



# **Improving Counterterrorism and Law Enforcement Cooperation between the United States and the Arab Gulf States**

**Thomas Warrick  
and  
Joze Pelayo**



**Atlantic Council**

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Cover photo: Former United States Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff and Bahraini officials (not in the photo) observing a demonstration of shipboarding skills in Manama, Bahrain, Nov. 11, 2007. *Source:* Thomas Warrick/ Department of Homeland Security.

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## Executive Summary

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In the past fifteen-plus years, the United States and the countries of the Arab Gulf—Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)—have responded to security threats from the terrorists of al-Qaeda, the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), and those directed, enabled, or inspired by them. These terrorists have posed a major threat to the security of the United States, Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and Australia. During those years, the United States and its allies, including the countries of the Arab Gulf, have developed robust cooperation in the military, diplomatic, and intelligence domains. However, another important area of cooperation has been less-well developed: civilian security cooperation in areas of aviation security, border security, law enforcement, and maritime security.

Today, the United States is contemplating whether to reduce its military footprint in the Middle East—with President Trump and many Democrats calling for the partial withdrawal of US military forces from the region. During the relative lull in the terrorist threat from al-Qaeda and ISIS, the United States and the countries of the Arab Gulf should look at whether it is to their mutual security advantage to increase non-military, non-intelligence security cooperation in the civilian domain.

Whether to ramp up civilian, non-military, non-intelligence cooperation in the next few years is a matter of some urgency. Most counterterrorism experts warn that while ISIS has been knocked back on its feet, it is working towards a comeback. Its mid-2020 efforts are on a par with its activities in Syria and Iraq in 2012, two years before it emerged in mid-2014 to take over territory comparable in size to the United Kingdom. Al-Qaeda still has affiliates that pose a danger to international aviation and continue to inspire terrorism in the United States—most recently in a shooting in Pensacola, Florida, on December 6, 2019, that killed three and wounded eight. The much sought-after end of the civil war in Yemen—however important and desirable it will be to alleviate human suffering there—will paradoxically increase the threat from terrorists who will try to benefit from the resumption of civilian flights in and out of Yemen.

Iran is also posing an increasing threat to many of the countries of the Middle East and to the United States. Leaving aside the nuclear issue, Iran is currently carrying out through proxies and deniable actors a campaign of asymmetric attacks and non-kinetic warfare with the publicly acknowledged goal of driving the United States out of the Middle East. Iran appears to be calibrating its campaign

to stay just below the level of provoking a major US military response, but that very fact calls out for the need to find other, non-military ways other than (or in addition to) economic sanctions to protect the United States and its Arab Gulf allies from Iran's destabilizing efforts. The tools of civilian counterterrorism and law enforcement can help.

This report recommends that the United States and the countries of the Arab Gulf should work together to develop the desired end-state for ISIS and al-Qaeda's style of terrorism. This should involve the goal of reducing terrorist groups to the level that their threat can be addressed by local law enforcement and security services, without the need for extensive military operations or international deployments.

In order to achieve the desired end-state, the United States and the Arab Gulf should also increase efforts to disrupt terrorists' ability to move operatives, money, materiel, and information across international borders. The governments should increase efforts to prevent terrorists from establishing safe havens from which they could otherwise plan and organize attacks. The United States and several of the Arab Gulf governments are among the most advanced in using airline passenger information, biometric screening, and watchlist management, and they should help other countries in Africa (such as Sudan), the Middle East, and South Asia to comply with United Nations Security Council Resolution 2396 (December 2017) to develop and use these capabilities to protect international civil aviation.

Recent experience has shown a number of successful models for enhancing counterterrorism cooperation between the United States and the Gulf, including in areas of terrorist finance and countering radicalization. Another model that deserves closer attention for capacity building programs is the joint US-Saudi Office of Program Management-Ministry of Interior (OPM-MOI), under which the two governments cooperate on a government-to-government basis to enable Saudi Arabia to benefit from both US private sector and US governmental security capabilities when the two governments agree that the cooperation is in their mutual benefit. Some other Arab Gulf countries could benefit from setting up a similar program.

Many of these civilian security sector tools developed to stop terrorists can also be effective against Iran's asymmetric threats.

Additionally, the United States and many of its Arab Gulf allies are currently facing an Iranian covert influence

campaign of cyber operations and disinformation intended to weaken the allies' ability to disrupt Iran's regional ambitions. Interestingly, Iran's influence campaign in the Gulf more closely resembles Russia's influence campaign against the United States rather than Iran's own influence campaign against the United States. While some in the United States

are rightly calling for a campaign of democratic nations against Russian influence to disrupt democracy in Europe and the United States, the United States also has a strong interest in working with its longstanding Gulf allies to understand and develop measures to resist Iran's malign influence operations in both the United States and the Middle East.

## Scope of This Report

This report looks at **civilian, non-intelligence cooperation** for the security of the peoples of the United States and the Arab Gulf states: specifically, Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. It focuses primarily on efforts to counter terrorism, whether by terrorist organizations or state sponsors. The use of "law enforcement" here reflects a focus on law enforcement as one means to target terrorists and disrupt their activities, and also reflects the fact that terrorist organizations often carry out criminal acts to raise funds. The breadth of other law enforcement cooperation is outside the scope of this report.

This report does not focus on US-Arab Gulf military cooperation, which has been addressed in other reports by Atlantic Council experts and other leading think tanks, nor cooperation between intelligence services. It focuses on cooperation on the US side by the Departments of Homeland Security, Justice, and Treasury, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and their respective Gulf counterparts. The report does not focus on criminal cooperation between governments without a terrorism nexus, such as occurs on most counternarcotics investigations, intellectual property, child exploitation, and other kinds of criminal activity—though measures that enhance cooperation on terrorism cases often benefit other law enforcement cooperation.

*The Atlantic Council's Scowcroft Middle East Security Initiative convened a task force in September 2019 in light of recent developments in counterterrorism and regional security and the upcoming November 2020 US election to inform the governments of the United States and the Arab Gulf on the state of non-military, non-intelligence security cooperation, and whether that cooperation should be increased. This report presents the key findings and recommendations of that effort. The report was written by Nonresident Senior Fellow Thomas Warrick, who was a senior official at the US Departments of State and Homeland Security from September 1997 to June 2019. For the last 10 ¾ of those years, he was Deputy Assistant Secretary for Counterterrorism Policy at the Department of Homeland Security. The report also draws on the knowledge of a task force of former senior officials from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Departments of Defense, State and Treasury, the National Security Council, and the US intelligence community with extensive experience with the Middle East, terrorism, and criminal threats. The report is the sole responsibility of Mr. Warrick, and while the report reflects a consensus among the task force, not all task force participants may agree with every recommendation.*

**Key Findings** in blue. **Recommendations** in black. **Topic headings** in red.

# I. Introduction

## The international fight against terrorism needs to change.

The world changed after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks by al-Qaeda against New York and Washington.<sup>1</sup> It further changed as a result of subsequent terrorist attacks in Bali,<sup>2</sup> Riyadh<sup>3</sup>, Madrid<sup>4</sup>, London,<sup>5</sup> and Brussels,<sup>6</sup> among others. Terrorist attacks directed, enabled, or inspired by al-Qaeda and its offshoots like al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) targeted nations in the Middle East, Europe, Africa, Asia, and the United States. In response, the United States and its allies around the world, including the Arab nations of the Gulf,<sup>7</sup> led a campaign against al-Qaeda and its affiliates and adherents and, starting in 2014, against ISIS.

To many in the United States and elsewhere, the apex of the counterterrorism campaign against al-Qaeda was the successful US military raid that killed Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad, Pakistan on May 2, 2011,<sup>8</sup> but this was merely the most public of a series of measures the United States and many allies, including the countries of the Arab Gulf,

had undertaken in the ten previous years. ISIS's rise in 2013-14 was not a surprise to counterterrorism experts, who had been tracking the group's activities since its days as al-Qaeda in Iraq when it was able to transfer operatives from their birthplace in cities like Darnah, Libya, through Damascus, Syria, into northwestern Iraq.<sup>9</sup>

After ISIS's capture of Mosul in June 2014, the US-led "Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS" was established in September 2014,<sup>10</sup> and ultimately included seventy-seven nations and five multilateral organizations.<sup>11</sup> Based on a combination of ground force operations led by the Iraqi government and the mostly Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces, backed by US and coalition airpower, intelligence, and unilateral strikes, these efforts led to ISIS's loss of its final piece of territorial control in Baghuz, Syria, on March 23, 2019<sup>12</sup> and the death of ISIS "emir" Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi on October 27, 2019.<sup>13</sup>

Separate military and other pressures against al-Qaeda affiliates continued, as demonstrated by operations against a number of operatives of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula

- 1 Thomas H. Kean and Lee H. Hamilton, *The 9/11 Commission Report, National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States*, 2004, <https://www.9-11commission.gov/report/911Report.pdf>. The death toll of 2,981 included 2,152 at the World Trade Center, 125 at the Pentagon, and 256 on the four planes; Poyraz-Dogan, "Navy Remembers 9/11, Honors Victims," Navy Office of Information Public Affairs, September 12, 2018, [https://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story\\_id=107045](https://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story_id=107045). It is estimated that more than six thousand were injured.
- 2 On October 12, 2002, two bombs hit busy nightclubs in the tourist island, killing 202 people from around the world and injuring more than two hundred. "The 12 October 2002 Bali Bombing Plot," BBC, October 11, 2012, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-19881138>.
- 3 On May 12 and November 8, 2003, two major bombings took place in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Other major attacks in Saudi Arabia took place in Yanbu and al-Khobar on May 1 and 29, 2004. "One Bombed Compound Owned by Pro-Western Saudi," CNN, May 13, 2003, <https://www.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/meast/05/13/Saudi.jadawel/index.html>; "Saudis Expect Another Attack Any Time," CNN, November 10, 2003, <http://edition.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/meast/11/09/saudi.explosion/index.html>; Neil MacFarquhar, "Five Foreigners Killed in Attack At Saudi Office," *New York Times*, May 2, 2004, <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/02/world/five-foreigners-killed-in-attack-at-saudi-office.html>; Neil MacFarquhar, "Militants Attack in Saudi Oil Area; at Least 10 Dead," *New York Times*, May 30, 2004, <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/30/world/militants-attack-in-saudi-oil-area-at-least-10-dead.html>.
- 4 On March 11, 2004, commuter trains in Madrid were attacked, killing 193 and injuring around two thousand. "The Madrid Train Bombings and What Happened Next," Reuters, February 14, 2007, <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSL14289939>.
- 5 On July 7, 2005, four coordinated suicide attacks in London killed fifty-two people and injured more than seven hundred. "July 7 2005 London Bombings Fast Facts," CNN, June 18, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2013/11/06/world/europe/july-7-2005-london-bombings-fast-facts/index.html>.
- 6 On March 22, 2016, three coordinated bombings at Brussels airport and a metro station killed thirty-two people and injured around 340 people from around the world. "Brussels Explosions: What We Know," BBC, April 9, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35869985>.
- 7 Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates form the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Iraq is the other Arab country included in this report, recognizing Iraq includes other ethnicities, including a substantial Kurdish population, as well as other ethno-linguistic groups.
- 8 "Press Briefing by Senior Administration Officials on the Killing of Osama Bin Laden," The White House, May 2, 2011, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/05/02/press-briefing-senior-administration-officials-killing-osama-bin-laden>. The raid took place shortly after 1 am Pakistan time on May 2 but was reported in Washington on the evening of May 1.
- 9 Brian Fishman and Joseph Felter, "Al-Qa'ida's Foreign Fighters in Iraq: A First Look at the Sinjar Records," Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, January 2, 2008, <https://ctc.usma.edu/al-qaidas-foreign-fighters-in-iraq-a-first-look-at-the-sinjar-records/>.
- 10 John Kerry, "Announcement of General John Allen as Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL," US Department of State, September 13, 2014, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2014/09/231627.htm>.
- 11 "82 Partners United in Ensuring Daesh's Enduring Defeat," The Global Coalition Against Daesh, accessed June 25, 2020, <https://theglobalcoalition.org/en/partners/>.
- 12 "Islamic State Group Defeated as Final Territory Lost, US-Backed Forces Say," BBC, March 23, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-47678157>.
- 13 "Remarks by President Trump on the Death of ISIS Leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi," The White House, October 27, 2019, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-death-isis-leader-abu-bakr-al-baghdadi/>.

(AQAP), including one of AQAP's founders, Qasim al-Rimi, who was killed in early 2020.<sup>14</sup>

**The terrorist threat posed by ISIS, al-Qaeda, and their supporters, however, has not gone away.** ISIS is working to stage a comeback. ISIS is already back to its 2012 level of activity in Iraq, which predated by two years ISIS's June 2014 takeover of much of northeast Syria and the Iraqi city of Mosul.<sup>15</sup> Nor has the threat from al-Qaeda receded: bin Laden's successor Ayman al-Zawahiri is still alive, and many of al-Qaeda's adherents moved to a safe haven in northwest Syria starting in 2014.<sup>16</sup> On December 6, 2019, Mohammed Saeed al-Shamrani, a pilot in the Royal Saudi Air Force, killed three and injured eight US service personnel at the Pensacola Naval Air Station. AQAP claimed credit for the attack.<sup>17</sup> AQAP named al-Rimi's successor on February 23, 2020, and is still active within Yemen.<sup>18</sup>

**The need for international cooperation against ISIS and al-Qaeda is still strong.** Every country in the Middle East today remains a source, transit, or destination country for terrorists who seek to threaten the United States, the Middle East, or US allies in Europe, Asia, and Africa. The United States remains a target for international terrorist groups<sup>19</sup> and has seen people born or raised in the United

States choose to travel to terrorist safe havens like parts of Somalia under al-Shabaab during the late 2000s and Syria under ISIS during the mid-2010s.

While the world copes with the public health, economic, and security threat from COVID-19, groups like ISIS and al-Qaeda are seeking to exploit these disruptions in their tailored recruiting and propaganda.<sup>20</sup>

## Change is coming to the US military presence in the Middle East.

*US President Donald J. Trump campaigned in 2016 in part on a promise to withdraw US forces from Afghanistan and the Middle East.* Since his 2016 inauguration, his administration has announced drawdowns or withdrawals in Afghanistan and Syria<sup>21</sup> and, despite sending additional troops to Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Kuwait in response to Iranian attacks,<sup>22</sup> is still interested in additional drawdowns. *A number of Democratic presidential candidates campaigned on significant drawdowns or outright withdrawal.*<sup>23</sup> Democratic nominee Joe Biden has said "it's a mistake to pull out the small number of troops that are there now to deal with ISIS"<sup>24</sup> and to patrol the Gulf, but said at a debate in November 2019 he would stop weapons sales to Saudi Arabia.<sup>25</sup>

14 "Al-Qaeda Leader in Yemen Killed by US Strike," *BBC*, February 7, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-51409581>.

15 Michael Knights and Alex Almeida, "Remaining and Expanding: The Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq in 2019-2020," *CTC Sentinel* 13, no. 5 (May 2020): pages 12-27, <https://ctc.usma.edu/remaining-and-expanding-the-recovery-of-islamic-state-operations-in-iraq-in-2019-2020/>.

16 Colin Clarke and Charles Lister, "Al Qaeda Is Ready to Attack You Again," *Foreign Policy*, September 4, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/09/04/al-qaeda-is-ready-to-attack-you-again/>.

17 Katie Benner and Adam Goldman, "F.B.I. Finds Links Between Pensacola Gunman and Al Qaeda," *New York Times*, May 18, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/18/us/politics/justice-department-al-qaeda-florida-naval-base-shooting.html>; FBI Press Release, "FBI Director Christopher Wray's Remarks at Press Conference Regarding Naval Air Station Pensacola Shooting Investigation," Federal Bureau of Investigation, May 18, 2020, <https://www.fbi.gov/news/pressrel/press-releases/fbi-director-christopher-wrays-remarks-at-press-conference-regarding-naval-air-station-pensacola-shooting-investigation>.

18 Gregory Johnsen, "Khalid Batarfi and the Future of AQAP," *Lawfare*, March 22, 2020, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/khalid-batarfi-and-future-aqap>.

19 The March edition of *Al-Naba*, ISIS's weekly newsletter urged its followers to step up their attacks on "crusader" nations, mainly the United States and Europe. "Contending with ISIS in the Time of Coronavirus," *Crisis Group*, March 31, 2020, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/contending-isis-time-coronavirus>.

20 Joseph Hinks, "With the World Busy Fighting COVID-19, Could ISIS Mount a Resurgence?," *Time*, April 29, 2020, <https://time.com/5828630/isis-coronavirus/>; Ryan Browne, "ISIS Seeks to Exploit Pandemic to Mount Resurgence in Iraq and Syria," *CNN*, May 8, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/07/politics/isis-coronavirus-iraq-syria/index.html>; Ivano di Carlo, "In Chaos, They Thrive: The Resurgence of Extremist and Terrorist Groups During the COVID-19 Pandemic," *European Policy Centre*, May 5, 2020, <https://www.epc.eu/en/Publications/In-chaos-they-thrive-The-resurgence-of-extremist-and-terrorist-group~32c800>.

21 Julian E. Barnes and Eric Schmitt, "Trump Orders Withdrawal of U.S. Troops From Northern Syria," *New York Times*, October 13, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/13/us/politics/mark-esper-syria-kurds-turkey.html>; Dan Lamothe et al., "Trump Orders Major Military Withdrawal from Afghanistan as Mattis Departs," *Washington Post*, December 21, 2018, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/trump-agitating-for-major-military-withdrawal-from-afghanistan-advisers-say/2018/12/20/0c35f874-04a3-11e9-b5df-5d3874f1ac36\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/trump-agitating-for-major-military-withdrawal-from-afghanistan-advisers-say/2018/12/20/0c35f874-04a3-11e9-b5df-5d3874f1ac36_story.html); Kylie Atwood and Ryan Browne, "Trump Administration Finalizing Plan to Withdraw 4,000 Troops from Afghanistan," *CNN*, June 27, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/26/politics/us-troops-afghanistan/index.html>.

22 Dan Lamothe, "U.S. to Send 1,800 Additional Troops to Saudi Arabia to Boost Defenses Against Iran," *Washington Post*, October 11, 2019, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/us-to-send-additional-troops-to-saudi-arabia-to-boost-defenses-against-iran/2019/10/11/7b8c8de6-ec42-11e9-9c6d-436a0df4f31d\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/us-to-send-additional-troops-to-saudi-arabia-to-boost-defenses-against-iran/2019/10/11/7b8c8de6-ec42-11e9-9c6d-436a0df4f31d_story.html); Alex Johnson et al., "U.S. Sends Hundreds of Troops to Mideast After Attack on Embassy Compound in Baghdad," *NBC*, December 31, 2019, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/u-s-sending-hundreds-troops-mideast-after-attack-embassy-compound-n1109196>; Courtney Kube, "U.S. to Send 3,000 Troops to Middle East After Embassy Attack, Soleimani Killing," *NBC News*, January 3, 2020, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/military/u-s-sending-thousands-more-troops-mideast-after-baghdad-attack-n110081>.

23 "Candidates Disagree over Whether to Keep Troops in the Middle East," *CNN*, January 14, 2020, [https://www.cnn.com/politics/live-news/january-democratic-debate-live/h\\_b728e6290818da7534bffb2e35b8ef7](https://www.cnn.com/politics/live-news/january-democratic-debate-live/h_b728e6290818da7534bffb2e35b8ef7).

24 "Biden: 'We Have Lost Our Standing in The Middle East,'" *CNN*, January 14, 2020, [https://www.cnn.com/politics/live-news/january-democratic-debate-live/h\\_3b34d3e1788f949d7460f3b26f2b5f0a](https://www.cnn.com/politics/live-news/january-democratic-debate-live/h_3b34d3e1788f949d7460f3b26f2b5f0a).

25 "Democratic Debate Highlights: Candidates Discuss Rights and U.S. Role in the World," *Washington Post*, November 20, 2019, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/democratic-debate/2019/11/20/eb26c980-0bde-11ea-8397-a955cd542d00\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/democratic-debate/2019/11/20/eb26c980-0bde-11ea-8397-a955cd542d00_story.html).



These criticisms of previous Middle East policy stem from two principal causes. First, the perception that *the United States has over-relied on military cooperation* to assure the security of the Middle East, a region the United States has considered to be of vital interest for more than eighty years. Robert M. Gates, US Secretary of Defense from 2006 to 2011, argued this case in the July-August 2020 issue of *Foreign Affairs*.<sup>26</sup> He rightly points out the forms of non-military power such as diplomacy and information programs that “Congress has starved.” However, his proposed solution was grounded in a pre-9/11 worldview of the tools of US national power: strengthening the US Department of State and US Agency for International Development, development assistance, working with international organizations, and overhauling public diplomacy.

The second basis for criticism of US Middle East policy is the perception that it has failed to achieve the goals advanced by US policymakers, specifically (1) building stable democracies and (2) ending the threat of terrorism.<sup>27</sup> While part of the reason for this perception can be explained by the natural tendency for politicians in a democratic society to over-promise,<sup>28</sup> it is also true that the United States has under-delivered—and sometimes failed—to adequately fund civilian programs needed to consolidate the success of military efforts. Gates makes this point with respect to Libya,<sup>29</sup> but the point is valid for Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, and the war against ISIS and al-Qaeda—in contrast to post-World War II Germany and Japan, and post-Korean War South Korea, where the United States did not skimp on civilian assistance.

It is therefore fair to ask what kind of change may be coming to US commitment to the Middle East. As William F. Wechsler, director of the Atlantic Council’s Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East, has pointed out, this invariably

causes concern about a repeat of the British withdrawal from the Gulf of the early 1970s,<sup>30</sup> which left a power vacuum ultimately filled by the United States. Today, some are asking whether China will in some way take the place of the United States.<sup>31</sup>

**There is another path that is also open to US policymakers:** to recognize that US national security interests can sometimes be better advanced by increasing *civilian* security sector efforts to work with and, where necessary, build up Middle East civilian counterterrorism and law enforcement capabilities.<sup>32</sup> Table 1 on page 6 lists some of the areas of expertise and cooperation of US civilian security departments and agencies. Consider the benefits to US national security of closer cooperation between US and Middle East counterparts in these fields.

From the standpoint of US national security, US military reductions should not necessarily mean that China or Russia fills the “vacuum” of security cooperation in the Arab Gulf. It could mean that the United States, instead of relying almost entirely on military and intelligence relationships, looks to build *civilian* security relationships as well.

