

# Defence Dilemmas of the GCC States – Threats and Military Build-Up

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## Abstract

Although regional states don't seek war, it cannot be ruled out that an unfavourable development in the international arena could lead to an unintended outbreak of a full-scale conflict, which would either directly or indirectly involve the Arab monarchies. In response to several threats within their proximity, these states have, for years, been pursuing several initiatives aimed at increasing their deterrence potential and interoperability in case of a crisis. The main goal of this article is to present and assess the GCC's threat perception, followed by an analysis of the multilateral and unilateral responses. The main research question concerns the degree to which the GCC states are able to establish a joint and effective military bloc within the Persian Gulf.

**Keywords:** Persian Gulf, security, GCC, defence, military procurements

The Persian Gulf region is very unstable, both from a political and a military perspective. It is where four significant wars have broken out in the past 30 years – Iraq with Iran (1980), Iraq with Kuwait (1990) and an international coalition with Iraq (1991 and 2003). Today, the Persian Gulf region may still be considered rather unstable. The defeat of the Saddam Hussein regime in 2003 eliminated Iraq as a significant threat and a destabilizing force, especially towards states such as Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. However, the American “Dual Containment” strategy subsequently collapsed, resulting in the strengthening of Iran.<sup>1</sup> As a consequence, the threat related to possible aggression on the part of the United States and/or Israel against Iran continues to rise.

However difficult it may be to believe that Iran is seeking war,<sup>2</sup> the ongoing crisis in the country’s immediate surroundings and the high level of mutual hostility may transform itself, without our noticing, into a military confrontation.<sup>3</sup> Such a scenario would be the worst possible for the Arab nations in the region, i.e., members of the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council): Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar. Any political-military crisis would have serious consequences not only for the security of these states but for Europe as well. This is because this region holds a considerable part of the world’s oil and natural gas reserves. In the event of a crisis and a disruption to the supply of these reserves, many countries in the world – including European and Asian – would face economic issues.

## Characteristics of the GCC States’ Armed Forces

Every GCC member is different, in geostrategic and political-military terms. Each has its own set of priorities and diverse threats from which it should defend itself. For example, Iraq has always been a historical threat to Kuwait, however not much of a problem for the distant Oman, which, in turn, has to focus on the safety of water routes through the Strait of Hormuz and the waters of the Gulf of Oman. There is also the perpetual issue of the inflow of terrorists and insurgents from Yemen, a challenge for Saudi Arabia as well (until 2003 Iraq posed a threat to Saudi Arabia, in the form of a possible large

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1 See more about dual containment: J.L. Mraz, B. Cory, R.P. Swan, DeCamp and Mulcahy.

2 More about Iranian armed forces and defence doctrine see: A.H. Cordesman, *Iran’s Military Forces in Transition: Conventional Threats and Weapons of Mass Destruction*; M. Connell, A.H. Cordesman and Kleiber, M. Eisenstadt, S.R. Ward. Data available also at: *Iran – Middle East Military Balance Files; The Military Balance 2012*; F. Wehrey, J.D. Green, B. Nichiporuk and others; O’Hern. About history of Iranian armed forces see also: R.S.N. Singh.

3 Possible war scenarios available at: S. Johnson and E. Chorley, R. Czulda *Czy Izrael podpali Bliski Wschód?* [Will Israel set the Middle East on Fire?].

scale ground war). Currently, Saudi Arabia – apart from the unsolved problem of Yemen – is less threatened by the possibility of facing a conventional war and more by the inflow of destabilization and extremism from Iraq. Qatar, on the other hand – similar to the United Arab Emirates – should fear Iran more than Iraq. However, even attitudes toward Iran vary from state to state. For example, as Brahim Saïdy from Qatar University notes, not every GCC state considers “Iran a common menace, because each has a nuanced foreign policy based on its political philosophy and its security alliances. Oman, Kuwait and Qatar maintain relatively good relations with Iran, while Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain’s dealings with Tehran are marked by tension, and even hostility” (42–43).

**Table 1.** Demographic statistics of Persian Gulf states (2014)<sup>4</sup>

Country	Regular	Reserves	Paramilitary	Population
Bahrain	8,200		11,260	1,281,332
Iran	523,000	350,000	2,130,000	79,853,900
Iraq	271,400		236,000	31,858,481
Kuwait	15,500	23,700	7,100	2,695,316
Oman	42,600		4,400	3,154,134
Qatar	11,800		8,000	2,042,444
Saudi Arabia	233,500		15,500	26,939,583
UAE	51,000			5,473,972

The result of both subjective (perception of threats) and objective conditions (geographic location, demographic potential) is that the GCC countries have military forces of differing sizes, with varying equipment and tasks. The largest belong to Saudi Arabia, with approximately 233 500 troops (*The Military Balance 2014*). In comparison, Kuwait (15 500), Qatar (11 800) and Bahrain (8 200) have the least. Not all of the nations in the region have reserves and paramilitary forces. Nevertheless, a common feature is their relatively small capability for operational enlargement in the event of war. Arab states in the region – probably with the exception of Saudi Arabia – would not be able to conduct a long-lasting war of attrition which would force them to mobilize tens of thousands of soldiers, simply because they have no one to mobilize.

