

THE GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL: PAST AND FUTURE  
OF THE GCC SECURITY POLICIES

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The origin of the GCC

In March 1903 a Royal Navy Vessel, HMS "Sphinx", sailed through the Gulf monitoring the movements in the area of the then allied French and Russian warships. Once in Kuwait the commander of the Sphinx was informed by Abdul Aziz ibn Feisal al-Saud (the founder of modern Saudi Arabia) that he had been promised "assistance in the shape of rifles and money" by the Russian consul of Bushire (1). This report to the British was not an act of deference on the part of the Saudi leader; it was a deliberate attempt to acquire a bargaining chip to secure that British assistance be recognised as necessary to the consolidation and further expansion of his newly reborn reign.

In nearly a century many things have changed on the world stage and in the Gulf, but the way local actors perceive their relationship with the outside powers hasn't changed that much. They are still preoccupied with the survival, stability and development of their states and, while trying to pursue these basic national goals with their own forces and methods, they recognise that there are limits to what they can achieve alone.

On May 26th, 1981, the heads of the six Gulf monarchies (Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrein, Qatar, United Arab Emirates and Oman) assembled in Abu Dhabi declared the establishment of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The basic objective of the GCC, stated in article 4 of its charter, is "To effect coordination, integration and cooperation between member states in all fields in order to achieve unity among them" (2). Security, defence and common foreign policy are not included among the fields of cooperation explicitly mentioned in the charter. These exclusions are not accidental and easily recall the example of the EEC, on which the GCC has modelled its organisational structure (3). This reticence about what have been the GCC's most visible areas of concern is only in part the reflection of the existing divergences and constraints. It is also the expression of a common understanding of the fact that - in the ultimate analysis - the real guarantee for the stability of the six member states and the regimes that rule them, lies in the achievement of a sound socio-economic development. Therefore, the primacy of economic and social policies professed by the GCC is not a mere facade. The legitimacy of the GCC towards the Gulf people rests on its being instrumental to the fundamental development endeavour. The importance of economic and cultural cooperation for the cohesiveness of the GCC is a fact that should not be overlooked, even if this article will confine its analysis to the GCC activity in the security sphere (4).

The moves towards integration among the six members date back to the early 60's, but political integration began to be seriously searched for only on the eve of the British withdrawal from the Gulf (1971). Throughout the 1970's the growing economic cooperation among the oil-rich Gulf countries led to the establishment of a web of economic institutions variously interconnecting the Six to both Iran and Iraq (5). When Iran and Iraq seemed to have settled their dispute over the Shatt Al-Arab with the 1975 Algier agreement, an attempt was

made to develop a Gulf collective security framework. However, the comprehensive mutual defence alliance proposed by Iran at the first conference (Muscat, November 1976) of the Gulf foreign ministers was rejected on various grounds. Nor was the much similar proposal embodied in the "National Charter" that Iraq presented to all Arab countries - but especially to its Arab Gulf neighbours - in February 1980 (6). Therefore, in spite of all these precedents, a coordinated and comprehensive integration thrust among the six states of the lower Gulf did not take off before 1981 and the establishment of the GCC. It was the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war in September 1980 that speeded up the already ongoing coordination process among these countries. The reason why the war had this catalyst effect is twofold: on one side the war temporarily put Iran and Iraq out of play as partners to any joint Gulf enterprise, thus enabling the six monarchies to concentrate on their common ground without having to defer to the pressures and enticements of their bigger Gulf brothers. On the other hand, the war undoubtedly pressed on the Six a stronger perception of the ample spectrum of threats they have to face, persuading them - in spite of all inter-cine rivalries - to try to join their forces.

### The internal threats

The spectrum of threats that faces the six GCC countries ranges from low-intensity internal disturbances to full-scale war. Low intensity threats are represented by: riots, terrorist attacks and isolated acts of violence stemming from political dissent and minority group grievances. Political dissent includes criticism or open rejection of the legitimacy in Islamic terms of the ruling regimes, as well as dissatisfaction with the pattern and pace of the state development policies. As for minorities, in the Gulf they are both indigenous and imported. The former include groups based on traditional regional/tribal affiliation (like the Dhofaris of Oman, or the Utayba, Qahtan and Harb Saudi tribes, several members of which took part in the occupation of the Great Mosque of Mecca in 1979), or religious creed (like the many Shiite communities scattered in all the GCC countries, where they represent a percentage of the native population ranging from the 75% of Bahrein to the XX of Saudi Arabia). The imported communities are made up of expatriate workers and can be divided into four categories according to provenance and position held: 1) non-Gulf Arabs (mainly, but not exclusively, Egyptians, Jordanians and Palestinians), 2) Indo-Pakistanis, 3) Southeastern Asians, 4) Westerners. Categories 1 and 4 hold important positions in sensitive areas (public administration, finance, management, oil industry), while categories 2 and 3 are mostly employed in services at the lowest ranks (but part of the Pakistani - especially in Saudi Arabia, Oman and UAE - are military personnel). Arab expatriates constitute one of the sources of spillover from the main Arab conflicts into the Gulf societies; Indians and South East Asians over the past years have protested their conditions of work through individual and mass protests; in the case of an emergency, Westerners' continuance in their duties can be questioned. Indigenous and imported minorities have little in common but for the fact that all may have reasons to express (and actually have over the last ten years) their grievances against the hosting countries and are therefore resented as potential threats to internal security. Facing this series of internal sources of trouble is extremely complicated by what has been defined as (external) "manipulative mobilisation" (7): i.e. the instigation from outside of domestically rooted protest through the manipulation of symbols and values common to both internal and external political action. This

