

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

RECONSIDERING THE ARMS RACE IN THE PERSIAN  
GULF: THE MAIN REASONS FOR ARMAMENT AMONG  
SAUDI ARABIA, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, AND QATAR

by  
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# ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Title: Reconsidering the Arms Race in the Persian Gulf: The Main Reasons Behind Armament Among Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Qatar

Conventional wisdom and Gulf local media's coverage of armament in the Gulf creates the perception that Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar's arms and defense investments and strife stem from an arms race. Nevertheless, contrary to this perception created by the media, the armament of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar is not due to an arms race. This thesis aims to show why and how there is no arms race between the Persian Gulf monarchies of Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Qatar. Gulf monarchies have recently invested in indigenous defense industries and have signed multibillion-dollar and multi-year arm agreements, often with Western countries. This thesis, analyzing the main reasons for the armament behavior of the Persian Gulf monarchies, aims to show that these monarchies are not in an arms race. The main reasons for the armament of these countries are honor and prestige stemming from a tribal past, a policy of diversifying their post-oil economies, and a policy of appeasement of the West. In this context, the thesis compared the coverage of the Gulf printed media on armament, military building, and alliance preferences, causing the perception of an arms race in the Gulf, with the reports of the international media on the same topics to demonstrate how Gulf monarchies legitimize their armament. The thesis tested the elements it extracted from the analysis of the military buildup and armament behavior in the Gulf. The findings reveal that the cause of tension and armament between Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar does not match the arms race phenomenon. The findings confirm the assertion that Gulf monarchies are armed for prestige, a policy of diversifying their post-oil economies, and seeking to appease the West.

## PREFACE

After securing a scholarship from King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia in September 2014, I had the opportunity to not only study the Arabic language but also experience Gulf culture and politics. Unexpectedly, the end of 2014 and the beginning of 2015 was a turning point for both me, Saudi Arabia, and the rest of the region. For me, I enjoyed the language and the culture to the full extent and also, discovered the politics of the Gulf. Yet, for the country and the region, it is still difficult to say that whatever happened was for the best. To remember, in January 2015 after passing away of King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, King Salman bin Abdulaziz ascended the throne, and his ambitious son Mohamad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz was appointed as Deputy Crown Prince and Defence Minister. The first applications of this accession on the ground were the Yemen War, and the political and economic tension which flared up among Gulf countries and culminated in the Qatar crisis in 2017. The direct reaction of the neighboring countries was that they rolled up sleeves to strengthen their armies and related infrastructure. While, the local Gulf media inflate their monarchs' military related moves, these happenings did not go unnoticed by mainstream global media. All these events along with the media's contribution, fed the perception that there is an ongoing arms race in the Persian Gulf.

After finishing my education in Saudi Arabia, I started to work as a journalist in Beirut, Lebanon at the end of 2015. Between 2015 and 2018, I was lucky to closely witness all of the developments. Needless to say, I followed and wrote several reports regarding the strife in the Persian Gulf. Apart from that, Beirut welcomed me with many advantages, with the most valuable being that I obtained the opportunity to study an MA in Political Studies at the American University of Beirut in 2019. My readings on global politics as well as my personal and vocational experience opened the way to meet quality scholars in the academy. Especially Professor Hilal Khashan's valuable article "Rethinking the Arms Race in the Gulf" was a real inspiration for me and motivated me to pursue this thesis.<sup>1</sup> All of the above experiences went into producing this thesis.

This thesis investigated the main reasons for the armament behavior and defense infrastructure construction witnessed in three Gulf countries: Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar. Their excessive arms purchases, efforts to build domestic defense infrastructure, and the cancerous conflict among them and Iran's threat have popularly created a perception that an arms race is going in the Persian Gulf. Furthermore, the Persian Gulf's local media and international platforms coverages feed this perception disproportionately. Therefore, this thesis argues that armament, domestic defense infrastructure construction, and conflict among Persian Gulf monarchies cannot be explained by the concept of an arms race.

To demonstrate this, the thesis examines how the Gulf states have responded to the challenges that they have faced since the 1970s and that pose a threat to their security. The thesis then aims to compare the framework as a result of research on the arms race

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<sup>1</sup> Hilal Khashan, "Rethinking the Arms Race in the Gulf," (December 9, 2021). <https://geopoliticalfutures.com/rethinking-the-arms-race-in-the-gulf/>.

literature with the armament behaviors of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar. The aim here is to examine whether the Gulf countries' efforts to build armament and defense infrastructure are different from the arms race concept and examples. After achieving this goal, the thesis aims to comparatively analyze news coverage about armament in the Gulf by the platforms selected from the Gulf local media. The aim here is to show how monarchies use local media to legitimize their armament and defense infrastructure construction. At the same time, it aims to compare the coverage of the Gulf local media with selected examples from international media platforms. As a result of this comparison, the thesis aims to reveal the differences between the Gulf local media's discourse on armament, army building, and defense infrastructure development in the Gulf and the discourse of the international media. Thus, it aims to show how and why the Gulf local media covered the arms deals, military moves, and defense infrastructure development of the monarchies as successes for the monarchies, and how the media inflated the monarch's military moves. From this point of view, the study aims to reveal the effect of the media on the arms race narrative in the Persian Gulf. The ultimate goal of the thesis is to synthesize all the above research and show that there is no arms race in the Persian Gulf. The thesis presents this analysis to the reader in 5 chapters.

Chapter 1 examines the ongoing challenges threatening both the existence and the stability of Gulf monarchies and their ways of tackling these challenges over the course of the 1970s up to today. It deals with the issues faced by the Persian Gulf monarchies since the 70s, the military and ideological threat posed by Iran to the Gulf monarchs before and after the revolution, the military threat of Iraq under Saddam, the rising threat of terrorism after the war in Afghanistan, the potential of a nuclear Iran, Arab-Israeli conflict, Arab Revolts and the tension between the Gulf countries. In response to those issues, Chapter 1 depicts the monarchs' moves toward each other and especially toward decades-long rivals in the hope of appeasing any potential crisis. Lastly, Chapter 1 compiles preventive solutions such as military alliances, foreign military bases, and enlargement attempts of armies by Gulf monarchs who failed to alleviate the issues they faced. In this respect, Chapter 1 deals with the background of the issues that the Persian Gulf monarchs encountered as well as their approach to the issues.

Chapter 2 reviews the arms race literature. It seeks a definition for the arms race phenomenon. It also investigates the rationale for the arms race by seeking why nations arm. It tackles actors, reasons, themes, consequences, and debates on the arms race. It reviews the specific cases that are perceived as an arms race. Following the learnings from arms race literature, Chapter 2 builds the methodology of the whole study.

Chapter 3 analyzes how the Persian Gulf monarchies justified their armaments through the media. In this way, it provides the reader with a broader perspective on the nature of the rivalry between the Persian Gulf monarchies – Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar. Accordingly, Chapter 3 seeks answers to the following questions: What is the role of the media in making the arms race perception in the Gulf and how did the monarchies use the press when they justified their armaments? To this aim, chapter 3 analyzes the discourse of the Persian Gulf printed media with a qualitative content analysis method to reveal how the Gulf monarchies think about the issues in general, and especially in the arms industry and armament.

The aim of Chapter 4 is to present the argument of the thesis. It argues that the tension and conflict between Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar is not an arms race. In order to discuss the invalidity of the perception of the arms race in the Persian Gulf created by the discourse of mainstream media, the aggressive armament of actors, and military buildup, Chapter 4 comparatively analyzes the military buildup of the Gulf discussed in Chapter 1, the arms race literature examined in Chapter 2, and the media discourse researched in Chapter 3. Thus, Chapter 4 deals with the question of why the armament and military buildup in the Persian Gulf cannot be defined as an arms race, and how the military buildup in the Persian Gulf can be explained if it is not an arms race. Hence, Chapter 4 discusses and analyzes the findings of the study.

Chapter 5 summarizes the findings of the study. Following to summary of the findings, it presents the study's suggestion to the monarchies: a collective defense strategy. In this vein, Chapter 5 argues how to achieve collective defense among the GCC countries.



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## ABBREVIATIONS

GCC	GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL
IFLB	ISLAMIC FRONT FOR THE LIBERATION OF BAHRAIN
KSA	KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA
PSF	PENINSULA SHIELD FORCE
UAE	UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
UK	UNITED KINGDOM
UN	UNITED NATIONS
UNSC	UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL
US	UNITED STATES
USA	UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

## CHAPTER I

### HISTORY OF CONFLICT IN THE PERSIAN GULF: THREAT PERCEPTION, GESTURES, AND MILITARY BUILDUP

Chapter 1 examines the ongoing challenges threatening both the existence and the stability of Gulf monarchies and their ways of tackling them over the course of the 1970s up to today. The objective of Chapter 1 is to examine how Persian Gulf monarchies have responded to issues that threaten their security. In the general framework of the thesis, Chapter 1 examines the issues that triggered the arms race debate and discourse in the Persian Gulf, thus leading the monarchies to armament and military buildup. To this end, in section A, the paper deals with the issues faced by the Persian Gulf monarchies since the 70s, the military and ideological threat posed by Iran to the Gulf monarchs before and after the revolution, the military threat of Iraq under Saddam, the rising threat of terrorism after the war in Afghanistan, the prospect of a nuclear Iran, Arab-Israeli conflict, the Arab Revolts and the tension between the Gulf countries. In response to those issues, part B depicts the monarchs' chess-like moves toward each other and especially toward decades-long rivals in the hope of placating any potential crisis. And lastly, in part C, the paper compiles preventive solutions such as military alliances, foreign military bases and enlargement attempts of armies by Gulf's monarchs who failed to alleviate the issues they faced. In this respect, this chapter deals with the background of the issues that the Persian Gulf monarchs encountered as well as their approach to the issues.

## **A. Issues Threatening the Gulf Monarchies**

Lying at the crossroads of the United States' hegemonic motives and energy security demands, Russia's geopolitical interests, and China's search for energy, the Persian Gulf has been an arena of competition between the great powers since the Cold War. In one way or another, the above-listed motives of those superpowers have given way to significant turmoil in the Persian Gulf such as Iran's quest for regional hegemony before and after the revolution which emerged as a possible nuclear threat, and Saddam's Iraq which ended with the bloody civil war in the country. Like butterfly effects, these events naturally led to alarm among the Gulf monarchies over their security. The results were not unexpected: the Gulf monarchies are among the highest spenders on defense as they allocate billions to their defense expenditures. While the mainstream media continues to fuel the perception of an arms race among Gulf countries, some of the academic literature also terms this spending as an arms race. Nevertheless, to better understand the issues that increase and challenge the security concerns of the Persian Gulf monarchies and evaluate the perception of the arms race in the Gulf, it is necessary to address the issues that have threatened Gulf monarchies since the second half of the 20th century.

It is safe to say that the 1970s was the turning point in the obvious rise of the security and threat concerns among the Gulf monarchs. The below listed substantial events makes this clear:

- Iran's increasing impact in the Gulf before the Iranian Revolution in 1979.
- The Iranian Revolution of 1979.
- Iran-Iraq war.

- The political and military threat posed by Iraq, which desired to consolidate its regional impact by occupying Kuwait.
- In the 90s and 2000s, the spiral of terrorism and its threat to the Gulf monarchs.
- Iranian threat in 2000s, the Arab Spring, which appeared at the end of 2010 and affected the main players in the region, leading to uprisings in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the civil war in Yemen.
- The conflict, competition, and disagreement among the Gulf monarchies on how to respond to these challenges.

These events not only have changed the security policies of the Gulf countries, and directed the security doctrines and alliance decisions, but also undoubtedly accelerated the arms race discourse as so discussed by related literature and media. Therefore, the thesis will present a historical background to the armament and arms race debate by emphasizing the threats the Gulf monarchies have faced and motivated them towards military buildup.

While having most in common in cultural, economic, and linguistic terms as they share the same geography, it is hard to say that Gulf monarchs have gone through similar challenges in terms of threats and security issues. The Iranian revolution of 1979 is a better case of an event over which the reactions of neighboring countries differed substantially. While the ruling elites of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain fully considered the ideological outbreak of the Iranian revolution as a source of concern for their interests and well-being, the rulers of Oman and Qatar did not share the same level of concern. This also applies to the case of Saddam's threat to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait as these two felt a direct threat from Saddam which lay to their north, yet this was not

the case for Oman and Qatar. Thus, one should be cognizant of the different perceptions and reactions of the Gulf countries when they meet apparently similar threats or security alerts.

All in all, before delving deeper into the issues, the conceptual expressions used throughout the study should be clarified. Throughout the thesis, I use the term "Gulf Regimes" to refer to the three Gulf countries under examination here, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar. I examine the competition of these countries with each other and its results, and how the specter of the Iranian threat affects these countries' relations with one another. Beside the encounters and responses in terms of armament between these rivals, this study also emphasizes the armed competition among these countries as not being thoroughly discussed in the related literature.

### ***1. Pre-revolutionary Iran: Both a Threat and a Safeguard for the Gulf Monarchies***

Iran has been the pioneering country challenging the Gulf monarchies for decades. To put it differently, Iran poses a serious threat to the Persian Gulf monarchies with its geographical position, military capacity, ideology, regional demands, and historical position. Contrary to popular belief, the Gulf elites had to face the Iranian threat, not only upon the 1979 Iranian revolution, but even before, during the reign of the last Iranian Shah, Mohammed Riza Pahlavi. Before the 1979 revolution, Gulf monarchs both regarded Iran as a counterweight to other regional threats faced by the monarchies and also considered her as a threat due to its territorial demands from the Gulf.

The Shah's territorial demands from the Gulf caused the latter to begin to view Iran as a threat. These demands gained momentum when the United Kingdom, the



protector of monarchies in the region for many years, declared that it would gradually withdraw from the region.<sup>2</sup> The United Kingdom's withdrawal from Aden in 1968 and other Gulf emirates in 1970 facilitated the Shah of Iran to consolidate his power in the Gulf. In addition, the decline of Nasser's popularity after his defeat by Israel in 1967 allowed Iran to take over the role as the region's gendarmerie.<sup>3</sup> The tension was escalated by Iran's nostalgia for a Bahrain that historically belonged to Iran. Though he could not prevent Bahrain from declaring its independence in 1971, the Shah of Iran occupied three islands belonging to the Trucial States, the predecessor to the United Arab Emirates, which is sufficient to prove that Iran's demands and threats against the Gulf preceded the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

While revolutionary waves from Egypt threatened the Gulf monarchies through Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Oman, Iran's role in the region was mostly stabilizing and sometimes a source of recovery for the Gulf elites. Here, no one can underestimate the USA's use of a twin pillar policy between Iran and Saudi Arabia with the aim of protecting the Persian Gulf from Soviet influence.<sup>4</sup> Guaranteeing US military support, Iran provided logistical support to Riyadh in suppressing the threat from Yemen. Iran's direct military intervention also effectively suppressed the Soviet-backed anti-monarchy revolt, started in Oman in 1963 which was fed by Arab nationalist and socialist ideologies. All these developments demonstrate that Iran not only was among the

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<sup>2</sup> Simon C. Smith, "Britain's Decision to Withdraw from the Persian Gulf: A Pattern Not a Puzzle," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 44, no. 2 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2015.1123541>.

<sup>3</sup> F. Gregory Gause, *The international relations of the Persian Gulf* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Brannon, "Pillars, Petroleum and Power: The United States in the Gulf," *The Arab Studies Journal* 2, no. 1 (1994), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27933629>.

security issues that Gulf monarchies faced, but also, when given chance, never missed the chance to play the role of savior as it did in the Cold War period.

Before examining the Iranian revolution and its emergence as a security issue for the Gulf regimes, it is necessary to assess the Shiites living in the Gulf, especially in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Kuwait. The Shiites, who took part in these countries' social, political, and economic life, organized demonstrations for political and economic reasons in the 1950s and were among the issues that the ruling elites dealt with as a threat to internal security. Shiite workers in oil companies in the Gulf often held demonstrations due to working conditions and salaries.<sup>5</sup> In addition, Iranian workers who came to the region from Iran to work in oil companies were viewed as a security problem by the Gulf elites, as the Iranian Shah demanded land from the region's countries. When it came to the Bahraini Shiites, they supported Nasser against the United Kingdom in Egypt's nationalization period of the Suez Canal, which worried the Gulf monarchs the most as the UK was their guarantor against any external threat. The case of Kuwait was not so different. In Kuwait, the Shiites began to demand various political rights with the political movement they founded long before the Iranian revolution. Therefore, the Shiite minorities in the Gulf were a significant political and social issue in the monarchies long before the Iranian revolution. However, the Iranian revolution and its encouraging the religious mobilization and awakening of the Shiites in the Gulf ultimately came to be one of the most significant topic in the Middle East.

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<sup>5</sup> Laurence Louer, *Transnational Shia politics: religious and political networks in the Gulf* (London: Hurst & Company, 2008). <https://go.exlibris.link/qLV2y7Jq>.

## ***2. Iranian Revolution of 1979***

To everyone's surprise, the overthrow of the Iranian Shah by the 1979 revolution fundamentally undermined the security of the Gulf, transformed the stability and threat perception of the Gulf elites, disrupted the alliance structure in the region, drove new alliances, and caused a war that would last eight years.<sup>6</sup> Iran, an ally of the USA and Saudi Arabia and an important balancing factor for the security of the Gulf before the revolution, shifted towards an anti-American and anti-monarchy position in 1979 and turned into a severe threat especially for Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, Shiite minorities living in the Gulf monarchies began to mobilize against the Gulf elites, with the anti-monarchy call of their leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, dreaming of exporting the revolution to its neighbors.<sup>7</sup> During this period, the increasing number of violent demonstrations and terrorist attacks worsened the case for the Gulf elites.<sup>8</sup>

Apart from the upheavals of the Shiite minorities, Khomeini's antagonistic messages also cemented the security panic in the Gulf regimes. In that regard, one should not underestimate the fertile grounds the revolution achieved. The revolution was later able to spread its ideology beyond its borders, in the backpacks of Shiite groups that had been taught in Iran.<sup>9</sup> In this vein, the organizations established by the Shiites in the Gulf monarchies such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Bahrain came to the fore as tools that carried Iran's revolutionary message and Gulf elites viewing them as elements of instability. It is safe to say that Khomeini's message of

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<sup>6</sup> Gause, *The international relations of the Persian Gulf*.

<sup>7</sup> Ruhollah Khomeini and Hamid Algar, *Islam and revolution : writings and declarations of Imam Khomeini* (Berkeley: Mizan, 1981).

<sup>8</sup> Gause, *The international relations of the Persian Gulf*.

<sup>9</sup> Louer, *Transnational Shia politics: religious and political networks in the Gulf*.

exporting the revolution to other countries became a foreign policy characteristic of Iran that fueled concerns and caused Gulf countries to view Tehran as a serious security issue in the Gulf.<sup>10</sup>

In Bahrain, where there has been tension between the ruling elite and the Shiite society for a long time, the masses organized anti-regime demonstrations in 1979 in parallel with the call of Khomeini. In 1981, the Bahraini regime announced that it had prevented a coup attempt and that the IFLB (Bahrain Liberation Islamic Front), founded by Shiite groups, was behind the coup. Even in Kuwait, where Shiite groups have more political rights than in other Gulf countries, the spiral of terrorism destabilized while there were limited uprisings. The 1983 bombing attacks by Shiite groups in Kuwait against the regime elite and their foreign allies again revealed that Iran was involved in the internal affairs of the Gulf and emerged as an element of instability.<sup>11</sup> The tension in the region, which rose due to Iran's policies targeting the monarchies and especially the Saudi Arabian regime, continued until Iran took a step back from this policy.

### ***3. Iran-Iraq War***

Between 1980-88, the Iran-Iraq war, disrupted the supply and delivery of oil and consequently destabilized the Gulf monarchies and triggered security issues in the region. It is necessary to remember two critical outcomes on the way to war. First, Egypt's signing of a peace agreement with Israel in 1978 –the Camp David Accords– and alliance with the USA, was punished by Arab countries, which shook the regional

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<sup>10</sup> Khomeini and Algar, *Islam and revolution : writings and declarations of Imam Khomeini*.

<sup>11</sup> Louer, *Transnational Shia politics: religious and political networks in the Gulf*.

impact of Cairo.<sup>12</sup> It also created a power vacuum in the region that the Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein did not hesitate to fill. Further, Iran itself could not avoid the detrimental outcomes of this vacuum as it experienced fluctuations in its domestic and foreign policy. While domestically, it tried to maintain its stability, it also triggered the internal problems in the Persian Gulf countries, especially Iraq.

When war broke out in September 1980, the Gulf monarchies were in a dilemma whether to support revolutionary Iran or Iraq's ambitious leader. Yet, the Iranian threat was more urgent, and revolutionary waves had already begun to threaten the stability of the Gulf. Thus, the Gulf monarchies had to align with Iraq to balance Iran. Yet, for reasons few could foresee, the cost of the war was high for the Gulf elite. First, the war lasted longer than expected, and Iran attacked oil refineries and ships belong to the Gulf monarchs during the war. Also, Iran-backed Shiite ideological groups in the Gulf monarchs attacked state institutions and statesmen in the Gulf monarchies especially in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Kuwait between 1983-1985. Furthermore, the most significant outcome that increased the cost of the war for the Gulf regimes was to inflate the Iraq war machine. When Baghdad failed to achieve meaningful success in the war against Iran, Gulf monarchs and the West supported Saddam in economic and military terms that later caused serious headache for the region.<sup>13</sup>

#### ***4. Iraqi Threat to Gulf Monarchs***

The Gulf elite managed to suppress the revolutionary storm from Iran and the side effects of the Iran-Iraq war, yet they would soon to have expend much time and

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<sup>12</sup> Gause, *The international relations of the Persian Gulf*.

<sup>13</sup> Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, "Iran-UAE Relations," in *Security and Bilateral Issues between Iran and Its Arab Neighbours* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2016).

effort to face the Iraqi threat in the early 1990s. During the eight-year war, Saddam had developed his weapon capacity with the intense military support he received from the USA, Western countries and Gulf monarchies. However, this aid given to Iraq to balance Iran was not enough to save the Iraqi economy after the war. Iraq, which was crushed under a heavy debt burden with the loans it received during the war, demanded more financial aid while asking the Gulf elites to remove its debts to save its economy. Again, Gulf elites, especially Kuwait, did not respond positively to Iraq's demands.<sup>14</sup> The Saddam administration, which desperately needed oil revenues to revive its economy due to low oil prices accused the Gulf monarchies, especially Kuwait and the UAE. However, Saddam's holding on to power was seemingly more critical than Iraq's grappling with the economic crisis. The Iraqi leader thought that foreign countries wanted to overthrow the Iraqi regime and himself.<sup>15</sup> Thus, Saddam responded by invading Kuwait, the wealthy Gulf monarchy.

### ***5. Terrorism in the Gulf and September 11***

After suppressing Iraq's military threat with US help and receiving security guarantees from Washington, which pursued a policy of containment of Iran, the Gulf monarchies had to confront the issue of global terrorism since the mid-90s. One could say that USA and the Gulf regimes' intentions and military and fiscal applications were the main factor behind the emergence of global terrorism, as militants, some of whom were Gulf citizens supported by the USA and especially Saudi Arabia, had won the war against the Soviets in Afghanistan. Just after their return to their homes, these fighters

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<sup>14</sup> Gause, *The international relations of the Persian Gulf*.

<sup>15</sup> F. Gregory Gause, "Iraq's Decisions to Go to War, 1980 and 1990," *Middle East Journal* 56, no. 1 (2002), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4329720>.

declared their opposition to the alliance of the Gulf regimes with the United States and naturally to the existence of US bases in the region.<sup>16</sup> To prove their opposition, the militants attacked the US military presence in the Gulf, especially Saudi Arabia. Facing simultaneously similar attacks from Iran-backed Shiite militants, the Gulf monarchies, especially Saudis, began to wrestle with relatively new headache of terror from all sides.

