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**UNITED STATES POLICY IN THE GULF REGION**

BY

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## ABSTRACT

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The Gulf region is an area of vital interest to the United States (US). Its interests lie in the areas of ensuring the continued flow of oil and guaranteeing the security of Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. This paper investigates to what extent the US can rely on Saudi Arabia to take a major role in ensuring its own defense and stability of the Gulf region. The US political strategy of dual containment and military strategy of prepositioned equipment and force projection are examined as well. Is the present US approach to the Gulf correct? The paper concludes that security in the Gulf can best be ensured by an enhanced US presence, such as permanent stationing of a heavy division, as the preeminent force in the region. The study recommends a change of US policy for the region by abandoning dual containment in favor of active engagement with Iraq and Iran.

## GLOSSARY

Gulf Region/States - Refers to the countries of the Arabian Peninsula and those countries contiguous to the Gulf. Included are: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Oman, Yemen, Iraq, and Iran.

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) - Formed by the six Gulf states of the Arabian Peninsula (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and UAE) in 1981 with the aim of coordination, integration, and cooperation among member states in all fields. This cooperation evolved into regional military cooperation to protect GCC states from the dangers posed by the Iran-Iraq War.

The Gulf - Most often referred to as the Persian Gulf or Arabian Gulf. To avoid confusion, it will be referred to as the Gulf in this paper.

Gulf War - Commonly referred to as the Persian Gulf War of 1991, Desert Shield/Storm, and War in Southwest Asia. Here it will be referred to solely as the Gulf War.

Dual Containment - Present US policy of simultaneously containing Iran and Iraq by economic means and/or threat of force as a means of ensuring regional security.

Vital Interest - An issue so important to a nation's well being that the leadership refuses to compromise beyond a point that it considers tolerable. Beyond that point the country's leaders are willing to risk economic and military sanctions.

## INTRODUCTION

### Statement of Problem

The purpose of this paper is to determine the validity of present United States (US) policy toward the Gulf region and the likelihood of its long term success. It will consider whether policy should change in order to better protect US interests. More specifically, the paper will examine the role of Saudi Arabia as the cornerstone on which US policy has been built in the past. US-Saudi relations have strengthened since the Gulf War and the contention that Saudi Arabia is key to future regional security, and should enjoy a special relationship with the US, will be investigated.

The Gulf region has been an enduring vital interest of the US since the discovery of significant oil reserves in the 1940s. Debate over the degree, tenor, and visibility of US involvement in the region has endured for almost as long. The region's balance of power and security concerns have changed considerably in the past five years. And, since the conclusion of the Gulf War in 1991, US policy has attempted to keep pace. The current

policy of "dual containment" clearly suggests that Iraq and Iran are the principal threats to US interests, while the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)<sup>1</sup> states are the US's allies.

### **Assumptions**

This study assumes the Gulf region will remain a vital interest to the US well into the future. The region will continue to be an area of internal conflict that will have an effect on all oil consuming industrialized countries. It is further assumed that some level of direct US involvement will continue to be required in the region in order to preserve security and stability.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **US Discovers Saudi Arabia**

When a British investment group gained the first oil exploration and production concession in Saudi Arabia in 1923, the US showed little interest.<sup>2</sup> The US was still largely isolationist and possessed adequate domestic reserves. The extent of Saudi oil reserves became of interest to the US during World War II, and subsequently as the US became a major economic

and industrial power its need for oil intensified. US petroleum companies, now with interest in the region, urged the government to assume a greater involvement in security and political stability in the Gulf region. In response, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration declared the defense of Saudi Arabia a vital interest to the US in 1943 and dispatched its first military mission there. In 1945, President Roosevelt and King Abd Al Aziz met on the U.S.S. Quincy, at the Great Bitter Lake, in the Suez Canal to codify an alliance between the two countries. This set a precedence for succeeding meetings between US Presidents and Saudi Kings. So, despite not sharing a common border, Saudi Arabia's relationship with the US became a cornerstone of Saudi foreign policy and regional security.<sup>3</sup>

Built on a common interest in oil, the relationship expanded during the Cold War as both countries shared a distrust of Soviet intentions. Over the years, this relationship has seen strains caused by differences between the two countries.

Misunderstanding on how each government conducts its political affairs caused much of this strain. Other areas ranged from cultural and religious differences, changes in US political interests, uneven and sometimes chaotic US relations with other Arab nations, to differing economic priorities. The most serious

area of strain has been in regard to US relations with Israel. Despite this, the US-Saudi relationship has endured and was validated in dramatic fashion by overwhelming US response to Iraqi aggression that culminated in the Gulf War in 1991.<sup>4</sup>

The US continues to recognize Saudi Arabia as the dominant power and influence in the GCC region. On the several occasions when the GCC has found it difficult to reach consensus on issues of interest to the US, the US has relied on its special relationship with Saudi Arabia to ensure its interests were protected. There is every anticipation this relationship will continue.<sup>5</sup>

#### **The Issue of US-Israeli Connection**

The close relationship between the US and Israel has proven problematic for the Arab world and Saudi Arabia in particular. Before the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, this relationship was only an irritant to Saudi Arabia. After the war, Saudi Arabia became convinced that Israel intended to undermine their strong ties with the US through such measures as attempting to block further US arms sales to Saudi Arabia. Negative western reaction to the Arab oil embargo of 1973 and US refusal to allow Saudi Arabia to buy necessary defensive weapons, only strained relations more.

