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NATIONAL SECURITY CHALLENGES TO SAUDI ARABIA

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FOREWORD

During my service as secretary of defense, from January 1969 to January 1973, I became impressed by the necessity for American military planning to account for the security perceptions and potential capabilities of our friends and allies in the large realm of our world commitments outside Western Europe. This necessity was dramatized by South Vietnam's difficulties in creating a defense force of its own that could be effective against North Vietnam as well as against internal insurgency. I was somewhat surprised when I became secretary of defense that even in late 1968 we were more absorbed in our own involvement in Indochina than in the need for South Vietnam to defend itself.

My Vietnamization program constituted an effort to rectify excessive American domination of Saigon's own perceptions about its national security needs. On the basis of our experience with changing the military picture in Indochina to one of responsibilities shared between Saigon and Washington for the defense of South Vietnam, we moved forward with security assistance programs elsewhere in the world that would implement a sense of genuine partnership in military affairs with key friends and allies.

Saudi Arabia was one such country where we began to become more sensitive to the security perceptions of a friendly state from the standpoint of the expressed concerns of that state for its own security. Against these perceptions we would measure our own. The same policy approach was used for Iran and Israel, among others.

There is no question that the preferred way to handle all security assistance requests from other countries is in the context of multilateral arms control agreements among the major arms suppliers. These agreements have not developed, despite the urgings of some

of us. The United States has not tried hard enough to negotiate arms control arrangements for the select regions of the world or for worldwide military sales programs, which continue to escalate. We must persist in efforts to control this arms traffic.

Our government is now faced with new requests for arms from Saudi Arabia, which, in the absence of agreed upon restraints among the major powers, we must deal with through unilateral decisions. We know that our refusal to sell military equipment to Saudi Arabia will open the door for someone else and in no way bring about greater restraint in worldwide arms sales. Yet, a positive decision on our part will not bring us any closer to this restraint. As the most powerful nation on earth we bear a great deal of responsibility for our cruel dilemma in Saudi Arabia.

The present study on national security challenges to Saudi Arabia is a model for looking at what the Saudis perceive to be of military consequence to them, in terms both of threats to their security and of methods of meeting these threats. Its author has recently been given a rare inside, in-depth look at these needs by the Saudis themselves. While critical in the past of our enormous security assistance programs worldwide and of our preoccupation with arms for Iran, Dale Tahtinen concludes that the U.S. national interest is served by paying close attention to security challenges as Saudi Arabia perceives these challenges regarding its own defense. His conclusions may be controversial, but his methodology is impeccable.

The day is long past when the United States could dictate to the Third World ways in which it ought to perceive its defense needs. While still being a leader in the establishment of a peaceful order, we can no longer play the cop on the beat as well. Indeed, we ran into serious trouble in the late 1960s when we tried to play both roles.

The AEI Public Policy Project on National Defense is planning more studies such as this one on the security challenges to key friends and allies of the United States in areas outside Western Europe, including analyses of Iran's future military role and of Israel's perceptions of its security needs on the West Bank and in Gaza.

Melvin R. Laird
Chairman
AEI Public Policy Project
on National Defense

1
INTRODUCTION

"No arm of the sea has been, or is of greater interest alike to the geologist and archeologist, the historian and geographer, the merchant, and the student of strategy, than the inland water known as the Persian Gulf." Though this statement was made some forty years ago by Sir Arnold Wilson, it is still valid. One might add to it that no country is more vital to the region than is the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Yet, were it not for the oil reserves in the Arab/Persian Gulf area and the dependence of the western world upon that commodity, U.S. policy in the region would probably be limited to quietly maintaining the basically pro-American orientation of most Arab states and of the Moslem, but non-Arab, state of Iran.[1] Low-key efforts would also be made to encourage anti-communist feelings throughout the region.

Since the oil embargo of 1973 and the subsequent leap in oil prices imposed by the non-Arab members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC),[2] American relations with the Gulf countries have been given a high priority. With the continuing possibility of an additional price rise at each semiannual OPEC meeting, it is important for the United States to maintain good relations with the major producing countries. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in particular have done much to moderate OPEC price increases and, on one occasion, to prevent one.

[1] The Arab/Persian Gulf will be referred to as the Gulf. The countries littoral to that body of water are: Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman.

[2] For a more extensive discussion of the price increases, see, George Lenczowski, *Middle East Oil in a Revolutionary Age* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1976).

Such decisions are made by the producing countries, of course, for a variety of reasons. Certainly the United States cannot assume that this support will always be forthcoming, and it may have to offer realistic assistance to Saudi Arabia, Abu Dhabi, and other friendly oil-producing states in achieving their goals. Continued support by Saudi Arabia and the UAE is important to the United States, especially because of their influence on other Arab oil-producing states. Indeed, Saudi Arabia by itself could defy OPEC or even disrupt or destroy it, though to do so would not necessarily be in its interest. Because the other members of the oil-producing states recognize its key position, Saudi Arabia holds immense power during the deliberations, even if it is seldom exercised.

Saudi Arabia has been friendly toward the United States for over four decades. The only one major exception to its continuing support of U.S. policy has been in regard to Washington's backing of Israel. Since the October 1973 war, Saudi Arabia has become even more of a leader among the Arab states. The other Arab states and Washington seek the support of the kingdom more than that of any other country in the Gulf.

Saudi Arabia gained in importance because what could not be accomplished upon the battlefield could in large part be attained in the economic realm through the embargo, which encouraged a more balanced policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict by the West in general and by the United States in particular. Without Saudi cooperation, the embargo would not have been such a significant success. Yet, even though the Saudis were at odds with the United States for supplying Israel with weapons during the war, the kingdom did not prolong the embargo. The Saudis were concerned about the economic chaos developing throughout the western world which could have led to political upheavals that would damage noncommunist regimes everywhere.

After the embargo, the Saudis were a major force in moderating oil prices, and they often used their revenues to further western interests. Riyadh expended large sums to turn other Arab states, such as the Sudan, Egypt, and Somalia, away from cooperation with the Soviet Union and toward the West.

Since any conflict or instability involving Saudi Arabia could have serious consequences for the United States, certain compelling questions arise: What types of national security challenges might be faced by the kingdom within the next decade? How is Riyadh likely to confront such difficulties? What form will Saudi military forces take during the coming decade? The answers to these questions are crucial to U.S. national security for the next decade.

2
POSSIBLE CONFLICTS

From the U.S. point of view, the most significant potential conflicts among the Gulf states would be those involving Saudi Arabia and the countries near its borders. Of all the Gulf states, Saudi Arabia is the most likely to become embroiled in a conflict because it is the most strategically located, and it is endowed with wealth of vital importance. Riyadh can play a key role in the three major potential conflict areas in the Middle East—the Persian Gulf, the Horn of Africa, and the Arab-Israeli arena. Although involvement in conflicts in any of those areas would carry a significant risk, the Saudis are oriented toward support of certain states should conflicts develop.

In the Gulf, Riyadh is most concerned that stability be maintained and that the smaller sheikhdoms and the Sultanate of Oman should continue as relatively traditional and moderate Arab states. The spread of any radical or revolutionary ideology in the area would alarm the kingdom. In regard to the disputed oil-rich Buraimi Oasis area, Saudi Arabia demonstrated its belief in maintaining stability in the region, its preference for good relations with neighbors, and its general dislike for direct military actions, and it came to an agreement with the UAE and Oman. Being the dominant power of the three, it probably hoped the settlement would set an example for other Arab states to be conciliatory with each other and to strive for a just resolution of outstanding differences. Obviously, Saudi Arabia wants to become the center of the Arab world, and not only of the Islamic religion. Indeed, the Saudis' religious role plays an important part in the formulation of Saudi foreign policy. The Saudis are constantly concerned about the spread of communism and other radical ideologies that they feel are incompatible with Islam. They believe the Moslem,

and particularly the Arab, states must settle differences that could be exploited by extremists.

Riyadh has used its financial power to encourage moderation in other states and to reduce communist influence. Egypt and Somalia offer recent examples of such "rial diplomacy." The Saudis financed Zaire's successful resistance to an invasion of Sheba Province (formerly Katanga) from Angola; Moroccan paratroops, Egyptian pilots, and French transports were used against the invaders. The Saudis have also used financial means to encourage the Sudan to move away from its former dependence upon the Soviet Union. The kingdom has also provided sizable financial assistance to Jordan, Oman, and North Yemen.

In each of these instances, the Saudi actions were in consonance with western goals and in dissonance with those of the Soviet Union. Saudi Arabia may eventually have to pay a price for this maneuvering. It might itself be victimized by external attack or by internal subversion encouraged by the groups or states it opposed. Nearby states might be attacked, forcing Saudi Arabia to provide more than financial assistance to keep the traditional moderate regimes in power without outside intervention.