In 2001, the effects of the September 11 attacks organized by Al-Qaeda in the USA not only transformed security policies worldwide, but also forced the Gulf monarchies to take new security measures. As a matter of fact, an essential part of those who organized and planned the September 11 attacks were Saudi citizens.<sup>17</sup> This resulted in the USA reducing its military presence in Saudi Arabia to the minimum level in 2003, presenting Al Qaeda as a serious threat for its interests in the region and moving its military presence to Qatar. The most significant application of this move on the ground was that Qatar and the United Arab Emirates advanced their strategic significance so much that they began to develop military capacities and began to dream of having independent security policies.<sup>18</sup> In this vein, those small Gulf monarchies strengthened their relations with the USA. In this context, the terrorism spiral in the Gulf shook the prestige of Saudi Arabia to the benefit of USA, tightened the relations of small Gulf monarchies with the USA, and deepened the split between Saudi Arabia and small Gulf monarchies.

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<sup>16</sup> Gause, *The international relations of the Persian Gulf*.

<sup>17</sup> Gause, *The international relations of the Persian Gulf*.

<sup>18</sup> Gause, *The international relations of the Persian Gulf*.

## ***6. Nuclear Program of Iran, Arab-Israeli Conflict and Arab Revolt***

To understand today's security crisis and the framework of the military doctrines experienced by the Gulf regimes, it is necessary to grasp issues such as Iran's increasing regional impact, the Arab uprisings, and intra-Gulf conflicts that the Gulf elites faced throughout the 2000s. After the September 11 attacks, the US intervention in Iraq in 2003 led to the revival of regional and local issues that the Gulf elites faced since the second half of the 20th century. After the US invasion, Tehran, which consolidated its influence in the region, especially in Iraq, triggered ideological and sectarian tensions, posing a threat to the Gulf elite once again. The mobilization of Shiites in Iraq after Saddam became a source of inspiration for the Shiites living in the Gulf. In addition, Tehran's aggressive nuclear policies reminded everyone that armament was a reality for the region. Because of Iran's nuclear activities, the regional balance of power fundamentally transformed. Thanks to Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's triumph in the presidential elections in 2005, Iran's radical rhetoric about the region advanced, while the concerns of the Gulf elites increased simultaneously. Despite Iran's challenge, the Gulf elites tried gestures and appeasement policies first, which will be discussed in part B. However, when the Gulf monarchies could not convince Iran, they asked to the USA to suppress Iran. In addition, GCC members, especially Saudi Arabia and UAE, implied that they would respond to Tehran's nuclear program by establishing their own nuclear programs. Thus, Iran's policies transformed the policies of Gulf regimes, especially Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Iran's regional policies, which became more aggressive with Ahmadinejad's term, became a thorny issue for the Gulf regimes. Iran embraced the Palestinian issue by giving open support to Hamas, which won the 2006 elections in Palestine. Criticizing



the US military presence in the Gulf, stating that the countries in the region, including Iran, should ensure the Gulf's security, Ahmadinejad's Gulf policy rang alarm bells among the Gulf elites. The ambitious Iranian leader's desire to embrace the Palestinian issue after his remarks toward Israel became another security concern for the Gulf. No one could ensure that Tehran would not attack the Gulf monarchies in the face of a military operation by Israel or the USA against Iran, which was willing to increase tensions in regional issues, and its nuclear activities implying that it was looking to take over leadership in the Islamic world. Moreover, the war between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon in 2006 was a source of concern for the Gulf. The fact that Iran carried the proxy war to Lebanon after Iraq raised concerns for the Gulf elites over their own Shiite populations. In this context, Iran's strengthening of its hand in the Gulf and the Levant brought up discussions that Tehran wanted to establish a Shiite crescent. Therefore, since the 2000s, Tehran, with its policies carried out through its proxies in Lebanon and Iraq and its stance on the Palestinian issue, has been among the severe security issues that the Gulf monarchies and especially Saudi Arabia have had to deal with.<sup>19</sup>

The Arab Revolts challenged the internal and external policies of the Gulf regimes, as it shook the balance of power in the region, strengthened proxy wars in the Levant, turned into civil wars in Libya, Yemen, and Syria, and overthrew the 30-year regime in Egypt. Although the Gulf regimes have successfully endured the Arab Revolts until now, it also brought up the most crucial hesitation regarding the security of the Gulf regimes, namely the survival of the regimes and the preservation of the

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<sup>19</sup> F. Gregory Gause, "Revolution and threat perception: Iran and the Middle East," *International Politics* 52, no. 5 (2015/09/01 2015), <https://doi.org/10.1057/ip.2015.27>; Gause, *The international relations of the Persian Gulf*.

status quo.<sup>20</sup> When demonstrations reached Bahrain in 2011, Saudi Arabia and the UAE used security forces to suppress the uprising. While Qatar and Oman called for dialogue, they did not send troops to Bahrain. This case is among the aspects that demonstrate the rift in the Gulf and the divergence between security policies. On the other hand, while the uprisings in Bahrain were bloodily suppressed, there were plenty of riots and demonstrations in other Gulf countries, especially in Saudi Arabia. In Yemen, the fact that the demonstrations turned into a civil war and, later, a proxy war waged by the Saudi Arabian-led GCC coalition against Iran is among the issues that affect Gulf security and trigger disagreements among GCC members. In addition, the bloody civil wars that occurred with the loss of state authority in countries such as Syria, Iraq, and Libya, caused a spiral of terrorism that culminated with the arrival of militias not only from the West, but also the Gulf monarchies. Consequently, Arab Revolts turned into issues that challenged the Gulf elites and reshaped the security policies of these monarchies.

### ***7. Disputes between the Gulf Elites***

The issues threatening the six-GCC-member Gulf monarchy are not limited to external or internal threats. The contentious relations of the Gulf elites with each other also emerge as a source of tension and threat between these regimes. At this point, it should be remembered that the land and sea borders, which were ill-determined during the British colonial period, were one source of problems between these countries from the 1930s to the 2000s. In addition, the geography of the Gulf contains some of the world's most significant oil and natural gas resources. As such, the determination of

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<sup>20</sup> "Will the Gulf monarchies work together?," Middle East Quarterly, March 1997, accessed June, 2022, <https://www.meforum.org/340/will-the-gulf-monarchies-work-together>.

land and sea borders in their favor is a crucial issue for the Gulf regimes that earn most of their income from natural resources. Therefore, sharing natural resources and determining borders are among the factors that decide the rift or competition among these countries and inevitable trigger security problems.

At this point, it is necessary to consider that Saudi Arabia, the largest country in the Arabian Peninsula in terms of size and population, is neighbors with other GCC members, and is the only land neighbor of Bahrain and Qatar. With the outcome of this location and rich natural resources, Saudi Arabia experienced border problems with all the remaining GCC member countries. For instance, the border issue between Saudi Arabia and Qatar could not be settled until 2001. In September 1992, tensions on the borders of the two countries resulted in the deaths of two Qatari soldiers and a Saudi soldier.<sup>21</sup> Due to a border dispute, Saudi Arabia did not recognize the independence of the UAE for three years, which was established in 1971.<sup>22</sup>

On the other hand, the GCC, established by the Gulf regimes in 1981, was unable to settle these issues at the outset. The Gulf elites' suspicion toward each other poisoned the GCC's institutional structure and rendered the council a lame duck. In this vein, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait could not resolve the maritime border dispute until 2000, when Iran began to drill for natural resources in the disputed region. This move by Iran was the catalyst that brought Kuwait and Saudi Arabia together to solve the maritime border issue. Another example emerged between Qatar and Bahrain due to the status of the Hawar Islands off the shore Doha. Due to the crisis, the two countries did

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<sup>21</sup> Krista E. Wiegand, "Resolution of Border Disputes in the Arabian Gulf," *The Journal of Territorial and Maritime Studies* 1, no. 1 (2014), <https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.aub.edu.lb/stable/26664097>.

<sup>22</sup> William A. Rugh, "The Foreign Policy of the United Arab Emirates," *The Middle East journal* 50, no. 1 (1996), <https://go.exlibris.link/wBQ7mXkG>.

not establish diplomatic relations for 26 years.<sup>23</sup> The two brought the issue of the Hawar Islands to the International Court of Justice. Eventually, they accepted the decision of the court in 2001.<sup>24</sup> The border problems that Saudi Arabia had with other Gulf regimes were also resolved through bilateral diplomatic initiatives. Therefore, it would not be wrong to argue that the GCC's weak institutional structure reveals the competition and conflict between the Gulf elites.

Among the Gulf regimes, the hegemony of Saudi Arabia, which stands out in terms of size, population, resources, and history, is among the issues that cause tension and threaten these countries. Saudi Arabia desires not only to dominate areas such as common currency, economic union, and joint army through the GCC, but also to direct Gulf's security policies, especially against Iran. Riyadh's attitude disturbs the other Gulf monarchies who would like to run an independent foreign policy. On the other hand, although they came together under the GCC, the independent foreign policy moves of Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, which became more evident as of the beginning of the 2000s, are among the factors that annoy Saudi Arabia. That is to say, due to its diverging foreign policy on issues such as Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Iran, Qatar's ruling elites were excluded and besieged by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain, first in 2014 and then in 2017. These events brought the tension among the GCC members to its highest level, so much so that the idea of military intervention in Qatar came to the fore.

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<sup>23</sup> Ulrichsen, "Iran-UAE Relations.": "March 2, 1997: Qatar and Bahrain look to boost ties," Gulf News, March 01, 2017, accessed March, 2022, <https://gulfnews.com/today-history/march-2-1997-qatar-and-bahrain-look-to-boost-ties-1.1986650>.

<sup>24</sup> Krista E. Wiegand, "Bahrain, Qatar, and the Hawar Islands: Resolution of a Gulf Territorial Dispute," *The Middle East journal* 66, no. 1 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.3751/66.1.14>, <https://go.exlibris.link/t5nvLVdT>.

Another source of tension among the Gulf monarchies is the determination of policies toward Iran and how to establish a relationship with Tehran. Since the mid-2000s, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, which have openly taken a stand against Tehran due to Iran's regional and nuclear policies, have often articulated that they are eager to support a possible foreign military attack against Iran. On the other hand, Oman, and Kuwait, which have positive relations with Iran, do not support this policy. The UAE, which has strong economic relations with Iran and has more than 400,000 Iranian businessmen in its country is not in tandem with Saudi Arabia in its Iranian policy, either. These political divergences had direct implementation on the ground. To illustrate, when protesters in Tehran burned the Saudi Arabian embassy in 2016, while Saudi Arabia and Bahrain suspended relations with Iran, the UAE adopted a more balanced stance by not severing its diplomatic relations with Iran. Likewise, Qatar did not fully follow the Saudi's stand against the Tehran, as it sees Iran as a balancing factor against Saudi Arabia, partially leading to it being punished by a blockade by the Saudi-led coalition. Considering each has a different agenda regarding the region, relations between Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates generate tensions and produce differences in foreign policy and security perceptions. This situation increases conflict among the Gulf countries and causes the security crisis to deepen.

## **B. Gulf Elites' Gestures towards Regional Powers and Each Other**

In this section, the paper discusses how the Gulf monarchies respond to the challenges that transformed the security perception in the region. Before adopting an aggressive armament policy, the Gulf monarchies, to appease the threats they faced, adopted a balancing policy by forming alliances with regional powers and superpowers,

made concessions through gestures to regional powers, and emphasized diplomacy. At first glance, one of the most significant reasons for these solution methods adopted by the monarchs can be perceived as the fact that the Gulf regimes do not have the human, military, and technological capacity to fight their regional rivals. However, through the study it will be clarified that the main cause behind this foreign policy maneuver is the regimes' fragile chemistry and so priority given to their survival. In the Middle East and North Africa, where the life span of the regimes is dependent on military coups, civil wars, and assassinations, one can easily understand the main causes of the priority given by Gulf elites to the survival of their regimes and the continuation of the status quo.<sup>25</sup>

### ***1. Gulf Monarchs' Gestures towards Iran***

From the 1980s till the early 2000s, Gulf elites consistently wanted to appease Iran case through cooperation and diplomacy, as it posed one of the most severe challenges to the Gulf since the 1979 revolution. After the death of the Khomeini in June 1989, the shift in leadership showed that there would be a noticeable softening and maneuvering in Iran's domestic and foreign policy. In this vein, the arrival of the pragmatic Hashemi Rafsanjani to the Presidency in August 1989 turned Iran toward its neighbors. When Saddam invaded Kuwait in 1990, Rafsanjani was not late to denounce Iraq emphasizing that it respects its neighbors. One should note that the rationale behind the deescalating foreign policy of Iran was not only related with politics, but also for economic reasons. It is because Rafsanjani promised in his election campaign that his liberal economic policies would revive Iran's exhausted economy by restraining Iran's revolutionary attitude towards its neighbors. The so-called moderate figure Mohammed

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<sup>25</sup> Gause, *The international relations of the Persian Gulf*; Joseph Mann, "King Faisal and the Challenge of Nasser's Revolutionary Ideology," *Middle Eastern Studies* 48, no. 5 (2012/09/01 2012), <https://doi.org/10.1080/00263206.2012.706220>.

Khatami of Iran wanted to continue Rafsanjani's legacy by accelerating Iran's reconciliation with its Gulf neighbors, especially Saudi Arabia. In addition, the restraining of the discourse of exporting revolution to other countries in foreign policy caused the revival of Iran's relations with its Arab neighbors. On the other hand, witnessing the positive steps taken by Iran, the GCC members, especially Saudi Arabia, were eager to improve relations and solve decades-long issues.

It should be emphasized that there are economic and political reasons behind Iran's reining in its revolutionary discourse and its efforts to enhance its relations with the Gulf. First of all, Tehran wanted to solve economic domestic problems such as unemployment, inflation, and price instability that resulted from the long war with Iraq. Secondly, Iran desired to overcome the isolation and containment imposed by the USA and the West by improving relations with its neighbors. Having positive relations with its neighbors would be a ground for Iran to find partners in the Gulf to negotiate on oil prices as Saudi Arabia holds a strong position in OPEC.<sup>26</sup> Thirdly, the regional atmosphere created by the withdrawal of Iraq from the scene after the Gulf War of 1991 made Iran want to consolidate and expand its regional impact.<sup>27</sup> In spite of Iran's moderate intentions, the Gulf regimes' reactions differed a lot as they still had security concerns in their heads. While the small Gulf regimes approached Iran to counterbalance Saudi Arabia, Riyadh wanted to placate the threat from Tehran. On the other hand, some of the GCC members, whose security sensitivity rose to a new high with Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, wanted to gain momentum in relations with Tehran to

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<sup>26</sup> Gause, *The international relations of the Persian Gulf*.

<sup>27</sup> Gause, "Revolution and threat perception: Iran and the Middle East."; R. K. Ramazani, "Iran's Foreign Policy: Both North and South," *Middle East Journal* 46, no. 3 (1992), <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.aub.edu.lb/stable/4328462>; Gause, *The international relations of the Persian Gulf*.

secure their regimes and appease revolutionary Iran after the reining in of Iraq. Therefore, the Gulf's dance with Iran is mainly linked to the security of the Gulf regimes and the continuation of the status quo in the Gulf.

#### a. Saudi Arabia

With the election of Rafsanjani as President, the GCC countries, specifically Riyadh, improved their relations with Tehran with various diplomatic visits and gestures, but with cautious steps. After the earthquake that caused the death of thousands of people in the Iranian city of Manjil in June 1990, Saudi Arabia immediately sent humanitarian aid to Iran.<sup>28</sup> Thereafter, the foreign ministers of Riyadh and Tehran met in New York in 1990 and then in Oman in March 1991 to reconcile the relations. In June 1991, Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal visited Tehran.<sup>29</sup> As a result of these negotiations, Riyadh decided to give a quota of 110,000 pilgrimages to Iran for the pilgrimage in 1991.<sup>30</sup> Just four years ago, in 1987, more than 400 people, most of them Iranian pilgrims, died in the clashes between Saudi forces and the Iranian pilgrims who demonstrated during the pilgrimage with Khomeini's calling, after which Riyadh suspended its relations with Tehran. Considering these outcomes, one can claim that both sides agreed to refresh bilateral relations.

Relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran rose from ministerial dialogue to high-level visits in the second half of the 90s, and this trend continued to gain momentum

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<sup>28</sup> "Saudi Arabia and Iran have not always been foes," Al Jazeera, March 13, 2021, accessed April, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/3/13/sectarianism-and-saudi-iranian-relations>; Steve Coll, "Earthquake shakes iran's view of its enemies," *Washington Post* July 2, 1990, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1990/07/02/earthquake-shakes-irans-view-of-its-enemies/d4573bc9-6f7d-40f0-84f8-5eb6cccedeb8f/>.

<sup>29</sup> Ramazani, "Iran's Foreign Policy: Both North and South."

<sup>30</sup> Ramazani, "Iran's Foreign Policy: Both North and South."



until the end of the 2000s. In this context, while GCC member states participated in the Organization of Islamic Conference's summit in Tehran in December 1997, Saudi Arabia was represented by Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdulaziz as a sign of goodwill. Iranian President Khatami welcomed Crown Prince Abdullah at the airport in Tehran. The Emir of Kuwait, Shaykh Jabir al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, also attended the summit in Tehran. In February 1998, former President Rafsanjani met with Crown Prince Abdullah during his 10-day visit to Saudi Arabia, and in return, Crown Prince Abdullah revisited Tehran in September 1998.<sup>31</sup> The dizzying pace of high-level bilateral talks demonstrated the gestures and efforts of reconciliation between the Arabian Gulf monarchies and Iran.

On his tour to visit Arab countries, Iranian President Khatami went to Jeddah in May 1999 - Khatami visited Saudi Arabia for the second time in 2002 - becoming the first incumbent president to visit Saudi Arabia after the 1979 revolution.<sup>32</sup> During his visit, Khatami discussed bilateral relations, including oil prices, with Crown Prince Abdullah. In the joint statement issued after the meeting, the two leaders emphasized that they would respect each other's national sovereignty and independence, and the two countries would not interfere in each other's internal affairs. This alleviated the Gulf elites' security concerns and marked a significant improvement in relations compared to the Khomeini era.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, following the meeting, the Riyadh administration's

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<sup>31</sup> "Rafsanjani fi al-Riyad ghadan: Khatimi yunashid Fahd aleamal lihalli al'azmat al-Iraqiat selmiyaan," Al-Bayan, February 20, 1998, accessed March, 2022, <https://www.albayan.ae/last-page/1998-02-20-1.1014413>.

<sup>32</sup> Gause, "Revolution and threat perception: Iran and the Middle East."

<sup>33</sup> "Saudi, Iranian leaders issue joint statement," BBC Monitoring Middle East - Political, May 19, 1999, accessed March, 2022, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/monitoring/348176.stm>.

gestures to Tehran continued, and Crown Prince Abdullah described Iran as a brother country in an interview he gave to the press.<sup>34</sup>

As a result of these visits and gestures, the two countries succeeded in bringing their relations to strategic talks by signing various agreements on security, economy, oil, and law. In this context, the two countries signed a security pact on terrorism and drug trafficking in 2001. Moreover, the endeavors of the two countries to keep oil prices high led to the emergence of an oil agreement between Riyadh and Tehran in 2003. On the other hand, in 2005, Iran's President Khatami and the president-elect Mahmoud Ahmadinejad sent condolences for the deceased King of Saudi Arabia, Fahd, while the new King of Saudi Arabia, Abdullah, was among the first Arab leaders to send a congratulatory message to Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Following Ahmadinejad's taking office in August 2005 as president, he went to Saudi Arabia to attend the Organization of Islamic Conference summit in Mecca in December 2005, and he paid an official visit in 2007 to Saudi Arabia. All these reciprocal visits and gestures hinted the willingness of the two sides to repair and develop relations and ensure the Gulf's security for their own sake.

#### b. United Arab Emirates

In addition to Saudi Arabia's optimistic attitude towards Iran, other members of the GCC, encouraged by the positive atmosphere of the 1990s, improved their relations with Iran and saw Tehran as a counterbalance to Riyadh's hegemony.<sup>35</sup> Aside from

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<sup>34</sup> "Iran welcomes Saudi crown prince's remarks on defence," *BBC Monitoring Middle East - Political* (London), 06/02/1999 1999, <https://www.proquest.com/wire-feeds/iran-welcomes-saudi-crown-princes-remarks-on/docview/451280261/se-2?accountid=8555>.

<sup>35</sup> Ramazani, "Iran's Foreign Policy: Both North and South."

Oman, which has had balanced commercial and political relations with Iran since the Shah period, UAE and Qatar responded positively to Tehran's regional rapprochement policy during the 90s, and were gradually ready to develop economic and political relations. Thus, until the mid-2000s, the UAE and especially Qatar made gestures to Iran at every opportunity, and Iran responded positively to these gestures.

It would not be inaccurate to argue that the UAE is the country with the most complicated and strange relations with Iran among the Gulf regimes. Firstly, UAE has close commercial relations with Iran via Dubai, and hosts more than 400,000 Iranians, most of whom are businessmen. Plus, the UAE hosts more than 3,000 Iranian-owned commercial enterprises. Further, unlike Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Kuwait, the UAE has been relatively free from ethnic and sectarian issues that would restrict its relations with Iran. However, the two simultaneously have profound issues with little room for diplomacy, such as the islands occupied by Iran just before the UAE's independence in 1971, Iran's regional and nuclear policies, the regional tensions escalated by the Arab Uprisings, and the regional policies of the UAE that attempted to suppress Iran's hegemony.

Diplomatic initiatives between the two countries, which have taken slow and careful steps since the 90s, led to gestures that improved relations between Tehran and Abu Dhabi. However, the relations between the two during the 1980s are worth mentioning. In the Iran-Iraq war, in which the Gulf regimes aligned with the Baghdad administration, the UAE, consisting of a federation of seven emirates, took a more independent stance in the war than other GCC members.<sup>36</sup> Dubai, Sharjah, and Ummul Karaviyyin, who had commercial relations with Iran, continued these commercial

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<sup>36</sup> Ulrichsen, "Iran-UAE Relations."

relations without interruption during the war. In addition, the founder of the UAE, Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, has been known as a mediator and proponent of diplomacy, which allowed Abu Dhabi to act as a mediator between Iran and Iraq in the 8-year-long war. Although Abu Dhabi's efforts to end the war were inconclusive, it was among the steps that warmed the relations between the two countries.

It was a critical for both countries to have leaders who prioritized diplomacy in this process. While the positive political atmosphere that emerged with Rafsanjani and then Khatami brought Tehran closer to the Gulf countries, the presence of Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan as the head of state in the UAE was among the most significant aspects that provided reciprocal gestures between the two countries. With this contribution, Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan sent a congratulatory message to Khatami, who was elected President of Iran for a second term in 2001. Al Nahyan went a step further and sent ministers from his cabinet to Tehran in July 2001 to congratulate President Khatami. It was the first visit at the highest level in 11 years.<sup>37</sup> While the visits of the UAE delegations to Iran continued in the 2000s, high-level Iranian delegations also visited the UAE in return.

At the beginning of the Ahmadinejad era, the two countries endeavored to enhance relations at every opportunity. When Ahmadinejad made his first official visit to Abu Dhabi in May 2007, he became the first Iranian President to visit UAE after its independence in 1971. While UAE President Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan welcomed Ahmadinejad at the airport in Abu Dhabi, 12 Iranian commercial divers, whom the

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<sup>37</sup> "UAE Foreign Affairs Minister visits Tehran tomorrow," Kuwait News Agency KUNA, July 22, 2001, accessed April, 2022, <https://www.kuna.net.kw/ArticleDetails.aspx?id=1179391&language=en>.

UAE had detained off the shore of Abu Musa Island, were released as a gesture.<sup>38</sup> During his visit, Ahmadinejad stressed that bilateral relations should be carried further in trade, politics, and culture and highlighted that Iran and the UAE were brother nations and not in competition. Furthermore, he implied that it was the USA that was embroiling relations between the UAE and Iran.<sup>39</sup> Yet, despite all these outcomes, Abu Dhabi cautiously approached Iran's gestures due to its increasing anti-US discourse, nuclear activities, and regional policies during the Ahmadinejad era.

