All this is complicated by the fastest population growth in

the world, limited economic opportunity, limited petroleum resources and an ever-dwindling supply of water. Yemen, as a source of instability on the Arabian Peninsula, a breeding ground for militant Islamists, and a difficult foreign policy challenge, is nothing new.

In the 5-to-10 year time frame, Salih could pass from the political scene. An officer in the army or perhaps the security services will emerge as the new leader. The degree to which this person and those supporting him will be able to control Yemen will depend on their success in balancing the competing factions and co-opting the potential opposition. Violence in Yemen on the part of disaffected groups is the norm, not the exception. The key to survival is the balancing act, and Ali Abdullah Salih has exceeded beyond all expectations. The policy of any Yemeni government for the foreseeable future will be to maintain the imperfect equilibrium in which it can survive.

The Saudis understand Yemen and have buffered themselves by maintaining influence with the tribes in the northern border regions and with various officials in Sanaa. Saudi Arabia is justified in its concern about destabilizing activities that could spill over into the Kingdom. Riyadh has steadfastly refused to allow Yemen membership in the GCC. The Saudis view Yemen membership as a potential destabilizing influence that might damage the current public face of consensus that the GCC is often able to project. Opposition by the more conservative Gulf Arab states to Yemen's membership is further assured by Iranian calls for Yemen's inclusion in the "Gulf community and the GCC."<sup>159</sup> The Iranians are transparently attempting to use Yemen membership in the GCC as a wedge issue in undermining GCC solidarity in opposition to Iranian policies in the region, and this virtually assures Yemen's continued status as an "observer" in GCC affairs.

This situation likely means that Yemen will have to go it alone over the next 10 years as it has over the last 30, but there are risks. A post-Taliban Afghanistan-like breakdown would produce additional safe havens for terrorists. These safe havens could destabilize areas in both Saudi Arabia and Oman. The Saudi-Yemeni border is ill-defined with a significant flow of largely unregulated cross-border activity. The Omani-Yemen border was finally demarcated in the mid-1990s but as one author pointed out, "No border settlement in the Gulf ever seems to be final," and there is a continuing risk that Yemen may make claims to Omani territory.<sup>160</sup> At the current time, Yemen is a center for jihadist activity, but they have limited ability to

export it outside the borders of the country. A total disintegration might change that dynamic.

This is possible but unlikely. Existing political and tribal arrangements have worked to some degree for 30 years. The likely scenario would be a period of instability followed by the establishment of an equilibrium that would have its ups and downs just as the government of Ali Abdullah Salih has had. Policymakers tend to forget that when Salih took power, two presidents in rapid succession had been assassinated; the Soviet Union was backing the PDRY with advisors and weapons, and the PDRY was in turn backing the National Democratic Front (NDF). The Yemeni power structure cannot be understood in a conventional western sense. Any Yemeni solution will be inherently unstable and contain the potential for terrorist mischief. Also, when the thought of intervention or “fixing Yemen” appears, think about the Egyptian investment of 1962 to 1968 and expunge the thought immediately.

## **Iraq**

Undoubtedly the ultimate outcome in Iraq will have important consequences for Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and perhaps even Bahrain. The emirates of the southern Gulf will likely be less affected. If the current U.S. policies vis-à-vis Iraq are successful, a Shi’a-dominated government will be able to control the entire country. In a perfect world, this control would be democratic with the sectarian groups sharing the oil wealth, economic prosperity, political participation, and physical security; however, Iraq is not a perfect world.

If the current Iraqi government manages to extend its control over the entire country and maintain that posture after a U.S. withdrawal, the Sunni who have not already fled will find their current position, as second-class citizens, worsen. If the threat of U.S. intervention to maintain a strategic status quo is removed, Iranian influence will grow during this period in which the Shi’a attempt to exert control over the Sunni. It is unlikely that the Iraqi government—no matter how much progress they believe that they have made—can do the job alone; thus it is only logical that the additional support would come from Iran whose influence already permeates the Green Zone. Recent cooperation between the Maliki government and Sunni groups represents the tactical “divide-and-conquer” approach to Iraqi politics as opposed to any real strategic realignment. It is this struggle that the Iraqi government faces for the next 5 years or perhaps longer. If the U.S. continues



a sizable presence in Iraq in terms of military training and support, then Iraqi nationalists and the various groups—that is, Sunni, Kurd, and secular Shi'ia that oppose Iranian influence—may well emerge as a political force capable of blunting the long-term Iranian goals of maintaining its influence in Baghdad and creating a weak, client state in Iraq.