Iraq. Saudi Arabia's most likely enemies in the Gulf area are Iraq and Iran. Riyadh is concerned over Iraq's longstanding claim on Kuwait and the occasional shooting incidents along the ill-defined border between those two states.

The dispute between Iraq and Kuwait predates the latter's gaining of full independence in 1961. Iraq claims that, as the legal successor of the former Ottoman Empire, it has right to the territories which were part of that empire. If that argument were accepted, Kuwait would become an integral part of Iraq. The Kuwaitis, however, contend that they have always maintained their status as an independent entity, though they have at times placed themselves under the protection of other powers, including the Ottomans. In any event, the Kuwaitis argue, such agreements with the Ottomans were superseded by the agreement of 1899, when they accepted British protection, while technically maintaining control over their own internal affairs.

As with so many colonial agreements, the borders were not clearly drawn, and conflicting or ambiguous agreements were concluded. Iraq might decide to settle the border issues militarily by taking over the entire country—an action which could be accomplished quickly unless other states intervened on behalf of Kuwait.

Saudi Arabia could do little militarily to stop any Iraqi incursion into Kuwait. A Saudi military facility is being built near the Iraqi and Kuwaiti borders, but the Saudis may never be able to challenge Baghdad's military power. In the next decade, the Saudis can only hope to make it difficult for any other Middle Eastern state to attack the kingdom. The Saudis might eventually be able to provide some military support to a sheikhdom like Kuwait, but it would result only in a temporary holding action and would carry the risk of strikes against key installations in the kingdom.

Iran. Elsewhere in the Gulf, there is continuing concern by Saudi Arabia over the possibility of greater Iranian efforts at achieving hegemony. Iran's seizure of the islands of Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tumbs in 1971 serves as constant reminder to the Arab states of the Iranian capability to accomplish direct military action outside its own territory. The large-scale assistance it gave Oman in putting down the Dhofar rebellion is another reminder of Iran's power and its willingness to use it to achieve its objectives. Pledges by the Shah to prevent any radical group from coming to power in the smaller sheikhdoms is a source of continuing concern, especially since the Iranians seem to have reserved for themselves the judgment of when a threat warrants intervention.

The Arab states also worry that as Iran's oil reserves diminish and its needs increase there may be a temptation either to seize some of the smaller sheikhdoms or to ignore the agreements limiting areas in the Gulf where Iran can drill for petroleum. The Saudis and the smaller sheikhdoms are also concerned over the possibility that Iran might take sides in an internal squabble, or even stimulate one (for example, among the seven states of the United Arab Emirates) and then move in to protect ethnic Iranians, to reestablish stability, or to prevent radical elements from gaining control. In another scenario, Iraq might move against Kuwait, with or without the tacit agreement of Iran, which would then move against other oil-producing states in the lower Gulf. Such a simultaneous action by the two most powerful military states in the region would leave Saudi Arabia and the other states with little recourse, barring external intervention. It should be noted that Iran denies any such intentions and that the conservative Arab states are careful not to criticize officially the traditional, pro-western regime of Teheran.

There is also the obvious concern that the present regime in Iran could be replaced by a more radical government. Using the precedent for Persian intervention on the other side of the Gulf, it might support radical elements. More than anything else, the fears of the Arab

states are fueled by the tremendous Iranian military buildup and the perceived willingness of Teheran to exercise the military option.

The Sheikhdoms. Regardless of the source of instability, the Saudis are very much concerned about the impact of a revolution elsewhere upon the kingdom. Some conflicts that could erupt in the Gulf and have a significant impact on Riyadh's security may be enumerated as follows.

The smaller sheikhdoms face potentially serious internal stability problems. Many of them result from the large numbers of foreign nationals needed to keep these economies functioning and to modernize them.[3] In Kuwait, for example, where there are approximately 425,000 indigenous residents, the remainder of the 1 million inhabitants comprise over 250,000 Palestinians, some 80,000 Egyptians, approximately the same number of Iranians, 45,000 Indians, 25,000 to 30,000 Pakistanis, and 10,000 to 15,000 Iraqis, as well as a few thousand Jordanians. Any of these groups could become internal security problems, the Palestinians being the most likely because they have no country to which they can return. Recognizing the importance of these Palestinians to the functioning of the Kuwaiti system, the government has allowed 5 percent of the salaries of Palestinians to be deducted for the support of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

Foreign nationals are especially needed in a country such as Kuwait for the military and police forces. There has been a serious effort to put Kuwaitis in the most sensitive positions, but as Kuwait worries about other developments in the Gulf area, particularly in neighboring Iraq, and increases its military capability, the country may be forced to rely upon foreigners in key positions. The most important question will be the loyalty of the people handling the weapons.

In contrast to Kuwait, neighboring Bahrain has the advantage of a population that is nearly 80 percent indigenous. The most important foreign group in the country is British expatriates. Bahrain is not, however, free from internal problems. Trade union activities could again lead to labor unrest, perhaps as a result of the action of outside forces. Another divisive factor that could lead to instability is the

[3]For a more detailed treatment of the problems in the lower Gulf states, see, Richard F. Nyrop, *Area Handbook for the Persian Gulf States* (Washington, D.C.: American University, 1977). See also, U.S. Congress, House, Committee on International Relations, *United States Arms Policies in the Persian Gulf and Red Sea Areas: Past, Present, and Future* (report of a staff survey mission to Ethiopia, Iran, and the Arabian Peninsula) 95th Congress, 1st session.

schism between the Sunni and Shi'i Moslems among the Bahraini population. Outsiders could easily exploit this vulnerability. Like Kuwait, Bahrain is extremely sensitive to the Palestinian problem, and members of that ethnic group have 5 percent of their salaries withheld for the PLO.

The United Arab Emirates is another Gulf sheikhdom suffering from a serious imbalance in population structure. Only about one-quarter of the UAE population is indigenous. In addition to the difficulties inherent in that situation, there are complications in the relations between the seven loosely-knit states comprising the UAE. There are territorial disputes between some of the seven states. Given the uneven wealth among them, external powers could easily encourage the demands of the less fortunate states for a larger share of the economic pie, even at the risk of military action. And the UAE also suffers from heavy reliance upon nonindigenous individuals in the armed forces. The presence of a significant number of Omanis in the UAE armed forces caused more than a little concern during the 1978 border dispute between Ras al Khaimah and Oman.

Qatar is another Persian Gulf sheikhdom where the indigenous population is a minority. Nearly 75 percent of the inhabitants are foreign nationals, and the differences between them and the native Qataris are significant. With a little encouragement from external sources, they could lead to serious stability problems.

Yemen and Oman. Saudi Arabia is also concerned about events near its southern and Red Sea borders. In the early 1960s, Saudi villages were bombed by the revolutionary regime in South Yemen. At its height, this conflict included some 50,000 Egyptians fighting on the side of the Yemeni regime against the royalist elements, which were supported by Riyadh. Because of their difficulties with the Yemenis, Saudi Arabia built a large military complex near the border area in an effort to defend the southeastern part of the kingdom.

Saudi Arabia may also have a problem in keeping a friendly regime in power in Oman. The Sultan, with significant Iranian assistance, has at least temporarily quelled the South Yemeni supported Dhofar rebellion. Despite large-scale Saudi financial assistance to Oman, however, there is concern about Iranian influence in that bordering state, particularly since Iran continues to maintain military forces in the sultanate.

Riyadh's diplomacy has been relatively successful in Oman and to a lesser extent in South Yemen, which has moderated its position somewhat but still provides significant staging and other help for the

forces operating in Ethiopia. In North Yemen, Saudi financial assistance has resulted in a mutually beneficial situation.

The Horn of Africa. The Saudis are extremely concerned about the situation along the Red Sea littoral. They are most anxious that the Marxist regime in Ethiopia should not be successful in its efforts to inflict a permanent defeat on the Eritreans and the Somalis. Riyadh was instrumental in persuading the Somalis to expel the Soviet Union and has provided significant financial assistance to Mogadishu. The Saudis were disappointed by U.S. unwillingness to supply arms to the Somalis during the unsuccessful invasion of the Ogaden Province of Ethiopia in support of the insurgent Somalis fighting in the area. Now, the Saudis are concerned whether the United States will also allow the Eritreans to be crushed by Soviet, Cuban, and Ethiopian forces.

Farther to the north, the Saudis enjoyed measurable success in persuading the Sudanese that their future did not lie with the communist countries. As Khartoum demonstrated an increased acceptance of that assessment and took appropriate action, the Saudi largess seemed to increase correspondingly. The Egyptians were also weaned away from the Russians, and much of the credit for Cairo's decision must be given to Riyadh.