<sup>4</sup> *The Military Balance 2014*.

**Table 2.** Total active military power in Persian Gulf states (1990–2010)<sup>5</sup>

Year	Iran	Iraq	Saudi Arabia	Bahrain	Kuwait	Oman	Qatar	UAE
1990	504,000	1,000,000	102,500	6,000	20,300	29,500	7,500	44,000
1993	528,000	382,500	157,000	6,150	11,700	35,700	7,500	54,000
2000	545,600	429,000	162,500	11,000	15,300	41,500	11,800	64,500
2003	350,000	389,000	199,500	10,700	15,500	39,700	12,400	41,500
2004	540,000	33,000	150,000	11,200	15,500	39,700	12,400	50,500
2005	540,000	105,700	199,500	11,200	15,500	39,700	12,400	50,500
2006	545,000	134,700	199,500	11,200	15,500	39,700	12,400	50,500
2007	545,000	161,380	224,500	11,200	15,500	39,700	12,400	50,500
2008	545,000	165,800	214,500	8,200	15,500	40,600	11,800	51,000
2009	523,000	190,744	221,500	8,200	15,500	42,600	11,800	51,000
2010	523,000	191,957	233,500	8,200	15,500	42,600	11,800	51,000

There are also differences between the states in terms of the sources of their armament imports. For example, Qatar imported equipment from the United Kingdom during the first period of its independence (1971), then from France (for example AMX-30 tanks, AMX-103P infantry fighting vehicles, Mirage 2000ED/D fighters. Currently the United States (the largest ally of Saudi Arabia until 2003) is Qatar’s largest partner in this area. Although Saudi-American relations weakened after 2003, it did not influence the partnerships between Washington and Qatar, Kuwait or Bahrain, which are still incredibly strong today. Oman, on the other hand, is a traditional armaments partner of the United Kingdom, from which it procured, for example, Challenger II tanks, Piranha armoured fighting vehicles and SEPECAT Jaguar ground attack jets. Differences may also be seen in the modernization priorities and directions of their respective build-ups. For example, the United Arab Emirates concentrate on developing a small naval fleet of rapid interception craft, which are able to combat pirates, smugglers and terrorists. Saudi Arabia, however, chooses much larger vessels and armoured/mechanized units.<sup>6</sup> Kuwait limits itself to coastal patrol vessels.

What all the states mentioned have in common is that they are attempting to modernize their anti-aircraft and anti-ballistic missile defence systems (which will be described later using examples in this paper). This is, without a doubt, a reaction to the evolution of modern warfare, which is increasingly based on ballistic/anti-ship missiles. GCC’s military modernization is seen as a direct reaction

<sup>5</sup> A.H. Cordesman, *The Gulf Military Balance in 2010*, 15.

<sup>6</sup> According to various media sources, Saudi Arabia was offered French DCNS’s Gowind class corvettes and FREMM frigates, as well as British Type 45 destroyers and US LCS vessels.

to Iran's military doctrine, which assumes a massive use of missiles against various targets in the Persian Gulf region. General Brigadier Yahya Rahim-Safavi, a senior military adviser to the Supreme Leader, confirmed such a strategy in 2012 (*Iran missiles can hit all US bases in ME*, Blomfield, Ferran). As Brahim Saïdy noted "the prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran with Shehab-3 intermediate range ballistic missiles dismays the GCC states" (40). As he notes, the proliferation of ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction are considered as a direct and imminent threat to the P-GCC states.

The GCC states are also developing their own air defence capabilities. In 2001, they initiated a joint command, control, communications programme, and a computers and intelligence (C4I) system called "Hizam al-Taawun" (*Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment – The Gulf States*). A tracking and identification system, connected to national air defence systems, established in cooperation with Thales, Raytheon and Ericsson, allows all GCC states to monitor air traffic within the member states' airspace and to cooperate when faced with danger. The most important element is contributed by Saudi Arabia – its system is composed of 17 AN/FPS-117(V)3 long-range radars as well as short-range radars: AN/TPS-43 and AN/TPS-72. An important contribution will be provided by Qatar which has ordered the AN/FPS-132 Block 5 radar from the United States. This will allow Qatar to monitor all of Iranian air space. How Qatar ultimately uses this system will be of great interest to the United States.

GCC states are also making a concerted effort to modernize their air forces' transport capabilities which are crucial for the rapid deployment of troops in case of a crisis in the Persian Gulf area or beyond (for example, as part of a NATO-led operation). This also applies to the procurement of precision-guided munitions ("smart weapons"), which would be essential in any offensive operation. Such weapons would be very useful against Iran.