Despite recent electoral trends, the process of trying to control the country will intensify sectarian issues and worsen resistance of Iraqi Sunnis. While the Shi'a-dominated Baghdad government will no doubt resent at one level or another the interference and influence of Iran in its internal affairs, it will tolerate it because aggravations with Iran will be relatively minor when viewed in the context of the hostility from Sunni political elements within Iraq and from their backers in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain. These frictions could escalate into threats and counterthreats and resurrect old territorial claims and jealousies. Although Arab, Iraq's tactical ally would likely be Iran simply because of the fear and hostility that a rearmed Iraq with a well-equipped army and a subjugated Sunni population would incur from the Arab Gulf states. The new Iraq would be no happier about Kuwait's ability to bottle up its ports or unwillingness to forgive Iraqi debts than Saddam Hussein. Over the longer term, the emergence of a strong, centralized Iraq would also resurrect a strategic threat to Iran as well. An independent nationalist government in Baghdad, even though Shi'ia, would ultimately present a threat to Iran too. While all the states of region call for a strong, stable Iraq, there is more than a little reason to question their sincerity. It is simply a matter of national interest—a strong Iraq has always emerged as a threat to its neighbors.

The other more appealing scenario from a Gulf point of view is that the current policy fails. The Iraqi government is unable to secure its territory. Iraq devolves into a series of Shi'a fiefdoms while the Sunnis are able, with support from the Arab Gulf states, to establish their own area like Kurdistan. This de facto partition could be the beginning of a highly federated Iraq. In this scenario, Iraq as a state will not have real policies that extend beyond its borders. The Sunni areas will find themselves increasingly aligned with Jordan and the Gulf Arab states. While not the ideal from a Gulf Arab point of view, it is far better than the emergence of a unified Shi'a Iraqi state either strongly influenced by Tehran or one that emerges a strong threat to its neighbors in the region.

## Conclusion

The Arab perspective on Gulf security over the next 5 to 10 years in the context of the historical narrative of state and dynastic development provides a series of useful insights. These, by necessity, are generalizations, but the perspective offers 250 years of practice, experience, and example. It allows the analyst to transcend exceptionalist myopia in which events that defy historical norms and are misidentified as permanent policy fixtures of the region; the GCC is an example. Each state in the region has its own individual narrative that occurs within the overall structure of the wider historical paradigm. How can this GSS environment be summarized in a manner that is useful to policymakers?

First, the emirates of the Arab Gulf are the central essential element in the historical GSS. The large states are obviously important, but they are fundamentally different because of size, potential influence, and national ambitions. The emirates have been the fundamental building bloc for security in the Arab Gulf. This system has been based on bilateral relationships with first the British and now the U.S., and it has provided dynastic security and a stable environment for economic development. As a result, it is the approach to security preferred by the emirates. In addition, there is an almost visceral reluctance to seek a primary security alignment with one of the large powers in the Gulf. This reluctance is in part rational and in part based on suspicions arguably transmitted by the historical threat posed by their larger neighbors. In this area, any progress toward a truly integrated defense structure between the emirates will be slow at best. The governments simply want to maintain their own militaries while paying lip service to a real GCC common force. The U.S. is the preferred shield against external threats with secondary relationships with the other western powers.

The same historical insecurity drives security preferences related to economic considerations. Despite extensive investments in the local economy, a strong undercurrent exists that argues for diversification of risk. Whether it is risk driven by regional, political, and military instability or risk driven by fears that economic growth cannot be sustained in a non-*rentier*, post-petroleum environment is immaterial. Diversification through sovereign wealth funds and other investment structures is aimed at sustaining prosperity in the face of catastrophic drops in the price of oil or eventually when

the oil-based economy is no longer viable. All the Gulf emirates are investing in infrastructure improvements that will diversify their economies. Dubai and Qatar are perhaps the most prominent but it remains to be seen if they can truly transform themselves into freestanding economies no longer dependent on oil. This is a question that has yet to be answered. All of the investment and infrastructure improvements are paid for by oil revenues, and it is a challenge to make the transition; nevertheless that is the goal.

Petroleum infrastructure security is increasingly important. Securing pipelines, refineries, offshore platforms, and related infrastructure requires a significant build-up in border, maritime, and internal security capabilities. To be sure, there are other potential internal security issues, but protecting the petroleum base tips the scales toward expenditures to support ever more sophisticated police and security forces and systems. This area will be an ongoing focus with ever-increasing resources applied and a greater likelihood for increased cooperation through the GCC. The mutual benefits from joint maritime, border, and police operations and coordination are potentially so significant that the security systems and efforts will become much more integrated.

For the foreseeable future, the insistence of the emirates on the bilateral approach to strategic security with the United States will continue to be, at times, a frustration to Saudi Arabia. The Kingdom has made real strides in settling long-standing differences with the various Gulf states. The recent border demarcation agreement with Qatar is a case in point. However, the fact remains that the smaller emirates prefer their strategic security be guaranteed by a friendly great power from outside the region. All of the ruling families in the emirates survived because their interests and those of the British Empire more or less coincided. From the point of view of the emirates themselves, British colonialism was not an issue. It was a relationship that, while contentious at times, allowed them to maintain their independence and ultimately enjoy largess of their petroleum resources. The decades after the British withdrawal brought a chain of events that reinforced their historical inclinations about security, the Iranian Revolution, the Iran-Iraq war, the “tanker war” in the Gulf, the invasion of Kuwait, and finally the invasion of Iraq. The lesson that the emirates fell back on was the historical lesson of dynastic survival—namely, that the best security for the state and the ruling family did not come from the region itself but rather from an outside power with shared interests. For this reason, real integration of

military and defense organizations under the GCC will simply not happen, and this will be a frustration for Saudi Arabia.