Summary of the Saudi Defense Position. Obviously, prowestern and staunchly anticommunist Saudi Arabia has enjoyed success using its immense oil wealth. It has become a major leader in the Arab world and beyond. There is a heavy price, however, which the conservative ruling family may be asked to pay—namely they may be confronted with military challenges by more radical states. In addition to Iraq—which is usually considered radical but is also highly pragmatic—Egypt might act against the Saudis in support of another state, such as South Yemen, if a radical regime prevails in Cairo as a result of a lack of progress toward an Arab-Israeli peace settlement, or for any other reason. Israel might strike Saudi petroleum fields or other facilities in retaliation for Riyadh's financial support of the confrontation states. The Saudis would be vulnerable to a similar attack for supporting any conservative Gulf state against attack by another regional or an external power.

3
PREPARING FOR DEFENSE

In considering the immensity of the task of protecting Saudi Arabia, the geographic area can be compared in size to all of the United States east of the Mississippi River. Although the real estate is predominantly desert, the oil reserves and other minerals make it valuable and attractive, and not only to its less fortunate neighbors. A number of external powers might be inclined to encourage subversion, as well as direct action against the kingdom.

As the appendix tables reflect, the Saudis are weak militarily compared with the other Gulf states.[4] Furthermore, with a successful Ethiopia growing in strength and confidence after its victory over Somalia, the kingdom faces another potential threat to its security. With a growing presence of Soviet, Cuban, and East European advisors on the African Horn, the Saudis improved relations with neighboring—and historically often hostile—South Yemen could be set back. Aden was cooperative in serving as a convenient stockpiling and transition point for arms from the Communist countries destined for Ethiopia. Indeed, when the Soviet Union was expelled from Somalia, a large floating dry dock was towed by the Russians from Berbera to Aden.

At present, the Saudis would be hard pressed to defend themselves against any serious military operation. Their greatest advantage is that they can afford to retreat from large areas of the kingdom in the face of superior force. In modern warfare, however, that advantage is largely negated. Large uninhabited or sparsely popu-

[4] See also, Committee on International Relations, *United States Arms Policies*, and General Accounting Office, *Perspectives on Military Sales to Saudi Arabia* (Washington, D.C., 1977). Both publications give extensive treatment to the Saudi defense buildup.

lated areas can be ignored, and air mobile units and modern fighters and bombers can strike at the key control areas. Consequently, the present Saudi military structure, the future development plans, and the likelihood of attaining those goals should be examined.

There seems no present danger that the Saudis will be overrun militarily by another regional state or that the foreign expatriates pose a serious internal threat. The kingdom's leaders, like those in most other countries, are preparing, however, for future challenges, even against worst-case scenarios. At a minimum, the Saudis are concerned that their lack of effective defense might tempt potential aggressors.

Saudi Arabia's armed forces comprise an air force, a land force, and a navy that is still in an embryonic stage of development. In addition, there is the separately constituted Saudi Arabian National Guard, which differs somewhat from the forces identified by that name in the western world.

The Air Force. The Royal Saudi Air Force has received significant attention in terms of modernization. Considerable efforts have been exerted in creating a surface-to-air missile system, as well as an effective surveillance and early warning system. In nearly all instances, the time necessary to prepare the Saudis to use such defense equipment has been of long duration. The infrastructure had to be created, and the Saudis had to be trained in the most basic, as well as the most highly sophisticated, capabilities.

At the beginning of the 1970s, the U.S. Defense Department recommended to the Saudis that they place greater emphasis upon improving the air force, and the eventual result was the purchase of F-5 aircraft. The Peace Hawk program was developed to help the Saudis achieve relative self-sufficiency in the use and maintenance of the F-5. The program's greatest difficulty has been in training enough skilled personnel to attain the goal, but by 1981, or soon after, the Saudis should have absorbed the 110 F-5s and associated facilities and weapons, including Sidewinder air-to-air missiles, Maverick air-to-ground missiles, and laser-guided bombs. Beyond the actual procurement of planes, the Peace Hawk program has also included the construction of facilities, from hangars and ramps to supply depots, firing ranges, and various flight-line support.

The F-5s serve a vital but limited role in the Saudi defense structure as a close-in fighter, and it can be effective in support of surface units. The F-5 limitations, however, are all-weather and night intercept functions. Also, its effectiveness as an interceptor is limited by

its radar capabilities and by its range restrictions. In order to increase its range, the Saudis will continue to develop in-flight refueling. The kingdom already possesses some capability in this area, but will require years to develop an effective operational system.

The 1974 U.S. Defense Department survey that recommended expansion of the Peace Hawk program also dealt with the need to replace the kingdom's British-made Lightning aircraft at the beginning of the 1980s. No specific plane was recommended, but an American replacement could be assumed to be the F-14, F-15, F-16, or F-18.

After examining their future defense requirements for the period beginning in the mid-1980s, the Saudis decided upon the F-15 Eagle as the advanced fighter to be purchased. The decision appears to have been arrived at by pragmatic reasoning, and militarily it is difficult to challenge.

The tremendous Saudi geographic area that must be defended requires an aircraft that has a long range, and the F-15 has an air superiority combat radius of well over 500 miles. Saudi Aradia's difficulties in defending its territory are complicated by the shortage of skilled manpower. To meet the challenges of the coming decades, the country must procure defense equipment which requires the smallest number of men to operate and to maintain those systems. Given this imperative, the F-15 became a logical choice because of its excellent detection equipment, superb combat capabilities, and relative ease of flight-line maintenance in an air defense mode. The kingdom's basic defense requirements can be met with fewer of these aircraft and less manpower than others. If the Saudis had selected a less sophisticated plane, lacking the Eagle's radar system, Riyadh may have felt it necessary to procure a separate airborne radar system, such as the E-2C Hawkeye or the AWACs, and the additional aircraft would drain the crucially short manpower. The F-15s extensive radar coverage and look-down, shoot-down capability and its ability to perform in all weather conditions, during any time of day, and requiring only a single crew member, combine to make the aircraft well-suited to Saudi needs.

The Saudis will realize another advantage from the F-15—it requires fewer maintenance people. The modular units are relatively easy to replace reducing the on-ground times considerably compared with the Lightning interceptors now in the inventories or with most sophisticated aircraft now on the market.

Although the Saudis appear to have made a wise military decision in requesting the purchase of the F-15, their air defense system

will still have serious gaps. The arrival and absorption of the Eagles, a process that will probably not be completed before the late 1980s, will greatly enhance the kingdom's capability to defend key parts of the country, but the forty-five operational F-15s (the remainder of the sixty will be trainers) can defend only the Mecca-Medina-Jidda complex, the capital area of Riyadh, and the Dhahran region. Simultaneous attacks upon those three key places would leave the Saudi air force hard pressed. This dilemma cannot be averted by procuring more F-15s because of the shortage of available manpower. Consequently, the Saudi strategy seems to be one of purchasing as many fighter aircraft as they can reasonably absorb, in order to make it costly for anyone to attack the most important parts of the kingdom.

Riyadh's defense procurement actions also reflect an apparent decision to develop a nonoffense oriented air force. The limited-range F-5s are good in supporting ground and naval units, while the F-15s enhance the Saudi air defense. Of course, the F-15 can also be used as a ground attack aircraft, but modification of the Eagle to carry out such operations effectively would require considerable assistance and approval from the United States. Any diversion of F-15s to ground attack missions would divert from an already thin air defense system.

In modernizing the air force, the Saudis will probably continue to procure equipment requiring the fewest trained people, despite the higher financial cost. This basis for decisions was already evident when, for example, the Saudis decided against accepting the American suggestion to develop an air mobile brigade, because it would have required some 400 helicopters, a significant burden on the already short supply of manpower. Yet, an air mobile brigade would be of particular value to Saudi Arabia, because of its vast geographic area and the difficulty in moving ground units to key areas throughout the kingdom.

This analysis of air force capabilities would be incomplete without consideration of the air defense capabilities on the ground. The Saudis have been emplacing American-made Improved Hawk (I-Hawk) surface-to-air missiles (SAM) in key areas of the kingdom. Although the I-Hawk is a mobile SAM system, Riyadh has been setting the batteries at fixed installations, and there is little evidence to indicate that the kingdom will alter that approach in the future. The new SAMs are additions to the earlier emplacements of unimproved Hawks, which are presently being upgraded to I-Hawk equivalence, a project that should be completed before 1980. The major difference between the two versions lies in the I-Hawk's improved guidance and solid propellant, its bigger and more destructive

warhead, its better Electronic Countermeasure Protection, and its ability to receive the missiles ready to fire, thus eliminating the necessity for maintenance and field testing.

If the Saudis develop a mobile SAM system, it will probably be with equipment such as the short-range French Shahine system, scheduled to begin arriving in the kingdom late in 1980. Based upon the older Crotale low-altitude system, the system has improvements that include mounting on AMX-30 tank chassis and an increase to six in the number of launcher containers. There is also an improved radar system and a greater range capability. The Shahine systems can provide close-in air defense for deployed ground forces, and they have the advantage of being as mobile as the armored units they seek to protect.