### The challenges from the Gulf side.

The countries of the Arab Gulf face a number of different challenges. **First is the challenge of modernization.** Saudi Arabia has the ambitious economic and social goals of Vision 2030, and other Arab Gulf nations have similar ambitions. But the reduction in oil demand, COVID-19, and lower oil prices are a challenge to these ambitions.<sup>33</sup> In Iraq, widespread protests with the support of millions of Iraqis call for an end to corruption, Iranian influence, and the *muhasasa* system by which political parties benefit from control of specific ministries.<sup>34</sup> Bahrain seeks to train a new generation

- 26 Robert M. Gates, “The Overmilitarization of American Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-06-02/robert-gates-overmilitarization-american-foreign-policy>. His article was an excerpt from his book *Exercise of Power: American Failures, Successes, and a New Path Forward in the Post-Cold War Period* (Knopf, 2020).
- 27 Bernie Sanders, “Ending America’s Endless War,” *Foreign Affairs*, June 24, 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2019-06-24/ending-americas-endless-war>; Steve Holland, “Trump to West Point Grads: ‘We Are Ending the Era of Endless Wars,’” Reuters, June 13, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-wars-idUSKBN23K0PR>; Ryan Teague Beckwith, “Read Trump’s ‘America First’ Foreign Policy Speech,” *Time*, April 27, 2016, <https://time.com/4309786/read-donald-trumps-america-first-foreign-policy-speech/>; Erik Goepner, and A. Trevor Thrall, *Step Back: Lessons for U.S. Foreign Policy from the Failed War on Terror*, Cato Institute, June 26, 2017, <https://www.cato.org/publications/policy-analysis/step-back-lessons-us-foreign-policy-failed-war-terror>.
- 28 George W. Bush, “President Discusses the Future of Iraq, Speech to the American Enterprise Institute,” White House Archives, February 28, 2003, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/02/20030226-11.html>.
- 29 Robert M. Gates, “The Overmilitarization of American Foreign Policy,” 2020.
- 30 William F. Wechsler, “US Withdrawal from the Middle East: Perceptions and Reality,” *The MENA Region: A Great Power Competition*, ed. Karim Mezran and Arturo Varvelli (Milano, Italy: Ledizioni, 2019), 13, <http://doi.org/10.14672/55260718>; <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/MENA-Chapter-one.pdf>.
- 31 Ariel Cohen, “Will China Replace the U.S. As The Middle East Hegemon?,” *Forbes*, February 14, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/arielcohen/2019/02/14/will-china-replace-the-u-s-as-the-middle-east-hegemon/#721534aa25cd>.
- 32 The question whether to change US support for civilian *non*-security assistance is outside of the scope of this paper.
- 33 Stephen Grand and Katherine Wolff, *Assessing Saudi Vision 2030: A 2020 Review*, Atlantic Council, June 17, 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/assessing-saudi-vision-2030-a-2020-review/>.
- 34 Abbas Kadhim, “The Challenges Iraq Faces After Prime Minister’s Resignation,” *MENASource*, Atlantic Council, November 30, 2019, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/the-challenges-iraq-faces-in-after-prime-ministers-resignation/>.

**Table 1: Examples of Civilian Security Sector Capabilities of the US Government**



**Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)**

Counterterrorism investigations.  
Cybersecurity.  
Forensics analysis.  
Watchlist management.



**Department of Homeland Security (DHS)**

Aviation security.  
Border security.  
Maritime security.  
Cybersecurity.  
Infrastructure protection.  
Customs investigations.  
Screening and vetting.  
Fraudulent document detection.  
Bulk cash criminal investigations.  
Disaster recovery.



**Department of Justice (DOJ)**

Law enforcement training.  
Training for prosecutors.  
Prison management and reform.  
Narcotics investigations and prosecutions.



**Department of the Treasury**

Terrorist finance disruption.  
Investigating abuses of the international banking system.  
Sanctions designations and enforcement.  
Financial criminal investigations.



**Department of State**

Policy coordination.  
Diplomatic support.  
Funding for many overseas programs.

of law enforcement officers to use modern investigative methods. Many Arab Gulf countries are trying to diminish their reliance on oil and gas revenues, find ways to productively employ a generation of their own young women and men, and to cope with the challenges of climate change in a region with limited water and arable land. All are trying to navigate the societal changes of the combination of smart-phone technology, the internet, and social media.

A second challenge arises from **political differences among the countries of the region**. Iran is covered in its own section on page 9. The other notable difference at present is what the US government refers to as the “rift” between Qatar and the “quartet” of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, and Kuwait. Jordan and Egypt are sometimes aligned with the Quartet as parties to the dispute. While this dispute has been simmering for many years, a major break in relations in June 2017 led to mediation efforts almost immediately by then-US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, in part to keep the Gulf

Cooperation Council (GCC) united and focused against the threat from Iran. Qatar still participates in the multilateral US-GCC Terrorist Financing Targeting Center in Riyadh.

**The Gulf countries’ security needs and interests are also changing.** The security situation in the Gulf has changed radically from what it was forty years ago in October 1980. It’s an effort to remember—or look up on the Internet—what the Gulf security picture looked like. September 22, 2020, was the fortieth anniversary of Iraq’s invasion of Iran, and August 2, 2020, was the thirtieth anniversary of Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait. The US defeat of Saddam Hussein in April 2003 changed the Gulf’s security situation radically. So, too, did the Bush Administration’s failure to prevent Iran from gaining a major role in post-Saddam Iraqi politics. By the middle of the first decade of the 2000s, the threat of conventional attack by any country other than Iran had largely evaporated, and all the countries in the region rightly considered al-Qaeda, and later ISIS, to be a threat to their security. Had Iran not actively backed the Huthis in

Yemen, the Yemeni civil war would almost certainly have stayed a largely Yemeni affair. The Arab Spring began in Tunisia in 2010 and spread to other countries in 2011 with lasting effects, even to those that did not undergo civil war or instability.

To deal with the changing security situation over the past twenty years, different countries of the Arab Gulf pursued different strategies of confrontation and co-optation, and all made use of international alliances. All relied to some extent on a mix of: (1) domestic security and law enforcement services; (2) military and intelligence cooperation with the United States and other countries, even including Iran in the case of Iraq's efforts to defend itself from state collapse after ISIS's June 2014 takeover of Mosul; and (3) a combination of legal and social pressures and incentives to deter people from becoming radicalized, and to de-radicalize or isolate those who were committed to violence.

While military support from the United States is welcome in many of the Arab Gulf countries, and—considering the threat from Iran—is essential to some countries, over-militarization of their security relationship with the United States is not necessarily the answer to their problems, either. Except for Iraq's campaign against ISIS, and setting aside the campaign in Yemen, the other countries of the Arab Gulf made only limited use of their military forces against terrorist groups.

## The challenge of Iran.

Today, Iran poses the greatest conventional and asymmetric challenge to the autonomy of the Arab Gulf states. Two of the countries are on reasonably good terms with Iran—Qatar and Oman, both of which also enjoy good relations with the United States. Two—Saudi Arabia and Bahrain—have been the subject of hostile attacks from Iran or Iranian proxies in the last several years.<sup>35</sup> Some attacks—such as the June 13, 2019 Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) attacks on oil tankers in the Gulf of Oman,<sup>36</sup> and the September 14, 2019 Iranian aerial attack on the Saudi Aramco oil facilities at Abqaiq and Khurais, Saudi Arabia<sup>37</sup>—qualify as conventional military attacks carried out by Iranian military units. Other attacks, such as the drone strike on August 17, 2019, by IRGC Quds Force (IRGC-QF)-backed Houthi forces against a natural gas liquids plant in the Shaybah oilfield in the Empty Quarter, Saudi Arabia, would likely be considered acts of war even though most of the international community recognizes the Hadi government, not the Houthis, as the legitimate government of Yemen.<sup>38</sup>

Other attacks qualify as terrorism by most internationally accepted definitions.<sup>39</sup> Iran has carried out or sponsored acts of terrorism in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia.<sup>40</sup> On March 3, 2014, Bahrain's police force was attacked by the Iran-backed al-Ashtar Brigades, when a sophisticated

35 *Country Reports on Terrorism 2019*, US Department of State, June 2020, <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2019/>. The pdf version of the 2019 report is at <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Country-Reports-on-Terrorism-2019-2.pdf>.

36 On June 13, 2019, IRGC vessels attacked two oil tankers in the Persian Gulf. "Tankers Are Attacked in Mideast, and U.S. Says Video Shows Iran Was Involved," *New York Times*, June 13, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/13/world/middleeast/oil-tanker-attack-gulf-oman.html>.

37 Thomas S. Warrick, "What the Abqaiq Attack Should Teach Us About Critical Infrastructure," *MENASource*, Atlantic Council, September 18, 2019, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/what-the-abqaiq-attack-should-teach-us-about-critical-infrastructure/>; "UN Report Links Iran To Attacks on Saudi Oil Tankers," *Oil Price*, June 13, 2020, <https://oilprice.com/Geopolitics/Middle-East/UN-Report-Links-Iran-To-Attacks-On-Saudi-Oil-Tankers.html>; "Special Report: 'Time to Take Out Our Swords' - Inside Iran's Plot to Attack Saudi Arabia," *Reuters*, November 25, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-aramco-attacks-iran-special-rep-idUSKBN1XZ16H>; David Wainer, "Missiles in 2019 Saudi Oil Attacks Came from Iran, UN Says," *Bloomberg*, June 12, 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-06-12/missiles-used-in-saudi-attacks-last-year-came-from-iran-un-says>.

38 Similarly, if the Huthis launched a drone strike against Abu Dhabi airport, as the Huthis claimed—but that Abu Dhabi denied—that would also likely be considered an act of war under international law. "UAE denies report of Houthi drone attack on Abu Dhabi airport," *Reuters*, July 26, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-emirates-attack/uae-denies-report-of-houthi-drone-attack-on-abu-dhabi-airport-idUSKBN1KG23W>.

39 There is no universally agreed definition of terrorism. Most internationally recognized definitions include these elements: (i) a non-state actor (ii) commits a criminal act (iii) against non-combatants who are not legitimate targets of war (iv) intending to spread fear among a civilian population (v) to coerce a government or international organization into taking action, or refrain from taking action. Under US law, 8 U.S.C. § 2331, "international terrorism" is defined as "violent acts" or criminal "acts dangerous to human life" outside the United States that "appear to be intended ... to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or ... to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping." The most succinct US legal definition is in 22 U.S.C. § 2656f(d)(2): "premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents." This is the standard prescribed for the annual Department of State country reports on terrorism. This report considers cyberattacks by non-state actors, including those acting under contract to a state entity such as the IRGC, as acts of terrorism, if the target is not a legitimate target of war, and the action is for political purposes. The United States designated the IRGC, an entity of the government of Iran, as a Foreign Terrorist Organization under section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1189, effective April 15, 2019. For the purposes of this paper, actions taken by the IRGC itself are treated as acts of war, rather than terrorism, but acts by private entities, such as businesses organized under Iranian law, would be acts of terrorism regardless.

40 Michael Belfer and Khalid Alshaikh, *Iran's Clandestine War on the Kingdom of Bahrain: Saraya al Ashtar and the Military Wing of Hezbollah Bahrain*, Dirasat, King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies (KFCRIS), 2019, <https://www.kfcris.com/pdf/09677d7a8899e33b05594dd8c0c433975d69199a5cf98.pdf>; In 1982, the IRGC-backed Islamic Front took over police stations, ministries and radio stations in Bahrain, and in 2018, Khamenei's representative Hossein Shariatmadari, renewed Iran's territorial claims over the island. "Flash Point - Bahrain," *Crisis Group*, October 16, 2018, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/trigger-list/iran-us-trigger-list/flashpoints/bahrain-0>; on July 15, 2015, Bahrain's security forces seized a ship with arms smuggled from Iran, including Iranian-made hand grenades, EFPs, among others. Phillip Smyth, "After Nuke Agreement, Blocking Iranian Aggression in Bahrain," *The Hill*, September 28, 2015, <https://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/foreign-policy/255028-after-nuke-agreement-blocking-iranian-aggression-in>.

improvised explosive device (IED) killed three policemen, including an adviser from the United Arab Emirates, who were lured to the site of the incident by a staged local protest.<sup>41</sup> On October 1, 2017, the militant group Wa'ad Allah ("God's Promise" Brigades), an affiliate of the Iran-backed al-Ashtar Brigades, detonated an IED that targeted a Bahraini Ministry of Interior checkpoint in Daih, Bahrain, injuring five police officers.<sup>42</sup> On October 28, 2017, an IRGC-trained group carried out a bomb attack in Bahrain against a passenger bus, killing a police officer and injuring eight others.<sup>43</sup> On November 10, 2017, Iranian-trained Bahrainis carried out an attack in Buri, Bahrain, against an oil pipeline that provides Saudi Arabian crude to the Bahrain Petroleum Company refinery at Sitra.<sup>44</sup> On December 31, 2019, Iran-backed militia elements, including Kata'ib Hezbollah, attacked the US Embassy in Baghdad, Iraq.<sup>45</sup>

Iraq is in the most difficult position of the countries studied in this report, given the campaign by Iranian proxy forces against the United States. Iran's purpose, its leaders admit, is to drive the United States out of the Middle East, starting with Iraq.<sup>46</sup> Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates are in the middle of the Arab Gulf spectrum.

The United States has considered Iran a state sponsor of terrorism since January 19, 1984,<sup>47</sup> and State Department terrorism reports during administrations of both parties

have variously called the Iranian regime "the foremost state sponsor of terrorism"<sup>48</sup> and "the world's worst state sponsor of terrorism."<sup>49</sup>

Iran sees the goals of the IRGC Quds Force as backing non-state actors that can carry out acts of violence to achieve political aims. Rohollah Qaderi Kangavari, an assistant professor at the IRGC's Imam Hussein University, wrote in the Autumn 2019 edition of *Afag-e Amniat* (Security Horizon) that "historically, whenever Iran defined its national security within its political border, its independence and national sovereignty were violated and its territorial integrity threatened. ... Therefore, Iran cannot counter external threats absent a robust regional or even extra-regional presence."<sup>50</sup> Qaderi Kangavari described the IRGC Quds Force goals as:<sup>51</sup>

1. To secure the survival of the Syrian regime... in order to preserve the overland corridor from Iran, over Iraq and Syria to Lebanon, for transport of forces, arms and equipment ....
2. To deter the Zionist regime ... by strengthening Hezbollah positions in the Golan Heights ....
3. To secure the territorial integrity of Iraq, governed by a Shia regime aligned with Iran and

41 *Country Reports on Terrorism 2014*, US Department of State, June 2015, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2014/239407.htm> (the pdf of the 2014 report's reference is at <https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/239631.pdf#page=163>); Michael Knights and Matthew Levitt, "The Evolution of Shi'a Insurgency in Bahrain," *CTC Sentinel* 11, no. 1 (January 2018):18-25, <https://ctc.usma.edu/evolution-shia-insurgency-bahrain/>.

42 *Country Reports on Terrorism 2017*, US Department of State, September 2018, <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2017/> (the pdf version of the 2017 report is at [https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/crt\\_2017.pdf#page=126](https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/crt_2017.pdf#page=126)); Michael Knights and Matthew Levitt, "The Evolution of Shi'a Insurgency in Bahrain."

43 *Country Reports on Terrorism 2017*, 2018; "Policeman Killed, Eight Others Injured in 'Terrorist' Act in Bahrain," *The National*, October 28, 2017, <https://www.thenational.ae/world/gcc/policeman-killed-eight-others-injured-in-terrorist-act-in-bahrain-1.670804>; Michael Knights and Matthew Levitt, "The Evolution of Shi'a Insurgency in Bahrain."

44 *Country Reports on Terrorism 2017*, 2018; Michael Knights and Matthew Levitt, "The Evolution of Shi'a Insurgency in Bahrain."

45 *Country Reports on Terrorism 2019*, US Department of State, June 2020, <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2019/>. The pdf version of the 2019 report is at <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Country-Reports-on-Terrorism-2019-2.pdf#page=120>; Mustafa Salim and Liz Sly, "Supporters of Iranian-Backed Militia End Siege of U.S. Embassy in Baghdad," *Washington Post*, January 1, 2020, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/supporters-of-iranian-backed-militia-start-withdrawing-from-besieged-us-embassy-in-baghdad-following-militia-orders/2020/01/01/8280cb34-2c9e-11ea-9b60-817cc18cf173\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/supporters-of-iranian-backed-militia-start-withdrawing-from-besieged-us-embassy-in-baghdad-following-militia-orders/2020/01/01/8280cb34-2c9e-11ea-9b60-817cc18cf173_story.html).

46 Hassan Rouhani (@HassanRouhani), "General Soleimani fought heroically against ISIS, Al Nusrah, Al Qaeda et al. If it weren't for his war on terror, European capitals would be in great danger now. Our final answer to his assassination will be to kick all US forces out of the region," Twitter, January 8, 2020, 6:00 a.m., <https://twitter.com/HassanRouhani/status/1214864354782384134>; Ali Khamenei (@khamenei\_ir), "Our parliament's enactment yesterday was very good. The day before yesterday, the enactment by the Iraqi parliament on expelling the US was also very good. God willing, He will grant them success and assist them to finish this path successfully," Twitter, January 8, 2020, 4:34 a.m., [https://twitter.com/khamenei\\_ir/status/1214842906156191744](https://twitter.com/khamenei_ir/status/1214842906156191744); Ali Khamenei (@khamenei\_ir), "The corruptive presence of the US in the region of West Asia must be stopped. #SevereRevenge," Twitter, January 8, 2020, 4:10 a.m., [https://twitter.com/khamenei\\_ir/status/1214836840823439361](https://twitter.com/khamenei_ir/status/1214836840823439361); Ali Alfoneh, *What Iran's Military Journals Reveal About the Goals of the Quds Force*, *Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington*, June 9, 2020, <https://agsi.org/what-irans-military-journals-reveal-about-the-goals-of-the-quds-force/>.

47 "State Sponsors of Terrorism," US Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/state-sponsors-of-terrorism/>. The pdf version of the 2019 report is at <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Country-Reports-on-Terrorism-2019-2.pdf>.

48 *Country Reports on Terrorism 2015*, US Department of State, June 2, 2016, page 10, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2015/257513.htm>. The pdf version of the report is now at <https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/258249.pdf>. The language quoted is at <https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/258249.pdf#page=10>.

49 Foreword, "State Sponsors of Terrorism," US Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Country-Reports-on-Terrorism-2019-2.pdf#page=3>.

50 Alfoneh, "Goals of the Quds Force," 2020.

51 Ibid.



protected by the paramilitary Shia al-Hashd ash-Shabi, which are under command of the Quds Force and advance Iran's agenda in Iraq ....

4. To expel United States forces from the region ....
5. To increase Iran's political, economic, religious, and cultural influence in Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon, in particular through postwar reconstruction of Syria and Iraq.

Qaderi Kangavari concluded that the IRGC QF efforts improves Iran's diplomatic bargaining position.<sup>52</sup>

Mr. Alfoneh summarized the writings of several IRGC-affiliated academics on Iran's strategic reliance on sub-state actors:

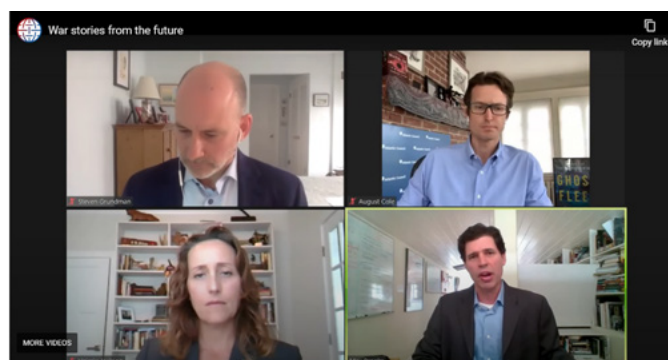
The first empirical analysis with specific reference to allies and proxies of the Quds Force appeared in the Autumn 2008 edition of *Siasat-e Defaee*. Here, the authors discussed how the Islamic Republic, through its influence among the Iraqi Shia, had managed to turn the threat of the U.S. military presence in Iraq into an opportunity. The Winter 2013 edition of *Afaq-e Amniat* [Security Horizon] went as far as describing Shia communities in the Gulf region and beyond as a "deterrent network." Elaborating on the same idea, an article published in the Winter 2013 *Siasat-e Defaee* [Defense Policy] claimed Iran's substate allies and proxies are on par with the deterrent force of Iran's arsenal of cruise and ballistic missiles.

For those countries threatened by Iran, the threat is diversifying. Iran is changing from being more than just a conventional military or terrorism threat. Comparable to what Russia and China are doing against the United States, Iran is carrying out a new kind of non-kinetic campaign with the goal of disrupting its adversaries' ability to resist Iran's regional ambitions. Iran's influence campaign against the United States has been comprehensively documented;<sup>53</sup> Iran's influence campaigns against the Arab Gulf nations much less so. And efforts to understand how Russia and China carry out "hybrid warfare" have not included Iran.<sup>54</sup>

This change represents a new challenge to Arab Gulf security, one that the US government has been remarkably slow to understand how to defeat—even though Iran, like Russia and China, has shown a deeper strategic understanding of the emerging security dynamic than conventional US thinkers.

This is in substantial part because Iran, along with Russia and China, learned a very different lesson about the importance of non-military campaigns from the one the United States learned after the hundred-hour campaign in 1990-91 to liberate Kuwait from Saddam Hussein. Writer Max Brooks, author of *World War Z*, put it this way:<sup>55</sup>

Desert Storm was the most disastrous campaign ever fought by the United States—because it taught other countries and non-state actors that the US military is too powerful to beat on the battlefield and thus must be forced to fight elsewhere. To that end, potential adversaries have been thinking creatively about warfare-by-other-means for decades.



Minute 20:30 - 21:30

Iran's choice to project power in asymmetric and quasi-deniable ways is longstanding policy for the Islamic Republic going back to its efforts to launch Lebanese Hezbollah in the early 1980s.<sup>56</sup> The Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) left a searing memory in the minds of Iran's revolutionary leaders. While the Iranian army fought Saddam to a bitter stalemate over eight years, the US military defeated the Iraqi army

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Emerson T. Brooking and Suzanne Kianpour, *Iranian Digital Influence Efforts: Guerrilla Broadcasting for the Twenty-First Century*, Atlantic Council, February 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/IRAN-DIGITAL.pdf>.

<sup>54</sup> Ross Babbage, *Winning Without Fighting: Chinese and Russian Political Warfare Campaigns and How the West Can Prevail*, Vol. I, Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2019, [https://csbaonline.org/uploads/documents/Winning\\_Without\\_Fighting\\_Final.pdf](https://csbaonline.org/uploads/documents/Winning_Without_Fighting_Final.pdf).

<sup>55</sup> Max Brooks, "War Stories from the Future: Launch of New Forward Defense Practice," Atlantic Council, June 18, 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/commentary/event-recap/war-stories-from-the-future-launch-of-new-forward-defense-practice/>.

<sup>56</sup> See, for example, *Iran's Networks of Influence in the Middle East*, International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), November 2019, <https://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-dossiers/iran-dossier/iran-19-03-ch-1-tehrans-strategic-intent>.

in one hundred hours.<sup>57</sup> The Iranian leadership learned an important lesson from this. When the United States engineered the swift invasion and occupation of Iraq in March-April 2003, the United States was not immediately prepared to ward off Iranian influence in Iraqi politics, which began in April and May 2003, nor was the United States prepared to combat a multi-dimensional insurgency that included a significant component of militias supported by Iran.<sup>58</sup> The Iranians, however, knew how to exert influence in Iraqi politics.

Iran has been running influence operations, mostly covert, against the United States for many years. These were ramped up by Tehran after seeing the power of social media used by protesters against the Iranian regime. Modern Iranian influence operations date from 2010, with the apparent goal of shifting US public opinion away from opposing Iran's regional ambitions and in favor of the US withdrawing its forces from the Gulf. This was the conclusion of a February 2020 Atlantic Council report by Emerson Brooking and Suzanne Kianpour, *Iranian Digital Influence Efforts: Guerrilla Broadcasting for the Twenty-First Century*.<sup>59</sup>

Iran has invested significant resources and accumulated vast experience in the conduct of digital influence efforts. These clandestine propaganda efforts have been used to complement Iranian foreign policy operations for the better part of a decade. Nonetheless, Iranian influence capabilities have gone largely unstudied by the United States, and only came to widespread attention in August 2018 with the first public identification of an Iranian propaganda network. ...

In pursuit of foreign and domestic information dominance, Iran began operating Facebook and Twitter sockpuppets as early as 2010. As the United States and Iran entered into a period of rapprochement and negotiation, the number of accounts grew exponentially. These accounts have been used to launder Iranian state propaganda to unsuspecting audiences, often under the guise of local media reports. To date, Facebook has identified approximately 2,200 assets directly affecting six million users. Twitter has identified eight thousand accounts responsible for roughly 8.5 million messages.