Ahmadinejad's ambitious policies that damaged Iran's image during the second half of the 2000s caused Tehran to become isolated not only in the international arena, but also the Gulf region. Following the end of the Ahmadinejad era and after Hasan Rouhani ascended to presidency in 2013, the Gulf states and Iran attempted to revive their relations. To this end, the UAE sent high-level delegations with positive messages to Iran in order to restore its political relations. In November 2013, UAE Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan was received by President Rouhani when he visited Iran and met with Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif. In his statement, Al Nahyan signaled that the relations with Iran in the new period could turn in a positive direction. He described Iran as a partner.<sup>40</sup> In 2013 and 2014, the reciprocal visits between Iran and the UAE cultivated a memorandum of understanding in various fields,

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<sup>38</sup> "Iran president starts first official visit to UAE," Reuters, May 13, 2007, accessed April, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-emirates-iran-ahmadinejad-idUSL1331465520070513>.

<sup>39</sup> "Iran President Arrives in UAE," Payvand, May 13, 2007, accessed April, 2022, <http://www.payvand.com/news/07/may/1150.html>; "Iran's Ahmadinejad in UAE talks," BBC Monitoring Middle East, May 13, 2007, accessed April, 2022, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/6650745.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/6650745.stm).

<sup>40</sup> "Iran and Gulf states make tentative diplomatic moves," Reuters, November 28, 2013, accessed April, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-gulfarabs-syria-idUKBRE9AR0MC20131128>.

and both sides highlighted the positive side of relations.<sup>41</sup> In addition, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, Emir of Dubai, who has close trade relations with Iran, not surprisingly stated that they do not desire any problems because Iran is a neighbor and pressure on Iran should be reduced, sanctions should be lifted, and room should be opened for Iran.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, despite having severe issues with Iran due to the Abu Musa Island crisis, and Tehran's general regional policies and nuclear activities, with the impact of its joint trade with Iran, UAE made gestures with careful steps in order to not break relations entirely and to keep Iran at the table. In return, Tehran desired to develop relations with the UAE at every opportunity. However, the legacy of the Ahmadinejad era, the turmoil in the region following the Arab Uprisings, and Iran's position and proxy wars were real challenges that limited and hindered this reconciliation.

### c. Qatar

Criticized and punished by the Gulf elites for its independent foreign policy, Qatar desired to maintain the momentum it had acquired in balanced bilateral relations with Iran since the 90s. On the other hand, Iran showed its appetite to enhance its bilateral relations with Doha, which it sided with in the regional crises in which Qatar was a party. In 1986, the Tehran administration supported Qatar's claims in the Fasht al

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<sup>41</sup> Ulrichsen, "Iran-UAE Relations."; "UAE, Iran slowly rebuild trust," *Al-Monitor*, April 28, 2014, accessed May, 2022, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2014/04/uae-iran-rebuilding-trust.html>.

<sup>42</sup> "al-Shaykh Muhamad bin Rashid al Maktoum: aml 'alaa yatarashah al-Sisi wa'an tarfae aleuqubat ean Iran," *BBC Arabic*, January 13, 2014, accessed May, 2022, [https://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast/2014/01/140112\\_uae\\_maktoum\\_pm\\_interview](https://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast/2014/01/140112_uae_maktoum_pm_interview); "Muhamad bin Rashid yabhath mae Zarif taeziz alsalam walaistiqrar," *Al-Bayan*, April 16, 2014, accessed April, 2022, <https://www.albayan.ae/across-the-uae/news-and-reports/2014-04-16-1.2103032>.

Dibal tension between Bahrain and Qatar.<sup>43</sup> While Iran took one more step by lifting the direct oil purchase ban it imposed on Qatar in 1990, in return, the two countries came to the stage of agreeing on a joint gas pipeline construction project.<sup>44</sup>

Qatar, also, did not remain uninterested in Iran's gestures and showed a tendency to side with Tehran in regional crises despite the USA and Saudi Arabia's discontent. When the US wanted to expand the isolation on Iran over its nuclear policies, in an interview with the press, the Qatari Foreign Minister stressed Qatari and Iran relations and highlighted that Qatar did not have any issue with Iran.<sup>45</sup> In Qatar's approach toward Iran, one can trace that Doha was well aware of Iran's weight in the intricate Gulf politics and moved accordingly throughout the 90s. Thus, during his 1997 visit to the United States, Qatari leader Hamad bin Khalifa said that Washington's Iran policies had failed, and that it needed to reconcile with Iran and its new president, Mohammed Khatami.<sup>46</sup> Balancing the Saudis and Emiratis, Iran fits the box well for Qatar, which continued its moves to bring Iran to the table.

In the 2000s, reconciliation and cooperation between Qatar and Iran continued. When Iran was under international pressure for its nuclear program, Doha supported Tehran in the international arena. In July 2006, when the UNSC resolution demanded

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<sup>43</sup> Jill Crystal, *Oil and politics in the Gulf: rulers and merchants in Kuwait and Qatar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>44</sup> "Iran-Qatar Gas Field," *New York Times* (1923-) (New York, N.Y.), 11/14/1990 Nov 14 1990, <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/iran-qatar-gas-field/docview/108443245/se-2?accountid=8555>.

<sup>45</sup> Caryle Murphy, "A Small Nation, Qatar Stands Tall by Standing Apart: [FINAL Edition]," *The Washington Post* (pre-1997 Fulltext) (Washington, D.C., United States Washington, D.C.), 04/03/1994 Apr 03 1994, <https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/small-nation-qatar-stands-tall-standing-apart/docview/307743967/se-2?accountid=8555>.

<sup>46</sup> W. Lippman Thomas, "Qatar Leader Chides US. Over Gulf: Visiting Ruler Says Policies Toward Iran, Iraq Have Failed," *The Washington Post* (1974-), 06/11/1997 Jun 11 1997, <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/qatar-leader-chides-us-over-gulf/docview/1453849340/se-2?accountid=8555>.

Iran suspend uranium enrichment, Doha was the only country that voted no.<sup>47</sup> However, in December 2006, when the UNSC imposed nuclear sanctions on Iran for not stopping uranium enrichment, Qatar approved the resolution. In the statement on Doha's approval of the resolution, Qatar announced that Iran has the right to develop nuclear technology for peaceful reasons, but the UNSC resolution aimed to prevent nuclear energy use for destructive purposes.<sup>48</sup> Thus, it shows that Qatar was also aware of the limits to its relationship with Iran vis-à-vis the other Gulf regimes.

When the Gulf monarchies realized that relations with Iran would be painful during the Ahmadinejad era, they tried to use possible compromises to convince Iran. To illustrate, when nuclear sanctions isolated Iran and Tehran's harsh moves against the USA increased tensions, the GCC members invited Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to the GCC summit in Doha in December 2007. In the statements before the summit, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the UAE stated that they were uncomfortable with Tehran's nuclear activities. On the other hand, noting its discomfort with the US military presence in the Gulf, Iran offered economic and security cooperation to the Gulf regimes at the summit. At the same time, GCC members proposed providing uranium to Iran to be enriched by the international consortium. However, the Gulf members did not tend to accept the proposal of an independent security architect to be built by the Gulf monarchies along with Iran.<sup>49</sup> The Doha administration was also the

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<sup>47</sup> "Security Council demands Iran suspend uranium enrichment by 31 August, or face possible economic, diplomatic sanctions," United Nations, July 31, 2006, accessed April, 2022, <https://press.un.org/en/2006/sc8792.doc.htm>.

<sup>48</sup> "Security Council imposes sanctions on Iran for failure to halt uranium enrichment, unanimously adopting resolution 1737 (2006)," United Nations, December 23, 2006, accessed April, 2022, <https://press.un.org/en/2006/sc8928.doc.htm>.

<sup>49</sup> "Ahmadinejad arrives for Gulf summit," Al Jazeera, December 3, 2007, accessed May, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2007/12/3/ahmadinejad-arrives-for-gulf-summit>; "Iran's Ahmadinejad proposes regional pacts at GCC summit," The Jerusalem Post, December 3, 2007, accessed April, 2022,



mediator in the agreement between the Saudi Arabian-backed coalition government and the opposition Iran-backed Hezbollah, which ended the 18-month government crisis in Lebanon in 2008. However, relations between Iran and the Gulf began to deteriorate when the efforts to appease Iran failed.

Although Iran's hostile policies towards the Gulf, especially Saudi Arabia in regional crises during the Arab Uprisings, especially in Syria and Yemen, mutual gestures and diplomacy between Qatar and Iran continued at the expense of Doha's relation with the Gulf monarchies. As a result of its developing relations with Iran, the Doha administration signed a defense pact with Tehran in February 2010.<sup>50</sup> When Iranian protestors burned the Saudi Embassy in Tehran following the execution of the Shiite cleric Nimr al-Nimr in Saudi Arabia, the Doha administration recalled its ambassador to Tehran in January 2016, stating that it was in solidarity with Saudi Arabia. However, unlike Saudis and Bahrainis, Qatar did not suspend its relations with Iran. This case proves well both the priority Qatar attaches to relations with Iran as well as the crack in the GCC.

The production and export of natural resources in the Persian Gulf are also among the issues that develop relations and create gestures between Iran and Qatar. First of all, both countries are among the countries with the largest natural resource reserves in the world. Iran and Qatar hold the second and third largest natural gas reserves, respectively, after Russia. One of the largest natural gas reserves in the world is located between the two countries. Also, the two are among the top five countries in

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<https://www.jpost.com/Iranian-Threat/News/Irans-Ahmadinejad-proposes-regional-pacts-at-GCC-summit#!>

<sup>50</sup> "Iran Signs Cooperation Pact with Gulf Neighbor Qatar," Voice of America, February 23, 2010, accessed May, 2022, <https://www.voanews.com/a/iran-signs-cooperation-pact-with-gulf-neighbor-qatar-85251882/171859.html>.

natural gas production.<sup>51</sup> In this context, in April 2017, Qatar announced that it had lifted the moratorium for developing the joint natural gas field in the maritime border region with Iran. At the same time, Iran announced that it had started new projects in the region and signed agreements with British and Chinese companies in the same month after this announcement.<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, when Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain imposed a blockade on Qatar in June 2017 with allegations such as terrorism support, relations with Iran, and independent foreign policies, the Tehran administration aligned with Doha and not only opened its airspace to Qatar, but also sent food aid.<sup>53</sup> All these are enough to demonstrate that Qatar's stance on Iran are far from aligned with the policies of the Saudi-led coalition, and reveal the disagreement and rifts on security concerns among the Gulf elites.

## ***2. GCC's Gestures towards Each Other***

Before resorting to armament and diverged security policies, the Gulf regimes attempted to build a joint security structure to ensure their security and solve the issue they faced. The fear fed by the Iranian revolution in 1979 and the Iran-Iraq war reminded them of the need for the joint security of the Gulf monarchies. During his visit to Kuwait in November 1980, the Saudi Arabian Minister of Internal Affairs, Nayef bin

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<sup>51</sup> Mehran Kamrava, "Iran-Qatar Relations," in *Security and Bilateral Issues between Iran and its Arab Neighbours*, ed. Anoushiravan Ehteshami, Neil Quilliam, and Gawdat Bahgat (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017).

<sup>52</sup> "Iran launches offshore gas projects in Gulf," Reuters, April 16, 2017, accessed May, 2022, <https://gulfbusiness.com/iran-launches-offshore-gas-projects-gulf/>.

<sup>53</sup> "Iran sends planes stuffed with food to Qatar," CNN, June 11, 2017, accessed May, 2022, <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/06/11/middleeast/iran-qatar-planes-food/index.html>.

Abdul Aziz, alluded to the Gulf countries establishing a joint security mechanism.<sup>54</sup> In talks within the Gulf, the Gulf monarchs desired to establish a common security framework as it was crucial for the Gulf regimes to take relations and cooperation to the next level in the fields of politics, economy, and security.<sup>55</sup>

The Gulf monarchies have addressed the issue of constructing a joint military and security structure multiple times since the establishment of the GCC. In this context, the joint military training of the armies of GCC members in October 1983 formed the basis of the brigade, stationed in Saudi Arabia, and named Peninsula Shield Force. With PSF, the Gulf monarchies intended to achieve tasks such as a common security framework, joint operations, contingency plans, purchase of weapons, and joint training.<sup>56</sup> However, the PSF could not play a meaningful role in preventing threats to the Gulf's security, as manifested clearly during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990.

Nonetheless, some Gulf elites insisted on building a common defense framework through the GCC, broadening the framework of military cooperation, and building deterrence. Following the Gulf War, Oman voiced its proposal to transform the

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<sup>54</sup> Yoel Guzansky, "Defence Cooperation in the Arabian Gulf: The Peninsula Shield Force Put to the Test," *Middle Eastern Studies* 50, no. 4 (2014/07/04 2014), <https://doi.org/10.1080/00263206.2014.901219>; "Saudis to sign Gulf defence pact," *The Jerusalem Post (1950-1988)*, 11/27/1980 Nov 27 1980, <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/saudis-sign-gulf-defence-pact/docview/920421477/se-2?accountid=8555>.

<sup>55</sup> "GCC about us," accessed May, 2022, <https://www.gcc-sg.org/en-us/AboutGCC/Pages/StartingPointsAndGoals.aspx>.

<sup>56</sup> Fred H. Lawson, "Security dilemmas and conflict spirals in the Persian Gulf," in *Routledge Handbook Of Persian Gulf Politics*, ed. Mehran Kamrava (London: Routledge, 2020); "Gulf states forming rapid deployment force," *The Jerusalem Post (1950-1988)*, 06/13/1983 Jun 13 1983, <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/gulf-states-forming-rapid-deployment-force/docview/928512066/se-2?accountid=8555>.

Peninsula Shield Force into a 100,000-strong force.<sup>57</sup> The plan was discussed in the GCC until the mid-90s but could not be realized, as many of the Gulf states feared that the elites in Riyadh wanted to monopolize not only the Gulf economy, but also the security policies of the Gulf. In addition, Saudi Arabia, along with other Gulf members, considered that it would be more advantageous in terms of cost-benefit to accommodate US security guarantees for regional security architecture. Therefore, following the end of the Gulf War, the GCC members welcomed the establishment of US military bases on their territories, even though they were not keen to accept US military engagement in the region before the Gulf war due to public objection. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 aligned the Gulf with the US. Moreover, for the Gulf elite living under the British protectorate until the 1970s, it was more painless to align under the US security umbrella rather than the idea of building common security. Apart from that, the small Gulf countries were worried that the possibility of Saudi hegemony would become more dominant as Riyadh empowered its position. Considering all this, it would not be unfair to state that the Gulf regimes could not establish a common understanding over security during the 90s despite their attempts.

Thanks to the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, Iran's nuclear activities, the increasing threat of terrorism, by the 2000s, the Gulf elites did not hesitate in making gestures to each other by taking new steps to create a meaningful security architecture and build a common security understanding. Again, under the shadows of the above-mentioned events, the Gulf elites signed the Common Defense Agreement in 2000. With the focus on harmony and coordination as stated in the agreement, the Gulf monarchies wanted to protect their territorial integrity, ensure national security, and

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<sup>57</sup> Lawson, "Security dilemmas and conflict spirals in the Persian Gulf."

build a common defense. It was also meaningful that Gulf elites announced the establishment of the Joint Defense Council, where these issues would be handled periodically.<sup>58</sup>

GCC members went one step further, and at their leaders' summits in 2005 and 2006, at the request of Saudi Arabia, they agreed to strengthen the Peninsula Shield Force both quantitatively and qualitatively.<sup>59</sup> When the Arab Revolts reached Bahrain in February 2011 and threatened the regime, the Peninsula Shield Force stepped in for the regime's security. However, while Saudi Arabia and the UAE used PSF to send forces to Manama to suppress the uprisings in Bahrain, Qatar and Oman preferred to observe the developments with a low profile and called for dialogue with the opposition. Kuwait also signaled dialogue but sent its navy to Bahrain to protect the regime. However, despite all this, the Gulf elites decided to establish a joint naval force in Bahrain under the GCC in 2014. Here, it is safe to express that the Gulf elites gave a chance to common security architecture and a common army by making diplomatic investments from the early 1980s to the mid-2010s. However, the intra-GCC conflict, which emerged with the acceleration of new threats in the region after 2010, became one of the most critical characteristics that destroyed the dreams of collective security and a united army in the Gulf.

Before the disputes that broke out between the Saudi-led bloc and Qatar in 2014, GCC countries endeavored to persuade each other by making various gestures. To this

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<sup>58</sup> "GCC - The Closing Statement of the Twenty First Session," accessed June, 2022, <https://www.gcc-sg.org/en-us/Statements/SupremeCouncil/Pages/TwentyFirstSession.aspx>.

<sup>59</sup> "GCC - The Closing Statement of the Twenty Sixth Session," accessed June, 2022, <https://www.gcc-sg.org/en-us/Statements/SupremeCouncil/Pages/TwentySixthSession.aspx>; "GCC - The Closing Statement of the Twenty Seventh Session," accessed June, 2022, <https://www.gcc-sg.org/en-us/Statements/SupremeCouncil/Pages/-TwentySeventhSession.aspx>.

end, Kuwait came forward as a mediator to reconcile the parties within the GCC. In the context of reconciliation, Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, the young Qatari Emir, who took over the administration in a bloodless coup in June 2013, met with King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia in Riyadh in November 2013.<sup>60</sup> Kuwaiti Emir Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah accompanied the meeting. Following the meeting, the international press disclosed that the Emir of Qatar and the other participants of the meeting had signed a pledge of compliance.<sup>61</sup> However, the handwritten agreement between Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, UAE and Qatar was more than a pledge, as it foreshadowed the pressure that was to be established on Qatar by the Saudi Arabia-led bloc a few years later. According to the document, while Qatar promised not to interfere in other's internal affairs, it also promised not to support non-state actors as well as antagonistic media, a reference to Qatar's Al Jazeera.<sup>62</sup> Following the agreement, the Gulf monarchies carried out further negotiations at the ministerial level through the GCC in Kuwait in January 2014 and in Riyadh in March 2014 to convince Qatar. However, when the negotiations proved fruitless, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the UAE withdrew their ambassadors from Qatar in March 2014. When the crisis ended nine months later thanks to the mediation of Kuwait, Qatar followed a policy that was more in line with the GCC until the crisis in 2017.

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<sup>60</sup> "Khadim alharamayn bahath mae 'amiray alKuayt waQatar almawducat almushtarakat wal'ahdath waltatawurat al'iqlimiat walduwalia", Al-Riyadh, November 24, 2013, accessed May, 2022, <https://www.alriyadh.com/886690>.

<sup>61</sup> Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, "The rise and decline of the Gulf cooperation council," in *Routledge Handbook of Persian Gulf Politics*, ed. Mehran Kamrava (London: Routledge, 2020).

<sup>62</sup> "Exclusive: The secret documents that help explain the Qatar crisis," CNN, July 11, 2017, accessed May, 2022, <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/07/10/politics/secret-documents-qatar-crisis-gulf-saudi/index.html>.

The parties who wanted to overcome the March 2014 crisis made various gestures to each other until the Qatar blockade in June 2017. In November 2014, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, and Qatar met again in Riyadh over the disputes and signed another pledge of compliance called the Supplementary Riyadh Agreement, which Kuwait had once again helped mediate. The agreement, which included four articles, was a continuation of the original agreement signed in November 2013, but this time Al Jazeera was mentioned by name.<sup>63</sup> Following the pledge, the GCC reached an agreement on counterterrorism at its Minister of Internal Affairs meeting in Doha in May 2015.<sup>64</sup> Accordingly, GCC members agreed to establish a joint terrorist blacklist mechanism including individuals and organizations.<sup>65</sup>

Saudi Arabia, led by King Salman bin Abdulaziz and his ambitious son Mohammed bin Salman, who came to power after the death of King Abdullah, launched an operation against the Iran-backed Houthis in Yemen in April 2015. Five months after the start of the operation, Qatar actively participated in the Saudi-led operation by sending military equipment and a force consisting of one thousand troops to Yemen.<sup>66</sup> Qatar's decision was seen as a valuable gesture as it came just after Riyadh and Abu Dhabi suffered heavy casualties in Yemen. Carrying an active role in the Saudi-led coalition in the Yemen war, Qatar continued its efforts to soothe the tension. Just before the crisis in 2017, despite international criticism, Doha deported a Saudi human rights

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<sup>63</sup> "Supplementary Riyadh Agreement," United Nations Treaty Collection, November 16, 2014, accessed May, 2022, <https://treaties.un.org/Pages/showDetails.aspx?objid=0800000280527ec6>.

<sup>64</sup> "GCC to have unified terror blacklist; KSA efforts hailed," Arab News, May 2, 2015, accessed May, 2022, <https://www.arabnews.com/saudi-arabia/news/740761>.

<sup>65</sup> Ulrichsen, "The rise and decline of the Gulf cooperation council."

<sup>66</sup> "Qatar deploys 1,000 ground troops to fight in Yemen," Al Jazeera, September 7, 2015, accessed May, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/9/7/qatar-deploys-1000-ground-troops-to-fight-in-yemen>.

activist to Riyadh.<sup>67</sup> However, all these policies of gestures could not thwart the growth of the Gulf's crack, particularly between the Saudi Arabia led-bloc and Qatar. In June 2017, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Bahrain announced that they had cut political, economic, and diplomatic relations with Qatar due to Doha's connections with the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, and Iran. Furthermore, Saudi led bloc declared the imposition of an embargo on Qatar and closed their airspace to the country.

### **C. Rationale for the Gulf Countries' Military Buildup**

The positive atmosphere among the Persian Gulf countries during the 90s and early 2000s turned sour following the election of Ahmadinejad of Iran in 2005. The regional competition and tension among the parties lead to ups and downs in bilateral relations. In this vein, the result of Iran's aggressive regional policy turned some GCC members namely Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Bahrain into enemies. While those parties waged war via their proxies in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, in the same parallel, the acceleration of regional crises increased tensions within the GCC, and thus the old rivalry and cracks were regenerated among the GCC members. In this framework, it would be safe to argue that the positive atmosphere for the security of the Persian Gulf was reversed into chaos by Iran's ambitious regional policies and nuclear activities, the Arab Uprisings, and regional proxy wars. These developments not only increased the sense of insecurity among the GCC members but also brought security concerns to the forefront. In addition, Iran's regional agenda caused Saudi Arabia and the UAE to put aside their previous gestures to appease Iran, and instead turned against Tehran. For this

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<sup>67</sup> Lynn Maalouf, "Qatar: Activist at risk of torture after deportation to Saudi Arabia", news release, May 30, 2017, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2017/05/qatar-activist-at-risk-of-torture-after-deportation-to-saudi-arabia/>; Ulrichsen, "The rise and decline of the Gulf cooperation council."



reason, the increasing rivalry and competition among the actors in the Gulf and the possibility of conflict focused attention on the arms race in the Gulf.

### ***1. The Gulf's Failed Gestures toward Iran***

The previous section discussed the gestures of the Gulf elites, especially Saudi Arabia, to improve relations with Iran and to prevent Tehran from posing a threat to Gulf security. Iran, on the other hand, tried to restore its relations with the Gulf elites during the Rafsanjani and especially the Khatami era. Despite the gestures of the Gulf monarchies, Ahmadinejad's hawkish policies not only increased panic among the Gulf elites, but also accelerated armament among the Gulf monarchies. In fact, various groups in Iran during the Rafsanjani and Khatami era, such as the Revolutionary Guards, resisted the administration's development of relations with the Gulf elite.<sup>68</sup> In addition, the Iranian administration sent mixed signals to the Gulf elites. Iran, which occupied UAE's Abu Musa and two other islands in 1971, expanded its presence in these islands in 1992, drawing the anger of Abu Dhabi and other Gulf elites. In this line, the Gulf elites believed that Iran backed the Shiite rebellions in Bahrain in 1994 and 1996. Also, as a result of the investigation, the Iranian Revolutionary Guards had a finger in the 1996 Khobar Tower attacks in Saudi Arabia, which caused the death of 19 US soldiers.<sup>69</sup> Thus, the above examples led the Gulf elites to approach Rafsanjani and Khatami's Gulf policy cautiously. For this reason, in almost all the GCC meetings, the issue of Abu Musa and other islands occupied by Iran was on the agenda, and the Gulf monarchies handled the Iran issue with particular care and attention. Nevertheless, Iran

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<sup>68</sup> Gause, "Revolution and threat perception: Iran and the Middle East."

