Industrialization in the Gulf

A socioeconomic revolution

Edited by
Jean-François Seznec and
Mimi Kirk

Published in Association with the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University

Routledge Studies in Middle Eastern Economies

5 Strategic dynamics of Iran–GCC relations

John Duke Anthony

This paper focuses on the origins and dynamics of the GCC's strategic concerns in its relationships with Iran. It posits three overarching strategic constants. First, Tehran, unlike the six GCC members, governs a country that is Iranian, not Arab. Second, the mother tongue of millions of Iranians is Farsi, not Arabic. Third, the one regional organization to which all of the GCC countries have longest belonged and which constitutes their single largest association with fellow Arabs, the League of Arab States, is one in which, by definition, Iran is not a member.

This paper contends that three additional constants in Iran's strategic and geopolitical calculations are at odds with the aspirations of the GCC countries' governments, leaders, and majority of their citizens. One is the radical and revolutionary nature of Iran's system of governance and political dynamics. These are seen as the antithesis of the governmental status quo-orientation of the GCC countries' respective administrative structures.

Another constant is the GCC's objection to Iran's numerous policy pronouncements and actions toward what GCC leaders regard as primarily Arab issues. More specifically, the objection is to Iran's interference in the domestic affairs of Arab League members Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine. Closer to home, the objection is to Iran's occupation of Abu Musa Island and the Greater and Lesser Tunb Islands. Before the GCC formed in May of 1981, these islands belonged to the Emirate of Sharjah and the Emirate of Ra's al-Khaymah, respectively. The GCC claims these islands should still belong to the Emirates.

A third constant is overall GCC resentment of Iran's opposition to the member-countries' support for a continuing Western defense presence in the region. Iran's continuing criticisms of GCC strategic decisions in this regard, the GCC leaders argue, ignore regional realities and preferences, namely that the GCC countries have no practical choice but to align their deterrence and defense needs with the assistance extended them by credible Great Powers. Buttressing their decision has been that these powers' foreign policy objectives coincide closely to the GCC peoples' legitimate interests in self-defense and the inherent right of their countries and governments to self-preservation.

Within the ever-present interplay of these constants, the paper's purpose is to describe and analyze a range of phenomena pertaining to the background and context of GCC–Iran relations that may not be readily apparent either to

generalists or to many specialists. This paper also takes note of a range of Iranian viewpoints on the country's interests and objectives toward the GCC countries. Even so, it makes no pretense to being balanced. Rather, the goal is to enhance awareness of the relationships between the two peoples and their respective governments on issues of strategic importance primarily from the vantage point of the GCC.

The paper's approach to explaining what has driven the exceptional caution of the GCC country leaders' dealings with Iran from before and since the GCC's creation is as follows. It is to highlight specific instances in which Iran could have dispelled the grounds for the GCC countries' suspicions and mistrust but did not. Providing such an evidentiary trail should shed light on the pan-GCC contention that Iranian behavior has frequently fallen short of inspiring the requisite trust and confidence that GCC leaders seek in a neighbor from whom they want nothing more or less than the most cordial and reciprocally rewarding ties.

That many in Tehran take exception to the GCC's grounds for doubt and suspicion of Iranian motives in such matters should not be surprising. However, the response by GCC representatives has been to cite logic and the verifiable record. Iranian actions, policies, and positions on matters of importance to the GCC members, they maintain, provide ample justification for their reservations and ongoing concerns.

The implications of such a response are clear. GCC leaders see no reason why Iranians should question the GCC's approach to protecting and furthering their legitimate interests. Least of all, they contend, should Tehran find their actions irresponsible. The record, they argue, hardly differs from what they believe Iran would do were it to face the same range of foreign policy priorities and challenges as the ones that confront the GCC.

An additional objective of the paper is to illuminate GCC leaders' efforts, wherever possible, to avoid antagonizing Iran while finessing and/or countering Tehran's criticisms of their ties to international allies and working partners.[1] In pointing out instances in which GCC and Iranian strategic objectives have diverged more than converged, it is difficult for this writer to conclude other than that the GCC's approach to Gulf defense has been driven from the start by notions of elementary prudence. Essentially, the GCC countries have sought to enhance their abilities, aided by others, to protect themselves against possible intimidation or attack by Iran, Iraq, or any other country.

Seeds of distrust: background, context, perspective

Any examination of GCC–Iranian strategic relations needs to acknowledge that Iran, from the beginning, was not alone in opposing the GCC's criteria for membership. The criteria implicitly—no good purpose would have been served had it been made explicit—excluded from consideration four countries that thought they should be included: Iran, Iraq, Jordan, and Yemen. Among the four, Iran has been by far the most outspoken in its criticism of the GCC's exclusivist criteria for admission. Little wonder why: the organization, by design,

is composed of Gulf Arab countries. Ethnic-based national differences alone, however, were and are not the sole attribute distinguishing the member-countries from Iran. Other common GCC attributes include a broadly common identity, culture, language, and history; a nearly identical set of developmental challenges; and similar systems of governance.

Seed one: Britain abrogates its special treaties

The seeds of the consensus determining the GCC's standards for admission were numerous, cumulative, and multifaceted. The earliest seed was planted in late 1967 and would be nurtured thereafter for the next four years. The context was Great Britain's political decision to relinquish its long unchallenged role as the paramount power in the Gulf. Great Britain declared that by the end of 1971 it would abrogate each of the longstanding treaties between itself and nine Arab Gulf states by which it administered their defense and foreign relations.

From a geopolitical perspective, the decision marked the end of an era in which the region's international economic, political, and military might had been dominated by Great Britain for more than 125 years. In this, there was something unique. Unlike the transitions from imperial rule to national sovereignty elsewhere in the Arab world, none of the representatives of the nine Arab signatories to the protected-state treaties had pressed the British to make such a decision.

Accordingly, the Gulf emirates affected by the decision initially responded with shock and trepidation. Nonetheless, once they realized the decision was irreversible, they quickly agreed to meet with British officials to explore the feasibility of forging as large, unified, and robust a successor state as possible.[2] To their good fortune, their efforts were supported by Kuwait, Oman, and Saudi Arabia, and, to a lesser extent, by Bahrain as well as Iran.

What emerged by the late summer and fall of 1971 as a result of numerous meetings, however, was not one country but three, namely Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. The latter united the six east Arabian principalities of Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Dubai, Fujairah, Sharjah, and Umm al-Qaywayn into a loose confederation. A seventh member-state, the Emirate of Ra's al-Khaymah, joined in March 1972. As they began to chart an existence free from British rule, each of these polities was apprehensive of what the future might hold. Of particular concern was how Iran and Iraq would react to what they were setting out to achieve.

All nine of the east Arabian rulers had grounds for being suspicious of Baghdad's and Tehran's respective national agendas and ambitions toward them. Not without reason, they regarded Iran and Iraq as eager to fill the perceived power vacuum occasioned by the British decision. They believed that, left unchecked, both countries would likely pose challenges to the region's stability and security. Accordingly, neither the British nor the Arab participants were inclined to allow Baghdad or Tehran to be privy, let alone party, to the sensitive aspects of their discussions and negotiations.

Seed two: America ascendant

In marked contrast to the termination of imperial rule elsewhere, the ending of Great Britain's position as the paramount strategic external power in these polities' defense systems was not accompanied by violence. Instead, Britain's abrogation of its protected-state treaties not only occurred peacefully, but was followed almost seamlessly by the beginning of another epoch. In it, the United States would constitute the most powerful foreign military presence in the Gulf.

Without question, the elevation of Great Britain's most important ally to the semi-official status of preeminent global force in the Gulf was synonymous, certainly in this particular region, with an entirely new international adventure for the United States. However, the phenomenon of a Great Power administering the region's defense was not. Indeed, in the eyes of the Gulf's inhabitants, the protective measures that Washington proceeded to undertake in pursuit of its own and its allies' interests and key foreign policy objectives could not have been more familiar, and echoed a continuous theme in Gulf history stretching back to the Portuguese presence dating from the early sixteenth century.