immediately brings to mind the so-called exportation of the Iranian revolution, that actually fuelled the protest of the Gulf Shiite communities on several occasions (8). But it should be borne in mind that manipulative mobilisation is by no means a new phenomenon in the Gulf: in the 60's Nasser made heard its first Arab nationalist gospel by all means available (from radio broadcasting to military intervention in Kuwait and Yemen), while in the 70's this role was taken over by Iraq. The effectiveness of this means of influence in the Arab world has much to do with the special role ideology played and still plays in the Arab-Islamic culture. However, the most important single contribution of the Gulf monarchies to inter-Arab politics in recent years is the strengthening of that drive for pragmatic, development oriented policies that has emerged on the Arab scene since 1973. This is not to say that subversion from outside is a threat to be taken lightly by the GCC countries (and there is no shortage of continuously up-coming events to stress this point). What is meant here is that this threat is not new, and the GCC countries are as well equipped as possible to face it.

#### Internal security cooperation

The range of low intensity internal threats described above affects all the GCC countries, even if the likelihood of the different subtypes (social, religious or tribal protest) varies according to each national situation. To this kind of threat the GCC countries have responded individually by strengthening national security mechanisms through both positive and negative actions. Positive actions comprise all measures aimed at easing internal dissent (from political liberalisation, to public castigation of corruption and concessions to the islamic fundamentalists) and the reorganisation of the police, security bodies and armed forces. Negative actions include a series of restrictions on the freedom of expression and assembly (whenever previously existing), and the revision of the naturalisation and residence laws. At the collective level internal threats have been countered by systematic transnational coordination. The GCC internal security cooperation (ISC) consists of a continuous exchange of data on the presence and activities of expatriates and present and potential opponents of the regimes in the various member countries. Surveillance data, especially concerning travel, is centrally stored in a data bank in Saudi Arabia fed by routine intra-GCC exchange. Lacking a multilateral ISC agreement, this cooperation is regulated by the security department of the Political Affairs Section (up to now always chaired by an Qmani official) of the GCC General Secretariat. The conclusion of a collective ISC agreement has been pressed for by Saudi Arabia since 1980 (before the establishment of the GCC), but has been resisted up to today by Kuwait on the grounds that some provisions (especially cross border "hot pursuit" and extradition) would infringe Kuwait's more liberal national laws. Notwithstanding this lack of formalisation, the comments gathered from Gulf diplomats prove that all member states are satisfied with the existing GCC internal security cooperation. In several occasions this cooperation has made possible the prevention of serious attacks (for example the 1981 attempted coup in Bahrein). Lately the chances for an ISC joint agreement seem to have increased, especially because of the disappearance in July 1986 of its strongest opponent: the Kuwaiti Parliament (9).

#### Military threats and GCC doctrine on external defence

At present, the most immediate and visible military threats to the GCC states come from within the Gulf system and more specifically from Iran in the context