<sup>69</sup> Gause, "Revolution and threat perception: Iran and the Middle East."

and the Gulf successfully cooled down the negative occasions and prevented the breakdown of relations for a while.

The radical transformation which started in the mid-2000s in the region with the encouragement of the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the fight against terrorism triggered many fault lines, from the security policies of regional countries to the emergence of hawk figures. In this context, Mahmud Ahmadinejad's Iraq policies, along with Iran's increasing nuclear activities, prevented the Gulf regimes' efforts to reconcile with Tehran and also troubled the relations re-established since the 1990s. Actually, one can argue that Saudi Arabia and the Gulf elites tried everything to persuade Iran. GCC leaders invited Ahmadinejad to Riyadh in March 2007 and to the GCC leaders' summit in Qatar the same year in December. Saudi Arabia even invited the Iranian President to pilgrimage.<sup>70</sup> However, when the parties could not reach a reconciliation despite all gestures, especially Saudi Arabia and the UAE began to make harsh statements toward Tehran. It was reported to the press by Saudi authorities that Saudi King Abdullah warned Iran's Ahmadinejad on the nuclear issue by saying "don't play with fire" in the 2007 meeting.<sup>71</sup> In addition, Riyadh began to express its displeasure with Iran's interference in Arab internal affairs in matters such as Lebanon, Hamas, and Iraq. King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia appealed to the United States - referring to Iran - to cut off the head of the snake, and the king also stressed that Tehran's nuclear facilities should be attacked.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> "Iran and Saudi alert to "enemy" plots - Ahmadinejad," Reuters, March 4, 2007, accessed May, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-iran-saudi-idUKHAF43764420070304>; "Ahmadinejad arrives for Gulf summit."

<sup>71</sup> Christopher Dickey, "Dickey: Saudi's War of Independence from Washington," *Newsweek*, March 28, 2007, <https://www.newsweek.com/dickey-saudis-war-independence-washington-95915>.

<sup>72</sup> Ross Colvin, "'Cut off head of snake" Saudis told U.S. on Iran

When the Arab Uprisings reached Bahrain in 2011, the Gulf elites accused Iran of being behind the demonstrations in Manama and the anti-regime riots in Saudi Arabia's eastern province. While Saudi Arabia and the UAE's common ground with Iran was rapidly shrinking, in 2016, Riyadh executed Shiite cleric Nemr al-Nemr over the allegation that he provoked anti-monarchy riots in Saudi Arabia.<sup>73</sup> Following the execution, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain cut ties with Iran due to the burning of the Riyadh embassy in anti-Saudi demonstrations in Tehran.<sup>74</sup> However, other actors in the GCC approached the developments more cautiously. While Abu Dhabi downgraded its relations with Tehran, Kuwait and Qatar withdrew their ambassadors from Iran but did not cut off relations completely.<sup>75</sup> At the same time, the proxy war in Yemen intensified. The tension went as far as the parties blaming each other over social media.<sup>76</sup> After all, the crack and disagreements in the GCC over Iran became even more apparent. On the other hand, the cooperation and diplomacy that the Gulf elites and Iran established since the 90s came to a dead end.

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, "Reuters November 29, 2010, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-wikileaks-iran-saudis-idUSTRE6AS02B20101129>.

<sup>73</sup> "Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr: Saudi Arabia executes top Shia cleric," BBC, January 2, 2016, accessed 2022, June, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-35213244>.

<sup>74</sup> "Saudi embassy in Tehran attacked by protesters", "Al Arabia, updated May 20, 2020, January 3, 2016, accessed June, 2022, <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2016/01/03/Saudi-embassy-attacked-in-Tehran->.

<sup>75</sup> "On Iran-Saudi rift, Gulf Arab states tread with caution," Reuters, January 11, 2016, accessed June, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-iran-gulf-states-idUSKCN0UP1TL20160111>.

<sup>76</sup> @SaudiEmbassyUSA, "'everyone knows that the #Iranians are present in #Yemen, provide support for the #Houthis, supply them with weapons...'", Twitter, October 14, 2015, <https://twitter.com/SaudiEmbassyUSA/status/654372103320240128>; @HassanRouhani, "'Why do you bomb oppressed people of Yemen, destroy infrastructure of a weak country & kill women & children?' #Yemenattack," Twitter, April 15, 2015, <https://twitter.com/HassanRouhani/status/588370970706051072>.

## ***2. GCC – The Failure to Create Unified Military Force***

The Gulf elites could not reach the military and political plans they dreamed of during the 80s and 90s due to the obstacles they faced. The reasons for this failure were the security umbrella offered by the USA, the intra-GCC conflict and the fear of Saudi hegemony, and the inability to reach a consensus on the common threat. For instance, Qatar, Kuwait, and UAE were suspicious of the Peninsula Shield Force, which the GCC formed after the council's joint exercise in 1984, on the grounds that it would pave the way for the strengthening of the Saudi Arabian hegemony over the Gulf. The small Gulf monarchies were worried by Saudi Arabia's large population, as well as the disagreements over the command and control of the PSF.

Likewise, Riyadh was hostile to proposals of a joint military structure by other Gulf monarchies. For instance, following the first Gulf War in 1991, Riyadh rejected a proposal by Oman to construct a 100,000 forces strong GCC joint army.<sup>77</sup> In addition, the security umbrella that Egypt and Syria would provide to the GCC under the Damascus Declaration was stalled due to the success of the US-led Desert Storm Operation and the belief that the security umbrella that Washington would offer would be more effective. It was no secret that the Gulf elites, especially Saudi Arabia, would feel uncomfortable with the presence of another Arab country's soldiers on their lands. On the other hand, with the acceleration of the disputes between Saudi Arabia and Qatar within the GCC, Doha withdrew its forces shortly after the Peninsula Shield Force exercise in Kuwait began in March 1996.<sup>78</sup> The one of the reason was that when the Emir of Qatar, Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani ousted his father in Doha with a bloodless

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<sup>77</sup> Lawson, "Security dilemmas and conflict spirals in the persian Gulf."

<sup>78</sup> James Bruce, "Qatari exercise opt-out deepens rift with GCC: [1996 Edition]," *Jane's Defence Weekly* (March 13, 1996), <https://www.proquest.com/trade-journals/qatari-exercise-opt-out-deepens-rift-with-gcc/docview/198503342/se-2?accountid=14511>.

coup in June 1995, the Saudis did not hesitate to present their displeasure. In fact, the Peninsula Shield Force was ranked last in security commitment in the eyes of the GCC. According to Kuwait's Chief of Staff, Fahd Al-Amir, the national army came first, foreign military support -the US commitment- came second, and PSF came last in his country's security architecture.<sup>79</sup> Even this approach itself reveals the Gulf elite's skepticism towards a common security architecture. Therefore, one can conclude that border issues between GCC members, their willingness to interfere in each other's internal affairs, and their suspicions about the common security architecture negatively affected the construction of a joint army.

The reasons behind the uselessness of the Peninsula Shield Force in the 1980s and 1990s were cost-benefit unevenness, a shortage of human resources, the Western security umbrella being more appropriate, and the command-and-control issue. By the 2000s, the sharp difference of the threat perception of the GCC members over the policy to be carried out against Iran, the Arab Revolts, the Israel-Palestine issue, and the Muslim Brotherhood fed the perception of deep distrust between the Gulf monarchies. Thus, the increase in disagreement and strife among the Gulf elites caused them to pursue individual security policies, thereby undermining the dreams of a joint military structure and accelerating armament. At this point, while the efforts of the joint defense council, which the GCC formed with the joint security agreement signed in 2000, were not fruitful, Saudi Arabia's desire to transform the Peninsula Shield Force in 2005 into a heavily armed division (of around 20 thousand soldiers) in terms of quantity and quality

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<sup>79</sup> Guzansky, "Defence Cooperation in the Arabian Gulf."

was not responded. As with many of the steps over the PSF, this one also remained on paper.<sup>80</sup>

When the anti-regime uprisings took place in Bahrain in 2011, only Saudi Arabia and the UAE sent forces to Manama under the framework of PSF to protect the regime, while Qatar and Oman preferred to call for dialogue with the opposition. Kuwait also signaled dialogue but sent its navy to Bahrain to protect the regime. While all these factors hindered the GCC's dreams of joint security policies and the formation of the joint army, PSF did not construct deterrence. Therefore, it is safe to state that the environment of insecurity, which has arisen as a result of the parties' distrust of each other increased with the impact of regional developments, was one of the most critical factors that pushed Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar to be included in the category of highest weapon-importers over the past decade.

### ***3. How did Gulf Regimes Expand Their Military Buildup?***

Between the 1980-1990s, the Iran-Iraq war, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, and the Gulf war posed threats not only to the security of the Gulf elites but also to their economies. During the Iran-Iraq war, Iran's attacks on oil tankers caused billions of dollars of income loss for the Gulf countries.<sup>81</sup> Thus, the Gulf monarchies desired to increase their economic cooperation and the establishment of a common security framework against the increasing regional threat due to the Iranian revolution and the Iran-Iraq war, therefore establishing the Gulf Cooperation Council in 1981. As a result, when Iran gained the upper hand in the war, it deteriorated the security of the Gulf

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<sup>80</sup> Guzansky, "Defence Cooperation in the Arabian Gulf."

<sup>81</sup> Gause, *The international relations of the Persian Gulf*.

countries, and triggered US military deployment in the Persian Gulf. Therefore, the Iran-Iraq war, along with Iran's revolutionary foreign policy, was among the most vital crises that the Gulf elites had to face throughout the 1980s.

When Saddam invaded and annexed Kuwait in August 1990, the Gulf monarchies, especially Saudi Arabia, took irrevocable measures both in and out of its border. First, the invasion made it clear to the world that the Gulf Cooperation Council, established in 1981, could not defend the Gulf countries against Saddam. So, despite the reactions from their own public and other Arab countries, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia had to call the US for aid. When Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein did not give up on the invasion of Kuwait, the US-led coalition forces attacked with an air and ground operation against Saddam's forces. The Saddam administration, on the other hand, launched a missile attack on Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain in response. This situation increased the atmosphere of panic in the Gulf. However, when the US-led coalition's attacks on Iraq intensified, Saddam's forces had to retreat from Kuwait at the end of February 1991.

Thanks to the result of Gulf war, Saddam's threat to the Gulf monarchies were suppressed. Also, Iran turned to its internal problems and restrained the revolutionary discourse. This led to the emergence of a power vacuum in the Gulf. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia wanted to use this gap to expand its hegemony over other Gulf monarchies. The Gulf monarchies, on the other hand, welcomed US forces on their territories, both to protect themselves from potential threats and to prevent Saudi Arabian rising hegemony. Thus, a large number of US military forces once deployed in Saudi Arabia due to the Gulf War now consolidated with land, sea, and air bases from Qatar to Bahrain, from Kuwait to the United Arab Emirates.

On the other hand, the preference of small Gulf monarchies, who favored the US umbrella over Saudi Arabia's hegemony, indicated the long-standing problems among the Gulf elites. The USA, on the one hand, provided security to the Gulf with the military bases it established, and it also contributed to the acceleration of armament in the region with the arms agreements it signed with the Gulf monarchies. At the same time, Western countries also accelerated their arms export to the Persian Gulf countries. Moreover, the Gulf's corrupt royal family members utilized these deals to make money for themselves, as in the Al Yamamah deal.<sup>82</sup> In this context, Saddam's invasion of Kuwait and the Gulf War that followed were among the most critical events posing a threat to the security of the Gulf monarchies while also transforming the security perception and alignment of the Gulf elites.

#### **D. Transformation of Threat Perception**

All in all, the Gulf monarchies have faced numerous challenges threatening their existence over the course of the 1970s till today. In this line, the Persian Gulf has been a region where great powers compete for their interests since the Cold War due to energy security and the geopolitical importance of the region. In one way or another, the above listed motives of those superpowers have given way to significant turmoil in the Persian Gulf such as Iran's quest for regional hegemony before and after the revolution which came up as a possible nuclear threat, and Saddam's Iraq which culminated with the invasion of Kuwait and the US invasion of Iraq. The Gulf monarchs have not only tried to appease those threats, but also aimed to settle their intra-GCC disputes. They attempted to revive a joint military union and common security architecture. However,

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<sup>82</sup> David Leigh and Rob Evans, "The al-Yamamah deal," *The Guardian* June 7, 2007, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/jun/07/bae15>.



while they saw the US security umbrella as more effective for security architecture, their security priorities and regional policies went in contrary directions. In this vein, Chapter 1 found that the Gulf monarchs could not overcome the feelings of insecurity while they accelerated independent security policies, armament, and military buildup. Thus, Chapter 1 discovered that this is the reference point for the general impression that an arms race is happening between Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar against each other. At the same time, Saudi and UAE seemingly take measures against Iran. In this vein, Chapter 1 examined the issues that fueled the arms race debate and threatened the security of the Gulf monarchies. Thus, Chapter 2 evaluates the arms race phenomenon and provides examples to set the background for the arms race debates in the Gulf.

## CHAPTER II

### WHY NATIONS ARM

Chapter 1 examined the issues that Persian Gulf monarchies faced and how Persian Gulf monarchies have responded to issues that threaten their security. It revealed that the threats that Gulf monarchs faced and their responses to those threats triggered the arms race discourse in the Persian Gulf. Chapter 2 reviews the literature on arms races. The objective of Chapter 2 is to examine how arms races occur between actors. Accordingly, Chapter 2 investigates 'Why do countries militarize' in the context of arms races and 'How do they militarize.' The objective of Chapter 2 is also to examine the examples of the arms race. Chapter 2 aims to lay the groundwork for understanding the armament behavior of cases in the Gulf by examining the examples of arms races in the literature. Chapter 2 then builds the methodology of the study. The arms race literature explored in Chapter 2 forms the heart of the study, given that the thesis questions the reasons for armament and arms race discourse in the Gulf. In section A, the study seeks a definition of the arms race phenomenon. In section B, the study investigates the rationale for arms race by asking why nations arm. The section tackles with reasons, actors, themes, consequences, and the debates on arms races. In section C, the study reviews the specific cases that are perceived as arms races. In section D, the study evaluates the lessons learned from the literature review. In section E, the study builds its methodology utilizing review of the literature.

## A. What is an Arms Race?

'Why nations arm' is an issue that international relations and war studies have long been dealing with. Scholars dealt with theories and concepts to analyze and clarify the issue, resulting in an extensive literature. According to one school of International Relations, the realism, one explanation is the desire to increase power. In this line, the one of the answer revolving around why nations arm would be directly related to power. Thus, one can conclude that desiring arms or military buildup is related to power. It would build a base for the second question. Why do nations seek to obtain or increase power? The literature gives comprehensive and multiple answers to this complex question. Among the most basic answers is that states desire arms to defend themselves. States want to build deterrence by acquiring defensive materials. Thus, by acquiring weapons, states imply to the enemy or potential enemy: If you wage war, you will face catastrophe.

For states, the second drive to be achieved by arming is to gain political leverage and attack to achieve their international goals. Perhaps, the central problem for the realist approach is how to rein in greedy and selfish states. Thanks to the anarchic structure of the international environment, nations may want to achieve their various objectives by gaining power and defeating the powerless. For this purpose, nations may want to build arms and reach power. Thus, the literature sought various answers to explain any such events happening between two or more states.

In the related literature, one of the answers to the issue is called armament race, a renowned concept. Lewis F. Richardson's works on the arms race are one of the earliest attempts to theorize the issue.<sup>83</sup> He defines an arms race as it happens between

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<sup>83</sup> L. F. Richardson, "Could an Arms-Race End Without Fighting?," *Nature* 168, no. 4274 (1951/09/01 1951), <https://doi.org/10.1038/168567b0>.

two states because of the escalation of the current balance of arms. Samuel L.

Huntington's definition is also among one of the earliest attempts in the literature. For Huntington, an arms race not only is "a progressive comparative peacetime increase in armaments by two states or coalition of states resulting from conflicting purposes or mutual fears. An arms race is thus a form of reciprocal interaction between two states or coalitions."<sup>84</sup> Richardson's and Huntington's stance differs them from other scholars as they mostly elaborate on the arms race's interstate structure, and tackle the bilateral structure of the arms race.

Grant T. Hammond identifies an arms race as a situation where actors seek political leverage via armament or military superiority over an adversary.<sup>85</sup> Hammond's simplistic and logical explanation for the arms race cannot be found in Colin Gray's stance on arms races as he numerates more detailed drives behind the term. Gray defines the term arms race with a list; i-there should be at least two or more parties aware of each other's hostility, ii-the parties should structure their armed forces by paying attention to the armament attitude of the enemy. iii-they should be in an intense qualitative and quantitative competition on issues such as soldiers, weapons, the doctrine of war. iv- there must be rapid qualitative and/or quantitative increases in the weapons, soldiers.<sup>86</sup> However, Gray's study and Hammond's article agreed on the political aspects of arms races. David Atkinson brings the general definition of the arms

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<sup>84</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, "ARMS RACES: PREREQUISITES AND RESULTS," *Public policy (Cambridge)* 8 (1958): 41.

<sup>85</sup> Grant Tedrick Hammond, *Plowshares into swords : arms races in international politics, 1840-1991* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993).

<sup>86</sup> Colin S. Gray, "The Arms Race Phenomenon," *World Politics* 24, no. 1 (1971), <https://doi.org/10.2307/2009706>, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/article/arms-race-phenomenon/B780FDD0C24BCD543FC27129DB6ACC93>.

race from the rich literature of the concept, and he builds the concept over the previous definitions including Gray's stance.<sup>87</sup> According to Atkinson, an arms race is an intense competition between two or more adversary states who seek military technological advancements or numerical military superiority over the other.<sup>88</sup>

After the Cold War, arms race studies saw a relative decline, as scholars turned their attention to other fields. However, there has been an increase in arms race studies lately and new studies criticize traditional approaches. Recent studies on the arms race demonstrate that it is not easy to apply the arms race concept to cases and it is difficult to identify the arms race phenomenon as any competition over arms. In this regard, recent studies of arms races focus on the causes and origins of arms races and their relationship to war.<sup>89</sup> Those studies also critically examine conventional realist approaches to arms race such as deterrence, action reaction model and the spiral model. Thus, the conventional realist approaches of the literature on the arms race have been tackled extensively in recent studies.

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<sup>87</sup> David Atkinson, "Arms Races," (Oxford Bibliographies, 2011).  
<https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199743292/obo-9780199743292-0002.xml>.

<sup>88</sup> Atkinson, "Arms Races."

<sup>89</sup> Richard J. Stoll, "To Arms, To Arms: What Do We Know About Arms Races?," (Oxford University Press, 2017-09-26 2017).  
<https://oxfordre.com/politics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-350>; Toby J Rider, Michael G Findley, and Paul F Diehl, "Just part of the game? Arms races, rivalry, and war," *Journal of Peace Research* 48, no. 1 (2011), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343310389505>, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0022343310389505>; Toby J. Rider, "Arms Races: An Assessment of Conceptual and Theoretical Challenges," (Oxford University Press, 2017-07-27 2017).  
<https://oxfordre.com/politics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-528>; Toby J. Rider, "Uncertainty, Salient Stakes, and the Causes of Conventional Arms Races," *International Studies Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (2013), <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.aub.edu.lb/stable/24017926>; Paul F. Diehl, "What Richardson Got Right (and Wrong) About Arms Races and War," in *Lewis Fry Richardson: His Intellectual Legacy and Influence in the Social Sciences*, ed. Nils Petter Gleditsch (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020).

Following the first decade of the 2000s, during which arms race studies increased in popularity, the definitions of the concept show some differences from the previous ones. The previous definitions cover the arms race in more detail as we witnessed in the above definitions of academics such as Huntington and Gray. However, recent arms race definitions are more general and inclusive. Among the recent definitions, Rider's definition can be used as an example at this point. Accordingly, "An arms race is a competition over the quality or quantity of military capabilities between states in the international system."<sup>90</sup> Rider's general approach to the definition cannot be found in the definition of Huntington, Gray as they define the phenomenon with a list and more limited perspective. On the other hand, Rider's definitions show some parallelism with the definition made by Atkinson and Hammond. As a result, although there are relative parallels between the old and new definitions, the new ones stand out as broader and more inclusive.

## **B. Rationale for Military Buildup and Arms Race**

While the arms race literature offers a broad debate about the definition, evolution, and results of the arms race phenomenon, it does not construct the same broad debate about why actors enter into arms races. However, the reasons for nations' armament revolve around threats from outside factors, defense capacity against threats, and the achievement of international goals. Glaser's approach to the subject draws attention as it deals in a multi-dimension factor with actors' armament and military building. Glaser's first approach is as follows; A state may want to develop its army to

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<sup>90</sup> Rider, "Arms Races: An Assessment of Conceptual and Theoretical Challenges," p. 2.

increase its power and achieve its international goals.<sup>91</sup> This approach, which naturally triggers armament, does not go unnoticed by potential enemies, which can trigger counter-moves.

Glaser's second approach is related to the nature of military technology. According to this approach, military technology is inherently open to R&D. This may be one reason that pushes actors to develop weapons. Actors may not want to fall behind in technological development and may move to armament, given that they do not know their opponent's intentions in advance. The other approach is states' knowledge of their rivals' military capabilities and programs. Accordingly, a state can decide to obtain arms according to the quality of information it has about the military programs of its adversaries. Thus, all these triggers can be counted among the causes of arms races.

Glaser adds that it is also difficult to distinguish whether the reason for armament is internal or external threats. In parallel with Glaser, Gray also highlights that it is difficult to distinguish the main reason for a state's decision to arm.<sup>92</sup> Glaser explains the internal reasons as follows: armament and military construction combine several internal interests, including investments in weapons technology, weapons manufacturers, and the army. For the external causes, Glaser refers to the action-reaction model of the arms race. Accordingly, the perception of military threat produced by the armament of an enemy state causes the other state to react by armament. The

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<sup>91</sup> Charles L. Glaser, "The Causes and Consequences of Arms Races," *Annual Review of Political Science* 3, no. 1 (2000), <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.3.1.251>, <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev.polisci.3.1.251>.

<sup>92</sup> Gray, "The Arms Race Phenomenon."

same direction could be found in Buzan and Herring's approach. They explain the action-reaction model in which a state strengthens its arms due to the perceived threat from adversaries.<sup>93</sup> Gray proposes that the actors of the arms race build their armies by paying attention to each other's armament.<sup>94</sup> In the 1960s, Glaser says, the nuclear race turned into a situation that produced action and reaction between the Soviets and the United States. With this approach, Glaser implies that the arms race continued over a single weapon, the nuclear bomb. Starting from this, Glaser argues that the arms race is a mutual decision of two or more actors; thus, there is a connection between the decision to obtain arms and engaging in an arms race. Thus, Glaser argues that a state avoiding war might choose to enter an arms race with an aggressive state that sends threat signals. According to this approach, states may prefer an arms race instead of waging war. However, this approach may not fully reflect the reasons for arms races.

According to realism, in the anarchic structure of the international environment, states may also want to obtain arms to survive and prevent territorial losses. The thesis subscribes here to realist view of the International Relations. This action, carried out to build defense capacity, is conceptualized as deterrence. At this point, deterrence assumes that a state must maintain its integrity and prevent territorial losses to survive.<sup>95</sup> Therefore, the deterioration of state integrity and the danger of losing territory may mean the loss of the country's national wealth and state integration. For Hammond, countries employ deterrence rather than resorting to destruction or as an instrument of

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<sup>93</sup> Barry Buzan and Eric Herring, *The arms dynamic in world politics* (Boulder, Colo: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998). <https://go.exlibris.link/bc2JnmCm>.

<sup>94</sup> Gray, "The Arms Race Phenomenon."