Saudi Arabia became embittered and feared weakening US resolve to defend its security.<sup>6</sup>

The continuing Arab-Israeli peace process, the overwhelming US response to defend Saudi Arabia in 1990, and continued US resolve since the Gulf War, has done much to reduce Saudi anxiety. Problems remain, but have returned to being more an irritant, than a major rift. Perhaps most troubling for Saudi Arabia is having to defend its relationship with a country characterized by some Islamic nations as the "Great Satan," who best represents the evil in Western culture. In addition, the Saudi-US relationship is viewed with suspicion because of continued US support for Israel.

#### **Post Gulf War Saudi Arabia**

The Gulf War has profoundly affected the relationship of Saudi Arabia with both the US and its Arab allies. Most importantly, it exposed the fundamental weakness of the GCC (and Saudi Arabia as its preeminent member) to provide for its own collective security. This weakness has enhanced US influence, as the only viable guarantor of security for GCC members. Regardless of Saudi Arabia's efforts to avoid an appearance of total reliance on the US for its security, that indeed is a

fact.<sup>7</sup> Also, there is continuing tension among Gulf region countries. Specifically, GCC members are at odds with Iraq, failing to compromise on differences after the Gulf War.

The US is now in a position of "calling the shots" in the Gulf. It is also a key player in the unsettling relations between Iraq and some GCC members. Present US policy, aimed at Gulf region security, has mostly worked since the end of the Gulf War. It is not clear that this policy is best for the future and it may be time for reevaluation.

## **PRESENT US POLICY AND STRATEGY**

### **Interests**

The Gulf region clearly possesses vital interests for the US. Complicating the task of securing its vital interests, the region is characterized by conflict and instability, imbalances of wealth and power, widespread quest for weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and uncertain internal political development. The Secretary of Defense has identified three criteria for determining whether a threat affects US vital interests. These are:<sup>8</sup>

- If it threatens the survival of the US or its key allies.

- If it threatens critical US economic interests.

- If it poses the danger of a future nuclear threat.

Clearly each of these criteria applies to US interests in the Gulf region. Because the region is volatile and dangerous, it is crucial that those interests are worthy of the potentially high price required to protect them.<sup>9</sup>

The US has identified its vital interests in the Middle East, as follows:<sup>10</sup>

- Assured access to Gulf oil
- A durable Arab-Israeli peace
- Security of key regional partners
- Protection of US citizens and property
- Freedom of navigation
- Successful reform in the former Soviet Union
- Human rights and democratic development
- Access to regional markets

Most of these have a direct impact on the Gulf region, and as such, have influenced the development of US policy in the region.

## US Policy

The President's National Security Strategy recognizes that a key objective in the Gulf region is to reduce chances that another aggressor will emerge who would threaten the independence of existing states. The US continues to encourage members of the GCC to work closely on collective defense and security to meet appropriate levels of defensive capabilities that assist in this key objective. It also recognizes, though, that the GCC requires maintenance of bilateral defense agreements with the US to maintain regional security.

US policy is based on the clear recognition that both Iraq and Iran pose the greatest threat to security in the region. It has implemented a strategy of dual containment of the rogue states of Iraq and Iran insofar as those states pose a threat to US interests, to other states in the region, and to their own citizens.<sup>11</sup> Dual containment replaces the previous policy of maintaining a balance of power between Iraq and Iran. Instead, it focuses on denying each state the ability to influence neighboring countries until such time that they change their hegemonic policies.

Iraq must comply with all relevant United Nations (UN) Security Council resolutions as the means by which to demonstrate

peaceful intentions. Iraqi threats emanate from its desire for regional hegemony through physical domination of neighboring states in the Gulf, Levant, and Persia; control over a majority of regional oil resources; domination and/or annihilation of Kurdish and Shia minorities; and development of WMD with effective theater range means of delivery. Iran must change its behavior of attempting to obtain WMD and missiles, in support for terrorism, in attempts to undermine friendly governments in the region, and in its dismal human rights record.<sup>12</sup>

Individually, or collectively, Iraq and Iran pose the greatest security threat to the Gulf region and provide the focus for US policy there. US strategy in the region has been designed to support its policy.