Iran also carries out covert<sup>60</sup> influence efforts against countries in the Arab world. It focuses on societies in conflict such as Yemen and Egypt,<sup>61</sup> and pushes pro-Iranian regime content through inauthentic accounts in Arabic with anti-Saudi<sup>62</sup> and anti-Bahraini<sup>63</sup> narratives.

As Brooking and Kianpour write,<sup>64</sup> Iran's efforts against the United States are integrated into a campaign that includes more than just disinformation:

Although Iran has certainly engaged in the spread of falsehood, this does not represent the majority—or even a significant portion—of its known digital influence efforts. While Iran makes systematic use of inauthentic websites and social media personas, the actual content it disseminates is a mirror of its state propaganda: biased in Iran's favor and contrary to US interests, but seldom wholly fabricated. If the principal intent of Russia's digital influence efforts is to distract and dismay, Iran's goal is most often to persuade. Where Russia uses clandestine

57 Shannon Collins, "Desert Storm: A Look Back," US Department of Defense, January 11, 2019, <https://www.defense.gov/Explore/Features/Story/Article/1728715/desert-storm-a-look-back/>; "The First Gulf War," US Department of State - Office of the Historian, <https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/short-history/firstgulf>.

58 IISS, *Iran's Networks of Influence*, 2019.

59 Brooking and Kianpour, *Iranian Digital Influence Efforts*, 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/IRAN-DIGITAL.pdf#page=6>, 2. Other reports to similar effect include *Suspected Iranian Influence Operation: Leveraging Inauthentic News Sites and Social Media Aimed at U.S., U.K., Other Audiences*, FireEye, August 21, 2018, <https://www.fireeye.com/content/dam/fireeye-www/current-threats/pdfs/rpt-FireEye-Iranian-IO.pdf>; Craig Timberg and Tony Romm, "It's not just the Russians anymore as Iranians and others turn up disinformation efforts ahead of 2020 vote," *Washington Post*, July 25, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2019/07/25/its-not-just-russians-anymore-iranians-others-turn-up-disinformation-efforts-ahead-vote/>; Alice Revelli and Lee Foster, "Network of Social Media Accounts Impersonates U.S. Political Candidates, Leverages U.S. and Israeli Media in Support of Iranian Interests," FireEye, May 28, 2019, <https://www.fireeye.com/blog/threat-research/2019/05/social-media-network-impersonates-us-political-candidates-supports-iranian-interests.html>.

60 This report distinguishes between "clandestine" and "covert" by using "clandestine" to refer to "operations sponsored or conducted by governmental departments in such a way as to assure secrecy or concealment," whereas "covert" refers to the strategic concealment of the "sponsorship of activities to effect change in the political, economic, military, or diplomatic behavior of an overseas target. See Michael E. DeVine, *Covert Action and Clandestine Activities of the Intelligence Community: Selected Definitions in Brief*, Congressional Research Service, June 14, 2019, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/intel/R45175.pdf#page=8>.

61 Jack Stubbs and Christopher Bing, "Special Report: How Iran spreads disinformation around the world," Reuters, November 30, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cyber-iran-specialreport/special-report-how-iran-spreads-disinformation-around-the-world-idUSKCN1NZ1FT>; Can Kasapoglu and Mariam Fekry, *Iran's Proxy War in Yemen: The Information Warfare Landscape*, NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, January 2020, <https://www.stratcomcoe.org/irans-proxy-war-yemen-information-warfare-landscape>.

62 Mona Elswah, Philip N. Howard, and Vidya Narayanan, *Iranian Digital Interference in the Arab World*, Oxford University, April 3, 2019, <https://comprop.oii.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/93/2019/04/Iran-Memo.pdf>.

63 Atlantic Council staff interviews in the region, March 2020.

64 Brooking and Kianpour, *Iranian Digital Influence Efforts*, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/IRAN-DIGITAL.pdf#page=9>, 5

means to play both sides of a political issue against each other, Iran uses clandestine means to amplify one side as loudly as possible. The goal is to build a guerrilla broadcasting apparatus that cannot be easily targeted by the United States or its allies.

However, in the Gulf, Iran's covert influence efforts appear to have a different purpose. Based on field interviews in the Gulf and discussions with officials there who track Iranian influence operations, Iran's covert influence efforts in the Gulf appear aimed toward the same goal as Russia's strategy against the United States—trying to sow division and dissension in Arab Gulf society, rather than trying to persuade Gulf leaders or audiences to support Iranian positions. **It is as if the Iranians carrying out operations in the Arab Gulf have borrowed from the Russian “playbook” for the United States and not their own “playbook” against the United States.**<sup>65</sup>

In Iraq, Iranian covert influence efforts have a different apparent goal: to spread active disinformation about US intentions to put the United States in a negative light, as well as playing up Iran's contributions to Iraq's defense against ISIS. (Iran also carries out public affairs efforts in Iraq, as the United States and other governments do.)

## Responding to the Iranian challenge.

In response to the Iranian challenge, the United States and other nations that oppose Iranian regional ambitions are using a combination of means: military presence,<sup>66</sup> “maximum pressure” economic sanctions,<sup>67</sup> cyber operations,<sup>68</sup> and what the *New York Times* described as “a series of short-of-war clandestine strikes, aimed at taking out the most prominent generals of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps and setting back Iran's nuclear facilities.”<sup>69</sup>

It makes equal, if not more, sense for those countries threatened by Iran to use some of the same counterterrorism

and law enforcement tools developed for al-Qaeda and ISIS-style terrorism. Some of these are already in use, but just as the international counterterrorism community has worked together to address the threat of terrorism, it makes equal sense for the countries threatened by Iran's campaign to work together to defend themselves against the Iranian challenge to their security.

## The challenge of building up non-military, non-intelligence security cooperation.

Military and intelligence cooperation between the United States and the Arab Gulf governments is already well-developed, compared to the non-military, non-civilian parts of the US-Arab Gulf cooperation. Consider the breadth of US-Arab Gulf military cooperation:

- Bahrain has been a “Major Non-NATO Ally”<sup>70</sup> since 2002 and hosts the US Navy's Fifth Fleet and US Naval Forces Central Command, participating in US-led military coalitions.<sup>71</sup>
- In Iraq, the United States re-established the Iraqi military and Iraqi National Intelligence Service after the 2003 liberation of Iraq from Saddam Hussein. US military forces are in Iraq pursuant to agreements that ended the 2003-2011 US military presence.<sup>72</sup>
- Kuwait hosts the headquarters of Combined Joint Task Force—Operation Inherent Resolve,<sup>73</sup> and 13,500 US troops are based in Kuwait, primarily at Camp Arifjan and the Ali al-Salem Air Base. Only Germany, Japan, and South Korea host more US military forces than Kuwait does.<sup>74</sup>
- In Oman, the US military has access to facilities and ports in Salalah and Duqm, and both countries work to ensure freedom of navigation near the Straits of

65 Whether Russia actually provided Iran with assistance in setting up Iran's influence operations is beyond the scope of this report.

66 Robert Burns, “US carrier in Persian Gulf region sends clear signal to Iran,” Associated Press, June 8, 2019, <https://apnews.com/fe16688b245a44a0b43729c31d916af4>.

67 “Iran Sanctions,” US Department of State, accessed July 11, 2020, <https://www.state.gov/iran-sanctions/>.

68 Joby Warrick and Ellen Nakashima, “Officials: Israel linked to a disruptive cyberattack on Iranian port facility,” *Washington Post*, May 18, 2020, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/officials-israel-linked-to-a-disruptive-cyberattack-on-iranian-port-facility/2020/05/18/9d1da866-9942-11ea-89fd-28fb313d1886\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/officials-israel-linked-to-a-disruptive-cyberattack-on-iranian-port-facility/2020/05/18/9d1da866-9942-11ea-89fd-28fb313d1886_story.html).

69 David E. Sanger, Eric Schmitt and Ronen Bergman, “Long-Planned and Bigger Than Thought: Strike on Iran's Nuclear Program,” *New York Times*, July 10, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/10/world/middleeast/iran-nuclear-trump.html>.

70 Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, *Major Non-NATO Ally Status – Fact Sheet*, US Department of State, January 30, 2020, <https://www.state.gov/major-non-nato-ally-status/>.

71 “U.S. Relations with Bahrain,” US Department of State, December 6, 2019, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-bahrain/>; US Department of State, “U.S. Security Cooperation With Bahrain,” March 20, 2020, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-security-cooperation-with-bahrain/>.

72 Chuck Mason, *U.S.-Iraq Withdrawal/Status of Forces Agreement*, Congressional Research Service, July 13, 2009, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R40011.pdf#page=13>; Anthony H. Cordesman, Daniel Dewit, and Sam Khazai, *Shaping Iraq's Security Force*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 12, 2014, [https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy\\_files/files/publication/131213\\_Iraq\\_Security\\_Forces.pdf#page=3](https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/publication/131213_Iraq_Security_Forces.pdf#page=3).

73 “U.S. Relations with Kuwait,” US Department of State, October 4, 2019, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-kuwait/>.

74 “U.S. Security Cooperation with Kuwait,” US Department of State, March 30, 2020, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-security-cooperation-with-kuwait/>.

Hormuz, a vital chokepoint. More than nine hundred Omani armed forces servicemembers have received training in the United States.

- Qatar hosts US Central Command (CENTCOM) at the Al-Udeid Air Base, the largest US military installation in the Middle East.<sup>75</sup>
- Saudi Arabia's military services have close relationships with the US military, and Saudi Arabia is the United States' largest Foreign Military Sales customer.<sup>76</sup> The United States has embedded advisors into key security, industrial, energy, maritime, and cybersecurity offices within the Saudi government, a unique cooperation program in the Arabian Gulf.<sup>77</sup>
- The United Arab Emirates hosts Gulf Air Warfare Center at Al Dhafra Air Base, where 3,500 US personnel are based. UAE ports provide vital logistical support for the US Navy, and collectively hosts more US Navy ships than any other single port outside the United States.<sup>78</sup>

Relations between US and Gulf Arab intelligence agencies are, for the most part, excellent,<sup>79</sup> but outside the scope of this report.

**In contrast, relations between the civilian security agencies of the United States and the Arab Gulf are not as well-developed. The extent of cooperation between non-military, non-intelligence services is much less than between military or intelligence services.**

The unclassified record includes examples of high-level visits<sup>80</sup> and training programs that are noted most often in annual reports and Congressional testimony, which are documented throughout this report. However, the scale of these activities is dwarfed by the level of military-to-military cooperation.

The reasons for this are not nefarious, nor the “fault” of any party, but rather are the result of the different historical evolution of the civilian security services of the countries involved. For example:

- The internally focused law enforcement, border security, and customs services in the region do not see a role for foreign allies in most domestic criminal investigations, which form the main part of the work of such services.
- These services have only recently come to value the importance of international cooperation on terrorism and crime.
- The US military has been expeditionary since the Spanish-American War, and has been trained and equipped over the last century to be forward-deployed around the world. Most members of the US Intelligence Community, by law, collect foreign intelligence, and so are almost entirely externally focused. Prior to 9/11, however, most domestic US law enforcement agencies lacked an extensive history of overseas engagement.
- While the militaries of the Arab Gulf and the United States have armies, air forces, naval forces, and a coast

75 “U.S. and Qatar Sign MOU Reaffirming Qatar’s Commitment to Supporting U.S. Military Activities,” US Department of Defense, January 14, 2019, <https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Releases/Release/Article/1731648/us-and-qatar-sign-mou-reaffirming-qatars-commitment-to-supporting-us-military-a/>.

76 “U.S. Relations With Saudi Arabia,” US Department of State, November 6, 2019, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-saudi-arabia/>; Christopher M. Blanchard, *Saudi Arabia: Background and U.S. Relations*, Congressional Research Service, February 18, 2020, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33533.pdf#page=32>.

77 “U.S. Relations With Saudi Arabia,” US Department of State, November 6, 2019, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-saudi-arabia/>; Blanchard, *Saudi Arabia*, 2020.

78 “U.S. Security Cooperation with the United Arab Emirates,” US Department of State, March 20, 2020, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-security-cooperation-with-the-united-arab-emirates/>.

79 “The current state of cooperation between our two countries is significant, and information sharing continues to increase in matters pertaining to al-Qa’ida,” according to Thomas J. Harrington, deputy assistant director, Counterterrorism Division - Federal Bureau of Investigation in *Saudi Arabia and the Fight Against Terrorism Financing*, Testimony Before the House Committee On International Relations/Subcommittee, March 24, 2004, <https://www.fbi.gov/news/testimony/middle-east-and-central-asia-saudi-arabia-and-the-fight-against-terrorism-financing>; former CIA Director John Brennan commented on the importance of the Saudi-U.S. intelligence partnership and what Saudi Arabia is doing to combat terrorism, in Brennan Hoban, “WATCH: CIA Director Brennan on Emerging Challenges for the US, Enhanced Interrogation Techniques, Drones, Cyber Threats, and Terrorism in Saudi Arabia,” *Brookings*, July 15, 2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brookings-now/2016/07/15/watch-cia-director-brennan-on-emerging-challenges-for-the-us-enhanced-interrogation-techniques-drones-cyber-threats-and-terrorism-in-saudi-arabia/>; Bradley Hope, Justin Scheck and Warren P. Strobl, “Saudi Arabia Wants Its Fugitive Spymaster Back,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 17, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/a-spymaster-ran-off-after-saudis-say-billions-went-missing-they-want-him-back-11595004443>.

80 Wray travelled to Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE to discuss areas of mutual interest including law enforcement, national security, and information sharing. “Director Christopher Wray Returns from Overseas Travel,” Press Release, FBI, April 13, 2018, <https://www.fbi.gov/news/pressrel/press-releases/director-christopher-wray-returns-from-overseas-travel>; “Travel to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Afghanistan, India, Japan, and the Republic of Korea, June 23-30, 2019,” US Department of State, accessed July 14, 2020, <https://www.state.gov/secretary-travel/travel-to-saudi-arabia-the-united-arab-emirates-afghanistan-india-japan-and-the-republic-of-korea-june-23-30-2019/>; “Secretary Mnuchin Leads Middle East Trip Focused on Combatting Terrorist Financing - Remarks,” US Department of Treasury, October 20, 2017, <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/SM0185.aspx>; “Readout of Secretary Napolitano’s Visit To Dubai,” US Department of Homeland Security, December 6, 2011, <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2011/12/06/readout-secretary-napolitanos-visit-dubai>; “Readout of Secretary Napolitano’s Visit to Qatar,” US Department of Homeland Security, December 4, 2011, <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2011/12/04/readout-secretary-napolitano-s-visit-qatar>.





April 2019, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Office of International Affairs hosted a meeting between a Bahraini delegation and high-level DHS officials. *Source:* Customs and Border Protection/Photographer: Donna Burton.

guard, **there is a mismatch on land border security.**

In countries that were formerly part of the Ottoman Empire, border security was traditionally a function of the army, whereas in the United States, border security has traditionally been a civilian function—prior to 2003 with the US Departments of Justice (DOJ) and the Treasury, and since 2003 with the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS). This mismatch meant that in the modern era, US military assistance, capacity building, and training to militaries in the Middle East did not include civilian border security, since this was not something with which the US military had extensive experience.

- US embassies often lack the space to accommodate the post-9/11 surge in counterterrorism cooperation. Terrorism was a regional security problem starting in the 1980s, but increased significantly after 9/11. Most

US embassy buildings throughout the Middle East were designed and built when diplomatic contacts and visa sections were fully mature, and when Cold War-era US military cooperation was fully underway, so architects and designers knew the space requirements for the programs that those embassies would house. However, the number of US government personnel and programs in the Middle East expanded considerably after 9/11.

- Most current US embassies in the Middle East were designed and built as a result of the Inman report of 1985,<sup>81</sup> which was a response to the 1983 bombing of the US Marine barracks in Beirut, Lebanon. The Inman report, named for its chair, Admiral Bobby Ray Inman, called for a range of security improvements to US embassies overseas, including setbacks from streets, relocating embassies to more secure locations, and other urgent

<sup>81</sup> Secretary of State's Advisory Panel on Overseas Security, *Report of the Secretary of State's Advisory Panel on Overseas Security*, 1985, <https://fas.org/irp/threat/inman/>.

physical changes demanded by security, especially against vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

- The Inman report has an extensive discussion of the importance of international cooperation on counterterrorism but, strikingly, more of the examples of cooperation are European than Middle Eastern.<sup>82</sup> The snapshot of US counterterrorism coordination as of 1985 is comprehensive for its time when the terrorism threat was different from what it has become since 9/11.<sup>83</sup>
  - As prescient and forward-thinking as the report was regarding terrorist threats to US diplomatic facilities, the report did not recommend that the size of embassies needed to be significantly increased to accommodate new functions, programs, and cabinet departments that would be needed to work with foreign partners on counterterrorism.
  - This premium on space in US embassies overseas has a negative effect on increasing US non-military, non-intelligence cooperation since 9/11, since the lead time to build a new embassy is very long.
  - Within the United States, even the name of the Department of Homeland Security had the effect of
- inhibiting DHS from establishing an overseas security presence early in its history. DHS now has the third-largest number of personnel overseas of any civilian cabinet department.<sup>84</sup> As of December 2017, DHS had two thousand personnel in more than seventy countries.<sup>85</sup> However, most of those personnel work in Preclearance operations, screening airline passengers at international destinations before they arrive in the United States.<sup>86</sup> Congress continues to ask whether DHS has too many or too few personnel overseas.<sup>87</sup>
- While all the United States has military attachés in the Arab Gulf countries, and all the Arab Gulf governments have military attachés in Washington, the United States has FBI legal attachés in only five of the seven countries studied in this report,<sup>88</sup> and not all the Arab Gulf countries have security attachés in their embassies in Washington. The FBI LEGAT program was created in 1940, before the CIA existed, to help collect intelligence in Latin and Central America in preparation for countering Nazi Germany.<sup>89</sup> In 2018, the FBI had 63 attaché offices with about 600 personnel stationed overseas and another approximately 600 on temporary assignment.<sup>90</sup> The FBI also offers extensive exchange programs, meetings with counterparts to exchange best practices, and when invited sends teams of experts in forensics, explosives, and other specialties to overseas locations after terrorist attacks.

82 Ibid., section on “Diplomatic Activities.”

83 Ibid., section on “Counter Terrorism Cooperation.”

84 “International Engagement Overview,” US Department of Homeland Security, July 31, 2012, <https://www.dhs.gov/international-engagement-overview>.

85 Ron Nixon, “Homeland Security Goes Abroad. Not Everyone Is Grateful.,” *New York Times*, December 26, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/26/world/americas/homeland-security-customs-border-patrol.html>, cited in *Report - DHS Overseas Personnel Enforcement Act of 2017*, Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs, July 30, 2018, <https://www.congress.gov/congressional-report/115th-congress/senate-report/308/1>. Essentially the same report was issued a year later, “DHS Overseas Personnel Enforcement Act of 2019,” September 10, 2019, <https://congress.gov/congressional-report/116th-congress/senate-report/97>.

86 Nixon, “Homeland Security Goes Abroad.”

87 In 2018: “DHS Overseas Personnel Enforcement Act of 2017,” Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs, July 30, 2018, <https://www.congress.gov/congressional-report/115th-congress/senate-report/308/1>. In 2019: “DHS Overseas Personnel Enforcement Act of 2019,” Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs, September 10, 2019, <https://congress.gov/congressional-report/116th-congress/senate-report/97>.

88 The FBI has legal attachés stationed in Iraq, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and covers Kuwait from Doha, Qatar, and Bahrain from Saudi Arabia. FBI, “Overseas Offices – Crime and terror have gone global. And so have we,” FBI, accessed July 12, 2020, <https://www.fbi.gov/contact-us/legal-attache-offices>.

89 George Piro, *The FBI Around the World*, FBI website, July 11, 2018, <https://www.state.gov/the-fbi-around-the-world/>. Piro was the FBI Assistant Director of the International Operations Division at the time.

90 Ibid.

## II. A Very Brief History of CT-LE Cooperation Between the United States and the Arab Gulf

**T**he 9/11 attacks were a shock to relations between the United States and the Muslim world generally and especially to the Gulf and Saudi Arabia. Fifteen of the nineteen hijackers were citizens of Saudi Arabia, two were from the United Arab Emirates, one was from Lebanon, and one was from Egypt. Osama bin Laden and many other top al-Qaeda leaders were Saudis.

Saudi officials later said they believed Osama bin Laden chose Saudis for the attack in order to drive a wedge between Saudi Arabia and the United States.<sup>91</sup>

Whether true or not, the attack and its immediate aftermath led to several years of mistrust between the United States and Saudi Arabia in particular.<sup>92</sup> American public opinion towards Saudi Arabia, which the Gallup organization reported was 56 percent favorable in August 1991 after the Gulf War and 47 percent favorable in February 2001, turned negative, varying in subsequent years between the mid-twenties to low-forties.<sup>93</sup>

### Al-Qaeda's 9/11 and 2003-2004 attacks unify the counterterrorism world.

Following the 2003-2004 wave of al-Qaeda attacks in Saudi Arabia, bin Laden made his strategic intent clear<sup>94</sup> that his goal was to overthrow the governments of the Arabian Peninsula and replace them with a government that would follow tenets he had laid down—a vision that considered it acceptable to kill innocents and even Muslims and other believers. To bin Laden and al-Qaeda,

eliminating US support for the governments of the region was a necessary step to achieving those goals. The need to eliminate US support was one of the lessons that bin Laden drew from the US liberation of Kuwait.

In the years after 2003, the governments of the Arab Gulf increased their counterterrorism cooperation with the United States across the board in the military, intelligence, and law enforcement worlds.<sup>95</sup> Iraq was liberated militarily from Saddam Hussein's rule in April 2003, and as of December 2003, the US military, the US Department of State, the FBI, and other government agencies had an active presence in the Arab Gulf.

**US Department of the Treasury:** In 2004, the US Department of the Treasury established the Office of Terrorism and Financial Intelligence (TFI), headed by an under secretary. TFI became the backbone of Treasury's involvement in counterterrorism and international law enforcement efforts. TFI had two main subsidiary offices, Terrorist Financing and Financial Crimes (TFFC), which was Treasury's counterterrorism policy arm, and the Office of Intelligence and Analysis, which provided counterterrorism intelligence analysis.<sup>96</sup> Treasury had long had the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), which enforced US and international economic sanctions. OFAC was moved into TFI and reported to the under secretary of the Treasury for terrorism and financial intelligence, as did the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FINCEN).

In the aftermath of 9/11, Treasury also expanded its attaché program. Before 2000, Treasury's director of international

91 Elaine Sciolino, "Saudi Affirms Ties to U.S.; Castigates Bin Laden as 'Deviant,'" *New York Times*, January 28, 2002, <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/01/28/international/middleeast/saudi-affirms-ties-to-us-castigates-bin-laden-as.html>. In 2002, the Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz embraced the United States as a close friend and added that bin Laden's objective was to "drive a wedge between the Kingdom and the United States."

92 David Ottaway, "The King and Us: U.S.-Saudi Relations in the Wake of 9/11," *Foreign Affairs* 88, no. 3 (2009): 121-131, [www.jstor.org/stable/20699567](http://www.jstor.org/stable/20699567); Keith Johnson and Robbie Gramer, "How the Bottom Fell Out of the U.S.-Saudi Alliance," *Foreign Policy*, April 23, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/04/23/saudi-arabia-trump-congress-breaking-point-relationship-oil-geopolitics/>; "How Did September 11 Affect US-Saudi Arabia Relations?," *DW*, accessed July 5, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/how-did-september-11-affect-us-saudi-arabia-relations/a-45446256>.

93 Gallup Organization, *Country Ratings*, accessed October 1, 2020, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1624/perceptions-foreign-countries.aspx>.