<sup>95</sup> Rider, "Arms Races: An Assessment of Conceptual and Theoretical Challenges."



war.<sup>96</sup> Therefore, states want to have a ready army to deter potential enemies. In this line, deterrence is a tool to prevent the destruction that war may cause. However, building deterrence may affect the threat perceptions of other states, and these reasons may trigger an arms race. In this context, according to Hammond, the essence of an arms race is deterrence.<sup>97</sup>

Rider argues that armies and weapons are necessary for an actor to maintain current order, protect himself, and signal to the enemy that war is costly.<sup>98</sup> In the same line, Robert Jervis argues that states need weapons to protect themselves.<sup>99</sup> However, opponents may perceive the actor's behavior as hostile, and this perception is one factor that triggers the opponent's armament behavior. While it creates a security dilemma for states, it employs the action-reaction theme, which is one of the main reasons for arms races and reveals the nature of competition.

At this point, the interaction between deterrence and action-reaction needs to be well examined. Failure to react to the enemy's action is seen as a sign of weakness and vulnerability in the anarchic structure of international relations where states are eager to consolidate their power. Therefore, for greedy enemies who realize their opponent's weakness, it may make sense to wage war. This approach highlights that states' primary concern is to consolidate their power and security. In sum, Rider formulated the Action-Reaction theme as follows: State X initiates military build-up for an unknown purpose – such as increasing its power, defense, greed, international goals, and R&D. Another state, state Y, chooses how to respond to this behavior of state X, which is attempting to

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<sup>96</sup> Hammond, *Plowshares into swords : arms races in international politics, 1840-1991*.

<sup>97</sup> Hammond, *Plowshares into swords : arms races in international politics, 1840-1991*.

<sup>98</sup> Rider, "Uncertainty, Salient Stakes, and the Causes of Conventional Arms Races."

<sup>99</sup> Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976).

expand its military capabilities through armament. If Y does not respond, then it turns out that state X is acting unilaterally. In this case, it becomes unnecessary to talk about a competition's existence. However, if state Y perceives X's actions are threatening its security, Y's response may be to develop its own army.<sup>100</sup>

The literature argues that arms races usually occur during persistent and prolonged rivalries.<sup>101</sup> Accordingly, arms races emerge when the rivalry between two or more states reaches a spiral. To this end, one of the few measurable features of arms races is competition in building arms.<sup>102</sup> However, arms races do not occur immediately, as developing weapons and building an army is expensive and time-consuming. For this reason, states want to build their security quickly through alliances before the race.

For any state, establishing and strengthening national security is a must. In this line, Gray emphasizes that this objective of states raises an issue; How will national security be guaranteed? There are three ways; either arm, form an alliance, or a combination of the two.<sup>103</sup> Differently, an arms race can also occur without enmity between the two states. A state may choose to obtain arms as a precautionary measure, and this behavior can trigger the other's threat perception and turn into an arms race. Therefore, according to Gray, an arms race creates a system by its action-reaction spiral.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Rider, "Uncertainty, Salient Stakes, and the Causes of Conventional Arms Races."

<sup>101</sup> Rider, Findley, and Diehl, "Just part of the game? Arms races, rivalry, and war."

<sup>102</sup> Glaser, "The Causes and Consequences of Arms Races."

<sup>103</sup> Gray, "The Arms Race Phenomenon."

<sup>104</sup> Gray, "The Arms Race Phenomenon."

The arms race's political side and potential implications show that states want to use it as leverage. In this context, Gray argues that there are themes such as political interests and diplomacy among arms race themes.<sup>105</sup> Accordingly, a state may increase its weapon capacity to increase its diplomatic weight in the international arena, ending in an arms race. It stems from the approach that weapons and armies can boost the state's leverage in the international arena.

Gray also argues that arms races could also be triggered by military and defense bureaucracies. Accordingly, military and defense bureaucracies, which want to maintain or even increase their annual budgets, may want to increase military purchases and investment in weapons technology.<sup>106</sup> However, to legitimize investment in weapons, this approach requires an external threat to the state. Therefore, the defense bureaucracy, which shares the profits of high defense expenditures, also benefits from this.

One of the reasons discussed regarding arms races in the literature is the issue of weapon technology and R&D. According to Gray, state X's getting ahead or making a breakthrough in weapon technology may trigger the threat perception of state Y.<sup>107</sup> The reason for this is that the offensive capacity that X gets through its investment may defeat the defense systems of the state Y. In this case, a severe problem arises in terms of defense and deterrence as the weapons of the state Y become obsolete. To this end, Gray argues that technological developments in weapon systems may also trigger arms races.

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<sup>105</sup> Colin S. Gray, "The Urge to Compete: Rationales for Arms Racing," *World politics* 26, no. 2 (1974), <https://doi.org/10.2307/2009900>.

<sup>106</sup> Gray, "The Urge to Compete: Rationales for Arms Racing."

<sup>107</sup> Gray, "The Urge to Compete: Rationales for Arms Racing."

The consequences of the arms race phenomenon have caused a great deal of controversy in the literature. Studies on the subject have aimed to understand how likely an arms race is to lead to war, while they analyzed through empirical tests. In this context, early studies - academicians such as Richardson, Wright, Hammond, Gray and Intriligator and Brito – dealt with the consequences of arms races. Richardson highlights that it is not necessarily that every arms race ends up with war, he stresses that an unstable arms race could end in war.<sup>108</sup> Accordingly, the chances of war increase if actors cannot terminate the race by agreement or by one's superiority over the other. Atkinson follows Richardson's approach on the consequences of the arms race. However, he does not give any spoiler hinting war is or is not at hand. Analyzing the duration of the arms race, Michael Dean Horn found that a prolonged arms race is more likely to end in war.<sup>109</sup> However, he claims that arms races are rare, and the short competition is unlikely to end in war. Michael Wallace, on the other hand, studied conflicts, disputes and wars between the 19th and 20th centuries, and found a connection between arms races and military conflict in his study.<sup>110</sup> According to Wallace, if a conflict becomes militarized, the probability of war between the actors is high, 82 percent.<sup>111</sup> Diehl, on the other hand, explained that contrary to Wallace's thesis,

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<sup>108</sup> Michael D. Intriligator and Dagobert L. Brito, "Can Arms Races Lead to the Outbreak of War?," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 28, no. 1 (1984), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002784028001004>, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0022002784028001004>.

<sup>109</sup> Michael Dean Horn, "Arms races and the international system" (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 1987) (Dissertation/Thesis).

<sup>110</sup> Michael D. Wallace, "Arms Races and Escalation: Some New Evidence," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 23 (1979). Susan G. Sample, "Arms Races and Dispute Escalation: Resolving the Debate," *Journal of Peace Research* 34 (1997).

<sup>111</sup> Wallace, "Arms Races and Escalation: Some New Evidence." Sample, "Arms Races and Dispute Escalation: Resolving the Debate."

he did not find a remarkable link between arms races and armed conflict.<sup>112</sup>

Accordingly, Diehl claimed that 30 percent of arms races are likely to turn into war.<sup>113</sup>

In recent studies, with wider perspective, researchers continued to explore whether an arms race would result in war.<sup>114</sup> The recent approaches view the relationship between arms races and wars as secondary and/or artificial. According to this, the arms race needs to be considered as the last phase of a wider rivalry between actors.

The recent studies discuss the duration of the arms race. Scholars agree that the duration of an arms race is not specific. Thus, actors do not prearrange the birth or deadline of an arms race. These studies, underline that arms races are long-term processes, as state activities such as building an army, developing or purchasing weapons and increasing the number of soldiers are not one-year events.<sup>115</sup>

The main debates in the literature show that arms races are different from military competition. Hammond discusses that an arms race is different from purchasing weapons to replace old arsenals.<sup>116</sup> It is also different from careful military competition, which means an arms race is more intense than military competition. Hammond places the arms race between war and military competition. Accordingly, the arms race is

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<sup>112</sup> Paul F. Diehl, "Arms Races and Escalation: A Closer Look," *Journal of Peace Research* 20 (1983); Susan G. Sample, "Arms Races and Dispute Escalation: Resolving the Debate," *Journal of Peace Research* 34, no. 1 (1997), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/424827>.

<sup>113</sup> Diehl, "Arms Races and Escalation: A Closer Look." Sample, "Arms Races and Dispute Escalation: Resolving the Debate."

<sup>114</sup> Rider, Findley, and Diehl, "Just part of the game? Arms races, rivalry, and war."

<sup>115</sup> Rider, Findley, and Diehl, "Just part of the game? Arms races, rivalry, and war."

<sup>116</sup> Hammond, *Plowshares into swords : arms races in international politics, 1840-1991*.

bigger and intense than military competition (arms race>military competition).

Hammond also adds that "war is not an arms race, and an arms race is not war."<sup>117</sup>

### **C. Examples**

Scholars analyzed many cases to understand how arms races emerged and resulted. From French Revolution till today, only a few cases have been identified as an arms race whereas many cases were identified as suboptimal.<sup>118</sup> In recent history, before the First World War, between 1900 and 1914, one of the most famous cases of an arms race happened between Great Britain and Germany in the form of naval competition. Also, the literature identifies "France versus England in the 1840s and 1850s; and the Soviet Union's missile development and procurement policy in the middle 1950s and from 1963 to 1970" as an arms race.<sup>119</sup> In the Cold War, the arms race was mainly discussed in the context of the nuclear arms race and missile development. The below relatively recent examples were utilized by the research to analyze arms races.

#### ***1. Indo-Pak Rivalry***

Before examining the arms race debates in the Persian Gulf, it is necessary to assess the different cases in different geographies where arms races and the arms debate are associated. To put it bluntly, understanding how and why other cases around the world built their military machines will provide data to examine the motives for the Persian Gulf countries' development of their armies. To this end, the never-ending

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<sup>117</sup> Hammond, *Plowshares into swords : arms races in international politics, 1840-1991*.

<sup>118</sup> Charles L. Glaser, "When Are Arms Races Dangerous? Rational versus Suboptimal Arming," *International Security* 28, no. 4 (2004), <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.aub.edu.lb/stable/4137449>. Glaser, "The Causes and Consequences of Arms Races."

<sup>119</sup> Gray, "The Arms Race Phenomenon."

hostility between Pakistan and India in South Asia presents an essential starting point because of its analogy with the cases in the Persian Gulf.

The hatred between Pakistan and India provoked bloody wars, ambitious military expenditure, military buildup, nuclear rivalry, and security concerns. One would find the reason fueling the hostility between the two in the conflicting religious mind between Hindus and Muslims in the late 19th century and the partition of India in the late 1940s. Furthermore, due to border disputes in Kashmir, the two fought four times against each other, resulting in Pakistan's division following the war in 1971. Today, the hostile relations not only stem from the historical hatred and Kashmir border dispute but also seemingly from nuclear competition.

The competitive framework of the relationship fed by historical conflicts, rivalry, and antagonism may have affected the acceleration of military buildup between India and Pakistan. It is also among the factors triggering discussions about the arms race between the two countries. SIPRI 2022 yearbook disclosed that between 2017 and 2021, while India was the largest arms importer in the world, Pakistan ranked eighth on the list.<sup>120</sup> Also, Asia and Oceania obtained 43 percent of the major arms supplies in the same period, which elevated the region to the top of the list. In another report showing the world's largest military spenders in 2021, India ranked among the top five countries as it ranked as the third largest military spender with 76,6 billion dollars, while Pakistan ranked 23 with 11.3 billion dollars. The report added that New Delhi accelerated its military's modernization and indigenous arms manufacture due to regional tension and

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<sup>120</sup> Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *SIPRI Yearbook 2022 Armaments, Disarmament and International Security Summary* (Oxford University Press, 2022).  
[https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/yb22\\_summary\\_en\\_v3.pdf](https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/yb22_summary_en_v3.pdf).

border conflict, implying competition with China and Pakistan.<sup>121</sup> In addition, some scholars found in their empirical studies that military expenditure indicates bidirectional causality between India and Pakistan, which points to an arms race between the two.<sup>122</sup> Furthermore, considering both countries' nuclear capacity, as India has 160 and Pakistan has 165 nuclear warheads, it becomes easy to claim that the two are engaged in an arms race.<sup>123</sup>

On the other hand, both sides' aggressive weapons acquiring policies and activities on the ground may not stem from bidirectional causality in military acquisition, as the asymmetry between India and Pakistan in almost all fields creates comfort for India and insecurity for Pakistan. To put it bluntly, India is bigger than Pakistan in terms of population, territorial size, economy, military personnel, and the global firepower index.<sup>124</sup> Thus, Pakistan's military budget and military spending do not cause a severe security concern for India, while Islamabad has much to fear from India's military and economic capacity. Also, China may present an immediate threat to India as it has invested in its military power much more than India over the last 30 years.<sup>125</sup> Yet, this did not prohibit India and Pakistan from forming an antagonistic discourse

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<sup>121</sup> Nan Tian Diego Lopes da Silva, Lucie Béraud-Sudreau, Alexandra Marksteiner, Xiao Liang, *Trends in world military expenditure, 2021*, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2022), [https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/fs\\_2204\\_milex\\_2021\\_0.pdf](https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/fs_2204_milex_2021_0.pdf).

<sup>122</sup> Jülide Yildirim and Nadir Öcal, "ARMS RACE AND ECONOMIC GROWTH: THE CASE OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN," *Defence and Peace Economics* 17, no. 1 (2006/02/01 2006), <https://doi.org/10.1080/10242690500369231>.

<sup>123</sup> Institute, *SIPRI Yearbook 2022 Armaments, Disarmament and International Security Summary*.

<sup>124</sup> "India," CIA, accessed August, 2022, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/india/>. "2022 India Military Strength," accessed August, 2022, [https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.php?country\\_id=india](https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.php?country_id=india).

<sup>125</sup> Rafi Amir-ud-Din, Fatima Waqi Sajjad, and Shazia Aziz, "Revisiting Arms Race between India and Pakistan: A Case of Asymmetric Causal Relationship of Military Expenditures," *Defence and Peace Economics* 31, no. 6 (2020/08/17 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1080/10242694.2019.1624334>.



toward each other over historical disputes, hostility, and alienation. However, this hatred may not fully represent the actors' attitudes, military doctrines, and experiences in the field.

Parallel to the above explanation, the military doctrines of the two sides in building their armies do not match each other. The literature assesses that while India aims to promote its power in South Asia to preserve the balance of power against its powerful rivals such as China, Pakistan seeks to restore the balance of power in the region by promoting security.<sup>126</sup> Also, Amir-ud-Din et al. evaluate that Pakistan's military expenditure is not only a reaction to India's aggressive military buildup but also a response to Afghanistan and Bangladesh, which Islamabad had to deal with in the Cold War.<sup>127</sup> At the same time, the literature assesses that India mainly considers China as an immediate threat. As a result, Amir-ud-Din et al. found in their empirical studies that the military expenditure of India and Pakistan may not be casually associated with each other.<sup>128</sup> Their analysis highlights that while India's military expenditure affects Pakistan's military expenditure, Pakistan's military spending may not bother India. The reason is that the challenge posed by terrorism, military coups, and domestic economic problems to Pakistan may be among the factors that appease India's security concerns towards Pakistan. In parallel with above arguments, Chaudhuri argues that the military

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<sup>126</sup> Amir-ud-Din, Waqi Sajjad, and Aziz, "Revisiting Arms Race between India and Pakistan: A Case of Asymmetric Causal Relationship of Military Expenditures."

<sup>127</sup> Amir-ud-Din, Waqi Sajjad, and Aziz, "Revisiting Arms Race between India and Pakistan: A Case of Asymmetric Causal Relationship of Military Expenditures."

<sup>128</sup> Amir-ud-Din, Waqi Sajjad, and Aziz, "Revisiting Arms Race between India and Pakistan: A Case of Asymmetric Causal Relationship of Military Expenditures."

buildup alone was not a cause for the war in 1965 between India and Pakistan.<sup>129</sup> He stresses the lack of evidence concerning Pakistan's effect on India's arms procurement.<sup>130</sup> He concluded that “the very notion of an arms race as popularized in a whole body of Anglo-American writings is less relevant with regard to South Asia.”<sup>131</sup> Therefore, due to the difference in military doctrines and threat perceptions, India may not view Pakistan as a serious security issue.

Furthermore, the military expenditure figures of India and Pakistan also reveal more about the asymmetric nature of the relationship. India has consistently ranked among the highest military spenders in the world, pushing Pakistan to allocate giant sources for military expenditure.<sup>132</sup> Even though Pakistan had to allocate considerable military resources to compete with India, its military spending could not compete with India's figures. India spent 76.6 billion dollars on its military in 2021, while Pakistan spent only 11.3 billion dollars on its military.<sup>133</sup>

India and Pakistan's nuclear activities whet arms race researchers' appetite. The reason seems that when China reached nuclear weapons in 1964, it alerted India's government and accelerated its nuclear activities. To put it bluntly, fear of China's nuclear capacity might have pushed India to develop its first nuclear weapons in 1974. As a result, India's reaction provoked Pakistan threat perception, which produced its

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<sup>129</sup> Rudra Chaudhuri, "Arms and Assistance in South Asia 1953–1965: Why Racing Alone Explains Little," in *Arms Races in International Politics: From the Nineteenth to the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Thomas Mahnken, Joseph Maiolo, and David Stevenson (Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>130</sup> Chaudhuri, "Arms and Assistance in South Asia 1953–1965: Why Racing Alone Explains Little."

<sup>131</sup> Chaudhuri, "Arms and Assistance in South Asia 1953–1965: Why Racing Alone Explains Little," 242-43.

<sup>132</sup> Amir-ud-Din, Waqi Sajjad, and Aziz, "Revisiting Arms Race between India and Pakistan: A Case of Asymmetric Causal Relationship of Military Expenditures." Diego Lopes da Silva, *Trends in world military expenditure, 2021*.

<sup>133</sup> Diego Lopes da Silva, *Trends in world military expenditure, 2021*.

first nuclear weapon in 1998. Thus, while Pakistan's nuclear activities were a reaction to India's nuclear capacity, the literature argues that the Indian nuclear buildup was a response to other security concerns rather than Pakistan.<sup>134</sup> In this vein, at first glance, the literature highlights India's nuclear construction emerged due to the Chinese nuclear threat. However, Perkovich uncovered another reason for India's nuclear purpose. He assesses the story of India's nuclear weapons development as incomplete and misrepresented, and he views internal factors consisting of moral and political benchmarks that directed India's nuclear ambition as New Delhi sought the prestige of becoming a great power.<sup>135</sup> Its desire to rid itself of its colonial past and stand on the same level as other dominant powers in the world is among the factors that drove India's nuclear policies. As a result, motives such as asymmetry, bidirectional causality, and the military doctrines, military spending, and nuclear priorities can be counted among the factors that may encourage the narrative of an arms race.

## ***2. Arab Israeli Dispute***

This section examines the wars and arms race between Tel Aviv and Arab states after the establishment of Israel in 1948, the increasing threat of non-state actors in the Middle East to Israel after the 1980s, and the regional policy and security doctrine built by Israel to combat these threats. The outputs of this review provide data for understanding the cases in the Persian Gulf within the framework of armament and defense doctrine. The wars between the Arab states and Israel, which started with the establishment of Israel in 1948, and the unending Arab-Israeli hostility are among the

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<sup>134</sup> George Perkovich, *India's nuclear bomb : the impact on global proliferation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

<sup>135</sup> Perkovich, *India's nuclear bomb : the impact on global proliferation*.

essential factors that keep the arms race discussions in the Middle East on the agenda. In the process of military build-up and doctrines, these wars and hostilities guided Israel and the Arab state. Israel constructed concepts such as deterrence, qualitative military edge, and regional superiority under the shadow of Arab-Israeli conflicts to overcome the threats to its existence. Therefore, Arab-Israeli wars, Israel's fears, regional policies, military doctrine, and security dilemmas can provide data to understand the reasons for armament in the Persian Gulf.

The effect of the perceived threat to Israel's existence (action) and the policy it has developed against this threat (reaction) indicate that Arab states and Israel are building up their armies at every opportunity and preparing for the next Arab-Israeli war. Israel fought neighboring Arab states in 1948, 1967, and 1973. In addition, Tel Aviv fought against Egypt in 1956 and Syria in 1982. Simultaneously, the literature dealing with the Arab Israeli conflict argues that there might have been an arms race between the parties before the 67 and 73 wars.<sup>136</sup>

At this point, military deals are considered among the factors that show actors' preparation for war and trigger arms race discussions. For example, Kober said that Israel developed a security doctrine on armament and army building in order to balance the broad Arab military alliance against it and to suppress its feeling of insecurity. He claims that this triggered the military building of Arab states, and this cumulative situation created a spiral model of armament.<sup>137</sup> Eliam's assessment, which overlaps with Kober's claims, emphasizes that Israel has developed a security doctrine through

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<sup>136</sup> Avi Kober, "Arms Races and the Arab–Israeli Conflict," in *Arms Races in International Politics: From the Nineteenth to the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Thomas Mahnken, Joseph Maiolo, and David Stevenson (Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>137</sup> Kober, "Arms Races and the Arab–Israeli Conflict."

conflicts since its very establishment.<sup>138</sup> In this respect, the arms deals Israel signed with the French in the early 1950s and the war with Egypt in Gaza at the beginning of 1955 led it to perceive Egypt and other Arab countries as a threat source. Moreover, Egypt, which wanted to develop its army due to the Israeli threat, signed an arms agreement with the Soviets through Czechoslovakia at the end of 1955. Thus, the arms deals Israel and Egypt signed with third parties may be considered within the action-reaction context.

The literature also argues whether the military expenditures of the parties have bidirectional causality to examine the rationale of arms races among the cases. It also sought to question if the military capacity between the parties could trigger the arms race.<sup>139</sup> In the period leading up to the 1967 war, Israel's defense expenditures between 1962-67 averaged 10 percent of GDP, while it averaged 9 percent for Egypt and Syria.<sup>140</sup> Kober found that Egypt doubled its military spending during this period compared to the previous period, while Israel increased its military spending 3.3 times in 1966 compared to 10 years ago.<sup>141</sup> Kober states that this situation, which triggered the arms race through bidirectional causality, continued until the mid-70s. However, he emphasizes that Israel's arms expenditures cooled in the process that lead to peace in Camp David.<sup>142</sup> Therefore, considering the military expenditures of both sides, one

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<sup>138</sup> Ehud Eilam, *Israel's military doctrine* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2018). <https://go.exlibris.link/1gJ13kBw>.

<sup>139</sup> Ioannis Choulis, Marius Mehrl, and Kostas Ifantis, "Arms Racing, Military Build-Ups and Dispute Intensity: Evidence from the Greek-Turkish Rivalry, 1985-2020," *Defence and Peace Economics* (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1080/10242694.2021.1933312>.

<sup>140</sup> SIPRI, "Military Expenditure Database," (1949 - 1982: SIPRI). <https://milex.sipri.org/sipri>.

<sup>141</sup> Kober, "Arms Races and the Arab-Israeli Conflict."

<sup>142</sup> Kober, "Arms Races and the Arab-Israeli Conflict."

could conclude that the Arab Israeli tension triggered an arms race, as Glaser stated.<sup>143</sup> One could additionally argue that armament behavior before wars creates bidirectional causality, as discussed in the literature.<sup>144</sup>

Israel, a country that lacks geopolitical depth and has a limited population, is surrounded by Arab states. This creates an asymmetry between Arab countries and Israel. As a result of the wars against the Arabs, Tel Aviv designed its strategy to overcome its fears, and revised its strategy with the changing nature of its threats. Bitzinger calls this the psychology that feeds on the threats around it and searches for security.<sup>145</sup> From this point of view, it can be thought that the quantitative asymmetry and uncertainty between the Arab states and Israel are among the most critical factors that led Tel Aviv to establish a strong army to deter its enemies by hard power.

Based on all these discussions, the IDF strategy document Israel announced in 2015 deserves to be examined to understand its doctrine.<sup>146</sup> The IDF strategy document, which is the source of Israel's strategy and shapes Tel Aviv's current regional policies, includes Tel Aviv's traditional security concerns, changing and transforming threat risks, and the measures taken against these threats. The doctrine also shows Israel's regional goals. In this context, Israel bases its strategy on hard power. Tel Aviv aims to maintain the regional qualitative military edge in the region, respond quickly to threats,

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<sup>143</sup> Glaser, "When Are Arms Races Dangerous? Rational versus Suboptimal Arming."