### **US Regional Strategy**

US Central Command (CENTCOM) includes the Gulf region in its area of responsibility. It is the agent for developing a military strategy for the region, supportive of US policy. CENTCOM recognizes that a Gulf strategy must be multifaceted in order to properly respond to regional diversity and the wide range of threats present there. It has developed five pillars of

strategy, that taken together, comprise the major activities CENTCOM takes to accomplish its mission. They are:<sup>13</sup>

1. Power Projection. This involves rapid projection of combat forces from the US to the region, postured for combat.

2. Forward Presence. This involves positioning of a limited but potent mix of service capabilities. These include naval forces, aircraft, Patriot batteries, and prepositioned equipment.

3. Combined Exercises. This provides forces with environmental training and causes additional forces to be present in the region.

4. Security Assistance. This helps to satisfy legitimate self-defense needs of regional friends.

5. Readiness to Fight. This is ensured by appropriate doctrine, plans, equipment, personnel, sustainment, and units needed to rapidly deploy.

Further, CENTCOM has developed a flexible three tiered approach to deterring aggression. This approach depends first on national self defense, where each nation is expected to bear primary responsibility to defend itself. Second, collective defense, where friendly regional states (such as the GCC) would band together in common defense. Finally, the third tier, where the US and other allies would assist Gulf region states in defense.<sup>14</sup>

Saudi Arabia has provided the most enduring partnership with the US of any country in the region. Economically and

militarily, Saudi Arabia is the preeminent power among the GCC. In addition, since the Gulf War Saudi Arabia's economic and political ties to the US have intensified, and Saudi Arabia has been elevated almost overnight to the status of regional power.<sup>15</sup> Finally, Saudi Arabia, more than any other Gulf state, embodies those vital US interests identified for the region. Because of the stated policy of dual containment, which excludes the two most powerful regional countries, the US, almost by default, must tie its future in the Gulf region to continued close relations with Saudi Arabia. This raises the question as to whether it is wise for the US to be so reliant on one regional state. It must be determined if Saudi Arabia can be politically stable and if it can provide the first two tiers of the CENTCOM approach to regional security.

#### **SAUDI ARABIA'S POSITION IN THE GULF**

The Saudi Monarchy has provided one of the most stable and enduring states in the Gulf region. This enabled it to develop consistent policies over the years. Within this context, its national security policies emphasized diplomacy within the Islamic world. Saudi rulers sought coalition, alliance, and

concessions as means of maintaining the role of power broker in the region; without requiring high levels of military expenditure. After the Gulf War, though, Saudi Arabia began to take actions to protect its national interests. There has been a shift toward a more assertive regional outlook, with a major part of that involving massive weapons acquisitions.<sup>16</sup>

This assertiveness requires more than political posturing or deal making among its regional neighbors. Saudi Arabia needs the political stability, military and economic strength, foreign policy influence, and an ability to lead in order to make pursuing these policies work.

### **Political Stability**

During its ninety year rule, the al-Saud family defused political tension by undermining or co-opting rivals. These tactics have been elaborated on in recent years by creating a welfare state that repays the Saudi people for their passivity with wealth. Since the Monarchy has not been a creature of any colonial power, it has enhanced its durability by the ability to declare credibility to rule. Further, the al-Saud has tied its rule to serving Islam, drawing much of its rationale to rule from

the function of serving the religion.<sup>17</sup> It enjoys enhanced legitimacy by making Islamic Law the law of the land.

The Monarchy is now beginning to experience real dissent from its citizens who desire change, political freedom, and greater say in national decisions. These groups of rich entrepreneurs, the middle class, and religious traditionalist are quite different, yet demand much the same things. Though it may be argued that results of the Gulf War vindicated the al-Saud pro-American policy, many Saudis were troubled. One view in opposition stated:

The short 'mother of all battles' (to quote Saddam Hussein), which ended so disastrously for Iraq, was not an occasion for rejoicing, nor for victory parades, in the kingdom, but rather a cause for soul-searching for many Saudis. The swift destruction of an Arab-Muslim army by the 'infidels' brought back the bitter memory of the Six Day War with Israel. Combined with the sight on the TV screens of an Iraqi soldier kissing the boots of an American marine, it was deeply humiliating and produced a religio-nationalist backlash against the Americans. Some Saudi nationalists even claimed that their country had been used by the West and that if anyone benefited from Iraq's defeat it was the 'Zionists and the Americans.'<sup>18</sup>

Though not the position of a majority of Saudis, doubts still remain concerning the Monarchy's policies. Almost everyone accepts both the rule of the al-Saud and the notion that the country should be strictly governed by the laws of Islam. But, for the first time after the Gulf War, growing public demands are

being made for increased participation in decision making, greater accountability, and an end to corruption.<sup>19</sup>

Much of the unrest comes from among young citizens. With an annual population growth of three percent, they represent a growing segment within the country. They have suffered through the budgetary setbacks of the late 1980s and 1990s, and they feel powerless to affect their lives. Perhaps more troubling than the unrest itself is the failure of the ruling family to even comprehend why unrest is festering, much less starting to address the underlying problems.<sup>20</sup> So publicized measures, such as King Fahd's Consultative Assembly established in 1993, are not being seen as true reform by much of the populace.