For 400 years there had thus not been one day when the protection and international affairs of most of the maritime reaches of the western side of the Gulf, or practically the entire length of eastern Arabia, had not been administered by a Western Great Power. With Saudi Arabia the sole exception in this one geostrategic feature, for during most of this period it had not yet formed the state and territory that it came to comprise from 1932 onward, the six contiguous countries that would later forge the Gulf Cooperation Council in 1981 were then and would remain unique. Nothing remotely like it had occurred before or since in the international experience of the rest of the Arab world's sub-regions, that is, the Fertile Crescent, the Levant, the Nile Valley, and Arab North Africa.

In the modern era predating the onset of the Iranian Revolution in 1979, the significance and strategic implications of this reality have long remained a major point of contention in Tehran. From an Iranian nationalistic perspective, it is galling that for four consecutive centuries the country at the center of the defense structures perpetuating international order and stability in the area has not been the country with by far the longest coast and largest population in the Gulf. Rather, it has been a non-Arab, non-Iranian, and non-Islamic foreign power.

Underscoring this ongoing strategic and historic reality is how the military might of one or more Western powers over much of the past half millennium has proven not only vital to maintaining Gulf peace and stability, but has also been central to the continued existence of a majority of the Gulf countries' traditional systems of governance. No less significant is that the presence of such concentrated superior foreign military force has improved the abilities of government leaders inside and outside the Gulf to better anticipate and prepare for scenarios that could affect their destinies.[3]

Seed three: Iran, Iraq, and the Gulf's intraregional balance of power

Although this paper is concerned primarily with Iran and the GCC countries, it is necessary to point out that, for the past half century, a challenge to Gulf security and stability has been Iraq. In 1958, Iraq's monarchy was overthrown and replaced by a radical revolutionary government. A succession of Iraqi post-monarchy leaders put the Gulf's seven remaining hereditary regimes on notice. For the next four and a half decades, one Iraqi government after another was dedicated to promoting the ideals of Arab nationalism, unity, secularism, and varying degrees of socialism.

This first of two demises of a Gulf dynastic regime over the course of the past 50 years was not without consequence. Indeed, leaders in Iran and all along the eastern edges of Arabia were thereafter keenly aware of Baghdad's interest in enhancing Iraq's role in Gulf affairs. An opportunity to do so was not long in coming. When Kuwait gained its independence from Great Britain in July 1961, Iraq sought to annex it by force. It was thwarted when Britain rapidly mobilized and deployed its armed forces back to Kuwait.

Even so, from 1968 onwards, an overarching reality for the Gulf countries could not have been clearer: within three years Great Britain would no longer perform its protective role in assuring the security and stability of the Gulf countries. Iraq continued its nationalist and expansionist aspirations in the face of this new regional balance of power, its leaders perceiving an opportunity to couple Iraq's pan-Arab ambitions with Gulf Arab polities soon to be free of British rule.

But a seeming paradox was at hand. Whereas Iraq had previously indicated an interest in challenging Great Power primacy in the Gulf's international affairs, the number of occasions when it had actually organized and dispatched forces in an effort to do so was significantly fewer than Iran's. Indeed, in modern history, Tehran's expansionist ambitions at Arab expense were, in marked contrast, more frequent and have existed over a much longer period of time.

Seed four: GCC apprehensions of Iran

In the eyes of the countries that would form the GCC, two Iranian reactions to Great Britain's decision to abrogate its remaining Gulf treaty relations were telling. The first reaction had to do with Iran's designs on Bahrain.

At the time, Bahrain's international status was viewed throughout eastern Arabia as one of first among equals. In 1948, Britain withdrew from what had been the seat of its Political Residency for the Gulf at Bushire on the southwestern Iranian coast and moved it to Bahrain, where it would remain until December 1, 1971. Bahrain henceforth served as the headquarters from which British interests and policy objectives were administered for the Gulf's nine remaining protected states.

Iran had once ruled Bahrain indirectly before its representatives were ousted in the late eighteenth century. Ever since, Iran had maintained irredentist claims to Bahrain and even set aside two seats for Bahrain in its parliament. It did so

with much fanfare in preparation for the day when the Arab island state's citizens would be liberated from British rule.

When that point arrived, the Shah of Iran assumed Bahrainis would not likely opt for separate national sovereignty and political independence. Rather, he presumed they would acquiesce to rule by Iran. To that end, he wagered further that Bahrainis would proceed to elect delegates to represent their interests in Iranian institutions.

Thus, once Britain's decision to abrogate its treaty obligations to Bahrain and the other eight emirates became known, the Shah insisted Bahrain be dealt with differently than the other emirates, reminding anyone in doubt that a majority of Bahrain's citizens, like Iran's, were Shi`i Muslims. Tehran was not alone in such views. In a meeting with this author at the time, former U.S. Admiral Arleigh Burke, who as Chief of Naval Operations had only shortly before held the highest office in the United States Navy, also recommended that Bahrain revert to as close an association with Iran as possible.

Iran's claims to Bahrain were dealt a body blow when the results of a British-engineered informal sampling of public opinion in the archipelago by an official of the United Nations were made public in May 1970. The UN representative had met at length with numerous Bahraini cultural and social groups' leaders and members to inquire about which among several possible post-British rule options, inclusive of the possibility of Bahrain rejoining Iran, the respondents most wished to pursue. To the dismay of the Shah and the Iranian government, the Bahrainis whose views had been solicited declared overwhelmingly in favor of obtaining their national sovereignty, political independence, and territorial integrity as an Arab country.

Scarcely had the Shah realized he had no choice but to accept this fait accompli, which in being backed by Great Britain and the United States he knew would likely be irreversible, than the beam of his expansionist-focused searchlight shone elsewhere. The Shah laid claim to three Arab-ruled islands located inside the Gulf only a short distance north of what was even then arguably the world's most strategically vital maritime route: the Hormuz Strait. Two of the islands—the Greater and the Lesser Tunb—were administered by the Emirate of Ra's al-Khaymah. The larger and more inhabited island of Abu Musa was administered by the Emirate of Sharjah. At the time, the two emirates were part of the seven so-called Trucial States that would become the United Arab Emirates.

As mid-point in 1971 came and went and the end date of the British treaties' validity drew nearer, it became increasingly obvious that the Shah was determined not to be thwarted a second time in his bid to expand Iran's territorial reach and control. To that end, he waited for the precise moment when neither the British nor any other power would likely be able or willing to stand in his way.

The Shah's timing was impeccable. On December 1, 1971, the very day before the British treaties expired, he ordered the Iranian navy to seize the three islands. What happened then sowed the seeds of a continuous thorn in GCC–Iranian relations. With the flimsiest of evidence justifying his claim that the islands rightly belonged to Iran, the Shah wrested control of territories whose peoples were almost entirely Arab and over which the two emirates' flags had flown for more

than a century. That the Iranian ship that seized one of the islands belonging to Ra's al-Khaymah was wider and longer than the island itself was predictably psychologically damaging to the Arabs.

As such, the act and the way it occurred imparted a lasting negative image of Iran, depicting a non-Arab country mercilessly imposing its will on defenseless Arabs. In retrospect, the heavy-handedness of Tehran's grab of Arab territory was but an omen of what would later be further Iranian adventurist actions against Iraqi and GCC interests.

Subsequent Iranian acts of antagonism against one or more Arab Gulf states' interests would also hardly be cost-free. Indeed, each one served only to vitiate further what little trust and confidence existed among the Arabs on the receiving end. Over the ensuing years, Iran would unilaterally engage in successive measures to increase its military domination of Abu Musa Island. In so doing, it directly violated the memorandum of agreement that an intimidated Ruler of Sharjah felt compelled to enter into in 1971, which specified that responsibility for the island's administration as well as receipt of revenues from its offshore oil production would be divided equally between the signatories.

Iran has consistently rejected the UAE's repeated calls for the dispute to be submitted to the International Court of Justice or international arbitration for settlement. Tehran has stated instead that the matter ought to be dealt with bilaterally between Iran and the UAE. In the fall of 2008, a UAE official, who insisted on nonattribution as he was not authorized to speak on the issue, informed this author that the UAE has interpreted Iran's position as "sending an unmistakable message that we are not important, that it does not need to take us seriously" (Anonymous UAE official 2008).