94 "Compilation of Usama Bin Laden Statements 1994-January 2004," Foreign Broadcast Information Service, January 2004, page 203-204, <https://fas.org/irp/world/para/ubl-fbis.pdf#page=215>.

95 Testimony of Daniel L. Glaser, Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Office of Terrorist Financing and Financial Crimes, Department of the Treasury before the Senate Committee on the Judiciary, November 8, 2005, 4, <https://books.google.com/books?id=9P3nTVX4HisC&pg=PA14&lpg=PA14#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

96 "Terrorism and Financial Intelligence," US Department of the Treasury, May 23, 2018, <https://www.treasury.gov/about/organizational-structure/offices/Pages/Office-of-Terrorism-and-Financial-Intelligence.aspx>.



Flags of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Source: abcdz2000/ Flickr.

finance would decide informally where to deploy attachés, who functioned as Treasury's overseas representative on financial and economic matters, primarily on macroeconomics and international finance.<sup>97</sup> According to a September 2005 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report, the number of Treasury's attachés "dropped from approximately 30 in 1981 to 7 at the beginning of fiscal 2005 [i.e., October 1, 2004]."<sup>98</sup> Treasury had sent officials to Iraq to aid in reconstruction. After Operation Iraqi Freedom removed Saddam Hussein in 2003, US Treasury officials had played an important role, working with Sinan al-Shabibi, governor of Iraq's Central Bank, to stabilize

Iraq's currency. However, GAO found that Treasury was planning on closing all but two of its attaché offices (Iraq and Japan) by the end of US fiscal year 2006.

With the establishment of TFI in 2004, Treasury attachés moved into terrorism finance. "Issues such as countering terrorist financing and money-laundering efforts are now of higher priority to Treasury and are part of the portfolio of issues for current financial attachés," Treasury said in September 2005.<sup>99</sup> Treasury had TFI and Treasury's International Affairs office jointly fund attachés to allow them to justify spending more time on terrorist finance issues.<sup>100</sup>

The **US Department of Homeland Security** was formally established on March 1, 2003,<sup>101</sup> and brought together for the first time in US history the responsibility for all or part of the missions of aviation, border, and maritime security; fraudulent document detection; visa security reviews; and other security functions. From the outset, DHS had an Office of International Affairs. However, despite the fact that the 9/11 hijackers came from the Middle East, the first visit by a secretary of homeland security to the region was in November 2007.<sup>102</sup> This was followed by another visit to the region in March 2008.<sup>103</sup>

Counterterrorism cooperation between the United States and the Arab Gulf generally increased during the administration of former US President Barack Obama. The FBI and Arab Gulf counterparts cooperated on investigations into specific cases, though most instances of cooperation were not publicized. The number of legal attachés expanded three-fold between the early 1990s and 2015.<sup>104</sup> In April 2013, DHS and Abu Dhabi opened up the Middle East's first Preclearance facility at Abu Dhabi airport.<sup>105</sup> The US Department of the Treasury worked assiduously to get Arab Gulf nations to take more effective steps to prevent terrorist groups from receiving donations or controlling funds.

97 "The Treasury Attache System," Central Intelligence Agency, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP68-00069A000100250007-4.pdf>.

98 "Treasury Has Reduced the Number of Attachés Overseas," Government Accountability Office (GAO), September 2005, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/250/247913.pdf>.

99 Ibid.

100 Ibid.

101 "A Brief Documentary History of the Department of Homeland Security: 2001-2008," US Department of Homeland Security - DHS History Office, <https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=37027>.

102 "Hearing before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations at the US House of Representatives," Department of Homeland Security Appropriations for 2010, 2010, p. 129, <https://bit.ly/2BQv7ep#page=129>; House Homeland Security Adviser Frances Townsend, who was appointed in May 2004, visited Saudi Arabia a number of times prior to Secretary Chertoff's visit. <https://www.c-span.org/video/?201912-1/us-policy-middle-east>.

103 "Saudi Arabia King meets US Chief of Homeland Security," Kuwait News Agency, March 26, 2008, <https://www.kuna.net.kw/ArticlePrintPage.aspx?id=1894670&language=en>.

104 Bruce Hoffman, Edwin Meese III, Timothy J. Roemer, *The FBI: Protecting the Homeland in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Report of the Congressionally Directed 9/11 Review Commission, 36, March 2015, <https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=763412#page=37>.

105 Ted Poe, "Opening statement at a hearing of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs' Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade," US Government Publishing Office, July 10, 2013, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-113hrg81871/html/CHRG-113hrg81871.htm>.





Saudi Arabia's Minister of Interior Prince Muhammad bin Nayef bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud greets DHS Counterterrorism Coordinator Under Secretary for Intelligence & Analysis Francis X. Taylor and DHS Deputy Counterterrorism Coordinator for Policy Thomas S. Warrick in Washington, DC, on December 10, 2014. *Source:* DHS photo by Jetta Disco.

### The October 2010 laser printer toner cartridge bomb plot.

The incident that most drove home to the US public the extent of post-2004 US-Saudi counterterrorism cooperation was the AQAP plot in October 2010 that involved putting explosives inside two laser printers being shipped from Sanaa, Yemen to the United States.<sup>106</sup> The explosives were concealed in toner cartridges inside the printers. According to press reports, a woman dropped off the two laser printers on October 27 at FedEx and United Parcel

Service offices in Sanaa, on October 27. They were addressed to two synagogues in Chicago,<sup>107</sup> and were set to go off while the planes were over the mid-Atlantic,<sup>108</sup> based on test packages that AQAP had sent several months earlier.<sup>109</sup>

On October 28, Saudi Deputy Interior Minister Muhammad bin Nayef bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud called US Deputy National Security Advisor for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism John Brennan to warn him of the plot.<sup>110</sup> How the Saudi Ministry of Interior learned of the plot is

106 Adam Schreck, "UAE airlines ban Yemen cargo after mail bomb plot," Associated Press, November 7, 2010, <https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/sdut-uae-airlines-ban-yemen-cargo-after-mail-bomb-plot-2010nov07-story.html>. Khaled Wassef, "Timeline of Yemen Bomb Plot," CBS, October 30, 2010, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/timeline-of-yemen-bomb-plot/>.

107 Lauren Etter, "Chicago Synagogue Cites Web Visits from Egypt," *Wall Street Journal*, October 30, 2010, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748703414504575584681982002308>.

108 John F. Burns, "Yemen Bomb Could Have Gone Off at East Coast," *New York Times*, November 10, 2010, <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/11/world/europe/11parcel.html>.

109 Mark Mazzetti and Scott Shane, "In Parcel Bomb Plot, 2 Dark Inside Jokes," *New York Times*, November 2, 2010, <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/03/world/03terror.html>; "Parcel Bomb Plotters 'Used Dry Run,' Say US Officials," BBC, November 2, 2010, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-11671377>; Andy Soltis, "Bomb Tip from Qaeda Traitor," *New York Post*, November 2, 2010, <https://nypost.com/2010/11/02/bomb-tip-from-qaeda-traitor/>.

110 Mark Mazzetti and Robert F. Worth, "U.S. Sees Complexity of Bombs as Link to Al Qaeda," *New York Times*, October 30, 2010, <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/2010/10/31/world/31terror.html>.

not entirely clear from publicly available information.<sup>111</sup> It emerged several days later that Saudi security officials had warned US counterparts in early October that AQAP was planning a terrorist attack using one or more aircraft. A CIA spokesman made a rare on-the-record confirmation that this information had come from “foreign partners.”<sup>112</sup>

Based on information provided to the United States by Prince Muhammad, which included the tracking numbers, the two packages were located within hours.<sup>113</sup> One package had flown on a passenger plane from Sanaa to Dubai, United Arab Emirates,<sup>114</sup> then on a UPS cargo plane to Cologne Airport in Germany, and then on another UPS cargo plane that landed at East Midland Airport in Leicestershire, England. The package was taken by British explosive experts. It had been scheduled to fly from Leicestershire to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and then to Chicago, Illinois. The printer initially tested negative for explosives and was only later discovered to have explosives inside the toner cartridge.

The second printer had been flown on a passenger plane from Sanaa to Doha, Qatar, and then another passenger plane from Doha to Dubai, UAE.<sup>115</sup> It had been put on a FedEx cargo plane in Dubai, when it was removed from the aircraft. The package was scheduled to fly to Newark, New Jersey, and then to O'Hare International Airport in Chicago.

Both packages were addressed to two synagogues in Chicago, Illinois. The individuals named on the packages were historical figures who persecuted Muslims—a Spanish grand inquisitor during the Spanish Inquisition, and a French crusader who fought against the Muslim kingdoms of the Levant and was executed by An-Nasir Salah ad-Din Yusuf ibn Ayyub (Saladin) in 1187.<sup>116</sup>

Details of the plot became public on October 29.<sup>117</sup> It was acknowledged almost immediately that “[t]he packages

were discovered thanks to a tip from Saudi Arabia. Saudi officials provided tracking numbers of the two packages bound for Jewish organizations in the United States, enabling quick tracing to the United Kingdom and Dubai....”<sup>118</sup> On November 5, AQAP claimed credit for the attack.<sup>119</sup> AQAP boasted in its next issue of *Inspire* magazine of what it called “Operation Hemorrhage” that the total plot had cost \$4,200 and described what it said was a description of how the bombs were constructed.<sup>120</sup>

Numerous US officials and independent journalists have all said that the information provided by Prince Muhammad, Saudi Arabia’s chief counterterrorism officer, helped save many lives. News analysis by the *New York Times* said:<sup>121</sup>

Within days, the two packages had advanced through four countries in at least four different airplanes—two of them carrying passengers—before they were identified in Britain and Dubai after an 11th-hour tip from Saudi Arabia’s intelligence service set off an international terrorism alert and a frantic hunt.

The foiling of the package plot was a significant success in an era of well-publicized intelligence breakdowns and miscommunications.

It was also a sobering reminder to officials around the world that quick response to timely intelligence rules the day. Despite the billions of dollars governments have spent on elaborate airport technology to guard against terrorism threats, the packages would probably have been loaded onto planes bound for the United States, but for the Saudi tip.

In July 2020, David Ignatius, writing in the *Washington Post* about bank accounts Prince Muhammad used to fund Saudi counterterrorism operations, said:<sup>122</sup>

111 Julian Borger, Chris McGreal, and Tom Finn, “Cargo Plane Bomb Plot: Saudi Double Agent ‘Gave Crucial Alert,’” *The Guardian*, November 1, 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/nov/01/cargo-plane-plot-saudi-agent-gave-alert>; Andy Soltis, “Bomb Tip from Qaeda Traitor,” *New York Post*, November 2, 2010, <https://nypost.com/2010/11/02/bomb-tip-from-qaeda-traitor/>.

112 Eric Schmitt and Scott Shane, “Saudis Warned U.S. of Attack Before Parcel Bomb Plot,” *New York Times*, November 5, 2010, [https://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/06/world/middleeast/06terror.html?\\_r=1&partner=rss&emc=rss&pagewanted=all](https://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/06/world/middleeast/06terror.html?_r=1&partner=rss&emc=rss&pagewanted=all).

113 “Story Of The U.S.-Bound Explosives Emerges,” NPR, October 30, 2010, <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=130935022>.

114 “Dubai Bomb Was Flown on Passenger Planes,” BBC, October 31, 2010, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-11661496>.

115 Ibid.

116 Mazzetti and Shane, “Parcel Bomb Plot” *New York Times*, 2010.

117 “Yemen-based al Qaeda group claims responsibility for parcel bomb plot,” CNN, November 6, 2010, <http://edition.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/meast/11/05/yemen.security.concern/>.

118 Ibid.

119 “Yemen-based al Qaeda group claims responsibility,” CNN, 2010.

120 Scott Shane, “Qaeda Branch Aimed for Broad Damage at Low Cost,” *New York Times*, November 20, 2010, <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/21/world/middleeast/21parcel.html>; “Al-Qaida Magazine Details Parcel Bomb Attempt,” NPR, November 22, 2010, <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=131520780>.

121 Mark Mazzetti, Robert F. Worth, and Eric Lipton, “Bomb Plot Shows Key Role Played by Intelligence,” *New York Times*, October 31, 2010, <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/01/world/01terror.html>.

122 David Ignatius, “The dazzling rise and tragic fall of Saudi Arabia’s Mohammed bin Nayef,” *Washington Post*, July 5, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/07/05/dazzling-rise-tragic-fall-saudi-arabias-mohammed-bin-nayef/>.

The fruits of this U.S.-Saudi partnership were clear in 2010 when the Saudis uncovered a plot by AQAP to transport plastic explosives hidden inside computer printer cartridges that would be shipped aboard international cargo planes. That operation, involving agents recruited through MBN's special-operations funds for Yemen, saved many lives, according to U.S. and Saudi former officials.

Referring to this incident, Frances Townsend, who was one of President George W. Bush's homeland security advisors, told Arab News in 2018, "The intelligence exchange between Saudi and American officials has saved American lives."<sup>123</sup>

The crucial role played by Prince Muhammad and the Saudi security services stood in sharp contrast to the near-undetectability of AQAP's explosives by the technology at the time. The fact that the British had difficulty detecting the explosive in the laser printer<sup>124</sup> showed that new measures were needed.<sup>125</sup>

## The rise of ISIS.<sup>126</sup>

The rise of ISIS in Syria and Iraq in March 2013-June 2014, which culminated in ISIS's takeover of Mosul, one of Iraq's largest cities, led to a major shift in the campaign against terrorist groups in the Middle East. ISIS at its peak in late 2014 controlled an area of approximately a hundred thousand square kilometers in northeast Syria and northwest

Iraq—the equivalent of the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait combined—with a population of eleven million<sup>127</sup>—greater than all the GCC countries except Saudi Arabia.

The June 2014 collapse of Iraq's security forces and the announcement by ISIS "emir" Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi on June 29, 2014, of the formation of a so-called "caliphate"<sup>128</sup> led the United States to organize a global coalition of seventy-seven nations and five multilateral organizations<sup>129</sup> to oppose ISIS militarily. The campaign to defeat ISIS was primarily a conventional ground campaign borne by the Iraqi Security Forces and the Syrian-Kurdish Syrian Democratic Front (SDF).<sup>130</sup> US and coalition countries provided air power, intelligence, and logistics.<sup>131</sup> In addition to the military effort, the eighty-two-member Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS organized a significant civilian effort to disrupt ISIS's access to finance, its ability to support its overseas terror networks with foreign terrorist fighters, and its propaganda, as well as providing some support to stabilization of areas liberated from ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

Other aspects of the campaign used direct action strikes to focus on a network of al-Qaeda veterans called the Khorasan Group. First publicly disclosed by then-US Director of National Intelligence James Clapper on September 18, 2014,<sup>132</sup> the leaders of the group were killed in a series of strikes in 2014 and 2015.<sup>133</sup> The Khorasan Group had been directing much of its effort to plot external attacks in the West.<sup>134</sup>

123 Ben Flanagan, "Saudi Intelligence Sharing 'Has Saved American Lives,' Former Homeland Security Adviser Frances Townsend Tells Arab News," *Arab News*, March 23, 2018, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1271891/world>.

124 Vikram Dodd, Richard Norton-Taylor, and Paul Harris, "Cargo Plane Bomb Found in Britain Was Primed to Blow up over US," *The Guardian*, November 10, 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/nov/10/cargo-plane-bomb-us-alqaida>; "Terrorist Bombers May Have Targeted Aircraft," Associated Press, November 1, 2010, <https://www.foxnews.com/us/terrorist-bombers-may-have-targeted-aircraft>.

125 Larry Greenemeier, "Exposing the Weakest Link: As Airline Passenger Security Tightens, Bombers Target Cargo Holds," *Scientific American*, November 2, 2010, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/aircraft-cargo-bomb-security/>.

126 The group's name in Arabic in 2014 was "دولة الإسلامية في العراق والشام," which translates as the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham—"al-Sham" referring to the region now known as the Levant, hence the acronym ISIL, but also translated as Syria, giving the acronym ISIS. The acronym in Arabic, داعش, Daesh, has pejorative connotations and was sometimes used, especially by Arabic and Western leaders.

127 Seth G. Jones, et al., *Rolling Back the Islamic State*, RAND Corporation, p. xi, 2017, [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1900/RR1912/RAND\\_RR1912.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1900/RR1912/RAND_RR1912.pdf) - page=11.

128 "ISIS Spokesman Declares Caliphate, Rebrands Group as 'Islamic State,'" SITE Intelligence Group, November 29, 2014, <https://news.siteintelgroup.com/Jihadist-News/isis-spokesman-declares-caliphate-rebrands-group-as-islamic-state.html>.

129 "82 Partners United in Ensuring Daesh's Enduring Defeat," The Global Coalition Against Daesh, accessed June 25, 2020, <https://theglobalcoalition.org/en/partners/>.

130 Ash Carter, *A Lasting Defeat: The Campaign to Destroy ISIS*, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, October 2017, <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/lasting-defeat-campaign-destroy-isis>.

131 Christopher M Blanchard and Carla E Humud, "The Islamic State and U.S. Policy," Congressional Research Service, September 25, 2018, 6, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R43612.pdf#page=9>.

132 "US admits there is a much scarier terrorist group than ISIS," Russia Today, September 21, 2014 (link to Russian web site omitted); Holly Yan, "Terrorist leader killed in drone strike -- but what is the Khorasan Group?," CNN, July 22, 2015, <https://www.cnn.com/2015/07/22/world/what-is-the-khorasan-group/index.html>.

133 "What is the Khorasan Group?," BBC, September 24, 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29350271>; Holly Yan, "Terrorist leader killed in drone strike -- but what is the Khorasan Group?," CNN, July 22 2015, <https://www.cnn.com/2015/07/22/world/what-is-the-khorasan-group/index.html> (referring to Muhsin al-Fadhili); Laurent Barthelemy and Thomas Watkins, "French jihadist Drugeon killed in Syria: US official," September 11, 2015 (referring to David Drugeon being killed in July 2015); Tim Stelloh, "Top Militant From Al-Qaeda Linked 'Khorasan Group' Killed in Syria, Pentagon Says," NBC News, October 18, 2015, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/top-militant-al-qaeda-linked-khorasan-group-killed-syria-pentagon-n446756> (referring to Sanafi al-Nasr).

134 Holly Yan, "Terrorist leader killed," 2015.



The United States and the coalition provided considerable training, assistance, and logistical support to Iraq (including the Peshmerga military forces of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region) and to the Syrian Democratic Forces. However, non-military, non-intelligence support to the Iraqi Security Forces was limited, and to the Syrian Democratic Forces it was almost non-existent.

On June 5, 2020, US Special Envoy to the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS Ambassador James F. Jeffrey said the United States will continue to maintain forces in Iraq until an enduring defeat of ISIS is accomplished and as long as the government of Iraq will allow.<sup>135</sup>

However, as noted above, ISIS is working to stage a comeback. ISIS is already back to its 2012 level of activity in Iraq, which predated by only two years ISIS's June 2014 takeover of much of northeast Syria and the Iraqi city of Mosul.<sup>136</sup>

### Pensacola Naval Air Station shooting.

On December 6, 2019, Mohammed Saeed al-Shamrani, a second lieutenant in the Royal Saudi Air Force, killed three US Navy sailors with a pistol at Naval Air Station Pensacola. He had arrived in the United States in 2017 to be trained as an aircraft weapons systems operator.<sup>137</sup> He was killed by a sheriff's deputy during the incident.<sup>138</sup> He was later identified as an associate of AQAP, and had communicated with AQAP operatives the night before the shooting.<sup>139</sup> The FBI had broken the encryption on al-Shamrani's iPhone and used the information found there to carry out a counterterrorism operation against Abdullah al-Maliki, an AQAP operative with whom al-Shamrani had been associated.<sup>140</sup> FBI Director Christopher Wray said that evidence showed that al-Shamrani had become

radicalized at least as far back as 2015, and had spent years planning the attack.<sup>141</sup>

Saudi Arabia acknowledged in a report shown to the *Washington Post* that al-Shamrani's extremist thought was shaped by four religious figures—two Saudis (whom the Saudi government said had been arrested in 2016), a Kuwaiti, and a Jordanian.<sup>142</sup> The report explained that his Twitter account—on which he posted more than 2,700 anti-American, increasingly extremist views—did not reveal his full name, nor his photo or biographical information, but rather elements of his name that are common in Saudi Arabia. “Of note, the Shamran tribe is one [of] the Kingdom's largest tribes, and countless of its members carry the name of Mohammed,” the *Washington Post* quoted from the Saudi report. “As it is not uncommon for extremists and terrorists to use pseudonym of a large tribe to hide their real identity on social media, it was difficult for authorities to properly identify the shooter until he released his manifesto.”<sup>143</sup>

The Saudi report said the Saudi government was working with the United States and other governments to determine the shooter's motive, and to improve screening procedures for Saudis sent to the United States for military personnel and students sent overseas.<sup>144</sup> The US Department of Defense (DOD) suspended operational training programs for all 850 Saudi servicemembers for almost three months. DOD subsequently announced new restrictions on the use of firearms and access to US government facilities. He also announced that Saudi students would be continually monitored while in US-based training.<sup>145</sup>

In his announcement that the US Department of Justice considered the killings to be an act of terrorism, US Attorney

135 “Briefing With Special Representative for Syria Engagement and Special Envoy to the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS Ambassador James Jeffrey On Readout From the Virtual Meeting of Ministers of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS Small Group,” US Department of State, June 5, 2020, <https://www.state.gov/briefing-with-special-representative-for-syria-engagement-and-special-envoy-to-the-global-coalition-to-defeat-isis-ambassador-james-jeffrey-on-readout-from-the-virtual-meeting-of-ministers-of-the-glob/>.

136 Knights and Almeida, “Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq,” 2020.

137 Missy Ryan, “Gunman in Florida base shooting may have embraced radical ideology years before arriving in U.S., Saudi report says,” *Washington Post*, December 11, 2019, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/gunman-in-base-shooting-may-have-embraced-radical-ideology-years-before-arriving-in-us-saudi-report-says/2019/12/11/249c6890-1bc6-11ea-87f7-f2e91143c60d\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/gunman-in-base-shooting-may-have-embraced-radical-ideology-years-before-arriving-in-us-saudi-report-says/2019/12/11/249c6890-1bc6-11ea-87f7-f2e91143c60d_story.html).

138 Ibid.

139 David Shortell and Evan Perez, “FBI finds al Qaeda link after breaking encryption on Pensacola attacker's iPhone,” CNN, May 18, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/18/politics/pensacola-shooting-al-qaeda/index.html>.

140 “FBI Director Christopher Wray's Remarks at Press Conference Regarding Naval Air Station Pensacola Shooting Investigation,” FBI, May 18, 2020, <https://www.fbi.gov/news/pressrel/press-releases/fbi-director-christopher-wrays-remarks-at-press-conference-regarding-naval-air-station-pensacola-shooting-investigation>.

141 Ibid.

142 Ryan, “Gunman in Florida base shooting.” The *Washington Post* included a critical comment by Center for Global Policy counterterrorism expert Hassan Hassan that this report “was clearly self-serving, designed to shift blame from the government to wayward clerics who don't belong to the indigenous Saudi religious landscape.”

143 Ryan, “Gunman in Florida base shooting.”

144 Ibid.

145 Sadie Gurman and Dustin Volz, “FBI Probe Ties Florida Attack to al Qaeda, Faults Apple,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 19, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/fbi-discovers-al-qaeda-link-in-pensacola-attack-11589809330>.