For Saudi Arabia, the lone large cohesive Arab state in the Gulf, the future promises to be somewhat similar but perhaps with greater frustrations. For the Kingdom, the issue is not just survival. The Saudis have real large-state aspirations. They see themselves as the leaders of the Gulf Arabs, and in that vein, the dominant state in the GCC. The GCC is a natural institution for cooperation on economic, diplomatic, and most of all integrated defense and security issues. Riyadh views a bilateral relationship with the United States as crucial but it wants the overall relationship with the Gulf states to be focused in more of a collective fashion through the GCC and the Kingdom. There is deep concern that Washington may make another mistake and further cripple the security and defense postures of the Sunni Arab Gulf states as it did with the invasion of Iraq. There is growing frustration with the ability of the Gulf emirates to pursue independent policies with some degree of impunity because of their bilateral security arrangements with the U.S. These policies are viewed as inconsistent with a more cohesive defense policy for the Gulf. Despite these concerns, the most important security issues for the Kingdom over the next 5 to 10 years will be internal—the nonpetroleum economy, unemployment, institutional reform, infrastructure security, border security, and most important succession. King Abdullah's government is moving to address these issues, and time will test how effective the measures will be.

The issue of a Palestinian state and unqualified U.S. support under the Bush administration for any policy that Israel labeled *antiterrorist* undermined U.S. credibility not only on the Arab street but among officials as well. Bush policies vis-à-vis the Palestinian issue have become an increasingly sensitive collective security issue for all of the Gulf states. It severely complicates both the internal security situation and the external credibility of the Gulf Arabs. The policies of the Bush administration with regard to Palestine were first a shock and then a severe disappointment to the Arab leadership in the region. Most Arab leadership had assumed that George W. Bush would follow the policies of his father, George H. W. Bush, in at least attempting to give the appearance of even-handedness with regard to the Palestinians. In fact, from an Arab perspective, Bush-administration policies appear to have been dictated by Israel and its U.S. supporters. For example, Gulf Arab officials often cite the demand that Palestinians adhere

to the letter of agreements with Israel while turning a blind eye not just to the refusal of Israel to remove settlements on the West Bank but also to the active expansion of those settlements. Leaving whatever moral and Muslim solidarity issues aside, U.S. policy has thoroughly embarrassed and further frayed the confidence of the Arab Gulf in U.S. judgment and friendship. It has handed the enemies of the pro-western, moderate Gulf leaders the gift of a critical “wedge issue” with which to further undermine their security, stability, and credibility. Here again, in the view of the Gulf Arab leaders the principal beneficiaries have been Iran and radical Arab political groups.

In particular, it has allowed Iran to expand its influence with heretofore purely Arab movements and expand the influence of power of its surrogates in the Arab world. There is pervasive concern around the Arab Gulf that U.S. policy in Iraq and with regard to Palestine has allowed Iran to consolidate its leadership in the Shi’a communities of the region and to make threatened inroads among Sunni groups.<sup>161</sup> The underlying frustration expressed almost unanimously by Gulf Arab officials at what they perceive as the lack of understanding and a disregard for the political reality in which they live could very well lead to less cooperation with the U.S. and a potentially more independent political course. Decreased cooperation or increased policy separation carries with it significant geopolitical security risks for all involved. An immediate concern over the next 2 to 3 years will be U.S. policy toward Iran. While a great deal of support exists for the political change in Washington represented by the Obama administration, there is concern, resulting in large part by the policy mistakes of the Bush administration, that Obama may pursue conciliatory policies with Iran that encourage Iranian adventurism and undermine U.S. Arab allies in the Gulf. All of the Gulf Arab states want to see close consultation with the U.S. and transparency on any new U.S. policy initiatives with Iran. The message is clearly talk if you like but do not give away anything significant because the Iranians have no incentive to compromise on anything of substance.<sup>162</sup>

The Arab Gulf has functioned within a very consistent paradigm over the last two centuries. It is this historical context that is the single most important determining factor when looking at future policy. The emirates prefer the protection of a great power through bilateral defense arrangements. Each has its own set of priorities and peculiarities; for sound historical reasons, they have learned to see the large states of the region as potential threats to their independence and dynastic ambitions. Historically, the guarantees

of one generation are quickly forgotten in the next. It would be impossible to list all the examples, but Iran's foregoing a claim to Bahrain in the early 1970s only to revive it later in the decade is a glaring example. The Kuwaitis do not trust Iraqi guarantees nor do the Qataris entirely trust Saudi ones. The only constant has been the guarantee of an outside power.