<sup>144</sup> Amir-ud-Din, Waqi Sajjad, and Aziz, "Revisiting Arms Race between India and Pakistan: A Case of Asymmetric Causal Relationship of Military Expenditures."

<sup>145</sup> Richard A. Bitzinger, "Military-technological innovation in small states: The cases of Israel and Singapore," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 44, no. 6 (2021/09/19 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2021.1947252>.

<sup>146</sup> *English Translation of the Official Strategy of the Israel Defense Forces*, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs (USA, 2016), <https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/legacy/files/IDFDoctrineTranslation.pdf>.

and be a part of a larger bloc in order to maintain the deterrence it has established as a result of previous wars.<sup>147</sup>

The items and targeted themes in the strategy document show that Israel relies on deterrence and regional hegemony to overcome its security dilemma, fears, and potential and current threats from Arab elements. It should be noted that Israel is a country with nuclear capabilities, though it has not formally announced it yet. At the same time, it has an army that prioritizes high technology, has war experience, and regularly receives military aid from the USA every year.<sup>148</sup> Moreover, Israel allocates large budgets to R&D to develop its defense industry. To put it differently, the outcome of this feeds Israel's qualitative military edge and its deterrence. One can argue that Israel does hesitate to engage in a new arms race. Thus, it would not be wrong to conclude that it invests more in defense and wants to sustain its deterrence.

#### **D. Lessons Learned from the Review of Literature**

Why nations arm is an issue that has been on researchers' radars for a long time, which they have tried to explain using various models. The reasons for the armament of nations are as follows: potential threats from enemies, military-technological developments, deterrence, action-reaction, political reasons, greed, competition, the anarchic nature of international politics, and bureaucratic interests. In response to the above developments, the general approach of states is as follows. Any step a state takes to meet its basic security needs may be perceived as a threat by another state. While this

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<sup>147</sup> *English Translation of the Official Strategy of the Israel Defense Forces*; Eilam, *Israel's military doctrine*. Bitzinger, "Military-technological innovation in small states: The cases of Israel and Singapore."

<sup>148</sup> Jeremy M. Sharp, *U.S. Foreign Aid to Israel* (Congressional Research Service, Feb 18, 2022 2022), <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/mideast/RL33222.pdf>.

causes a security dilemma, the parties that perceive threats from each other want to seize superiority by armament and military build-up and survive with counter moves. This intense interaction process is conceptualized as an arms race.

Arms races occur between two or more states that carefully observe each other's military behavior. When the balance of military power between actors deteriorates, the parties start to compete intensely against each other over qualitative and quantitative military build-up, with a hostile attitude. In this process, both parties threaten each other's national security. Both sides accelerate their armament, wanting to build deterrence to counter these threats and show that the conflict will be costly. Thus, the atmosphere increases the security dilemma between the actors. In this case, the probability of conflict arises as the parties seek military superiority. Arms races are long-term based. Therefore, arms races are inherently costly as they heavily consume qualitative and quantitative resources. They, therefore, strengthen the probability of conflict, as they lead the state to bankruptcy and limited resources. States, to avoid this, are eager to form alliances, withdraw from the race, or fight while they can.

The reasons for arms races are not limited to the moves of states which need security in the anarchic international environment. The behavior of states, which want to increase their power and gain political leverage by developing their military technology, can turn into a model that triggers other actors and thus creates a mutual action and reaction. It would also be safe to say that defense bureaucracies and arms manufacturers can trigger arms races. At this point, the defense bureaucracy, which wants to protect and increase its annual budget, can direct the state towards a military buildup beyond its needs. In addition, the close contact of defense companies with the defense bureaucracy due to the nature of the arms industry can accelerate the military



mass of a state. The parties may start a race because this military mass disrupts the regional or international military balance. Furthermore, the nature of military technology is that it is open to R&D. In this context, the innovation that an actor brings in weapon technology may cause the weapons of other actors to become obsolete, thus deteriorate the balance of power. In this case, nations may want to arm themselves or improve their technology. Thus, it would be safe to say that advances in military technology have caused an arms race spiral.

On the other hand, for states, losing territory creates vital consequences that are difficult to reverse. Normally, states want to protect their natural resources, population, and territories. Thus, they desire to establish an army with a high deterrence capacity that suppresses threats, and thus they want to obtain arms. The purpose of deterrence is to demonstrate to potential enemies the high cost of war. This move may be perceived as hostile by rival states and may trigger competition. Thus, one may conclude that deterrence is the essence of arms races.

In this context, it can be argued that intense competition is one of the most important issues that can be measured in arms races. However, arms deals, increases in arms capacity, and defense budgets do not always provide reliable data to measure arms races. Changes can be observed in defense budgets and defense agreements in cases such as employment growth and the desire to renew old weapons. Therefore, it can be said that this situation has nothing to do with the arms race. Also, bearing in mind that an arms race is an intense, rare and long-term process, it turns out that the concept is different from mere state competition or replacing old weapons with new ones.

To better understand the arms race phenomenon, the examples in which the race took place provide a suitable ground. As the chapter examined the example of Indo Pak

rivalry, state X (India) may accelerate its armament to prevent a threat it perceives from state Y (China). Here, one can say that India has formed an army against the threats coming from China (state Y). Again, as seen in the example of India, state X may invest in R&D for a particular weapon system –in this case, a nuclear weapon - for political reasons, that is, to prove that it has overcome its colonial past and is now a world power. However, all the above measures that state X took may cause a security crisis for state Z (Pakistan) due to its territorial proximity or other reasons such as history with state X. Thus, state Z perceives a threat from state X. In this process, state Z would like to acquire the same weapon system as state X- a nuclear weapon. This could be related to psychological factors triggered by the historical tension and political agenda between Z and X and X's military technological superiority - nuclear capacity -. Therefore, it is understood that state X initiated the action. Due to the threat signal from state Y, state X's armament triggers state Z, which turns into a spiral. From this point of view, one can argue that one of the most vital factors triggering arms races revolves around security and threat, and the primary purpose of states is defense. Thus, one could conclude that the need for defense is at the core of the arms race.

The hatred, tensions, and wars between Israel and the Arab states show that the parties are armed to suppress the threat they believe is coming from each other and to establish deterrence, which turned into an armed rivalry between the 50s and 70s. Following the war that started with the declaration of Israel (State A) in 1948, state A strengthened its army through arms deals. This turned into a spiral that triggered the Arab states (state B), especially Egypt. In addition, state A's attack on state B – in Gaza and Suez – is a situation that accelerates and triggers the construction of deterrence of state B. At this point, state B wants to ensure its security and prepare for the next war by

signing large arms deals with other countries. With the direct threat from state B and the effect of the arms agreements signed by state B, State A accelerates the construction of its army while signing new arms agreements and developing its military doctrine. The crisis between Israel and Arabs here is called mutual causality, as may happen between India and Pakistan. Therefore, the 'action-reaction spiral' and 'armed competition,' triggered by the desire of both sides to establish military superiority and deterrence against each other, is defined as an arms race. Chapter 2 discovered how arms races occur by investigating arms race literature and examples. After its review, Chapter 2 extracted materials from the literature and examples to measure the arms race. Chapter 3 analyzes how the Gulf monarchies use media to legitimize their military buildup.

## **E. Methodology**

This section provides information about the study's research questions, methods, data collection and techniques, and data sources. This thesis claims that the armament, military buildup, and competition among the Gulf monarchies, namely Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar, is not due to an arms race. To examine this claim, the thesis investigates the armament behavior of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar along with local and international media coverage of the military buildup among them. Accordingly, the thesis questions how and why the armament, military buildup, and the competition among the Gulf monarchies cannot be defined as an arms race. The study also investigates an alternative to an arms race perspective in analyzing the military buildup in the Persian Gulf.

To do this, the thesis first asks research questions. The first question is to what extent can the armament and military buildup of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar in

the Persian Gulf be termed an arms race? The second question is how do Gulf monarchies use local media organs to legitimize their armament? How does the instrumentalization of the local media by the monarchies pave the way for an arms race discourse in the region? The third question is why the armament of the monarchies in the Persian Gulf cannot be considered within the scope of the arms race.

To answer the first question, the thesis, with the help of secondary sources, intend to comparatively analyze the issues that threaten the Persian Gulf monarchies, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar, from before the Iranian Revolution of 1979 till today. The aim is to establish a historical background to assess how the Gulf monarchies' behavior, habits, and responses to the issues they faced were formed. The thesis intend to use the background comparatively to examine and analyze the behavior and habits of the Gulf monarchies when they face threats to their security. This helps the thesis evaluate the reasons for monarchies' military buildup, armament, and competition. Therefore, this analysis makes it easy to trace the main reasons for the armament in the Persian Gulf.

While answering the first question, the study examines the arms race phenomenon via the literature review method. In this way, the study intend to find definitions and examples of the phenomenon. Since the debate of Gulf monarchies' armament, military buildup and competition revolved around the arms race, it is necessary to use secondary sources to examine the phenomenon. Thus, the thesis selects and subscribes to the following definition: an arms race is a race on quantity and quality of military arsenal between the states.

To test the arms race as given in this definition phenomenon more closely on the cases from the Gulf, the thesis creates categories/themes from the arms race literature.

Those themes serves as a component of analysis for the thesis. The themes distilled from the related literature as indicators of the arms race are as follows: (a) Action-Reaction, (b) Deterrence, (c) Political Leverage, and (d) Technological Race. The thesis intend to use these themes to examine and compare the reasons behind the armament of the Gulf monarchies, and uses these themes to test whether the armament behavior of the monarchies can be termed an arms race. Having founded connections among the above themes, the thesis crosschecks those connections to have a complementary analysis.

In relation with the first question, the thesis also examines arms race examples from different regions, namely the Indo-Pak rivalry and Arab-Israeli conflict through secondary sources to crosscheck the invalidity of ascribing an arms race to the Persian Gulf monarchies. The thesis checks the reasons for military buildup and military doctrines of those arms race examples. In this way, the thesis intend to identifies the similarities and differences between those examples and the cases in the Persian Gulf. The aim for this analysis is to understand the real causes behind the arms race in different geographies. Thus, the output here is used comparatively when examining whether the armament of the cases in the Persian Gulf was an arms race. In this way, the thesis intend to link the related literature, methodology, and cases in the Persian Gulf, and so identifies its approach to the cases in the Gulf's armament.

Interested in how media coverings themselves reflect and construct a particular idea of arms race; the thesis found qualitative content analysis very useful. Therefore, to answer the second question, the thesis uses qualitative content analysis method. In this line, the thesis first claimed that what happening in the cases in the Gulf on armament is due to tribalism, appeasing the West, and diversification of economy policies. To

enhance the validity of the themes and the main argument of the study, the thesis triangulates the data by turning account of Gulf local and international printed media organs as primary sources. The overall aim of the media analysis twofold: to show how the Gulf monarchies used the media to legitimize their armament and to reveal the media's contribution to arms race discourse in the region and, to enhance the validity of the themes and the main argument of the study.

The sources from the Gulf used in the media analysis are as follows; Saudi Arabia's Al Riyadh, Al Jazirah, Ukaz, and Arab News, UAE's Al Ittihad; and Qatar's Al Sharq. Due to the archive restrictions and issues in almost all of the internet platforms of the Gulf media organs, the thesis intent to reach the related media coverage of the Gulf media through different databases. In this context, the relevant dated news of the above-printed newspapers were reached through the Foreign Broadcast Information Service, BBC Monitoring, and Factiva databases. The international weekly and daily printed newspapers used in media analysis are as follows, The Economist and the New York Times.

The thesis takes priority to compare the definition, themes, and examples of the arms race with the behavior of the Gulf monarchies in the face of threats and the Gulf and international media's publications on armament in the Gulf. Just after this thorough comparison, to answer the third question, the thesis analyzed whether or not monarchies were in an arms race.

This analysis helps the thesis gain a fuller understanding of the arms race themes and strengthened the main arguments of the study: What happening in the Gulf cannot be called or reasoned as the arms race, but can be better explained by tribalism, appeasing the West, and diversifying economy policies.

## CHAPTER III

# RATIONALE FOR THE GULF COUNTRIES' MILITARY BUILDUP

Chapter 2 found how the arms race happens by investigating arms race literature and examples. After its examination, Chapter 2 extracted themes from the literature and examples to measure the arms race. Chapter 3 analyzes how the Persian Gulf monarchies justified their armaments through the media and provides the reader with a broader perspective on the nature of the rivalry between the Persian Gulf monarchies under examination – Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar. Accordingly, this chapter seeks answers to the following questions: What is the role of the media in feeding a perception of an arms race in the Gulf? How did the monarchies use the press when they justified their armaments? To this aim, Chapter 3 analyzes the discourse of Persian Gulf printed media with the qualitative content analysis method to reveal how the Gulf monarchies think about the issues that arise, especially in the arms industry and armament.

The expressions in texts sometimes have hidden content or send implicit messages to the reader. By analyzing the text, researchers mine for hidden messages through events and examples. For this reason, it may be necessary to look between the lines to understand what the analyzed text is saying. In other words, examining official or public statements is essential to understand the relations between states. The indirect and implicit expressions usually place in the messages of states about internal and external threats, their foreign policies, military moves, and political and sociological

maneuvers. From this point of view, the printed press and other media organs in regimes are essential tools that construct, carry, and transmit these state messages.

### **A. How and Why Does the Arab Media Construct Its Discourse?**

The literature, which deals with the Arab print and visual media, divides the publishing policies of media organizations into three categories: the traditional government-controlled pattern; the reformist government-controlled pattern; and the liberal commercial pattern.<sup>149</sup> The first media pattern is a selective approach dominated by strict editorial understanding, advocating, and highlighting government policies and demonstrating their achievements. The second group represents a relatively liberal approach, where limited freedoms are given in handling local and international news. The third pattern reflects an approach in which reports of media organizations are published critically and for the benefit of the public; therefore, editorial policies tend to be more liberal.

William Rugh also divides Arab media into three. The first group is called the mobilization category, second group is conceptualized as the loyalist category and the third group is the diverse media.<sup>150</sup> The first group refers to the press monopolized by authoritarian regimes and used to support their ideology. It is stated in the second group that limited freedoms are recognized, and intervention is less in this media group. The third category includes media establishments where freedom of expression and a wide

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<sup>149</sup> Mohamed Kharbach, "Understanding the ideological construction of the Gulf crisis in Arab media discourse: A critical discourse analytic study of the headlines of Al Arabiya English and Al Jazeera English," *Discourse & Communication* 14, no. 5 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750481320917576>, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1750481320917576>.

<sup>150</sup> William A. Rugh, "Do National political systems still influence Arab media?," *Arab Media and Society* (2007), <https://www.arabmediasociety.com/do-national-political-systems-still-influence-arab-media/>.



variety of views. Bearing in mind the broadcasting policies of the media organs of the Persian Gulf countries and the restrictions on freedom of opinion in the Gulf, and also considering the journalistic experience of this author, it would be safe to say that local publications in Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar are heavily related to government-controlled media.

It is safe to say that local media institutions in authoritarian countries are platforms that praise and inflate the policies of their governments, self-congratulate, are used as an instrument in the national construction process, serve as a platform to hide internal and external problems and send messages of defiance to rivals and enemies. Thus, the tone of the Gulf media is generally an accurate litmus text of the state of relations among GCC members. Analyzing the media in the Gulf, Abdulmajid states that the Gulf local media are generally manipulative because they reflect the ideology and interests of governments.<sup>151</sup> Van Dijk emphasizes that the media's coverage are under the influence of the country's social, cultural and political atmosphere.<sup>152</sup> Herman and Chomsky emphasize that in an atmosphere of heightened tension between states, media organs support state propaganda and guide society in this context.<sup>153</sup> At this point, the news of Gulf print media inflates the success of their countries and criticizes adversaries. In this line, according to Herman and Chomsky, instrumentalized media organs help build the state's local and national discourse.<sup>154</sup> In this context, it becomes

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<sup>151</sup> Adib Abdulmajid, "Media and Ideology in the Middle East: A Critical Discourse Analysis," *Domes (Milwaukee, Wis.)* 28, no. 1 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1111/dome.12179>.

<sup>152</sup> A. van Dijk Teun, *Racism and the Press* (Taylor and Francis, 2015).

<sup>153</sup> Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing consent: the political economy of the mass media* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988).

<sup>154</sup> Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing consent: the political economy of the mass media*.

meaningful to follow the discourses, aims, interests, and polarization of the Gulf regimes through the local media.

On the other hand, Rawi and Iskandar report that critical journalism is not tolerated in most Arab countries and argue that critical journalism is considered a crime and that the laws are regulated accordingly.<sup>155</sup> They state that criticism of the regime is prohibited by law, even in countries where some media organs (Al Jazeera) are seen as "critical and libertarian," such as Qatar.<sup>156</sup> Noha Mellor argues that obedience to rulers is among the aims of media in the laws regulating media in Saudi Arabia. She points out that editors at publications are subject to be fired if they publish news critical of members of the royal family or the regime.<sup>157</sup> Therefore, one can say that the media organs in the Gulf monarchies are designed to convey the ideological and political messages of the state. The legal regulations strictly prohibit criticism of the regime.

The literature deals with the Persian Gulf monarchies' use of media in nation-building and publications that strengthen this claim through hostilities. Emphasizing that the small gulf monarchies and the Saudi administration are investing in this area as satellite broadcasts increase their influence in the Arab world, Andrew Hammond argues that the local media is intended to be used to build the discourse and ideology of the regimes in the region.<sup>158</sup> The regimes' instrumentalization of the media creates irony

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<sup>155</sup> Ahmed Al-Rawi and Adel Iskandar, "News Coverage of the Arab Spring: State-Run News Agencies as Discursive Propagators of News," *Digital Journalism* (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2021.1987946>.

<sup>156</sup> Al-Rawi and Iskandar, "News Coverage of the Arab Spring: State-Run News Agencies as Discursive Propagators of News."

<sup>157</sup> Noha Mellor, "The Saudi press - the combined power of wealth and religion," in *Routledge handbook on Arab media*, ed. Noha Mellor and Nouredine Miladi (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, : Routledge, 2021).

<sup>158</sup> Andrew Hammond, "Saudi broadcasting media - a tool for regional influence," in *Routledge handbook on Arab media*, ed. Noha Mellor and Nouredine Miladi (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, : Routledge, 2021).

by contradicting the past. The Saudi Arabian government panicked during Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and thus shut down its media for three days and restricted the public from getting news. Andrew Hammond argues that in the last ten years in the Gulf media, the emphasis has shifted from Islam to nationalism, and there has been a tendency to act in a more hostile manner toward rival countries.<sup>159</sup> Thus, it would be safe to say that the Gulf regimes use local media as a tool in the task of pumping nationalism into the construction of national identity.

## **B. Materials and Time Frame**

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait on August 2, 1990 showed that the Peninsula Shield Force built by GCC monarchies had no deterrence. Thus, it was announced to the whole world that GCC members were vulnerable. Following the Iraqi invasion and the Gulf War, the monarchies sought various ways to ensure their security. In this process, the Damascus Declaration signed by Syria and Egypt and GCC members in Damascus in 1991 was a product of this effort. However, in the Nasser period, the Arab nationalist ideology, which had led to the spread of revolutionary ideas in the armies of the region, especially the Saudi Arabian army, and coups in the royal regimes, remained in the memories of GCC members. For this reason, the presence of the soldiers of another Arab country on the monarchy's territory, even if it would ensure the regime's security, was one of the most critical obstacles to the realization of the Damascus Declaration. In this process, GCC members opened their doors to the USA, which wanted to establish hegemony in the region to secure energy routes through military bases. On the other hand, the Gulf monarchies had to accelerate building their armies, which they had been

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<sup>159</sup> Hammond, "Saudi broadcasting media - a tool for regional influence."

suspicious of for a long time due to the fear of coups. For all these reasons, it would be safe to analyze the aftermath of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait as a prelude to local and international media coverage of military buildup, armament, and the arms race, in the Persian Gulf.

This chapter analyzes the Gulf print media and international media coverage about armament, military construction, military exercises, and military alliances in the Gulf. The chapter compares the following newspapers: from Saudi Arabia Al Riyadh, Al Jazirah, Ukaz and Arab News; UAE's Al Ittihad; and Qatar's Al Sharq. It deals with each newspaper's editorial, column, and news stories. In addition, the chapter compares the armament-related coverage of Gulf media with international media. To do this, it employs the news, the New York Times from the USA, and the Economist from the UK. This chapter, through its analysis, aims to reveal the manipulation and bias in coverage produced by Gulf printed media. Due to the irregularity and deficiency in the archives of media organs in the Gulf regimes, the study analyzed these news articles through particular databases. These databases are as follows: for local press Foreign Broadcast Information Service, BBC Monitoring, Factiva; and for international press, the NYT and The Economist archives.

### **C. Dimensions, Components and Analyze**

Persian Gulf monarchies use the media to give themselves and their citizens the impression that their country is doing well and to message their rivals and enemies that they are not idle. Moreover, these countries also use the media to justify and celebrate their military achievements. Thus, the Gulf printed media broadcasts have a tendency to praise the monarchies' actions on issues such as the construction of the domestic arms

industry, armament, military moves, and alliances with other countries, with a tendency to present them as an element of pride and prestige. In other words, the Persian Gulf media broadcasts tend to justify the political and military moves of the monarchies.

The themes/categories analyzed below naturally produce mutual causality among each other. In this line, the media content listed under a theme in the analysis may also be valid for another theme. Thus, the chapter made the below analysis with awareness of the transparent walls between the themes. For this reason, the chapter tackles media content multi-dimensionally.

### ***1. Pride and Prestige***

It would be safe to say that one of the main reasons why the Gulf media praises the monarchies' policies has to do with the past of tribalism. The concepts of prestige and superiority in inter-tribal relations are essential as they reinforce the power and tribal image and are a source of pride. In this context, these small Gulf countries view state-of-the-art weapons, military products produced by domestic industry, military alliances, and military successes as showcases. In this way, the Gulf monarchies present themselves to rival states as prestigious and powerful. However, this arrogant muscle show is not held to deter the opponent but to show his own superiority. Therefore, one can propose that this approach has nothing to do with theme of deterrence in arms races. Thus, prestige and pride would be the first theme regarding the Gulf monarchies' discourse on armament and military moves. The coverage of the Gulf media on military successes, defense agreements and military maneuvers of the regimes is listed under prestige and pride. In this way, this section analyzes media's bias, discourse, and how the monarchies justify their defence policies.

The Persian Gulf regimes, which were hesitant to implement the 1991 Damascus Declaration, aimed to build and strengthen their military capacity while planning to enter the U.S. security umbrella. In its editorial article in September 1992, the Saudi Arabia-based *Ukaz* newspaper praised that the Saudi regime for agreeing to purchase 72 F-15 warplanes from the United States within the scope of improving the air force of Saudi Arabia.<sup>160</sup> According to media analysis, following the Gulf War, such high-numbered defense purchases in the Gulf began to be reported through the media. In this line, *Ukaz* presents the agreement with the U.S. as a success for the Saudi Arabian regime. It also emphasizes that the U.S.'s approval of the arms agreement proves the significance of Riyadh for the region and Washington. Also, the newspaper highlights the Kingdom's Islamic importance in its coverage and uses Islamic and national discourse. The following expressions in the article show this. "As for us, this matter is at the forefront of our priorities, and we will not allow anyone to harm these holy places or any inch of the kingdom's territory. Nor will we allow any concessions to be made to any party at any time."<sup>161</sup> Thus, one can say that this discourse has a tone that highlights Saudi hegemony in the region and the search for leadership in the Islamic world.

Based on this article, one can say that the Saudi media praised and inflated the regime's military purchases. At the same time, the regime used the media to legitimize military agreements. In an atmosphere where the security crisis deepened with Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, the Gulf regimes brought such agreements to the forefront. Thus, they displayed these agreements as an element of prestige in order to instill a sense of security in their people and show their enemies that they did not stand idly by.

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<sup>160</sup> "Our Will and Our Political and Military Decision," in *UKAZ* (FBIS-NES-92-185, 14 September 1992).

<sup>161</sup> "Our Will and Our Political and Military Decision."

