

## **The GCC, Iran, and Iraq** Gulf States Deal with Twin Threats to Security

by John Duke Anthony

In the aftermath of Desert Storm, the United States and its GCC allies have been pursuing a multi-tiered approach to regional deterrence and defense: (1) strengthening the national armed forces of the GCC member states; (2) enhancing the GCC countries' collective capacities to deter and defend against outside threats; (3) expanding the cooperative defense links between the GCC members and their regional partners, especially Egypt and Syria; and (4) deepening the engagement and commitment of the international coalition's great powers—primarily, the United States, Great Britain, and France—to the GCC region's defense.

To date, the greatest progress has been registered within the first and fourth tiers. Major constraints in the areas of demography, military infrastructure, and financial capabilities, *inter alia*, continue to impose significant near-term limits on what is possible in the second and third tiers.

In the fourth tier, Desert Storm was instrumental in redefining the US-GCC defense partnership and in bringing to the fore successes and achievements which will guide the relationship into the next century. Among these achievements are the following: (1) bilateral, trilateral, and multilateral exercises between various GCC countries and the

United States, Great Britain, and France; (2) the signing by four GCC countries of Defense Cooperation Agreements (DCAs) with the United States (Oman already had one dating from 1980) and similar agreements with Great Britain and France; (3) the implementation of agreements to pre-position US military equipment as a contingency to prevent a conflict or defend against one that has begun; (4) the purchase, primarily by Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, of significant amounts of advanced weaponry and defense systems; and (5) the highest level of cooperation, in the history of American involvement in the region in such matters as intelligence sharing, joint training, and familiarization visits among senior staff.

### **An Unambiguous Commitment**

Negotiated over a three-year period in the aftermath of Desert Storm, the DCAs commit the respective GCC countries to: (1) pre-position vital military equipment to be used in their defense; (2) conduct regular exercises and maneuvers with the non-GCC country partner; and (3) extend such other assistance as may be agreed upon mutually by the parties.

To be sure, the agreements fall short of formal basing agreements and are considerably less than treaty commitments. Yet they constitute a clear signal of an unambiguous US and allied coalition determination to come to the defense of the GCC countries. They further signal the GCC members' determination to do whatever is neces-

sary to uphold their inalienable right to self-preservation.

The most dramatic manifestation of the efficacy of these agreements has already occurred twice—first, in response to Iraq's movement of troops in a threatening manner toward Kuwait in October 1994, and, again, in reaction to a possible similar threat to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia in August 1995. The judgment of the signatories was unanimous—the rapid integration of the brigade-sized pre-positioned equipment in Kuwait and other defense material stored elsewhere in the GCC region was decisive in ending these episodes. Tried and tested, the DCAs have therefore proven to be credible deterrents.