This situation will not change if the current GSS is maintained. The current situation has arguably lasted 250 years, and there is no reason for it to change. The threat posed by Iran in one sense probably assures willing participation of the Gulf emirates in the GSS. Of the large Arab states, Saudi Arabian frustrations will ebb and flow over the next decade. They will seek to exert more influence in the relationship with the United States as it pertains to the Gulf, but frustrations notwithstanding, security policy will reflect a continued desire for strong bilateral guarantees and a preeminent leadership role among the Arab Gulf states. A major shift, or the perception of a major shift, in the posture of the United States in the Arab Gulf might create critical uncertainties, but only extreme uncertainty about U.S. intentions would lead to a major reformulation of the Gulf security paradigm. In such an unlikely event, any number of factors might come into play. Saudi Arabia would attempt to expand its influence as would Iran. While the emirates might accept temporary protection from a large state within the region, they would actively seek external guarantees from new outside partners. The lessons of the last two centuries have been learned too well and the system has been highly beneficial to dynastic fortunes of the ruling elites of the Arabian Gulf. ↑



## Endnotes

1. Fareed Zakaria, "Interview with Henry Kissinger," GPS CNN International, 9 June 2008.
2. What often is accepted as historical background with the U.S. government is a perspective on the last 30 to 50 years in the region. In reality, this is only a tactical point of reference since most of the ongoing controversies, despite being couched in 21st century terms, originate from a much deeper historical perspective. It is a byproduct of an international relations approach to understanding a region with its tendency to be light on in-depth political, cultural, and social knowledge.
3. The tactical situation can telescope from the next 5 to 10 years in the Persian Gulf to the 25 years of Muhammad Reza Shah's post-coup rule in Iran (1953-1979)—a foreign regime totally outside the historical norm—or it can be the 80-year-old British-created anomaly of Iraq that the U.S. destroyed in 8 weeks. Because a policy or situation is outside the norm does not mean that for reasons of national interests it should not be pursued or supported; rather it means that it should be understood, and the risks understood from an understanding of the historical context. That the Shah's regime collapsed like a house of cards or that Iraq disintegrated as a unified state is of no surprise at all to those who understand the historical context. Neither does it mean that supporting the Shah for 25 years was a bad idea. It does, however, mean that viewing the Shah as essential to U.S. security and interests in the Gulf was placing a lot of eggs in a very unstable basket.
4. Andrew Scott Cooper, "Showdown at Doha: The Secret Oil Deal That Helped Sink the Shah of Iran," *Middle East Journal* 62 (Fall 2008): 567.
5. The Safavid Empire was founded by Shah Ismail in the early 16th century. At that time, Persia—now Iran—was principally Sunni. Convinced by missionaries from Bahrain of the validity of the Twelver Shi'a interpretation of Islam, Shah Ismail converted and then mandated the Twelver form of Shi'ism as the state religion. The term *Twelver Shi'ism* refers to those who believe that twelve Imams followed the death of Ali, son-in-law of the Prophet, and that the last Imam occulted and will return at the end of time. There are two other major forms of Shi'ism, *sevener*, also called Ismaili and *fiver*, the most prominent group being the Zaydis of Yemen, who believe that the occultation occurred with the seventh and fifth Imams respectively. Today the dominant Shi'a group is the Twelvers. From the time of the Safavids, Persia or Iran has been predominantly Twelver. For a concise explanation, see John L. Esposito, ed., *The Oxford History of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 44-49.
6. Malcolm C. Peck, *Historical Dictionary of the Gulf Arab States* (Toronto: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2008), 233. (Hereinafter cited as Peck, *Gulf Arab States*.)
7. Christopher A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridians: The British Empire and the World 1780-1830* (London: Longman Limited, 1994), 35-74.



