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THESIS

THE EFFICACY OF U.S. SECURITY COOPERATION IN THE GULF

by

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September 2021

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THE EFFICACY OF U.S. SECURITY COOPERATION IN THE GULF

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the efficacy of U.S. security cooperation for advancing peace and stability in the Persian Gulf. It asks why the ongoing regional instability is disproportionate to the United States' investment. The thesis examines the U.S. relationships with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in the post-9/11 environment through two case studies and posits that dysfunctional partnerships have prevented the United States from achieving its foreign policy goals. The case studies reveal that although the U.S. partnerships were nominally functional, U.S. policy increasingly focused on two activities working at cross-purposes to regional stability. First, security cooperation efforts emphasized transferring the burden of security to regional actors. Second, U.S. security cooperation prioritized optimizing the benefits from arming those same regional actors. Thus, the post-9/11 paradigm represents a shift from pursuing regional policy goals towards realizing benefits. The ongoing state of regional instability in the Persian Gulf appears to be partially explained by the unintended consequences of the United States' post-9/11 regional security paradigm. Consequently, U.S. security cooperation may need to conform to a goals-centered approach, thereby sacrificing benefits, if the United States intends to make regional peace and stability a policy priority.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
A.	SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION.....	5
B.	LITERATURE REVIEW	6
	1. Security Cooperation Institutional Perspectives.....	6
	2. Security Assistance and Cooperation Effects	8
	3. Security Assistance and Cooperation Uniformities	10
C.	POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES	13
D.	RESEARCH DESIGN.....	14
E.	THESIS OVERVIEW AND CHAPTER OUTLINE.....	16
II.	ASSESSMENT OF THE U.S.-SAUDI SECURITY RELATIONSHIP.....	17
A.	U.S.-SAUDI SECURITY RELATIONSHIP 2001–2008	17
B.	U.S.-SAUDI SECURITY RELATIONSHIP 2009–2016	21
C.	U.S.-SAUDI SECURITY RELATIONSHIP 2017–2020	25
D.	CONCLUSION	30
III.	ASSESSMENT OF THE U.S.-UAE SECURITY RELATIONSHIP.....	31
A.	U.S.-UAE SECURITY RELATIONSHIP 2001–2008	32
B.	U.S.-UAE SECURITY RELATIONSHIP 2009–2016	35
C.	U.S.-UAE SECURITY RELATIONSHIP 2017–2020	40
D.	CONCLUSION	44
IV.	CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS.....	45
A.	FINDINGS.....	46
B.	IMPLICATIONS	48
	LIST OF REFERENCES.....	51
	INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST	65

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AECA	Arms Export Control Act
AGM	air-to-ground missile
APC	armored personnel carrier
AWACS	Airborne Warning and Control System
CENTCOM	U.S. Central Command
CRS	Congressional Research Service
DCA	defense cooperation agreement
DMDC	Defense Manpower Data Center
DOD	Department of Defense
DoS	Department of State
DPW	Dubai Ports World
DSCA	Defense Security Cooperation Agency
EGT	evolutionary game theory
FMS	foreign military sales
FMTR	foreign military training report
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GPS	Global Positioning System
HIMARS	High Mobility Artillery Rocket System
IISS	International Institute for Strategic Studies
IMSC	International Maritime Security Construct
IR	international relations
JCPOA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
MNNA	major non-NATO ally
MOI	ministry of interior
MRTT	multi-role tanker transport
MTCR	Missile Technology Control Regime
NSPM	national security presidential memorandum
NSS	national security strategy
PAC	Patriot advanced capability 3
PM-SANG	Office of the Program Manager, Saudi Arabian National Guard

PPD	Presidential Policy Directive
SAMI	Saudi Arabian Military Industries
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
TCA	technical cooperation agreement
THAAD	Terminal High Altitude Air Defense
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UAV	unmanned aerial vehicle
UNCTAD	United National Conference on Trade and Development
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
USMTM	U.S. Military Training Mission

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I. INTRODUCTION

In May 2019, the United States announced the deployment of the USS Abraham Lincoln carrier strike group, a B-52 task force, and thousands of U.S. military personnel to deter Iranian aggression in the Persian Gulf.¹ Soon after, a spate of attacks attributed to Iran against merchant vessels transiting the Strait of Hormuz threatened to disrupt the world's oil supply.² In an effort to curb Iranian aggression, the United States declared emergency arms sales worth \$8 billion to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.³ Soon after, an undeterred Iran destroyed a \$130 million U.S. Global Hawk operating over international waters.⁴ By September 2019, a swarm of Iranian missiles and drones crashed into the Abqaiq and Khurais oil facilities in eastern Saudi Arabia in what former Secretary Pompeo called “an unprecedented attack on the world's energy supply.”⁵ Accompanying the escalating crisis with Iran, in Yemen, the Human Rights Watch organization reported that Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates were causing the largest humanitarian crisis in the world.⁶ Concurrently, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates were leading an aggressive campaign to isolate Qatar. The fallout from the Qatar rift threatens to fracture the U.S.-supported framework that has formed the cornerstone of regional security in the

¹ Matt Spetalnick and Idrees Ali, “U.S. Deploying Carrier, Bombers to Middle East to Deter Iran: Bolton,” Reuters, May 5, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-iran/u-s-deploying-carrier-bombers-to-middle-east-to-deter-iran-bolton-idUSKCN1SC01B>.

² United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), *Review of Maritime Transport 2019*, UNCTAD/RMT/2019/Corr.1 (Geneva: United Nations, 2019), 21, https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/rmt2019_en.pdf.

³ Clayton Thomas et al., *Arms Sales in the Middle East: Trends and Analytical Perspectives for U.S. Policy*, CRS Report No. R44984 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2020), <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/details?prodcode=R44984>.

⁴ Jim Garamone, “Iran Shoots Down U.S. Global Hawk Operating in International Airspace,” U.S. Department of Defense, June 20, 2019, <https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/1882497/iran-shoots-down-us-global-hawk-operating-in-international-airspace/>.

⁵ “Saudi Arabia Oil and Gas Production Reduced by Drone Strikes,” BBC, September 14, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-49703143>.

⁶ “Yemen: Events of 2019,” Human Rights Watch, January 14, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/yemen>.

Persian Gulf.⁷ The ongoing crises in the Persian Gulf challenge the core premise of U.S. security cooperation: namely, as a means for the United States to enhance regional stability.

Despite decades of investment, U.S. security cooperation in the Persian Gulf appears to have fallen short of improving regional stability. In terms of monetary value, from 1950–2020, the United States provided \$172B worth of weapons and training to Saudi Arabia, making it the largest recipient of U.S. security sector assistance in the world.⁸ During the same period, Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) records indicate the United States provided \$90B worth of arms and training to the other five Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) monarchies under various arms deals and service contracts.⁹ The weapons and training include some of the best systems and programs in the world. For example, the U.S. delivered a complete modernization package for the Saudi Armed Forces, including the Patriot Advanced Capability-3 (PAC-3) air defense system.¹⁰ The United States also delivered the F-16E/F “Desert Falcon” to the UAE, the most advanced F-16 variant in the world, more advanced than the F-16 C/D in the U.S. inventory.¹¹ Similarly, Qatar received the F-15QA (Qatar Advanced), considered the most sophisticated Eagle variant ever built and the model for the USAF’s future EX variant.¹² In addition to the top-class prestige weaponry, the United States also trained sixty thousand officers and trainees from all of the GCC military services.¹³ The training included four-year service

⁷ Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, “Implications of the Qatar Crisis for Regional Security in the Gulf,” AlSharq Strategic Research, June 29, 2017, <https://research.sharqforum.org/2017/06/29/implications-of-the-qatar-crisis-for-regional-security-in-the-gulf/>; Anna L. Jacobs, “Resolution of Gulf Rift Not Likely to Mend Fault Lines in North Africa,” The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, January 21, 2021, <https://agsiw.org/resolution-of-gulf-rift-not-likely-to-mend-fault-lines-in-north-africa/>.

⁸ “DSCA Historical Sales Book,” Defense Security Cooperation Agency, accessed June 24, 2021, <https://www.dsca.mil/resources/dsca-historical-sales-book>.

⁹ Defense Security Cooperation Agency, “DSCA Historical Sales Book.”

¹⁰ SIPRI Arms Transfers Database (accessed 27 April 2021), www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers.

¹¹ “The Most Advanced F-16s in the World aren’t American,” Defense Industry Daily, December 09, 2020, <https://www.defenseindustrydaily.com/the-uaes-f-16-block-60-desert-falcon-fleet-04538/>.

¹² Stefano D’Urso, “The Most Advanced Version of the F-15 Eagle, the F-15QA, Just Made its First Flight,” Business Insider, April 17, 2020, <https://www.businessinsider.com/most-advanced-version-of-f15-eagle-f15qa-made-first-flight-2020-4>.

¹³ “Foreign Military Training and DOD Engagement Activities of Interest,” Department of State, accessed July 24, 2021, (Foreign Military Training Joint Reports to Congress 2000–2019), <https://www.state.gov/foreign-military-training-and-dod-engagement-activities-of-interest/>.

academy programs, graduate programs, pilot training, English-language courses, counterterrorism, and special operations courses.¹⁴ However, despite long-standing U.S. patronage, the ongoing war in Yemen, the Qatar rift, and the Iran crisis in the Gulf suggest the United States' Gulf partners are not only unable to maintain regional stability, but they are also destabilizing the region. The UAE's alleged illicit U.S. arms transfers to proxy forces in Libya, and Saudi Arabia's poor battlefield performance in Yemen also suggests U.S. security cooperation, as a means to achieve U.S. policy goals, is not working as intended.¹⁵ The disparity between the United States' seventy years of security sector assistance in the Gulf and the questionable return on investment have led many experts to conclude that U.S. security cooperation in the Gulf has failed.¹⁶ While most criticism has not been empirically tested, at first glance, the ongoing tensions in the region challenge the efficacy of U.S. security cooperation in the Persian Gulf and raise questions about whether there are any substantive opportunities for improvement.

This thesis asks why the apparent security outcomes in the Gulf are so disproportionate to the level of investment and investigates whether the fault is due to the quality of the security cooperation relationship with partner nations. The project explores the efficacy of U.S. security cooperation in the Gulf, focusing on the two most influential actors in the region: Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. This line of inquiry prioritizes actionable insights for the practitioner in an effort to overcome what Walt

¹⁴ Department of State, "Foreign Military Training and DOD Engagement Activities of Interest."

¹⁵ "Menendez Demands Investigation into Reports that UAE Illegally Gave U.S. Arms to Libyan Militants," United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, July 02, 2019, www.foreign.senate.gov/press/ranking/release/menendez-demands-investigation-into-reports-that-uae-illegally-gave-us-arms-to-libyan-militants; Nadwa Al-Dawsari, "Running Around in Circles: How Saudi Arabia is Losing its War in Yemen to Iran," Middle East Institute, March 3, 2020, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/running-around-circles-how-saudi-arabia-losing-its-war-yemen-iran>.

¹⁶ For a sampling of criticism see Andrew Miller and Daniel Mahanty, "U.S. Security Aid Is a Faith-Based Policy," Just Security, April 14, 2020, <https://www.justsecurity.org/69533/u-s-security-aid-is-a-faith-based-policy/>; Andrew Exum, "U.S. Arms Sales to the Gulf Have Failed," The Atlantic, June 21, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/06/us-military-support-gulf-all-backwards/592249/>; or Andrew Miller and Richard Sokolsky, "What Has \$49 Billion in Foreign Military Aid Bought Us? Not Much," The American Conservative, Feb 27, 2018, <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/what-has-49-billion-in-foreign-military-aid-bought-us-not-much/>.

describes as the theory-policy gap in academic scholarship.¹⁷ The intent is to establish objective confidence in the strategic rationale of U.S. security cooperation policy and praxis. This approach assumes that policy and praxis are inextricably linked together and that any successful policy in the Middle East results from deliberate planning and execution rather than the pursuit of aspirational goals.¹⁸ The research question asks why security assistance and cooperation appear to be failing in the Gulf and if it is an issue of failed policy, failed execution, or a failed security cooperation relationship.

The thesis discriminates the effectiveness of security cooperation from the efficacy of security cooperation, the latter defined as the United States' ability to wield success factors within its control. The distinction is relevant to this study for several reasons. First, the term efficacy differs from effectiveness in that it focuses on the United States' ability to achieve deliberately defined goals and objectives, not just the presence of beneficial outcomes.¹⁹ Efficacy denotes specific attribution to the United States for achieving foreign policy objectives. Also, efficacy signifies agency beyond structural constraints. The concept is often described in terms of collective efficacy or an enterprise's ability to coordinate and implement the actions necessary to achieve specified goals.²⁰ The study's focus on attribution enables an objective study of U.S. agency, the relationship between expectations and the capability to achieve them. Efficacy is an essential revision of the standard measures of effectiveness that emphasize the relationship between system inputs and correlative system changes.²¹ This study asserts that scholars have addressed the latter sufficiently, and a body of literature now exists to assess the efficacy of U.S. security cooperation. In short, the study assumes that what works and what does not is well-

¹⁷ Stephen M. Walt, "The Relationship Between Theory and Policy in International Relations," *Annual Review of Political Science*, 8 (November 2005): 23–48, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev/polisci.7.012003.104904>.

¹⁸ Karl P. Mueller et al., *U.S. Strategic Interests in the Middle East and Implications for the Army*, PE-265-A, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2017, 7–8, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE265.html>.

¹⁹ Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "efficacy," accessed April 24, 2021, <https://www.oed.com>.

²⁰ Albert Bandura, *Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control* (New York: W.H. Freeman, 1997), 477.

²¹ Gordon Raisbeck, "How the Choice of Measures of Effectiveness Constrains Operational Analysis," *Interfaces* 9, no. 4, (August 1979): 85–93. <https://doi.org/10.1287/inte.9.4.85>.

established. What remains is evaluating how well the United States conforms to the established knowledge.

A. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION

On the surface, the evolving dynamics in the Persian Gulf challenge the strategic logic of U.S. security cooperation. According to U.S. statute, security cooperation includes all activities conducted by the Department of Defense (DOD) with a foreign country's security establishment.²² The statute identifies three interrelated purposes of U.S. security cooperation: to develop a partner nation's security for defense and multinational operations, to gain access to a partner nation's territory or airspace, and to build relationships according to the national interests of the United States. Joint doctrine outlined in Joint Publication 3-20, emphasizes security cooperation as a means "to advance national security objectives, promote stability, prevent conflicts, and reduce the risk of having to employ U.S. military forces in a conflict."²³ In recent years, the concept increasingly focuses on enabling U.S. partners to take on the burden of ensuring their own.²⁴ However, the academic literature reveals that arming foreign militaries increases the probability of conflict and reduces foreign policy cooperation with the United States.²⁵ As a case in point, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, both long-time recipients of U.S. security assistance, exhibit a new and dangerous military activism operating contrary to U.S.

²² United States Code, Title 10 - Armed Forces, Sec. 301 Definitions (2018), <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2018-title10/html/USCODE-2018-title10-subtitleA-partI-chap16-subchapI-sec301.htm>.

²³ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Security Cooperation*, JP 3-20 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2017), I-1, https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp3_20_20172305.pdf.

²⁴ Melissa G. Dalton et al., *Shifting the Burden Responsibly: Oversight and Accountability in U.S. Security Sector Assistance* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2019), 1. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/shifting-burden-responsibly-oversight-and-accountability-us-security-sector-assistance>.

²⁵ Peter Rudloff and James Scott, "Buying Trouble? The Impact of Foreign Assistance on Conflict in Direct and Indirect Rivalry Situations," *All Azimuth* 3, no. 1, (Jan 2014): 35–54, <https://doi.org/10.20991/allazimuth.167320>; Patricia L. Sullivan, Brock F. Tessman, and Xiaojun Li, "US Military Aid and Recipient State Cooperation," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 7, no. 3 (July 2011): 275–94, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1743-8594.2011.00138.x>.

interests.²⁶ Their actions corroborate the paradoxical nature of U.S. security cooperation. By helping Gulf nations develop independent military capability, they now use that capability to pursue their own divergent interests.²⁷ The United Arab Emirates' and Saudi Arabia's active involvement in Syria, Yemen, Libya, and Egypt exemplify the dilemma of U.S. security cooperation in the Gulf. It appears increasingly unlikely that U.S. security cooperation in the Gulf contributes to the intended foreign policy goals of maintaining regional stability. A study evaluating the efficacy of U.S. security cooperation will help policymakers and practitioners understand the limits and prospects of U.S. security cooperation and its role in achieving foreign policy goals.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Security Cooperation Institutional Perspectives

There exists a persistent institutional dissonance in the United States regarding what security cooperation is. This dissonance creates a definitional dilemma where various government institutions define and approach security cooperation differently. Bilal Saab describes the institutional dissonance by stating, “the key actors involved in security cooperation—the White House, Congress, Department of Defense, and Department of State—do not have a unified understanding of security cooperation: what it is supposed to achieve, how to use and improve it, and how to tell if it is working.”²⁸ Similarly, the Congressional Research Service argues that Congress and the State Department tend to think of security assistance and cooperation as a limited foreign policy tool, whereas the DOD conceptualizes the same as a broad military strategy.²⁹ In further contrast, the White

²⁶Emile Hokayem and David B. Roberts, “The War in Yemen,” *Survival* 58, no. 6 (Nov 2016): 157–186, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2016.1257202>; Emma Soubrier, “Global and Regional Crises, Empowered Gulf Rivals, and the Evolving Paradigm of Regional Security,” in *Shifting Global Politics in the Middle East*, ed. Marc Lynch and Amaney Jamal (Washington, DC: POMEPS, 2019), 63–66. <https://pomeps.org/pomeps-studies-34-shifting-global-politics-and-the-middle-east>.

²⁷ Exum, “U.S. Arms Sales to the Gulf Have Failed.”

²⁸ Bilal Y. Saab, “Broken Partnerships: Can Washington Get Security Cooperation Right?” *The Washington Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (July 3, 2019): 77–89, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2019.1663120>.

²⁹ Kathleen McInnis and Nathan Lucas, *What Is ‘Building Partner Capacity’? Issues for Congress*, CRS Report No. R44313 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2015), 15, <https://www.hsdl.org/?abstract&did=789241>.

House views arms sales as a flexible and expedient political tool distinct from security assistance or cooperation.³⁰ As a consequence of institutional dissonance, assessing security assistance and cooperation depends on the tacit expectations and assumptions of the concept. This may explain why there is no consensus on the efficacy of security cooperation or how to evaluate the endeavor.

Further complicating the definitional dilemma is that security cooperation remains an unresolved puzzle of international relations theory. The Handbook of International Relations suggests that no IR theory provides a satisfactory explanation for security cooperation, defined simply as state-to-state cooperation in the field of security.³¹ According to the handbook, realist approaches fail to address the relative abundance of cooperative agreements in an anarchic system. Liberalism fails to account for variations in security cooperation relationships, especially between democratic and non-democratic states. Constructivism falls short of offering any distinct hypotheses to account for expected behaviors.³² In volume one of his three-volume treatise on military assistance, William Mott IV argues that the subject does not conform to a discrete discipline but may be its own type or mode of international relations.³³ Mott also concludes, “As arms transfers become market transactions and lose the trappings of diplomacy, it is becoming clear that neither economics nor political science is very good at explaining or predicting military assistance, in any form.”³⁴ He argues that the doctrinal scholarship fails to offer the cross-disciplinary approach necessary to understand the subject.³⁵ As an unresolved puzzle, there is no established theoretical framework to help explain, predict, or evaluate security cooperation.

³⁰ A. Trevor Thrall and Caroline Dorminey, “Risky Business: The Role of Arms Sales in U.S. Foreign Policy,” CATO Institute, Mar 13, 2018, <https://www.cato.org/policy-analysis/risky-business-role-arms-sales-us-foreign-policy>.

³¹ Harald Müller, “Security Cooperation,” in *Handbook of International Relations*, ed. Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse, and Beth A Simmons (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2013), 626.

³² Müller, “Security Cooperation,” 626–627.

³³ William H. Mott IV, *Military Assistance: An Operational Perspective* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999), xii.

³⁴ Mott IV, *Military Assistance: An Operational Perspective*, 16.

³⁵ Mott IV, *Military Assistance: An Operational Perspective*, 19.

One possible resource for understanding security cooperation is evolutionary game theory's concept of enduring competition. Andrew Kydd suggests that evolutionary game theory (EGT) models may help explain security cooperation behavior over an infinite time period.³⁶ According to Kydd, some models demonstrate that nations are engaged in an enduring game of competition in which there is no end state, only cyclical patterns of conflict and temporary periods of peace. Paradoxically, the proliferation of peace incentivizes conflict by making conflict more lucrative. Along the same lines, Echevarria argues that instability is the enduring condition of the social order; therefore, the idea of maintaining a durable peace is "unwarranted and unsustainable."³⁷ His research implies that perpetual effort and resources are required to impose temporary pockets of stability in a naturally volatile world. The Department of Defense only recently began to adopt similar conclusions regarding security cooperation. Joint Doctrine Note 1–19 frames security cooperation as part of the open-ended "competition continuum" that includes managing strategic advantage relative to the adversary based on given resources and policy constraints.³⁸ The conceptualization of security cooperation as an infinite effort helps explain the challenge of assessment. As an open-ended endeavor, there is no end state to measure.

2. Security Assistance and Cooperation Effects

A review of the data science literature reveals that different facets of security assistance and cooperation yield different and sometimes complementary effects. For example, several studies conclude that arms transfers alone do not promote regional stability or prevent interstate conflict but more often exacerbate or incite conflict,

³⁶ Andrew H. Kydd, "Game Theory and the Future of International Security," in *The Oxford Handbook of International Security*, ed. Alexander Gheciu and William C. Wohlforth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198777854.001.0001>.

³⁷ Antulio Echevarria II, "The Problem of Stability: Military Strategy in a Non-Newtonian Universe," *Military Strategy Magazine* 7, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 12–16, <https://www.militarystrategymagazine.com/volume/7/issue/1/>.

³⁸ Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Competition Continuum," Joint Doctrine Note 1–19, (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2019), https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/jdn_jg/jdn1_19.pdf.

especially between rival states.³⁹ In one of the most comprehensive empirical studies focusing on Middle East regional stability, Childs finds that a 1% increase in material aid under the Foreign Military Sales program correlates with a 15% increase in the probability of interstate conflict within two years of the sale.⁴⁰ The adverse effects of arms transfers also correlate with increased probability of domestic (intrastate) conflict, including civil war and coups.⁴¹ However, nonmaterial aid, such as training, and the provisioning of defensive weapon systems, reduces the probability of domestic conflict.⁴² Moreover, in the few empirical studies on the subject, U.S. troop deployments significantly reduce the probability of interstate conflict but have little or no effect on domestic stability.⁴³ Additionally, an econometric analysis conducted by RAND finds that U.S. troop presence has a “positive, statistically significant effect on U.S. bilateral trade,” concluding that troop presence abroad preserves three times more economic benefits than the potential budget savings from retrenchment.⁴⁴ The findings from the quantitative research show that security cooperation in the form of arms transfers and training can enhance stability when combined with U.S. troop presence, but it cannot replace the regional effect of forward-

³⁹ David Todd Kinsella, “Arms Transfers, Dependence, and Regional Stability: Isolated Effects or General Patterns?” (Political Science faculty publications and presentations, Portland State University, Feb 2019), 10, https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/polisci_fac/10; Peter Rudloff and James Scott, “Buying Trouble?”; Gregory S. Sanjian, “Promoting Stability or Instability? Arms Transfers and Regional Rivalries, 1950–1991,” *International Studies Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (December 1999): 641–670, <https://doi.org/10.1111/0020-8833.00140>.

⁴⁰ Steven J. Childs, “Granting Security? U.S. Security Assistance Programs and Political Stability in the Greater Middle East and Africa,” *Journal of the Middle East and Africa* 10, no. 2 (April 3, 2019): 157–82, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21520844.2019.1596649>.

⁴¹ Arvind Magesan and Eik Swee, “Out of the Ashes, Into the Fire: The Consequences of U.S. Weapons Sales for Political Violence,” *European Economic Review* 107, no. 1 (August 2018): 133–156, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eurocorev.2018.05.003>; Cécile Fauconnet, Julien Malizard & Antoine Pietri, “French Arms Exports and Intrastate Conflicts: An Empirical Investigation,” *Defense and Peace Economics* 30, no. 2 (Feb 2019): 176–196, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10242694.2018.1488371>.

⁴² Michael J. McNerney et al., *Assessing Security Cooperation as a Preventive Tool*, RR-350-A (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2014), https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR350.html; Childs, “Granting Security?” For research on the efficacy of provisioning defensive weapon systems see Fauconnet, Malizard & Pietri, “French Arms Exports and Intrastate Conflicts.”

⁴³ Angela O’Mahony et al., *U.S. Presence and the Incidence of Conflict*, RR-1906-A (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2018), https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1906.html; In Childs, “Granting Security?” the data suggests

⁴⁴ Daniel Egel et al., *Estimating the Value of Overseas Security Commitments*, RR-518-AF (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2016), www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR518.html.

deployed troops. The strategic rationale for providing arms and training in lieu of U.S. troop presence is unsupported. However, proper employment of arms transfers, training, and troop deployments can yield favorable outcomes under the right conditions. The scholarship suggests that deliberate trade-offs are warranted depending on the resources available and the intent of U.S. policy.

3. Security Assistance and Cooperation Uniformities

There appear to be only a few uniformities that determine whether security cooperation contributes to U.S. policy objectives. Mott IV's comprehensive treatise on military assistance reveals a distinct set of "lawlike regularities" that determine the success or failure of any security partnership.⁴⁵ The literature review supports Mott IV's assertions described in more detail below. Moreover, the uniformities appear to be interrelated in a hierarchical structure rather than as separate competing variables.

The degree of aligned interests is the primary determinant of success in any security relationship. Mott IV concludes that across all of his historical case studies in peacetime and war, convergent aims remained the dominant predictor of success.⁴⁶ Likewise, Wilkins puts a premium on common interests as the foundation for alliances, coalitions, and strategic partnerships.⁴⁷ In his Congressional testimony, Christopher Paul explains that his study of 29 U.S. security partnerships revealed that the alignment of interests is paramount to success.⁴⁸ The scholarship provides strong consensus regarding the importance of compatible interests. However, the literature also shows that perfect convergence rarely exists in any security partnership, suggesting that aligning interests is a process of

⁴⁵ William H. Mott IV, *United States Military Assistance: An Empirical Perspective* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002), ix-x.

⁴⁶ Mott IV, *An Empirical Perspective*, 308.

⁴⁷ Thomas S. Wilkins, "'Alignment', Not 'alliance' – the Shifting Paradigm of International Security Cooperation: Toward a Conceptual Taxonomy of Alignment," *Review of International Studies* 38, no. 1 (Jan 2012): 53–76, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41485490>.

⁴⁸ *Examining DOD Security Cooperation: When it Works and When It Doesn't: Testimony before the Full Committee on Armed Services, U.S. House of Representatives*, 114th Cong. 1 (2015) (statement of Christopher Paul, RAND senior social scientist), <https://www.hsdl.org/?abstract&did=789068>.

negotiation. Other factors define and shape the United States' ability to align interests, namely, the degree of U.S. influence, commitment, and policy cohesion.

A high degree of influence is consistently associated with successful U.S. security partnerships. For example, Mara Karlin's case studies of contemporary U.S. security assistance illustrate that the United States requires a controlling influence over the partner nation's most sensitive military affairs to be effective.⁴⁹ Walter Ladwig's research on counterinsurgencies also emphasizes the importance of control.⁵⁰ His analysis demonstrates that tight (and consistent) conditions on security aid provide the necessary leverage for affecting a client's behavior. Likewise, researchers conclude that the more stringent the conditions, the lower the moral hazards to the United States.⁵¹ However, Mott IV warns that client states can wield significant reverse leverage by choosing or threatening to choose alternate suppliers.⁵² The risk of reverse leverage may explain the United States' policy of "strategic denial" in the Middle East, an effort to limit the extent to which regional partners turn to competing suppliers by positioning itself as the provider of choice.⁵³ Without sufficient influence, the United States cannot negotiate and align interests.