In addition, the Saudis have purchased Redeye SAMs, handheld, shoulder-fired missiles that also provide some mobile, low-altitude SAM capabilities. To help meet its air defense challenges, Saudi Arabia is expected to buy more command and control related systems along with ground communications and radar systems. These will be added at a slow rate, keeping in mind the necessity to have manpower available to operate and maintain them.

Even with the additional improvements in the SAM system and associated areas, Saudi Arabia will remain vulnerable unless it has a long-range aircraft with effective radar. The F-15 emerges as an excellent selection even though approximately twice as many planes as were requested would be required to protect the kingdom. Possessing that number of aircraft would do little good unless there were manpower to operate and maintain them. The possibility of hiring foreign expatriates for such a sensitive national security task is understandably unattractive to Saudi leaders.

As may be seen in Table 1 in the appendix, the kingdom is at a numerical and qualitative disadvantage in comparison with the air forces of its neighbors Iran and Iraq. In addition, with the increase in the number of aircraft and foreign personnel in Ethiopia, the Saudis may be facing a powerful new enemy on its other side. Of course, much depends upon whether Ethiopia will train indigenous pilots and whether the Soviet Union and Cuba will merely maintain their presence in Ethiopia or will attempt to build an independent Ethiopian fighting force. Also, much will depend upon whether the Ethiopian regime itself will move toward a policy of greater pragmatism or will regularly purge the military for ideological reasons, thus keeping the armed services relatively weak. The extent of Israel's continued assistance to the Ethiopian military, particularly the air

force, will also be important in determining whether Ethiopia develops an effective strike force.

At a minimum, it is evident that the procurement of the F-15 would do much to improve Saudi Arabia's capabilities relative to its neighbors. It must be kept in mind, however, that during the next seven years, while Saudi Arabia is waiting to receive those aircraft and then absorbing them into its inventories, the other countries in the Persian Gulf and Red Sea regions will also be increasing their air force capabilities.

Since not all of the threats to Saudi Arabia come from external forces, the kingdom must also commit some of its forces to counter-insurgency roles. Saudi Arabia has some thirty BAC-167 aircraft for use in counterinsurgency and training roles, and it is increasing the number of those planes. The leadership is aware of the dangers inherent in having large numbers of foreigners working within the country. With the setbacks that have occurred on the Horn of Africa, the Saudis will be increasingly concerned about radical movements spreading from countries at that end of the kingdom, as well as from other states such as Iraq. Therefore, the kingdom must be able to respond to internal dissidents operating as insurgent units.

Saudi Arabia can be expected to add more helicopters to its inventories, as transports for units and supplies, as gun ships, and as support for naval and coast guard units. The number will be increased gradually, as skilled personnel become available.

Saudi Arabia's air force will probably continue to be oriented toward a defensive role, and it will take more than a decade before it can defend the kingdom effectively against a major attack. Meanwhile, the leaders appear to hope to build up an air force that will make any military operation against the country too expensive for a would-be aggressor.

Saudi Ground Forces. While air superiority may be important, such power is not sufficient for defense without adequate ground units. Accordingly modernization of Saudi Arabian land forces should continue to receive a high priority. Over a decade ago, the Saudis, with American assistance, undertook the modernization of their army maintenance system. The effort has been progressing with reasonable success, and the Saudis are taking over more of the program's management and are operating more of the equipment that has been procured during the modernization process. In terms of maintenance, indigenous Saudi troops are performing reasonably well and can be expected to continue showing improvement.

The Saudis are mechanizing two infantry brigades, patterned after similar American units, and upon completion of these efforts the kingdom will probably mechanize two additional infantry brigades. It is important to note that government has again shown a sensitivity to its manpower limitation: rather than increasing the number of brigades, it is improving existing ones. Typical of the equipment that has been procured for the brigade mechanization and that is likely to be purchased for other brigades are Tow and Dragon missiles, law rockets, 155 millimeter howitzers, armored personnel carriers, tanks, light and medium recovery vehicles, Redeye surface-to-air missiles, bridge launchers, wreckers, and bulldozers.

Saudi Arabian land forces will continue to be modest in size, despite the immenseness of the country. The units are stationed in the border areas. For most of the next decade, the Saudis probably would be able to cause significant casualties on an invading force from the region, but not defeat it.

Saudi land forces lack the ability to move many units between trouble spots, and this problem is likely to continue to be serious over the next decade. On the positive side, Saudi units have made significant progress in absorbing new equipment and in creating an indigenous training capability, which should help in modernizing other forces within their land force. Units in training at Tabuk, for example, have demonstrated enthusiasm and ability.

Like the air force, Saudi land forces are structured for defense of the kingdom. One reserve brigade was sent to Syria during the last Arab-Israeli conflict, but Riyadh might be reluctant to send more than token units into another conflict outside the kingdom. As is evident from Tables 2 and 3 in the appendix, Saudi Arabia is at a considerable disadvantage in armor, especially compared with Iran and Iraq, its chief rivals in the area. The Saudis have a geographic advantage in the long distance from Iraq to the key areas of Saudi Arabia. Similarly, if there were an invasion the Saudis would have plenty of time to attack the strung-out armor columns from South Yemen or Ethiopia. Saudi Arabia must possess air superiority, however, to take full advantage of its geography. If there were an Iranian invasion, with sufficient warning the Saudis could put some of its armor forces into position, but, again, an effective air defense would be more important. For the next decade, Saudi land forces would be of quite limited assistance to any of the smaller sheikhdoms facing an invasion.

The National Guard. Although the Saudi Arabian land forces would be used to meet an internal security threat, the primary group for

that purpose is the Saudi Arabian National Guard (SANG). SANG, an organization separate from the Ministry of Defense and Aviation, is commanded by the third ranking person in the government. Its mission includes support of the land forces in defense of Saudi Arabia.

A program scheduled to be completed by 1980 calls for four infantry battalions to be mechanized, with an artillery battery in each one. As with other Saudi modernization programs, SANG has required extensive infrastructure building, including instruction in the English language and in management techniques and improving training and basic support facilities. Since the guard is not being prepared for front-line combat, its mechanization is much lighter than that of the land forces. The basic combat vehicle is a V-150 wheeled armored personnel carrier, and there are no tanks in the program. SANG's air defense system is being limited to Vulcan anti-aircraft guns, and Tow missiles will provide anti-tank capability.

SANG is expected to seek to mechanize at least four more battalions in a similar mode. It will probably also make a significant effort to build an integrated logistics management system and an improved communications systems.

Saudi Arabia's land forces and its national guard could present stiff resistance to any invading force, but for the next decade or longer, manpower limitations will prevent the kingdom from possessing any sizable ground forces. As long as defense remains the primary interest, the necessity for sizable ground forces is not critical. Saudi Arabia can be expected to continue improving its ground units, and possibly even expanding them, in order either to support the smaller sheikhdoms in an attack by another regional power or to discourage such an action. It is doubtful that Riyadh could increase its forces as fast as its neighbors can, even if the leadership adopted such a policy. The country's best option for its ground forces is to modernize them with armaments that require the fewest men to operate and maintain.

Naval Forces. No defense force in a state littoral to any sizable body of water would be complete without a naval force, and Saudi Arabia is no exception to that rule. The country possesses an extensive coastline along both the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea. To protect these shores, the Saudis have launched a significant building project, which includes a naval base on each side of the country and a large naval headquarters in Riyadh. The two bases are nearly identical in size and composition; one is located at Jidda, on the Red Sea; and the other at Jubail, on the Persian Gulf. By the beginning of 1980, the construction of the ports and facilities should be completed.

It will be the mid-1980s or later, however, before the Saudis can absorb the ships they are purchasing for their navy.

These vessels will consist mostly of missile patrol boats. The remaining purchases will probably be noncombat ships. Altogether, the Saudi navy is unlikely to include more than a couple dozen naval combatants of a limited range by the middle of the 1980s.

Riyadh will probably face its most serious recruitment difficulties in developing its naval force. The indigenous population lacks a naval tradition and has less enthusiasm for naval service than for the land and air service.

In the future, the Saudi navy should be able to provide little more than a modicum of surveillance and coastal protection in the most important offshore areas of Saudi Arabia. Helicopters would enhance the navy's coastal defense capabilities, but, again, manpower would have to be found and trained to carry out such operations and to maintain the equipment.

The kingdom can count on its fledgling coast guard for some assistance in carrying out its defense policies, but the force remains small and is very much a close-in shore operation. The coast guard has purchased eight hovercraft, and there are plans for a significant modernization of the coast guard, with additional patrol boats and air surveillance craft.

Conclusion. Saudi Arabia is actively attempting to improve the country's national security insofar as it can with the purchase of modern weapons. Beginning from a low point on the military modernization scale, the Saudis have made significant progress. Certainly, if one were merely examining what existed in Saudi Arabia in the 1960s compared with today, remarkable statistical improvements could be cited. The Saudis' aircraft have increased in number by several hundred percent, and their ability to deliver ordinance tonnage has increased by even more. Billions of dollars have been spent upon the development of an air defense system over the past decade, and astronomical comparisons could be made in the statistics on military expenditures. Acquisitions have been impressive, even though attention has been focused on building an infrastructure, which would not be reflected in the category of combat preparations.