The example of these three islands is as good as any in illustrating the GCC countries' reservations regarding Iran's intentions at their expense. But the sense of distrust of Iran during the period prior to the GCC's formation was not unlimited, and did not in every instance prove an insurmountable barrier to the two entities agreeing to cooperate with one another in issue-specific matters. Instead, both sides acknowledged it was only prudent to try to find ways of accommodating each other's legitimate interests. As such, in more than one instance a mutually agreeable *modus operandi* was reached that enabled Iran and one or more Gulf Arab countries to cooperate in strategic matters pertaining to the region's stability and security.

Seed five: the Nixon Doctrine's Twin-Pillar Strategy

One such effort to enhance the nature and degree of strategic cooperation between the Gulf's Arab countries and Iran would become a fifth seed in which both Arab trust and mistrust vis-à-vis Iran were established. The effort, known as the Twin-Pillar Strategy (TPS) between Iran and Saudi Arabia, was devised soon after the abrogation of Britain's Gulf treaties.

The catalyst for the TPS was the early 1970s American decision to withdraw from Vietnam. In its wake, Washington sought to lessen the need to mobilize and

deploy large numbers of American forces abroad in the then foreseeable future. The result was the Nixon Doctrine or the Guam Doctrine, the latter nomenclature deriving from the American-controlled island of Guam where the president first enunciated the strategy's scope and focus.

The cornerstone of the Nixon Doctrine as it pertained to Arab–Iranian relations in the Gulf was a strategic understanding between the United States and Riyadh, on one hand, and Washington and Tehran, on the other. The goal was to link Iran and Saudi Arabia in special separate bilateral relationships with the United States over and beyond what already existed between them. Only thus, the parties agreed, would they likely be able to enhance the prospects for maintaining national security and regional stability in Arabia and the Gulf.

But no sooner did conceptualization of the Nixon Doctrine become known than it proved problematic. The prospects for its success were limited in part due to its timing. More specifically, the early formulations of the TPS predated the outbreak of the October 1973 Arab–Israeli war and the ensuing Arab oil embargo against the United States, Great Britain, and the Netherlands. Indeed, the oil embargo pointed to the likely constraints on the TPS' efficacy, certainly in matters of mutual trust and suspicion as they pertained to Israel. The limits became apparent when Saudi Arabia and numerous other Arab countries opted to adhere to the embargo but, significantly, Iran did not, choosing instead to materially benefit from the situation at Arab expense, as it had done after the 1967 Arab–Israeli War.

Iran's refusal to participate in the embargo proved costly. It tarnished the country's image among many of its domestic political factions, and it angered Arab nationalists throughout the Gulf region. Furthermore, it sent a red flag to the Palestinians, Syrians, and most other Arabs.

Saudi Arabia and other Arabs found the rationale behind Iran's actions lacking in credibility. In a 2008 conversation with this author, a GCC leader reflected back on Iran's 1973 decision. In describing its effect upon a broad swath of Arab opinion, he said,

> We had seen the Shah do this before. When he did so again in this instance it was clearer than ever before that in matters pertaining to Israel and Palestine regarding issues of elemental justice and human rights, he was not only not with us, he was aligned with Israel, which was then, as now, unjustly occupying our fellow Arabs in Egypt, the Palestinian territories, and Syria.
>
> (Anonymous GCC leader 2008)

Confronted with the domestic and international damage to his image, the Shah moved quickly to try to restore favor with those whom he had offended. To that end, he opened Iran's coffers. For the next several years, he took care to ensure that Iran was one of the most generous providers of financial assistance to Egypt. The aid was rationalized as a means to help compensate Cairo for the economic losses incurred by the war's closure of the Suez Canal.[4]

The consequences of Iran's actions and inactions in response to the October 1973 Arab–Israeli War were therefore mixed. While the Shah's decisions did nothing to inspire confidence among Gulf Arab leaders regarding an issue of fundamental importance to their sense of justice, at the same time Tehran and Riyadh were careful not to challenge the overall efficacy of the Nixon Doctrine. To the contrary, the Cold War premises of the doctrine remained in place. Neither of the countries' leaders nor the leaders in Kuwait and the other soon-to-be-independent Gulf polities were inclined to cast doubt or renege on their underlying agreement to enhance their respective capacities for deterrence and defense.

Seed six: the March 1975 Algiers Accord

Adherence to the Nixon Doctrine was only one example of how the Arab side of the Gulf, notwithstanding its reservations about Iran, was able to forge a degree of policy unity with Iran in which both parties benefited. Another event gave them an additional reason to cooperate. The catalyst was the aftereffect of significantly elevated international oil prices that did not revert to their prewar levels following the end of the oil embargo in March 1974. Indeed, the earlier reluctance of the Arab Gulf states to grant Iran a regionally paramount defense role would rapidly and unexpectedly be eclipsed, albeit temporarily, by a development that neither Gulf Arabs nor Iranians had adequately anticipated.

The development was reflected in mounting Western anger at the continuing high price of oil being charged by Arabs and Iranians. Western leaders and Americans in particular cited the high oil prices as a major reason for a plethora of challenges faced by the world's industrialized economies. With no apparent end to the challenges in sight, a growing number of prominent American strategic and foreign policy analysts began to ponder an option that had previously not been under consideration. They began to weigh the pros and cons of the United States, either alone or in concert with other Western countries, seizing the Gulf's oil fields, if necessary, by force.

The highly charged tensions that accompanied the implications of such publicly voiced threats by American officials were not without effect. In the face of such intimidation, all eight Gulf governments reacted as one. They agreed to set aside their differences so as to meet and discuss how best to confront the challenges before them. Failure to do so, they acknowledged, risked the obvious: the possibility of powerful foreign interests trying to set them against each other in a quest for strategic advantage and economic gain at their expense. Worse, leaders on both sides of the Gulf envisioned that one or more Western Great Powers might have in mind returning to the Gulf with vastly larger, more advanced, and better equipped armed forces than ever before.

The reasons for pan-Gulf paranoia at the time were not imagined. Every Middle Eastern leader was painfully aware of two precedent-setting cases. In each, superior foreign forces inflicted their might on Arabs and Iranians with a view to overthrowing their leaders and undoing their governments' policies. Twenty years earlier, France, Great Britain, and Israel, united in their opposition

to Egyptian leader Gamal Abd al-Nasser, hurled their respective armed forces against Egypt with the intention of toppling him and thereby dealing a body blow to the then-champion of the cause of Arab nationalism.

Three years earlier, the United States and Great Britain successfully engineered the overthrow of the democratically elected Iranian government led by Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh. The act restored British control over, and introduced a substantial American stake in, Iran's oil industry. With an eye to preventing the United States and its allies from using force in this instance, all eight Gulf countries' leaders agreed to convene in Algiers. They did so with a view to settling the most prominent differences between them, which at the time were those between Iran and Iraq.

The summit concluded with the Algiers Accord. In it, the representatives of Baghdad, Tehran, and all the other Gulf countries declared a set of principles by which they professed they would henceforth be bound. The accord's specific language underscored the signatories' intent "to reach a final and permanent solution of all the problems existing between the two countries [Iran and Iraq] in accordance with the principles of territorial integrity, border inviolability, and noninterference in internal affairs" (Algiers Accord 1975).

Against all expectations to the contrary, the Algiers Accord would last almost four years until broken by Iran in February 1979. Barely a day after Iranian Ayatollah Rouhollah Khomeini returned from exile abroad, Tehran called for the overthrow of the Iraqi government, violating a cardinal principle of the accord. Subsequently, in the 6 March 1991 "Damascus Declaration," the six GCC countries, together with the foreign ministers of Egypt and Syria, recommitted themselves to the principle of noninterference in one another's domestic affairs. The Damascus Declaration as of this writing is, of course, moribund. Even so, the significance of its life after death in terms of its direct bearing on GCC relations with Iran is this: the GCC countries have held fast to their insistence that adherence to this principle is the *sine qua non* of their relations with each other and with non-GCC members within the Gulf, namely Iran and Iraq.[5]

Yet as impressive as the extended adherence to the Algiers Accord by its signatories came to be, it only postponed a further manifestation of suspicion and distrust between the Gulf region's Arabs and Iranians. In this light, the accord merely temporarily brushed aside the signatories' differences. The most important of these differences was over the presummit Western and Iranian debate over why or why not the Gulf Arab countries should cede to Iran the premier position of military prominence and geopolitical advantage in pan-Gulf matters.