8. The first shots of the conflict were actually fired in 1754 in the backwoods of Pennsylvania by a Virginia colonel named George Washington. It became a global conflict in 1756.
9. James Onley, *The Arabian Frontier of the British Raj: Merchants, Rulers, and the British in the Nineteenth-Century Gulf* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1-5.
10. Joseph A. Kechichian, "Unity on the Arabian Peninsula," in *Iran, Iraq, and the Arab Gulf States*, ed. John A. Kechichian (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 281.
11. Sultan bin Zayid bin Sultan al-Nahyan, "The UAE Vision for Gulf Security," in *Iran, Iraq, and the Arab Gulf States*, ed. John A. Kechichian (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 386.
12. Michael Knights, *Troubled Waters: Future of U.S. Military Assistance in the Persian Gulf* (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2006), 8-9.
13. *Ibid.*, 9.
14. Anthony Cordesman, "Security Challenges and Threats in the Gulf: A Net Assessment," Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) article (Washington, D.C.: CSIS, 8 September 2008), 3; available from [www.csis.org/component/option,com\\_csis\\_pubs/task,view/id,4863/type,1/](http://www.csis.org/component/option,com_csis_pubs/task,view/id,4863/type,1/) (accessed 9 March 2009).
15. Knights, *Troubled Waters*, 9.
16. An opinion voiced by military officers from the UAE, Qatar, and Kuwait in July and August 2008.
17. Joseph A. Kechichian, "Can Conservative Arab Gulf Monarchies Endure a Fourth War in the Persian Gulf?" *Middle East Journal* 61, No. 2 (Spring 2007): 298.
18. J. E. Peterson, *Historical Dictionary of Saudi Arabia* (Oxford: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2003), 61.
19. F. Gregory Gause III and Jill Crystal, "The Arab Gulf: Will Autocracy Define the Social Contract in 2015?" in *The Middle East in 2015*, ed. Judith Yaphe (Washington, D.C.: The National Defense University, 2002), 190.
20. Ahmad Mustafa Abu Hakima, *History of Eastern Arabia 1750-1800* (Beirut: Khayats), 27.
21. It should be pointed out that the Seven Years' War formally began in 1756, but the shooting actually started with George Washington's initial foray against the French at Fort Duquesne at present day Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1754.
22. Peck, *Gulf Arab States*, 170.
23. Rosemarie Said Zahlan, *The Making of the Modern Gulf States* (London: Ithaca Press, 1998), 37. (Hereinafter cited as Zahlan, *Modern Gulf States*.)
24. *Ibid.*, 39.
25. Helen Chapin Metz, ed., *Persian Gulf States - Country Studies* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, Federal Research Division, 1998), 58-59.

26. Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq* (Boulder, CO: The Westview Press, 2003), 110-111.
27. Zahlan, *Modern Gulf States*, 48.
28. *Ibid.*, 54.
29. Knights, *Troubled Waters*, 39.
30. Interview with knowledgeable official familiar with the historical working of the succession process in Kuwait.
31. Comments of a senior Kuwaiti military officer on the dangers of a U.S. withdrawal.
32. "Iran nuclear dispute hurting neighbours: Kuwait," *The Peninsula*, 10 August 2008, 4.
33. *Ibid.*
34. "Kuwait Eyes Oil Storage Abroad – Iran Could Easily Shut Hormuz," *Arab Times*, 5 August 2008, 1, 8. Available from [www.arabtimesonline.com/client/pagesdetails.asp?nid=20530&ccid=11](http://www.arabtimesonline.com/client/pagesdetails.asp?nid=20530&ccid=11) (accessed 9 March 2009).
35. Discussion with a U.S. official familiar with Kuwaiti attitudes on petroleum security.
36. "British Embassy Amman (Johnston) to Hadow (Foreign Office), 30 October 1958," Public Records Office, FO371/134021.
37. "France's defence review – Let's get real," *Economist*, 21 June 2008, 63. Also available from [www.economist.com/world/europe/displaystory.cfm?story\\_id=11580198](http://www.economist.com/world/europe/displaystory.cfm?story_id=11580198) (accessed 9 March 2009).
38. Peck, *Gulf Arab States*, 37. It should be noted that this struggle for control in the southern Gulf paralleled another more protracted struggle that pitted the Shi'a Safavid Empire against the Sunni Ottoman Empire in what we now call Iraq. The struggle for Mesopotamia lasted from roughly the rise of the Safavid dynasty between 1500 and 1510 and the emergence of Shah Ismail I (1500-1524) until the mid-17th century when the Ottomans emerged as the winners. The Safavids developed from a mystical religious *Sufi* order founded by Sheikh Safi al-Din (1252-1334). The Safavids transformed Persia or Iran from a predominantly Sunni to an officially Shi'a state. The U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, the Sunni in one configuration or another constituted the ruling group in Mesopotamia, was the Sunni minority—"the 350-year-old applecart" that the U.S. overturned in 2003. For a more detailed but concise explanation, see John L. Esposito, ed., *The Oxford History of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 363-371.
39. Zahlan, *Modern Gulf States*, 61.
40. Onley, *The Arabian Frontier of the British Raj*, 91, 101-102.
41. Habibur Rahman, *The Emergence of Qatar, The Turbulent Years 1627-1916* (London: Kegan Paul, 2005), 76-77.
42. Zahlan, *Modern Gulf States*, 65.
43. Peck, *Gulf Arab States*, 38.
44. Zahlan, *Modern Gulf States*, 67.