4

HOW THE SAUDIS WOULD FARE IN WAR

To determine Saudi Arabia's progress in preparing for future national security challenges, the probable effectiveness of the armed forces in different situations should be examined. The most useful criteria for analyzing that effectiveness are whether the Saudi military can maintain internal security and whether it can counter foreign threats of various types. Also, it would be useful to consider under what circumstances Saudi Arabia might try to project its military power beyond the country's boundaries.

SANG and the land forces, in combination with the limited counterinsurgency air units, could probably deal with internal security challenges directed at the present regime. Depending upon the fervor of the dissidents, however, it may not be possible to prevent sabotage of the oil fields or pipelines. Foreign expatriates, who would have less to lose, would be more likely to conduct such activity than would a Saudi citizen. Saudis already have received extensive benefits, and they will have an opportunity for considerably more as the kingdom continues to accumulate more wealth.

Since sabotage attempts might succeed, at least temporarily, the number of foreigners in the country should be considered. There are between 1½ million and 2 million foreign workers in Saudi Arabia, and there is little indication that the number will be reduced within the next decade. The largest group comprises some 1 million Yemenis, who have traditionally done manual labor. The next most significant group consists of the thousands of Palestinians, who hold skilled and professional positions throughout the civilian economy. Smaller numbers of Egyptians, Jordanians, Lebanese, and other Arabs also are among the foreign labor force. The remaining outsiders include South Koreans, Indians, Pakistanis, Filipinos, Western Europeans, Americans, and Japanese.

No state can prevent a concerted sabotage effort by any small group of highly dedicated individuals, especially if they are willing to sacrifice their lives to carry out their actions. A state can prepare for a defense, however, against all but the most fanatical of groups. It is perhaps for that reason that the Saudis have combined their limited military defense capability with an aggressive policy of encouraging the settlement of conflicts between states within the region. Riyadh also works diligently and contributes financial resources to encourage regional states to reject communist or other radical ideologies. The Saudis are aware of the national security problems that can develop if extreme ideologies in other Arab states cause instability among the expatriate workers, as well as some indigenous inhabitants. Riyadh seems to be following a policy of using its finances to reward potentially belligerent states that might export revolution, and, if all other efforts fail, relying on its small but effective land and national guard forces to maintain internal stability.

The Iraqi Threat. In applying the second criteria, military effectiveness, the Saudi capability to respond to specific actions by neighboring states must be examined. The contiguous nation of Iraq poses a more likely threat than does any other Arab state, because of its powerful military capability. In a large-scale attack against Saudi Arabia, Iraqi bombers and fighters could penetrate the air defense system, and they will retain this capability until Saudi forces have absorbed the F-15s. At that juncture (in the mid-1980s), Riyadh should reasonably be able to defend the country's key areas from attack—from the capital city to the major oil facilities in the eastern part of the country.

In the short run, Iraq will not be able to project ground forces into these key areas because of the distance and the difficulty of the terrain to be traversed.[5] This situation may be altered, however, by the end of another decade. It is conceivable that the Iraqis could be tempted to launch punitive air measures against the kingdom for its support of traditional regimes, for producing too much petroleum, or for obstructing higher oil prices. Such an attack might even result from limited Saudi support of the Kuwaitis in their territorial disputes with Iraq. Such an action might even emanate from Iraqi support of internal dissidents that wish to radicalize Saudi Arabia and bring it more in line with the Iraqi position.

Saudi oil reserves would probably not be a factor in any attack launched by Iraq. Iraq's oil reserves may be second only to Saudi

[5]It should be noted, however, that under ideal conditions the Iraqis could probably reach Dhahran via land in approximately twenty-four hours.

Arabia's. The Iraqi conflict with Kuwait probably results from the Iraqi desire for better access to Basra, its one major port area on the Gulf, rather than for Kuwait's extensive petroleum resources.

Iranian Power. Saudi Arabia would find it more difficult to protect key areas against an attack launched by Iran than by Iraq, given Iran's growing power. Iran has greater military strength than Saudi Arabia and Iraq combined, and there is little indication that this imbalance is likely to be altered significantly within the next decade.

As in the case with Iraq, in the event of an attack by Iran the Saudi Arabians could expect only to make the operation excessively costly for the enemy. The Saudis would need an effective air defense system, including long-range fighters that can intercept hostile aircraft before they reach key targets. If some aircraft got past the airborne defenses, the Saudis would hope to destroy them with the SAM system they built around strategic areas. The F-15s, combined with other improvements slated for the next five to seven years, should give the kingdom a credible enough defense so that neighboring Gulf powers would hesitate to strike.

In any attacks upon the smaller neighboring sheikhdoms in the foreseeable future, the Saudis would be able to do very little. The Saudis would not be able to project sufficient force to prevent either Iraq or Iran from seizing any smaller state. Given Riyadh's decision to build an almost exclusively defensive force, that assessment should not be surprising.

There are several other reasons why Riyadh opted for a defensive strategy. Unlike its powerful neighbor Iran, Saudi Arabia knows it lacks the manpower to become a major Indian Ocean power. Moreover, it possesses such massive wealth that no more resources are needed; it does not have the problem of other nations in satisfying a hungry military at the expense of internal development projects. Secondly, Riyadh does not lack access to the Persian Gulf or to the Red Sea. The kingdom need only be concerned about its free access through the Straits of Hormuz and Bab el Mandeb and the Suez Canal. Finally, Saudi Arabia covets no land belonging to another country. Indeed, the regime has been trying to set an example for other Arab states in agreeing to reasonable compromises over disputed territories.

Peninsular Powers. Saudi Arabia's relations with the Sultanate of Oman, to the south, remain good, but any change of regime there could pose serious problems. The Saudis provided considerable assistance, mostly financial, to the sultanate as it attempted to quell the

rebellion in its Dhofar province. The insurrection was supported by neighboring South Yemen with help from Iraq, Libya, and the Soviet Union and its Eastern European allies.

Without the intervention of outside forces, an attack by a hostile regime in Oman would not seriously endanger the Saudis, especially in light of Saudi defense preparations. In the event of a serious challenge to the government in Muscat, the Saudis could provide only financial support, perhaps paying for other Arab troops to enter the sultanate to preserve the regime. It could also stand by, or provide financial aid, while Iran intervened to maintain the government in power. Iran sent large numbers of troops and other military assistance to Oman in the mid-1970s to quell the rebellion in Dhofar. Some 1,000 of those troops still remained in the sultanate in late 1977.

Elsewhere on the Arabian Peninsula, Saudi Arabia may face a significant future security challenge from South Yemen, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY). In 1969, Riyadh was engaged in a border war with the PDRY, and military hostilities between the two states occurred in 1974 and 1976. The influx of large numbers of communist advisors in South Yemen and the role the PDRY played in support of Ethiopia during the war on the Horn of Africa make the Saudis understandably nervous. Their efforts to wean the South Yemenis away from their dependence upon more radical forces has not been particularly successful, and there is continuing concern about new hostilities erupting in the future.

If another border war occurs, Saudi Arabia should be able to hold its own if no outside forces are involved. On the other hand, if the PDRY has the assistance of external forces, the Saudis may have to relinquish some territory, but any invading force would eventually become vulnerable because of the open terrain it would be crossing. The presence of F-15s would then be of critical importance to the Saudis, especially if foreign pilots were flying advanced MiGs for the PDRY.

Neighboring North Yemen, the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR), might also present a future military challenge to the Saudis, though Riyadh has enjoyed significant success in luring it away from its reliance on the communist states and Iraq. Prior to the application of rial diplomacy, Saudi Arabia was engaged in open belligerency with North Yemen. In 1962 Riyadh was supporting the deposed traditional ruler against the radical republican government. During that conflict, the Yemenis received large-scale Soviet and Egyptian assistance. At its high point, the Egyptian presence in Yemen numbered some 50,000, and Egyptian MiGs bombed Saudi villages. A more moderate

regime came to power in Sana in 1974, and the Saudis were able to establish better relations, even financing a military modernization program for the new government. The main stipulation was that the program would be carried out by western states, with additional weapons purchases coming from them.

Saudi Arabia would have concern for its national security if there were a change of regime in the YAR, a possibility made more likely by the Somali defeat on the African Horn. Great pressure could be exerted on Saudi Arabia by such a regime, with support from bordering PDRY and nearby Ethiopia. Furthermore, a more radical regime could come to power in disheartened Somalia, creating tremendous pressure on the YAR to rid itself of the Saudis. The Saudis' faith in the West, it might be argued, has yet to bear significant benefits.