**Why publicly acknowledged success stories of counterterrorism cooperation are relatively rare**

Military operations against terrorism are often discussed publicly by both US and Arab Gulf officials, but—with the Pensacola shooter case as a notable exception—both US and Arab Gulf officials generally do not publicly discuss instances of cooperation on counterterrorism cases. There are several reasons for this:

- Military operations, especially against high-value terrorists, are considered more newsworthy by media organizations, compared to investigations, arrests, prosecutions, and convictions, which receive considerably less attention.
- Protection of intelligence sources and methods, or confidential informants.
- Protection of details before a case is adjudicated by a court or decided on appeals.<sup>1</sup>
- Cases often involve citizens of one side or the other, and that side by law or custom limits what information can be revealed.
- Publicity about a plot could encourage copycats or, worse, cause other plotters to correct whatever mistakes led to the plot's disruption.
- Publicity about a terrorist plot, even if foiled, could embarrass one side or the other.
- Reticence to talk about cooperation may be grounded in one side's desire not to be associated with policies of the other side that would be unpopular—for example, US support for Israel, or human rights policies in some Arab Gulf countries.

1 “FBI Director Christopher Wray’s Remarks at Press Conference Regarding Naval Air Station Pensacola Shooting Investigation,” FBI, May 18, 2020, <https://www.fbi.gov/news/pressrel/press-releases/fbi-director-christopher-wrays-remarks-at-press-conference-regarding-naval-air-station-pensacola-shooting-investigation>.

General William Barr gave one of the most detailed public descriptions of Saudi-US counterterrorism cooperation in the investigation:<sup>146</sup>

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia gave complete and total support for our counterterrorism investigation, and ordered all Saudi trainees to fully cooperate. This

assistance was critical to helping the FBI determine whether anyone assisted the shooter in the attack.

While there was no evidence of assistance or pre-knowledge of the attack by other members of the Saudi military (or any other foreign nationals) who are training in the United States, we did learn of derogatory material possessed by 21 members of the Saudi military who are training here in the United States.

Seventeen had social media containing some jihadi or anti-American content. However, there was no evidence of any affiliation or involvement with any terrorist activity or group. Fifteen individuals (including some of the 17 just mentioned) had had some kind of contact with child pornography. While one of these individuals had a significant number of such images, all the rest had one or two images, in most cases posted in a chat room by someone else or received over social media.

The relevant U.S. Attorneys offices independently reviewed each of the 21 cases involving derogatory information and determined that none of them would, in the normal course, result in federal prosecution.

However, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia determined that this material demonstrated conduct unbecoming an officer in the Saudi Royal Air Force and Royal Navy and the 21 cadets have been dis-enrolled from their training curriculum in the U.S. military and will be returning to Saudi Arabia (later today).

The Kingdom has assured me that it will review each of these cases under their code of military justice and criminal code. The Kingdom has also agreed that we will have full access to anyone we want to interview in Saudi Arabia and any documents relevant to our investigation. Indeed, it has already been providing documents. Further, the Kingdom has assured us that, if we later decide to charge any of those being sent back to Saudi Arabia in connection with this counterterrorism investigation, it will return them for trial.

We appreciate Saudi Arabia’s cooperation in this case.

146 “Attorney General William P. Barr Announces the Findings of the Criminal Investigation into the December 2019 Shooting at Pensacola Naval Air Station,” Department of Justice Office of Public Affairs, January 13, 2020, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/speech/attorney-general-william-p-barr-announces-findings-criminal-investigation-december-2019>.

### III. Survey of the Current Landscape

#### Future counterterrorism threats.

Terrorist attacks continue to threaten the United States and the countries of the Arab Gulf, though in ways different from years past.

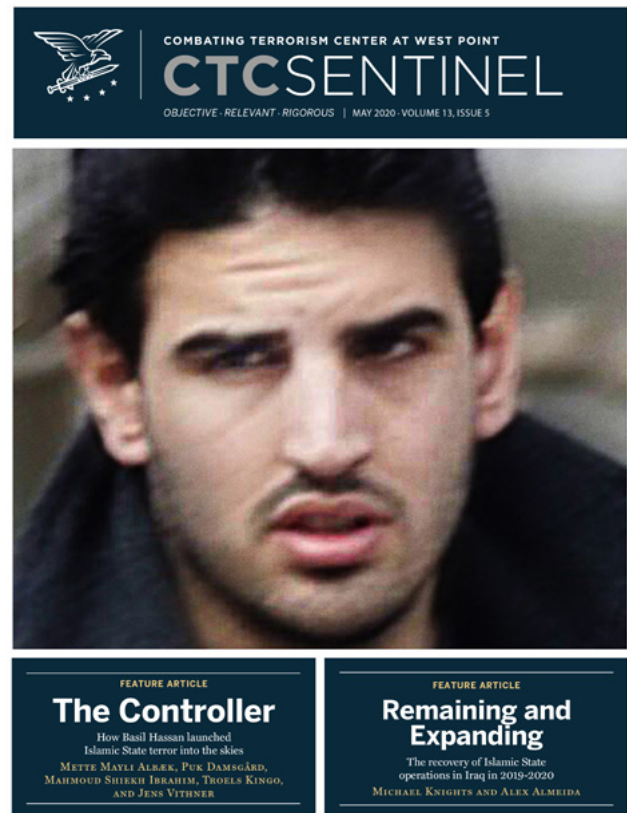
**Al-Qaeda and ISIS-style terrorism:** The December 2019 Pensacola shooting was a reminder to both the United States and the Arab Gulf that despite the measures put in place since 9/11, including stringent screening and vetting, al-Qaeda's and ISIS's brand of terrorism continues to motivate terrorists to plan and carry out attacks.

ISIS may have lost control of its territory in 2019, but it is working to stage a comeback. As Michael Knights and Alex Almeida documented in a May 2020 study for the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point:<sup>147</sup>

The Islamic State has recovered from its territorial defeats since 2017 to mount a strong and sustained resurgence as an insurgent force inside Iraq. A new analysis of attack metrics from the past 18 months paints a picture of an Islamic State insurgency that has regained its balance, spread out across many more areas, and reclaimed significant tactical proficiency. Now operating at the same levels it achieved in 2012, a number of factors suggest that the Islamic State could further ramp up its rural insurgency in 2020 and 2021. An input of experienced cadres from Syria, a downturn in Iraqi and coalition effectiveness, and now the disruption of a combined COVID and economic crisis will likely all feed into an escalating campaign of attrition against the Iraqi state, military, and tribes.

To the same effect, Hassan Hassan, program director for non-state actors and geopolitics at the Center for Global Policy, wrote in May 2020 for the *Guardian*:<sup>148</sup>

Over the last two months, Islamic State has carried out a series of large-scale and coordinated attacks in parts of Syria and Iraq. The spike in attacks has renewed fears about the group's resurgence .... The heightened activity is especially worrying because the conditions that have made it possible appear set to worsen in the coming months.



Isis has never ceased attacks in the two countries since the loss of its territories, but the recent operations are particularly bad news. Aside from the attacks, for example, reports from the ground consistently suggest that the group has had greater visibility and mobility this year in villages and suburbs across Iraq and Syria. ...

Isis clearly benefited from the security vacuum and decreased pressure in both countries. As Isis establishes a foothold, it soon becomes hard to weaken it without deeper international engagement. Renewed tactical operations might force it underground but it will not dismantle its networks, because that process requires a patient counter-terrorism strategy that seemed to exist a year ago. ...

In other words, the chances for further Isis recovery are increasing as the odds decrease for a

<sup>147</sup> Knights and Almeida, "Recovery of Islamic State Operations in Iraq," 2020.

<sup>148</sup> Hassan Hassan, "Islamic State is back and this time the west is ill-prepared to take it on," *The Guardian*, May 24, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/may/24/islamic-state-is-back-and-this-time-the-west-is-ill-prepared-to-take-it-on>.

tougher crackdown led by the US. This pattern is what makes the current phase particularly dangerous. If the pattern continues in the coming months, Isis is likely to become a far greater threat that will be much harder to contain than it is now.

**In Syria, the failure to return foreign fighters and their families to Europe and elsewhere creates a threat for the future.**

The al-Hol refugee camp in eastern Syria is home to fourteen thousand foreign fighters, plus an additional thirty thousand Iraqis who live in a separate section of the camp.<sup>149</sup> Many women are still loyal to ISIS. Despite considerable efforts by the United States government and a number of Arab countries to return foreign fighters, as well as their non-combatant spouses and children, most governments—especially in Europe—have been unwilling to take back their own nationals because they say they have no way of either prosecuting them or rehabilitating them. Conditions are difficult, security is lax, and the Syrian Kurdish authorities in charge of the camp were late to develop a complete registry of who is there. At some point, the foreign fighters and the many who still support ISIS will leave Syria. While those in the camp have had biometric identity checks that would preclude their coming to the United States, they will continue to be a terrorism threat to the Middle East and, particularly, to Europe.

**In Yemen, both AQAP and ISIS-Yemen terrorists are still carrying out “hundreds of attacks throughout Yemen,”**

as the Department of State’s 2019 country report said.<sup>150</sup> Qasim al-Rimi, one of the founders of AQAP, was killed in an airstrike in early 2020.<sup>151</sup> His death and the death

of bombmaker Ibrahim al-Asiri, along with losses in the Yemeni civil war, have by all accounts weakened AQAP.<sup>152</sup>

Paradoxically, the failure to end the civil war in Yemen has made it harder for AQAP operatives to travel outside of Yemen, since most civilian flights in and out of Yemen are suspended, and movement in and out of Yemen is more difficult than in peacetime. The civil war in Yemen is recognized as a major humanitarian crisis, and if international efforts are successful in brokering an end to the civil war, it will likely have the effect of making it easier for AQAP to move operatives, money, and materiel in and out of Yemen. Although the end to the civil war may restore governance to much of Yemen, it is likely that a ceasefire will not significantly increase short-term local Yemeni counterterrorism pressure against AQAP, particularly if the Houthis continue to control Sanaa.

**Domestic terrorism in the United States is an increasing concern to US counterterrorism officials at the federal, state, and local levels, drawing some focus away from al-Qaeda and ISIS.**

Since 9/11, more US citizens have died in terrorist attacks by white supremacists and terrorists with a similar political alignment than in attacks by ISIS or al-Qaeda sympathizers.<sup>153</sup> The September 2019 *DHS Strategic Framework for Countering Terrorism and Targeted Violence*<sup>154</sup> was the first formal Trump administration departmental strategy to explicitly call out white supremacism as “one of the most potent forces driving domestic terrorism.”<sup>155</sup>

The May 25 death of George Floyd at the hands of a Minneapolis, Minnesota police officer<sup>156</sup> and subsequent

- 149 Louisa Loveluck, “In Syrian camp for women and children who left ISIS caliphate, a struggle even to register names,” *Washington Post*, June 28, 2020, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/syria-al-hol-annex-isis-caliphate-women-children/2020/06/28/80ddabb4-b71b-11ea-9a1d-d3db1cbe07ce\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/syria-al-hol-annex-isis-caliphate-women-children/2020/06/28/80ddabb4-b71b-11ea-9a1d-d3db1cbe07ce_story.html); “A Children’s Crisis: Update on Al Hol camp and COVID-19 concerns,” Save the Children, May 11, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/childrens-crisis-update-al-hol-camp-and-covid-19-concerns>.
- 150 *Country Reports on Terrorism 2019: Yemen*, US Department of State, June 2020, <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2019/yemen/> (pdf is available at <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Country-Reports-on-Terrorism-2019-2.pdf#page=148>).
- 151 Rukmini Callimachi, Eric Schmitt, and Julian E. Barnes, “U.S. Strikes at Leader of Qaeda in Yemen,” *New York Times*, January 31, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/31/world/middleeast/qaeda-yemen-alrimi.html>; “Al-Qaeda Leader in Yemen Killed by US Strike,” BBC, February 7, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-51409581>.
- 152 Eric Schmitt, “Killing of Terrorist Leader in Yemen Is Latest Blow to Qaeda Affiliate,” *New York Times*, February 10, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/10/us/politics/al-qaeda-yemen-qassim-al-rimi.html>.
- 153 From 2009 to 2018, “right-wing extremism” was responsible for 73.3 percent of all murders, compared to 23.4 percent by “Islamist extremism,” according *Murder and Extremism in the United States in 2018*, Anti-Defamation League, January 2019, 16, <https://www.adl.org/media/12480/download#page=16>; Vera Bergengruen and W.J. Hennigan, “‘We Are Being Eaten From Within.’ Why America Is Losing the Battle Against White Nationalist Terrorism,” *Time*, August 8, 2019, <https://time.com/5647304/white-nationalist-terrorism-united-states/>. In the fourteen years between 1994 and 2019 in which fatal terrorist attacks occurred, the majority of deaths resulted from right-wing attacks, with right-wing attackers being most likely than religious terrorist to cause more deaths in a given year. Seth G. Jones, Catrina Doxsee, and Nicholas Harrington, “The Escalating Terrorism Problem in the United States,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 17, 2020, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/escalating-terrorism-problem-united-states>.
- 154 *Department of Homeland Security Strategic Framework for Countering Terrorism and Targeted Violence*, US Department of Homeland Security, September 2019, [https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/19\\_0920\\_plcy\\_strategic-framework-countering-terrorism-targeted-violence.pdf#page=15](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/19_0920_plcy_strategic-framework-countering-terrorism-targeted-violence.pdf#page=15); Thomas S. Warrick, “DHS’s new counterterrorism strategy calls out white supremacism, but will need resources and support,” *New Atlanticist*, Atlantic Council, September 23, 2019, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/dhss-new-counterterrorism-strategy-calls-out-white-supremacism-but-will-need-resources-and-support/>.
- 155 DHS, *Strategic Framework for Countering Terrorism and Targeted Violence*, 2019, [https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/19\\_0920\\_plcy\\_strategic-framework-countering-terrorism-targeted-violence.pdf#page=15](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/19_0920_plcy_strategic-framework-countering-terrorism-targeted-violence.pdf#page=15).
- 156 Evan Hill, et al., “How George Floyd Was Killed in Police Custody,” *New York Times*, May 31, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/31/us/george-floyd-investigation.html>.

protests increased concerns in the United States about domestic terrorism and the US government's response to it. In June 2020, a DHS Office of Intelligence & Analysis (I&A) report written for US state and local law enforcement said “militia extremists and [groups] who advocate a belief in the superiority of the white race have sought to bring about a second civil war, often referred to as a ‘Boogaloo’ by intentionally instigating violence at First Amendment-protected activities.”<sup>157</sup> DHS's subsequent July 2020 deployment of armed security officers to Portland, Oregon, and efforts to disseminate intelligence reporting about protected First Amendment activity<sup>158</sup> led to sharp criticisms about DHS's tactics<sup>159</sup> and changes inside DHS.<sup>160</sup> Regardless of the outcome of the November 3, 2020 US election, the FBI, DHS, and DOJ will probably be devoting additional resources in 2021 to domestic terrorism investigations.

**Iran is a continuing threat, in terms of a terrorist threat from its proxies, directly from its military, and indirectly through non-kinetic operations.** After a series of attacks by Iranian proxies in late 2019,<sup>161</sup> on January 3, 2020, the United States launched a strike that killed IRGC QF chief Qasem Soleimani.<sup>162</sup> In retaliation, Iran launched missile strikes against US military positions in Iraq at airbases at al-Asad in Anbar province, and near Irbil in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region.<sup>163</sup>

In cyberspace, especially, Iran is continuing to carry out attacks. These cyberattacks are an example of Iran's “peculiar sense of symmetry,”<sup>164</sup> an extensive history in which Iran sees itself as responding, more or less in-kind, to actions carried out against it. Iran sees the United States, Israel, and Saudi Arabia, and other countries as acting in concert to check Iran's regional ambitions.



TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Special unit of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Ground Force includes skillful handpicked members. Source: Tasnim News Agency/Commons Wikimedia.

Iran, as noted above, is also carrying out a series of influence operations against the United States and several Arab Gulf nations, with the apparent goal of undermining efforts to thwart Iran's regional ambitions.

While many of Iran's efforts predated the Trump administration's formal announcement in May 2018 of its “maximum pressure” sanctions campaign, there is no doubt that Iran's efforts have stepped up since then. Even if Trump is not re-elected, the threat of asymmetric attacks from Iran

157 Natasha Bertrand, “Intel report warns that far-right extremists may target Washington, D.C.,” *Politico*, June 19, 2020, <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/06/19/intel-report-warns-far-right-extremists-target-washington-dc-329771>.

158 Shane Harris, “DHS analyzed protester communications, raising questions about previous statements by senior department official,” *Washington Post*, July 31, 2020, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/dhs-analyzed-protester-communications-raising-questions-about-previous-statements-by-senior-department-official/2020/07/31/313163c6-d359-11ea-9038-af089b63ac21\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/dhs-analyzed-protester-communications-raising-questions-about-previous-statements-by-senior-department-official/2020/07/31/313163c6-d359-11ea-9038-af089b63ac21_story.html).

159 Michael Chertoff, “The Hijacking of Homeland Security,” *New York Times*, July 28, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/28/opinion/homeland-security-portland-trump.html>.

160 Geneva Sands and Zachary Cohen, “DHS official to be reassigned after intelligence collection on journalists,” *CNN*, August 1, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/08/01/politics/brian-murphy-dhs-official-reassigned-intelligence-journalists/index.html>.

161 Thomas S. Warrick, “Iraq: It's not over yet,” *MENASource*, Atlantic Council, January 2, 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/iraq-its-not-over-yet/>.

162 “Remarks by President Trump on the Killing of Qasem Soleimani,” The White House, January 3, 2020, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-killing-qasem-soleimani/>; David A. Wemer et al., “Soleimani Killing Threatens to Break Open US-Iranian Conflict,” *New Atlanticist*, Atlantic Council, January 3, 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/soleimani-killing-threatens-to-break-open-us-iranian-conflict/>; Thomas S. Warrick, “What the killing of Iran's General Soleimani means for Europe,” *Euronews*, January 4, 2020, <https://www.euronews.com/2020/01/04/what-the-killing-of-iran-s-general-soleimani-means-for-europe-view>.

163 Gordon Lubold, Nancy Youssef, and Isabel Coles, “Iran Fires Missiles at U.S. Forces in Iraq,” *Wall Street Journal*, January 7, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/stampede-at-funeral-procession-for-iranian-commander-kills-35-11578390888>; William F. Wechsler et al., “De-Escalation Still Possible After Iran's Missile Retaliation,” *New Atlanticist*, Atlantic Council, January 8, 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/de-escalation-still-possible-after-irans-missile-retaliation/>.

164 Thomas S. Warrick, “If the US launches cyberattacks on Iran, retaliation could be a surprise,” *Fifth Domain*, January 30, 2020, <https://www.fifthdomain.com/thought-leadership/2020/01/30/if-the-us-launches-cyberattacks-on-iran-retaliation-could-be-a-surprise/>.



or its proxies, cyberattacks, and influence campaigns is not likely to be “turned off” soon.

**COVID-19 is having an effect on the counterterrorism picture in the Middle East, but so far not a major one.** No assessment of the security situation in late 2020 could fail to take account of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors of this report did fieldwork in the Gulf in early March 2020, days before international travel in both the United States and the Arab Gulf ground to a halt. In each of the countries visited, security officials made clear they treated the COVID-19 as a security threat, not just a threat to public health or their economies.<sup>165</sup> In this, they were ahead of some of their security counterparts in the United States.<sup>166</sup>

The effects of COVID-19 on the threat from terrorism will almost certainly be mixed—increasing the threat in some ways, but decreasing it in others.<sup>167</sup> On July 6, 2020, United Nations (UN) Secretary-General António Guterres warned at the UN’s Virtual Counter-Terrorism Week conference that COVID-19 created new opportunities for ISIS, al-Qaeda and white supremacists to exploit divisions, local conflicts, failures in governance, and other grievances to advance their goals.<sup>168</sup> European Union Minister for Foreign Affairs Josep Borrell said, “It is true that, in some places, the crisis has led to a reduction of terrorist activity, mainly due to the mobilization of state security services. But in other regions, terrorism and human suffering caused by it continue unabated.”<sup>169</sup> A report by the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee’s executive directorate said that “The increase in the number of young people engaging in unsupervised Internet usage – particularly on gaming platforms – offers

terrorist groups an opportunity to expose a greater number of people to their ideas, although the relationship between online activity and radicalization to violence is not fully understood.”<sup>170</sup>

While those comments at a UN conference may be speculative, al-Qaeda propagandists have also mastered the art of working from home. An al-Qaeda online magazine published in May 2020 boasted of its influence in the Arabian Peninsula and reaffirmed al-Qaeda’s claim that the Arabian peninsula remains the center of support and strategic depth for al-Qaeda’s efforts to “liberate the two Holy Mosques.”<sup>171</sup> It also claimed that the December 2019 Pensacola attack caused cracks in the relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia.

Similarly, an ISIS online magazine, *al-Naba*, said in an editorial on March 19, “The Crusaders’ Worst Nightmare,” that COVID-19 would cause Western governments to be more reluctant to send soldiers overseas, and called on ISIS fighters to “escalate their military operations against the apostate helpers in Muslim countries” or to carry out terrorist attacks in European cities when their “security and medical institutions have reached the limits of their capacity.”<sup>172</sup>

Indeed, fears of COVID-19 helped accelerate US, French, and United Kingdom withdrawals from Iraq.<sup>173</sup> CNN reported in early May that “Coalition troops are no longer accompanying Iraqi units or the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces during raids on ISIS targets due to the pandemic.”<sup>174</sup>

*Text continues on page 29.*

<sup>165</sup> Atlantic Council staff interview in the region, March 2020.

<sup>166</sup> During a sharp colloquy on February 25, 2020, between DHS Acting Secretary Chad Wolf and Sen. John Neely Kennedy (R-LA), Wolf struggled to provide statistics on the spread of COVID-19 and the federal response, ending with a frustrated Kennedy making it clear he regarded COVID-19 as a major homeland security issue: “Don’t you think you ought to check on that? As the head of Homeland Security?” and “Mr. Secretary, you’re supposed to keep us safe. You’re the Secretary of Homeland Security,” ending with “Mr. Secretary, I’m going to hush here. You’re supposed to keep us safe. And the American people deserve some straight answers on the coronavirus. And I’m not getting them from you.” Video accompanies Aaron Blake, “Trump’s DHS head has a brutal exchange on coronavirus—courtesy of a GOP senator,” *Washington Post*, February 25, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/02/25/chad-wolf-john-kennedy-coronavirus/#comments-wrapper>.

<sup>167</sup> Joze Pelayo, “Amid the coronavirus, where are US-Gulf counterterrorism efforts headed?,” *MENASource*, Atlantic Council, June 30, 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/amid-the-coronavirus-where-are-us-gulf-counterterrorism-efforts-headed/>.

<sup>168</sup> “UN Chief Warns COVID-19 Provides Opportunity for Terrorists,” Associated Press, July 6, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2020/07/06/world/ap-un-virus-outbreak-extremist-impact.html>.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.



<sup>171</sup> Abdullah Khaled, Twitter post, May 23, 2020, 3:02 p.m., @AbdullahKhaledS, “First was the claim the Arabian Peninsula (Saudi Arabia) remains the center of support and strategic depth for the group to ‘liberate the two Holy Mosques’,” <https://twitter.com/AbdullahKhaledS/status/1264270724207972355>.

<sup>172</sup> “Contending with ISIS in the Time of Coronavirus,” International Crisis Group, March 31, 2020, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/contending-isis-time-coronavirus>.

<sup>173</sup> Pesha Magid, “Islamic State Aims for Comeback Amid Virus-Expedited U.S. Withdrawal,” *Foreign Policy*, April 6, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/04/06/iraq-islamic-state-comeback-coronavirus-us-withdrawal/>.


<sup>174</sup> Ryan Browne, “ISIS seeks to exploit pandemic to mount resurgence in Iraq and Syria,” CNN, May 8, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/07/politics/isis-coronavirus-iraq-syria/index.html>.