of the Iran-Iraq war. Nevertheless, the GCC countries are exposed - at least theoretically - to a larger range of military threats. The worst of the possible threats come from an East/West open conflict where the two sides strive to interdict to the other the use of Middle East oil. Possible versions of this rather unlikely but catastrophic scenario could see a Soviet land invasion of the Gulf through Iran, or an Israeli invasion of the Arabian peninsula through Jordan - in both cases the aim being the control of the Gulf oilfields. The occurrence of this kind of extreme contingency is almost independent from any regional development: there is nothing that the GCC countries individually or collectively can do to counter it at the military level. On the contrary, all the remaining military threats can be at least partially faced by an effective military cooperation among the GCC countries. To the west of the Arabian Peninsula lies the Horn of Africa, an important although often neglected segment of the South Eastern "arc of crisis". The states of the western shore of the Red Sea (Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia and Somalia) have all antagonised or caused troubles to Saudi Arabia in modern times. At present, none of these countries have the political incentives or the military capabilities to mount a land attack on the Peninsula. Nevertheless, the Red Sea has recently assumed additional significance for the Gulf system with the completion in 1985 of the line connecting Iraq to the main Saudi pipeline to Yanbu. Disruption of traffic in the Red Sea - caused for instance by Ethiopia or South Yemen in connection with an intensification of local conflicts - would seriously damage Saudi Arabia. Therefore, the GCC needs to maintain a moderate capacity of surveillance, air coverage and naval capability on its Western flank: Saudi Arabia has already begun to develop these assets. The conceivable threat from the south comes from within the Peninsula in the form of border clashes with South Yemen or internal insurgences in North Yemen and Oman. At the military level the danger represented by South Yemen, alone or in combination with Ethiopia, is moderate (all the GCC strategic targets are out of reach of PDYR air power), while at the political level the destabilising effect on Oman and Saudi Arabia of a hostile unified Yemen or even of a reignition of the Dhofar rebellion could be serious. Here again a modest military capacity is sufficient to check any likely threat. What is really needed is a wiser regional policy that could lessen, it not eliminate, local roots of conflict and diminish the risks of their intersection with East/West competition (10). The only conceivable threat from the North is represented by Israel. It is hard to conceive plausible aims for an overland Israeli attack on the Peninsula excluding an East/West scenario. However, demonstrative air strikes could be used by Israel to "punish" or warn the GCC states, although it must be noted that only Saudi Arabia and Kuwait lie within the range suitable for a sustained Israeli air activity/action. In fact, from Lebanon to Bagdad and Tunis, Israel has proved to be militarily able and politically willing to perform this kind of air raid regardless of international laws, and over the last years has harassed Saudi Arabia with repeated violations of its airspace. Consequently, the common ties with the US are not seen by Saudi Arabia as an alternative to independent defence capabilities on the Northern front (11). Nevertheless, the more serious and likely military threats to the GCC states come from the East, more specifically from Iran and Iraq. Iraq constitutes the physical shield of the Peninsula since only the fall of Basra would make possible an overland invasion from Iran. But Iran does not need to invade Kuwait or Saudi Arabia to compel or deter militarily the GCC countries: all their strategic targets are within air reach from Iran and Teheran can easily contend the control of the Gulf waterways to the littoral states. While Iraq may constitute a protection from Iran, it represents a menace in itself for the

Northern GCC states both by its location and by its historical record. Iraq has already tried to redesign its Southern border at the expenses of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait's outlets to the sea and contiguous oilfields have an obvious appeal to Baghdad. Consequently, while at present Iran and Iraq pose a military threat to the GCC states only as a reflection of their ongoing war in any foreseeable future the GCC has to plan its defenses so as to deter both its bigger neighbours. Nevertheless, it must be said clearly that, however the GCC states may develop their military capabilities individually and collectively, they cannot hope to match that sheer power of size, population and resources that Iran and Iraq possess. What they can and are trying to do is to build their collective and national assets so as to provide a military deterrent sufficient to make any direct confrontation as costly as possible to their adversaries. It is in this deterrent role that lies the ultimate rationale for any GCC defense cooperation (DC). Nevertheless, leaving aside for the moment social, economic and military problems, there still remains a host of political problems to hamper the development of an effective GCC DC. First of all, not all the member countries are affected by all the threats delineated above. On the contrary, Saudi Arabia alone is exposed on all fronts, and while Kuwait and Oman may expect attacks from without the Gulf (respectively, from North and South), the remaining three members (Bahrein, Qatar and the UAE) are exposed exclusively to the threats coming from within the Gulf. Even shared threats do not weight alike on the countries affected. Oman may be concerned by a strong alliance between marxist PDYR and "socialist" Ethiopia, but Saudi Arabia would be much more affected because of its stronger stakes in Afro-Arab politics and its dependence from the Red Sea traffic. GCC states not directly confronted with a specific threat obviously prefer to insulate themselves from possible spill overs. In the same time, all of them are bound to cooperate with Saudi Arabia that alone possesses the military assets necessary to face the threats coming from the Gulf. But it is exactly the alliance with Saudi Arabia that connects the smaller GCC states to a wider spectrum of threats. The factors delineated above induce important differences among the GCC countries in the political perceptions of the existing military threats. Coupled with the significant discrepancy in military potentialities among the member countries, these differences are inevitably translated into a different level of dedication to the development of a GCC policy of defence cooperation.