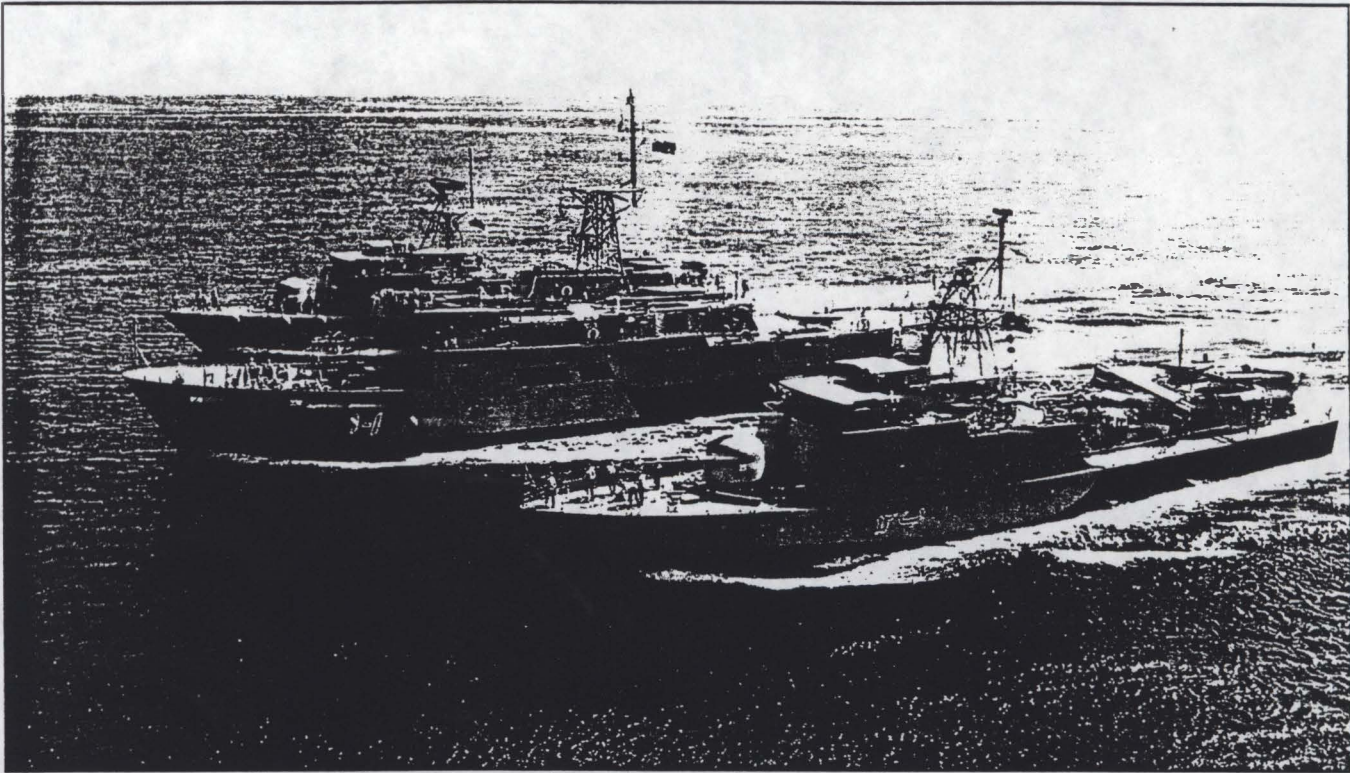
### **Burden-Sharing**

In addition to the successes and achievements of the DCAs and the significantly enhanced level of US-GCC countries' cooperation on regional defense matters in general, Desert Storm effected an economic aspect to Gulf security. One of the GCC members' greatest contributions to the GCC-allied countries' defense relationship has been, and continues to be, in the area of financial burden-sharing. As they did in the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq War, the GCC countries defrayed substantially US and other allied costs during Desert Shield/Desert Storm in 1990-91 and during the October 1994 and Summer 1995 renewals of Iraq's threat to Kuwait.

Had the monetary dynamic unfolding in the early days of Iraq's aggres-

---

*John Duke Anthony, President and CEO of the National Council on US-Arab Relations, writes frequently on American interests and involvement in the Arab countries, the Middle East, and the Islamic world.*



**Ships of the Royal Navy of Oman on exercises; the armed forces of four other GCC states—Qatar, Bahrain, UAE, and Kuwait—are involved in Defense Cooperation Agreements (DCAs) with the United States. These agreements have been a major part of the redefinition of security relations between the GCC states and foreign countries.**

sion against Kuwait not been resolved, the international coalition of forces may not have been as forthcoming or comprised 30 nations. The GCC countries' cooperation on oil supplies and policies during the conflict was also a major financial contribution. In meeting this challenge, the GCC members and their supporters demonstrated that the financial component of mounting a credible deterrence and defense can be as important as the military component.

### **Recurring Challenges**

Despite these achievements and triumphs, there are still major regional security challenges to be met. Those that are influenced by problems inherent in any great power-smaller power relationships, by intra-GCC border disputes, and by radicalism often wrapped in the garb of religious symbolism are all important and related considerations. However, in the final analysis, they pale in comparison to the GCC countries' more direct and immediate concerns with regard

to Iraq, Iran, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

### **Iraq**

Iraq is hardly the threat it was before. Nevertheless, there has been no fundamental weakening of the resolve of GCC leaders in insisting that Iraq be made to comply fully with the UN-mandated sanctions, despite the growing concern amongst the populations and leaders of the GCC states with how repeated extension of the UN-mandated sanctions are hurting the Iraqi people.

Their continued hard-line support for Kuwait and the sanctions is understandable. First, virtually every GCC leader is appalled by the lack of any serious, good faith effort by Iraq to address such issues as compensation for Iraq's invasion and occupation of Kuwait and repatriation of the Kuwaiti and other nationals—proportionately equivalent to 260,000 Americans—that the Baghdad regime continues to hold hostage in Iraq.

Second, Iraq's non-compliance with UN resolutions on the dismantling of its weapons of mass destruction, equipment, and facilities continues to be unacceptable. Since the potential for the GCC countries' being on the receiving end of such weaponry at some point in the future cannot be dismissed, such non-compliance is intimidating to leaders throughout the GCC region.