45. Peck, *Gulf Arab States*, 39.
46. Zahlan, *Modern Gulf States*, 71.
47. *Ibid.*, 72.
48. Peck, *Gulf Arab States*, 39
49. Nadav Safran, *Saudi Arabia: The Ceaseless Quest for Security* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 379.
50. Zahlan, *Modern Gulf States*, 77.
51. *Ibid.*, 79.
52. Senior Bahraini official knowledgeable about political and reform issues.
53. Senior Kuwaiti political analyst.
54. Senior U.S. official knowledgeable about Bahraini security issues.
55. Senior Bahraini official knowledgeable about political and reform issues.
56. Sarah Strickler, "des Konigs Enstandte," *Vanity Fair*, German Edition, 5 June 2008, 16.
57. "Shias in the Gulf - Grumbling and rumbling," *The Economist*, 28 February 2009, 51-52.
58. Speech by the Iranian Minister of the Interior Sadeq Mahsouli at the Bahrain Security Conference and Exposition, 24 February 2009, Manama, Bahrain. Prior to speaking, Mahsouli and Iran were taken to task in a blistering speech by the Qatari General Secretary of the Gulf Cooperation Council Sheikh Abdul Rahman Bin Hamad Al Attiyah.
59. Senior Bahraini official knowledgeable about political and reform issues. This is most interesting because as earlier pointed out, it has been a message that Iranians have been putting out in several quarters. It is very much an undercurrent in the diplomatic communities of several Gulf Arab states. It appears that Tehran is pushing that story line in several different places simultaneously. There is some logic to this being a very good line for the Iranians to take in the Gulf. They do not want to become more isolated in their own back yard. The Iranians want to get some separation between the Gulf emirates and Washington; thus, exploiting Arab unhappiness and in some cases outright disillusionment with U.S. policy in Iraq and the fact that no one in the Gulf wants to see another conflict, the Iranians are using the attraction of conspiracy-theory politics in the region to create a sense of caution vis-à-vis Iran. In short, if the U.S. were making a deal, a Gulf Arab state would not want to be too vociferous in supporting the current confrontation policy only to have Washington pull the rug from under them with some secret arrangement.
60. Senior Bahraini official knowledgeable about Iran issues.
61. Peck, *Gulf Arab States*, 239.
62. Rahman, *Emergence of Qatar*, 82.
63. *Ibid.*, 240.
64. Zahlan, *Modern Gulf States*, 101.
65. Rahman, *Emergence of Qatar*, 226.

66. Peck, *Gulf Arab States*, 240.
67. Zahlan, *Modern Gulf States*, 102.
68. Peck, *Gulf Arab States*, 240.
69. Zahlan, *Modern Gulf States*, 104.
70. Peck, *Gulf Arab States*, 241.
71. Knights, *Troubled Waters*, 224
72. Senior U.S. official knowledgeable about Gulf emirate affairs.
73. Knights, *Troubled Waters*, 224.
74. Anthony Cordesman, *Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, and the UAE* (Boulder: The Westview Press, 1997), 227.
75. Senior Qatari official with detailed knowledge of defense policy.
76. Ambassador Chase Untermeyer, "Qatar's role in the Arabian Gulf" (presentation, Bilateral U.S.-Arab Chamber of Commerce—Opportunities in Qatar), Houston, Texas, 24 October 2008.
77. Senior U.S. official knowledgeable about Gulf emirate affairs.
78. Peck, *Gulf Arab States*, 249.
79. Zahlan, *Modern Gulf States*, 198.
80. Muhammad Morsy Abdullah, *The United Arab Emirates: A Modern History* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1978), 23-39.
81. Zahlan, *Modern Gulf States*, 109.
82. Ibid.
83. Major Clarence Mann, *Abu Dhabi: Birth of an Oil Sheikdom* (Beirut: Khayats, 1964), 52.
84. Zahlan, *Modern Gulf States*, 111.
85. Peck, *Gulf Arab States*, 194.
86. Ibid., 113.
87. Ibid., 115.
88. Senior U.S. official familiar with the structure of the internal security apparatus in the UAE.
89. "Khalifa committed to boosting performance of security forces," *Gulfnews.com* (17 September 2008); available from <http://archive.gulfnews.com/articles/08/09/17/10245673.html> (accessed 9 March 2009).
90. "Let's get real," *Economist*, 63.
91. Charles Saint-Prot, "EU-GCC Relations: The French Perspective," *France and the Arabian Gulf* (Abu Dhabi: The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 2007), 78.
92. Senior U.S. diplomat with extensive experience in Gulf policy.
93. Jumana Al Tamimi, "Iran must solve islands issue," *Gulfnews.com* (9 September 2008); available from <http://archive.gulfnews.com/articles/08/09/09/10243695.html> (accessed 9 March 2009). See also Simon Henerson, "The Persian Gulf's 'Occupied Territory': The Three-Island Dispute," *Policy Watch* (No. 1402,