These inherent contradictions have been put into shade at least partially and temporarily - by the polarization of the GCC defence activity on the Gulf front caused by the Iran-Iraq war. In this respect a GCC "doctrine" on external defence has progressively been developed. The 1981 first official communique' of the Supreme Council outlined the core of the GCC doctrine. It was a declaration of self-reliance; responsibility for the security of the Gulf was to rest on the regional countries. This position represented the result of a long internal debate and a signal to the outside world. Kuwait's long dated preference for non alignment had prevailed over Omani perception of Gulf security as necessarily linked to the West (since 1978 Oman had proposed plans for a regional defense pact linked to the US). Through this doctrine a non-confrontational signal was sent to Iran, while temporarily conveying a message to the US who had previously been offering a too intrusive kind of protection (namely requiring basing rights). In the following years the GCC doctrine was refined in tune with external and internal development; the more significant specifications are: 1) an attack on one member country would be faced as an attack on all (1982); 2) the six member countries take the responsibility for defending their territories, air spaces and territorial waters to the exclusion of any foreign intervention (1984); 3) beyond the six

country borders, on sea and land, the GCC may have interests but no exclusive responsibility: the protection of the traffic in the Gulf international waterways rests with the international community as well (1986). From the point of view of this doctrine the military actions taken by the GCC countries since 1981 (see below) and the Kuwaiti request of protection of its shipment from the 5 permanent members of the UN security Council (put forward in December 1986) are perfectly justified.

#### Defense cooperation: Programs, performances and obstacles

To implement its doctrine on external defence the GCC has developed a series of programs in the military sphere, which is supervised by an ad hoc structure. The GCC military affairs comprises a decisional branch and an executive one. At the bottom of the decisional line there is the committee formed by the chiefs of staff that since September 1981 met at least once a year. The recommendations of the committee are submitted to the Ministers of Defense that meet annually (sometimes together with their Foreign Affairs colleagues) to define the guidelines of defense cooperation. However, on this as on the other fields of GCC activity, the final say pertains to the Supreme Council composed by the six heads of state. The executive and support role is performed by the Military Committee of the GCC General Secretariat. The Military Committee - chaired by the Saudi Brigadier General Yusuf Mohammed Al-Madani - is assisted in its work by three departments: 1) Joint Activities, 2) Education and Training, 3) Armed Forces. Attached to each department are three functional subsections (12) that together cover all the ground of the GCC defense cooperation. The sensitive area of ideological orientation is covered by a special unit located in Kuwait that implements the recommendations of the directors for "Moral Guidance" of the various national armies (13).

For the sake of analysis the GCC military programs can be divided into long term actions and medium to short term ones. Long term programs aim to strengthen the GCC capability of sustaining war and diminish its dependence from the outside for: weapon systems and military equipment, military advisors and combat forces. Since January 1982 the GCC defense ministers have agreed to pursue these goals through three distinct sets of actions: 1) a coordinated arms procurement policy; 2) the development of a GCC military industry; 3) an improved autonomous capacity for military training. At present the GCC states are equipped with American, Brazilian, British, Chinese, French, German, Italian, Swiss and Soviet (Kuwait) arms. This diversification of weapons and equipment seriously hinders joint operations, effective command and control and the transfer of spare parts and ammunition. At the January 1982 ministerial meeting the principle of a coordinated arms policy was accepted but the idea of a complete arms standardization was rejected - by the Saudis - on the grounds that it would make the GCC "dependent on a single source". At the III GCC summit (Manama, November 1982) a call for a broader military cooperation was explicitly mentioned for the first time and an informal agreement was reached on a policy of compatibility rather than commonality in military procurement. However, since 1982 full-scale coordination of procurement remained more a goal than a reality. While some joint efforts have materialized (see, for instance, what is said below on joint air defense), major systems have still been purchased uncoordinately. In the field of fighter aircraft diversification still prevails in spite of a common program aired in 1984. The initial plan that at least four countries (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrein and the UAE) would