An argument can easily be made that the al-Saud's rule may be in peril. They have faced challenges to their rule over the past sixty years, but in each case have survived and triumphed -- a tribute to their political skills and acumen.<sup>21</sup> Now the al-Saud are facing new problems, many of which are intertwined, and most are of their own making. They have failed to broaden their political legitimacy by: (1) not giving the populace a voice; (2) making unwise and expensive arms purchases that have failed to contribute to security; (3) making unwise capital investments that have not contributed to the country's productivity; (4)

allowing unfettered growth of Islamic institutions, in essence, growing their own opposition; and, (5) too closely aligning with the US. The crux of the al-Saud's dilemma is that neither the fundamentalists nor modernists need the Monarchy's existence to achieve their goals and aspirations.<sup>22</sup>

The greatest danger is that today's Saudi Arabia follows policies that are increasingly resembling policies of the Shah's Iran. The parallels, according to Wilson and Graham, include:<sup>23</sup>

- A ruling family perceived as being corrupt and tied to the US

- Foreign policy pegged to strong US presence in the Gulf, with indirect ties to Israel.

- Oil prices not based on national considerations.

The al-Saud must grapple with these dilemmas and the US should avoid repeating mistakes made prior to the Iranian Revolution.<sup>24</sup>

The Monarchy is not doomed, but it would be wise for the US to adopt a low profile and be careful in its public pronouncements dealing with Saudi policy issues.

### **Military Capability**

The Gulf War demonstrated the inability of the GCC, and Saudi Arabia in particular, to defend itself from external aggression without significant support from the US. In fact,

massive weapons purchases by Saudi Arabia and other GCC members brought very little actual security to the region.<sup>25</sup>

Saudi Arabia has made significant arms purchases since the Gulf War. These systems include Patriot missiles, M1A2 tanks, F-15 aircraft, and several military infrastructure upgrades. Despite this, the concept of Saudi Arabia being able to provide its CENTCOM defined tier I defense is doubtful. It is even less likely that the GCC could fulfill its collective tier II defense requirements.

On 6 March 1991 a first draft of the Damascus Declaration proposed a concept of the GCC-plus-two, where Egyptian and Syrian troops would remain in the Gulf to form the nucleus for an Arab peace force.<sup>26</sup> But, this concept failed to reach fruition. Instead, individual countries adopted an independent approach to procurement, training, and force structure; nullifying any additive effect of joint efforts.<sup>27</sup> In addition, they mistrusted Egyptian and Syrian attempts to permanently station forces on the Arabian Peninsula. This resulted in bilateral agreements between individual GCC states and key Western powers.<sup>28</sup>

The reasons for Saudi Arabia's inability to provide for its own defense are several and profound. They include:<sup>29</sup>

- Lack of population base in relation to potential adversaries. In addition, this population is divided into regional and tribal groups lacking a common purpose.

- Large territory, with many common borders and unprotected avenues of invasion.
- Large oil reserves places it under constant danger from an attack for economic opportunity.
- Distrust by the Monarchy in creating a large standing army that could take power.
- Budgetary restraints limiting defense expenditures.

A recent Rand analysis suggested that it would take 3.5 effective equivalent divisions (EED) of heavy mechanized forces to provide a good chance of successfully defending against an Iraqi attack on the Arabian Peninsula. Under the best conditions, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait could provide only two EEDs. Three to four US heavy brigades would be required to make up the difference, arguing strongly for a US presence in the Gulf region.<sup>30</sup>

### **Economic Situation**

As discussed, Saudi Arabia faces some serious obstacles to building an effective military force that could provide a credible defense. Besides the failure to reach a consensus among GCC states, Saudi Arabia faces problems in terms of population base and geography. To the casual observer, it is a country endowed with great wealth due to its considerable oil reserves.

One could expect that the country could use its economic strength to either buy an impenetrable defense or to influence others not to be aggressive toward it.

Since the 1960s, the al-Saud assumed their people would accept economic development as a substitute for democracy. As a result, Saudi Arabia became akin to a welfare state providing subsidies for most basic services, guaranteed employment, and grants for certain activities.<sup>31</sup> This appeared to be the correct strategy in the 1970s and early 1980s, which were the years of easy money. The economy instead turned downward by the mid 1980s bringing on budget deficits, unemployment, and a new upheaval of militant Islam.<sup>32</sup>

The Gulf War simply compounded economic problems. Despite being the winner and effectively taking Iraq out of the oil market, Saudi Arabia is now in the uncomfortable position of selling more oil, for less. Saudi war expenses have been estimated at 60 to 70 billion dollars. Oil production has been increased from 5.7 million barrels per day (m.b.d.) in 1990 to 8.5 m.b.d. in 1992, to 10.5 m.b.d. in 1994. Each increase in production has cost millions to achieve, yet decreasing oil prices have failed to produce significant increases in revenues.<sup>33</sup>