## Common Defence Efforts

States in the region have been trying to increase their security since they first gained independence. The collective defence concept of the Persian Gulf states gives some hope that this strategic objective may be achieved. One of the results of this concept was the creation in 1981 of joint military forces, called the Peninsula Shield Force (PSF), which are to become "the armed forces" of the GCC. During the Iraq – Iran war, they were created in response to the Iranian occupation of the Iraqi Al-Faw Peninsula. In 1990, the PSF began modernizing, and transforming itself into an infantry division. Their formation began with the creation of a common doctrine and procedures (*Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment – The Gulf States*). The efficiency of the GCC members was undoubtedly tested in the international coalition's war

against Iraq (1991). Units from these states mainly served within the Joint Forces Command-East (*United Arab Emirates: A Country Study* 147).

The next stage in building a collective defence was the signing of a multilateral defence agreement during the 21<sup>st</sup> GCC summit in December 2000. A Joint Defense Council and Military Committee was established. What is more, in the Joint Defense Agreement it was concluded that “any aggression against a member state would be considered as aggression against all the GCC states” (Koch 28). In 2001 a joint air-defence project was initiated (the above-mentioned “Hizam al-Taawun”). The GCC states conduct collaborative military exercises in the territory of one of its members every two years. More and more frequently, joint training facilities are being created. For example, the United Arab Emirates has created a training base available to soldiers of the GCC members. Pilots from this region practice at the Dhafra base. With the help of the United States, a new centre for ballistic missile defence training is now being created at the Al Bateen base.

In 2006 – having decided that a joint, standing military contingent was too expensive – a plan to create rapid reaction forces, amounting to no more than 22 000 troops, dispersed across the territories of the member states, under joint command in Riyadh (a Saudi project, precisely formed and formally accepted in 2009)<sup>7</sup> was created. These forces were to possess an aerial and naval component, which the initial idea lacked. It is worth remembering that there were some voices in the past, which called for the complete dissolution of the GCC forces which – according to some – died a natural death in 2006 (Ali Khan).

When, at the beginning of 2011, the government in Bahrain declared a state of emergency in response to lengthy pro-democratic demonstrations by the Shiite majority, an armed intervention by the GCC took place.<sup>8</sup> As a result, representatives of the member states accepted a strategy to enlarge the PSF to as many as 100 000 troops, located within the territory of their respective states (Kermali). This would be an enormous quantitative leap, since these forces totalled around 40 000 troops at the time. Additionally, there is an idea to create a second base in Bahrain (to accompany the base in Saudi Arabia) which would allow for the faster pacification of social unrest. In December 2013, during the 34<sup>th</sup> Summit (in Kuwait City) the GCC announced the formation of a joint military command.

A larger Peninsula Shield will enable two tasks to be carried out. The first is the creation of effective deterrent forces in the case of a potential war with Iran. Although Tehran does not want a war – like the GCC member states – one cannot rule out the possibility of an indirect threat, i.e., a war between Iran and Israel or

<sup>7</sup> Information received from the Kuwaiti Ministry of Defence, July 2011.

<sup>8</sup> GCC sent the first group of approximately 1 200 soldiers and security forces from Saudi Arabia (in armoured cars) as well as 600 policemen from the United Arab Emirates to this country. They took up key points within the capital of Manama (officially to “protect critical Bahrain military infrastructure from foreign intervention,” not because of the internal situation).

the United States. Tehran could then attack American installations in Bahrain, Qatar or Kuwait. At least, this is what official declarations say (*Iran vows to hit US bases if Israel strikes*). Iran's naval forces could block the strategically important Strait of Hormuz and the Gulf of Oman, thus confining the GCC members within the waters of the Persian Gulf. Iran could then use mines, coastal anti-ship missiles and submarines to disrupt shipping lanes in the Persian Gulf. Exporting oil would be much more difficult or may even be paralyzed. Iran could also commit covert acts of sabotage against coastal oil and natural gas extraction and processing installations. Such acts would have significant consequences for the economic situation of the GCC states as well as for their national security. Successfully disrupting the Persian Gulf states' production would lead to a decrease in the world's oil supply.

Another task for the PSF is to "extinguish" all sorts of social unrest. Leaders of the authoritarian states in the region do not wish to share the fate of the dictators in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. Such a scenario, however, cannot be ruled out because, although the GCC members went through the Arab spring without any trouble, the situation is still uncertain. If the ruler in Bahrain fell, similar occurrences could spread to other GCC states. The conflicts between the Shiites and the Sunnites also play a large role. In order to explain how complicated the situation is, one should look to the GCC meeting in May 2011 when Jordan and Morocco were invited, neither of which are within the territory of the Persian Gulf (*Morocco and Jordan ask to join GCC*). Both states are mainly Sunnite, have reasonably strong armed forces and could provide significant military support to the PSF, in return for financial aid. The idea was supported by Bahrain, which accuses Iran of interfering in its internal affairs and attempting to strengthen Shiite Islam in the territory of the Maghreb and the Persian Gulf (Mikaïl 2). The idea of inviting Iraq – dominated by the Shiites – was rejected in advance, as the GCC is made up of Sunnite states, all of which oppose Shiite Iran which has a strong influence in Iraq.