Third, although it lost more than half of its conventional military might in Desert Storm, Iraq has reorganized its forces and has cannibalized spare parts to amass a sizeable army. The crisis of October 1994, for example, demonstrated that Iraq has the capability to mobilize and move large numbers of forces quickly to threaten Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Even after innumerable UN inspections, accurate knowledge of the full nature and extent of Iraq's military-industrial complex remains elusive, fueling fears that lifting UN sanctions against Iraq will lead to a level and type of rearmament beyond anything the GCC countries could hope to match.

Fourth, revelations this past August that accompanied the defection of Iraq's Hussein Kamel, the uncovering of a much vaster Iraqi biological weapons program than Baghdad had hitherto acknowledged, and the discovery of a continuous illicit Iraqi effort to obtain spare parts for its missiles and other weaponry in violation of the sanctions have hardened GCC resolve.

GCC leaders see the sanctions as upholding UN-approved, legitimate, and non-violent means of forcing Iraq to comply with the will of the UN Security Council—on peacekeeping and security issues in general, the lead unit within the world's most important international organization. To paraphrase the views of many GCC leaders on this issue, "Who would argue that the Iraqi regime not be held accountable for violating its neighbor's internationally recognized rights to national sovereignty, political independence, and territorial integrity? To do so would undermine regional peace, security, and stability."

#### **Iran**

Iran borders Iraq and all six GCC countries and has thousands of its citizens working in several GCC countries. While the air force and land components of its armed forces remain weaker than they were a decade ago, Tehran has undertaken an extensive naval weapons development program. In the past three years alone, Iran has been able to combine mines, anti-ship missiles, anti-aircraft assets, and the fortification of islands claimed by the UAE into an integrated capability to close, if only through intimidation, the Hormuz Strait in a crisis. In addition, Tehran's efforts to integrate submarines into its naval forces and heightened Iranian naval exercises that emphasize amphibious assaults—most likely aimed at the GCC nations in the future—underscore the GCC countries' concerns regarding Iranian intentions and capabilities.

For the remainder of the 1990s, many Western military analysts believe the continuation and current configuration of the US military presence in the Gulf should be sufficient to counter any

threat resulting from Iran's significantly expanded naval capabilities. Beyond that time span, there is less consensus, especially if the nature and extent of the present US engagement and/or commitment were to be reduced.

---

## **The Gulf as a whole is still plagued by the idiosyncratic bluster and often belligerent behavior of two very powerful, unpredictable, and anti-status quo regional powers**

---

Certainly, any pan-GCC effort to confront Iran physically would pit their vastly under-manned and under-armed defense forces against the overwhelmingly greater power represented by Iran's much larger population (even now, at 60 million, more than twice the size of the entire GCC countries' citizenry) and its far more numerous and experienced armed forces. Iran's armed forces, presently at just under 400,000 soldiers, is more than double the armed forces of all the GCC countries combined. A current example of the GCC countries' inability to oppose Iran's actions—legally and diplomatically, let alone militarily—is their failure to persuade Iran to reverse, or even to discuss seriously, its de facto imposition of sovereignty over and fortification of islands near the Hormuz Strait that are claimed by the UAE.

#### **Weapons of Mass Destruction**

In Washington and GCC defense circles alike, the continuing revela-

tions about the extent of ambitious Iraqi and Iranian weapons development programs have been one prolonged wake-up call about the potential threats such programs may pose to Gulf security in the future if allowed to go unchecked. The extent to which Iraqi officials have repeatedly denied the existence of such programs and their innumerable efforts to deceive UN and International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors, on one hand, and China's, Russia's, North Korea's, and various European countries' increasingly proactive approach to meeting Iran's nuclear and advanced weaponry needs on the other, continue to have a chilling effect throughout the GCC region.

The joint GCC-US strategic goal is to slow, if not halt or bring under effective international supervision and control, WMD proliferation among the GCC countries' neighbors. Short of that, the objective is to ensure that other countries cannot expect to conduct relations with the GCC countries on a business-as-usual basis if, at the same time, they are aiding and abetting either Iraq's or Iran's quest to become a nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons power.

Although Desert Storm underscored once again the US and other nations' commitment to defend the GCC member states, assured security for these six countries nonetheless remains uncertain. The Gulf as a whole is still plagued by the idiosyncratic bluster and often belligerent behavior of two very powerful, unpredictable, and anti-status quo regional powers. The erratic troop movements, the offensive capabilities built from weapons acquisition, development, and expansion programs, and the amphibious and other military exercises of these powers that continue to be focused in the direction of the GCC countries are viewed with more than apprehension by a great many Gulf defense analysts. Viewed in their entirety, they constitute ominous signs for a region which supplies most of the world's energy requirements and, for that reason and others, is in need of sustained security and stability. ■