Trimming the budget is politically difficult to achieve. Defense alone consumes thirty percent of the official budget and another thirty percent of the budget listed as other expenses. The Saudis can not afford to cut defense spending for security reasons, but neither can they increase it for economic reasons. The country can ill afford to cut its social spending due to its peoples' expectations. Direct taxes on the Saudi people can not be seriously contemplated due to questions on the Islamic correctness of taxes. This leaves the option of increasing user fees or decreasing subsidies, neither of which can have the major impact of the budget required. In December 1993 the Financial Times wrote that "Saudi Arabia was a briefly rich country, outsiders and Saudis alike have been slow to realize that the spending spree is over." The general attitude can best be summed up, as follows:

For decades, Saudi largesse built mosques, fought communism, bought off trouble or simply paid for princely pleasures. Everyone, it seems, got his cut -- gunman and oilman, planner and pimp. Ripping off the Saudis was big business. In the past, even Saudi Arabia's friends sometimes sniggered when they watched it spend money on weapons it could not use and friends it could not trust. Now they worry about what will happen when it can no longer afford to do so.<sup>34</sup>

The general feeling is, unless the King does something soon, there will be a lot of political problems.<sup>35</sup> Indeed the problems

have already begun. It is unrealistic to believe Saudi Arabia is in a position to do anything meaningful in terms of improving its ability to defend itself. Their energies will be consumed with satisfying the needs and desires of an increasingly restless populace.

### **Foreign Policy**

Even in foreign policy Saudi Arabia lacks the strength to effectively influence events regionally or worldwide. Saudi Arabia is still searching for a coherent foreign policy resulting from the Gulf War and the failure of its pre-war strategies. It desires seemingly simple aims that are really quite difficult: national security, Arabian Peninsula hegemony, and a prominent role in the Arab and Islamic world.<sup>36</sup>

These aims have been most difficult and may never be achieved. The Gulf War victory caused two difficulties for foreign policy. First, it forced Saudi Arabia into a close, public relationship with the US that borders on dependency. This relationship opens Saudi Arabia up to charges by Islamic traditionalists and other Islamic countries of consorting with infidels. Secondly, the Gulf War divided the Arab world, between the coalition supporters and the supporters of Iraq.<sup>37</sup> The Arab

world found for the first time it could not return to amicable relations after the fight, as has been traditional in the past.

Saudi Arabia has a basic mistrust of non-Islamic nations. At times it has had difficulties with Arab countries, such as Iraq, Jordan, and Syria. The failure of the GCC to agree on a common defense has previously been discussed. In addition, it turned its back on an offer by Egypt and Syria to permanently station military units on its soil.<sup>38</sup> This could have provided for a credible all-Arab defense from Iraqi aggression, but may have cost Saudi Arabia its sovereignty.

Given Saudi economic and political difficulties, it may be difficult for Saudi Arabia to be as influential in the future. Saudi Arabia may receive attention or envy due to its resources, but will not earn respect based on prestige or influence.

### **Culture and Religion**

Saudi Arabia represents a homogeneous society which in many ways is a mystery to most Westerners. It is viewed as intolerant and distrustful of foreigners on the one hand, yet enchanting and generous on the other. As an Islamic state inseparable from its religion the Saudi political system can be difficult for secular Western governments to understand. The Saudi Monarchy bases its

legitimacy on the Bedouin concept of tribal democracy that is patriarchal and family oriented. Traditionalists reject Western participatory democracy because it establishes the people, rather than God, as the source of decision. In every way Saudi Arabia stresses the Islamic aspect of governing.<sup>39</sup>

Western governments are in error if they see inconsistency in Saudi Arabia. If anything, over the past sixty years, with its stable monarchy, Islamic foundations, and Arab tribal society; it has been a model of consistency both in domestic and international policies. Western governments have proven less consistent in their relations with Saudi Arabia. Changes in leadership, shifting interests, and capitalists policies have made it difficult for Saudis to trust, much less understand, Western motives in the Gulf region.<sup>40</sup>

Except for its support for Israel, the US has been the most palatable Western society for Saudi Arabia to interact with. Despite this, the US should realize basic cultural differences will always present an obstacle and relations should be couched in that context.<sup>41</sup> Cultural differences and a lack of understanding by each party means the US should accept that relations can not be expected to be closer than they are now. The US should not attempt to influence Saudi Arabia in such a way

as to appear intrusive in its internal affairs. This includes not pushing it on issues of human rights, democracy, or acceptance of Israel.<sup>42</sup> The US neither understands internal Saudi actions, nor has any right to interfere in them.