A high level of U.S. commitment boosts the degree of U.S. influence, reflecting another uniformity of successful partnerships. Biddle argues that successful outcomes require a significantly large commitment.⁵⁴ He explains that "small footprints usually mean small payoffs."⁵⁵ Kinsella views the challenge from an enduring competition perspective, arguing that one of the major differences between Cold War and post-Cold

⁴⁹ Mara E. Karlin, *Building Militaries in Fragile States: Challenges for the United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018).

⁵⁰ Walter C. Ladwig, *The Forgotten Front: Patron-Client Relationships in Counterinsurgency* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), chap. 3.

⁵¹ Keren Yarhi-Milo, Alexander Lanoszka, and Zack Cooper, "To Arm or to Ally? The Patron's Dilemma and the Strategic Logic of Arms Transfers and Alliances," *International Security* 41, no. 2 (Fall 2016): 90–139, https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00250.

⁵² Mott IV, *An Empirical Perspective*, 7–12.

⁵³ Clayton Thomas et al., *Arms Sales in the Middle East*, 7–8.

⁵⁴ Stephen Biddle, "Building Security Forces & Stabilizing Nations: The Problem of Agency," *Daedalus* 146, no. 4 (October 2017): 126–38, https://doi.org/10.1162/DAED_a_00464.

⁵⁵ Biddle, "The Problem of Agency," 126.

War arms transfers was the presumption that major powers were committed to maintaining regional security.⁵⁶ The implication was that the United States would intervene directly in a crisis on behalf of the security partner. Kinsella's research shows that arms transfers generally cause regional instability except when major powers are actively committed to deterrence.⁵⁷ Following a similar perspective, the RAND Corporation found that higher U.S. commitment, in the form of troops deployed in-country, reduces interstate conflict as a form of extended deterrence against an adversary and provides more leverage to restrain host country behavior.⁵⁸ The overall research portrays U.S. commitment as a form of signaling to the partner nation. In order for the U.S. to extend deterrence to another country, the nature of the commitment must be absolutely credible.⁵⁹ The scholarship also suggests a unique relationship between security assistance and U.S. commitment. Arms transfers and advisory missions are no substitute for U.S. presence in maintaining stability unless they are tied to a credible commitment to deploy troops if necessary. Notably, without credible commitment, U.S. influence diminishes.

U.S. policy cohesion is the fourth uniformity of successful security assistance and cooperation efforts, underpinning the United States' commitment and influence in security partnerships. Mott IV defines cohesion as an integrated effort combining foreign policy, military strategy, and economic aid into a unified approach for achieving U.S. aims with the partner nation⁶⁰ His definition implies a synchronized whole-of-government approach with a clear and consistent purpose. Derek Reveron provides more emphasis on the State Department and Department of Defense, arguing that any security assistance program done well includes early national-level coordination between the DOD and DoS using the

⁵⁶ David Kinsella, "Stability and Instability in Third World Security Complexes: The Role of Arms Transfers," (Political Science faculty publications and presentations, Portland State University, Jan 24, 2013), https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/polisci_fac/1.

⁵⁷ Kinsella, "Role of Arms Transfers," 27.

⁵⁸ Angela O'Mahony et al., *U.S. Presence and the Incidence of Conflict*, RR-1906-A (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2018), https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1906.html.

⁵⁹ Paul K. Huth, "Extended Deterrence and the Outbreak of War," *American Political Science Review* 82, no. 2 (June 1988): 423–443, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1957394>.

⁶⁰ Mott IV, *An Empirical Perspective*, 73–76.

National Security Strategy as the focal point for synchronization.⁶¹ However, U.S. policy cohesion may be easier said than done. Matissek describes two policy approaches related to security assistance and cooperation, arguing that whole-of-government approaches are necessary but rarely come to fruition in the United States.⁶² He suggests comprehensive state-building policies and the more austere containment-type security policies must be integrated and resourced adequately for a whole-of-government approach to take effect. The overall scholarship emphasizes consistency as a crucial element for success. The literature suggests that without consistent, cohesive policy, the United States' ability to signal its commitment to partner states declines, thereby jeopardizing its credibility and influence.

C. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES

The scholarship on security assistance and cooperation suggests that the profile of the U.S. security relationship with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates may help clarify the efficacy of U.S. contributions towards regional stability in the Persian Gulf. The thesis evaluates the following hypothesis:

H₁: The U.S. security partnerships with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are dysfunctional. U.S. security assistance and cooperation efforts with the partner nations do not conform to the four uniformities associated with successful security partnerships. Therefore, the efficacy of U.S. security cooperation contributing towards regional stability in the Persian Gulf is low.

The literature review suggests a hierarchical relationship among the four uniformities associated with successful security relationships. The four uniformities included the alignment of interests, U.S. influence, commitment to the partner nation's security, and U.S. policy cohesion. The thesis focuses on the relationship itself as the primary determinant of policy success. If the U.S. security relationships with Saudi Arabia

⁶¹ Derek Reveron, *Exporting Security: International Engagement, Security Cooperation, and the Changing Face of the U.S. Military* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2016), 103.

⁶²Jahara Matissek, "The Crisis of American Military Assistance: Strategic Dithering and *Fabergé Egg* Armies," *Defense and Security Analysis* 34, no. 3 (Aug 2018): 267–290, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14751798.2018.1500757>.

and the United Arab Emirates do not conform to the profile of successful partnerships, then U.S. efficacy is low. Moreover, the relationships are unlikely to produce favorable outcomes as intended in U.S. policy, including enhancing regional stability.

Alternatively, U.S. relationships may conform to the profile of a successful security relationship. The confirmation of functional partnerships with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates serves as the null hypothesis:

H₀: The U.S. security partnerships with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are functional. U.S. security assistance and cooperation efforts with the partner nation conform to the four uniformities associated with successful security relationships. Therefore, the efficacy of U.S. security cooperation in the Gulf is high.

The hypothesis under investigation addresses whether the profile of the U.S. relationships with Gulf partners is functional or dysfunctional. If the null hypothesis proves true and U.S. efficacy is high, then the security partnerships are more likely to achieve U.S. foreign policy goals as intended, including enhancing regional stability.

D. RESEARCH DESIGN

The thesis uses a case study to evaluate the U.S. security relationship with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates from 2000 to 2020. The case study evaluates the four uniformities associated with successful security partnerships under three presidential administrations. The 2001–2008 Bush administration, the 2009–2016 Obama administration, and the 2017–2020 Trump administration. The intent is to focus on U.S. policy under each administration's Conventional Arms Transfer Policy and the security assistance and cooperation objectives outlined in the U.S. Foreign Military Training Report (FMTR) to Congress. The study operationalizes the four independent variables associated with security cooperation success as follows.

U.S. Policy Cohesion – U.S. policy is evaluated as either cohesive or not cohesive. Cohesive policy is absent contradictory policies or strategies working at cross-purposes. Cohesiveness requires consistency over time, defined as policies that do not reverse course more than once per four-year period. The allowance for change once per four-year period

recognizes that U.S. policy may adapt to changing circumstances or new administrations. The study primarily relies on the specific objectives published annually by the State Department for Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. However, the study also utilizes the Conventional Arms Transfer Policy of the United States and associated national strategy documents to identify changes in U.S. policy.

U.S. Commitment – U.S. commitment is assessed to be either committed or not committed. The study determines the level of U.S. commitment to a partner nation's security based on defense agreements and the number of active-duty military personnel permanently assigned in-country. A minimum of 200 military personnel serves as the cut-off for commitment. The study uses 200 as the benchmark to discriminate from U.S. Marines assigned to embassies to protect U.S. assets. The study uses the Department of Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) and secondary sources to determine troop presence in-country.

U.S. Control and Influence – U.S. influence is defined as sufficient or insufficient based on the partner nation's degree of dependency on U.S. armaments. The study identifies dependency when the majority (51%) of military equipment is from the United States versus alternate suppliers. The assessment uses quantitative data from the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) *Military Balance*, an annual publication that lists the military inventory for each country.

Alignment of Interests – The United States' and partner nations' security interests are either convergent or divergent. The study uses a two-part process to identify convergence. First, convergent interests are predicated on cohesive U.S. policy, U.S. commitment, and sufficient U.S. influence. If any of the three variables are absent, then the study asserts that U.S. and partner nation interests are divergent, as suggested in the literature review. Second, the study evaluates official statements, documents, and secondary sources between the United States and the partner nation to identify evidence of convergence or divergence. Thus, the convergence of interests focuses specifically on the overlap between U.S. and partner nation security policy.

Functional Security Partnership – The study defines a functional security partnership as a relationship in which U.S. policy is cohesive, the United States is committed, retains sufficient influence, and shares convergent security interests with the partner nation.

There are several challenges to the proposed research design. First, the Department of Defense classifies the country-level objectives for security cooperation in the CENTCOM theater. However, the State Department provides an annual report to Congress outlining the foreign policy objectives for all military training, education, and engagement activities provided to the partner nation. The research design asserts that the foreign policy objectives for conducting military engagements and training with a partner nation are the same as for providing military hardware. Secondly, the qualitative assessment regarding convergence is vulnerable to subjective interpretation. However, evidence of direct divergent interests should be sufficient to overcome any bias in the assessment. Additionally, the threshold criteria defining a functional relationship is based on objective qualitative and quantitative data measuring four separate variables making the hypothesis impossible to prove without multiple sources of evidence. While the degree of alignment may be open to interpretation, divergent interests are generally explicit.

E. THESIS OVERVIEW AND CHAPTER OUTLINE

The thesis organizes the project into four chapters. Chapter I introduces the topic and highlights the dilemma of security cooperation and assistance in the Gulf. It also presents the relevant literature regarding security cooperation and focuses on the uniformities associated with successful security cooperation relationships.

Chapters II and III address the U.S. security relationship with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates from 2001 to 2019. Each chapter evaluates the relationship during three time periods coinciding with different presidential administrations. The analysis includes an evaluation of the four uniformities associated with security cooperation success. Finally, Chapter IV summarizes the findings of the research project and assesses the implications of the study.

II. ASSESSMENT OF THE U.S.-SAUDI SECURITY RELATIONSHIP

Since the turn of the century, the security relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia has been defined by three U.S. presidents and three Saudi monarchs amidst a host of historic regional challenges. With President George W. Bush, King Fahd (1982-2005), and then his successor, King Abdullah (2005-2015), the two countries weathered the aftermath of the attacks of September 11, 2001, and the 2003 invasion of Iraq. President Barack Obama and King Abdullah, followed by his successor, King Salman (2015-present), witnessed the collapse of the regional order in the wake of the Arab Spring as regimes toppled in Egypt and Tunisia, and new wars erupted in Syria, Libya, Iraq, and Yemen. President Trump and King Salman faced the instability of the ongoing wars along with an increasingly aggressive Iran and a resurgent Russia. The following analysis evaluates the elements of continuity and change in the U.S.-Saudi relationship to discern whether the security partnership has remained functional given the trying circumstances of the past twenty years.

A. U.S.-SAUDI SECURITY RELATIONSHIP 2001–2008

The U.S.-Saudi relationship from 2001 to 2008 reflected a series of severe strains catalyzed by the attacks of September 11, 2001, and the 2003 invasion of Iraq. By 1996, U.S.-Saudi relations reached their lowest point than at any previous time in history.⁶³ U.S. regional policy at the time focused on containing Iraq and Iran using the force structure deployed to fight the 1990–1991 Persian Gulf War.⁶⁴ The heavy U.S. commitment of forward-deployed forces in Saudi Arabia deterred further interstate conflict but also motivated extremist violence against Saudi Arabia and the United States leading up to the

⁶³ Rachel Bzostek and Samuel Robison, “U.S. Policy toward Israel, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia: An Integrated Analysis, 1981–2004,” *International Studies Perspectives* 9, no. 4 (2008): 359–376, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1528-3585.2008.00342.x>.

⁶⁴ Joshua Rovner and Caitlin Talmadge, “Hegemony, Force Posture, and the Provision of Public Goods: The Once and Future Role of Outside Powers in Securing Persian Gulf Oil,” *Security Studies* 23, no. 3 (August 2014): 548–581, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15325024.2014.935224>.

attacks of September 11, 2001.⁶⁵ The resulting global war on terrorism became a source of fear, hostility, and domestic instability in Saudi Arabia, further straining U.S.-Saudi relations.⁶⁶ Likewise, criticism against the Kingdom from Congress and the U.S. media increased in light of revelations that Saudi nationals were responsible for the 9/11 attacks.⁶⁷ The 2003 Iraq War further exacerbated tensions between the two countries. The collapse of the Sunni Baathist regime in Iraq made Saudi Arabia more vulnerable to Iranian aspirations.⁶⁸ By 2008, Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal described U.S.-Saudi relations as a “train wreck.”⁶⁹ Despite the ongoing cooperation in the war on terrorism, relations remained severely strained in 2008.

During the Bush presidency, U.S. security cooperation policy in Saudi Arabia was not cohesive until after 2004. From 2000 to 2004, U.S. objectives emphasized maintaining access to Saudi territory and promoting cooperation and interoperability with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).⁷⁰ However, there were changes each year with alternating emphases: enabling the Kingdom to take more responsibility for regional defense (2000), providing support to Operation SOUTHERN WATCH (2001), supporting military action against Iraq (2002), supporting the war on terrorism (2003), and exposing the kingdom to international norms and U.S. values (2003).⁷¹ By 2005, the U.S. objectives for Saudi Arabia remained focused on the war on terrorism, exposing Saudis to U.S. values and international norms, and enabling the Kingdom to assume greater responsibility for self-

⁶⁵ Rovner and Talmadge, “Securing Persian Gulf Oil,” 572–573.

⁶⁶ David E. Long, “US-Saudi Arabia Diplomatic Relations: An Evolutionary Process,” in *Handbook of US-Middle East Relations: Formative Factors and Regional Perspectives*, ed. Robert E. Looney (New York: Routledge, 2014), 414–415.

⁶⁷ David Ottaway, “The King and Us: U.S.-Saudi Relations in the Wake of 9/11,” *Foreign Affairs* 88, no.3 (May/June 2009): 121–31, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2009-05-01/king-and-us>.

⁶⁸ Henner Fürtig, “Conflict and Cooperation in the Persian Gulf: The Interregional Order and U.S. Policy,” *Middle East Journal* 61, no. 4 (Autumn 2007): 627–640, <https://doi.org/10.3751/61.4.13>.

⁶⁹ Bruce O. Riedel, *Kings and Presidents: Saudi Arabia and the United States Since FDR* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2018), 152.