It seems that it would be very difficult in practice for the joint forces to carry out the first task. Despite the declarations and the planned quantitative development, the problems remain the same, which are, for instance, a lack of armaments and standardization of procedures, a lack of interoperability, and a small military potential, which is no match for Iran's armed forces. The value of the PSF may be much larger with regard to the other aspect mentioned, i.e., as internal pacification forces.

## External Military Support for the GCC

Due to its geographical conditions (the small size of most of the states and their location in a politically and militarily unstable region, the Persian Gulf, surrounded by much stronger states – Iraq and Iran) as well as the lack of strategic depth,

the GCC states are aware that neither their national armed forces, nor the PSF, will ensure their security. That is why they are forced to look for a strategic partner, which would be ready to defend them in its own interest rather than for an altruistic goal. Linking their own security with another, stronger entity's vital interests is one of the basic purposes of the security policy of many states in the region, e.g., Qatar or Kuwait. That is because the GCC members do not have any realistic chance of being an effective opponent to Iran. They may only count on their defence potential to deter an aggressor or, should that fail, hold the aggressor back long enough for international support to arrive.

Neither the United Kingdom, nor France (which established its first military bases in the region in May 2009) will be able to provide sufficient support. The United Arab Emirates plays host to a French naval base, located in Abu Dhabi (Zayed Port), for a detachment of the Armée de l'Air (Al Dhafra airbase) and a "Peace Camp" that could host around 500 troops (*Sarkozy Opens French Military Base in Abu Dhabi; French President Sarkozy Opens UAE Base*).<sup>9</sup> It is worth noting that these are the first new French military installations in 50 years and the first ones in a country which was not previously a French colony. What is more, President Sarkozy signed agreements updating the defence accords from 1975, essentially pledging France's assistance to Abu Dhabi during crises (Cody). It is hard not to notice the influence France has – Paris secured a deal for 380 Leclerc tanks and more than 60 Mirage 2000 multirole jet fighters. Paris also offered 60 Rafale multirole fighter aircrafts to the United Arab Emirates. Although the GCC countries actively cooperate with these European powers (e.g., through joint exercises, naval ship visits, weapon supplies), none of them are strong and committed enough to actively support them in a crisis.

The GCC members keep trying to diversify their security sources. For instance, Kuwait is developing defence cooperation with Bangladesh, and Qatar is doing so with India. Pakistan is a military partner for the states in the region too. Their cooperation with NATO is developing as well. The fact that Qatar – mostly using French and British armaments – designated two Mirage 2000–5 assault jets and two C-17 Globemaster III transport aircrafts to NATO's operation over Libya is worth remembering as well. The United Arab Emirates announced that it would send up to 24 jets (Mirages and F-16s), but eventually failed to do so as a result of the criticism by NATO of Bahrain's activities related to the suppression of the Shi-ite protests. Kuwait provided financial support for the operation. The GCC members also support the Combined Task Force (CTF 151 and CTF 152), groups within the Combined Maritime Force.

The search for a new and reliable ally, ready to provide a wide and permanent hard security umbrella is accompanied by the growing involvement of the United

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<sup>9</sup> See also: *Camp de la Paix (Peace Camp), United Arab Emirates*.



States in the Persian Gulf region during the Iraq-Iran war (1980–1988). The beginning of the “Earnest Will” operation in 1987 was a clear signal confirming America’s position. The operation itself was aimed at protecting oil tankers against attacks (See more: Zatarain, Tarock, Navias and Hooton). This was interpreted as a clear message of Washington’s readiness to support small states in the region and its concern with an unhindered flow of energy.

The First Iraq War (1990/1991) proved to be a turning point, as the GCC members played an active part, fearing that the war may spread and Iraq’s potential desire to expand its territory into Saudi Arabia and then to other GCC members. The situation in the region allowed a series of military agreements to be signed which were not disclosed at the request of the Arab states: the United States signed such an agreement with Oman (1980) first, then began close defence relations with Saudi Arabia (1990), Bahrain (1991), Qatar (1992) and the United Arab Emirates (1992) (Hajjar 20).

The defence agreements gave the Americans a permanent foothold in the Persian Gulf and allowed certain strategic objectives to be achieved which the Pentagon had presented at the beginning of the 1990s. The first task was to improve operational capabilities in the region, especially in terms of rapid deployment. Other objectives were closely related with the strengthening of the defence capabilities of the GCC states. It is because of these military agreements in particular that the Americans have their permanent bases in Bahrain (the V fleet), Kuwait (for instance the large Ali Al Salim air force base), Oman (Thumrait base) and Qatar (Al Udeid, the regional CENTCOM command). The American air force has accumulated equipment for 26 000 troops in Oman itself. The GCC states do not advertise this alliance very much as they know that it is necessary, but very socially unpopular.