In short, Saudi Arabia's unique role in the Arab and Islamic worlds and its strategic location make its friendship important to the US. Both countries share common concerns about regional security, oil exports, and sustainable development.<sup>43</sup> It is appropriate and sensible for the US to continue to tie its policy goals in the Gulf region to a close relationship with Saudi Arabia. Given its profound weaknesses, it is unrealistic to expect Saudi Arabia to take any kind of major role in defending the Arabian Peninsula or in deterring potential enemies. Its hegemony extends no further than intermittent control over fellow GCC members. The US must remain committed to Saudi Arabia's continued viability and hence, stability and security in the region. Given this, the US should be prepared to take a critical look at its policy for the Gulf region.

#### **SHORTCOMINGS IN US POLICY**

US Gulf region policy seeks to:

1. Contain Iraq and Iran on the assumption that they are rogue states posing a significant threat to regional security. Dual containment attempts to isolate and economically punish these states until one or both changes its behavior.

2. Assist GCC states in their defense or guarantee it through direct action.

Gulf states would prefer the option of balancing Iraq against Iran,<sup>44</sup> but with Saddam Hussein in power and no effective dialogue with Iran; the US feels it can only adopt the dual containment policy. The problem with dual containment is that it is expensive and fatiguing to the US and GCC. It also yields the initiative to Iraq or Iran who can produce a war scare and hurried US deployments to the Gulf whenever either one of them desires.<sup>45</sup> As long as Saddam Hussein remains in power, Saudi Arabia will grudgingly accept dual containment, but not shoulder the costs of repetitive US deployments. With no credible GCC collective security structure, the threshold for requiring US reinforcement to the Gulf will remain low.<sup>46</sup>

Dual containment also fails to recognize unintended side effects. Containment has not punished the regimes, but the people in both countries. Worse, rather than take the blame, these regimes have succeeded at portraying the US as the cause for their hardships.<sup>47</sup> In addition, the policy tends to push Iraq and Iran closer together, despite their history of

hostility.<sup>48</sup> So rather than bring resolution to a regional problem, dual containment appears to be continuing the stalemate with potentially detrimental results.

Likewise, the five pillar strategy relying on minimal forward US presence, prepositioning, and power projection from continental US (CONUS) has proven problematic. Prepositioning of three heavy brigades of equipment, on shore, in the Gulf region does enhance US ability to react to a threat of invasion by Iraq or Iran, by reducing the need for strategic lift.<sup>49</sup> The strategy still relies on moving significant numbers of personnel by air to the Gulf and deprocessing of equipment before the force can be applied. These troops would not be acclimated nor oriented to the area, yet would have to be prepared to fight immediately upon arrival.

A lack of a strong US force stationed in the Gulf region, giving the initiative to Iraq or Iran, has serious implications. The US and its GCC allies can not act to prevent a provocation, but are left to react to potential threats.<sup>50</sup> This reaction requires expensive and disruptive deployments from CONUS that may not be timely enough to deter the aggression. The cost of coping with Iraq through repetitive deployments will not be cheap. Secretary of Defense William Perry estimated the US deployment to

the Gulf in October 1994 cost between \$500 million and \$1 billion.<sup>51</sup> This was for a comparatively limited deployment of less than two heavy brigades for a short period of time. Such deployments can not go on indefinitely. The Gulf states are less willing to shoulder a portion of these costs and difficulty in obtaining consensus from Western Allies for such actions against Iraq continues to grow.

### CONCLUSIONS

US policy in the Gulf has created an interminable stalemate with a staggering bill. A 1991 Cato Institute study estimates the peacetime costs for defending the Gulf at \$60.3 billion a year.<sup>52</sup> These are hidden costs that should be added to the "cheap" price of each barrel of Saudi oil exported. It has also established an unrealistic goal of removing Saddam Hussein from power while befriending the Iraqi people. This goal is to be obtained without causing the dissolution of Iraq into ethnic homelands or weakening it to the point where it will not be able to deter Iranian aggression.

US policy in the Gulf region is failing to meet expectations in two significant areas:

1. The military strategy is not ensuring security of Saudi Arabia and the GCC, based on prepositioned equipment and power projection of forces from CONUS. The GCC will have to rely on the US for its defense. The lack of a strong, permanently based US force in the Gulf has given Iraq the initiative and has failed to deter his aggressive moves.

2. The political strategy is not forcing a change in behavior in Iraq and Iran through dual containment. Dual containment is not causing either country to modify its behavior. Past US containment policies concerning North Korea, Cuba, and Viet Nam have not achieved stated goals and instead have put the US at odds with its more pragmatic allies. Containment prevents the US from influencing negotiations and puts it behind its allies in engaging a subject country once restrictions are belatedly lifted.