by the F-16 was hampered by the restrictions imposed by the US fighter export that gives different clearance status to the various GCC countries. When in 1985 Saudi Arabia cancelled a deal to buy additional 40 F-15's (it intended to deploy part of them at its northern base of Tabuk and it was requested to guarantee they wouldn't be used against Israel), it seemed for a while that either the European Tornado or the French Mirage 2000 were likely to become the common GCC fighter. But then Saudi Arabia and Oman decided for the Tornado, Bahrein chose the F-4 (waiting for the F-16) and the UAE ordered 38 Mirage 2000, while Qatar and Kuwait stayed with their Mirage F-1's. The blame for this discrepancy in the GCC arms procurement policy between asserted goals and actual behavior must be equally shared by the smaller sheikhdoms- that still put prestige before effectiveness - and the GCC Western partners. The difficulties that Arab countries encounter in the purchase of sophisticated US arms, largely due to pro-Israeli lobbying in the Congress, have caused many GCC and other Arab countries to look elsewhere for reliable suppliers. For their part European suppliers compete harshly for their share of the Arab arms market, a fact that does not contribute to the rationality of the arms procurement planning of these countries. In this respect the development of a GCC arms industry would provide more independence and continuity. A first step in this direction could be to revive the Arab Military Industrialization Organization that before 1979 was taking off to match Gulf investments to the Egyptian industrial base. Egypt is eager to regain this role for economic and political reasons, however also Iraq, Jordan, Turkey and Pakistan have put forward their candidature. Up to now, political as well as practical obstacles have hindered any real progress to this end; nevertheless, in May 1983 the GCC Defense Ministers agreed to fund extensive feasibility studies of the various alternatives. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia is developing its own capacity in arms production, manufacturing light equipment and assembling under license. The Kingdom is also engineering joint ventures with Brazil, Turkey and West Germany for bilateral and triangular productions inside and outside the country. Saudi Arabia is therefore likely to become the cornerstone of a joint GCC arms industry that, unlike its Egyptian predecessor, will have part of the production taking place in the Peninsula itself (14). Finally, long term GCC military plans include the improvement and harmonization of training. To this end common curricula are being developed and nationals from all the GCC countries will be trained in three military colleges: the King Feisal college in Saudi Arabia, the Zayed the Second College in the UAE and the Kuwait Military College.

Coordination and a more rational exploitation of existing national assets are the medium to short term GCC goals in the military sphere. The development of a collective air defense system and the operational integration of national armies through joint manoeuvres are the areas in which GCC defense cooperation is more advanced. Planning for an integrated air defense began in January 1982 and has been specially advocated by the Saudis whose existing assets are the backbone of any present and future air defense system for the Peninsula. However, the development of an integrated system has been slowed down for political reasons- in fact, the establishment of such a system would be tantamount to make the GCC heavily dependent on the Saudis and the US: just the kind of domination that the smaller GCC states fear most. In effect, the C31 of the integrated air defense system would be centered around the five E3A AWACS aircraft delivered by the US to Saudi Arabia in 1986. This causes some concerns: since the Saudi AWACS provide intelligence for the US forces rating in the Gulf (as proved by the events of summer 1987 described below) it could become difficult to distinguish between local and US military responsibilities, 2) under the US-Saudi agreement attached to the controversial AWACS sale, any use by other states of the intelligence gathered by the surveillance aircraft requires US approval - thus making any GCC cooperation in this field dependent on the US; 3) finally, the AWACS themselves will be operated by mixed US-Saudi

so that, in practice any GCC air activity would be monitored by the US. In addition to that, the improvement of the national air defense capabilities will heavily rely on US sales of interceptor aircraft, surface-to-air missiles, radar, and communication equipment. Definite steps in this direction have already been made: US Hawk SAM's, already deployed in Saudi Arabia and Bahrein are on order for the UAE and Kuwait may adopt them too. The upgrading of the existing radar and early warning systems is being made with an eye to future integration: Bahrein installed in 1982 a Westinghouse radar of the same Tipsy series used in Saudi Arabia; the components of the US Lambda system, that will provide the UAE with early warning and electronic warfare capabilities, are explicitly designed to be eventually plugged into the Saudi C3I network to which Kuwait's Thomson radars and SAM's could also be connected. The central piece of this integrated air defense will be the Peace Shield C3I/BM system presently under development in Saudi Arabia (16). The Omani air defense, mostly composed of British equipment, is to be upgraded to fit into this developing network; to this end the GCC Military Committee allocated in March 1982 1.8 billion of USD for Omani military purchases over a 12-years period (an indefinite sum went to Bahrein for the same purpose) (17).

Even before the establishment of the GCC the member countries were staging bilateral military exercises. These joint manoeuvres have increased in scope and number since 1983, when the first exercises involving all member countries were held in the UAE. To present, naval and air manoeuvres are still mostly bilateral while land joint exercises have given birth to the GCC Rapid Development Force codenamed Peninsula Shield. The creation of this force has openly been advocated since the attempted coup in Bahrein in December 1981. But this force, too, has encountered political obstacles concerning the definition of its nature and mission. The Peninsula Shield is meant to be the first repellent of any external land aggression, a sort of shock absorber. But the rejection of the Saudi proposal to have it split in two nuclei - one at its NE border, one at the SW one - underlined the other members' unwillingness to engage themselves in other than on the Gulf front. Even on this front some members try to avoid being automatically drawn into conflict. This is the meaning of the refusal to make out of the Peninsula Shield a permanent force. The refusal has been clearly expressed by Oman alone on the grounds that such an arrangement would have a provocative effect on Iran and a negative one on Omani internal security and military readiness. Another reason for the lack of enthusiasm toward the GCC-RDF is, again, the fear of Saudi domination. Kuwait, Oman and the UAE have balked at putting this RDF under permanent Saudi command and proposed that when the force enters one member's territory the command structure reverts to that of the host country (a provision intended to prevent the use of the force to intervene in internal conflicts). At present the force is stationed at King Khaled Military city (at Hafr al-Batin, near the Saudi-Kuwaiti border) and is composed of nearly two brigades, mostly Saudi but including two Kuwaiti battallions (one armoured). The other countries participate only with token forces mostly made up of liaison officers, while other -indefinite- national forces are "earmarked" to the RDF. Obviously, the future of the force is still uncertain and depends on inter-GCC and regional political evolution.