## Trends in the Armaments of GCC States

The Persian Gulf region is currently the location of one of the largest purchasers of armaments in history. The GCC states – which spend a larger part of their GDP on defence than the global average – fear that they will not be able to avoid participating in a war in the coming years. This means as much as 10 per cent of all global military transactions involve them (Solmirano and Wezeman 2). According to “The Military Balance 2014,” in 2013, a significant real increase in defence spending occurred in Oman (39%), Bahrain (36.7%) while there was a reduction in Kuwait (-6%) (*The Military Balance 2014* 303).

“Nevertheless, even a massive procurement of weapon systems, no matter how advanced, is no match for Iran’s military power and its ability to conduct modern warfare over any length of time” – Yoel Guzansky from INSS analyses – “the basic conditions behind this reality include the Gulf states’ inferior geo-strategic

situations, their domestic constraints, their dependence on foreign manpower, and their difficulty in creating effective security cooperation among themselves” (85). The author adds that the distinguishing feature of the GCC states is the diversification of armament supply sources which leads to a duplication of training, supply and equipment maintenance systems. “Gulf states are investing larger sums to equip themselves with parallel systems. So, for example, the air force of the United Arab Emirates is equipped with both American-made and French-made fighter planes, and the Saudi air force operates both American and British fighter jets” (Guzansky 94).

**Table 3.** Estimated MENA defence expenditure 2013: sub-regional breakdown<sup>10</sup>

State	Expenditure (%)
Saudi Arabia	34.5
Israel	10.6
Iran	10.3
Iraq	9.8
Algeria	5.8
United Arab Emirates	5.5
Oman	5.4
Egypt	3.8
Bahrain + Kuwait	3.4
Qatar	2.9
Libya	2.8
Morocco	2.2
Jordan + Lebanon	1.6
Yemen	1.1
Tunisia + Mauritania	0.5

The United States is the region’s largest arms supplier. In 2001–2004, the Americans were a party in 56.1 per cent of all military contracts in the region (Guzansky 89). According to SIPRI, from 2005–2009, weapons from the United States accounted for 54 per cent of all imports, and in the case of Kuwait and Qatar it was more than 90 per cent (Solmirano and Wezeman 3). Americans have offered advanced hardware to GCC allies which has caused surprise in some quarters. Congress surprised many experts when it voted in favour of a \$7 billion deal to sell THAAD anti-missile systems to the United Arab Emirates. Like Saudi Arabia, they agreed

<sup>10</sup> *The Military Balance 2014*, 303.

to additionally buy advanced JDAM “smart” bombs. Further entries on the list of the largest armament suppliers in the region include states such as France, the United Kingdom, Russia and China, however, the last two countries mostly closed deals with Iran.

**Table 4.** The suppliers of major conventional weapons to the GCC states (2005–2009)<sup>11</sup>

Recipient	China	France	Russia	UK	US	Others	Total
Bahrain	-	-	-	34	55	11	100
Iran	35	-	65	-	-	-	100
Iraq	-	-	14	1	52	33	100
Kuwait	-	3	-	-	91	6	100
Oman	-	15	-	4	79	2	100
Qatar	-	-	-	-	98	2	100
Saudi Arabia	6	4	-	42	40	8	100
UAE	-	35	2	-	60	3	100

Two states can be considered regional leaders: Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. “The Military Balance 2012” states, that the Saudi “defence budget has more than doubled over the period (in nominal terms), whilst real defence spending in 2010 was 20.5% higher than 2001 levels” (*The Military Balance 2012*, 314). This was possible mainly because of high budget incomes. In 2005, the government noted a record budget surplus of \$57 billion. The latest and most important military procurements include: 72 Eurofighter Typhoon multirole fighters, 12 assault AH-64D Apache helicopters, 35 UH-60L Black Hawk utility helicopters, 58 M1A1 Abrams tanks, an upgrade of these tanks, along with its existing 315 M1A2, to create a fleet of 373 M1A2 (Saudi) Abrams configuration, new engines for 70 F-15S Strike Eagle jets, 724 Piranha wheeled vehicles, and six multirole aerial tankers Airbus A-330 MRTT.

This is, however, not all. For example, in October 2010 the US Congress received information that Saudi Arabia was ready to spend another \$30 billion on armaments (Ukman). According to the “Military Balance 2012,” a package that includes 84 F-15SA jets, together with supporting equipment, munitions (approximately 5,000 AGM-114R Hellfire II, 600 AGM-88B HARM, 400 AGM-84 Block II Harpoon, 300 AIM-9X Sidewinder, 500 AIM-120C/7 AMRAAM and many more) and upgrades to existing aircraft are worth approximately \$60 billion. These also include 70 AH-64D Apache Longbow assault helicopters, 36 AH-6i light attack/reconnaissance helicopters, 12 MD-530F light utility helicopters and 72 UH-60M

<sup>11</sup> Solmirano and Wezeman 3.