The US and its Gulf region allies want to remove Saddam Hussein, while the rest of the world wants to do business with him.<sup>53</sup> Because Western allies are in dispute over its policy, the US could find itself increasingly isolated and forced to choose between keeping pressure on Iraq while risking serious divisions with its allies.<sup>54</sup> More ominous is that US intentions leave Saddam Hussein with no way out. He could rightly conclude that even complete acceptance of UN conditions by Iraq would not lead to an end of sanctions as long as he remained in power. This will make him a greater danger to the region. A State Department official admitted as much, saying: "If Saddam ever thinks the sanctions are never going to be lifted, he could say to hell with this, I'm not going to be a nice guy anymore."<sup>55</sup>

Saddam Hussein is a survivor who has already swallowed humiliations that might have finished off a lesser man.<sup>56</sup> It would seem to make more sense for the US to deal with him rather than try to eliminate him.

Finally, preservation of US vital interests in the Gulf are inextricably linked to the survival and prosperity of Saudi Arabia. It is the economic and political strength of the GCC and the most reliable source of inexpensive oil for Western countries. Saudi internal difficulties limit its ability, either alone or with its GCC allies, to be effective in dealing with regional security issues.

As the most enduring US ally in the region, Saudi Arabia deserves continued and unwavering security guarantees from the US. Despite the importance of this Saudi-US partnership, the US can not expect a greater level of overt involvement between the two. Solutions to securing Saudi Arabia and ensuring US vital interests in the region are extraterritorial to Saudi Arabia and require intensified US leadership.

## RECOMMENDATION

Leadership in the Gulf requires the US to take bold steps militarily and diplomatically. These steps may seem radical, representing policy reversal, if present policy is perceived as successful. But, present policy has caused a stalemate, achieving no objective. A change in US approach to the region is both reasonable and necessary.

First, militarily ensure Gulf security. Recognize declining emphasis on Europe and consider restationing a heavy division from there to the Gulf. The US has rejected past Kuwaiti requests for permanent stationing<sup>57</sup> -- it may be time to take them up on their offer. Ease Arab concerns by sending personnel on unaccompanied tours, keeping them busy with training and readiness. The US has proven it has no hegemonic desires during the Gulf War and strong diplomacy can assure Arab states of US intentions. Islamic groups will oppose such action, but they already oppose any Western presence. With US equipment presently prepositioned in the Gulf and periodic US deployments there, permanently basing US personnel will not cause much additional opposition. This should be especially true if paired with recommended diplomatic initiatives.

Permanent basing will stabilize the area, demonstrate US resolve, and prove more affordable than repetitive deployments. More importantly, both Iraq and Iran will be forced to reassess potentially aggressive strategies. Based on the Rand study of EEDs required to defend the GCC, this US force would not be just a "trip-wire" but an effective defense.

Secondly, do not contain, but engage Iraq and Iran. Particularly in the case of Iraq, Saddam Hussein is not an ideologue but an opportunist. Facing US resolve in the form of troops on the ground will reduce Iraqi opportunities for provocation. Offered his survival, Saddam Hussein could be willing to compromise with the US in ways considered impossible previously. It may be argued that Saddam Hussein wins. All he will have won is survival, which is already a fact. The US need not be naive and should be resolute in negotiations. Saddam Hussein must understand that the military "stick" remains poised at his southern border to punish unacceptable behavior. Handled judiciously, engagement could produce positive results with Iran as well.

It is not definitively known whether the US can produce a win-win situation in the Gulf by engaging Iraq and Iran. Being more pragmatic in approach, the US could accomplish significant

gains. For certain, it would be hard to do worse than the present stalemate that has no real resolution to the situation in sight.



<sup>1</sup> Jean R. Tartter, "Regional and National Security Considerations," in Persian Gulf States: Country Studies, ed. Helen Chapin Metz (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1994), 333.

<sup>2</sup> Fareed Mohamedi, "The Economy," in Saudi Arabia: A Country Study, ed. Helen Chapin Metz (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1993), 134.

<sup>3</sup> Eric Hooglund, "Government and Politics," in Saudi Arabia: A Country Study, 222.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 223.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph A. Kechichian, Rand: Political Dynamics and Security in the Arabian Peninsula Through the 1990s, (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1993), xvi, xviii.

<sup>6</sup> Eric Hooglund, "Government and Politics," in Saudi Arabia: A Country Study, 223-224.

<sup>7</sup> Peter W. Wilson and Douglas F. Graham, Saudi Arabia: The Coming Storm (New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1994), 117-119.

<sup>8</sup> William J. Perry, Secretary of Defense, United States Security Strategy for the Middle East (May 1995): 5.

<sup>9</sup> For an explanation of vital interest, see: Donald E. Nuechterlein, America Overcommitted: US National Interests in the 1980s. (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1985) reprinted in "War, National Policy, & Strategy," vol. 1, Part A, Course 2 (Carlisle Barracks, PA: US Army War College, Academic Year 1996): 157.

<sup>10</sup> William J. Perry, Secretary of Defense, United States Security Strategy for the Middle East, 6-10.

<sup>11</sup> General J.H. Binford Peay III, United States Central Command: 1995 Posture Statement, presented to the 104th Congress, 1.

<sup>12</sup> President William J. Clinton, A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement (February 1995): 30-31.