Little can be said today on the effectiveness of an eventual joint military action: one can only infer on the basis of past performances, with the caveat that since 1981 military actions involving the GCC have been taken only



a national or bilateral basis. From the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war until summer 1987 only Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have been involved in military actions. Both states opened fire against intruding Iranian aircrafts, but only Saudi Arabia acknowledged to have downed one F-4 Phantom on June 5, 1984. Kuwait's air defense has been supported by full sharing of the intelligence gathered by Saudi AWACS at least since end 1983 (18). Finally, the GCC-RDF was dispatched from Hafr al-Batin to Kuwait on March 3, 1986 at the climax of that successful offensive that brought to the Iranian occupation of the peninsula of Fa'o. During summer 1987 the GCC countries have been obliged to take additional military steps in response to the worsening of the Gulf situation caused by the chain of events triggered by the Iraqi attack on the US frigate Stark. At 9 pm of May 17 an AWACS manned by a mixed US-Saudi crew was on a routine mission without air cover when it tracked an aircraft coming south from Iraq and later identified as a Mirage F-1. It monitored the aircraft's sharp turn towards the Stark and the streak of its Exocet closing on the US frigate. At this point the AWACS commander asked fighter protection from the Riyadh airbase and requested the two F-15's that were immediately scrambled to intercept the F-1. The Saudi pilots radioed back that they were following the Mirage but needed an explicit order from their commander to intercept it. The order never came and the F-15's abandoned their chase after reaching the Saudi airspace limit. Pentagon sources acknowledged in the aftermath that the Saudis were not obliged under standing agreements to respond to an attack on US forces (19). It is still unclear whether or if the Saudi chain of command was too slow to react at all. Nevertheless, the episode shows a reality, however impalatable to the American minds it may be. The Saudi reaction was militarily efficient and politically coherent with the mission of defending the Saudi territory, the GCC doctrine and the existing international agreements. The other less dramatic military actions taken by the GCC countries in the following months conform to this same line. There have been contrasting reports on the GCC cooperation to the success of the US mission of escort to the reflagged Kuwaiti tankers. However it is clear that the GCC countries have agreed to: 1) the enlargement to the south of the Saudi AWACS surveillance in order to cover the route of the escorted convoys; 2) the provision in case of emergency of basic facilities to the US forces (medical services, water and fuel); 3) the minesweeping of the GCC territorial waters in connection with the US. In spite of all polemics, these actions have been performed efficiently enough to deserve the appreciation of the US defense secretary (20).

On the contrary, existing reports on the efficiency of the GCC forces acting jointly on the combat ground are not encouraging (21); but it would be unreasonable to expect too much collectively from forces that even taken individually are still in their youth. Given an unequivocal dedication of time, money and political will most of the problems of military inadequacy that now face the GCC could probably be either overcome or significantly lessened. As hinted above, four broad sets of problems affect the development of the GCC military potentialities. Economic problems rest on the dramatic dependence of the Gulf budgets on oil revenues. While it is hazardous to predict the future of oil prices, it is already clear that the end of a prolonged period of stable high prices forced the GCC countries to rethink their commitments; uncertainty over the resources available inevitably affects the continuity of the military modernization effort. The socio-cultural problems of the GCC armed forces are no less important and mirror those of their societies at large. These armies have born out as quasi-personal military forces devoted to tribal chiefs and this origin is still full of implications. The more evident