Black Hawk medium transport helicopters. What is more, Riyadh is still interested in procuring between 600 and 800 Leopard battle tanks from Germany (*Saudi Arabia wants to buy 600–800 Leopard tanks from Germany*).<sup>12</sup> No wonder then that in 2014 Saudi Arabia was the biggest arms importer in the world (its arms imports increased by 54% between 2013 and 2014) (*Saudi Arabia largest importer of defense equipment in 2014, and probably 2015*).

In September 2011, The US Defense Security Cooperation Agency announced that Saudi Arabia's had made a formal request for up to \$886 million worth of equipment, including 36 M777A2 lightweight 155mm howitzers, 54 M119A2 105mm howitzers, six AN/TPQ-36V Fire Finder Radar Systems, 24 Advanced Field Artillery Tactical Data Systems, 17 136 rounds of M107 155mm High Explosive (HE) ammunition, 2 304 rounds of M549 155mm Rocket Assisted Projectiles (RAPs), 60 M1165A1 High Mobility Multipurpose Vehicles (HMMWVs), 120 M1151A1 HMMWVs, 252 M1152A1 HMMWVs and other equipment (*Kingdom of Saudi Arabia – Howitzers, Radars, Ammunition, and Related Support*). Riyadh has also found enough resources to procure 78 additional sets for 78 anti-tank wheeled vehicles LAV-AT, 404 CBU-105D/B Sensor Fuzed Weapons and associated equipment, parts, training and logistical support for an estimated cost of \$355 million (*Saudi Arabia – CBU-105 Sensor Fuzed Weapons*), additional 153 LAV vehicles and night-vision equipment. Saudi Arabia is contemplating acquiring new DDG 51 Arleigh Burke-class destroyers with Aegis ballistic missile defence capabilities (Cavas). What is more, Riyadh is still interested in procuring between 600 and 800 Leopard battle tanks from Germany and requested an upgrade of its PAC-2 batteries to PAC-3 configuration (*Saudi Arabia wants to buy 600–800 Leopard tanks from Germany*). In October 2013, Saudi Arabia requested various munitions, including 650 AGM-84H Standoff Land Attack Missiles-Expanded Response (SLAM-ER), 973 AGM-154C Joint Stand Off Weapons (JSOW) and 400 AGM-84L Harpoon Block II missiles.

According to the INSS, the increase in the expenditure of the United Arab Emirates, the largest regional recipient of weapons from 2005–2009 (57 per cent of imports) amounted to as much as 700 per cent – in the same time frame, they rose from \$1.9 billion to \$15.4 billion (the SIPRI data suggests an increase from \$11 billion to \$13 billion with this data being closer to the truth) (Guzansky 90; Solmirano and Wezeman 2). During this period, the United Arab Emirates modernized its own fleet for \$3.4 billion with 62 French Mirage 2000–9 jets (from the new Mirage-5 class), 80 US-made F-16 F-16E/F Block 60 Fighting Falcon (Desert Falcon) multirole fighters (for \$6.4 billion) and 60 AH-64E Guardian assault helicopters. In April 2013, they decided to buy another 25 F-16 Block 60 fighters for at least \$4 billion.

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<sup>12</sup> Germany has already stopped selling the Leopard 2 tanks and G36 Heckler and Koch assault rifles to Saudi Arabia, but it continues to provide other defensive weapons.

**Table 5.** GCC states among top 10 Middle East and North Africa defence expenditures 2010–2011<sup>13</sup>

Country	2010	% of Regional Total	2011 Estimate	% of Regional Total	Real % Change
Saudi Arabia	45.17	38.11	46.18	36.18	- 3.1
Israel	17.17	14.49	18.25	14.30	- 2.8
Iran	10.56	8.91	11.96	9.37	- 3.4
UAE	8.65	7.29	9.32	7.30	+ 5.1
Algeria	5.59	4.72	8.61	6.74	+ 44.0
Egypt	5.43	4.58	5.53	4.33	- 3.2
Iraq	4.19	3.53	4.79	3.75	+ 8.9
Oman	4.19	3.53	4.29	3.36	- 1.6
Kuwait	3.91	3.30	4.05	3.17	- 6.2
Qatar	3.12	2.63	3.45	2.71	8.2
TOTAL	107.97	91.09	116.42	91.21	- 1.01

The United Arab Emirates also ordered, among others, 40–60 UH-60M Black Hawk helicopters, 60 AH-64E Guardian assault helicopters, 12 C-130J-30 Super Hercules and six C-17 Globemaster III transport airplanes, three Airbus A-330 MRTT multirole aerial tankers, six Baynunah class corvettes, up to 50 anti-aircraft artillery weapon systems, two Falaj II class corvettes and one Abu Dhabi class frigate. In November 2012, the United Arab Emirates made an official request to expand its THAAD purchases from 2011 worth \$1.96 billion with an additional nine launchers and 48 missiles (\$1.4 billion) (*United Arab Emirates – Terminal High Altitude Area Defense System Missiles (THAAD)*). A multibillion-dollar purchase of 60 Rafale jet fighters is still possible, as well as a “Diamond Shield,” an air-defence system that could form the basis of an integrated missile shield for the entire Arabian Gulf region (Black). Apart from all this, the United Arab Emirates are willing to procure another batch of fighter jets (25 x F-16E and 5 x F-16F Block 60/61 *Desert Falcon*).