<sup>13</sup> General J.H. Binford Peay III, USCENTCOM Strategic Plan: 1995-1997 (Rev. 95): 4-9.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>15</sup> "Trouble in the Oil Patch: The Gulf's Uneasy Rulers," Financial Times (April 19, 1995) in World Press Review (August 1995): 9.

<sup>16</sup> Joseph A. Kechichian, Rand: Political Dynamics and Security in the Arabian Peninsula Through the 1990s, 52-53.

<sup>17</sup> Peter W. Wilson and Douglas F. Graham, Saudi Arabia: The Coming Storm, 81-82.

<sup>18</sup> Mordechai Abir, Saudi Arabia: Government, Society and the Gulf Crisis (London: Routledge, 1993): 186.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>20</sup> "Trouble in the Oil Patch: The Gulf's Uneasy Rulers," Financial Times, 6.

<sup>21</sup> Peter W. Wilson and Douglas F. Graham, Saudi Arabia: The Coming Storm, 266.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 266-267.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 268.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 268.

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- <sup>25</sup> Joseph A. Kechichian, Rand: Political Dynamics and Security in the Arabian Peninsula Through the 1990s, 68.
- <sup>26</sup> Rosemary Hollis, Gulf Security: No Consensus, Whitehall Paper Series 20 (Weymouth, UK: Royal United Services Institute for Defense Studies, 1993): 35,36.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid., 36.
- <sup>28</sup> Joseph A. Kechichian, Rand: Political Dynamics and Security in the Arabian Peninsula Through the 1990s, 69.
- <sup>29</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman, After the Storm: The Changing Military Balance in the Middle East (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993): 561-572.
- <sup>30</sup> David A. Shlapak and Paul K. Davis, Possible Postwar Force Requirements for the Persian Gulf: How Little is Enough?, A Rand Note (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1991): 26.
- <sup>31</sup> Patrick Martin, "Hard Times in the Oil Kingdom," The Globe and Mail (January 16, 1995) in World Press Review (April 1995): 36.
- <sup>32</sup> "Saudi Arabia's Future: The Cracks in the Kingdom," The Economist vol. 334, no. 7906 (March 18, 1995): 21.
- <sup>33</sup> Mordechi Abir, Saudi Arabia: Government, Society and the Gulf Crisis, 204-205.
- <sup>34</sup> "Saudi Arabia's Future: The Cracks in the Kingdom," The Economist, 21.
- <sup>35</sup> Patrick Martin, "Hard Times in the Oil Kingdom," The Globe and Mail, 36.
- <sup>36</sup> Peter W. Wilson and Douglas F. Graham, Saudi Arabia: The Coming Storm, 119.
- <sup>37</sup> Joseph A. Kechichian, Rand: Political Dynamics and Security in the Arabian Peninsula Through the 1990s, 101.
- <sup>38</sup> Rosemary Hollis, Gulf Security: No Consensus, 38-39.
- <sup>39</sup> Helen Chapin Metz, Saudi Arabia: A Country Study, xxi, xxiv, 65-66.
- <sup>40</sup> Eric Hooglund, "Government and Politics," Saudi Arabia: A Country Study, 222-228.
- <sup>41</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman, After the Storm: The Changing Military Balance in the Middle East, 605.
- <sup>42</sup> Peter W. Wilson and Douglas F. Graham, Saudi Arabia: The Coming Storm, 125.
- <sup>43</sup> "Country Fact Sheet: Saudi Arabia," US Department of State Dispatch vol. 5, no. 34 (August 22, 1994): 564.
- <sup>44</sup> Chas W. Freeman, "The Middle East: Challenges Born of Success," Joint Forces Quarterly, 44.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid., 45.
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid., 45.
- <sup>47</sup> Jean-Pierre Tuquoi, "Iraq Survives - And Waits," Le Monde, in World Press Review (November 1994): 32.
- <sup>48</sup> F. Gregory Gause III, "The Illogic of Dual Containment," Foreign Affairs vol. 73, no. 2 (March/April 1994): 60.
- <sup>49</sup> General J.H. Binford Peay III, United States Central Command: 1995 Posture Statement, presented to the 104th Congress, 42-43.
- <sup>50</sup> John D. Morrocco and David A. Fulghum, "Allies' Goal: Rein in Hussein," Aviation Week & Space Technology vol. 141, no. 16 (October 17, 1994): 19-20.
- <sup>51</sup> Tim Zimmerman, "Gun Barrel Diplomacy," US News & World Report vol. 117, no. 16 (October 24, 1994): 44.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>55</sup> Nancy Gibbs, "A Show of Strength," Time vol. 144, no. 17 (October 24, 1994): 38.

<sup>56</sup> "Up the Hill and Down Again," The Economist vol. 333, no. 7885 (October 15, 1994): 49.

<sup>57</sup> Mordechai Abir, Saudi Arabia: Government, Society and the Gulf Crisis, 209.

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