- 8 September 2008, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy), 1-2 and Thomas R. Mattair, "Mutual Threat Perceptions in the Arab/Persian Gulf: GCC Perceptions," *Middle East Policy* (Summer 2007), 133-140.
94. Karen Attwood, "Iran told to remove Abu Musa buildings," *The National*, 17 August 2008, 4.
  95. Sami Moubayed, "Tehran feels an Arab sting," *Asia Times* (12 September 2008), 2; available from [www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle\\_East/JI12Ak04.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/JI12Ak04.html) (accessed 9 March 2009).
  96. UAE official intimately familiar with UAE foreign and economic policy goals, November 2008.
  97. Senior U.S. official familiar with the structure of the internal security apparatus in the UAE.
  98. Jeffery E. Garten, "Keep Your Rich Rivals Close," *Newsweek*, 18-25 August 2008, 45.
  99. Ambassador Yousef Al-Otaiba, UAE ambassador to the United States, and Ambassador Hamad Al-Kaabi, UAE permanent representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency, speech at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, D.C. on 14 January 2009.
  100. Senior UAE official intimately familiar with UAE foreign and economic policy goals, November 2008.
  101. "Abu Dhabi, Dubai at odds over lifestyle, Tehran ties," *Kuwait Times*, 18 August 2008, 1, 14. Available from [www.kuwaittimes.net/read\\_news.php?newsid=NzY4MzIxMDg0](http://www.kuwaittimes.net/read_news.php?newsid=NzY4MzIxMDg0) (accessed 9 March 2009).
  102. "The world's most utterly failed state," *Economist*, 4 October 2008, 49. Also available from [www.economist.com/world/mideast-africa/displayStory.cfm?source=hptextfeature&story\\_id=12342212](http://www.economist.com/world/mideast-africa/displayStory.cfm?source=hptextfeature&story_id=12342212) (accessed 9 March 2009).
  103. Christopher Davidson, "Dubai: The Security Dimension of the Region's Premier Free Port," *Middle East Policy* (Summer 2008, 15, 2; International Module), 143.
  104. "Dubai: Not-so-hot property," *The Economist*, 11 October 2008, 67. Also available from [www.economist.com/world/mideast-africa/displaystory.cfm?story\\_id=12381473](http://www.economist.com/world/mideast-africa/displaystory.cfm?story_id=12381473) (accessed 9 March 2009).
  105. "Qatar valuations scare off investors as Oman soars," *Kuwait Times*, 8 August 2008, 21. Also available from [www.kuwaittimes.net/read\\_news.php?newsid=MTYyNjQ2Njcz](http://www.kuwaittimes.net/read_news.php?newsid=MTYyNjQ2Njcz) (accessed 9 March 2009).
  106. "Dubai's bail-out—The Outstretched palm," *The Economist*, 28 February 2009, 78.
  107. Zvika Krieger, "Build It and They Will Learn," *Newsweek*, 18-25 August 2008, 49.
  108. "Like a bird leaving its nest," *The National*, 17 August 2008, 3. Available from [www.thenational.ae/article/20080816/PAGETHREE/391640358](http://www.thenational.ae/article/20080816/PAGETHREE/391640358) (accessed 9 March 2009).
  109. Scott MacLeod, "The Gulf: Giddy Heights," *Time International Edition*, 9 June 2008, 49.

110. "Oman set to get Qatar gas through Dolphin pipeline," *Gulfnews.com* (17 June 2008); available from <http://archive.gulfnews.com/articles/08/06/17/10221551.html> (accessed 9 March 2009).
111. MacLeod, "The Gulf: Giddy Heights," *Time*, 49.
112. J.B. Kelly, *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1795-1880* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1968), 5-7.
113. Zahlan, *Modern Gulf States*, 125.
114. Kelley, *Britain and the Persian Gulf*, 9. While the Kharajites were and are more theologically akin to the Sunni, historically the Kharajites were the allies of the Caliph Ali and the party of Ali, the Shi'a, in their opposition to Qurayshi and Umayyad rule. It was a Kharajite ally of Ali that killed him because he was willing to negotiate with the Umayyad. It should also be noted that Oman maintains perhaps the best relations with Iran of any of the Gulf states.
115. Richard F. Nyrop, *Area Handbook for the Persian Gulf States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1977), 343.
116. *Ibid.*
117. Peck, *Gulf Arab States*, 215. Ras al-Kaimah and Sharjah are two of the seven emirates that comprise the United Arab Emirates or Trucial States. They were dominated by the Qawasim tribal grouping, and their power was sea-based. It was Qawasim activities in the Gulf and Indian Ocean that provoked the British to extend their control in the Arabian Gulf in the early 19th century.
118. Phillips, *Oman*, 175.
119. Cordesman, *Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, and the UAE*, 123.
120. Peck, *Gulf Arab States*, 216.
121. Zahlan, *Modern Gulf States*, 130.
122. Peck, *Gulf Arab States*, 217.
123. *Ibid.*, 218.
124. Zahlan, *Modern Gulf States*, 132.
125. Cordesman, *Bahrain, Qatar, Oman and the UAE*, 132.
126. *Ibid.*, 130.
127. Judith Miller, "Creating Modern Oman," *Foreign Affairs* (May/June 1997), 14. The reference to the "third faction" or pragmatists is undoubtedly a reference to those allied with Rafsanjani who opposed confrontational politics and prefer to build Iran into the economic power of the Gulf with an economy that functions independently of oil subsidies and good relations with the West, Russia, and China.
128. "Oman set to get Qatar gas through Dolphin pipeline," *Gulfnews.com* (17 June 2008).
129. Duraid Al Baik, "East-west channel being planned for UAE oil exports," *Gulfnews.com* (23 September 2008); available from <http://archive.gulfnews.com/articles/08/09/23/10247125.html> (accessed 9 March 2009).
130. Metz, ed., *Persian Gulf States*, 306.