The expenditures of Kuwait and Bahrain are also impressive. They have also bought some modern equipment. Kuwait ordered eight KC-130J tankers, two C-17 Globemaster III transport airplanes and 16 AH-64 Apache helicopters, and made a formal request to buy 209 MIM-104E PATRIOT GEM-T missiles (up to \$900 million) (*Kuwait – MIM-104E...*). In July 2012, Kuwait requested 60 PATRIOT Advanced Capability (PAC-3) missiles and associated equipment, parts, training and logistical support for an estimated cost of \$4.2 billion (*Kuwait – PATRIOT...*). In March 2014, it ordered two batteries for PAC-3 missiles. Kuwait is still looking for 14–18 new fighters to replace its aging F/A-18C/D Hornet jets. Bahrain

<sup>13</sup> *The Military Balance 2012*, 306.

ordered nine UH-60M Black Hawk helicopters, AIM-120C AMRAAM missiles and small Sea Keeper patrol crafts.

**Table 6.** Recent procurements of aircraft (selected)

NAME	AMOUNT	FIRST DELIVERY	COUNTRY
<i>Combat airplanes</i>			
Typhoon	44	2009	Saudi Arabia
F-15SA	84	2015	Saudi Arabia
F-15SA <sup>a</sup>	68	2015	Saudi Arabia
-	24/36/72	-	Qatar
-	14/18	-	Kuwait
AT-802U	6	2010	UAE
-	60	-	UAE
F-16E Desert Falcon (Block 60)	25	-	UAE
F-16F Desert Falcon (Block 60)	5	-	UAE
-	12	-	Bahrain
F-16C/D Fighting Falcon (Block 50)	12	2015	Oman
Typhoon	12	2017	Oman
<i>Transport airplanes</i>			
C-130J-30 Super Hercules	20		Saudi Arabia
KC-130J Tanker	5	2016	Saudi Arabia
A330 MRTT	6	2011	Saudi Arabia
C-130J Super Hercules	2	2013	Saudi Arabia
C-130J Super Hercules	2	2013	Oman
C-130J-30 Super Hercules	1	2012	Oman
C-295M/MPA	8	2013	Oman
A330 MRTT	3	2013	UAE
C-17 Globemaster III	6	2011	UAE
C-130J-30 Super Hercules	12		UAE
KC-130J Tanker	8	2014	Kuwait
C-17 Globemaster III	2	2014	Kuwait
KC-130J Tanker	3	2013	Qatar
C-17 Globemaster III	4	2009	Qatar
C-130J-30 Super Hercules	4	2011	Qatar
A330 MRTT	2		Qatar

<sup>a</sup> – modernization of currently used jets to SA standard

Qatar is also active (See more: Czulda, *Qatar's Defence Procurement*) – it ordered and has already received four Lockheed C-130J-30 Super Hercules airplanes and 21 AugustaWestland AW139 helicopters for approximately \$400 million. In November 2012, they announced their intent to field two THAAD batteries with 150 missiles (\$6.5 billion) (*Qatar – Terminal High Altitude Area Defense*). Additionally, in July 2013 Qatar requested one AN/FPS-132 Block 5 early warning radar plus associated equipment and services for USD 1.1 billion. Qatar reinforced its weak and small armoured units (still 30 outdated French AMX-30 tanks in service) with an order for 36 German Leopard 2A4 tanks. Qatar revealed its desire to procure 200 more tanks (*Qatar wants to buy up to 200 tanks from Germany*). In April 2013, Qatar ordered 62 Leopard tanks from the latest 2A7 series and 24 PzH 155mm tracked self-propelled howitzers (as a replacement for French 155mm Mk F3) for a total cost of \$2.5 billion (Foss 4). In March 2014 Qatar ordered two multirole Airbus A330 MRTT aircraft.

**Table 7.** Recent procurements of helicopters (selected)

Name	Amount	Supplier	State	First delivery
AH-64E Guardian	70	Boeing	Saudi Arabia	
MD-530F	12	MD Helicopters	Saudi Arabia	2013
AH-6i Little Bird	36	Boeing	Saudi Arabia	
UH-60M Black Hawk	72	Sikorsky	Saudi Arabia	
AW139	3	AugustaWestland	Saudi Arabia	2013
AH-64E Guardian	60	Boeing	UAE	
CH-47F Chinook	20	Boeing	UAE	2010
UH-60M Black Hawk	40–60	Sikorsky	UAE	2010
AH-64D Apache	16	Boeing	Kuwait	2007
AW139	21	AugustaWestland	Qatar	2009
UH-60M Black Hawk	12	Sikorsky	Qatar	
MH-60R/S	22–28	Sikorsky	Qatar	
AH-64E Guardian	24	Boeing	Qatar	
NH90 TTH	20	NHIndustries	Oman	2010
Super Lynx 300	16	AugustaWestland	Oman	2004
AH-1F Cobra	12	Bell	Bahrain	2005
UH-60M Black Hawk	9	Sikorsky	Bahrain	2009
Bell 421	6	Bell	Bahrain	

Additionally, the authorities in the capital of Doha continue to consider what to replace the Dassault Mirage 2000–5 aircrafts with (up to 72 new airplanes).