However, due to the lack of pilots, the Gulf regimes had to employ retired European and U.S. pilots or pilots transferred from Pakistan for many years in their armies. In a report published in 2019, serious concerns were expressed about the capacities and qualifications of pilots from Gulf monarchies.<sup>162</sup> It emphasizes that the war pilots of the Gulf could not even respond to sudden dangers in the military exercises.<sup>163</sup>

Through the media, the monarchies attempt to show the value of their military alliances to rival countries by praising the military exercises they held with superpowers. In its news on April 2018, Al Riyadh newspaper stated that the Gulf Shield, the largest military maneuver in the region, with the participation of 24 countries led by the Saudi and US armies, had ended.<sup>164</sup> The paper underlined that one of the aims of the military maneuver, in which land, air, and naval units participated, was to show participating countries the military planning of the Saudi Arabian Army, its superior ability to manage military operations, and its use of state-of-the-art weapons and global military systems. The tribes of the Saudi army in question were praised in the news.

Through military exercises, monarchies tend to show each other and their enemies that they have good relations with their powerful allies. Therefore, it can be observed that they copy each other and bring pride to the fore with the sociological background coming from tribalism. UAE-based Al Ittihad covered the military exercises of the UAE army with Western countries in three news reports dated October 2017, December 2017, and January 2018. In October 2017, the coverage stated that the

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<sup>162</sup> Zoltan Barany, *Military Officers in the Gulf: Career Trajectories and Determinants*, Center for Strategic and International Studies (2019).

<sup>163</sup> Barany, *Military Officers in the Gulf: Career Trajectories and Determinants*.

<sup>164</sup> "dire alkhaliq akbar hashd easkarii bialsharq alawst," *Al Riyad* 8 April 2018, Factiva.

exercise had taken place between the US and UAE armies, and land and air elements were involved in the training.<sup>165</sup> The news dated December 2017 noted that a military drill was carried out between the UAE army and the armies of the UK, US, and France.<sup>166</sup> The news dated January 2018 states that the UAE and USA navies have started a joint naval exercise.<sup>167</sup> The common theme in all the coverages is that the UAE armed forces had an 'extraordinary performance' in the exercises, with confirmation from the superpowers. Therefore, while praising the capability and capabilities of the UAE army, it also emphasizes the international forces' approval.

In its news on March 2019, the Saudi newspaper *Al Riyadh* celebrates the anniversary of the operation launched by the Saudi Arabian-led coalition against the Iranian-backed Houthis in Yemen four years ago.<sup>168</sup> Throughout the article, it emphasizes Saudi Arabia's military successes and the liberation of the Yemeni people from Iran. It is stated that from the first hours of the operation, the Saudi army started to achieve success. The paper praised the military operation by saying, "the Decisive Storm constituted a watershed that thwarted the Iranian regime's ambitions to control the city of Aden, Bab al-Mandab, the Gulf of Aden, and the two security systems of the Red Sea, the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean."<sup>169</sup> In the diplomatic field, it reports that Saudi diplomacy surprised Iran and that Riyadh gained regional and international

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<sup>165</sup> "aikhtitam altamrin almushtarak bayn alquwaat albariyat alamaraty waljaysh alamyryky althaalith," *Al Ittihad* 1 October 2017, Factiva.

<sup>166</sup> "alquaat almusalahat tukhtatam binajah tamrayn <<alealm 4>> bimusharakat amyrykyt wabiritaniat wafaransia," *Al Ittihad* 15 December 2017, Factiva.

<sup>167</sup> "antilaq altamrin aleaskarii <<2018 Native Fury>> bayn alamarat walwilayat almutahidat alyawm," *Al Ittihad* 21 January 2018, Factiva.

<sup>168</sup> "26 mars.. yawm 'anhaa aliainqilab al'aswad," *Al Riyadh* 27 March 2019, Factiva.

<sup>169</sup> "26 mars.. yawm 'anhaa aliainqilab al'aswad."



support for the operation. In this context, the news sends a message to the people of Saudi Arabia and its rivals that the country has succeeded in the war in Yemen, both militarily and politically. It can be stated that the news discourse is self-congratulatory, inflates Saudi's achievements, and highlights pride. Given the withdrawal of Qatar and the UAE from the operation and the escalating attacks by Iran and the Houthis against Saudi Arabia, it would be safe to say that the success of the Saudi Army and its politics in Yemen is questionable. International media reports also highlight the inadequacy of the Saudi army and politics in Yemen.

At this point, the coverage of the international press emphasizes that the military moves, arms purchases, and operations of the Gulf monarchies failed, and the Yemen example showed this. In its news dated July 27th-August 2nd, 2019, the weekly newspaper the Economist discusses the threat of the Houthis in Yemen to energy shipments in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz.<sup>170</sup> The article states that the Houthis in Yemen attacked sensitive targets in Saudi, and the GCC countries could not prevent this. The article's discourse on the military capabilities of the GCC countries is interesting: "Though they have spent tens of billions of dollars on military kit from America and Europe, it is not always the right kit. Tanks and fighter jets have limited value in an asymmetric conflict. Their navies are small and lack combat experience; they train with the Americans and are investing in new ships, but play only a supporting role in regional security."<sup>171</sup> The article emphasized that the GCC countries have failed in collective security. It also highlighted that the Houthis' attacks on Saudi Arabia show that Riyadh has problems with self-defense, deterrence, and defense capacity. There are

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<sup>170</sup> "Spiralling," Article, *The Economist*, July 27th-August 2nd 2019, Gale.

<sup>171</sup> "Spiralling."

significant differences between the international media and the local media. While the Economist emphasizes the GCC's military incapacity, the Gulf media reports their countries' military successes. The Economist illustrates the GCC's inability to defend itself by giving examples of Houthi attacks on Saudi Arabia and GCC members in Yemen. In this context, the international media implies that the weapons purchased by the GCC countries, and their military exercises are not as valuable as the regime believes them to be. The Gulf media prefers to describe the GCC members' weapon purchases and military exercises as successes. The Gulf media chooses not to comment on issues such as the military failure of the GCC on issues related to threats and attacks from Iran and Yemen.

While Western media reports that the airstrikes in the Yemen War led by the Saudi regime killed civilians due to the incapability of the Gulf armies, they emphasize that the Saudi-led bloc could achieve no success against the Houthis and Iran. The New York Times article, dated 26 December 2018, criticizes the US arms sales to Saudi Arabia and Riyadh's operation in Yemen.<sup>172</sup> Emphasizing that Saudi Arabia has the third largest F-15 fleet in the world, the newspaper said that the Saudi pilots had almost no combat experience. The coverage underlined that inexperienced Saudi pilots flew from high altitudes to avoid being shot down, which caused civilian deaths in Yemen. The article emphasizes that the Saudi airstrikes did not show any success, and says, "this war has been a strategic disaster for the Saudis...Iran has gained Saudi Arabia's clumsy prosecution of war."

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<sup>172</sup> Declan Walsh and Eric Schmitt, "U.S. arms sales to Saudis leave a stain in Yemen: civilian deaths climb; errant bombings drive debate on an alliance with the Kingdom," *New York Times* (1923-) (New York, N.Y.), 12/26/2018 2018.

## ***2. Building Post Oil Economic Diversification Policies***

The Persian Gulf regimes - Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar - desire to reduce their reliance on oil exports in the framework of their respective 2030 visions, which they announced one after the other. At this point, UAE, and Qatar, in particular, aim to export defense materials with the help of the defense industry they have built. UAE ranked 18th among the world's largest arms exporters between 2017-2021.<sup>173</sup> In addition, Saudi Arabia wants to reduce its budget allocated to defense imports. Like the UAE, Qatar aims to diversify its economy through defense exports.

On the other hand, the media undertakes a vital task of announcing and legitimizing the defense industries of these countries. For this reason, the second theme in the media was that of building post-oil economic diversification policies. It should be kept in mind that building defense infrastructure is related to increasing non-oil exports, reducing dependence on oil, and curbing defense imports. Thus, it would be safe to say that these policies are not related to an arms race, such as achieving political goals in the international arena through armament, building defense capacity, deterring the enemy, or offensive capabilities.

Al Riyadh, in the news dated July 2018, stated that Saudi Arabia Military Industries (SAMI) signed a Joint Venture agreement with the Spanish Navanti company on the production of 5 corvettes.<sup>174</sup> In the news, which stated that 60% of the corvettes to be produced would be domestic, it was emphasized that the agreement fits perfectly with "Vision 2030 by localizing 50% of the total military spending by 2030". Founded

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<sup>173</sup> Pieter D. Wezeman, Alexandra Kuimova, and Siemon T. Wezeman, *Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2021*, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2022).

<sup>174</sup> "SAMI tawaque atifaqiat JV mae Navantia la 5 taradat bikhutut tawtin binisbat 60%," *Al Riyadh* 19 July 2018, Factiva.

in May 2017, SAMI aims for a defense industry concept similar to the roof defense companies established in other GCC countries. Within the scope of Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia announced that it aims to reduce dependence on oil, as well as increase domestic products in the defense industry. While praising SAMI in the news, the following statements draw attention: "SAMI is combining the latest technologies and the best national talent to develop military products and services at par with international standards across four business divisions - Aeronautics, Land Systems, Weapons and Missiles, and Defense Electronics. The company is also focused on increasing exports and bringing foreign investment to the Kingdom's military industries sector."<sup>175</sup> It can be stated that SAMI, which was established within the scope of all these developments, carries a message to the people of Saudi Arabia and other rival GCC members in terms of showing that the Saudi regime is not staying idle and is creating employment by making technological investments. Similar moves have taken place in the UAE and Qatar regarding their domestic defense industries. Given that Qatar and UAE copied Saudi Arabia's "Vision 2030," it could also be supposed that they are similarly copying the Kingdom with regards to developing their domestic defense industries.

The UAE is the pacesetter in the domestic defense industry in the Gulf. UAE-based *Al Ittihad* newspaper, in a news article dated to January 2013, gives information about the export success and other products of the UAE defense company Tawazun, including an armored vehicle, at the IDEX defense fair held in Abu Dhabi.<sup>176</sup> It states that the company wants to compete in various markets, including the Far East, and it is noted that the company wants to be a parts supplier in the aviation sector. The article

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<sup>175</sup> "SAMI tawaque atifaqiat JV mae Navantia la 5 taradat bikhutut tawtin binisbat 60%."

<sup>176</sup> "tawazun alqabidati takshif ean mudaraeat amaratyt mudadat llalgham," *Al Ittihad* 31 January 2013, Factiva.

underlines that the ratio of UAE employees is 55% in Tawazun, and that domestic defense industry companies create employment for citizens. It would be safe to say that the Gulf regimes use the media to legitimize their domestic industrial and weapons construction. In addition, the domestic defense moves in Saudi and Qatar show that these countries are copying and imitating each other. Hence, their tribalism and the perception of superiority are still alive.

The Qatar-based Al Sharq newspaper, in a news article in March 2018, announced that Qatari defense company Barzan Holding signed many defense agreements at the defense fair DIMDEX 18 held in Doha.<sup>177</sup> Underlining that Barzan Holding is the first industrial company established in Qatar in the field of defense and security, it celebrates that the company has signed agreements with many international defense companies to improve the capabilities of the Qatari army. It states that companies from Italy, Turkey, the USA, Norway, the UK, and Germany were among the companies with which Barzan Holding signed agreements at the fair. Regarding Barzan, the news states that the business platform is also “a gateway to the military industries in Qatar, which will provide opportunities for cooperation for international companies in the field of research and development, facilitating the transfer of knowledge and creating innovative technology in the field of defense and security.”<sup>178</sup> Barzan Holding is one among a list of defense companies list established by the Gulf monarchies, such as EDGE and Tewazun in the UAE and SAMI in Saudi Arabia. One can say that these companies set an example in the imitation and jealousy of monarchies

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<sup>177</sup> "barzan alqabidata tawaqae eadadan min alaitifaqiaat fi majalat aldifae walamn," *Al Sharq* 14 March 2018, Factiva.

<sup>178</sup> "barzan alqabidata tawaqae eadadan min alaitifaqiaat fi majalat aldifae walamn."

in the Persian Gulf. While the monarchies want to export through defense companies, they also tend to protect their prestige and pride through these companies.

### ***3. Appeasing the West***

Within the scope of their Vision 2030, the Gulf monarchies have been building the domestic defense industry with the partnership of defense companies from Western countries. In parallel, they continue to purchase weapons from the West - mainly American and Western European countries - with contracts worth billions of dollars. Thus, the rulers of the Persian Gulf monarchies, with their heavy military spending and industrial collaborations with the West, desire to mask potential criticisms to their regimes. In addition, they would like to secure Western help when any threat arises. Therefore, one may conclude buying arms and building their defence industries is less related to the arms race. At the center of this narrative, the media offers an excellent background and tool for the Gulf regimes. For this reason, the third theme built through the press is to appease the West.

The Economist questions the arms purchases of the Gulf monarchies in its article dated March 20, 1999. The article highlights that a long time passed after the Gulf War in 1991, and there was no immediate threat to the Persian Gulf monarchies. Therefore, the article asks: "why their governments need to keep spending so much money on defence."<sup>179</sup> The answer is more interesting; "even after all these purchases, the Gulf states still cannot defend themselves without Western help."<sup>180</sup> Moreover, citing the Al Yamamah scandal as an example, the article says, "Arms sales in Saudi Arabia have

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<sup>179</sup> "Won't you buy?," Article, *The Economist*, 1999/03/20/ 1999, Gale.

<sup>180</sup> "Won't you buy?."

also gained an ugly reputation for helping certain princes amass personal fortunes through commissions on contracts."<sup>181</sup> Therefore, it is understood that the Gulf monarchies want to appease the West through sweet arms deals and call Western countries for help when needed.

UAE's *Al Ittihad* newspaper reported in 1999 that Muhammad Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Armed Forces commander-in-chief, signed many defense agreements at the IDEX fair held in Abu Dhabi.<sup>182</sup> At the fair, the coverage stated that MBZ signed defense agreements for the training of military personnel, as well as missiles, electronic warfare systems, navy, and ammunition for the UAE army, with various countries, including the USA and Germany. The agreements signed by MBZ, whose influence on the military increased at that time, show the policies of MBZ to develop the UAE armed forces and the policies aimed at appeasing the West.

Saudi-based newspaper *Arab News*'s article praised the \$60 billion defense deal that the kingdom will sign with the United States.<sup>183</sup> The article legitimizes the military deal by highlighting that Saudi Arabia, like other countries, has the right to defend itself. Stressing that 75,000 Americans will be employed in US factories thanks to the military deal, the news underlines the importance of relations between the two countries. The article underlines the necessity of Saudi defense. Also, it emphasizes that the agreement will create employment in the USA thanks to the money paid by the kingdom. One should recall that when the military deal was on the agenda, US President Barrack Obama was in office, and relations between the two countries began

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<sup>181</sup> "Won't you buy?."

<sup>182</sup> "Military, other cooperation contracts concluded at defence fair," *Al Ittihad* 18 March 1999, BBC Monitoring.

<sup>183</sup> "Saudi paper defends planned 60bn-dollar US arms deal," *Arab News* 15 September 2010, BBC Monitoring.

to deteriorate. In this respect, one can state that the kingdom is willing to pay billions of dollars to appease the USA.

#### **4. Defiance**

The fourth theme constructed through the media is the messages of intimidation that the Persian Gulf monarchies send to their enemies and each other. In the struggle for hegemony in the Gulf, the local media also took on the task of conveying the messages of the monarchies to each other and to Iran, which they perceive as a threat. The Gulf monarchies send this message by criticizing their alliances, military maneuvers, arms purchases, local defense industry production, and each other's military alliances. For example, Riyadh wants to build an indigenous defense industry within Vision 2030, aiming to localize more than 50 percent of its military expenditures by 2030.<sup>184</sup> However, in 2018, the share of domestic industry in military production in Saudi was only 2%.<sup>185</sup> In line with their own visions for 2030, Qatar and the UAE are investing in their military industries and signing co-production agreements with Western countries. At this point, the purpose of building a defense industry, armament, and military alliances is to show the opponent or the enemy that monarchies are not idle.

Monarchies also send these messages by criticizing each other's defense policies and alliance preferences. However, this intimidation cannot be done through purchased or manufactured weapons. As in the case of Qatar and Yemen, the Gulf monarchies send messages of intimidation through their powerful allies. The Qatari administration

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<sup>184</sup> *Saudi Vision 2030 Document* (Saudi Arabia, 2016), <https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/v2030/overview/>.

<sup>185</sup> Zoltan Barany, *Indigenous Defense Industries in the Gulf*, Center for Strategic and International Studies (2020).



requested assistance from regional powers such as Turkey and Iran against the bloc led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which blockaded and threatened Qatar due to its foreign policy in 2017. Thereupon, a unit from the Turkish Army was deployed to Qatar in the same year. In the same vein, Saudi Arabia, which got stuck in the Yemen war, which started in 2015, suffered losses and could not resist the missile threats from Iran and the Houthis. Riyadh eventually ensured its security by increasing the US military presence on its territory. While US Patriot missiles were deployed in Saudi territory, the US navy increased its presence in the Gulf to protect the oil trade. In other words, these countries cannot use the weapons they bought and the defense infrastructures they built to defend themselves in times of crisis. Instead, they call on other countries to help ensure their safety. Therefore, one can conclude that monarchs desired to establish deterrence and intimidation, not through the weapons purchased or the defense industry built, but with the military assistance of their allies.

In an interview with Saudi-based Al Jazirah newspaper, Saudi Arabia Interior Minister Nayef bin Abdulaziz talked about Iran's nuclear enrichment efforts.<sup>186</sup> The minister said it should be remembered that Israel attacked Iraq before its nuclear reactor was completed. He stated that the world would not allow Tehran to produce and develop nuclear weapons, and "Iranian officials ... would respond to international appeals, so that the Iranian rejection of international appeals does not give a pretext to any foreign power to hurt Iran's interests" he said.<sup>187</sup> From the minister's statement, one can evaluate that Saudi Arabia threatened Iran's nuclear policy by citing the Israeli attack on Iraq's nuclear reactors as an example. It should be remembered that

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<sup>186</sup> "Saudi interior minister urges Iran to reconsider nuclear stand," *Al Jazirah* 21 May 2006, BBC Monitoring.

<sup>187</sup> "Saudi interior minister urges Iran to reconsider nuclear stand."

Ahmadinejad was elected as president of Iran in 2005, and Iran's relations with the Gulf states began to deteriorate due to Tehran's proactive foreign policy. Considering the tone of the minister's statements, one can say that Saudi Arabia started to take a tougher position against Tehran following Ahmadinejad's election.

On the other hand, with the blockade launched against Qatar in 2017, the conflict between the Gulf regimes accelerated through the media. Saudi-based *Al Riyadh* published an article on January 2019 that heavily criticizes Qatar's alliance preferences and regional policies.<sup>188</sup> According to the article, Israel, Iran, and Turkey used Qatar to dominate the Arab geography. The article tackles Qatar's connection and relations with these countries and terrorist groups. In this respect, the article criticizes Qatar's pursuit of alliances and accuses Doha of betraying Arab interests.

Similarly, an article published in the UAE-based newspaper *Al Ittihad* on February 2019 claims that Qatar has spent billions of dollars to persuade US President Donald Trump.<sup>189</sup> The article states that the Doha administration exerted political pressure on the US President through the Western media, lobbies, and Trump's close team to end the boycott. The article gives detailed information about the agreements made by the US lobby companies and the Qatari administration. Between the lines of the article, it is understood that the UAE is disturbed by the political attempts and alliance efforts made by Qatar to break the embargo. The Gulf monarchies use the local media to legitimize their arms purchases, and also use the local media to legitimize their messages of contention and intimidation with each other.

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<sup>188</sup> "qatar tanqul marakiz mukhatatat tahaluf alshari ala afryqya baed fashaliha fi asya," *Al Riyadh* 25 January 2019, Factiva.

<sup>189</sup> "aldawhat tuasil anfaq almalayin liastimalat almuqarabin min tramb," *Al Ittihad* 24 February 2019, Factiva.

On the other hand, in December 2018, Qatar-based newspaper Al Sharq published an article highlighting that Qatar is a more attractive partner for the West than the UAE and Saudi Arabia.<sup>190</sup> It is emphasized that Riyadh has been subjected to pressure and has lost its credibility due to the subject of the Saudi citizen journalist Jamal Khashoggi, who was killed in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul. While the article states that Qatar has overcome the political and economic blockade imposed on it and is a reliable partner, the news is also a message to the GCC summit to be held in Riyadh on December 9, 2018.

During the blockade against Qatar, the Qatar-based newspaper Al Sharq published numerous news articles criticizing Saudi Arabia and the UAE's military constructions. In its news dated February 2019, Al Sharq published a story criticizing IDEX military expo in UAE. Al Sharq's article stated that the British newspaper Guardian declared the fair as "a devastating celebration of militarism."<sup>191</sup> Two news pieces dated March 2018, and July 2018, covered the messages of the French parliament and international human rights organizations calling for the French administration to not sell weapons to Saudi Arabia and the UAE.<sup>192</sup> Both articles focused on the human rights violations recorded by Abu Dhabi and Riyadh in Yemen. It is understood that the actors in the GCC, whose relations were broken with the crisis in 2017, interfered with each other's arms purchases and alliance preferences, highlighted criticism of the other, and intimidated each other through the media.

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<sup>190</sup> "qatar sharik akthr jadhibiat lilgharb min alriyad wabwzby," *Al Sharq* 2 December 2018, Factiva.

<sup>191</sup> "alghardian- IDEX aboudhzby ahtifal mudamir lilnazeat aleaskaria," *Al Sharq* 22 February 2019, Factiva.

<sup>192</sup> "lajnat parlamaniat faransiat tutalib biwaqf tasdir alsilah lilsaeudiat walamarat," *Al Sharq* 1 March 2018, Factiva. "munazamat huquqiat duliati li"baris"- awqfu tasdir alsilah lilsaeudiat walamarat," *Al Sharq* 5 July 2018, Factiva.

It would be safe to say that the approach of international media to the conflict and rivalry between the monarchies is calmer than the news of the local media in the Gulf. The Economist, in an article dated December 12th-18th, 2020, discusses the embargo of Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt against Qatar.<sup>193</sup> The report states that Qatar and Saudi Arabia are close to reconciliation, even if they do not want to. However, it states that the conflict and friction between the UAE and Qatar continue. The article claims there is tension between the UAE and Riyadh by saying, "reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Qatar would add to a growing list of disagreements between Saudi Arabia and the UAE."<sup>194</sup> The article states that the UAE's 2019 withdrawal from the Saudi-led operation against the Houthis in Yemen has created conflict between Riyadh and Abu Dhabi. However, Saudi and UAE media reported that the withdrawal of Abu Dhabi from the Yemen operation was a planned move and did not create any troubles between the two countries.

#### **D. What does the Media Emphasize?**

The above analysis shows that Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar use their local media as a tool to justify their ideologies, regional policies, military alliances, and rivalries, especially armament. At this point, the local media in the Gulf wanted to show their host countries' superiority by praising them, which is directly connected to the tribal culture in the Gulf.

The Saudi, UAE, and Qatari local media have been tasked to inform the public about the arms deals of the monarchies with Western countries, especially after the 90s. Local media outlets tend to laud their regimes' arms deals, reflecting them as a success.

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<sup>193</sup> "Bridging the Gulf," Article, *The Economist*, December 12th-18th 2020, Gale.

<sup>194</sup> "Bridging the Gulf."

In addition, the Gulf media wants to demonstrate that monarchies are valuable in the eyes of the West through these agreements. In this respect, the local media coverage reflects the struggle for pride, prestige, and superiority among monarchies. However, the international media reports that the arms purchase agreements of the monarchies were made in order to appease the West, and monarchies would like to ensure their security through alliances. Also, it highlighted that their military attempts failed, as seen in the Yemen war.

Local media tend to report on the indigenous defense industry initiatives accelerated by the monarchies since the 2000s with great enthusiasm and praise. These coverages by Gulf media outlets contain tones that reflect the tendency among monarchies to copy and imitate each other.