Confronted with this situation, Washington officialdom was faced with a quandary. With its preferred candidate to play the role of paramount regional power rejected by all seven of the Gulf's Arab countries, it had little choice but to explore other possibilities. To its good fortune, Saudi Arabia seized the opportunity to play an enhanced role in the strategic formulation and execution of the Gulf's defense policies. Doing so, its analysts reasoned, helped to further regional security and stability while allowing the Kingdom to pursue its own interests and foreign policy objectives.

Riyadh's inclination to take on this role followed year-long strategic surveys of the country's defense needs. The surveys were conducted in association with Great Britain, the United States, and other countries following the October 1973 Arab–Israeli War. The thrust of the strategic assessors' conclusions was that, within the time span of the next twenty years, the places from which Saudi Arabia would most likely be vulnerable to threat or attack would be Iraq and/or Yemen, but not Iran. This was not surprising. At the time, Iraq was perceived to be the greater and more likely threat in light of its larger and more modernized armed forces.[6] Accordingly, the strategic need for Riyadh to have good relations with Tehran as a potential check against possible Iraqi adventurism was logical and compelling.

Seed seven: the Muscat conference of 1976

Even so, Tehran's value as a strategic counterweight to Baghdad was limited. By itself, it was insufficient to override Saudi Arabia and the other Arab countries' unease with Iran's non-Arab identity, coupled with the implications of its multi-faceted relationship with Israel. In an effort to find a way to bridge the doubts and suspicions of Iran's international intentions, Oman's Sultan Qaboos bin Said invited representatives of all eight Gulf governments to convene in Muscat to explore such possibilities in the fall of 1976.

Despite the lofty ambitions and possibilities implicit in the strategic challenges that drew them together, the participants in the Muscat meeting were unable to agree on an acceptable set of policies. Neither were they able to concur on an institutional means by which they might systematically coordinate efforts to maintain and strengthen what they acknowledged was in their collective interest: namely, the region's defense. According to accounts shared with this writer by attendees of the Conference, Iran's and Iraq's representatives did everything they could to dominate the proceedings in ways that the other attendees found intimidating and threatening.

The reported behavior of Iran and Iraq's representatives reflected not only their respective agendas to expand their influence in matters pertaining to Gulf affairs in general. It also revealed their separate ambitions to reconfigure the region's balance of power to their benefit with little, if any, regard for the interests of the six monarchial regimes lining the shores of eastern Arabia. In the heated give-and-take between the representatives of these two erstwhile neighbors *cum* competitors, who within only a few years would become enemies, the other six countries' representatives were in effect consigned to the role of onlookers, largely unable to get a word in edgewise.

According to the Conference attendees, the Iranian and Iraqi participants were particularly disdainful of the strategic orientation of the six Arab monarchies' defense policies. In particular, they viewed the insistence of these countries' leaders on maintaining close military ties with their Great Power allies as outdated, unnecessary, and unbecoming of sovereign and independent nations. The experience of witnessing such displays of Iranian and Iraqi hubris, stridency, condescension, and disrespect toward the six east Arabian countries' strategic

situations and preferences was far-reaching in its effect. Like nothing else, it gave important impetus to what in five years would be the formation of the Gulf Cooperation Council by the Gulf's six dynasties and the accompanying decision not to invite Iran or Iraq to become members.

Seed eight: the Iranian Revolution and the Iran–Iraq War

Whereas the islands issue, the Nixon Doctrine's TPS, the Algiers Accord, and the Muscat Conference all predate the ouster of the Shah, there have been many more Iran–GCC disputes and disagreements since the Pahlavi Dynasty was overthrown. Of these, the most far-reaching in its impact was the record of Iranian violations of the Algiers Accord in interfering in the domestic affairs of Iraq following the return of Iranian Ayatollah Rouhollah Khomeini from exile in February 1979. Senior Iraqi and American officials with whom this writer spoke in the course of escorting several American Congressional staff delegations to Iraq in the mid-to-late 1980s alluded to 111 additional violations of the Accord by Iran in comparison to none by Iraq.

Cumulatively, these provocations were followed by the inevitable onset of the Iran–Iraq War that would last from September 1980 to August 1988; the documentation of Iranian efforts to sow subversion in practically every GCC country; Tehran's continued refusal to submit the three islands' dispute with the UAE to peaceful international settlement; the Islamic Republic's pursuit of uranium enrichment processes that, unchecked, could eventually give it the capacity to produce nuclear weapons; Iranian government leaders' continuing call for the withdrawal of all Western defense forces from the Gulf; and Iran's insistence on being a player in inter-Arab affairs as evidenced by its support for domestic political factions in Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, and elsewhere in the Arab world. The overall impact of this evidentiary record has sown an unbroken row of seeds for further pan-GCC distrust of Iran that exists to this day.

It should be clear that GCC country leaders insist that the reasons for their limited trust and confidence in Iranian motives and agendas regarding Gulf defense and security are grounded in fact, not myth. Pressed for proof, they cite not only the record chronicled herein but also numerous specific occasions when Iran has threatened virtually every GCC country. In contrast, they contend, Iran cannot point to more than two instances when an action by a GCC country could possibly be interpreted as having threatened Iran. One arguable exception is Saudi Arabia's ongoing strategic actions designed to ensure that international oil prices remain lower than what Iran would prefer, with Iran pointing out with arithmetical accuracy that it has three times the population of all six GCC countries combined and thus has far more people with legitimate material, defense, and development requirements that, on moral and humanitarian grounds, it is obliged to try to meet and serve.[7]

Another possible exception could be differing GCC and Iranian perceptions regarding an issue involving Doha and Tehran. In the eyes of some Iranian nationalists, Qatar has been benefiting unjustly from revenues derived from its

exploitation of the offshore North Dome Field, known in Iran as the South Pars Field, which straddles the median line delineating the two countries' international maritime boundary. Qatar's position, however, is similar to Kuwait's regarding the Rumeila oil field that overlaps the border between Kuwait and Iraq. It is also similar to that of Riyadh in a situation pertaining to an oil field that straddles the border between Saudi Arabia and the UAE's Emirate of Abu Dhabi.

Qatar, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia have been proceeding in accordance with the school of thought that whichever country develops and produces oil for export or domestic use from its side of an acknowledged international boundary—as the boundary between Iran and Qatar, Kuwait and Iraq, and Saudi Arabia and the UAE are acknowledged to be—is entitled to receive the economic proceeds of that production. Iran's complaint is therefore understandable that this approach works to its disadvantage. An unstated reason is that because Iran has been under American-led economic sanctions for more than a quarter of a century, international oil companies have refrained from assisting Iran in its goal of producing from its side of the field in question. Even so, that the GCC countries have adhered to their obviously advantageous and legally defensible position with respect to the development of the region's energy resources has hardly endeared them to Iran.

Iranian counterpoints

From the foregoing, it should not be surprising that Iran has repeatedly expressed its displeasure at the elusiveness of its quest to be the Gulf's paramount power. In turn, Tehran's displeasure has given the GCC countries' leaders reason to believe that the Islamic Republic may at some point resort to means other than peaceful political persuasion to produce outcomes more to its liking. A particular GCC concern in this regard remains Iran's continued refusal to acquiesce to the GCC's criteria for admission. The implication of the refusal is that Iran may remain intent on doing whatever it deems necessary to gain entry into the GCC, which would be a disaster in GCC eyes.[8] Indeed, Iran appears to reject outright the idea that it should take the GCC's "no" for an answer. Instead, it has continuously argued from an entirely different perspective—one that from the beginning until the present the GCC countries have found objectionable—as to why it should be included.