As price is not a factor, the best are competing for the contract: Eurofighter Typhoon, Lockheed Martin F-35 Lightning II, Boeing F/A-18E/F Super Hornet, Boeing F-15E and Dassault Rafale. Oman is not falling behind in any way – it has procured two Airbus A320 aircraft and twelve Typhoon jets, ordered three C-130J Super Hercules (including one in the J-30 version), NH-90 TTH helicopters, twelve F-16C/D Fighting Falcon (Block 50) fighters and three modern corvettes. Such large financial outlays represent great news for the Americans and the Israelis. “The strengthening of the Gulf states’ military capabilities serves Israel’s interests” – thinks Yoel Guzansky – “especially if they adopt a more aggressive stance toward Iran” (91).

The same author adds: “The massive weapons purchases of recent years, especially missile protection systems, fighter planes, and advanced naval vessels, are intended first and foremost to strengthen the Gulf states’ ability to defend their weak point: essential assets, especially oil production, refining, and transport infrastructures, but also desalination facilities (the only source of water in these states) and military infrastructures” (Guzansky 91). Nevertheless, some purchases are made based on political grounds. For example, Saudi Arabia’s willingness to procure the Russian S-400 air defence systems to convince Russia not to supply the S-300 to Iran.

## Conclusions

In summary, there are many factors which – at least potentially – could facilitate a close political and military integration of the GCC states. Among these are elements such as cultural and religious proximity and existing organizational frameworks (such as the GCC as a platform for cooperation), external threats as well as financial resources. These would allow the GCC states to accomplish even the most ambitious of visions. Nevertheless, in practice, the GCC states so far have been unable to create effective joint military structures or even to adapt a common vision of threats and challenges. The lack of a proper strategic culture and military ethos, strong divisions and rivalry within GCC, an anxiety over domination from Saudi Arabia, and national interests mean that despite declarations and a planned build-up and pooling of military assets, the GCC states are not a monolithic entity and in case of war, a joint military operation under the aegis of the “Peninsula Shield” would be of limited value. Of potentially higher value would be the second contingency presented in this paper – an internal pacification force which requires less operational preparation and is less demanding than a military force used during a conventional full-scale war. The use of the “Peninsula Shield” in such a role is essential for the GCC states because social and economic problems have not been solved and a new wave of



civil unrest is just a matter of time. What is more, the GCC states cannot rely on the United States in this scenario.

If the GCC, as a whole, is not a strong and unified entity, should its strength be considered the sum of particular states? The GCC representatives are attempting to convince the international community that together they are very strong and capable. The PSF commander, General Mutlaq Bin Salem al-Azima, said the following in March 2011: “GCC forces are, after NATO, the best. No country has F-15s, Tornados, Mirages, and Typhoon jets, as well as the various different kinds of modern tanks, and all forms and varieties of naval craft. There is great coordination [between the Gulf States]; and we [the GCC military forces] have military forces that no state or institute in the world can compete with, with the exception of NATO” (al-Saeri).

Such an approach is typical for decision-makers of the GCC, who view their armed forces and deterrence potential, from the perspective of the quantity of equipment they possess and its technological advancement, rather than their real capability to effectively use it. The question of the real combat value of the GCC states, their effectiveness and the ability to cooperate in the face of a conflict remains unanswered. Even hundreds of state-of-the-art tanks and jets are not enough in the face of problems such as frontline personnel potential and a lack of strategic depth. This weakness may never be overcome. As a result, as Omar al-Shehabi (director of the Gulf Center for Development Policies in Kuwait) notes despite a high level of military spending, the GCC states need to “rely on Western countries to provide military protection and security” (*Persian Gulf states ‘unable to protect themselves’ despite military build-up*).

The dependence on a foreign workforce, not only in economic terms, but also for their respective armed forces, is another vulnerable point of most GCC states. The indigenous societies of most of these states are small and inactive because of their wealth, and enlistment is not compulsory (it was in Kuwait not long ago).<sup>14</sup> A large percentage of the soldiers are foreigners who cannot make use of the wealth, prestige and privileges of the indigenous population. This makes maintaining such an army expensive and its loyalty in case of war would be questionable. Who would die for his employer after all? In the event of a political-military crisis or a full-scale conventional war, the governing bodies of the GCC members may have to resort to praying and asking the United States for assistance.

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<sup>14</sup> In January 2014 the United Arab Emirates announced that they will introduce compulsory military service for all men over the age of 18 or those who have finished high school and are under 30 (Bayoumy).

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