It is possible to grasp the relations among the monarchies, which deteriorated further in the 2000s, through the local media. While the monarchies criticize each other for their foreign policies, they prefer to present their criticism through local media. Additionally, Saudi Arabia, in particular, sends messages of intimidation against Iran through its media. In addition, these monarchies criticize each other's military alliances and arms purchases through the local media.

In this context, the local media coverage of the Gulf monarchies' defense-related moves reflects the messages of prestige, post-oil economic policies, appeasement of the West, and intimidation. However, these messages of the local media may create the misperception that there is armed tension between the regimes. However, as mentioned in the themes above, the tension between monarchies is not related to an arms race based on deterrence and the action-reaction model. On the contrary, it reflects a kind of strife and disagreement rooted in tribalism and political differences.

Chapter 3 analyzed how the Persian Gulf monarchies justified their armaments through the media and provided the reader with a broader perspective on the nature of the rivalry between the Persian Gulf monarchies – Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar. Chapter 3 revealed that messages of local Gulf media that created the misperception that there is armed tension between the regimes. Chapter 4 will refute the allegation that there was an arms race among the Gulf monarchies.

## CHAPTER IV

### DEBUNKING THE ARMS RACE IN THE GULF

"Money for them is like rice. Are similar amounts not placed with the Americans?"<sup>195</sup>

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Sisi said mockingly by referring to the Persian Gulf monarchies, in a leaked voice recording allegedly belonging to him.

"...\$3 billion, \$533 million, \$525 million - that's peanuts for you. You should have increased it."<sup>196</sup>

U.S. 45th President Donald Trump said to Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Mohammed bin Salman, during the billions dollars arms deal.

Chapter 3 explored how Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar justified their armament through the media and provided the reader with a comprehensive perspective on the nature of the rivalry between the Persian Gulf monarchies. Chapter 3 revealed that coverage of the Gulf local media fed the misperception that armed tension exists between the Gulf regimes. Chapter 4 argues that the tension and conflict between Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar is not an arms race. In order to discuss the invalidity of the perception of the arms race in the Persian Gulf created by the discourse of the mainstream media, the aggressive armament of actors, and military buildup, Chapter 4 comparatively analyzes the military buildup of the Gulf discussed in Chapter 1, the

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<sup>195</sup> "Sisi mole leaks president's demands for Gulf cash," The New Arab, February 9, 2015, <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/analysis/sisi-mole-leaks-presidents-demands-gulf-cash>.

<sup>196</sup> "Remarks by President Trump and Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Before Bilateral Meeting," news release, March 20, 2018, <https://sa.usembassy.gov/remarks-president-trump-crown-prince-mohammed-bin-salman-kingdom-saudi-arabia-bilateral-meeting/>.

arms race literature examined in Chapter 2, and the media discourse researched in Chapter 3. In part A, the chapter deals with the questions why the armament and military buildup in the Persian Gulf cannot be defined as an arms race and how the military buildup in the Persian Gulf can be explained if it is not an arms race. Part B discusses the findings.

#### **A. Findings - Why it is not an Arms Race?**

In the Persian Gulf, the revolution in Iran in 1979, the Iran-Iraq war in 1980, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, and terrorism affected the threat perceptions of the Gulf monarchies, primarily Saudi Arabia, at various levels. One of the main reasons for the emergence of such a fluctuation is the desire to fill the gap created by the UK's withdrawal from the region in the early 1970s by regional actors such as Iran and Iraq. However, after the Gulf War in 1991, the USA filled the security gap with the military bases it established in the Persian Gulf monarchies that ensured the security of international oil routes. Therefore, one can claim that the Gulf monarchies prefer to align with the USA to guarantee their security and economy. In return, the Persian Gulf monarchies signed billions of dollars in arms deals with the United States and Western countries. For the Gulf regimes, what was meant by these alliance efforts and sweet arms deals was to curb each other's hegemony in the region by improving relations with the USA and Western countries and to call these countries for aid when needed, on the other hand. However, the efforts of the Gulf monarchies to ally with the USA and the West through armament, the conflicts and fluctuating relations between monarchs, the remarkable arms deals the monarchies signed and the military industry attempts are interpreted by the observers and the media as an arms race in the Persian Gulf. Here, by



employing Chapter 2's arms race themes; deterrence, action-reaction, military construction, political leverage, and military technology, this research claims that the Gulf regimes are not in an arms race. In order to analyze this, the above themes will be examined in turn through the armament and alliance policies of the Gulf monarchies. In addition, the local media analysis of the Gulf in Chapter 3 will be called for help, and it will be shown that the armament behavior in the Gulf is not an arms race.

### ***1. Jealousy and competition instead of deterrence***

Based on the narrative of the international environment's anarchic structure, states want to obtain arms to survive, ensure their security and prevent territorial loss. At this point, states want to build deterrence to defend themselves against potential threats through arms and the army. Thus, deterrence accepts that a state must maintain its integrity and prevent territorial losses to survive. Territorial loss may mean the loss of natural resources, which are considered national wealth, and may lead to state fragmentation. For this reason, states must demonstrate that they are ready to go to war if necessary, and to message their adversaries the high cost of war. At this point, states want to build their defense and keep their deterrence high because war is costly and destructive. In this line, army buildup and armament are desired as tools of deterrence and defense. However, actors carefully watch each other's moves and want to make sense of each other's arming. When state X is armed for its security, state Y cannot be sure as to the purpose of X's armament. Therefore, Y naturally obtains arms to overcome the security dilemma it faces. Thus, arms races emerge within the framework of the state's primary defense and security demands and needs. In this process, states that follow each other's military moves enter the action-reaction spiral, which is an

armed competition generally spread over a long period. However, it is essential to keep in mind that arms races are an infrequent and costly interaction. Therefore, it is thought that states prefer to ensure their security through alliances rather than armaments and arms races.

The conflict, rivalry, jealousy, and tension between the Persian Gulf monarchies Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE is no secret. Particularly the border issues of small monarchies with each other and Saudi Arabia after their independence in 1971 were among the issues that formed the basis of this tension. These countries established the GCC in 1981 to provide economic cooperation, put common security into service, and solve their problems. At the same time, they attempted to activate the Peninsula Shield Force as a joint security force. The subsequent events such as Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, bilateral border problems that continued until the early 2000s, reluctance in common security, and differences in foreign policy, revealed that these countries could not establish a common defense and deterrence. The reasons for this may be the conflict of monarchies with each other and differing political goals, as well as the hegemony that Saudi Arabia, which has an asymmetrical advantage in terms of population and geography, wants to establish over the tiny Gulf countries. Given their armies' incompetence, the Gulf monarchies had to obtain arms to appease the West and secure their security through alliances with other countries, such as the alliance with the US and its military bases in the Persian Gulf.

In parallel, the armament of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE is not aimed at deterring each other and convincing each other that war will be costly. It is because these countries tend to provide their security through alliances with other countries whenever needed. US bases in the Persian Gulf, countless military exercises with

Western countries, and billions of dollars' worth of weapons purchased but not used for inexperienced and limited manpower armies show that deterrence in the Persian Gulf is intended to be built through alliances with powerful countries, not with built armies, purchased weapons, and an indigenous defense industry.

In its moves against Iran, which stands out as a severe threat to the stability of the Gulf regimes, Saudi Arabia once more had to call on its allies for help. The Riyadh administration, which cannot resist Iran's asymmetric threat with armament, is looking for a solution within the US security umbrella. In addition, compared to the Gulf regimes, the weapon capacity of the Iranian army is thought to be technologically obsolete. Therefore, it is not easy to claim that there is armament depending on mutual causality between the parties. To determine an arms race between the parties, the literature examines whether mutual causality and action-reaction occur over arms expenditures between the parties.

Moreover, in the Yemen war that has been going on since 2015, Saudi Arabia's deploying US patriot missiles on its territory against the threat from the Houthis and calling the US for help are examples of Riyadh wanting to establish deterrence by purchasing it from other countries. This thesis determined through the media analysis in Chapter 3 that Saudi Arabia could not suppress the threat in Yemen, could not prevent attacks on its territory, and suffered significant casualties against the Houthis. It, therefore, called its Western allies for help. Thus, the ineffectiveness, and lack of deterrent capacity of the armies established by these countries, mainly with the weapons they bought from the West, has emerged once again with the Yemen war that started in 2015, as was the case with the 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

If the arms purchases of the Gulf regimes do not aim at deterrence or cannot build the country's defense through deterrence, what does it aim to do? As seen in the reports in the Gulf local media examined in Chapter 3, one of the reasons for the arming of Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar is the dispute between them. However, the competition here sits on a different ground than the competition entailed by an arms race. It would be safe to say that the main reason these monarchies obtained arms is linked to the past of tribalism in the Gulf.

The concepts of prestige and superiority in inter-tribal relations are important as they reinforce the power and tribal image and are a source of pride. Also, due to jealousy among tribes, these narrow structures want to seize the upper hand and demonstrate their superiority. In this context, state-of-the-art weapons, military products produced by the domestic defense industry, and so-called military successes are seen as a showcase for these small Gulf monarchies. In this manner, the Gulf monarchies/tribes present themselves as more prestigious and powerful than the rival state/monarchy/tribe. The coverage of the Gulf media analyzed in Chapter 3 also reveals this situation. Therefore, armament in these monarchies is not done to deter the rival but to show their state or tribe's superiority. In this context, one can claim that the armament of the Gulf regimes is not intended to build deterrence but is related to the concepts of prestige, honor, and pride based on the past of tribalism. It would also be safe to say that a deterrent through armament is not a real goal, given that they provide security through alliances. Therefore, the concept of deterrence, the essence of the arms race, could not be identified among the cases examined in the Gulf.

## ***2. Copying each other over Tribalism instead of Action-Reaction***

The aim of a state that wants to ensure its security by arming and establishing deterrence may not always be understood correctly by other states. The rival state, which does not want to lag behind its armed competitor or potential enemy and wants to maintain its deterrence and balance of military power, obtains arms as a counter move. The spiraling of this situation is defined as action-reaction in the literature. According to this concept, which is the essence of the arms race, state X initiates military construction for an unknown purpose. Another state, state Y, decides how to respond after observing state X's efforts to increase its military capabilities through armament. If Y does not respond, then it turns out that state X is acting unilaterally. In this case, it becomes difficult to talk about the existence of armed competition. However, if State Y perceives that State X's moves are threatening, then State Y's response may be to build an army and armaments. In this process, where intense competition is observed, both sides will want to follow each other's moves and respond to these moves. Therefore, one can say that there is a vital link between deterrence and action-reaction. This situation reveals the arms race between the actors.

On the other hand, the tribal past of the Persian Gulf countries is an essential element that maintains its influence even today and shows itself in social, political, and economic fields. Jealousy and imitation are among the prominent themes in tribalism. In this respect, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar have all announced a "Vision 2030." In the framework of these visions, three countries announced one after another that they were starting to build their defense infrastructure. The same attitude is present in the arms deals signed with the USA and the West. At first glance, one can claim that monarchies' behavior, such as arms purchases and defense industry constructions, reflects the action-

reaction behavior in the arms race, which begins with the aim of convincing the enemy that war will be expensive. However, in Gulf monarchies, the behaviors of copying each other (imitation) and jealousy, demonstrating their own superiority, which are rooted in the past of tribalism, are different from the action-reaction spiral. Although the search for supremacy and envy creates rivalry and dispute between Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar, in Gulf social life, these concepts come from the past of tribalism. Therefore, elements such as superiority and copying each other hold a strong position in the Gulf society. As a result of the analysis, it is safe to say the armament behaviors of the cases examined are not related to the concept of action-reaction in the arms race. It stems from jealousy, an eagerness to copy and imitate. In addition, in the printed media news analyzed in Chapter 3, the actors' copying, imitation, and jealousy of each other were revealed through the Gulf local media's discourse. Therefore, it is a more realistic approach in which the armament of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar are linked to tribalism, not action-reaction in an arms race.

### ***3. Appeasing the West through Military Alignment instead of using Weapons for Political Leverage***

Chapter 2 examined that the arms race could begin with the attempts of greedy states in an anarchic international environment that desire to achieve political goals. In this context, nations may desire to reach power and achieve their international goals through weapons. Consequently, weapons and armies are used as political leverage at this point. A state may prefer to get arms to increase its diplomatic weight in the international arena or attack another state. It could trigger an arms race between the actors, as the other state, which is not sure of the intentions of the potential armed enemy, will naturally want to protect itself. According to this approach, the power that

weapons and armies will bring is used for the state's interests in the international arena; however, this behavior may trigger an arms race.

The struggle for hegemony comes to the fore in the messages the Persian Gulf monarchies send each other and their potential enemies. The monarchies enact policies of intimidating each other through their respective national medias. Considering the armament and army construction of Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar, one can think that these monarchies want to use their army and weapons to convey the above message. However, these countries have not been able to build a capable army, as seen in the Yemen war launched by the Saudi-led coalition in 2015. Thus, the actors in the Gulf and other regional powers are aware of the ineffectiveness of the monarchies' armies. In addition, the coup of the armies in Arab countries is another reason for concern in the monarchies. Chapter 1 analyzed the cells in the Saudi Arabian Air Force, influenced by Nasserist-Arab nationalist ideas, who wanted to carry out a coup against King Faisal in 1969. Therefore, it would be safe to conclude that with the echo of this experience, the Gulf monarchies deliberately avoided forming a strong army.

In addition, due to the lack of human capacity and quality, the Gulf monarchies' Air Force warplanes were used for a long time by Pakistani and Western pilots who had retired from the armies of other countries. The inadequacy of the Gulf officers, on the other hand, strengthens the doubts about the capabilities of the armies built by the monarchies. Published reports emphasize that the combat pilots of the Gulf cannot respond to sudden dangers in military exercises.<sup>197</sup> Therefore, there are serious doubts

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<sup>197</sup> Barany, *Military Officers in the Gulf: Career Trajectories and Determinants*.

about the offensive capacity, adequacy, and strength of the armies built by Gulf monarchies.

To this end, one can argue that Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar want to achieve their political goals in the international arena not through their armies, but through military alliances with Western countries. Here, the concept of appeasing the West comes to the fore. It would be safe to say that the Gulf monarchies view the USA and Western countries as a tool both to ensure their security and to achieve their political goals. Examples such as billions of dollars of arms deals with the USA and Western countries and the cooperation with Western companies in the domestic defense industry show that these regimes want to hide potential criticisms against them. In addition, it is understood that monarchies want to take advantage of the security umbrella offered by Western countries when any threat arises, and want to achieve their political goals with the leverage provided by the Western alliance.

At this point, the aim of the alliances established with Western countries through arms deals and military industry construction, and frequently organized military exercises is to show the opponent or the enemy that they are not idle, on the other hand, to appease the West. In fact, the Qatar crisis in 2017 provides a vital basis for understanding the ineffectiveness of weapons and the armies built by the monarchies. When Saudi Arabia and the UAE launched a blockade of Qatar to achieve their political goals, they also considered military options. However, Qatar's alliance with the USA and Turkey and the Turkish military unit that it called for duty prevented this situation. In other words, the example of Qatar demonstrated that the Gulf monarchies could not meet their political goals and security through their weapons and armies. Likewise,



Saudi Arabia, which got bogged down in the Yemen war it started in 2015, suffered losses and could not resist the missile threats from Iran and the Houthis, wanted to ensure its security by deploying US Patriot missiles on its territory and demanded that the US military presence be increased. The UAE also withdrew from the Saudi-led coalition in 2019 due to its losses in Yemen. Therefore, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar showed that they could not achieve their political goals through armament and army building. Instead, they wanted to reach their political goals and appease the West through the atmosphere of arms agreements and alliances signed with the USA and western countries. For this reason, political leverage and 'the power will' over armament, which triggered the emergence of the arms race, cannot be applied to the cases in the Gulf.

#### ***4. Military Industry for Diversifying the Economy instead of Technological Competition***

The literature discusses that the arms race can also be triggered by R&D in defense technology and defense infrastructure construction. Accordingly, state X's advance or breakthrough in weapon technology may trigger state Y's perception of threat. The reason for this is the possibility of the state Y's weapon systems being technologically left behind and inadequate for defense. In a potential war, state Y's threat perception increases, as it can no longer defend itself with its obsolete weapons. For this reason, it would be safe to claim that technological developments in weapon systems and infrastructure construction also impact arms races and armament among the actors.

Persian Gulf regimes - Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar - want to reduce their reliance on oil exports within the framework of their future aspirations. At this point,

especially UAE and Qatar want to increase exports with the help of the defense industry they have built. UAE ranked 18th among the countries that exported the most weapons worldwide between 2017-2021.<sup>198</sup> Saudi Arabia wants to build an indigenous defense industry and localize more than 50 percent of its military spending by 2030.<sup>199</sup> However, in 2018, the share of domestic industry in military production in Saudi Arabia was only 2%.<sup>200</sup>

Starting from this, it is possible to trace the roots of tribalism when analyzing the synchronization of Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar's attempts on the domestic defense industry. Saudi Arabia founded the state-sponsored defense and aerospace firm Saudi Arabian Military Industries – SAMI – in 2017. Qatar, on the other hand, announced the founding of the state-backed defense firm Barzan Holding in 2016, and Barzan became active in 2018. UAE established a roof defense firm called EDGE Group in 2019. According to the company's website, it has 20 companies and around 6,000 employees. Therefore, it would be safe to say that the Gulf regimes copy each other in constructing defense infrastructure.

In addition, it can be stated that the construction of local defense industries in the Gulf by helping defense companies in Western countries, in a way, provides benefits for circulating the income from oil, placating the West, and purchasing security alliances from the West. One of the most important goals here for the UAE and Qatar is to reduce their dependence on oil by exporting defense rather than being motivated by

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<sup>198</sup> Alexandra Kuimova Pieter D. Wezeman, Siemon T. Wezeman, *TRENDS IN INTERNATIONAL ARMS TRANSFERS, 2021* (2022), [https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/fs\\_2203\\_at\\_2021.pdf](https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/fs_2203_at_2021.pdf).

<sup>199</sup> *Saudi Vision 2030 Document*

<sup>200</sup> Barany, *Indigenous Defense Industries in the Gulf*.

deterrence building. The Gulf local media, on the other hand, undertakes an essential task of announcing the military-industrial constructions of these countries in the context of superiority. For this reason, the central theme of the defense industries being built is post-oil economic diversification policies instead of deterrence building or action-reaction spiral.

## **B. Debate**

Chapter 4 found that the armament of the Gulf monarchies, the construction of the army, and the defense industry initiatives cannot be associated with the arms race. The arms race literature, the differences in the discourse of the local and international media, and the aims of military construction in the Gulf were compared to show the disagreement of the arms race discourse in the Persian Gulf. In the analysis, tribalism, appeasing Western countries, and post-oil diversification economies came to the fore as the reasons for armament. Chapter 4 does not deny the ongoing tension and rivalry between Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar. However, Chapter 4 found that the tension, rivalry, and strife between the Gulf monarchies are not related to an arms race, but due to the tribal structure, political goals, and alliance preferences of the Gulf. Chapter 5 summarizes the findings and suggests a collective defense strategy for the GCC countries.

## CHAPTER V

### THE NEED FOR A COLLECTIVE GCC DEFENSE STRATEGY

Chapter 4 found that the tension, rivalry, and strife between the Gulf monarchies are not related to the arms race phenomenon, but rather the armament and military build-up arose due to the tribal structure, political goals, and alliance preferences of the Gulf. Chapter 5 aims to summarize the results and offer a collective defense strategy for the GCC countries. The Gulf monarchies have encountered considerable challenges threatening their existence from the 1970s till today. At this point, the Persian Gulf has been a region where great and regional powers have competed for their interests since the Cold War due to energy security and the region's geopolitical importance. In one way or another, the motives of those super and regional powers had given way to significant turmoil in the Persian Gulf. Those are the regional hegemony quest of Iran before and after the revolution of 1979, which turned into a possible nuclear threat, the threat posed to the Gulf monarchies by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, and the turning of Baghdad into an island of instability with a civil war, terrorism, Arab Revolts, and Gulf's internal strife. The Gulf monarchies have not only tried to placate those threats but also sought to quell their disputes within the GCC. They attempted to revive joint military union and common security architecture through Peninsula Shield Force. However, while they saw the US security umbrella as more effective for security architecture, their security priorities and regional policies went in the opposite direction. In this vein, they could not contain their feelings of insecurity while they accelerated independent security policies, armament, and military buildup. This is the reference

point of the general wisdom that claims an arms race is happening between Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar against each other. At the same time, Saudi Arabia and UAE are seemingly taking measures against Iran.

At this point, the general wisdom of an arms race between the regional parties began to arise with the acceleration of armament and army building. In parallel, the reasons for arms races are as follows: potential threats from the enemy, military-technological developments, deterrence, action-reaction, political reasons, greed, competition, the anarchic nature of international politics, and bureaucratic interests. In response to the above actions, the general approach of states is as follows. Any step a state takes to meet its basic security needs may be perceived as a threat by another state. While this causes a security dilemma, parties that perceive threats from each other want to seize superiority by armament and military build-up and survive with counter moves. This intense interaction process is conceptualized as an arms race.

On the other hand, the Gulf local print media has played an active role in the discourse on the armament and military buildup in the Persian Gulf. In this context, the messages of the local media may create the misperception that there is armed tension or an arms race between the parties. This is because Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar use their local media as a tool to justify their ideologies, regional policies, military alliances, and rivalries, especially armaments. At this point, the local media in the Gulf wants to show their host countries' superiority by praising monarchies. Thus, one can say that it stems from the tribal culture in the Gulf. Therefore, this coverage by Gulf media outlets contain tones that reflect the tendency among monarchies to copy and imitate each other. In this context, the news that the local media reflects over the defense-related

moves of the Gulf monarchies reflects the messages of prestige, post-oil economic policies, appeasement of the West, and intimidation. Thus, the tension between monarchies is not related to an arms race based on deterrence and the action-reaction model. On the contrary, it reflects a kind of strife and disagreement rooted in tribalism and political differences.

As a result, the military development and the defense industry initiatives of the Gulf monarchies cannot be associated with an arms race. The thesis analyzed the themes in the arms race literature, the instrumentalization of the local media by the monarchies to justify their armament, the differences in the discourse of the local and international press, and the aims of the military building of the Persian Gulf monarchies to demonstrate the disagreement of the arms race discourse in the Persian Gulf. In the analysis, tribalism, appeasing Western countries, and post-oil diversification economies came to the fore as the reasons for armament. The thesis does not deny the ongoing tension and rivalry between Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar. However, the thesis found that the tension, rivalry, and strife between the Gulf monarchies are not related to the arms race phenomenon. Rather, the armament and military build-up arose due to the tribal structure of the monarchies, political goals such as appeasing the West, and alliance preferences of the monarchies.

In this context, the thesis suggests that it is a more realistic and achievable goal for the Gulf monarchies to have an understanding beyond individual efforts to ensure their security. At this point, the linguistic, religious, and ethnic ties between them and their collective history can serve as a glue to bring these monarchies together. Therefore, the Gulf monarchies can accomplish an understanding that will end their

disagreements by acting based on respect for each other's independent domestic and foreign policies. The author is aware that the deep strife, distrust, jealousy, and rivalry among the Gulf monarchies are significant obstacles to achieving the above goals. Monarchies, however, have a variety of tools to circumvent these issues. In this context, it would be a meaningful approach to activate the role of the GCC and transform it into a respected institution. Discussing the issues between the monarchies through the GCC will increase the power of this institution and turn it into a trustworthy umbrella organization in every sense. If the GCC acquires this role, it will provide valuable ground for easing political disputes and a collective approach to security. This study analyzed the failure to achieve the collective security and joint military policy that the Gulf monarchies endeavored from the 80s to the early 2000s. However, the direction of the world, greedy and ambitious states, the rapid developments in weapons technology, and terrorism all present new issues for the Gulf regimes. In addition, Gulf monarchies now have the experience of using the weapons they have acquired for many years, as seen in the Yemen war. All these threats make the collective security approach even more essential for the security of the Gulf. For this reason, it will be a valuable strategy for the Gulf monarchies to bring a collective security policy to the agenda again to ensure the security of the Persian Gulf and energy routes.

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