⁷⁰ Department of State, “Foreign Military Training and DOD Engagement Activities of Interest,” (Saudi Arabia, 2000–2004).

⁷¹ Department of State, “Foreign Military Training and DOD Engagement Activities of Interest,” (Saudi Arabia, 2000–2003).

defense.⁷² Overall, U.S. security policy for Saudi Arabia was not cohesive until after 2004, although relations remained severely strained throughout the period.

U.S. troop presence in Saudi Arabia fluctuated considerably from 2001 to 2008, indicating a significant shift in U.S. commitment to regional security. From 1997 to 2002, the number of U.S. troops in-country gravitated towards a steady state of approximately 5,000 personnel. However, during the 2003 invasion of Iraq, Department of Defense records show an official peak of 12,218 active-duty members permanently stationed in Saudi Arabia, followed by a radical drop to 235 personnel by September 2004.⁷³ After 2004, steady-state troop counts declined 90% and remained at 300 to 500 personnel throughout the Bush presidency reflecting a new minimum level of commitment to Saudi Arabia's defense.⁷⁴ The reason behind the dramatic reduction stems from the strained relations caused by Saudi objections to U.S. offensive operations launched from Prince Sultan Air Base, the most capable airbase in the region at that time.⁷⁵ The result was a recharacterization of the U.S.-Saudi relationship and a permanent transition of U.S. forces to Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar starting in 2003.⁷⁶ After the marked change in the U.S.-Saudi relationship, the U.S. remained minimally committed throughout the Bush presidency.

U.S. influence in Saudi Arabia remained strong from 2001 to 2008, but the Kingdom actively diversified its weapons portfolio away from U.S. manufacturers to

⁷² Department of State, "Foreign Military Training and DOD Engagement Activities of Interest," (Saudi Arabia, 2004–2008).

⁷³ Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) (Total Military, Civilian, and Dependent Strengths by Regional Area and by Country; accessed June 15, 2021), <https://dwp.dmdc.osd.mil/dwp/app/dod-data-reports/workforce-reports>.

⁷⁴ Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) (Total Military, Civilian, and Dependent Strengths by Regional Area and by Country; accessed June 15, 2021), <https://dwp.dmdc.osd.mil/dwp/app/dod-data-reports/workforce-reports>.

⁷⁵ Benjamin S. Lambeth, *Air Power Against Terror: America's Conduct of Operations Enduring Freedom*, MG-166-1-CENTAF (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2005), <https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG166-1.html>; "US Pulls out of Saudi Arabia," BBC, April 29, 2003, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/2984547.stm; Jim Sciutto, "U.S. Troops Preparing for War in Qatar," ABC, January 7, 2006, <https://abcnews.go.com/WNT/story?id=130093&page=1>.

⁷⁶ Michael R. Gordon and Eric Schmitt, "Aftereffects: Bases; U.S. will Move Air Operations to Qatar Base," *New York Times*, April 28, 2003, <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/04/28/world/aftereffects-bases-us-will-move-air-operations-to-qatar-base.html>; Rebecca Grant, "The Short, Strange Life of PSAB," *Air Force Magazine*, July 1, 2012, <https://www.airforcemag.com/article/0712psab/>.

increase its independence. In 2001, roughly two-thirds of Saudi weapon systems originated from the United States, all of which required U.S. logistics and technical support.⁷⁷ Although resentful of U.S. coercive leverage, the ruling family met nearly every demand made by the administration leading up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq.⁷⁸ However, after the conventional phase of the war (March-April 2003), the U.S.-Saudi security relationship changed significantly. In 2005–2006, arms transfers to Saudi Arabia reoriented towards preserving the ruling family’s security, specifically through modernization of the Kingdom’s National Guard.⁷⁹ U.S. arms transfers negotiated in 2005 and 2006 included \$1B of riot control vehicles, armored personnel carriers, water cannons, ammunition, and assorted equipment for ensuring internal security.⁸⁰ Second, King Abdullah pursued large contracts with European countries to modernize Saudi Arabia’s Air Force and Navy. The European arms deals in 2005 and 2006 included 72 Eurofighter Typhoon aircraft and two defense deals with France to acquire French submarines, tanks, and combat aircraft.⁸¹ Thus, while U.S. influence over Saudi Arabia was strong leading up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, post-war relations witnessed the ruling family’s efforts to diversify its inventory and mitigate its complete dependence on U.S. military support.

The 2003 shift in U.S.-Saudi relations reflected a growing divergence between the two countries’ regional policy goals, although evidence suggests the relationship remained minimally functional. Although Saudi Arabia provided essential support enabling the United States to defeat Saddam Hussein’s Ba’ath regime in Iraq, the assistance was predicated on Saudi Arabia’s complete dependence on the United States for its future security.⁸² The Saudi royal family officially announced their objections to a U.S.-led war

⁷⁷ International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *The Military Balance*, (2001), (London: IISS, 2001), 119–151, <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/tmib20>.

⁷⁸ Furtig, “Conflict and Cooperation in the Persian Gulf,” 638.

⁷⁹ IISS, *The Military Balance*, (2006), 165–216.

⁸⁰ IISS, *The Military Balance*, (2006), 178.

⁸¹ IISS, *The Military Balance*, (2006), 177; IISS, *The Military Balance*, (2007), 214.

⁸² Louisa Dris-Aït-Hamadouche and Yahia H. Zoubir, “The US-Saudi Relationship and the Iraq War: The Dialectics of a Dependent Alliance,” *Journal of Third World Studies* 24, no.1 (Spring 2007): 109–135, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45194355>.

in Iraq in a televised statement days before the U.S. invasion.⁸³ In addition, senior Saudi officials suggested to the press that the United States had overstayed its welcome at Prince Sultan Air Base, leading some to conclude that the U.S. and Saudi Arabia had different priorities for the region.⁸⁴ By 2004, the two countries had redefined their relationship, and the United States began its permanent relocation from Prince Sultan Air Base to Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar. Despite the dramatic change, two factors suggest the security relationship remained minimally functional. First, a small contingent of U.S. personnel remained to stay and train Saudi military forces.⁸⁵ Second, the Kingdom continued to pursue significant defense contracts with the United States, albeit with a new focus on internal regime security.⁸⁶ By the end of the 2001–2008 period, the relationship was redefined by minimally converging interests to defend the Al-Saud regime from threats within the Kingdom.

B. U.S.-SAUDI SECURITY RELATIONSHIP 2009–2016

The U.S.-Saudi relationship from 2009 to 2016 changed from minimal coordination to policy friction as the U.S. sought to reduce its commitment to the Middle East. In the early years of the Obama presidency, the unanticipated continuation of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan led Washington to question the United States' heavy investment in the Middle East and seek a transition towards the Asia-Pacific.⁸⁷ The United States' initial policy position in the Middle East was active disengagement.⁸⁸ However, the Arab Spring (2010-

⁸³ "Saudi Arabia Rejects Participation in War Against Iraq," CNN, March 18, 2003, <http://www.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/meast/03/18/sprj.irq.saudi/>.

⁸⁴ "Some Discontent Brews Between Saudi Arabia, U.S.," CNN, January 30, 2002, <http://edition.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0201/30/lad.01.html>.

⁸⁵ Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC), 2003–2008.

⁸⁶ IISS, *The Military Balance*, (2004–2008), chap. 4.

⁸⁷ White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: White House, 2010), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf.

⁸⁸ Ken Pollack "Obama's Foreign Policy and the Future of the Middle East" (presentation, Middle East Policy Council's 77th Capitol Hill Conference, Washington, DC, July 21, 2014), <https://mepc.org/obamas-foreign-policy-and-future-middle-east>; Paul Williams, "President Obama's Approach to the Middle East and North Africa: Strategic Absence," *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law* 48, no. 1 (2016), <https://scholarlycommons.law.case.edu/jil/vol48/iss1/5>.

2012), the rise of the Islamic State (2013-2014), and widespread political turmoil challenged the regional order and redefined the United States' role in the region.⁸⁹ Fawaz Gerges argues that U.S. policy in the Middle East during this period reflected high aspirational goals for self-directed transformation in the Middle East.⁹⁰ He notes that the Oval Office challenged the notion that the status quo, defined as U.S. support to autocratic regimes, was in the United States' best interests in the long term. Instead, the new approach put a premium on popular political movements, which required the United States to avoid backing autocratic leaders. The result was policy friction between the United States and the long-supported autocratic leaders who could no longer rely on the United States for their regimes' security.

U.S. security objectives in Saudi Arabia were somewhat fungible albeit nominally cohesive from 2009 to 2016 period. In 2009, policy objectives continued to emphasize Saudi Arabia's important role in the war against terrorism.⁹¹ However, in 2010, the U.S. policy objectives changed dramatically and emphasized the need for Saudi Arabia to manage its own defense.⁹² By 2012, foreign policy objectives in the Persian Gulf were standardized across all of the Gulf countries. Notably, the U.S. published the same security cooperation objectives for both Iran and Saudi Arabia: to enhance "strategic bilateral and regional relations."⁹³ This was also the first time in decades that the United States provided security assistance (albeit minimal) to Iran to attend select regional security conferences.⁹⁴ The new policies reflected a desire for the United States to transfer the burden of managing security to the regional actors, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf states. After 2012, U.S.

⁸⁹ Fawaz Gerges, "The Obama Approach to the Middle East: The End of America's Moment?" *International Affairs* 89, no. 2 (2013): 299–323, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23473538>.

⁹⁰ Gerges, "The Obama Approach to the Middle East."

⁹¹ Department of State, "Foreign Military Training and DOD Engagement Activities of Interest," (Saudi Arabia, 2009–2010).

⁹² Department of State, "Foreign Military Training and DOD Engagement Activities of Interest," (Saudi Arabia 2010–2012).

⁹³ Department of State, "Foreign Military Training and DOD Engagement Activities of Interest," (Saudi Arabia, 2012–2014).

⁹⁴ A review of the "Foreign Military Training and DOD Engagement Activities of Interest" indicates that the United States began funding Iran's military to attend regional security conferences starting in 2009.

security objectives for Saudi Arabia remained relatively unchanged and continued to emphasize the Kingdom's responsibility to resolve and prevent regional conflicts.

Paradoxically, the United States' efforts to transfer the burden of security included an increase in the number of U.S. troops stationed in Saudi Arabia to support an expanding train and advise mission. The United States continued to station a small force of military personnel as part of the Saudi-funded U.S. Military Training Mission (USMTM) and the U.S. Office of the Program Manager, Saudi Arabian National Guard (PM-SANG).⁹⁵ Additionally, the United States invented a new policy mechanism called a technical cooperation agreement (TCA) to extend military support to the Saudi Ministry of the Interior.⁹⁶ The additional TCA missions constituted the only programs in the world that allow the U.S. military to train a country's interior security forces.⁹⁷ The new missions increased troop levels from 2013 to 2015, peaking at 654 active-duty personnel.⁹⁸ In 2015, the United States also provided military intelligence and logistical support to Saudi Arabia to defend the Kingdom from Houthi violence.⁹⁹ Although the Obama administration emphasized transferring the burden of security to regional actors, the United States increased its commitment to the Kingdom's defense through a series of Saudi-financed technical agreements, service contracts, and direct U.S. military support for the war in Yemen.

Despite contradictory policies and strained relations, U.S.-Saudi military ties expanded from 2009 to 2016 through several high-profile arms deals. During this period, Saudi Arabia continued to diversify its defense portfolio by acquiring field artillery systems from China (PLZ-45), mine-resistant infantry patrol vehicles from France (Aravis), and

⁹⁵ Defense Manpower Data Center, 2009–2016.

⁹⁶ Christopher M. Blanchard, *Saudi Arabia: Background and U.S. Relations*, CRS Report No. RL33533 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2020), <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RL/RL33533>.

⁹⁷ Richard Bumgarder, "MOI-MAG Advise and Train in Saudi Arabia," U.S. Army Public Affairs, November 6, 2019, https://www.army.mil/article/229552/moi_mag_advise_and_train_in_saudi_arabia.

⁹⁸ Defense Manpower Data Center, 2009–2016.

⁹⁹ "Statement by NSC Spokesman Bernadette Meehan on the Situation in Yemen," White House Office of the Press Secretary, March 25, 2015, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/03/25/statement-nsc-spokesperson-bernadette-meehan-situation-yemen>.

tanker transports from Europe (A330 MRTT).¹⁰⁰ However, in a personal meeting with King Abdullah in March 2010, Secretary Gates negotiated what was then the largest U.S. arms deal in history.¹⁰¹ The deal comprised a lifetime value of \$60 billion in major conventional weapon systems. It included an extensive provision of advanced munitions and significant upgrades to the Saudi National Guard, Royal Saudi Land Forces, and Royal Saudi Air Force.¹⁰² The United States also completed dozens of new arms transfers during this period, including AH-64E Apache combat helicopters, upgraded tanks and munitions, specially configured King Air-350 surveillance aircraft, AGM-114L HELLFIRE missiles, and over 10,000 laser and GPS-guided precision bombs.¹⁰³ By 2015, fast-tracking arms deliveries became the centerpiece of U.S. policy as a means to reassure Gulf partners.¹⁰⁴ As a result, the percentage of U.S. weaponry in the Saudi arsenal continued to increase, creating enduring U.S. dependencies in the Saudi National Guard and the military services.

The U.S.-Saudi security relationship from 2009 to 2016 reflected minimally compatible interests punctuated by acute discord and competing priorities. Multiple media outlets reported senior Saudi official calls for the Kingdom to distance itself from the United States due to divergent policies regarding Iran's regional role, the political aftermath of the Arab Spring, and the Syrian civil war.¹⁰⁵ Notably, Saudi Arabia rejected the rotating seat of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to protest U.S. policies in

¹⁰⁰ IISS, *The Military Balance*, (2009-2016), chap. 4.

¹⁰¹ Riedel, *Kings and Presidents*, 156.

¹⁰² IISS, *The Military Balance*, (2009-2016), chap 4.

¹⁰³ SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, (accessed 27 April 2021).

¹⁰⁴ "U.S.-Gulf Cooperation Council Camp David Joint Statement," White House Office of the Press Secretary, May 14, 2015, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/05/14/us-gulf-cooperation-council-camp-david-joint-statement>.