**Table 2: Selected US Government Offices, Programs, and International Agreements to Support International Counterterrorism Cooperation**



<p><b>US Department of State</b></p> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Bureau of Counterterrorism and Countering Violent Extremism (CT):</b> Takes a leading role in developing coordinated strategies and approaches to defeat terrorism abroad and securing the counterterrorism cooperation of international partners.<sup>1</sup> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Countering the Financing of Terrorism (CFT) – tools and programs to isolate and weaken terrorist groups and their support networks; helps build the capacity of foreign partners to detect illicit funds.</li> <li>Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund (CTPF) – designed to build a network of partnerships from South Asia to the Sahel where terrorist networks seek to establish a foothold.</li> </ol> </li> <li><b>Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL):</b> Uses a wide range of tools to counter crime, illegal drugs, transitional crime, and instability abroad, including foreign assistance to help partners build, reform, and sustain the necessary criminal justice system for international drug control and cross-border law enforcement cooperation, either through training in other countries or serve as hosts for training and mentoring programs.<sup>2</sup> From 2010-2015, INL assisted Iraq's Ministry of Interior to develop its law enforcement institutions through the Police Development Program (PDP).<sup>3</sup></li> <li><b>Bureau of International Security and Nonproliferation (ISN):</b> Works to prevent the spread of Weapons of Mass Destruction, delivery systems, and advanced conventional weapons capabilities—and to try to roll back such proliferation where it has already taken root.<sup>4</sup></li> <li><b>Office of Program Management–Ministry of Interior (OPM-MOI):</b> The Technical Cooperation Agreement between the United States and Saudi Arabia “facilitates the transfer of technical knowledge, advice, skills and resources from the United States to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the areas critical infrastructure protection and public security, including border protection, civil defense capabilities, and coast guard and maritime capabilities.”<sup>5</sup> In the case of the OPM-MOI, all expenses are fully funded by the government of Saudi Arabia.<sup>6</sup> This program has been considered as a model to other Gulf Arab countries.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Antiterrorism Assistance Training (ATA)</b></p>	<p><i>Run by the State/ Diplomatic Security and Counterterrorism Bureaus, ATA is the primary program for State Department funding for training and technical assistance relating to counterterrorism and law enforcement. ATA has in the past provided training to Arab Gulf countries, such as Bahrain and Oman.<sup>7</sup></i></p>
<p><b>Mutual Legal Assistance Agreements (MLATs)</b></p> <p>(once in force, they are implemented by the US Department of Justice)</p>	<p><i>These treaties allow for the exchange of evidence and information in criminal and related matters. The United States does not have an agreement of this kind in force with any of the Arab Gulf governments.<sup>8</sup></i></p>
<p><b>Office of Program Management – Ministry of Interior (OPM-MOI)</b></p>	<p><b>The Office of Program Management – Ministry of Interior</b> refers to both a program and a Department of State's umbrella agreement under which the United States provides training and technical assistance to Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Interior (MOI) and State Security Presidency (SSP) through Project Specific Agreements (PSA). Saudi Arabia funds the cost of this program.</p>
<p><b>US Department of Homeland Security</b></p> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC):</b> FLETC trains selected international students on a reimbursable basis in areas common to law enforcement officers, such as proper use of firearms, tactics, investigations, and legal training.<sup>9</sup> FLETC's International Training Division also exports training programs and technical assistance outside the United States pursuant to a policy decision.</li> <li><b>US Coast Guard programs through Foreign Military Sales (FMS) agreements:</b> The US Coast Guard can provide training and technical assistance through FMS programs.<sup>10</sup></li> </ol>
<p><b>Customs Mutual Assistance Agreement</b></p>	<p><i>These agreements allow for the exchange of information, intelligence, and documents that will ultimately assist countries in the prevention and investigation of customs offenses. Each agreement is tailored to the capacities and national policy of an individual country's customs administration. In the Gulf region, only <b>Bahrain</b> and <b>Kuwait</b> have signed such an agreement.<sup>11</sup></i></p>

Endnotes to Table 2 appear on pages 64-65.

**Table 2: Selected US Government Offices, Programs, and International Agreements to Support International Counterterrorism Cooperation** *(continued)*

<p><b>US Department of Justice</b></p> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. International Criminal Investigations Training Assistance Program (ICITAP):</b> Works with foreign governments to develop professional and transparent law enforcement institutions that protect human rights, combat corruption, and reduce the threat of transnational crime and terrorism. Bahrain, Iraq and Bahrain have previously participated.<sup>12</sup></li> <li><b>2. Office of Prosecutorial Development Assistance and Training (OPDAT):</b> Works with foreign counterparts to build capacity and enhance cooperation in prosecuting transnational and organized crime, terrorism, terrorist financing, money laundering, and other transnational criminal activities. It provides training to Arab Gulf countries and others to strengthen and implement capabilities focused on combatting terrorism through prosecutorial and judicial skills development, anti-money laundering and anti-terrorism financing, asset recovery, and legislative reform. In 2018, OPDAT held its first workshop in Bahrain.<sup>13</sup> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. OPDAT has Resident Legal Advisors (RLAs), who are experienced US prosecutors and implement most programs, and provide expert assistance and case-based mentoring to foreign counterparts. They can also provide technical assistance to ministries of justice, public prosecutors' offices, and to judges and other justice sector personnel.</li> </ol> </li> <li><b>3. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA):</b> Combats drug trafficking and distribution, aims at reducing the availability of illicit controlled substances on domestic and international markets. DEA offices in the Middle East are primarily focused on bilateral and multilateral cooperation to pursue to combat regional drug threats.<sup>14</sup></li> <li><b>4. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI):</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. <i>FBI National Academy:</i> Offers advanced courses in intelligence theory, terrorism and terrorist mindsets, management science, law, behavioral science, law enforcement communication, and forensic science for US and international law enforcement managers who have demonstrated leadership qualities.<sup>15</sup></li> <li>b. The FBI provides training or technical assistance workshops to national law enforcement personnel around the world to build capacity to investigate and prosecute crimes related to terrorist financing, narcotics, and money laundering.<sup>16</sup></li> <li>c. <i>FBI Legal Attaches:</i> commonly known as <b>LEGATs</b>—are located at the US embassy or consulate in the host nation. LEGATS keep in close contact with other federal agencies and national and international law enforcement associations. LEGATs conduct international liaison and information sharing in accordance with executive orders, laws, treaties, Attorney General Guidelines, FBI policies, and interagency agreements.<sup>17</sup></li> <li>d. <i>Middle Eastern Law Enforcement Training Center:</i> located in Dubai, it provides training to Dubai's National Police and other officers in the region through a partnership between the government of Dubai and the FBI.<sup>18</sup></li> </ol> </li> </ol>
<p><b>Extradition Treaties</b></p>	<p><i>A treaty under which a person in one country is transferred for prosecution purposes or punishment to another country. None of the Gulf Arab states has an extradition agreement with the US, which has extradition treaties with over a hundred nations.<sup>19</sup></i></p>
<p><b>Mutual Legal Assistance Agreements</b></p>	<p><i>These treaties allow for the exchange of evidence and information in criminal and related matters. The United States does not have an agreement of this kind in force with any of the Arab Gulf governments.<sup>20</sup> These agreements are negotiated by the US Department of State in coordination with the Department of Justice.</i></p>

**Table 2: Selected US Government Offices, Programs, and International Agreements to Support International Counterterrorism Cooperation** *(continued)*

<p><b>US Department of Treasury</b></p> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC):</b> administers and enforces economic and trade sanctions based on US foreign policy and national security goals against targeted foreign countries and regimes, terrorists, international narcotics traffickers, among others, that threaten the foreign policy, economy and national security of the US.<sup>21</sup></li> <li><b>Office of Terrorist Financing and Financial Crimes (TFFC):</b><sup>22</sup> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Works across all elements of the national security community and with the private sector and foreign governments to identify and address the threats presented by all forms of illicit finance to the international financial system. The office leads international engagement efforts and works with partner countries such as the Arab Gulf states in enforcement, policy, and regulatory efforts, including through the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and the Terrorist Financing Targeting Center (TFTC).</li> </ol> </li> <li><b>Office of the Comptroller of the Currency (OCC):</b> OCC sponsors several initiatives to provide Anti-Money Laundering/Countering the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT) training to foreign banking supervisors, such as its annual AML/CFT School, to increase their knowledge of money laundering and terrorism financing typologies and to improve banking supervisors' ability to examine and enforce compliance with national laws and international agreements.<sup>23</sup></li> <li><b>The Office of Technical Assistance (OTA):</b><sup>24</sup> works side-by-side with counterparts through mentoring and hands-on training conducted through co-location at a relevant US Government agency. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>OTA's Economic Crimes Team (ECT) provides on-the-job training and technical assistance to help foreign governments develop internationally compliant AML/CTF regimes.</li> </ol> </li> <li><b>Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN):</b> focuses on safeguarding the financial system from illicit use and combat money laundering and promote national security. FinCEN cooperates with foreign partners by providing "policy recommendations and guidance, analytical training, technological advice, and staff support in order to foster the implementation of anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing (AML/CFT) regimes worldwide."<sup>25</sup></li> </ol>
<p><b>US Department of Defense</b></p> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>International Security Affairs, Middle East:</b><sup>26</sup> oversees policy issues related to the nations and international organizations of Europe, Russia, the Middle East, Africa, and the Western Hemisphere <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Special Operations Combatting Terrorism (SOCT):</b><sup>27</sup> Develops policy guidance and oversee the of implementation of all DoD policies, strategies, and plans. Some relevant responsibilities include: Capacity building of foreign partners to counter terrorist threats; counterterrorism plans, programs, actions, and requirements consistent with national strategies and DoD policy and objectives.</li> </ol> </li> <li><b>Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund (CTPF):</b> designed to build a network of partnerships from South Asia to the Sahel to develop more effective partnerships and strengthen civilian counterterrorism partnerships.<sup>28</sup> The CTPF funds in the Arabian Peninsula have been used to counter al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and other regional terrorist groups. Oman, Bahrain, and other Gulf States are key partners.<sup>29</sup></li> <li><b>Counter Narcotics Global Threats (CNGT):</b><sup>30</sup> the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Counternarcotics and Global Threats develops DoD counterdrug (CD) and counter-transnational organized crime (CTOC) policy. These missions focus on countering illicit drug trafficking, but also include countering illicit financial flows and the illicit trafficking of people, wildlife, natural resources, and weapons.</li> <li><b>National Defense University, Near East and South Asia (NESA)</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sits within the National War College, Center for Strategic Studies and builds and sustains communities of influence and partnership among security professionals and other key stakeholders throughout the NESA region. The flagship of the NESA Center's annual programming is the Foundation Seminar series, consisting of the recurring Senior Executive Seminar (SES), Executive Seminar (ES), and Combating Transnational Threats Seminar (CT-SES). Omani officials have recently attended NESA.<sup>31</sup></li> </ol> </li> </ol>
<p><b>Joint and Combined Exchange Training Program (JCET)</b></p>	<p><i>Military training programs in which American Special Forces train with host country counterparts – these sometimes include military units with a counterterrorism purpose. For example, Kuwait's Ministry of Interior and the National Guard have participated in these US programs to work with local counterterrorism units via trainings and exercises.<sup>32</sup></i></p>



## IV. Key Findings and Recommendations

### Key Findings

Counterterrorism experts agree that al-Qaeda's and ISIS's brand of terrorism continues to pose a threat to the security of the United States, the Arab Gulf, and other parts of the world, including Europe, Africa, South and Southeast Asia, and Australia. ISIS is working on its comeback in eastern Syria and western Iraq, and is looking to re-establish itself in places like Libya, and the Sinai. A number of al-Qaeda veterans are still in circulation. One of al-Qaeda's biggest affiliates is currently based in Syria's Idlib province, which borders on Turkey. AQAP is still a functioning organization and is likely, ironically, to pose a greater threat after peace is restored in Yemen. Al-Shabaab and other ISIS and al-Qaeda affiliated terrorists are active in Africa and will use countries like Sudan as transit gateways. Countries like the United States are still seeing domestic terrorists pursue their own grievances.

By all accounts, it will be two to three years before several of these groups looks likely to stage a comeback. The current relative pause in major terrorist activity caused by the success of the efforts to defeat ISIS efforts in Iraq and Syria and the COVID-19 pandemic creates an opportunity that governments around the world, led by the United States and the Arab Gulf, should use to prevent that resurgence.

Much ink, real and virtual, has been spilled emphasizing the need to encourage economic development, social justice, human rights, and religious tolerance as the key to countering violent extremism and terrorism prevention without the need to resort to "forever wars."<sup>175</sup> As valid as these points are, they are all long-term solutions. Counterterrorism policymakers and operators need to establish priorities and look for solutions that can be put in place to prevent the resurgence that otherwise will arrive in two to three years.

### Here are ten overall observations about the counterterrorism landscape in October 2020:

1. **The current relative pause in major terrorist activity is an opportunity for a serious discussion between the United States and the Arab Gulf governments about the endstate for al-Qaeda and ISIS-style terrorism** (see recommendation 2, below). That end-

state should include as a goal that **al-Qaeda and ISIS-style terrorism is a problem addressed through civilian—not just military—solutions.**

2. **The global endstate for al-Qaeda and ISIS-style terrorism, not just for the United States and the Arab Gulf, should involve reducing the threat to the level where their remaining adherents can be handled at the local or national level.** Ideally, each country should be able to address most terrorist threats without outside assistance. This would include being able to prevent the recruitment of terrorists, carry out law enforcement investigations, disrupt terrorists' ability to travel, disrupt their ability to raise or spend money, prosecute terrorists or divert them to non-prosecutorial programs, and incarcerate or rehabilitate them so that they do not pose a threat domestically or internationally.
3. **Internationally, policymakers and operators should focus on disrupting terrorists' ability to move operatives, money, and information.** Terrorists' ability to do harm is significantly reduced if they cannot travel and others cannot travel to join them, or if they cannot send or receive funds, and if their communications can be disrupted or monitored. Short of killing or incarcerating terrorists, this is the best way to stop them from harming innocents.
4. **Policymakers and operators should prioritize the need to eliminate terrorist safe havens.** Safe havens allow terrorists the ability to plot, recruit, fundraise, train, build, plan, and eventually carry out attacks. Safe havens allow for the surviving plotters to return, rest, and re-fit after an operation. **This is one area where military operations may be required,** because terrorists become much harder to dislodge when local governance is weak or effectively non-existent.
5. **The United States and Arab Gulf nations have a common interest in reducing the threat from malign Iranian influence.** The challenge of Iran, as noted above, goes beyond just terrorism and its use of deniable proxies. It also includes Iranian influence operations and other measures that form part of an integrated campaign with the goal of (a) preserving

<sup>175</sup> Steven Simon and Richard Sokolsky, *19 Years Later: How to Wind Down the War on Terror*, Quincy Institute, June 2020, <https://quincyinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/QUINCY-PAPER-No.1-June-2020-STEVEN-SIMON-F-1.pdf>; Douglas London, *Rethinking US Counterterrorism Strategy*, Middle East Institute, July 6, 2020, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/rethinking-us-counterterrorism-strategy>; Daniel Byman, "Eighteen Years On: The War on Terror Comes of Age," *CTC Sentinel* 12, no. 8, September 10, 2019, pages:1-7, <https://ctc.usma.edu/eighteen-years-war-terror-comes-age/>.

the current regime in power and (b) establishing a secure, dominant Iranian position over any neighbors it perceives as a threat. Driving the United States out of the Middle East, starting with Iraq, is seen by Iran as essential to victory.

Just as the United States and the Arab Gulf need to have a serious discussion about the endstate for al-Qaeda and ISIS-style terrorism, **there also needs to be a serious discussion about the desired end-state of the current conflict with Iran.** Iran's nuclear program is a challenge in a class all its own. Apart from that, ending Iran's other malign influence efforts, including ending Iran's support for terrorism, should be a "must do" goal. Part of this will need to be ending Iran's efforts to create military forces that are outside the control of the state but under the control of the IRGC-Quds Force—as is currently the case with Lebanese Hezbollah and Kata'ib Hezbollah. None of these endstates is likely to happen quickly or easily.

6. **The United States and the Arab Gulf need to elevate the importance of non-military, non-intelligence security cooperation against terrorism, and to recognize that cooperation has benefits to both sides.** There are fundamental differences between US and Arab Gulf political systems, and the security architecture of all eight countries covered by this report is significantly different. (See Annex 1 on page 56.) However, the United States has overcome such alignment differences in setting up high-level, senior-working level, and working level channels with its "Five Eyes" partners,<sup>176</sup> the European Union,<sup>177</sup> and other key allies like Germany.
7. **Concerns about human rights will continue to be important in US and European decisions about law enforcement and security cooperation with the Gulf.** The death of Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul on October 2, 2018, and actions against Gulf citizens who live abroad, are not acceptable to most citizens of Western countries. **Not only will security cooperation be reduced if such incidents take place, but they jeopardize political and economic cooperation across a wide range of interests important to Gulf countries.**
8. **There are times when training is more important than technology.** There is a tendency common to the United States and other countries, not just in the Middle East, to prioritize purchases of technology over training. In the United States, for example, DHS funding often goes to state and local governments for purchasing equipment, because it can be done with a one-time appropriation, and because merely purchasing prestige technology produces a short-term sense of progress from appropriators and federal, state, and local officials. Training programs, on the other hand, often take years to achieve their intended effects, but their effects can be more lasting. Security sector assistance can also be shaped and tailored to balance technology with training, to reduce the risk that security services use technology to eliminate the rights and privacy of citizens. Policymakers everywhere need to remind themselves that if their ultimate goal is a secure and prosperous society, training programs often provide significant and more lasting returns.
9. **Moving away from over-reliance on military forces and military security assistance towards support for civilian security services can promote the rule-of-law and respect for citizens' rights and privacy in ways that will benefit both counterterrorism efforts and the security of the region.** Criticisms from left, right and center in the United States have warned that an over-reliance on overseas military and assistance efforts to achieve success in counterterrorism and security efforts can leave governments with an "all or nothing" lethal approach when better, less-lethal law enforcement solutions could produce a better outcome. It is important that law enforcement training and assistance adopt best practices in crowd control and respect for internationally accepted human rights.
10. **International efforts for security sector reforms are most successful when they coincide with host government efforts at reform.** Lessons from international efforts at security sector reform outside the Gulf have shown that meaningful reforms take time and are often difficult to establish. However, international efforts work best when they are matched by a desire

176 The Five-Country Ministerial includes Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States, and on the US side involves DHS and DOJ. "Five Eyes Security Summit Concludes With Pledge to Tackle Emerging Threats," *Homeland Security Today*, July 31, 2019, <https://www.hstoday.us/channels/global/five-eyes-security-summit-concludes-with-pledge-to-tackle-emerging-threats/>. Service and component heads meet separately as the "Border Five" (B5) and "Migration Five" (M5). "International Strategic Framework for Fiscal Year 2019 to 2022," Canada Border Services Agency, 2019, <https://www.cbsa-asfc.gc.ca/pd-dp/tb-ct/evp-pvp/spb-dgps-isf-csi-eng.html>.

177 "Joint U.S.-EU Statement Following the U.S.-EU Justice and Home Affairs Ministerial Meeting," DOJ, December 11, 2019, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/joint-us-eu-statement-following-us-eu-justice-and-home-affairs-ministerial-meeting-0>.



Sept. 6, 2007. U.S. Coast Guard's Patrol Forces Southwest Asia. Members of the U.S. Coast Guard's Patrol Forces Southwest Asia conduct container climbing during a visit, board, search, and seizure (VBSS) demonstration at their training facility in Manama, Bahrain, Sept. 6. PATFORSWA makes up part of the coalition forces that conduct Maritime Security Operations in the Persian Gulf. Maritime security operations help set the conditions for security and stability in the North Arabian Gulf and protect Iraq's sea-based infrastructure to help provide the Iraqi people the opportunity for self-determination. *Source:* Photo by Lt.Cmdr. Robert Wyman/U.S. Coast Guard.

on the part of the government of the host nation.<sup>178</sup> For international donors, this means balancing between (i) those countries that need reform the most against (ii) those donors that are the most receptive and committed to reforms.

### **Recommendations for joint action by the United States executive branch and Arab Gulf governments.**

#### **1. The United States and the Arab Gulf governments should jointly and publicly commit to closer civilian counterterrorism and law enforcement cooperation.**

- As noted above, military and intelligence cooperation between the United States and the Arab Gulf governments is already well-developed. In contrast, non-military, non-intelligence cooperation is

less well-developed, with fewer personnel, fewer programs, and significantly fewer resources.

- There is room to increase cooperation on criminal investigations into global terrorist networks, aviation security, the use of airline passenger information to detect terrorism movement, maritime security, terrorist finance, bulk cash smuggling, and other areas.
- Increased openness to counterterrorism cooperation should be possible now because of the increasing number of international and regional agreements calling for joint action. UNSCR 2396 and the associated work by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) provide an international framework for collaboration of information on terrorist travel. The multilateral Financial Action

<sup>178</sup> Alex Walsh, *What Has Changed in Policing since the Arab Uprisings of 2011? Surveying Policing Concepts and Modes of Contestation*, Arab Reform Initiative, January 25, 2020, <https://www.arab-reform.net/publication/what-has-changed-in-policing-since-the-arab-uprisings-of-2011/>.

Task Force (FATF), headquartered in Paris, and the regional body MENAFATF, headquartered in Bahrain, provide an international and regional framework for cooperation on terrorist finance.<sup>179</sup>

- It is important that the United States and the Arab Gulf work together on civilian counterterrorism efforts, but it is also important that they talk about it more publicly. The reticence to talk publicly about non-military counterterrorism successes has reasons noted above on page 21.
- However, in the long run, the lack of public commitment to cooperation in the face of the joint threat from terrorists makes further cooperation on counterterrorism that much harder. It contributes to the misperception in the United States that some Arab Gulf governments secretly support al-Qaeda or ISIS terrorists, or the misperception in Iraq that the United States government was responsible for creating ISIS. (That half of Iraqis in one survey believe this is also due to Iranian disinformation operations.<sup>180</sup>)
- Both sides need to appreciate the extent to which popular mistrust of the other side makes the region's problems that much more difficult to solve. The Trump administration's January 2017 "Muslim ban" enjoyed 60 percent support among US citizens.<sup>181</sup> This was due not just to the 9/11 attacks themselves, but in part to the fact that the Arab Gulf governments did not claim credit for their cooperation after 9/11 to disrupt terrorist plots. Counterterrorism experts—including former Republican and Democratic officials<sup>182</sup> and career counterterrorism experts—pushed back strongly against this misperception, knowing of the counterterrorism successes that were made possible by cooperation with the Arab Gulf countries. However, in many parts of the United States the

cynical perspective remains that the world has not changed—even though it has.

- A public commitment to closer **civilian** cooperation on counterterrorism will also demonstrate to the US public the common search for non-military solutions to the threat of terrorism. Another misperception in the United States is that efforts against al-Qaeda and ISIS are part of a "forever war" that the United States has not won, and from which it cannot extricate itself.<sup>183</sup> It is indisputable that the US military has been active in Afghanistan, Iraq, and other countries without pause for more than nineteen years. The interest in finding non-military alternatives to keep people secure should be greater now than ever before.

## 2. The United States and Arab Gulf governments should take advantage of the relative lull in al-Qaeda and ISIS-style terrorism to begin strategic discussions about the endstate for this particular threat. That endstate should focus on reducing al-Qaeda and ISIS-style terrorism to the level where terrorism is a local problem addressed through civilian law enforcement—not just military—solutions.