The type of strength possessed by the YAR as it reaches higher levels of military modernization must be analyzed in order to assess how well Saudi military forces would fare against it. In 1976, Saudi Arabia began financing a five-year modernization program for the YAR armed forces. Although some 100 Soviet advisors remain in North Yemen, they will have little, if any, involvement in the defense modernization program. This effort will be carried out with the assistance of fewer than seventy-five Saudi advisors, and probably a small number of Americans. The primary goal is to reorganize fifteen or sixteen understrength brigades into about a half dozen full-strength units. In addition to receiving improved training and other support assistance, the YAR armed forces will be given 105-mm howitzers, mortars, basic transportation vehicles, and machine guns. Air defense weapons of the Vulcan type are already being procured for North Yemen. If the Soviet Union is unwilling to supply spare parts for Russian-made equipment in YAR inventories, the YAR may eventually purchase light tanks, aircraft of the F-5 type, anti-tank weapons, armored vehicles, and patrol boats from western sources.

Even if all these weapons were procured and reasonably absorbed, Saudi Arabia should be able to defend itself against the YAR if no outside forces intervened on the Yemeni side. If there were such intervention, the situation would be similar to that discussed in regard to South Yemen. If North Yemen were under attack by a neighboring state, the Saudis could offer only limited military assistance, as in the case of the Gulf sheikhdoms.

In regard to Jordan, the Saudis have little to worry about as long as the present regime remains in power. In the next decade, however, they have to be prepared for a change of government in

the Hashemite Kingdom, though there is a strong likelihood that King Hussein's passing will not result in an accession to power by a radical group.

African Scenarios. Across the Red Sea, Saudi Arabia must be constantly prepared for worst-case scenarios. Riyadh's rial diplomacy could boomerang as a result of Ethiopia's victory against Somalia—and all the more so if it defeats Eritrea, which is fighting for independence with Saudi support. As a punitive measure, Ethiopia has a number of options to make the Saudis pay for their anti-Ethiopian actions. The Ethiopians might want to set an example, showing other nations they should not accede to Saudi opposition to communist and other radical ideologies.

The most direct measure the Ethiopians could take would be to launch direct attacks against facilities on the Red Sea side of the kingdom or to operate large forces out of either of the Yemens against Saudi Arabia. For any such action to be successful within the next decade, however, Ethiopia would require the assistance of a large number of Cuban, Soviet, or other combat forces. The Ethiopians would be more likely to support subversive effort aimed at Saudi Arabia or its Arab allies.

What happens to the Sadat regime in Egypt has serious potential national security ramifications for Riyadh. If the present government resigns or is removed from power because of lack of progress toward a peace settlement with Israel, a more radical regime, of the Nasser variety, may come to power in Cairo. The new regime might replace Saudi financial support with closer Soviet relations. The Saudis well remember the Egyptian attempts to subvert the present ruling family. As Riyadh realizes, Saudi passage in and out of the Red Sea could easily be blocked by its neighbors. A hostile Ethiopia and a less than friendly South Yemen are already in a position to close the Straits of Bab el Mandeb.

The Israeli Threat. A major military threat that the Saudis do worry about, and will continue to be concerned with, is the state of Israel. Its incursions into Saudi airspace, particularly in the Tabuk area, combined with its warnings that the oil-producing states providing the money to the confrontation countries may be punished in any future Arab-Israeli war, gives the Saudis little confidence in Israel. Furthermore, Israel's continued assistance to the Marxist government in Ethiopia has also added to Saudi suspicions, given Riyadh's antipathy toward Marxist and radical regimes.

With the F-15 and other improvements, Saudi Arabia should be able to deter any Israeli strikes on its oil wells by making an attack costly. In the event of such attacks, however, the Saudis could not completely prevent damage to those facilities, which provide the petroleum for many western economies. They would be vulnerable to Israeli strikes against F-15 bases, and with the F-15s in Saudi Arabia, Tel Aviv has warned that it may be necessary to launch preemptive strikes against military facilities in the kingdom.

For the next decade, the Saudis cannot hope to destroy, without significant losses, any attacking Israeli air strike force, but they can attempt to make that effort costly to the Israelis. Applying the same type of pragmatism, Saudi Arabia would probably not deploy its F-15s in an Arab-Israeli conflict in the mid-1980s, when they are operational, for several reasons.

(1) The Saudis know that, while they might cause some Israeli losses, many of their own aircraft and their limited number of pilots would ultimately be lost.

(2) Deploying the F-15s to an Arab-Israeli conflict would leave the kingdom's air defenses highly vulnerable.

(3) The Saudis will provide money to the confrontation states and quietly urge moderation, but there is no indication that they will send into combat more than a token force for the reserves, as they did in 1973. If the leaders were to deploy a front-line unit to such a conflict, they would risk the loss of a significant portion of the kingdom's small but crucial defense force.

(4) There are only a limited number of airfields from which the Saudis could launch F-15 strikes against Israel. The most logical base would be Tabuk, which is highly vulnerable to Israeli attack, with or without the F-15s there.[6] Other airfields in the country's northern area, such as Turayf or Gurayat, have asphalt airstrips but lack the military support facilities to allow for the sustained operation of F-15s, and there are no known plans to build such facilities.

All in all, Israel seems most likely to tangle with Saudi F-15s if it attacks Saudi Arabia—in the Dhahran area, where the oil fields are located, in the Mecca-Medina-Jidda area, which is protected from Taif, or in the southern border area, whose defense is centered at Khamis Mushait.

Wisely or not, Saudi Arabia does not envision the type of defense

[6] The State Department has reportedly indicated, however, that Saudi Arabia does not intend to station F-15s at Tabuk. See Drew Middleton, "U.S. Asserts Saudis Will Not Base F-15s Near Israeli Border," *New York Times*, April 10, 1978, p. A4.

that develops an offensive capability. It might be argued that with a limited population and highly lucrative natural resources Riyadh should adopt an Israeli type of military outlook, emphasizing a deadly offense as the best possible defense. A number of factors, however, militate against the Saudis adopting anything other than a highly defensive posture—its limited manpower, its need to rely upon other states for almost all of its military needs, its inclination to use its wealth to influence other states toward moderation, and its basic conservatism.

5
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES

There would probably be little disagreement that a friendly and cooperative Saudi Arabia is crucial to the United States and the remainder of the western world. With its tremendous petroleum reserves, the kingdom can influence world oil-pricing policy and force moderation upon the other producers. It is certainly no secret that Saudi Arabia could pump one-third less oil than it does today and still receive revenues sufficient to meet the country's needs. Keeping the petroleum in the ground might actually be a better long-run investment than selling it now for inflated dollars. It is also no secret that the tremendous oil wealth of the kingdom is highly coveted by a number of other states, and in terms of East-West relations, the Soviet Union would probably not be averse to seeing Saudi Arabia fall under more radical control.

Consequently, the first question which should be answered is whether Riyadh's security is of strategic importance to the United States. The economic importance of Saudi Arabia for this country even exceeds the 10 percent of our oil imports which come from the kingdom: Western Europe and Japan are highly dependent upon Persian Gulf petroleum, much of which comes from Saudi Arabia, and there is little evidence that there will be any lessening of the importance of such shipments.

The importance of that oil is not in its availability alone, but also in its price, as has been demonstrated by Riyadh's role in OPEC. Were a radical regime to gain control of Saudi Arabia, the small, traditional, and basically prowestern oil-rich sheikhdoms might also fall to a wave of radicalism in the Gulf area. Were that to occur, the western world would be in a highly vulnerable economic position, and the military consequences would be disastrous on a global scale.

Given the importance of maintaining a friendly regime in Saudi Arabia, it is essential to consider what the United States should do to support Riyadh's goals, as well as the options the Saudis might exercise in the absence of adequate American cooperation.

It should go without saying that the United States cannot take Saudi Arabia for granted. Riyadh may be stridently anticommunist, and it may continually attest to its belief in a stable and prosperous western world, but the kingdom cannot therefore be forced to accept anything the United States thinks appropriate. Saudi Arabia should be treated not as a client but as an equal partner, seeking to achieve certain goals in the interest of both states. The Saudis obviously desire to purchase American technology in order to achieve economic development and a credible defense. It is in the American interest that Saudi Arabia be able to discourage other states from launching any type of attack against it thereby disrupting the flow of critically needed oil to the industrial world.

In terms of Saudi Arabia's defense needs, the U.S. role in many ways precedes the present modernization program and the requests for sophisticated armaments. The arms flow into the Middle East reflects a most interesting pattern since the beginning of this decade. The United States has provided highly sophisticated offensive weapons to both Iran and Israel, making them dominant powers within the region and causing other regional states to become concerned about their own security. These actions were taken by Washington despite warnings that if those weapons were provided to Iran and Israel the other states might turn increasingly to the Soviet Union to provide them with more modern arsenals to maintain pace with their competitors. Not surprisingly, Moscow has continued to respond positively to such entreaties, and the major states in the region realized a significant increase in their military capabilities. This was the case for all countries except one—Saudi Arabia.