¹⁰⁵ "Saudi to Reassess Relations with US," Al-Jazeera, October 23, 2013, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2013/10/23/saudi-to-reassess-relations-with-us-report>; "Saudi Arabia Warns of Shift Away from U.S. over Syria, Iran," Reuters, October 22, 2013, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-usa/saudi-arabia-warns-of-shift-away-from-u-s-over-syria-iran-idUSBRE99L0K120131022>; Nawaf Obaid, "Amid the Arab Spring, a U.S.- Saudi Split," *Washington Post*, May 15, 2011, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/amid-the-arab-spring-a-us-saudi-split/2011/05/13/AFMy8Q4G_story.html.

the region.¹⁰⁶ Additionally, Prince Turki Al-Faisal, royal family insider and former Saudi Ambassador to the United States, suggested that the Kingdom was no longer allied with the White House administration but would remain loyal to the American people based on historical ties and shared interests.¹⁰⁷ However, the Brookings Institution's leading expert on U.S.- Saudi relations, Bruce Riedel, notes that both the United States and Saudi Arabia compromised on key issues to preserve the strained relationship.¹⁰⁸ According to Riedel, Washington softened its position on Egypt and Bahrain during the Arab Spring upheavals to appease King Abdullah. Likewise, King Salman remained silent on the United States lifting sanctions against Iran in exchange for U.S. support to the war in Yemen.¹⁰⁹ The evidence suggests that U.S.-Saudi interests were nominally compatible during this time period and strongly influenced by a strictly transactional relationship predicated on U.S. intent to reduce its role in the region.

C. U.S.-SAUDI SECURITY RELATIONSHIP 2017–2020

The U.S.-Saudi relationship from 2017 to 2020 experienced a qualified revival during the Trump presidency centered on containing Iranian adventurism and optimizing economic benefits. The period was marked by unprecedented Saudi foreign policy activism, evidenced by the Kingdom's kidnapping of the Lebanese prime minister, its ongoing war of choice in Yemen, and its initiated crisis with Qatar.¹¹⁰ U.S. foreign policy also experienced a radical shift by redefining the purpose of arms transfers as a tool of

¹⁰⁶ Robert Worth, "Saudi Arabia Rejects U.N. Security Council Seat in Protest Move," *New York Times*, October 18, 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/19/world/middleeast/saudi-arabia-rejects-security-council-seat.html>; Colum Lynch, "Saudis Shock U.N., Quit Security Council Over Syria," *Foreign Policy*, October 18, 2013, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/10/18/saudis-shock-u-n-quit-security-council-over-syria/>.

¹⁰⁷ Prince Turki Al-Faisal, "Mr. Obama, we are not 'free riders'," *Arab News*, March 14, 2016, <https://www.arabnews.com/columns/news/894826#.VubddRYBwbU.twitter>.

¹⁰⁸ Riedel, *Kings and Presidents*, Ch 6.

¹⁰⁹ Riedel, *Kings and Presidents*, 176.

¹¹⁰ F. Gregory Gause III, "Saudi Arabia: How Much Change?" in *The Contemporary Middle East in an Age of Upheaval*, ed. James L. Gelvin (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2021). <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781503627703>.

economic security.¹¹¹ For the first time, the United States government committed to promoting the U.S. arms industry abroad by reducing the regulatory environment and maximizing the financial benefits of the global conventional arms market.¹¹² In 2019, responding to concerns from Congress, the State Department’s Inspector General addressed the potentially destabilizing effects of expedited arms transfers to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates but concluded that all arms transfers, to include “emergency sales” absent Congressional oversight, complied with the Arms Export Control Act.¹¹³ The report cited 4,221 arms transfers to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates from January 2017 to August 2020, all of which were under the legal threshold for notifying Congress.¹¹⁴ In addition to the unprecedented support to Saudi Arabia through arms deals, the United States also deployed two fighter squadrons to protect the Kingdom from Iranian aggression in the wake of missile and drone attacks on oil and natural gas facilities in Saudi Arabia.¹¹⁵ The deployments served as a clear departure from previous U.S. policy emphasizing the need for partner nations to defend themselves. The new U.S. policy reprioritized the relationship with Saudi Arabia as a means to advance U.S. prosperity.

The U.S. security cooperation policy in Saudi Arabia from 2017 to 2020 was relatively cohesive, albeit controversial due to repeated challenges by Congress. The explicit security objectives remained unchanged since 2012 and focused on three lines of effort: maintaining relations, professionalizing the Saudi military, and improving interoperability with U.S. and aligned forces.¹¹⁶ A key priority outlined in the 2017

¹¹¹ Donald Trump, *National Security Presidential Memorandum on United States Conventional Arms Transfer Policy (NSPM-10)*, April 19, 2018, <https://www.hsdl.org/?abstract&did=825730>.

¹¹² Trump, *NSPM-10*.

¹¹³ Office of Inspector General, Department of State, *Review of the Department of State’s Role in Arms Transfers to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates*, Report no. ISP-I-20-19, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, 2020), 9, <https://www.stateoig.gov/system/files/isp-i-20-19.pdf>.

¹¹⁴ Office of Inspector General, Department of State, *Arms Transfers to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates*, 11.

¹¹⁵ Donald Trump, “Deployment of U.S. Armed Forces to Saudi Arabia” (official memorandum, Washington, DC: Office of the President, 2019), <https://www.hsdl.org/?abstract&did=832258>.

¹¹⁶ Department of State, “Foreign Military Training and DOD Engagement Activities of Interest,” (Saudi Arabia, 2012–2019).

National Security Strategy (NSS) included facilitating the export of U.S. military equipment abroad to strengthen U.S. competitiveness.¹¹⁷ The 2017 NSS matched the United States' new conventional arms transfer policy emphasizing the economic benefits of selling armaments.¹¹⁸ However, debates continued in the 115th and 116th Congress regarding arms sales to Saudi Arabia and concerns over the Kingdom's conduct in Yemen, leading to several attempts to curb U.S. support to the Saudi-led coalition.¹¹⁹ In 2019, Congress submitted a joint resolution to end all U.S. involvement in Yemen except counterterrorism operations, but it failed to pass a presidential veto.¹²⁰ The Trump administration also invoked emergency authorities in May 2019 to proceed with arms sales to Saudi Arabia that were opposed by Congress.¹²¹ Congress attempted to stop the arms transfers and passed three bills that were all vetoed in July 2019, and a subsequent Senate vote failed to overcome the veto.¹²² Except for the controversy in Congress, U.S. arms transfers to Saudi Arabia continued unabated.

During the period 2017 to 2020, the United States also increased its defense guarantees to Saudi Arabia. In addition to record numbers of arms transfers, the United States deployed an expeditionary air wing, two fighter squadrons, and U.S. radar and missile systems constituting about 3,000 military personnel to Saudi Arabia.¹²³ In President Trump's official notification to Congress dated November 20, 2019, the communication cited Iran's attacks against Saudi oil and gas facilities a month prior as the

¹¹⁷ White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: White House, 2017), 30, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.

¹¹⁸ Trump, *NSPM-10*.

¹¹⁹ Jeremy M. Sharp, Sarah R. Collins, and Christopher M. Blanchard, *Congress and the War in Yemen: Oversight and Legislation 2015–2020*, CRS Report No. R45046 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2020), <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R45046/22>.

¹²⁰ To Direct the Removal of United States Armed Forces from Hostilities in the Republic of Yemen that have not been Authorized by Congress, S.J. Res. 7, 116th Cong., 1st sess. (2019-2020), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-joint-resolution/7>.

¹²¹ Blanchard, Saudi Arabia: Background and U.S. Relations, 26.

¹²² Office of Inspector General, Department of State, *Arms Transfers to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates*, 7.

¹²³ Trump, "Deployment of U.S. Armed Forces to Saudi Arabia."

catalyst for the deployment. As part of the deployment, the U.S. Navy positioned the USS *Nitze*, an Arleigh Burke-class destroyer, off the coast of Saudi Arabia to fend off any follow-on missile attacks from Iran.¹²⁴ Contrary to previous policy, the United States no longer focused on reducing U.S. forces in the Middle East. Instead, it put into practice a form of extended deterrence not seen since the Cold War.

Saudi Arabia's dependence on U.S. arms and support continued throughout the 2017–2020 period, but some signs of reverse leverage challenged U.S. influence. In October 2017, during the historic first visit of the Saudi monarchy to Russia, King Salman signed a memorandum of understanding with Russia, including the purchase of the S-400 air defense system.¹²⁵ That same month, the Saudi Arabian Military Industries (SAMI) also announced new arms transfers, including Kornet anti-tank guided missiles and TOS-1A advanced multiple rocket launchers and education and training contracts to sustain Russo-Saudi military development in the Kingdom.¹²⁶ At the height of Congressional opposition to U.S. arms transfers to Saudi Arabia in 2020, SAMI signaled to U.S. audiences that it could acquire equivalent weapons systems or products through any number of foreign partnerships.¹²⁷ Nevertheless, significant U.S. deliveries continued to arrive in Saudi Arabia, including M-1A2S Abrams tanks, modernized PAC-3 Patriot air defense systems, and advanced F-15SA fighter aircraft.¹²⁸ Notably, the day after King Salman's historic meeting in Russia and the Saudi-Russo arms deal announcement, the U.S. Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) announced the sale of the Terminal High-Altitude

¹²⁴ “Trump to Hear Military Options on Iran as Saudis Show Oil Site Damage,” CBS, September 20, 2019, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/donald-trump-iran-military-options-saudi-arabia-shows-damage-aramco-oil-facility-khuraib-today-2019-09-20/>.

¹²⁵ Anna Borshchevskaya, “The Tactical Side of Russia’s Arms Sales to the Middle East,” in *Russia in the Middle East*, ed. Theodore Karasik and Stephen Blank (Washington, DC: Jamestown Foundation, 2018), 198, <https://jamestown.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Russia-in-the-Middle-East-online.pdf?x87069>.

¹²⁶ “Saudi Arabia Signs Agreement to Manufacture Russian Weapons Locally,” AlArabiya News, October 5, 2017, <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/gulf/2017/10/05/Saudi-Arabian-Military-Industries-signs-agreement-to-manufacture-Russian-weapons-locally->.

¹²⁷ Agnes Helou, “Amid Western Arms Embargoes on Saudi Arabia, SAMI has a Backup Plan,” Defense News, January 14, 2020, <https://www.defensenews.com/industry/2020/01/14/amid-western-arms-embargoes-on-saudi-arabia-sami-has-a-backup-plan/>.

¹²⁸ SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, (accessed 27 April 2021).

Air Defense (THAAD) system to Saudi Arabia under a new \$15 billion contract.¹²⁹ The timing of the DSCA notification and the S-400 notification one day apart suggests Saudi Arabia used the S-400 announcement as leverage. However, Saudi Arabia continued to field predominantly U.S. equipment even as the ruling family tried to diversify across multiple foreign partners.

U.S. and Saudi interests remained minimally compatible from 2017 to 2020, although Congressional support waned considerably. Despite multiple attempts to curb arms sales to Saudi Arabia, Congress was unable to overcome presidential vetoes or the emergency powers granted by the 1976 Armed Export Control Act. Additionally, the U.S. reversal on the Iran issue, as evidenced by the controversial withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), suggests that the United States favored powers like Saudi Arabia over traditional solidarity with European allies.¹³⁰ However, multiple human rights violations against political activists, culminating in killing and dismemberment of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, alienated key Saudi supporters in the United States.¹³¹ Additionally, the oil price war between Russia and Saudi Arabia created a new challenge for the U.S. economy. As a result, the United States threatened to withdraw all military support from Saudi Arabia if it did not resolve the conflict with Moscow and cut oil production.¹³² Nevertheless, the fact that Saudi Arabia complied with U.S. demands suggests that national priorities remained convergent through the intersection of each nations' economic interests and position on Iran.

¹²⁹ "Saudi Arabia-Terminal High Altitude Area Defense and Related Support, Equipment and Services," Defense Security Cooperation Agency, Oct 6, 2017, https://www.dsca.mil/sites/default/files/mas/saudi_arabia_17-28.pdf.

¹³⁰ Steven Simon, "Iran and President Trump: What is the Endgame?" *Survival* 60 no. 4 (July 2018): 7–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2018.1494975>.

¹³¹ Hussein Ibish, "Why U.S. Saudi Relations are Facing an Unprecedented Crisis," *Policy and Governance-Saudi Arabia* (blog), May 11, 2020, <https://agsiw.org/why-u-s-saudi-relations-are-facing-an-unprecedented-crisis/>.

¹³² "Trump Warned Saudis to Cut Oil Supply or Lose U.S. Military Support," *Middle East Eye*, April 30, 2020, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/trump-warned-saudis-cut-oil-supply-or-lose-us-military-support-report>.

D. CONCLUSION

The U.S.-Saudi security partnership from 2001 to 2020 remained nominally functional despite several controversial episodes that threatened to end the relationship. U.S. policy, while dynamic in light of unprecedented regional turmoil and vastly different policy approaches in the White House and Riyadh, was also relatively cohesive as articulated in relevant U.S. official reports and documents. The U.S. also remained committed, albeit minimally at times, with no less than 235 U.S. active-duty personnel stationed in the Kingdom throughout the 20 years. Equally important, Saudi dependency on U.S. military support remained constant, which provided sufficient U.S. influence to negotiate aligned interests. Even when U.S. and Saudi priorities and values were not convergent, interests remained compatible, as evidenced by significant episodes of compromise by both parties. However, the assessment found that the decisions of each nation's elite leaders defined the character of the security relationship. More often than not, arms transfers were a presidential tool of political expediency that rarely appeared to be part of a deliberate vision or strategy to improve regional stability. Nevertheless, the U.S.-Saudi security relationship demonstrated remarkable resilience under the most trying conditions rendering it nominally functional for most of the twenty-year period.