inheritance is that the GCC military potential is fragmented not only into national armies but also within them. The armies of the United Arab Emirates were formally merged in 1976 but in fact still maintain a degree of independence (especially those of Dhoha and Dubai); at the same time, the special forces that in every country are devoted to the protection of the ruling family often constitute distinct armies within the army (as in the case of the 10,000 men strong Saudi National Guard). Moreover the traditional allegiance to the leader reflects itself on over-centralization of decision making, lack of independent initiative and politicization in the promotion process. Still in the socio-cultural area, a traditional distaste for manual work handicaps the military career in the eyes of Gulf nationals. In any case the GCC countries are afflicted not only by a shortage of educated native personnel in every field, but by the very narrowness of their demographic base. This demographic shortage is compensated in the military as in the civilian field by foreign contract personnel. No reliable figures are available on the size of foreign military personnel in Bahrein, Kuwait and Qatar, while foreigners represent roughly one sixth of the armed forces in Oman and Saudi Arabia and one third in the UAE (22). Foreign military personnel is present at every level from skilled cadre to senior command officers; non-Westerners include Jordanians, Moroccans and Pakistanis, while Westerners are mostly British, French and US citizens. Obviously, this huge presence of foreigners pose problems of dependability in wartime and of independence in peacetime. Given the prevalence of the air and naval dimension in the military threats facing the GCC, these countries must develop a strategy based on inferior numbers and the compensating use of air power, anti-aircraft missiles and modern naval warfare. This strategy requires to concentrate on a not easy absorption of highly technological capabilities that leave no room for local warfare traditions. To that must be added the continuous evolution of military technology that forces the GCC armies to a rate of innovation as high as 20 percent annually (23).

Summing up, GCC military cooperation cannot be dismissed as just wishful thinking: progress toward joint air defense, arms interoperability and joint military operativeness have been made. Even under the best conditions it will take a long time before these steps materialize into a coherent GCC collective defense. However, the real question is whether the GCC itself will survive long enough to reap the benefits of its developing policies, of which defense cooperation is just one aspect.

## Conclusions

From the point of view of Gulf security the GCC represents just one of the possible configurations. In modern times the Gulf area has experienced a security system, the "pax britannica", that was able to guarantee stability to the area until 1970. Then the US took over but created an unstable system based on the "twin pillars" policy, i.e. on the presumed complementary role of Iran and Saudi Arabia. The effects of the Shah's unchecked ambitions is notorious, the way was paved to the Iranian revolution and a regional arms race. The Iran-Iraq war artificially created the environment in which Saudi Arabia could pool the common needs and concerns of the present GCC members in spite of their divergences. At present, these internal contradictions are not so deep as to threaten the survival of the organization. On the contrary, the slow but steady

implementation since 1983 of the Unified Economic Agreement has progressively smoothed away existing conflicts of interest. The traditional territorial and dynastic quarrels have found in the GCC Commission for the Settlement of Disputes an effective mediation instrument at the internal and regional level (24). Saudi Arabia has been keen to relieve that fear of domination seldom aired but strongly felt by the other five members. Facts show that all members, and especially Kuwait and Oman, have shared GCC policies and key decisions—often against Saudi's own position. The real challenge to the GCC paradoxically comes from peace, from the way the Iran-Iraq war will finally end. Both countries, if clearly victorious, would endanger the survival of the GCC because their renewed regional ambitions simply could not tolerate the existence of an independent political will in the same area. From the outbreak of the war Iraq has claimed that it was fighting for the defense of the Peninsula countries; if it wins, they cannot but accommodate its requests. Iraq may not renew its territorial claims on the GCC, but even the request to reshape the GCC economic cooperation to allow Iraqi participation would be tantamount to destroy the Council as it is now. An Iranian clear victory on the battle ground is likely to come about with a breakthrough in Southern Iraq that would cause a dramatic dilemma to neighbour countries: a military intervention of Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia or a dismemberment of Iraq would alter so deeply the regional balance that even a GCC that survives such an earthquake would have to change its perspective and role. Even a victory brought about by a violent change of regime in Baghdad would leave Iran too strong for the GCC to face. The existing "tactical" split within the GCC between pro-Iraqis (Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Qatar) and pro-Iranis (UAE and Oman) follow the traditional commercial, demographic and cultural lines of exchange and during the war has allowed the GCC to maintain a dialogue open with both belligerent sides. Both Iran and Iraq, if emerging politically reinforced from the war, would try to exploit this diversification to force the GCC either to accommodate its requests or dissolve. On the contrary, the GCC would survive and perform a fundamental stabilizing role in case of a diplomatic settlement of the war that would leave neither side too strong and both in need of reconstructing their economies.

The international community and namely the West have a clear interest in the survival and development of the GCC, but their actions often risk to undermine instead of reinforcing it. The fundamental contradiction between the West and the GCC lies in that they accord different orders of priority to the interests they share. Both are interested in the continuity of the oil flow and in the stability of the Gulf area; but while to the West the existence of the GCC and the survival of its regimes in their present form is just instrumental to those ends, to the GCC countries oil and Gulf security are just instrumental to their existence. This difference of perceptions is not irreconcilable, but has its consequences. The fundamental policy prescription for the West is to strive to reconcile its own long and short term interest: if regional security organization is to be preserved because it offers the only valid alternative to overengagement and overexposure, their internal law of existence must be respected. From the security point of view the GCC came into being to counteract the linkage between domestic and regional threats, but the indispensable condition for this counteraction to succeed is that the "active neutrality" of these countries be respected. This implies the right to maintain friendly relations with both East and West, to procure their arms from any source that conforms to their needs and to refuse any intervention that would violate their national sovereignty.