131. Sultan Qaboos, *Basic Law*, 1996. The source was Articles 5 and 6 of the Basic Law with a commentary on the Defense Council and succession by a senior U.S. Government official with a detailed knowledge of the succession issue in Oman.
132. Miller, "Creating Modern Oman," 17.
133. Mark N. Katz, "Assessing the Political Stability of Oman," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 8, No. 3 (September 2004), 3.
134. "Saudi Arabia: Can it make peace in the wider region?" *The Economist*, 11 October 2008, 65. Also available from [www.economist.com/world/mideast-africa/display-story.cfm?story\\_id=12380962](http://www.economist.com/world/mideast-africa/display-story.cfm?story_id=12380962) (accessed 9 March 2008).
135. Madawi al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 17.
136. John L. Esposito, ed., *The Oxford History of Islam* (Oxford: The Oxford University Press, 1999), 114.
137. Al-Raheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 19.
138. J. E. Peterson, *Historical Dictionary of Saudi Arabia*, 7.
139. Al-Rahseed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 26.
140. *Ibid.*, 41.
141. *Ibid.*, 43.
142. *Ibid.*, 46.
143. "Letter from British Embassy Amman (Johnston) to FO (Hadow), 30 October 1958," PRO, FO371/134021. Johnston believed that British Embassy in Washington and the Foreign Office were too affected by U.S. pessimism regarding traditional regimes and tended to overlook Washington's infatuation with Nasser.
144. Safran, *Saudi Arabia: The Ceaseless Quest for Security*, 161.
145. Prince Sultan ibn Abd-al-Aziz ibn Saud, Minister of Defense and Aviation, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (interview, BBC, September 2006).
146. *Pillar policy* is a term used to describe the specific U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East that emerged during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. Particularly during the Johnson administration, the Vietnam War and the British decision to withdraw East of Suez brought a reassessment of U.S. commitments. It was determined between 1962 and 1968 that the U.S. would focus on supporting key allies in the region as opposed to pursuing a broad policy of engagement there. The key allies were Israel, Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia—the odd quartet.
147. Senior Arab Gulf official knowledgeable about U.S.-Saudi Arabia relations and security affairs.
148. *Ibid.*
149. Former senior official in Iraqi government knowledgeable about attitudes at the senior level within the Iraqi government.
150. Senior Arab Gulf official knowledgeable about U.S.-Saudi Arabia relations and security affairs. Questions about the intent of the U.S. to replace Saudi Arabia with Iran as the principle U.S. ally in the region could very well be the result of

another Iranian disinformation effort in the Gulf. Officials in Washington may view the entire question as nonsense, but given the levels of concern about U.S. policy, the propensity for conspiracy theories to flourish in the Gulf and the pre-1979 history of U.S.-Iranian relations gives the Arab states pause for thought. It does not have to be true to have an impact.

151. Christopher Boucek, "Saudi Arabia's 'Soft' Counterterrorism Strategy: Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare," *Carnegie Papers* (Washington, D.C.: Middle East Program – Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 97, September 2008), 3-6. Available from [www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=22155&prog=zgp&proj=zme](http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=22155&prog=zgp&proj=zme) (accessed 9 March 2009).
152. *Ibid.*, 21.
153. Joseph A. Kechichian, "Affirming the Saudi Will to Power: Domestic Challenges to King Abdullah," *Policy Brief* (Washington, D.C.: Middle East Institute – Web Publication, No. 16, June 2008), 2. Available from [www.mideasti.org/policy-brief/affirming-saudi-will-power-domestic-challenges-king-%E2%80%98abdullah](http://www.mideasti.org/policy-brief/affirming-saudi-will-power-domestic-challenges-king-%E2%80%98abdullah) (accessed 9 March 2009).
154. *Ibid.*
155. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
156. Senior U.S. military officer involved in contingency planning for Saudi Arabia.
157. "Telegram from Governor of Aden, Sir Charles Johnston, to CO, Secretary of State for the Colonies," 15 February 1963, PRO CO1055/3, 1-3.
158. Senior U.S. Diplomat highly knowledgeable about Saudi Arabian affairs.
159. Speech by the Iranian Minister of the Interior Sadeq Mahsouli at the Bahrain Security Conference and Exposition, 24 February 2009, Manama, Bahrain.
160. Cordesman, *Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, and the UAE*, 131.
161. During the course of a month-long trip to the region in February and March 2009 senior Arabs officials in the region time and again reiterated this theme of expanding Iranian influence fueled by Iraq and the Palestinian issue.
162. In over a score of meetings with senior Gulf Arab politicians, government officials, and analysts during February and March 2009, this concern about U.S. rapprochement with Iran was a recurring theme. Most believe that real progress or compromise on the Iranian's part is unlikely and that discussions with the U.S. will merely be used by the Iranians to increase their influence and political leverage in the Gulf.