It was predictable, however, that the Saudis—with their wealth and their exposure to punitive actions, as well as their efforts to stem radicalism—would want to improve their defenses. The Saudi intention did not seek an offensive force capability, like those possessed by other Middle Eastern powers, but to defend the kingdom against attack from those states required highly sophisticated equipment. Riyadh chose to purchase modern weapons that require the least possible manpower to operate, support, and maintain, such as the F-15.

The F-15 Sale. It might be helpful to cite the F-15 sale as an example of what is in the American interest. Although it is too late to alter

previous sales to other countries, and the action-reaction cycles that have occurred, it is imperative to analyze whether the sale of sixty F-15s to Saudi Arabia is in the interest of the United States. It might be appropriate to ask whether the arrival of those planes in late 1981 will exacerbate any existing arms races in the region. Since Saudi Arabia is so far behind the other regional powers in military capability, the answer would seem to be negative.

Another approprite question is, are the planes likely to be utilized against any forces outside Saudi Arabia? As shown earlier, that answer would also seem to be negative unless Saudi Arabia is attacked first.

Would such aircraft in the kingdom invite an attack by any outside power? There has been such speculation. The American Israel Public Affairs Committee argues that the existence of such planes in Saudi Arabia might require Israel to launch an attack against Tabuk in the northwestern part of the kingdom.[7] This raises an even more troublesome question about future arms transfers to the powers already dominant in the region: Does the transfer of American weapons tend to make the recipient state more belligerent? This question should be asked of every arms purchase, including those to Saudi Arabia. At present there is no indication of hostile intentions to project massive force beyond its borders on the part of the kingdom. Nor does there seem to be any future disposition to do so, no special irredentist aims or hegemonic pretensions.

Will the equipment be transferred to a third country? In the Saudi case, the answer is almost certainly no. To do so in the absence of American permission would be a violation of the agreement made at the time of the sale, and that would jeopardize the entire military modernization program. To begin buying arms from someone other than the Americans would result in a considerable loss of time from the changes in approach, training techniques, and equipment.

Finally, from whom would the Saudis attempt to acquire such weapons, and what impact would that have upon the United States? To replace the F-15, the Saudis have indicated that they would prefer the most advanced Mirage available from France, such as the F-1 or the Mirage 2000 or 4000, and that they might even finance additional research and development to improve the capabilities of the aircraft they decide to purchase. The Mirage 4000 would be a two-engine aircraft with greater thrust than previous models and

[7] For more details, see, American Israel Public Affairs Committee, "F-15s to Saudi Arabia—A Threat to Peace" (Washington, D.C., 1978).

with a superior ground attack capability. It would not, however, be available until 1983.

A major reason for opposition to the sale of the F-15s is the possibility that the planes might be used in a future Arab-Israeli war: just their existence in the kingdom would have to be taken into account by Israeli military planners. Yet, if the Saudis bought the advanced Mirages, even though they might be somewhat inferior to the F-15, Tel Aviv's planners would still have to consider their existence. And there is not likely to be the same tight restrictions against third party transfers or against use of the planes in any future conflict. Even under those circumstances, the Saudis are unlikely to commit their planes or pilots to an Arab-Israeli conflict unless directly attacked; if the Saudis are forced to buy French aircraft, Riyadh would probably finance the purchase by the confrontation states of the same advanced Mirages in order to achieve some standardization of equipment. Then the Saudis might be under even greater pressure to commit planes and pilots to an Arab-Israeli conflict.

An Arab-Israeli Settlement. The United States could contribute significantly to Saudi Arabia by helping achieve a successful settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, especially one providing for resolution of the Palestinian demand for their own national government. The large numbers of homeless Palestinians living and working throughout the Gulf area are a constant source of potential revolutionary activity. Their attempts to sensitize other Arab peoples to their plight could radicalize elements of the population, creating internal security problems. Yet, if there is one issue upon which the Arab states can agree, regardless of their ideological orientation, it is that the Palestinians must be given an independent national status fashioned out of territories presently occupied by Israel. A resolution of the Palestinian issue would remove potential internal security problems in the pro-western Arab states.

With a settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the countries of the Gulf region may be less inclined to expend so much effort on their military forces. At least it might become easier to determine exactly why a state wanted to buy a particular weapon, and there might be some way of preventing the spiraling purchases of offensive arms, which then require the purchase of an effective defense against those weapons. Settlement of the conflict might even terminate Israel's assistance to the Marxist regime in Ethiopia. The United States would be an important beneficiary of such a settlement, since its support of Israel has contributed to a volatility in relations with most Arab states.

The United States can give both political and military help to Saudi Arabia in its quest for national security. It would be in the interest of neither country for the United States to encourage Saudi Arabia to overarm or to under prepare, but both states seem to exercise due caution in this regard.

Conclusion. Although it should be apparent from the foregoing discussion that Saudi Arabia faces a number of potential national security challenges, none is of an immediate nature. Nevertheless, it is understandable why a sovereign nation would want an adequate defense against possible aggressors it perceives as external security threats and to develop forces capable of maintaining internal security in a time of crisis.

How the Saudis would respond to defense challenges may be reflected in their careful approach to military modernization. Riyadh has procured weapons and configured forces best suited to their unique needs and manpower problems. Confronting a probable temptation to purchase more equipment at a faster rate than it could be absorbed, the Saudis demonstrated an appreciation of the complexity of developing an effective defense force.

Some of the Saudis' defense requirements have resulted from their own actions. Their policy of rial diplomacy, for instance, may have made enemies. On the other hand, their immense wealth may have made the Saudis feel their options were limited because of the necessity to protect themselves from would-be aggressors. The experience with Yemen in the early 1960s made them take greater interest in defense, but the real impetus began in the 1970s.

Saudi Arabia is, and will remain, vital to the United States and the western world. The kingdom has nearly always used its wealth in a manner beneficial to western interests, and its petroleum is fundamental to the continued development of the industrialized world. The United States must be concerned with Saudi Arabia's national security if the relationship between the two states is to continue to be mutually beneficial.

APPENDIX

The following tables give statistics on the number and types of major weapons in the states bordering Saudi Arabia. Such statistics cannot reflect either the quality of the equipment or the ability of available manpower to utilize the arms. Data in the tables are generally from 1 July to 30 June. The information is derived almost entirely from International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance, 1977-1978* (London, 1977).

Table 1

Combat Aircraft

Country/Type of Aircraft	1977–78	On Order
Iran		
F-4 fighter-bomber/interceptor	173	—
RF-4E reconnaissance	16	—
F-5 fighter, ground attack	112	69
F-14 fighter	40	40
F-16 fighter	—	160
P-3 maritime reconnaissance	6	3
S-65 anti-submarine warfare	6	—
Total	353	272
Iraq		
MiG 23B fighter, ground attack	90	—
Su-7B fighter-bomber	60	—
MiG-17 fighter-bomber	30	—
Hunter ground attack	20	—
Tu-16 medium bomber	4	—
Il-28 light bomber	10	—
T-52 light strike	20	—
MiG-21 interceptor	115	—
MiG-19 fighter	20	—
Total	369	—
Saudi Arabia		
F-5E fighter	70	20
BAC-167 ground attack	30	11
Lightning fighter	37	—
Total	137	31
Bahrain		
None		
Kuwait		
A-4M fighter-bomber	4	—
Hunter fighter, ground attack	4	—
T-67 fighter, ground attack	5	—
Lightning interceptor	10	—
T-55 interceptor	2	—
Mirage F-1 interceptor	12	8
BAC-167 ground attack	12	—
A-4 fighter-bomber	—	26
Total	49	34

Table 1 (continued)

Country/Type of Aircraft	1977–78	On Order
Oman		
Hunter fighter, ground attack	16	—
Jaguar fighter, ground attack	12	—
BAC-167 ground attack	8	—
Total	36	—
Qatar		
Hunter fighter, ground attack	4	—
Total	4	—
United Arab Emirates (UAE)		
Mirage V fighter, ground attack	24	—
Hunter fighter, ground attack	8	—
MB-326 ground attack	6	—
Total	38	—
Jordan		
F-5 fighter, ground attack	60	—
F-104A interceptor	18	—
Total	78	—
North Yemen (YAR)		
MiG-17 fighter-bomber	8	—
MiG-21 fighter	some	—
Il-28 light bomber	14	—
Total	22[a]	—
South Yemen (PDRY)		
MiG-21 fighter	12	—
MiG-17 fighter-bomber	15	—
Il-28 light bomber	6	—
Total	33[a]	—

[a] Some aircraft believed to be in storage.