Most Iranian critics couch their arguments for GCC membership in the following manner. First, Iranians are undeniably heirs of one of the world's more renowned anvils of antiquity, including the classical era when ancient Persia was universally acknowledged as one of the most culturally advanced civilizations in the Middle East. Many Iranians contend further that much of their country's rich history is older and more variegated than that of the GCC. Second, Iranians posit that the deep-rooted family ties between millions of Arabs and Iranians on both sides of the Gulf are centuries-old and counting. Third, Iranian nationalists point out that Iran has been present at the creation of more international organizations than any GCC country except Saudi Arabia. For example, Iran is, among other things, a founding member of the United Nations; the United Nations

Economic, Social, and Cultural Organization; the International Court of Justice; the Organization of the Islamic Conference; the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries; and the earlier but subsequently disbanded Baghdad Pact, the Central Treaty Organization, and the Organization for Regional Cooperation and Development. Fourth, since the onset of the Iranian Revolution in 1979, unlike Iraq and Kuwait, and, further afield, Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria, Iran has been able to maintain without interruption its national sovereignty, political independence, and territory free of foreign intervention and control.

Tehran's leaders further contend that the GCC has consistently failed to come to a geo-strategic political and military accommodation with the reality of Iran's far more extensive Gulf coast. That alone, many in Tehran argue, ought to merit, if not Iran's membership in the GCC, then Iran's participation in any and all deliberations bearing on the defense of the Gulf as a whole. To wit: Iran's southern shoreline, which spans almost the entire length of the Gulf along its western side, is more than twice as long as the shores of any two other Gulf countries combined.

Yet another Iranian attribute that has no equivalent among any of the GCC nations is the country's demographic weight. As mentioned above, Iran's nearly 80 million citizens outnumber the six GCC member-states' citizens combined by a ratio of more than three to one. A related consideration has to do with Iran's human resources in comparison to those in the GCC. With the exception of Saudi Arabia, Iran has a comparatively larger number of citizens with advanced doctoral degrees, applied technical expertize, and professional experience—skilled labor assets in demand throughout the Gulf. Further, these numbers are over and beyond the more than one million largely middle and upper professional classes of Iranians living and working in Europe and North America, with estimates of as high as a million Iranians living in United States alone.

Yet except for the UAE Emirate of Dubai, which hosts estimates varying from 250,000 to 440,000 to 500,000 Iranian workers and business representatives,[9] the GCC countries have done little to capitalize on a ready source of fellow Gulf-skilled labor in the service of the two people's shared commercial interests. In the face of these realities, Iranians have largely concluded that GCC employers and would-be joint venture business partners are prejudiced against hiring Iranians. They believe that, despite being immediately adjacent to the GCC countries, being fellow Muslims, and in many instances being able to communicate in Arabic, GCC employers across the board have preferred to hire Western expatriates as well as South Asian and Southeast Asian laborers instead.

Further, Iran's leaders call attention to the fact that it has on several occasions provided important strategic and tactical assistance to the GCC countries' most important protector, the United States, only to receive little or nothing in return. Examples include when: 1) Iran accepted from but refused to return to Iraq the armed forces and civilian aircraft that Saddam Hussein sent to Iran in the fall of 1990 for what he hoped would be safekeeping; 2) Iran tacitly supported the United States and numerous other countries mobilizing and deploying hundreds of thousands of their armed forces personnel to Arabia with the goal of reversing Iraq's aggression against Kuwait in 1990–1991; 3) Iran offered the American

oil company Conoco a $2.3 billion concession to develop the country's offshore gas reserves in the South Pars Field in 1995, only to have the Clinton administration, which was pressured by the principal American lobby for Israel, the American Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), to veto the concession and subsequently declare that it would revisit America's relations with any country that invested more than $20 million in Iran's energy industry; and 4) Iran tacitly supported by not opposing America's attacks against al-Qaeda bases and violent extremist operatives in Afghanistan in the fall of 2001.

Even so, that Tehran has persisted in its pursuit of a nuclear development program that could enable it to eventually produce one or more nuclear weapons and the means to project them abroad has overridden these positive examples of Iranian international behavior. It has also deepened the GCC's fears regarding the Gulf's intra-regional balance of power, and has caused representatives of every GCC country to comment to this writer their dismay at the seeming irony embedded in the observation that in 2003, America attacked Iraq, and Iran won—without firing a single bullet or shedding a drop of blood—just as it also won when the United States earlier eliminated the threat that Taliban-ruled Afghanistan had posed to Iran. Instead of the GCC countries significantly loosening or otherwise diminishing related ties to their non-Gulf Great Power protectors as a result, the opposite has occurred.

As a result of this strengthening of Iran, GCC–U.S. defense ties have been consistently expanded. Further, not least among potentially ominous developments related to Iran has been the degree to which a growing number of GCC countries have moved to explore the possibilities of pursuing their own nuclear development programs. In every instance thus far, they have done so in close association with the United States, France, Great Britain, South Korea, and other powers, thereby deepening their already extensive reliance upon and defense cooperation with non-Gulf countries.

The above has documented reasons as to why in large measure the GCC's founders opted not to invite either Iraq or, more importantly, Iran to join the GCC, as well as why they remain opposed to the idea of either country joining it. An additional reason for the exclusion of Iran and Iraq was that a war was being waged between the two countries at the time. On that ground alone, admitting either country, let alone both, would have inevitably and unavoidably drawn the GCC countries into the conflict against their wishes.

GCC–Iran shared interests and concerns

In enumerating the reasons why the GCC countries have refused to extend an invitation to either Iran or Iraq to become a member, it is important to emphasize that the strategic dynamics of GCC–Iranian relations are far from being a distinguishable whole. Depending on the issue, the specific nature and extent of relations with Iran differs from one country to the next. And though the mistrust on the side of the GCC is strong, the countries have historically shared a number of commitments with Iran that may bode well for future relations.

Wars

Iran and the GCC countries share a common goal of avoiding an invasion and occupation by foreign powers. The sinews of this interest and concern are wrapped around a joint GCC–Iranian belief that such an intervention would threaten their security and stability. This concern is also anchored in another belief, namely that given what the Gulf has, what it does, where it is, and the importance of all three attributes to humankind as a whole, such a conflict and its repercussions could quickly become global in scope. In this regard, it is Iran and the GCC countries' mutual conviction that the four wars that have occurred in or near the region dating from eight months before the GCC was established have been four too many.

Clash of Civilizations

Another GCC–Iranian goal has been to counter the so-called "Clash of Civilizations" (CC) thesis propagated by writers such as Bernard Lewis and the late Samuel Huntington. The thesis of these two authors *cum* polemicists posits that the world's future wars are as likely to be caused by stark differences between and among people's cultures as by anything else. Analysts the world over have taken this to imply, among other things, an inevitable conflict between Western and Muslim countries.

The formulation, dissemination, and widespread acceptance of this thesis have been and remain troubling for Arabs and Iranians alike. The results have introduced a significantly greater degree of tension and mutual animosity, suspicion, and distrust not only between them, but also in Western–Muslim relations, than previously existed. Many analysts contend that this is not an accident, that it was what Lewis, if not also Huntington and the neo-conservatives appointed to key American strategic, defense, and foreign policy posts within the administration of President George W. Bush, had in mind.

Iranians, GCC citizens, and other Arabs have been in broad agreement in their response. They have contested and continuously sought to repudiate the CC postulate's implicitly negative depiction of an irreconcilable divide between Arabs, Iranians, and other Muslims, on one hand, and the Western world, on the other. Separately and at times in concert within international organizations of which they are members, the GCC countries and Iran have repeatedly rebutted the CC's prediction of a marked increase in culture-driven interstate conflicts as illustrative of future trends and indications in world affairs. They are jointly determined to do whatever is necessary to defend their cultures and diminish Western and American tendencies to demonize Middle Easterners and Muslims in general.

On this particular issue, GCC and Iranian government leaders agree that, left unchecked, such antagonistic and provocative Western sentiments could spread. They believe the impact could be devastating should this occur. Among potentially damaging results would be the threat of their quests to retain—or in the case

of the Palestinians and Syrians obtain—their respective national sovereignties, political independence, and territorial integrity.

Energy

A third GCC–Iranian common strategic interest revolves around energy issues. In particular, it relates to the production and pricing of the region's oil and gas resources. A recent variant of this shared interest has been their concern about a growing sentiment and an emerging shift in the focus of American energy policies.

Neither Arabs nor Iranians deny that altered American attitudes about energy issues were evident throughout the 21-month 2008 U.S. electoral campaign. GCC and Iranian analysts alike charge that not only the then-incumbent Bush administration, but virtually all of the Democratic and Republican Party candidates for election, failed to acknowledge that speaking of a reliance on "foreign oil" is code for Arab and Iranian oil. In choosing not to be clear, specific, or educative, the candidates not only pandered to xenophobia and isolationism, but also catered to the baser and more crudely perceived exigencies of American domestic political electioneering.