- These discussions could be held bilaterally, multilaterally, or with a subset of countries interested in committing serious resources to a coordinated effort. How the discussions are held should be secondary to achieving as broad an agreement as possible between the United States and the Arab Gulf on how to achieve the endstate.
- These discussions should not be aimed at developing high-level principles on the importance of defeating terrorist groups. The countries involved have held frequent meetings for this purpose, such as the June 4, 2020 virtual ministerial small group of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS.<sup>184</sup> This effort

179 "Overview," Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force, accessed September 26, 2020, <http://www.menafatf.org/about>.

180 Thomas S. Warrick, "Congressional Hearing - US-Iran Tensions: Implications for Homeland Security," Atlantic Council, January 15, 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/commentary/testimony/congressional-hearing-u-s-iran-tensions-implications-for-homeland-security/>, (pdf is available at <https://homeland.house.gov/imo/media/doc/Testimony-Warrick.pdf>).

181 Steven Shepard, "Poll: Majority of voters back Trump travel ban," *Politico*, July 5, 2017, <https://www.politico.com/story/2017/07/05/trump-travel-ban-poll-voters-240215>.

182 Ben Flanagan, "Saudi Intelligence Sharing 'Has Saved American Lives,' Former Homeland Security Adviser Frances Townsend Tells Arab News," *Arab News*, March 23, 2018, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1271891/world>; Sudarsan Raghavan, Peter Finn, and Greg Miller, "In Foiled Bomb Plot, AQAP Took Bait Dangled by Saudi Informant," *Washington Post*, May 9, 2012, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/in-foiled-bomb-plot-aqap-took-bait-dangled-by-saudi-informant/2012/05/09/gIQA9oXIEU\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/in-foiled-bomb-plot-aqap-took-bait-dangled-by-saudi-informant/2012/05/09/gIQA9oXIEU_story.html); Thomas J. Harrington, "Saudi Arabia and the Fight Against Terrorism Financing," Testimony Before the House Committee On International Relations/Subcommittee, FBI, March 24, 2004, <https://www.fbi.gov/news/testimony/middle-east-and-central-asia-saudi-arabia-and-the-fight-against-terrorism-financing>.

183 Edward Wong, "Americans Demand a Rethinking of the 'Forever War,'" *New York Times*, February 2, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/02/us/politics/trump-forever-war.html>.

184 "Joint Communique by Ministers of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS Small Group," US Department of State, June 4, 2020, <https://www.state.gov/joint-communique-by-ministers-of-the-global-coalition-to-defeat-isis-small-group/>.





The Island-class cutter patrol boat USCGC Wrangell (WPB 1332), alongside two U.S. AH-64D Apache helicopters, assigned to U.S. Army Charlie Troop Heavy Cav, and two Kuwaiti Apache helicopters conduct a mock sea-and-air strikes during a bi-lateral training exercise in the Arabian Gulf. The combined-joint exercise provided U.S. forces, which also included U.S. Navy, an opportunity to exchange tactics and best practices with Kuwait naval forces. CTG 56.7 conducts maritime security operations to ensure freedom of movement for strategic shipping and naval vessels operating in the inshore and coastal areas of the U.S. 5th Fleet area of operations. *Source:* U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Torrey W. Lee.

needs to be operational, forward-looking, and lead to commitments of resources and priorities by non-military security services with support from diplomatic and military personnel.

- If multilateral, this should be analogous to the Washington Conference of 1943 (code-named “Trident”) held in the Federal Reserve Board of Governors room in Washington, DC.<sup>185</sup> This US-UK conference was led by then-US President Franklin D. Roosevelt and UK Prime Minister Winston Churchill, along with military and civilian planners and other top officials from both sides—and it took two weeks. It was not a scripted set-piece: although acrimonious at times, in the end the two governments set a date for the largest amphibious invasion in military history, Operation Overlord, and settled the course of post-Sicily operations against

Italy.<sup>186</sup> Resources were prioritized and allocated. Diplomats and civilian leaders reached agreements on a shared political strategy.

- The goals for these strategic meetings should be to agree on non-military commitments that will lead to the desired endstate in which ISIS and al-Qaeda terrorism is reduced to a criminal-justice problem. Participants will need to be able to make commitments on behalf of their heads of government—including commitments of resources; capacity building programs in Arab Gulf and third countries; diplomatic campaigns to bring other nations on board; intelligence sharing; standards for using airline passenger information; standards for securing airports; changes to national laws to disrupt terrorist finance, travel, and communications; agreements on how evidence can be exchanged,

185 Department of State Office of the Historian, “Foreign Relations of the United States, Conferences at Washington and Quebec, 1943,” <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1943/introduction>.

186 Dwight Jon Zimmerman, “The Trident Conference: Gen. George C. Marshall’s victories during and after,” Defense Media Network, May 23, 2013, <https://www.defensemedianetwork.com/stories/marshalls-trident-conference-victories/>.

including evidence from social media, to facilitate criminal prosecutions; and agreements as to how the governments will address ISIS and al-Qaeda terrorists who come into their custody.

- Planning for such an effort, whether a single conference or a series of bilateral meetings, would take at least a year, even without travel limitations imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. If there were to be a conference, it should not be held until late 2021 or 2022. However, if this leads the governments to set up secure, high-bandwidth videoconference capabilities between security ministries, that would likely have collateral benefits in enabling further cooperation.
- Unless the US president decides to head the delegation, the US side should be headed by a senior National Security Council (NSC) official, probably the national security advisor or the deputy national security advisor. Although Washington's instinct would be to have the Department of State lead this kind of counterterrorism effort, the lead roles on the Arab Gulf side would be their internal security ministries, not their foreign ministries. This needs to be an operational, not a diplomatic, planning effort. The Department of State will play a key facilitation role on the US side. At a minimum, US attendees should include the highest-ranking available officials from the Departments of Defense, Homeland Security, Justice, the FBI, State, Treasury, and the intelligence community.
- Lead representatives from the Arab Gulf side should likewise be able to speak for their head of state, and to make commitments for their security services, police services, and military services.
- The Gulf rift—in which a quartet of nations (Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates) are at odds with Qatar—should not be allowed to prevent an agreement on the endstate for ISIS and al-Qaeda. Qatar still participates in the Terrorist Financing Tracking Center in Riyadh, an example how some counterterrorism cooperation continues. US diplomatic efforts to resolve the dispute are ongoing and are likely to pick up in 2021, regardless of who wins the November 3, 2020 US presidential election.

### 3. The Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS and future, similar efforts need a “Justice, Interior, and Home Affairs” counterpart process

- As noted above, the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS was put together in September 2014 to organize the campaign against ISIS. The effort devolved into four main tracks:

1. A **diplomatic-led track** in which the US Department of State and ministries of foreign affairs met at both the ministerial and working level.<sup>187</sup>
  - Another multilateral effort, the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), was organized by the US Department of State's Counterterrorism Bureau to work with counterpart offices in foreign ministries and bodies like the United Nations. While it does include operational bodies like the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (EUROPOL), and the European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation (EUROJUST), its governmental membership is narrower. Only three of the seven Arab Gulf countries covered by this report are members of the GCTF.
2. A **military track** in which the US Department of Defense and US military worked with the militaries of some coalition members under the banner of the Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR) to conduct the military campaign against ISIS in Syria and Iraq.<sup>188</sup>
3. A **terrorist finance track**, called the Counter ISIS Finance Group,<sup>189</sup> led by the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Italy, in which international organizations like INTERPOL tackled ISIS's access to finance. This group served as a way to improve anti-money-laundering and terrorism finance legislation.
4. An **“other” track** in which international organizations discussed ISIS's recruitment of foreign terrorist fighters and messaging. However, there was no comparable joint task force for other non-diplomatic civilian efforts such as border

187 “The Global Coalition To Defeat ISIS,” US Department of State, accessed July 14, 2020, <https://www.state.gov/bureaus-offices/bureaus-and-offices-reporting-directly-to-the-secretary/the-global-coalition-to-defeat-isis/>.

188 Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve, *History*, accessed October 14, 2020, [https://www.inherentresolve.mil/Portals/14/Documents/Mission/HISTORY\\_17OCT2014-JUL2017.pdf?ver=2017-07-22-095806-793](https://www.inherentresolve.mil/Portals/14/Documents/Mission/HISTORY_17OCT2014-JUL2017.pdf?ver=2017-07-22-095806-793).

189 *Counter ISIS Finance Group Leaders Issue Joint Statement*, US Department of the Treasury, August 28, 2020, <https://home.treasury.gov/news/recent-highlights/counter-isis-finance-group-leaders-issue-joint-statement>.



“His Highness Brigadier Shaikh Nasser bin Hamad Al Khalifa Commander of the Bahraini Royal Guard and His Highness Major Shaikh Khalid bin Hamad Al Khalifa, Commander of the Royal Guards Special Force and Commander of the Joint Counter-terrorism Exercise ‘Haras Al Mamlaka 1’ attended the final activities of the event,” Manama, Bahrain, 06 Dec 2017. *Source: Bahraini Police.*

or aviation security, despite the obvious importance of limiting ISIS’s ability to move operatives across borders and by air through countries like Turkey

- A parallel effort to organize law enforcement, aviation, and border-security ministries in the campaign against ISIS never got off the ground, but it should have. While discussions among diplomats resolved a number of problems in the campaign to defeat ISIS, discussions that directly involved ministries of justice, interior, and home affairs/homeland security might have resolved some of those problems more quickly as they were the responsible ministries in their respective governments. Examples of some of the issues that might have been resolved more quickly include:

- Criminalizing travel to join ISIS.
- Facilitating the sharing of evidence for investigations and prosecutions.
- Facilitating common standards for collecting and using biometrics, especially for ISIS fighters captured on the battlefield.
- Facilitating the sharing of captured terrorist documents in a form that all countries can use them as evidence in criminal or civil proceedings—not just for prosecution purposes, but for other, non-criminal measures where evidence of terrorists’ actions, practices, and tactics is important. The United States made many documents available to qualified scholars and experts for research purposes, but this should have been an international standard to encourage other countries to adopt similar, or even more forthcoming, policies.



- Disposition of captured “foreign fighters,” the term used for non-Syrian, non-Iraqi ISIS fighters captured on the battlefield.
  - Decisions on how to handle spouses and children of ISIS fighters, and how to prevent them from becoming the next generation of ISIS fighters.
  - Decisions on priorities for tracking travelers by air for counterterrorism purposes.
  - Turkey was ISIS’s main border with much of the world, and Turkey had the greatest burden of trying to detect ISIS fighters and prevent their travel. A more coordinated justice-interior-home affairs/homeland security ministerial might have provided more support to Turkey, and at an earlier stage.
  - Supporting other countries like Libya and Egypt whose border security measures were most tested by ISIS’s travel abilities.
- While ISIS has lost its territory, the urgency or impetus for organizing a separate ministerial track for justice, interior, and home affairs ministries has obviously dissipated.
  - If and when such a need arises in the future—which, given that ISIS is trying to stage a comeback, could occur in two to three years—the United States and the Arab Gulf states should lead the effort to establish more direct contacts, including ministerial contacts, among justice, interior, and home affairs ministries involved in the efforts to make ISIS’s defeat permanent.
  - Another option would be adapting the GCTF into the border-aviation security role, broadening its membership and changing it from a diplomatic lead with operational ministries in support into an operational-ministries lead with diplomatic ministries in support. The United States could decide to retain its current approach, given the significantly greater personnel and resources available to the Department of State’s Counterterrorism Bureau compared to its counterparts in other ministries of foreign affairs.
- 4. Use the Saudi-US model of the Office of Program Management–Ministry of Interior (OPM-MOI) to allow other Arab Gulf countries to benefit from training and technology available from US private companies.**
- A number of Arab Gulf countries are interested in working with the United States or American companies for training and technology to help them upgrade policing, aviation security, maritime security, and investigative capabilities. However, many of them would prefer to work directly with the US government rather than develop the infrastructure to navigate the decentralized, complex world of foreign—that is, United States—procurement.
  - For those countries, the model set up between the United States and Saudi Arabia may be the right approach. Based on earlier successful models,<sup>190</sup> in 2008 the two governments set up the **Office of Program Management–Ministry of Interior (OPM-MOI)**, which is a Saudi-funded, jointly run effort for the benefit of the Saudi Ministry of Interior (MOI) and the Saudi State Security Presidency (SSP).
  - OPM/MOI is chartered by a government-to-government Technical Cooperation Agreement. When the MOI or SSP wants to acquire training or technology, it negotiates a Project Specific Agreement (PSA) with the US government. The PSA specifies the goals of each program. Each PSA will have one or more specified deliverable lists (SDLs) that describe precisely what will be delivered by the US side, and the terms for delivery.
  - The US side works with the Saudis to determine who will fulfill the SDLs, which can be parts of the US government or private US companies.
  - While this may seem specific and bureaucratically cumbersome, this specificity and transparency give a number of important advantages.
    - Agreements go through a policy review in both governments that help ensure the political implications of programs are properly considered before either side commits resources and personnel. This avoids the embarrassment of a project being publicly cancelled in ways that attract negative attention.
    - The number and magnitude of possible misunderstandings are significantly reduced.
    - The transparency and legal and policy review of the agreements significantly reduce the risk of corruption by anyone involved with the project.
    - The fact that US and Saudi program managers

190 *Civil Defense, Technical Cooperation - Agreement Between the United States of America and Saudi Arabia*, US Department of State, January 16, 2013, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/08-516-Saudi-Arabia-Cvl-Def-Agmt-w-Correct-and-Extens.pdf>; Richard Bumgarder, “MOI-MAG Advise and Train in Saudi Arabia,” US Army, November 6, 2019, [https://www.army.mil/article/229552/moi\\_mag\\_advise\\_and\\_train\\_in\\_saudi\\_arabia](https://www.army.mil/article/229552/moi_mag_advise_and_train_in_saudi_arabia); Christopher M. Blanchard, *Saudi Arabia: Background and U.S. Relations*, Congressional Research Service, page 27, February 18, 2020, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33533.pdf#page=32>.



work frequently with each other, jointly overseeing several agreements, helps increase trust and understanding, and allows for differences that do arise to be resolved more smoothly than would be the case if every contract were a standalone agreement.

- US providers of services or technology have experienced US OPM-MOI personnel they can work with to explain Saudi needs and expectations. Likewise, Saudi officials have US personnel well-known to them, when they need answers to questions.

- One of the most important benefits is that OPM-MOI provides a considerable body of infrastructure in the Kingdom, including housing and other basic needs, for those who are working in the Kingdom to fulfill PSAs. This reduces transaction costs of standing up and winding down individual teams to carry out each individual project. It also allows US government departments and agencies, and US private contractors, to have greater confidence they will be able to work effectively in the Kingdom. This infrastructure support helps reduce the friction that would otherwise detract from the efficient carrying out of the project.

- Some Arab Gulf countries, notably the United Arab Emirates (UAE), are sophisticated customers in the US and international market. Saudi Arabia obviously has the model in place. Others, however, could find the model beneficial.

## 5. **Make better use of information collected by governments under United Nations Security Council Resolution 2396: airline passenger information, biometrics, and movements of watchlisted individuals.**

- One of the most important diplomatic achievements in counterterrorism was United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2396 (2017), in which the Security Council for the first time established a Chapter VII mandate that all UN member states should establish and use airline passenger information,<sup>191</sup> use biometrics, and establish watchlists to detect terrorists who may be flying in or out of their

territories. Governments are also expected to share information to help other countries detect terrorist travel.

- The United States and a number of Arab Gulf states were innovators in the use of airline passenger information,<sup>192</sup> and most Arab Gulf states were already in compliance with UNSCR 2396's mandatory requirements when it was adopted in December 2017.<sup>193</sup>

- The United States and the Arab Gulf should find ways to benefit from each other's collection and analysis of airline passenger information and biometrics. There are many ways this can be done. Sharing of information is one option. Another is being able to query data in one another's holdings when looking for whether particular individuals or selectors (like a cell phone number) have traveled in the other country. To protect privacy, automated tools can allow such queries to be searched without human intervention, with any possible matches referred to human officials to assure privacy, civil rights, and civil liberties concerns are satisfied before information is actually shared.

- The United States has one of the world's largest, if not the largest, collection of terrorist identities. This collection is dynamic as new records are added regularly. There is an obvious advantage to other countries, including Arab Gulf countries, to screen travelers against such holdings. The Arab Gulf nations also have valuable collections of such information.

- The potential advantages of this level of cooperation are considerable. If terrorists understand that they cannot fly on airplanes in, out, or over the territories of the United States and the Arab Gulf nations without the risk of detection, they will be boxed in. Their movements will be severely curtailed.

- This will be especially important when travel in and out of Yemen is restored after a possible peace agreement.

191 "API-PNR Toolkit," International Air Transport Association, accessed July 13, 2020, <https://www.iata.org/en/publications/api-pnr-toolkit/>; "Guidelines on Advance Passenger Information (API)," United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee, March 14, 2016, <https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/news/document/guidelines-on-advance-passenger-information-api/>; "Passenger Name Records: the challenges of identification and authentication," Thales Group, accessed July 13, 2020, <https://www.thalesgroup.com/en/markets/digital-identity-and-security/government/eborder/passenger-name-record>.

192 "Disrupting Terrorist Travel: Implementation of Passenger Name Record (PNR) Advance Passenger Information (API) Requirements of UNSCR 2396," conference agenda for June 28, 2018, US Mission to the United Nations, <https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/UN-HLC-APIPNR-Side-Event-Concept-Note.pdf>.

193 "SITA Advance Passenger Processing," SITA, accessed July 13, 2020, <https://www.sita.aero/solutions-and-services/solutions/sita-advance-passenger-processing>.



Road strengthens US-Kuwaiti alliance & safety. U.S. Army Lt. Gen. William G. Webster, the commanding general of Third Army, cuts a ribbon with Kuwait's military and highway patrol personnel, Dec. 30, 2009, to celebrate the opening of a new military convoy route. The Kuwaiti government provided the route for U.S. troops traveling between camps across Kuwait. Source: U.S. Army photo by Spc.Jason C. Adolphson.

- The key to unlocking the potential CT/LE benefits of these technologies requires increased trust. Methods such as liaison officers in the others' vetting and targeting centers, and running queries for partners against one's own data holdings, are goals to work towards. Military services have long learned the benefits of liaison officers in an ally's headquarters. This is the heart of the success of NATO operations for the past seventy-plus years. There are other examples in the law enforcement and customs world.
- Achieving this level of cooperation also requires the United States to take the lead in working out arrangements with the European Union about differences between the US and EU approach to privacy.<sup>194</sup>

**6. The United States and Arab Gulf states should work together to expand use of UNSCR 2396 technologies to other countries in Africa and South Asia.**

- As the United States and the Arab Gulf nations work more closely to gain the benefits of UNSCR 2396 technologies, they should work together to expand the use of these technologies to other countries in Africa and South Asia. As noted above, UNSCR 2396 technologies have the potential to make territory "denied airspace" to terrorists. The greater the denied area, the correspondingly more difficult terrorist travel becomes.
- Some African countries are at a relative disadvantage in setting up airline passenger information, watchlists, and biometrics collection programs.

194 "Passenger Name Records Agreements," US Department of Homeland Security, April 20, 2015, updated June 3, 2019, accessed July 13, 2020, <https://www.dhs.gov/publication/passenger-name-records-agreements>.

They may lack the technological infrastructure or the resources to set up and operate such systems.

- This is particularly the case in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has caused travel disruptions and economic chaos around much of the world.
- Because the United States and several of the Arab Gulf countries have relatively greater experience with UNSCR 2396 technologies than some other countries do,<sup>195</sup> they should work together to expand the use of these technologies to Africa and South Asia.
- Each country brings unique advantages and can benefit from leveraging a common interest in better understanding terrorist travel in and around the Middle East.
  - Several West African countries are Last Points of Departure (LPD) airports for the United States, or have large numbers of their citizens working in the United States, and those countries may be easier for the United States to work with.
  - Other African or South Asian countries, including in the Horn of Africa, may be easier for the Arab Gulf governments to work with. The Arab Gulf governments also have an interest in seeing all South Asian governments increase their counterterrorism cooperation generally.

**7. Given the risks of terrorist operations out of Yemen after peace is restored, the United States and the Arab Gulf would benefit from planning for the resumption of civil aviation.**

- Negotiations have been underway for some time to bring an end to conflict in Yemen.<sup>196</sup> When this happens—and depending of course on the state of the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>197</sup>—civil aviation flights to and

from Yemen will resume, and maritime commerce may also increase. Unless the civil authorities in Yemen are able to build up a robust counterterrorism capability, groups like AQAP and ISIS-Yemen could be able to move more freely inside Yemen and outside it.

- The United States and the Arab Gulf states, particularly those that used to have flights to Yemeni airports—including Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates—should begin consultations immediately, in advance of the resumption of flights, on how those countries with flights from Yemen will screen air travelers.
- Even if Yemen is not able to comply with UNSCR 2396 on its own, the United States and Arab Gulf states can ensure that any airport with flights in and out of Yemen collects airline passenger information and biometrics, and runs watchlist checks on travelers.
- This information should be shared to the maximum extent feasible, to ensure that travelers flying in and out of Yemen are screened against all available information, since biometrics of possible terrorists could be in the possession of any of several countries in the region and outside the region.

**8. Given Sudan's unique history as a terrorist transit country, the United States and the Arab Gulf would benefit from undertaking special, joint, but bilateral efforts to understand terrorist travel, human smuggling, and terrorist finance networks through Sudan.**

- The rise of ISIS in Syria led to Sudan becoming a terrorist transit country<sup>198</sup> for ISIS moving operatives from Syria to Libya, since one of the main routes was to fly from Damascus to Khartoum, then to travel overland into southeastern Libya.<sup>199</sup> Similarly, Port Sudan on the Red Sea used to have ferries

<sup>195</sup> "Countries Requiring Advance Passenger Information," Egyptair, accessed July 13, 2020, <https://www.egyptair.com/en/fly/check-in/Pages/apis.aspx>.

<sup>196</sup> Elana Delozier, "The Coronavirus Pandemic Could Be the Key to Peace in Yemen, Foreign Policy, April 9, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/04/09/coronavirus-pandemic-peace-talks-yemen-houthi-saudi-arabia/>; "UN backing for Saudi mediation between Yemen's STC, Hadi government," *Arab Weekly*, July 1, 2020, <https://the arabweekly.com/un-backing-saudi-mediation-between-yemens-stc-hadi-government>.

<sup>197</sup> Ali Mahmood, "Yemen cancels flights and suspends classes over coronavirus fears," *The National*, March 15, 2020, <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/yemen-cancels-flights-and-suspends-classes-over-coronavirus-fears-1.992776>.

<sup>198</sup> *Country Reports on Terrorism 2014 – State Sponsors of Terrorism*, p. 286, US Department of State, June 2015, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2014/239407.htm>, the pdf is available at <https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/239631.pdf#page=286>. See also *Country Reports on Terrorism 2015 – State Sponsors of Terrorism*, p. 301, US Department of State, June 2016, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2015/index.htm>, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/258249.pdf#page=301>.