III. ASSESSMENT OF THE U.S.-UAE SECURITY RELATIONSHIP

The security relationship between the United States and the United Arab Emirates has primarily been defined by the Emirates' strategic vision and meteoric rise as a small nation. Despite its size,¹³³ the UAE is home to the seventh-largest proven oil reserves globally (more than Russia) and commands more sovereign wealth than Saudi Arabia.¹³⁴ The UAE's extraordinary resources have given it outsized influence and ambitions to become a regional power with international reach.¹³⁵ During its ascendancy onto the international stage (buoyed by a surge in oil prices from 2002 to 2008), the UAE began to craft and diversify new security relationships beyond its 1994 Defense Cooperation Agreement with the United States.¹³⁶ In addition to its diversification strategy, the UAE also enacted an aggressive soft power campaign to enhance its security relationships with countries like the United States.¹³⁷ Although the United States has never designated the United Arab Emirates as a Major Non-NATO Ally (MNNA) as it has Kuwait and Bahrain, the UAE's carefully stage-managed image presented to Washington has enamored foreign and military policy elites and cultivated a reputation as a capable ally above its Arab peers in the Middle East.¹³⁸

¹³³ According to the CIA World Factbook, the UAE is about 4% the size of Saudi Arabia in terms of territory, and a third in size in terms of population. However, in terms of citizenship, there are just over 1.1 million Emiratis compared to 21.5 million Saudis living in their respective countries. "CIA World Fact Book," updated July 8, 2021, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/>.

¹³⁴ Christopher M Davidson, *From Sheikhs to Sultanism: Statecraft and Authority in Saudi Arabia and the UAE* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 3–4.

¹³⁵ Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, "Small States with a Big Role: Qatar and the United Arab Emirates in the Wake of the Arab Spring" (discussion paper, Durham University, 2012), <https://dro.dur.ac.uk/10011/1/10011.pdf>.

¹³⁶ Kristian Ulrichsen, *The United Arab Emirates: Power, Politics and Policymaking*, (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 185.

¹³⁷ See notes from Davidson on UAE's 'Soft Power Council,' Davidson, *From Sheikhs to Sultanism*, 1 & 276, note 4.

¹³⁸ Albadr AbuBaker Alshateri, "How Washington Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the UAE," *American Diplomacy* (Feb 2020), <https://americandiplomacy.web.unc.edu/2020/02/how-washington-learned-to-stop-worrying-and-love-the-uae/>.

A. U.S.-UAE SECURITY RELATIONSHIP 2001–2008

From 2001 to 2008, the U.S.-UAE security relationship started to take shape despite the challenges of the U.S. war on terrorism. In 2002, Secretary Colin Powell and Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed established the U.S.-UAE Strategic Partnership to expand bilateral cooperation.¹³⁹ In an additional act of support, the UAE military deployed in 2003 beside U.S. and coalition forces in Afghanistan.¹⁴⁰ By 2006, the UAE developed a reputation for hosting more U.S. naval ship visits than any other non-U.S. port in the world.¹⁴¹ The growing relationship culminated in 2008 with the first visit to the United Arab Emirates by a sitting U.S. president and the formulation of the U.S.-Gulf Security Dialogue to isolate and strengthen Iran.¹⁴² However, not all developments were positive during this period. W.A. Terrill notes that UAE's ties to the Taliban and the participation of two Emirati citizens in the 9/11 hijackings negatively impacted U.S.-UAE relations. Additionally, the Dubai Ports World (DPW) controversy in 2006 became a highly publicized national security issue when a UAE company attempted to purchase port management of six major U.S. seaports. Congress blocked the deal, but the prevailing message was that the United States would always treat Arab allies with suspicion.¹⁴³ This may explain why the UAE continued to pursue alternate security agreements with France, including the establishment of the first permanent French base in the Persian Gulf.¹⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the UAE started to assert itself as an important U.S. security partner in the Persian Gulf from 2001 to 2008.

¹³⁹ Richard Boucher, "The U.S.-UAE Strategic Dialogue Meetings," Department of State, November 6, 2002, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2002/14960.htm>.

¹⁴⁰ "On the Frontline with UAE Forces in Helmand," National News UAE, July 22, 2011, <https://www.thenationalnews.com/uae/on-the-frontline-with-uae-forces-in-helmand-1.423315>.

¹⁴¹ "Fact Sheet: The United States-UAE Bilateral Relationship," White House, February 2006, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2006/02/20060222-10.html>.

¹⁴² Christopher M. Blanchard and Richard F. Grimmett, *The Gulf Security Dialogue and Related Arms Sale Proposals*, CRS Report no. RL34322 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2008), 2–4, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/weapons/RL34322.pdf>.

¹⁴³ W. Andrew Terrill, *Regional Fear of Western Primacy and the Future of U.S. Middle Eastern Basing Policy* (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, 2006), 62–63, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep11627>.

¹⁴⁴ "France to Get Military Base in UAE," Al Jazeera, January 16, 2008, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2008/1/16/france-to-get-military-base-in-uae>.

Despite growing ties, the U.S. security policy in the United Arab Emirates was extremely limited in scope from 2001 to 2008. The State Department's annual reports to Congress emphasized the same foreign policy objectives for nearly eight years: provide military education, training, and technology to improve interoperability with U.S. forces.¹⁴⁵ For a brief two-year period starting in 2008, the annual objectives included exposing the Emirati military to U.S. values and increasing awareness of international norms and human rights.¹⁴⁶ Otherwise, military interoperability remained the sole focus.

U.S. commitment to the Emirates' defense grew substantially from 2001 to 2008. Department of Defense records indicate a low of twenty-one military personnel assigned to the UAE in September 2002, expanding to 1,555 personnel assigned by September 2008.¹⁴⁷ Another indicator of the United States' growing commitment to UAE's security was a bilateral agreement signed with the UAE in February 2006 establishing the Gulf Air Warfare Center at Al Dhafra Air Base.¹⁴⁸ The Air Warfare Center was established to improve pilot proficiency in the Persian Gulf and eventually extended Air and Air Defense training to all GCC member states. By the end of 2008, the U.S. commitment to the UAE was at a historic high.

From 2001 to 2008, the UAE held an increasingly prominent position in U.S. security policy, but the Emirates remained independent of U.S. control due to its extensive inventory provided by the French. In 2001, most of the major weapon systems in the UAE originated from France, with lesser contributions from the UK and Russia. At the turn of the century, the Emirati military inventory consisted of French Mirage 2000 aircraft and Leclerc main battle tanks, Russian BMP-3 infantry fighting vehicles, and British Scorpion reconnaissance vehicles.¹⁴⁹ The only U.S. equipment in inventory included AH-64A

¹⁴⁵ Department of State, "Foreign Military Training and DOD Engagement Activities of Interest," (UAE, 2001–2008).

¹⁴⁶ Department of State, "Foreign Military Training and DOD Engagement Activities of Interest," (UAE, 2008–2009).

¹⁴⁷ Defense Manpower Data Center, 2001–2008.

¹⁴⁸ "Curtain Up at AFCENT's Air Warfare Center," Air Force Magazine, January 9, 2015, <https://www.airforcemag.com/curtain-up-at-afcents-air-warfare-center/>.

¹⁴⁹ IISS, *The Military Balance*, (2001–2002), chap. 4.

Apache attack helicopters, M109A3 self-propelled howitzers, and I-HAWK surface-to-air missile batteries.¹⁵⁰ U.S. weapon systems represented a fraction of the Emirati inventory until 2004 when the first of 80 F-16 Block 60 “Desert Falcons” arrived.¹⁵¹ The UAE invested \$2-3 billion in research and development costs for the Desert Falcon aircraft. The sale marked the first time the United States exported a better aircraft than it had in its own inventory.¹⁵² By 2008, U.S. aircraft constituted nearly half of the Emirati Air Force inventory, but France remained the provider of choice for most of UAE’s military arsenal.

U.S. and UAE security interests remained aligned from 2001 to 2008, even during the turmoil leading up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Despite strong domestic opposition to the war, including mass protests in Dubai, UAE provided the United States with overflight rights and refrained from public criticism of the United States.¹⁵³ During a press conference in Abu Dhabi in January 2005, the assistant secretary of defense, Peter Rodman, announced the formation of the U.S.-UAE Joint Military Commission to formalize military ties and highlighted the UAE’s “good, quiet cooperation” with the United States.¹⁵⁴ The UAE also openly supported the US-backed provisional government in Iraq by contributing \$215 million in reconstruction assistance.¹⁵⁵ Yet for all of the public cooperation, there were also several areas of conflict, including the UAE’s record on illicit transfers of nuclear technology, human rights abuses, human trafficking, and disagreements on U.S. calls for

¹⁵⁰ IISS, *The Military Balance*, (2001-2002), chap. 4.

¹⁵¹ SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, (accessed 27 April 2021).

¹⁵² Gilles Van Nederveen, “The F-16 Block 60: A High-Tech Aircraft for a Volatile Region,” *Air & Space Power Journal* 14 no. 3 (September 2000): 96–98, https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/ASPJ/journals/Volume-14_Issue-1-4/2000_Vol14_No3.pdf.

¹⁵³ Sean Foley, “The Gulf Arabs and the New Iraq: the Most to Gain and the Most to Lose?” *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 7, no. 2 (June 2003): 24–43, https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/olj/meria/meria03_fos01.html; Jon B. Alterman, “Special Report: Iraq and the Gulf States the Balance of Fear,” United States Institute of Peace, August 1, 2007, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2007/08/iraq-and-gulf-states-balance-fear>.

¹⁵⁴ Lydia Georgi, “U.S. Seeks to Formalize Military Links with the UAE,” *The Daily Star Lebanon*, January 13, 2005, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/ArticlePrint.aspx?id=64518&mode=print>.

¹⁵⁵ “Reliable Allies for 41 Years,” UAE Embassy to the United States, accessed June 30, 2021, <https://www.uae-embassy.org/uae-us-relations/reliable-allies-41-years>.

political reform.¹⁵⁶ The main area of U.S.-UAE convergence during this period revolved around deterring Iran.¹⁵⁷ Both countries actively sought to isolate Iran's growing regional ambitions. Because of the commonly perceived threat posed by Iran, U.S.-UAE interests remained compatible during this period.

B. U.S.-UAE SECURITY RELATIONSHIP 2009–2016

The U.S.-UAE security relationship experienced significant challenges from 2009 to 2016, highlighting the UAE's increasing capability and independence from the United States. The U.S. policy of Middle East retrenchment coupled with the threat posed by the Arab Spring propelled the UAE's assertive regional security strategy.¹⁵⁸ The new strategy, in development since the 2004 death of UAE's founding father, Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan, emphasized inculcating a positive image in Washington to nurture closer ties without becoming reliant on the United States.¹⁵⁹ The UAE's proactive strategy fulfilled Washington's desire for Gulf nations to share the burden of regional security but also reduced Washington's influence on UAE decision-making.¹⁶⁰ Nevertheless, despite multiple policy disagreements described in more detail below, the UAE's reputation as a capable and reliable military partner continued to grow. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, Martin Dempsey, described the UAE as the United States' most credible and capable ally.¹⁶¹ The Secretary of Defense, Ash Carter, stated that the UAE "unquestionably has one of the most

¹⁵⁶ Annual updates to Congress from 2005–2008 all contain references to UAE areas of concern. See Kenneth Katzman, *The United Arab Emirates (UAE): Issues for U.S. Policy*, CRS Report no. RS21852 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2005–2008), <https://apps.dtic.mil/>.

¹⁵⁷ Katzman, *The United Arab Emirates (UAE)*, (2008 update).

¹⁵⁸ Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, "Fire and Fury in the Gulf," *IndraStra Global* 4, no.2 (2018): 1–8, <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-55716-2>; Hussein Ibish, "The UAE's Evolving National Security Strategy" (occasional paper 4, Gulf States Institute in Washington, 2017), <https://agsiw.org/uaes-evolving-national-security-strategy/>.

¹⁵⁹ Gaith A. Abdulla, "The making of UAE Foreign Policy: A 'Dynamic Process Model'" (occasional paper 84, Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 2014), <https://www.ecssr.ae/en/publication/the-making-of-uae-foreign-policy-a-dynamic-process-model/>; Alshateri, "How Washington Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the UAE"; Ibish, "The UAE's Evolving National Security Strategy."

¹⁶⁰ Ibish, "The UAE's Evolving National Security Strategy," 8.

¹⁶¹ Martin Dempsey, "Thoughts on the Future of the Gulf," (presentation, Center for Strategic & International Studies, Washington, DC, March 18, 2013), <https://www.csis.org/events/gulf-roundtable-cjcs-general-martin-e-dempsey>.

capable militaries in the Middle East, and a truly excellent bilateral relationship with us that's growing stronger and more institutionalized every day.”¹⁶² And former U.S. CENTCOM Commander, Anthony Zinni, called the UAE partnership “the strongest relationship that the United States has in the Arab world today.”¹⁶³ In large part due to UAE’s influence campaign in Washington, by 2016, the UAE emerged as the United States’ partner of choice in the Middle East.

From 2009 to 2016, U.S. policy objectives for the UAE remained cohesive, albeit limited in scope. In 2010 and 2011, the State Department published identical foreign policy objectives for the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Kuwait, stressing interoperability with U.S. forces and developing host nation expertise for Gulf countries to manage their own defense.¹⁶⁴ In 2012, the U.S. prioritized “military professionalization” and “interoperability with U.S. and coalition forces” as its foreign policy objectives for UAE and most of the Gulf monarchies.”¹⁶⁵ Reflecting a renewed emphasis on burden sharing, the U.S. Security Sector Assistance policy published in 2013 outlined the U.S. intent “to help allies and partner nations build their own security capacity.”¹⁶⁶ In addition to burden sharing, U.S. policy also stressed expediting arms transfers as a centerpiece of security cooperation. For example, the new Conventional Arms Transfer Policy published in 2014 emphasized streamlining security cooperation and the conventional arms transfer process and taking “all available steps to hasten” arms transfers and security assistance.¹⁶⁷ The

¹⁶² Ash Carter, “Remarks by Secretary Carter at the 2016 IISS Manama Dialogue, Manama, Bahrain,” Department of Defense, December 10, 2016, <https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/1026655/remarks-by-secretary-carter-at-the-2016-iiss-manama-dialogue-manama-bahrain/>.

¹⁶³ Rajiv Chandrasekaran, “In the UAE, the United States has a Quiet, Potent Ally Nicknamed ‘Little Sparta,’” *Washington Post*, November 9, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/in-the-uac-the-united-states-has-a-quiet-potent-ally-nicknamed-little-sparta/2014/11/08/3fc6a50c-643a-11e4-836c-83bc4f26eb67_story.html?utm_term=.fc1b56c39aea.

¹⁶⁴ Department of State, “Foreign Military Training and DOD Engagement Activities of Interest,” (UAE, 2011–2012).

¹⁶⁵ Department of State, “Foreign Military Training and DOD Engagement Activities of Interest,” (2013–2016).