If few others sensed what this element of American politics signaled for future United States relations with the GCC countries and Iran, none in Tehran and the GCC capitals were in doubt. The message received was one of irresponsible and potentially dire consequences, that is, divorce proceedings between the United States and the existing reciprocally rewarding relationship of interdependence between the United States and most of the countries, including those in the Arab and Islamic world in particular, that produce for export hydrocarbon fuels, the source of 80 percent of America's transportation needs. Propelling such electoral concerns to the forefront, on one hand, were pervasive worries about climate change and the environment. On the other was a combination of widespread American ignorance and prejudice against Arab, Iranian, and other Muslim oil-exporting countries.

If successfully implemented, the commitment would sever the energy-specific ties between the United States as the world's premier oil importer and the Gulf countries as the world's premier oil exporters. Left unstated but clear to many analysts was the following: in the short-term, the effort to implement such a policy would likely prove harmful to both sides.

But for those who have long been jealous of the Arab–U.S. energy relationship, the prospects for American and other Great Power policies at some point tilting away from the Arab energy exporters and closer toward Israel would be welcomed. In their view, the rupture between Washington and the capitals of the Arab oil exporters would potentially drive an enormous and much desired wedge in the overall Arab–U.S. strategic relationship. It would also help preclude the emergence of a future renewed American–Iranian strategic relationship—unless American, Israeli, and other neo-conservative strategists were to have their way in changing the regime in Tehran and replacing it with one more responsive and favorable to American, Israeli, and other Western countries' interests. Stated differently, the goal would be for regime change to lead to a new situation in

which the successor government in Iran would be more amenable to the United States as well as to Israel, moderate in its approach to the Arab–Israeli conflict, less supportive of Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Assad government in Syria, and unlikely to continue supporting Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Palestine.

Maritime security

A fourth GCC–Iranian shared concern has to do with seaborne security issues, namely the prevention of disruptions to their respective ports' exports and foreign-sourced goods upon which citizens of the GCC and Iran are vitally reliant. In this regard, only Iran has threatened, albeit only rhetorically thus far, the Gulf's maritime commerce.

Whenever Iran has implied such threats, the impact has been damaging, not only to the economies of all eight Gulf countries, but to much of the world. An example is the numerous occasions when Iran attacked foreign vessels engaged in the region's seaborne trade during the second half of the 1980–88 Iran–Iraq War. In so doing, Tehran threatened the maritime safe passage of a quarter of the world's international energy exports that originate daily inside the Gulf.

The harm that Iranian forces inflicted upon foreign shipping during that period was indiscriminate and extensive. In attacking the ships of a dozen countries, including four ships carrying Iranian oil, the Islamic Republic not only heightened international anxieties regarding regional security and stability and thereby depressed the level of inward flows of foreign investment into the Gulf, but also heightened maritime insurance rates that, in turn, negatively affected the economies of every country in the Gulf.

Fast forward: the contemporary period

A sanctioned Iran

For most of the intervening years since the GCC's establishment until the present, the relationships between the GCC countries and Iran have been unsteady. The ties have been laced with the same kinds of tensions noted earlier, including Iran's robust nuclear development program, which served as a catalyst for the imposition of sanctions by the United States and then by the United Nations Security Council.

The UN Security Council justified the heightened levels of international sanctions against Iran with its charge that Tehran has failed to cooperate fully with the investigations of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) into Iran's nuclear development program. Declaring they were not persuaded that Iran had earlier been completely truthful in its declarations to the IAEA, three of the Security Council's five permanent members—the United States, France, and Great Britain—have continued their support for sanctions and other efforts to isolate the Islamic Republic in an effort to halt the enrichment of the uranium components of its nuclear program.

As China and Russia, in contrast, have emphasized the need for conciliatory measures, the UN sanctions have been narrower in scope than Washington, Paris, and London would have preferred. Without question, the GCC countries have favored using whatever means necessary to avoid the outbreak of yet another war in the region. Even so, while the GCC countries have not called for the cessation of sanctions, they have indicated their preference for the United States and the European Union to engage Iran peacefully and productively.

Threats to attack Iran

Persistent rumors that fueled GCC apprehensions about Iran provided a subtext to the international discussion of the nuclear issue prior to the election of U.S. President Barack Obama. Of particular concern was how continued American and other foreign opposition to Iran might play out in terms of Gulf security and stability. Despite continued refutation from United States and Israeli administration officials, the rumors held that the United States and/or Israel might attack Iran militarily.

Certainly throughout the second half of the Bush administration, both sides engaged in saber-rattling, with U.S. officials pointedly refusing to rule out military options, while sending two carrier battle group ships to the Gulf and staging simulated war games near Iran's territorial waters. Iranian officials did not ignore these actions. Citing what they referred to as provocative American actions designed to bring about armed conflict, they periodically issued pronouncements threatening to respond with all means available. Among the suggestions were that Iranian forces could wreak havoc on United States interests in the GCC region and beyond, with instruments ranging from support for armed groups fighting American and U.S.-trained forces in Iraq and Afghanistan to the sabotage of UAE or other GCC coastal desalination and power-generating installations.

Choosing not to limit its responses to rhetoric alone, Tehran has staged its own annual offshore war games in and around the Hormuz Strait most years since the early 1990s. These games have included: 1) demonstrations of its navy's capacity to remain for longer and longer periods at sea without the need for replenishment of supplies; 2) practicing armed forces special operations activities associated with enhancing its undersea abilities to attack or otherwise neutralize adversaries' ships, pipelines, and water intake for coastal electrical power generating and desalination plants; and 3) simulating amphibious landings, which GCC analysts conclude could only be directed toward one or more of the GCC countries. Viewed in their entirety, such actions have persuaded GCC strategic analysts and defense leaders to be on their guard less against Iranian intentions, which as with any country are oftentimes hard to fathom with clarity, and more against Iranian capabilities to inflict harm upon one or more GCC countries and/or their allies.

As the international standoff with Iran continued in the aftermath of the transition from the American presidential administration of George W. Bush to that of Barack Obama in early 2009, some analysts implied that the most propitious moment for the United States and/or Israel to attack Iran would turn on the status

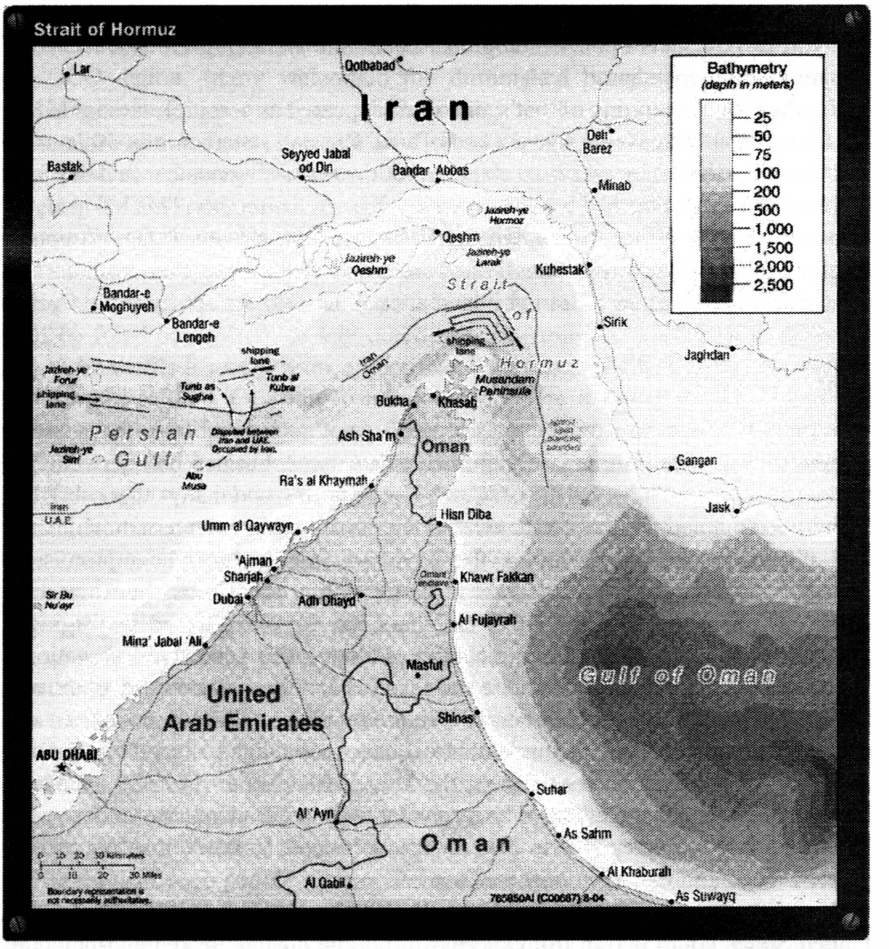

Figure 5.1 Strait of Hormuz map.