Table 2

Tanks in the Persian Gulf Area

Country/Type of Tank	1977–78	On Order
Iran		
Chieftain	760	1,220
M-47/-48	400	—
M-60A1 medium tanks	460	—
Scorpion light tanks	250	110
Total	1,870	1,330
Iraq		
T-62, T-54/-55	1,350	some (T-62 med.)
T-34	50	—
AMX-30 medium tanks	some	—
PT-76 light tanks	100	—
Total	1,500+	—
Saudi Arabia		
AMX-30	400	—
M-47/-60 medium tanks	75	200 M-60's
M-41	60	—
Scorpion, some light tanks	150	100
Total	685+	300
Bahrain		
No tank force		—
Kuwait		
Chieftain	12	153
Vickers	50	—
Centurion medium tanks	50	—
Total	112	153
Oman		
No tank force		—
Qatar		
No tank force		—
United Arab Emirates (UAE)		
Scorpion light tanks	80	—
Total	80	—
Jordan		
M-47/-48/-60	320	—
Centurion medium tanks	200	—
Total	520	—

Table 2 (continued)

Country/Type of Tank	1977–78	On Order
North Yemen (YAR)		
T-34, T-54 medium tanks	30	—
Total	30	—
South Yemen (PDRY)		
T-34, T-54 medium tanks	200	—
Total	200	—

Table 3

Armored Personnel Carriers

Country/Type of Vehicle	1977–78	On Order
Iran		
M-113, BTR-40/-50/-60/-152	About 2,000	—
BMP	—	some
Total	2,000	—
Iraq		
BTR-40/-50/-60/-152, OT-62	About 1,800	—
BMP	100	—
Total	1,900+	—
Saudi Arabia		
M-113, Panhard M-3, Commando	some	250
Total	—	250
Bahrain		
	none	—
Kuwait		
Saracen	130	some
Total	130	—
Oman		
	none	—
Qatar		
Saracen	8	—
Total	8	—
United Arab Emirates (UAE)		
Saracen	30	—
Panhard M-3	some	—
Total	30+	—
Jordan		
M-113	600	—
Saracen	120	—
Total	720	—
North Yemen (YAR)		
BTR-40/-152	120	—
Walid	some	—
Total	120+	—
South Yemen (PDRY)		
	none	—

Table 4
Helicopters

Country/Type of Helicopter		1977–78	On Order
Iran			
		Army	
AH-1J		120	82
Bell 214A		100	193
AB-205A		52	—
CH-47C		40	—
Huskie		20	—
	Total	332	275
		Air Force	
Huskie		10	—
AB-205		6	—
AB-206A		4	—
AB-212		5	—
Bell 214C		5	38
CH-47C		2	50
Super Frelon		16	—
AS-61A		—	2
	Total	48	90
		Navy	
AB-205A		5	—
AB-206A		14	—
AB-212		6	—
SH-3D		20	—
RH-53D		3	3
	Total	48	3
Iraq			
Mi-1		4	—
Mi-4		35	—
Mi-6		16	—
Mi-8		30	—
Super Frelon		10	—
Alouette III		40	20
	Total	135	20

Table 4 (continued)

Country/Type of Helicopter	1977–78	On Order
Saudi Arabia		
AB-206	16	—
AB-205	24	—
Alouette III	12	—
AB-204	1	—
Total	53	—
Bahrain		
Scout (Police)	2	—
Total	2	—
Kuwait		
AB-204B	6	—
AB-205	4	—
Whirlwind	2	—
Gazelle	24	—
Puma	12	—
Total	48	—
Oman		
AB-205	20	—
AB-206	3	—
AB-212	1	—
AB-214	5	—
Total	29	—
Qatar		
Whirlwind	2	—
Commando	4	—
Gazelle	2	—
Lynx	—	3
Total	8	3
United Arab Emirates (UAE)		
AB-205	8	—
AB-206	6	—
AB-212	3	—
Alouette III	10	—
Puma	5	—
Total	32	—

Table 4 (continued)

Country/Type of Helicopter		1977–78	On Order
Jordan			
Alouette III		18	—
S-76		—	4
	Total	18	4
North Yemen (YAR)			
Mi-4		some	—
AB-205		some	—
	Total	some	—
South Yemen (PDRY)			
Mi-4		some	—
Mi-8		8	—
	Total	8+	—

Table 5
Manpower

Country/Branch of Service		1977–78	
Iran			
Army		220,000	
Navy		22,000	
Air Force		100,000	
Para-Military Forces		70,000	
Reserves		300,000	
	Total	712,000	
Iraq			
Army		160,000	
Navy		3,000	
Air Force		25,000	
Para-Military Forces		4,800	Security Troops
		50,000	People's Army
Reserves		250,000	
	Total	492,800	
Saudi Arabia			
Army		45,000	
Navy		1,500	
Air Force		15,000	
Para-Military (National Guard)		35,000	
	Total	96,500	
Bahrain			
Army		2,300	
	Total	2,300	
Kuwait			
Army		8,500	
Navy		500	
Air Force		1,000	
	Total	10,000	
Oman			
Army		11,800	
Navy		450	
Air Force		750	
Para-Military Forces		3,000	
	Total	16,000	

Table 5 (continued)

Country/Branch of Service		1977–78
Qatar		
Army		3,500
Navy		400
Air Force		300
	Total	4,200
United Arab Emirates (UAE)		
Army		23,500
Navy		800
Air Force		1,800
	Total	26,100
Jordan		
Army		61,000
Navy		160
Air Force		6,650
Para-Military Forces		10,000
	Total	77,810
North Yemen (YAR)		
Army		37,600
Navy		750
Air Force		1,500
Para-Military Forces		20,000
	Total	59,850
South Yemen (PDRY)		
Army		19,000
Navy		300
Air Force		2,000
Para-Military Forces		1,500
	Total	22,800

Table 6
Naval Vessels

Country/Type of Vessel	1977–78	On Order
Iran		
Destroyers	3	4 (Spruance Class)
Frigates	4	—
Corvettes	4	—
Patrol Boats	60	12 FPBG with Exocet SSM
Minesweepers	5	—
Landing Ships	2	—
Landing Craft	2	2
Logistic Support Ships	2	—
SRN-6 Hovercraft	8	—
BH-7 Hovercraft	6	—
Tang Class Subs	—	3
Total	96	21
Iraq		
SO-1 Submarine Chasers	3	—
OSA-Class FPBG with Styx SSM	10	—
P-6 Torpedo Boats	12	—
Patrol Boats	4	—
Minesweepers	2	—
Total	31	—
Saudi Arabia		
FPBG	1	6
FPB (Jaguar-Class)	3	—
Large Patrol Craft	1	—
Small Patrol Boats	50	—
SRN-6 Hovercraft	8	—
MCM	—	4
Landing Craft	—	4
Total	63	14
Bahrain		
Patrol Launches (Police)	9	—
Total	9	—

Table 6 (continued)

Country/Type of Vessel	1977–78	On Order
Kuwait		
Inshore Patrol Boats	12	—
Patrol Launches	16	—
Landing Craft	3	—
Total	31	—
Oman		
Patrol Vessels	3	—
Training Ship	1	—
FPB	4	3
Small Landing Craft	4	—
Minesweepers	—	2
Logistic Support Ships	—	1
Total	12	6
Qatar		
Patrol Craft	6	—
Coastal Patrol Craft	5	—
Total	11	—
United Arab Emirates (UAE)		
Large Patrol Craft	6	—
Small Patrol Craft	9	—
Coastal Patrol Craft (Police)	14	—
Total	29	—
Jordan		
Small Patrol Craft	10	—
Total	10	—
North Yemen (YAR)		
Large Patrol Craft	5	—
MTB	3	—
Total	8	—
South Yemen (PDRY)		
Submarine Chasers	2	—
MTB	2	—
Minesweepers	3	—
Small Patrol Craft	6	—
Landing Craft	2	—
Total	15	—

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National Security Challenges to Saudi Arabia, by Dale R. Tahtinen, examines the potential conflicts facing that oil-rich kingdom during the next decade. The study discusses the steps taken by the Saudis to improve their defense capabilities and analyzes the effectiveness of Saudi military forces in meeting specific security challenges. Tahtinen also considers how the national security concerns of Saudi Arabia relate to those of the United States.

The Saudis have attempted to apply rial diplomacy to persuade other countries to move away from dependence on radical states, particularly those professing violence or communism. The author considers the problems the kingdom may have created for itself through this policy. Tahtinen concludes that, since the United States and Saudi Arabia share so many goals, an even greater effort should be made to improve relations between the two countries.

Dale R. Tahtinen, the assistant director of foreign and defense policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute, was Senator Robert P. Griffin's assistant for research and legislative analysis. Prior to that, he served with the Defense Intelligence Agency. Among his studies published by AEI are *Arms in the Indian Ocean* (1977), *Arms in the Persian Gulf* (1974), and *The Arab-Israeli Military Balance since October 1973* (1974). He has also written several AEI works with Robert J. Pranger, including *Implications of the 1976 Arab-Israeli Military Status* (1976) and *Nuclear Threat in the Middle East* (1975).

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