¹⁶⁶ “Fact Sheet: U.S. Security Sector Assistance Policy,” White House, April 05, 2013, <https://www.hsdl.org/?abstract&did=747214>.

¹⁶⁷ “Presidential Policy Directive–United States Conventional Arms Transfer Policy (PPD-27),” White House Office of the Press Secretary, January 15, 2014, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/01/15/presidential-policy-directive-united-states-conventional-arms-transfer-p>.

policy updates reflected the U.S. intent outlined in the 2010 National Security Strategy to pivot away from the Middle East.¹⁶⁸ While U.S. policy objectives for security cooperation with the UAE were cohesive, they were also generically applied across all Gulf countries, signaling a deliberate effort to disengage from the region.

From 2009 to 2016, despite U.S. efforts to disengage from the Persian Gulf, the United States ended up increasing its security commitments to the United Arab Emirates through a series of troop assignments and high-profile defense agreements. According to DOD records, from 2009 to 2016, the United States increased its steady-state troop presence to an average of 2,000 active-duty personnel stationed in the UAE, with a peak of 4,021 personnel assigned in March 2014.¹⁶⁹ Additionally, starting in 2012, the United States expanded its presence at Al Dhafra Air Base by stationing Global Hawk UAVs, AWACS, F-15 Eagles, and F-22 Raptors.¹⁷⁰ Also, in 2012, the U.S. Army deployed the Patriot Security Assistance team as part of a long-term defense contract to advise UAE personnel on the maintenance and tactical employment of the Patriot missile defense system.¹⁷¹ Furthermore, the U.S. Marine Corps established a military training mission to train the Emirates' new Presidential Guard under a separate agreement.¹⁷² The high-profile defense contracts culminated in 2015 and 2016 when the UAE became the first foreign nation to purchase and employ the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense System

¹⁶⁸ White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: White House, 2010), 43, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf; Pollack, "Obama's Foreign Policy and the Future of the Middle East."

¹⁶⁹ Defense Manpower Data Center, 2009–2016.

¹⁷⁰ Katzman, *The United Arab Emirates (UAE)*, (September 14, 2015 update).

¹⁷¹ Debra Valine, "United Arab Emirates gets Air Defense Boost from U.S.," U.S. Army Public Affairs, March 20, 2019, https://www.army.mil/article/218898/united_arab_emirates_gets_air_defense_boost_from_u_s.

¹⁷² "Personnel Sourcing Guidance in Support of Marine Corps Training Mission-United Arab Emirates (MCTM-UAE)," U.S. Marine Corps Public Affairs, October 24, 2012, <https://www.marines.mil/News/Messages/Messages-Display/Article/895109/personnel-sourcing-guidance-in-support-of-marine-corps-training-mission-united/>.

(THAAD).¹⁷³ The THAAD contract included a dedicated security assistance team to train and advise UAE personnel in-country.¹⁷⁴ Thus, despite U.S. emphasis on transferring more of the security burden to Gulf partners, the number of U.S. military personnel stationed in the UAE increased significantly.

Between 2009 and 2016, the Emirates' strategy of diversifying across multiple arms suppliers ensured the UAE remained independent of U.S. controlling influence. Soubrier assesses that this is part of an emerging shift in Gulf nations' security strategy, particularly the UAE, to gain leverage with exporting countries and deprive supplier states of any undue interference in their foreign policies.¹⁷⁵ The UAE's approach is evident from the long list of defense agreements signed in 2015 and 2016 with Canada, Georgia, Italy, Finland, Poland, Sweden, Germany, and Indonesia.¹⁷⁶ Although the percentage of U.S.-sourced equipment in the UAE increased after High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS) and C-17 Globemaster deliveries, the arms transfers were matched by alternate suppliers to include Russian BMP-3s and Swedish Saab 340 Erieye airborne early warning and control aircraft.¹⁷⁷ The UAE's stringent offset requirements also ensured that any arms deal over \$10M required the company to compensate the host nation as a condition of the sale—generally in the form of a joint venture with UAE as the 51% shareholder.¹⁷⁸ Thus, the UAE security strategy obfuscates which country exerts influence on whom and suggests that the UAE postures itself to exercise significant reverse leverage.

¹⁷³ Adriane Elliot, "Antiballistic System Shared with International Partner," U.S. Army Public Affairs, January 13, 2016, https://www.army.mil/article/160912/antiballistic_system_shared_with_international_partner.

¹⁷⁴ Elliott, "Antiballistic System Shared with International Partner."

¹⁷⁵ Emma Soubrier, "The Weaponized Gulf Riyal Politik(s) and Shifting Dynamics of the Global Arms Trade," *The Economics of Peace and Security Journal* 15, no. 1 (April 17, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.15355/epsj.15.1.49>.

¹⁷⁶ Ibish, "The UAE's Evolving National Security Strategy," 21.

¹⁷⁷ IISS, *The Military Balance*, (2009-2017), chap. 4.

¹⁷⁸ "United Arab Emirates National Trade Estimate," Office of the United States Trade Representative, 2010, https://ustr.gov/sites/default/files/uploads/reports/2010/NTE/2010_NTE_UAE_final.pdf; Soubrier, "The Weaponized Gulf Riyal Politik(s)," 51.

U.S.-UAE interests were relatively compatible from 2009 to 2016, but divergent policies in the wake of the Arab Spring threatened the relationship. For example, the White House's calls for Hosni Mubarak to step down in 2011 appalled royal elites in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates and signaled a dramatic turn in the United States' historical support for the region's autocratic allies.¹⁷⁹ The event led Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed (MBZ) to warn President Obama that supporting the demands of Arab Spring activists could spell the end of the U.S. relationship.¹⁸⁰ The crux of the divergent interests rested on the UAE's view that any Islamist movement, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, represents an existential threat.¹⁸¹ The UAE's hardline anti-Islamist stance contradicted the United States' Middle East retrenchment policy and drove the Emirates to take steps to shape the region in their favor. Examples include the 2014 airstrikes against Islamists in Libya,¹⁸² the controversial transfer of U.S.-sourced weapons to proxies in Yemen,¹⁸³ the 2014 Qatar crisis,¹⁸⁴ and proxy rivalries inflaming the Syrian conflict.¹⁸⁵ Although perceptions of waning U.S. commitment to the region damaged U.S.-UAE ties, the relationship improved once the two countries realigned to combat the Islamic State in Syria.¹⁸⁶ As a symbol of their aligned interests, the United States authorized the UAE to command airstrikes in Syria, the only Arab country authorized to direct strikes in the

¹⁷⁹ Ibish, "The UAE's Evolving National Security Strategy," 17.

¹⁸⁰ Alex MacDonald, "Barack Obama's Legacy in the Middle East: Six Things we Learned from 'A Promised Land,'" *Middle East Eye*, November 17, 2020, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/barack-obama-promised-land-middle-east-we-learned>.

¹⁸¹ Robert F. Worth, "Mohammed bin Zayed's Dark Vision of the Middle East's Future," *New York Times*, January 9, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/09/magazine/united-arab-emirates-mohammed-bin-zayed.html>.

¹⁸² "Egypt, UAE Carried out Tripoli Air Strikes: U.S. Officials," Reuters, August 25, 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-security-airstrikes/egypt-uae-carried-out-tripoli-air-strikes-u-s-officials-idUSKBN0GP1VJ20140825>.

¹⁸³ Clayton Thomas et al., *Arms Sales in the Middle East*, 35.

¹⁸⁴ Islam Khalid Hassan, "GCC's 2014 Crisis: Causes, Issues and Solutions," *Aljazeera Centre for Studies*, March 31, 2015, <https://studies.aljazeera.net/en/dossiers/2015/03/201533172623652531.html>.

¹⁸⁵ Line Khatib, "Syria, Saudi Arabia, the U.A.E. and Qatar: the 'Sectarianization' of the Syrian Conflict and Undermining of Democratization in the Region," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 46, no. 3 (2019): 385–403, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2017.1408456>.

¹⁸⁶ "Fear of U.S. Neglect Fades with Islamic State Fight UAE Says," *Bloomberg*, January 8, 2015, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-01-08/fear-of-u-s-neglect-fades-with-islamic-state-fight-u-a-e-says>.

theater.¹⁸⁷ Notably, the UAE conducted more airstrikes in Syria than any other coalition member, second only to the United States.¹⁸⁸ The renewed partnership culminated in the launch of the Sawab Center, a joint U.S.-UAE endeavor to counter extremist propaganda.¹⁸⁹ U.S.-UAE interests converged once the United States was actively engaged in countering Islamist movements.

C. U.S.-UAE SECURITY RELATIONSHIP 2017–2020

The U.S.-UAE relationship, buoyed by extensive defense contracts and agreements, increased significantly from 2017 to 2020. However, in contrast to previous administrations, the U.S. policy of *principled realism* deemphasized American ideology in favor of countering regional threats, namely Iran and Islamist extremism, by making “allies with anyone that shares our goals.”¹⁹⁰ As a result, scholars disagree on whether the Trump administration’s policies contributed towards a decline or improvement in regional stability. For example, Mehran Kamrava argues that the Qatar rift in 2017 served as an indicator that the U.S. policy, marked by a massive influx of new weaponry and regional activism, deepened the region’s instability.¹⁹¹ In contrast, Ray Takeyh argues that the administration’s foreign policy agenda led to the historic signing of the Abraham Accords, normalizing relations between Israel and the UAE, ultimately setting the stage for a more stable Middle East.¹⁹² Although the Trump administration prioritized security interests over American values, the UAE’s long-standing record on human rights abuses became a point of controversy that led to multiple attempts by Congress to block arms sales to the

¹⁸⁷ Ibish, “The UAE’s Evolving National Security Strategy,” 30.

¹⁸⁸ Chandrasekaran, “In the UAE, the United States has a Quiet, Potent Ally Nicknamed ‘Little Sparta.’”

¹⁸⁹ “Launch of the Sawab Center,” Department of State Office of the Spokesperson, July 8, 2015, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2015/07/244709.htm>.

¹⁹⁰ “President Trump’s Speech to the Arab Islamic American Summit,” White House, May 21, 2017, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/president-trumps-speech-arab-islamic-american-summit/>.

¹⁹¹ Mehran Kamrava, *Troubled Waters: Insecurity in the Persian Gulf* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), chap. 3.

¹⁹² Ray Takeyh, “Trump’s Parting Gift to Biden: A more Stable Middle East,” *Foreign Policy*, November 16, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/11/16/trump-biden-iran-israel-uae-middle-east/>.

country.¹⁹³ The most prominent arms deal included fifty F-35 Joint Strike Fighters and eighteen MQ-9 Reaper drones associated with UAE's normalization of relations with Israel.¹⁹⁴ The controversial arms deal reflected the conflicting nature of the United States' relationship with authoritarian regimes in the Persian Gulf.

Notwithstanding opposition from Congress, U.S. security policy in the United Arab Emirates remained cohesive from 2017 to 2020. There were no changes to the country's foreign policy objectives beyond promoting interoperability and military professionalization.¹⁹⁵ However, the administration made critical changes affecting the transfer of arms technology to foreign nations. First, the administration changed the Reagan-era Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) and the U.S. Conventional Arms Transfer Policy to facilitate exporting advanced weapon systems abroad, specifically armed drones to the UAE.¹⁹⁶ Additionally, the 2017 National Security Strategy made the defense industrial base a central tenet of American prosperity requiring "reform [ed] regulations and processes to facilitate the export of U.S. military equipment."¹⁹⁷ Notably, although the State Department's 2020 country report documented significant human rights abuses in the UAE, including torture, arbitrary arrests, and detention of political dissidents,¹⁹⁸ the allegations did not appear to affect U.S. foreign policy in the UAE.

From 2016 to 2020, the United States expanded its commitment to the defense of the United Arab Emirates. The two countries signed a new Defensive Cooperation

¹⁹³ Katzman, *The United Arab Emirates (UAE)*, (April 15, 2021 update).

¹⁹⁴ Katzman, *The United Arab Emirates (UAE)*, (April 15, 2021 update), 14.

¹⁹⁵ Department of State, "Foreign Military Training and DOD Engagement Activities of Interest," (UAE, 2016–2019).

¹⁹⁶ Paul K. Kerr, *U.S.-Proposed Missile Technology Control Regime Changes*, CRS Report No. IF11069 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2021), <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/details?prodcode=IF11069>; Trump, *NSPM-10*; "Exclusive: Trump Administration Advances \$2.9 Billion Drone Sale to UAE," Reuters, November 5, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-emirates-drones-exclusive/exclusive-trump-administration-advances-2-9-billion-drone-sale-to-uae-sources-idUSKBN27M06L>.

¹⁹⁷ White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (2017).

¹⁹⁸ "2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: United Arab Emirates (2020)," Department of State, accessed August 11, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/united-arab-emirates/>.

Agreement (DCA) in May 2019, solidifying military-to-military ties and increasing the number of U.S. troops and equipment stationed in-country.¹⁹⁹ The U.S. also deployed F-35 Joint Strike Fighter aircraft to Al Dhafra in the wake of escalating tensions with Iran marking the first F-35 deployment to the Middle East.²⁰⁰ Additionally, according to the Congressional Research Service, the U.S. stationed 3,500 personnel in the UAE.²⁰¹ The 3,500 estimate constitutes a significant increase from the 2009–2017 average of 2,000 personnel stationed in-country.²⁰² The signing of the 2019 DCA, along with the high-profile aircraft deployments and increased U.S. troop presence, marked a new level of U.S. commitment to UAE’s security.

By 2020, the United States became the UAE’s majority military supplier reflecting a new level of U.S. influence. From 2017–2020, the United States delivered thousands of surplus tactical vehicles such as the MaxxPro and Caiman APCs. In addition, the United States delivered RQ-1 Predator UAVs, HIMARS, AH-64E Apache helicopters, and upwards of 18,000 missiles, bombs, and advanced munitions.²⁰³ In 2019, the White House invoked emergency authorities to bypass Congressional objections and expedite the provision of \$1 billion of precision-guided munitions to UAE to deter “Iranian adventurism in the Gulf.”²⁰⁴ Additionally, the State Department approved the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter and MQ-9 Reaper sales in late 2020.²⁰⁵ According to U.S. officials, the solid U.S.-UAE partnership influenced UAE’s normalization with Israel and enabled the Emirates’ long-

¹⁹⁹ “UAE, U.S. Activate Defense Cooperation Pact, Reuters, May 29, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-emirates-defence-bolton/uae-u-s-activate-defence-cooperation-pact-state-news-agency-idUSKCN1SZ2OB>; Phil Stewart, “U.S. Signs New Defense Accord with Gulf Ally UAE,” Reuters, May 16, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-emirates-military/u-s-signs-new-defense-accord-with-gulf-ally-uae-idUSKCN18C1TN>.