Source: Courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.

of the Iranian nuclear reactor at Bushire, situated in the southwestern part of the country in an area adjacent to the Gulf coast, with regard to its receipt or utilization of uranium fuel enrichment rods from which it could eventually produce a nuclear weapon.

Analysts in and beyond the Gulf argue that the consequences of either an armed attack on or accident or explosion at the Bushire reactor could pose a Chernobyl-like threat.[10] Such an eventuality, a prominent Kuwaiti strategic analyst indicated to this writer, would have the potential for a disaster of epochal proportions. An explosion at Bushire would immediately threaten to contaminate most of the northern Gulf's vital water supplies, to say nothing of the danger any radiation released as a result of such a catastrophe could have on shipping

into and out of the Gulf of vital food supplies, medicines, and, most importantly, its hydrocarbon fuels upon which global economic wellbeing are and will long remain vitally dependent.[11]

Yet the optimum timing of that scenario disappeared as press releases issued by the Islamic Republic News Agency and official Russian statements on 30 January 2008, reported that Russia's final shipment of the remaining nuclear fuel destined for the Bushire reactor had been delivered earlier in the month. This led analysts to doubt whether either the United States or Israel would attack that particular reactor, but it did not rule out the possibility of strikes on other reactors and related facilities located in Iran at inland sites somewhat distant from the Gulf.[12]

Fear run amok

These recent events played out amidst broad fears of a resurgent Iran. The question of how to deal with Iran, not only on the nuclear issue, but in a broader strategic perspective, loomed large for the GCC, the United States, and many other countries. Opinions remained divided on the relative merits of continued international isolation of Iran versus engagement and the pursuit of conciliation and compromise.[13]

Material matters compounded the difficulties that the United States and its allies, on one hand, and the GCC members, on the other, faced in forging a unified position among so many countries. Massive and pervasive international interests remained eager to increase the level of foreign investments, trade, and the establishment of joint commercial ventures with Iran. Indeed, economic and commercial rewards were the undeniable, if unacknowledged, objectives of many foreign governments and businesses, the United States and the GCC countries included, in what all agreed could be incalculable strategic advantages and material benefits for any country able to gain significant access to Iran's massive oil and gas resources and its large consumer market.

Some analysts continued to believe that the kinds of potential benefits the United States could derive from successful regime change in Tehran, including privatizing the country's energy sector and opening it and other sectors of the economy to GCC-based American and other foreign contracts and operations, outweighed any benefits of the "spoils of war" cited by those who had earlier advocated attacking Iraq and which, in the invasion's aftermath, critics' accounts to the contrary have increasingly been obtained.[14]

If only in terms of the 2008 presidential campaign rhetoric, the change in American presidents from Bush to Obama seemed to offer relatively positive prospects for opening a new chapter in American–Iranian, as well as GCC–Iranian, relations. Certainly a less hostile and antagonistic tone to whatever dialogue might ensue between Tehran and Washington appeared likely at the onset of the Obama administration. Not to put too fine a gloss on the euphoria that accompanied the new president's election victory and his inauguration, few denied that the possibilities for civil dialogue were greater than at any point not only in the previous eight years, but dating back to 1979 when the Iranian Revolution began.

If nothing else, the new American president's promise to explore the prospect for meaningful dialogue with Iran was immediately well received throughout the GCC region. Many welcomed the diminished prospect that Washington would continue the previous administration's allusions to forcible regime change in Tehran. Those skeptical of a change in the nature of U.S.–Iranian and GCC–Iranian relations, however, took care to remind analysts that the idea of toppling the government in Tehran began not with the administration of President George W. Bush, but with the Clinton White House.

Another uncertain prospect under examination as control of the White House changed hands was whether Iran would hold fast to its long insistence that the Gulf be freed of Western or any other non-Gulf militaries. Were it to do so, it would be difficult to envision a significant thawing of either the U.S.–Iranian relationship or the GCC–Iranian relationship. Were it not to do so, few things would be more welcomed in Washington and the capitals of the GCC countries.

Further, in the absence of a major political rapprochement between Washington and Tehran, it remained to be seen to what extent, if at all, Iran could expect to consolidate its geopolitical gains in Iraq. Not the least of the GCC countries' apprehensions regarding these unknowns was how Iran and Iraq might possibly form an informal bilateral power bloc that could potentially pose threats to the governmental status quo in the GCC region.

Certainly, the GCC leaders reckoned that Baghdad and Tehran at peace and in a mutually beneficial relationship with each other might explore the possibilities of what they could achieve in tandem vis-à-vis one or more GCC countries or the GCC as a whole that neither could accomplish alone. If so, who could say they would not be hard-pressed to resist rekindling the sense of strategic oneness they achieved and maintained for almost four years following their entering into the Algiers Accord three and a half decades earlier?

The roots of such pan-GCC fears are anchored in an awareness of the Islamic Republic's intimate association with the post-Saddam Hussein government led by Iraqi Shi`as, many of whom Tehran supported during their long exile in Iran. Whether such a scenario could prove credible is questionable. Analyst Ali Ansari has written about "the overthrow of Saddam [Hussein] – through democratic elections – by a regime comprised largely of individuals who had lived in or were sympathetic to Iran." He added that "one of the major arguments working against the notion that Iran wants to destabilize a post-invasion Iraq is the fact that there has never been a more pro-Iranian government in Baghdad." This, according to Ansari, constitutes a monumentally profound reordering of Gulf strategic realities directly resulting from the U.S.-led invasion and occupation of Iraq that commenced in March 2003, has continued until the present, and shows every sign of continuing far into the future (Ansari 2006). Destabilizing Iraq would also constitute an ongoing affront to the Islamic Republic leaders' religious sensitivities, given that the location of many shrines deemed holy not only by Iran's Shi`i Muslims but by Shi`i Muslims everywhere are in Iraq, not Iran.

At the same time, since the Obama administration entered office, no Iranian leader of stature has up to the time of this writing publicly attacked a growing

international consensus as to what an American withdrawal from Iraq might entail. Some feared that the decision might lead to massive instability and insecurity along much of Iran's long border with Iraq, in which case the result could produce a chaotic situation far more ruinous for the GCC region's strategic interests than the previous one. If such a situation were to occur, it would call into question how, if at all, withdrawal would further the Islamic Republic's, let alone Iraq's or the GCC's, interests.

If it remained unclear as to what further actions the GCC countries and their allies might take to forge a mutually beneficial strategic relationship with Iran, or at least what they might do to avoid a serious deterioration in the relationships between the two sides of the Gulf as they exist, it was not for lack of the GCC's eagerness, or for that matter a comparable eagerness on the part of Iran, to put such uncertainties to rest.