NOTE:

- 1) David Holden and Richard Johns The House of Saud, London, Pan Books, 1982 (1981), p.27.
- 2) GCC-General Secretariat, Basic Law, Riad, 1981.
- 3) The GCC structure comprises: the Supreme Council (that brings together the six heads of State once a year to set the principles of GCC policies, acts also as Commission for the Settlement of disputes); the ministerial council (composed by the Foreign Ministers, it meets every 3 months); the general Secretariat (a permanent body located in Riad, supervises and supports the implementation of GCC policies).
- 4) For a comprehensive analysis of all GCC policies see John Sandwick (ed), The Gulf Cooperation Council, Moderation and Stability in an Interdependent World, Boulder (Colorado), Westview Press, 1987.
- 5) See Gerd Nonnemann, Iraq, the Gulf States and the War, Ithaca Press, 1986, Appendix VI: List of the main joint organizations.
- 6) Text in Nonnemann, op.cit., appendix I.
- 7) Mazher Hameed, Arabia Imperilled, The Security Imperitives of the Arab Gulf States, Washington, MEAG, 1986, p. 42.
- 8) An example for all is the intricacy between endogenous and exogenous motivations in the 1979 Shite uprising in thge oil rich Hasa province of Saudi Arabia (for details, see Colin Legum et al. (ed) , New York, Holmes and Meier, Middle east Contemporary Survey: 1979-80, p.688-690).
- 9) Existing discontinuously from the 30's, the Kuwaiti Assembly has been suspended indefinitely by the Amir on the grounds that its censorship hampered the Government effectiveness in a time of crisis.
- 10) On the limits and negative effects of Saudi policies towards the Yemens and the Horn of Africa, see Roberto Aliboni, The Red Sea Region, New York, Syracuse U.P.,passim.
- 11) According to Colonel al-Sudayri of the Royal Saudi Airforce "the measure of the threat is related to the extent Israel ignores Us warnings...when it feels its security needs justify military actions" (Al-Sudayry et al., Five War Zones, The Views of Local Military Leaders, New York, Pergamon, 1986, p.163).
- 12) To dept. 1 are attached the unities for: Strategic Activity, Combat Equipment and Combat Support; to dept. 2: Cadre Organization, Military Publicising and Military Colleges; to dept. 3: Naval Forces, Land Forces, Air and Air Defense forces (GCC-General Secretariat, Synopsis on the General Secretariat, Riyadh, 1987, p. 25 in Arabic
- 13) Among the actions taken since 1982: the organization of up-dating seminars, the biannual publishing of the journal at-Ta'awun al-Ma'nawi, the appointment in each military unit of an officer of liason with the GCC (UAE-Ministry of Information Documents on the Gulf Cooperation Council, 1984, p.161-2 in Arabic.
- 14) The participation of the other GCC countries (probably dispersion of the industries in exchange for joint financement) is already under discussion amnd could materialize soon (see Summary of World Broadcast, ME/8555/A/6, 30.4.87)
- 15) The problems encountered by the Saudis in manning the AWACS have already delayed the planned schedule of withdrawal of the US operating and training mission (s. Jane's Defence Weekly, 9.5.87, p.863).
- 16) Under this huge scheme a centralized Command Operations Center (COC) already existing in Riyadh- will be linked to 5 Sector Command (corresponding to the 5 main airbases) each providing C31 for its sector; the Saudi Land Forces C3 system will also be linked to the underground hardened COC.

- 17) In September 1984 an annual sum of (25) 60 million the Defense Ministers allocated "to strengthen air defense systems and communications"; however, to June 1987 the Omanis deny to have benefitted from any of these funds.
- 18) See "Text of Shaykh al-Ahmed Press Conference", American-Arab Affairs, summer 1984, p.150.
- 19) International Herald Tribune, "Saudi Fighters Refused to Intercept", 21.5.87.
- 20) See Weimberger's declaration quoted in IHI, 27.8.87, p.7.
- 21) The GCC land manoeuvres held in Saudi Arabia in October 1984 were described as "haphazard and caotic" (see Arab Plans for Gulf Defence Way off Target", The Sunday Times, 2.12.84.
- 22) Calculations based on Military Balance, London, IISS, 1987-88.
- 23) Rates of modernization as evaluated by M. Hameed, Arabia Imperilled, op.cit., p.135.
- 24) For instance, the Commission successfully mediated the normalization between Oman and South Yemen in 1982, and the Bahrein-Qatar dispute over the Fasht alDibal coral reef in 1986.

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