²⁰⁰ Stephen Losey, “F-35A Deploys to Middle East for First Time,” Air Force Times, April 15, 2019, <https://www.airforcetimes.com/news/your-air-force/2019/04/15/f-35-deploys-to-middle-east-for-first-time/>.

²⁰¹ Katzman, *The United Arab Emirates (UAE)*, (2021 update).

²⁰² Defense Manpower Data Center, 2009–2016.

²⁰³ SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, (accessed 27 April 2021).

²⁰⁴ Katzman, *The United Arab Emirates (UAE)*, (2021 update), 18.

²⁰⁵ “Major Arms Sales Notifications November 2020,” Defense Security Cooperation Agency, accessed August 11, 2021, <https://www.dsca.mil/major-arms-sales/archive-date/202011>.

sought-after F-35 acquisition.²⁰⁶ As a result, the United States became the UAE's definitive military supplier of choice.

Despite the growing relationship, U.S.-UAE interests remained nominally aligned from 2017 to 2020. Beyond the Abraham Accords, the UAE also supported the U.S.-led International Maritime Security Construct (IMSC) to counter ongoing Iranian attacks against commercial shipping in the Strait of Hormuz.²⁰⁷ Additionally, the two nations coordinated multiple counterterrorism missions against Al Qaeda in Yemen, culminating in the textbook operation liberating the port of Mukalla.²⁰⁸ However, the United States and the United Arab Emirates diverged on several issues ranging from human rights to regional security. For example, in 2017, the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee charged the Secretary of Defense to investigate reports of Emiratis torturing detainees in Yemen.²⁰⁹ The UAE was also a key instigator of the 2017 Qatar crisis, considered one of the worst regional crises to affect the security of the Persian Gulf.²¹⁰ A third example includes the UAE hiring U.S. contractors to spy on critics of the Emirati government, leading to changes in U.S. cyber export laws.²¹¹ The UAE also actively worked to defeat the United Nations and U.S.-supported Libyan government, including arming proxy forces.²¹² What is unclear is the U.S. response occurring through diplomatic channels to address the divergent

²⁰⁶ Joyce Karam, "US F-35 Sale to UAE Shows Regional Shifts and Improves Emirati Deterrence in Region," National News UAE, November 10, 2020, <https://www.thenationalnews.com/uae/government/us-f-35-sale-to-uae-shows-regional-shifts-and-improves-emirati-deterrence-in-region-1.1109373>.

²⁰⁷ Scott Neuman, "UAE Agrees to Join U.S.-Led Maritime Coalition to Protect Gulf Shipping," National Public Radio, September 19, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/09/19/762225417/uae-agrees-to-join-u-s-led-maritime-coalition-to-protect-gulf-shipping>.

²⁰⁸ William Maclean, Noah Browning, and Yara Bayoumy, "Yemen Counter-Terrorism Mission Shows UAE Military Ambition," Reuters, June 28, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-emirates/yemen-counter-terrorism-mission-shows-uae-military-ambition-idUSKCN0ZE1EA>.

²⁰⁹ "Senators Demand Investigation of Reports of Torture in Yemen," Reuters, June 23, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-prisons-usa-congress/senators-demand-investigation-of-reports-of-torture-in-yemen-idUSKBN19E2GZ>.

²¹⁰ Tamara Qiblawi et al., "Qatar Rift: Saudi, UAE, Bahrain, Egypt Cut Diplomatic Ties," CNN, July 27, 2017, <https://www.cnn.com/2017/06/05/middleeast/saudi-bahrain-egypt-uae-qatar-terror/index.html>.

²¹¹ "New U.S. Law Says Intelligence Agencies Must Report Risks of Ex-Spies Working Overseas," Middle East Eye, January 22, 2020, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/new-us-law-says-intelligence-agencies-must-report-risks-ex-spies-working-overseas>.

²¹² Amy Mackinnon, "The Conflict in Libya is Getting Even Messier," Foreign Policy, February 4, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/02/04/libya-conflict-un-report-uae-haftar/>.

interests. However, in terms of Iran and Islamist extremism, the two countries' interests remained compatible.

D. CONCLUSION

The U.S.-UAE partnership from 2001 to 2020 was functional, although Emirati interests defined the relationship. U.S. security policy was cohesive yet extremely limited, focusing almost exclusively on establishing military interoperability. By 2020, the UAE was considered a highly competent military ally with an arsenal composed of predominantly advanced American weaponry. However, despite the UAE's reputation as a capable Arab ally in the region, the U.S. continued to deploy thousands of troops to the Emirates to underwrite the nation's security. Although it is difficult to discern the extent to which UAE's reputation is based on its soft power campaign to win over influential U.S. elites, it is noteworthy that Congress tried to block arms transfers to the country based on an alarming list of human rights abuses. Nevertheless, the U.S.-UAE relationship remained functional throughout the twenty-year period.

IV. CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This thesis investigated the efficacy of U.S. security cooperation in the Persian Gulf to address the disparity between the seventy years of investment and the current state of regional instability. The thesis asked why the current instability is so disproportionate to the investment, considering the United States equipped the Gulf monarchies with the best weapon systems in the world (some exceeding U.S. capability) and provided world-class training to sixty thousand of the Gulf monarchies' best military professionals. The ongoing war in Yemen, Iranian attacks on commercial shipping and oil and gas facilities, and fractures in the Gulf Cooperation Council are just a few examples that the U.S.-supported regional order is in decline.

In an effort to frame an empirical investigation, the thesis identified several contradictions and institutional challenges facing U.S. security cooperation and assistance: First, long-standing institutional dissonance exists regarding how to define security sector assistance and what it can accomplish. Second, security cooperation remains a puzzle within the academic literature and fails to explain or predict the conditions under which autocracies cooperate with democratic states. Third, contemporary research suggests that the link between cooperation, peace, and stability must be considered a continuous effort variously described as an infinite game or enduring competition. In this view, regional stability is not a permanent end state, but rather a deliberately defined interim or acceptable temporary condition based on limited resources and policy constraints. Consequently, in the absence of a deliberately defined and agreed upon interim state, the concept of a stable Persian Gulf is open to interpretation. Subsequently, a variety of policy approaches strive to accomplish indeterminate goals that are more aspirational than practicable. Notably, the official purposes for conducting U.S. security sector assistance codified in statute and in joint doctrine fall into this category. Advancing national security interests, developing a nation's security, and building relationships are examples of indeterminate goals that defy objective investigation.

The thesis focused on U.S. efficacy to overcome the contradictions and institutional dissonance regarding security sector assistance. The thesis defined U.S. efficacy as the

United States' ability to wield factors within its control to achieve foreign policy goals. The literature review identified four primary factors within U.S. control: provision of material aid versus non-material aid, type of weapon systems delivered, number of troops deployed in-country, and quality or character of the security relationship with the partner nation. In turn, the literature suggested four uniformities that define a functional security relationship: U.S. policy cohesion, commitment to the partner nation's defense, controlling influence over the partner nation's defense decisions, and the alignment of interests. Notably, the thesis identified that these uniformities are interrelated and mutually supportive, thus creating a hierarchical or cascade effect. Cohesive policy is necessary for credibility, credibility is essential to signal commitment, commitment is required to achieve sufficient influence, and sufficient influence is required to negotiate an alignment of interests. All four uniformities are manipulable and define the quality of the security partnership for accomplishing U.S. foreign policy goals.

A. FINDINGS

In the Saudi Arabia case study, the U.S.-Saudi relationship proved remarkably resilient despite clear divergent priorities, primarily Iran and Iraq. While U.S. foreign policy was nominally cohesive within each presidential administration's tenure, U.S. policy was nearly incoherent and often contradictory when viewed across tenures. The three administrations experimented with radically different policy approaches with Saudi Arabia. From 2001–2008, the Bush administration attempted to remake the regional order by invading Iraq, a policy Saudi Arabia opposed due to fears that the resulting vacuum would strengthen Iran. In the aftermath, the Obama administration experimented with disengagement in the Middle East in the belief that regional state and non-state actors could stabilize the region if left on their own. In the Saudi view, Obama-era policy again benefitted an increasingly assertive Iran. In a reversal of U.S. policy, the Trump administration sided against Iran, withdrew from the JCPOA, and recommitted to defending Saudi Arabia from Iranian aggression. Across the three presidential administrations, the only continuity was the provision of increasingly high-profile arms deals framed variously as a symbol of U.S. commitment and, at other times, in direct contradiction, as an effort to help the Kingdom assume responsibility for its own defense.

While the uniformities associated with a functional security partnership were nominally present within each president's tenure, if viewed across the twenty-year period, the U.S.-Saudi partnership was dysfunctional and unlikely to produce favorable long-term outcomes as intended in U.S. policy. This may explain why security sector assistance increasingly focused on realizing benefits rather than achieving foreign policy goals.

In the United Arab Emirates case study, from 2001 to 2020, the U.S.-UAE security partnership remained functional, although the UAE's interests and strategic vision primarily defined the relationship. At the start of the period under study, U.S.-UAE relations were at their lowest due to the Emirates' ties to the Taliban in Afghanistan and revelations that two Emirati citizens took part in the 9/11 attacks against the United States. The UAE's association with the 9/11 hijackers and the Taliban undoubtedly played a role in the highly publicized 2006 Dubai Ports World controversy in which Congress opposed allowing a UAE company to manage U.S. port security. After 2006, the UAE's aggressive soft power campaign to endear itself to the military and foreign policy establishment appears to have changed Washington's perceptions, as evidenced by abundant and conspicuously gratuitous praise adopted by Washington elites. Mainly due to UAE's influence campaign, the Emirates emerged as the United States' preferred military partner of choice in the Middle East. Notably, with one exception, the official U.S. policy objectives for UAE never extended beyond promoting interoperability and professionalization. However, for a short two-year period from 2008 to 2009, the foreign policy objectives published in the annual FMTR to Congress included exposing the Emirati military to U.S. values and international norms regarding human rights. Except for this brief interlude, the U.S. avoided addressing the friction between U.S. values and the UAE's human rights record. The U.S. policy trend away from U.S. values coincided with an increased emphasis on deriving maximum economic benefits, culminating in the Trump administration's *principled realism*, which justified emergency arms sales to the Emirates despite ethical reservations from Congress. This may explain why the U.S.-UAE relationship flourished only when the United States conformed to UAE's vision for the region. As long as the United States actively opposed Iran, countered Islamist movements, and overlooked the Emirates' human rights record, the relationship prospered, and the UAE

and the United States realized the benefits of lucrative arms deals. The uniformities associated with a functional security partnership were minimally present across all three presidential administrations. However, the security partnership was driven by UAE's long-term policy goals for the region as the United States' long-term policy goals were indiscernible apart from optimizing the benefits of the bilateral relationship.

Based on the theoretical framework, the thesis hypothesized that the U.S. could not achieve its foreign policy goals of enhancing regional stability due to dysfunctional security partnerships with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. The thesis analyzed the four security cooperation uniformities in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates across three presidential administrations and determined that contrary to the main hypothesis, U.S. security relationships were nominally functional during each period under study. However, the analysis also revealed that enhancing regional stability in the Persian Gulf was never an explicit U.S. foreign policy goal after 9/11. In fact, U.S. foreign policy increasingly focused on two interconnected activities working at cross-purposes to regional stability: 1. transferring the burden of security to regional actors, and 2. optimizing the economic benefits of arming regional actors. Thus, the post-9/11 security sector assistance paradigm represents a policy shift from pursuing regional policy goals towards realizing benefits. As a result, the ongoing state of regional instability in the Persian Gulf appears to be partially explained by the unintended consequences of outsourcing responsibility for regional security to the highest bidder.

B. IMPLICATIONS

In hindsight, Mott's warning from his 1999 treatise appears prescient when he suggested that as arms transfers became more akin to market transactions, the effects of security cooperation would devolve unpredictably.²¹³ The case studies outlined in this thesis support Mott's conclusions and imply that the shift in policy focus from goals to benefits represents a devolution of security cooperation since the end of the Cold War. Absent from the Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates case studies is evidence that

²¹³ Mott IV, *Military Assistance: An Operational Perspective*, 16.

the United States willfully wielded factors within its control to achieve the deliberate effects of successful security cooperation. For example, the literature review identified that security cooperation efforts that focus on defensive weapon systems, credible troop commitments, and nonmaterial aid reduce the probability of regional conflict. Although the four uniformities associated with functional partnerships were present in both case studies, the United States leveraged its bilateral partnerships to maximize benefits. The exclusive focus on security cooperation benefits versus effects was an unexpected finding that suggests the link between functional U.S. security partnerships and regional stability is unfounded in the post-9/11 paradigm.

The shift from security cooperation goals and effects to realizing benefits presents several implications for practitioners. First, it is unclear how representative the two case studies are of post-9/11 security cooperation overall. Likely, Saudi Arabia's and the United Arab Emirates' vast oil wealth is a unique factor. Additionally, the United States' unsuccessful attempts to promote democracy in the region undoubtedly have complicated U.S. policy approaches in the Persian Gulf. However, if the case studies represent broader trends, it is unlikely that security cooperation efforts at the sub-policy level, such as at U.S. embassy country teams or the combatant commands, can overcome approaches exclusively focused on maximizing benefits. Further research is required to parse the differences between benefits-based and goals-based approaches, but it appears that benefits-based approaches ignore the unintended consequences and the implicit tradeoffs of supporting authoritarian regimes. The benefits-based approach also elevates economic benefits over the promotion of U.S. values. And since it ignores security cooperation's effects on partner nation's behavior, the benefits-only approach is not conducive for solving foreign policy problems. Subsequently, withholding arms transfers or conditioning security assistance and troop commitments on a partner nation's behavior might risk the loss of some significant benefits, but it may be the most effective means for effecting behavioral change. Consequently, U.S. security sector assistance policy may need to conform to a goals-centered approach, thereby sacrificing some benefits, if the U.S. intends to make regional peace and stability a policy priority.

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