Notes

1 On August 25, 2009, in remarks on the record to a group at the Middle East Institute in Washington, D.C. at which this writer was present, American Ambassador to Kuwait Deborah Jones explained Kuwait's decision long ago to align itself with the United States and other Great Powers for its national defense and related interests. In so doing, she used an analogy that applies to most of the other GCC countries. "If you are smaller in size and not as powerful as someone else on the playground, you naturally tend to go out of the way not to antagonize or provoke the stronger person," she said. "In addition, as an insurance policy, you tend to associate yourself closely with whoever could protect or defend you in the event that the mightier person were to think they could threaten or harm you in some way and get away with it."
2 An account of the actions and reactions occurring during this period between the British and the people that would eventually form the GCC can be found in Anthony 2003 and Anthony 1975. This writer was the only American allowed by then British Political Agent Julian Walker to be present as an observer at the final meeting in Jumeirah, Dubai, in July 1971, when the rulers of six emirates (all but Ra's al-Khaymah) opted to form the United Arab Emirates.
3 Two examples are illustrative. One is how the perpetuation of such arrangements helped reinforce adherence to the norms of international law and interstate behavior by foreign and domestic actors alike. Another is how such certainties have tended to strengthen the defense agreements and understandings by which most of the Gulf's eight countries conduct their relations with one another.
4 It is unknown to me whether the decision of the government of Egypt to allow the Shah to be buried in Egypt was in part a gesture influenced by the Iranian monarch's having assisted Egypt financially in the 1970s. Nor am I aware of what part, if any, Egypt's decision was a way of paying homage to the fact that the Shah's first wife, Fawzia, was a daughter of Egypt's King Fouad and a sister of his son and Egypt's last monarch, King Farouk.
5 An exception when some GCC members did not adhere to this principle involved Qatar. In the aftermath of Qatari Ruler Shaykh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani being overthrown in July 1995 by his son, Shaykh Hamad, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE all supported the short-lived efforts of the former ruler to regain his position. Qatar's new government did not take these actions lightly. One way in which it was perceived by many to have expressed its displeasure was that *Al Jazeera*, the popular Qatari satellite television news station, subsequently hosted and aired the remarks of guest speakers who criticized one or more aspects of these countries' policies.

6 Further influencing this option was that Iraq had signed a Treaty of Friendship with the Soviet Union in 1971, the very year that Great Britain had declared it would abrogate its defense and foreign relations obligations to nine east Arabian principalities. The signing of the treaty heightened Iranian, Saudi Arabian, and the Gulf Shaykhdoms' concern that Moscow and Baghdad might henceforth collaborate to advance their respective national interests in the Gulf at the expense of the Arabian Peninsula's dynastic regimes.

7 Of interest is that the counterargument would not necessarily be more logical or, for that matter, illogical. That is, countries with differently calculated strategic analyses and preferences cannot *ipso facto* be regarded in and of themselves as *prima facie* seeking to threaten another country any more than one could credibly argue the reverse.

8 This writer has attended numerous meetings in which so-called specialists of a neo-conservative bent of mind have argued from an entirely different perspective. They have advocated strongly that the GCC should allow Iran to join its ranks. The rationale advanced in support of such a recommendation has been that no regional organization can hope to be successful if it does not include all the member countries within the region where it is situated. The seductive cadence and at first glance seemingly persuasive reasoning in this instance is fallacious. It fails to recognize that a cardinal reason why the North Atlantic Treaty Organization succeeded for the better part of half a century in keeping the peace between its Western European and North American members vis-à-vis the Central and Eastern European members of the Soviet Bloc during the Cold War was the exact opposite—it was because the latter two clusters of Soviet-occupied and oriented countries in the European region were *excluded*, not included. Similarly, during most of the same span of time, regional peace in East Asia after the Korean War was maintained because such countries as China, North Korea, and Mongolia were *not* members of the region's Western-anchored de facto defense arrangement. In the eyes of GCC country representatives with whom this writer has discussed the issue, an unstated strategic objective behind the neo-conservative arguments in this regard is transparent. It is to do whatever is necessary to divert GCC and American attention away from the Arab–Israeli conflict by shifting it to the Gulf region. Were Iran ever to gain entry to the GCC, this reasoning contends, the Gulf would likely become far more laced with tension than otherwise. More specifically, the GCC's as well as America's agendas would likely be altered in such a way as to have Gulf realities replace or surmount international concerns in brokering an Arab–Israeli peace agreement that would entail Israel agreeing to permanently define its borders, end its colonization of Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank, terminate its exploitation of Palestinian water and other natural resources, evacuate its settlements in Syria's rich Golan province, address the Palestinian and Syrian refugee problem, and unequivocally accept and help to establish a fully sovereign, independent, and territorially intact State of Palestine.

9 The two higher estimates were provided the author in separate meetings in Abu Dhabi with a senior staff member of the Abu Dhabi-based Arab Monetary Fund in early November 2008 and an editor of an Abu Dhabi-based national newspaper in April 2010. The lower number was the estimate of a senior diplomat at a foreign embassy in the UAE capital. This individual cautioned that the full-time resident Iranians in Dubai should be considered separately from the indeterminate and more fluctuating number of Iranians who travel back and forth to the emirate on short-term business visits. None of the three individuals who shared their views on this matter were allowed to speak for the record.

10 At a meeting in Kuwait on 14 December 2009 with officials of the Kuwait Fund for Economic and Social Development, this writer was provided a handout containing information about Kuwait's involvement in the aftermath of the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear reactor disaster. Beyond documenting Kuwait's 23-year concern with the implications of potential fallout stemming from accidents at nuclear power plants, the handout noted that Kuwait was the chief administrator of a special fund established within the United Nations that was tasked with helping to relocate the 200,000 people displaced by the Chernobyl accident.

11 The Kuwaiti strategist made this point at an international conference in the GCC region in 2007 in which this writer participated. Although he cannot be named, as he was not authorized to speak for the record, he emphasized that all the Gulf countries are to varying degrees vitally dependent on the intake of Gulf waters to power their electricity generating and desalination plants to meet their basic human health and economic development needs. In addition, Najmedin Meshkati, a former Iranian nuclear specialist, has called attention to a quite different reason for concern. He contends that, because of the international sanctions, "Iran has not been able to hire qualified Western contractors to conduct safety analyses and quality control inspections" at its nuclear power plants. Instead, the reactor builders, on one hand, and those tasked with ensuring that all appropriate safety measures have been and are being met at this particular nuclear installation and its facilities, on the other, are one and the same: Russians. Having the Russians supervise themselves, in Meshkati's view, is analogous to "the fox is in charge of the hen house." The implication would seem to be that, because the Russians "are supervising themselves," the inherent danger stemming from Iran's inability to access the safest possible nuclear technology available is self-evident. See Meshkati 2007.

12 Neither did it preclude a scenario where a future earthquake in Iran, of which there have been many throughout the country's history, could result in a disaster affecting the reactor at Bushire or other reactors elsewhere that could be equally devastating.

13 For an analysis of the range of arguably probable as well as uncertain regional and global consequences of an American, Israeli, or American–Israeli attack on Iran, see Anthony 2008a. See also Anthony 2008b.

14 For an account of how, contrary to popular perceptions, the neo-conservatives' and other groups' goals for changing the regime in Iraq and occupying the country have succeeded in more cases than many imagine, see Anthony 2005.

Bibliography

Algiers Accord (1975) Online HTTP: www.midseastweb.org/algiersaccord.htm (accessed May 21, 2010).

Anonymous GCC leader (2008) Personal interview, Doha, Qatar, December.

Anonymous UAE official (2008) Personal interview, Abu Dhabi, November.

Ansari, M.A. (2006) *Confronting Iran: The Failure of American Foreign Policy and the Next Great Crisis in the Middle East*, New York: Perseus Books.

Anthony, J.D. (1975) *Arab States of the Lower Gulf: People, Politics, Petroleum*, Washington, D.C.: Middle East Institute, 1–29.

Anthony, J.D. (2003) *Dynamics of State Formation: The United Arab Emirates, Abu Dhabi: Emirates* Center for Strategic Studies and Research.

Anthony, J.D. (2005) "Measuring the Iraq War's 'Accomplishments' through the Lens of its Authors: A Preliminary Assessment," address to the Voltaire Institute's International Axis for Peace Conference, Brussels, 17 November. Online HTTP : www.ncusar.org (accessed November 19, 2009).

Anthony, J.D. (2008a) "War with Iran: Regional Reactions and Requirements," 20 June. Online. HTTP: www.ncusar.org (accessed November 19, 2009).

Anthony, J.D. (2008b) "War with Iran: Regional Reactions and Requirements" (condensed version), *Middle East Policy*, 15 (3):1–29.

Meshkati, N. (2007) "Interview: Waiting for an Iranian Chernobyl," *The Nuclear Age*, 2612, 11 July.