<sup>199</sup> Sarah A Tobin, "The New Lost Boys of Sudan," in *Youth Politics in the Middle East and North Africa*, POMEPS Studies 36 (Washington DC: Project on Middle East Political Science, 2019), 73–78, [https://pomeps.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/POMEPS\\_Studies\\_36\\_Web-1.pdf#page=74](https://pomeps.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/POMEPS_Studies_36_Web-1.pdf#page=74); *Migration Trends Across the Mediterranean: Connecting the Dots*, International Organization for Migration, page 9, June 2015, <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Migration/StudyMigrants/IOs/IOMTrendsAcrossMediterranean.pdf#page=14>.



to Saudi Arabia<sup>200</sup> and Yemen, although these are suspended because of COVID-19.<sup>201</sup>

- As of October 1, 2020, the United States still considers Sudan as a State Sponsor of Terrorism (SST),<sup>202</sup> though efforts are underway to change this before the November 3, 2020 US election.<sup>203</sup> In September 2019, a new civilian-led transitional government (CLTG) replaced former Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, who had been charged by the International Criminal Court in 2009 and 2010 for crimes against humanity, genocide, and other crimes. In August 2020, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo traveled to Sudan to meet with its transitional leaders to discuss the lifting of sanctions, which Pompeo, according to press reports, tied to Sudan's normalizing relations with Israel and compensation for US victims of the 1998 al-Qaeda attacks on the US embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, the October 12, 2000 attack on the *USS Cole*, and the January 1, 2008 murder of US Agency for International Development (USAID) employee John Granville.<sup>204</sup> A letter from Pompeo to US Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell dated September 16, 2020, lays out the prospects and conditions for starting the process of formally removing Sudan from the SST list.<sup>205</sup>
- Sudan was attacked by the United States in retaliation for the al-Qaeda 1998 attacks against the US embassies in Tanzania and Kenya. In the aftermath of 9/11, Sudan expelled foreign terrorists, and began working with United States counterterrorism officials.<sup>206</sup>
- While the United States is currently limited in the ways it could work with Sudan prior to the lifting of the SST status, other countries, including some of the Arab Gulf countries, could work with Sudan to

integrate it into the group of countries that cooperate on counterterrorism, particularly when it comes to movement of possible terrorists, or their money, through Sudan.

## 9. Find ways to cooperate to expose malign Iranian behavior.

- The outcome of the November 2013 US election will significantly affect US policy towards Iran but, no matter the outcome, Iranian malign behavior will continue to be a concern to the United States and at least some of the governments of the Arab Gulf.
- Iran's nuclear program is in a special category, but Iran's efforts to project power through terrorism, its proxies, cyberattacks, and influence operations all point to a concerted Iranian campaign that will require a concerted response including strengthening the non-military defenses of nations under threat from Iran.
- The United States and the Arab Gulf have the common interest of preventing terrorist groups like ISIS and al-Qaeda from moving operatives, funding, and materiel. Similarly, the United States and several of the Arab Gulf states have a common interest in limiting Iran's ability to move operatives, funding, and materiel to advance its malign agenda.
- Many of the same tools used to detect terrorist travel are also effective at detecting travel by IRGC Quds Force operatives or Iranian cyber operatives. However, Iranian operatives have the resources of a government behind them, which dwarfs the resources of al-Qaeda and ISIS. Moreover, the IRGC-QF's history of counterfeiting shows an ability to use the capabilities of a state for its purposes.<sup>207</sup>

200 "Ferry from Port Sudan to Saudi Arabia," Travel Africa Overland, July 2016, <https://travelfrafricaoverland.com/ferry-sudan-to-saudi/>.

201 "Ferries in the Red Sea," Wikivoyage, accessed July 13, 2002, [https://en.wikivoyage.org/wiki/Ferries\\_in\\_the\\_Red\\_Sea](https://en.wikivoyage.org/wiki/Ferries_in_the_Red_Sea).

202 US Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2019*, 199, June 2020, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Country-Reports-on-Terrorism-2019-2.pdf#page=200>.

203 Cameron Hudson, "Removing Sudan's terrorism designation: Proceeding with caution," *AfricaSource*, Atlantic Council, March 16, 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/africasource/removing-sudans-terrorism-designation-proceeding-with-caution/>; Robbie Gramer and Colum Lynch, Document of the Week: Pompeo Seeks Deal to Remove Sudan From Terrorist List Before U.S. Election, Foreign Policy, September 18, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/09/18/pompeo-trump-seeks-sudan-terrorist-sponsor-list-deal-before-trump-election-africa-congress/>.

204 Samy Magdy, "Pompeo in Sudan visit pushes normalizing ties with Israel," *Washington Post*, August 25, 2020, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/pompeo-in-sudan-top-us-official-to-visit-since-uprising/2020/08/25/a253d11a-e6b9-11ea-bf44-0d31c85838a5\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/pompeo-in-sudan-top-us-official-to-visit-since-uprising/2020/08/25/a253d11a-e6b9-11ea-bf44-0d31c85838a5_story.html); David Pilling, Andres Schipani, and Katrina Manson, "Pompeo visit to Khartoum raises removal of Sudan from terror list," *Financial Times*, August 25, 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/602a1d16-fb04-4be1-b883-bf73ef6a8f35>; Jason Burke and Zeinab Mohammed Salih, "US proposes removing Sudan from terrorism list for \$330m compensation," *The Guardian*, August 26, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/aug/26/us-propose-to-remove-sudan-from-terrorism-list-for-330m-compensation>.

205 Letter from Michael Pompeo to Mitchell McConnell, September 16, 2020, <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/7213125-Pompeo-Letter-McConnell-Sudan-2020-09-18-073433.html#document/p1>.

206 Ibid.

207 "Treasury Designates Large-Scale IRGC-QF Counterfeiting Ring," US Department of the Treasury, November 20, 2017, <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/sm0219.aspx>.





Dubai Police during Ramadan at a cannon firing ceremony to announce Iftar. Source: Photo by Leoni Milano/Unsplash.

- In one small respect, detecting and limiting travel of IRGC-QF operatives should be simpler than detecting ISIS terrorists, because ISIS terrorists come from a larger number of countries than IRGC-QF operatives do. Airline passenger information might be a more effective tool against the IRGC-QF than against ISIS or al-Qaeda. Although Iran would obviously not help such a collection effort, international flights in and out of Iran, by definition, have a non-Iranian terminus where airline passenger information is supposed to be collected and analyzed.
- The United States has had success in the past several years collaborating with other governments like Germany, France, and Italy to make it harder for Mahan Air to land in their countries, on the ground that Mahan flies military equipment and personnel

to Middle East conflict zones.<sup>208</sup> Mahan Air is controlled by the IRGC-QF and has been sanctioned by the US Treasury Department since the Obama administration in 2011.<sup>209</sup> If the United States opts for a more multilateral Iran strategy in the future, other countries might be willing to partner with the United States and the Arab Gulf in an effort to identify IRGC-QF operatives to aviation security and law enforcement personnel to prevent their international travel.

#### **10. Find ways to cooperate to better understand Iranian influence operations.**

- A wealth of reporting discussed above has revealed details of Iranian influence operations in United States, the Arab Gulf, and other countries

208 John Irish, "France bans Iran's Mahan Air for flying arms, troops to Syria, elsewhere," Reuters, March 25, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-sanctions-france-airline/france-bans-irans-mahan-air-for-flying-arms-troops-to-syria-elsewhere-idUSKCN1R6103>; "Italy to ban flights by Iran's Mahan Air from mid-December," Reuters, November 2, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-iran-sanctions-italy/italy-to-ban-flights-by-irans-mahan-air-from-mid-december-idUSKBN1XC0FV>; "Treasury Designates IRGC-QF Weapon Smuggling Network and Mahan Air General Sales Agents," US Department of the Treasury, December 11, 2019, <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm853>.

209 "Treasury Designates Iranian Commercial Airline Linked to Iran's Support for Terrorism," US Department of the Treasury, October 12, 2011, <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg1322.aspx>.

in the Middle East. However, more attention has been paid to Iran's kinetic operations like Abqaiq and its proxy attacks in Iraq, and even its recent cyberattacks against Israel. To the Iranian government, these are not separate stovepipes, they are part of a concerted campaign.

- When the United States sought to understand the influence operations of the Soviet Union during the Cold War, this was not the domain only of intelligence and military operators. The United States also brought to bear foreign policy experts and media experts—noted CBS News journalist Edward R. Murrow was named the director of the US Information Agency by President John F. Kennedy in 1961.<sup>210</sup>
- The United States and likeminded countries of the Arab Gulf should devote more resources and attention to better understand Iran's tactics, techniques, procedures, and goals for its influence operations.

#### 11. Develop ways to expose Iranian influence operations to the public.

- One reason Iran has opted to use covert influence operations in both the United States and Arab Gulf countries is that Iran's policies and goals in the United States and the region are generally both unpopular and unwelcome. Protesters in Iraq in 2019 have called for Iran to end its meddling in Iraqi politics and its efforts to corrupt the Iraqi political system.<sup>211</sup>
- While responding in kind might seem an attractive option, there are limits to what influence operations in Iran can accomplish.
  - First, there is no evidence that influence operations in Iran will deter Iran from carrying out influence operations outside of Iran.
  - Second, after the failure of the 2009 “Green Movement,” the Iranian regime cracked down

hard and instituted changes to make it hard for a popular “color revolution” to succeed in the future.<sup>212</sup>

- Third, the 2019-2020 demonstrations in Iran caused by 50 to 200 percent gasoline price hikes<sup>213</sup> and the demonstrations that followed the IRGC shutdown of Ukraine International flight 752 show that **internal regime failures** are what drive popular anti-regime protests.<sup>214</sup> Influence operations from outside Iran are neither necessary nor sufficient to produce positive changes in the Iranian government's own influence operations.
- The best way to thwart Iranian influence operations may be to expose them publicly. As a noted US jurist once wrote, “Sunlight is said to be the best of disinfectants; electric light the most efficient policeman.”<sup>215</sup> Public exposure of Iranian influence operations could have three effects:
  - Given the Iranian regime's unpopularity in the United States and the Arab Gulf, exposing their influence operations would almost certainly make Iran and its messages more unpopular with the public—causing Iran's influence operations to have exactly the opposite effect from the one Iran intends.
  - To the extent that Iran uses authentic voices to amplify its covert messages, exposure would discourage authentic voices from being receptive to Iranian influence.
  - To the extent that Iran uses operatives in third countries to deliver its messages, exposure of Iran's influence operations could lead to investigation and prosecution of those third-country operatives. For example, if Iran uses operatives in the United States to post social media content aimed at audiences in Bahrain or Saudi Arabia, it is highly likely this would run afoul of one or more US sanctions or criminal laws.

210 “Murrow Is Selected as Director of the U.S. Information Agency,” *New York Times*, January 28, 1961, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1961/01/28/118894252.html?pageNumber=1>.

211 Qassim Abdul-Zahra, and Joseph Krauss, “Protests in Iraq Reveal a Long-Simmering Anger at Iran,” Associated Press, November 6, 2019. <https://apnews.com/article/13cf4d0ffdd4908ba340abf9631a3cb>; Brooking and Kianpour, *Iranian Digital Influence Efforts*, 2020.

212 Borzou Daragahi, “A decade after Iran's Green Movement, some lessons,” *IranSource*, Atlantic Council, June 12, 2019, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/iransource/a-decade-after-iran-s-green-movement-some-lessons/>; Omid Memarian, “Iran's Green Movement Never Went Away,” *Foreign Affairs*, June 14, 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/iran/2019-06-14/irans-green-movement-never-went-away>.

213 Farnaz Fassihi and Rick Gladstone, “Iran Abruptly Raises Fuel Prices, and Protests Erupt,” *New York Times*, November 15, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/15/world/middleeast/iran-gasoline-prices-rations.html>.

214 Amir Azimi, “Why Iran plane disaster protests mark most serious test yet,” BBC Persian Service, January 18, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-51147191>.

215 Louis D. Brandeis, *Other People's Money*, 1914, <http://louisville.edu/law/library/special-collections/the-louis-d.-brandeis-collection/other-peoples-money-chapter-v>.

## For US policymakers and opinion leaders generally:

### 12. Recognize that the countries of the Arab Gulf face different security challenges: one size does not fit all.

- US policymakers and opinion leaders, both in government and outside it, need to give greater recognition to the diversity of the security challenges facing the countries of the Arab Gulf. In particular, the tendency to group the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries together can lead to missing opportunities to advance counterterrorism cooperation because, in this instance, one size does not fit all.
- Specialists in European affairs would be cautious about treating Germany and Greece as the same, and the countries of the Arab Gulf are almost as diverse
- There are several political “fault lines” that differentiate some Arab Gulf countries from each other. For example:
  - The level of sophistication of each country’s military forces.
  - The level of sophistication of each country’s internal security services, and the extent to which norms like human rights are internalized.
  - The country’s relationship with Iran.
  - The country’s reliance on international trade, investment, or tourism.
  - The country’s attitude towards the Muslim Brotherhood and similar movements.
- These fault lines become problematic when the United States tries to treat the GCC as a group of like-minded states when, so often, it is not. Failure to account for these differences, especially in decisions where a GCC consensus is required, creates the problem that progress may depend on the most reluctant member. For the United States to wait for a consensus could mean failing to take advantage of security opportunities to cooperate with fewer than all six GCC governments.

- Some security issues will always be best treated bilaterally, particularly when sensitive information is involved.
- US and Arab Gulf efforts to create multilateral security institutions like the **Middle East Security Architecture (MESA)** are worthwhile,<sup>216</sup> even if MESA does not turn into a Middle East NATO overnight. MESA could start out with relatively modest ambitions and grow into something more.
- Even if issues like counterterrorism continue to be handled bilaterally, one of MESA’s more important functions should be as a forum to discuss further security cooperation on counternarcotics and other law enforcement and customs mutual assistance issues where multilateral cooperation would be useful. MESA needs to broaden the parties at the table—or have alternative “tables”—that include the security services of the respective countries in question. For the United States, this means bringing the Departments of Justice, Treasury, and Homeland Security to the table, along with the FBI.
  - One of the first agenda topics for such a multilateral discussion could be how to streamline handling requests for evidence usable in court from social media accounts and providers.

### 13. Security sector assistance and cooperation can help promote US objectives in promoting human rights and the rule of law.

- The US Congress and US administrations of both parties have long sought to use US military and civilian assistance programs to encourage other governments to respect human rights and to promote the rule of law. Properly managed and funded, US security sector assistance can be used to encourage other governments and their security services to respect human rights and the rule of law. The countries in the Arab Gulf come from different legal traditions than the United States,<sup>217</sup> but while there are fundamental differences, there are also important areas where both values and interests align. It is in the overarching national interest of the United States to seek out opportunities to advance those common interests.

216 “Joint Statement by Middle East Strategic Alliance (MESA),” US Department of State, September 18, 2019, <https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-by-middle-east-strategic-alliance-mesa/>; C. Todd Lopez, “Middle East Strategic Alliance Effort Aimed at Stabilization,” US Department of Defense, April 30, 2019, <https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/1829790/middle-east-strategic-alliance-effort-aimed-at-stabilization/>.

217 A reasonably short summary of the development of aspects of the legal systems in the Gulf can be found in Sara Razai, *Law and Legal Systems in the Arab Middle East: Beyond Binary Terms of Traditionalism and Modernity*, Institute of Law and Justice in Arab Societies, October 2019, <https://iedja.org/en/law-and-legal-systems-in-the-arab-middle-east-beyond-binary-terms-of-traditionalism-and-modernity/>. Two brief summaries of the US perspective of rule of law for non-legal audiences are *Overview – Rule of Law*, United States Courts, accessed October 9, 2020, <https://www.uscourts.gov/educational-resources/educational-activities/overview-rule-law>, and the associated materials collected there; and *The Rule of Law*, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, June 22, 2016, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/rule-of-law/>.

**14. Some countries in the Middle East are interested in advancing the professionalization of their security services, and the United States should embrace those opportunities.**

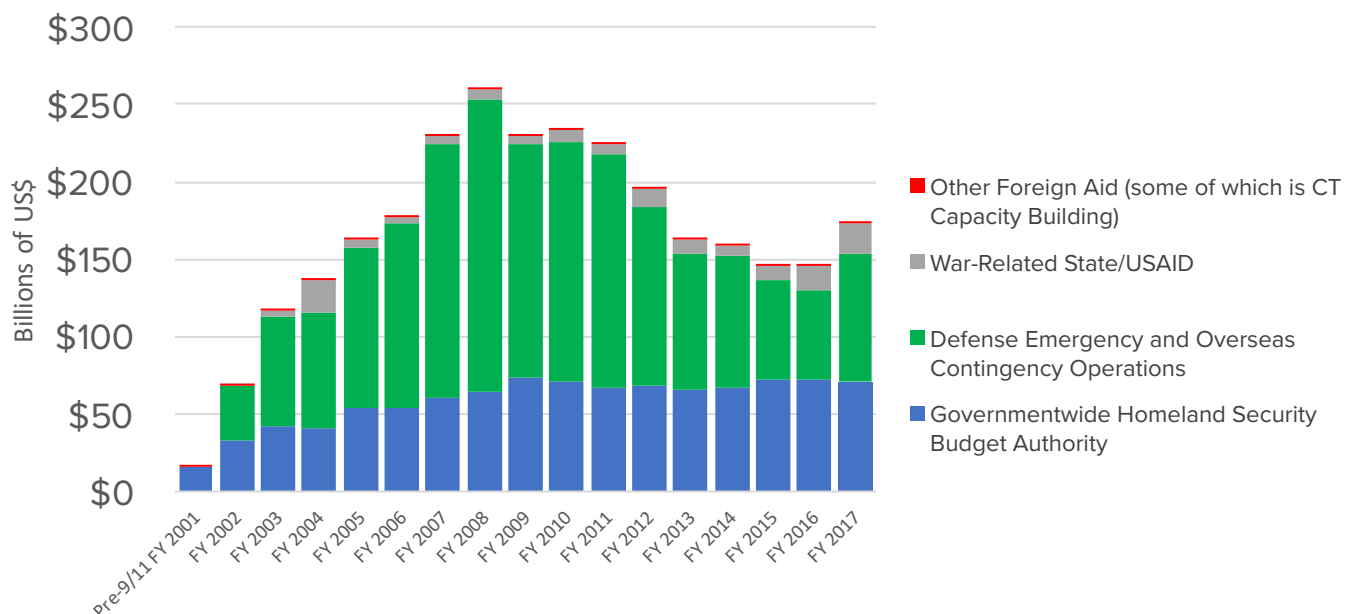
- All countries find reasons at times to undertake major efforts to improve the professionalism of their police and security services. In the United States, the May 25, 2020 murder of George Floyd led to calls at the state, local, and federal level for improvements in police methods and tactics.
- Some Arab Gulf countries have also, for their own reasons, undertaken reforms, and when they do so, the United States should consider supporting them. Bahrain wants to significantly enhance its ability to conduct criminal investigations to support prosecutions.<sup>218</sup> This action was taken by the Bahraini government in support of reforms made following the 2011 Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry.<sup>219</sup> Other countries in the Gulf, including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Oman, have also at times undertaken reforms of their security services.

**For the United States Government - Executive Branch:**

**15. Close up the US policy-resources gap on civilian counterterrorism overseas capacity building.**

- Both the 2011 Obama and 2018 Trump administration counterterrorism strategies called for US government efforts to help build the capacity of foreign partners.<sup>220</sup> While both administrations focused resources on military support—particularly in the campaigns in Afghanistan, Iraq, and against ISIS—overseas capacity building has been consistently under-resourced.
- The May 2018 Stimson Study Group on Counterterrorism Spending<sup>221</sup> noted the difficulty of determining how much the US government was spending on counterterrorism and homeland security programs. The group then came up with an estimate in which a portion of “other foreign aid,” shown in the thin red line in each fiscal year in Figure 1, represents civilian overseas counterterrorism capacity building.

**Figure 1: US Government Counterterrorism Spending**



Source: Stimson Study Group on Counterterrorism Spending, May 2018

<sup>218</sup> Atlantic Council field interviews, March 2020.

<sup>219</sup> M. Cherif Bassiouni et al., *Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry*, December 10, 2011, <http://www.bici.org.bh/BICReportEN.pdf>.

<sup>220</sup> “National Strategy for Counterterrorism,” The White House Archives, June 2011, p. 9, [https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/counterterrorism\\_strategy.pdf#page=15](https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/counterterrorism_strategy.pdf#page=15); “National Strategy for Counterterrorism of the United States of America,” The White House, October 2018, pp. 23-24, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/NSCT.pdf#page=31>.

<sup>221</sup> *Stimson Study Group on Counterterrorism Spending: Protecting America While Promoting Efficiencies and Accountability*, Stimson Center, May 2018, pp. 12-13 and 25-27, [https://www.stimson.org/wp-content/files/file-attachments/CT\\_Spending\\_Report\\_0.pdf#page=14](https://www.stimson.org/wp-content/files/file-attachments/CT_Spending_Report_0.pdf#page=14).



- The Trump administration proposed dramatic cuts in foreign assistance accounts in fiscal years 2019 and 2020, but the US Congress restored most of the cuts.<sup>222</sup>
- National strategies are not budget documents, but the gap between the policy process and the resource process is striking on counterterrorism.
  - In military affairs, the US Department of Defense is the responsible cabinet department for both the policy process and the budget process. In intelligence, the Office of the US Director of National Intelligence works closely with the intelligence community on policy and budgets.
  - In contrast, civilian overseas capacity building policy and resources are not aligned.
  - Instead, the US National Security Council runs the policy process, with participation from the Department of State and the interested civilian agencies: Justice, Treasury, and Homeland Security. Interagency policy coordinating committees report to deputies committees, which reports to the principals committee (cabinet secretaries) and ultimately the National Security Council, which the president chairs.<sup>223</sup>
  - However, under Presidential Policy Directive 23,<sup>224</sup> funding for most overseas capacity building programs comes from the State Department's budget. State takes input from the other civilian departments, develops its request, then submits its budget request through the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). Only the State Department briefs the Congress on State's budget request, even when the implementing agency is DHS, Treasury, or DOJ.
  - Typically, budget for cabinet departments are formulated a year or more in advance. Thus, departments and agencies in the fourth quarter of 2020 are well into preparation of budgets for fiscal year 2022, which will started October 1, 2021.<sup>225</sup>
- The lowest layer where the policy and resources track comes together is at the deputies committee level.
- The problem becomes particularly acute when a new terrorist threat arises. The counterterrorism policy community may correctly anticipate a threat, such as the rise of ISIS, which first became a serious concern in 2013, a year before ISIS took Mosul, or terrorists' use of explosives concealed in electronics, such as the toner cartridge plot. However, the counterterrorism policy community has no easy way to shift civilian capacity building resources in less than one to two years.
- Unlike the military, where budget shifts can be made within the Defense Department, and often just between regional commands, shifting civilian security sector assistance programs and resources involve a minimum of two or more teams of experts (from State and DHS, for example) coming to a consensus on the need for change, then convincing two different resource offices (one in each department), and potentially two different parts of OMB. Congressional approval is often required. If the program funds run through a US embassy overseas, oftentimes the ambassador and embassy personnel must also be brought on board. All these steps take time.
- This policy-resource process for counterterrorism decisions needs to be streamlined. There are a number of ways this can be done, if State and the departments involved recognize the importance of setting up a faster process to deal with emergencies.
  - One option is to integrate a small number of budget personnel into the counterterrorism policy process, for example, by membership on the interagency policy committee on counterterrorism, the Counterterrorism Security Group (CSG).<sup>226</sup> That way, OMB is at least at the table.

222 Edward Wong, Annie Karni, and Emily Cochrane, "Trump Administration Drops Proposal to Cut Foreign Aid After Intense Debate," *The New York Times*, August 22, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/22/us/politics/trump-foreign-aid.html>; Adva Saldinger, "Congress Again Rejects Steep Cuts to US Foreign Assistance in New Budget," *Devex*, March 22, 2018, <https://www.devex.com/news/sponsored/congress-again-rejects-steep-cuts-to-us-foreign-assistance-in-new-budget-92403>.

223 "National Security Presidential Memorandum 4," The White House, April 4, 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/national-security-presidential-memorandum-4/>.

224 White House, Fact Sheet: U.S. Security Sector Assistance Policy," April 5, 2013, <https://www.hsdil.org/?view&did=747214>.

225 Jordyn Phelps, "President Trump releases 2021 budget proposal, calls for cuts to social safety net programs," ABC, February 10, 2020, <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/president-trump-releases-2021-budget-proposal-calls-cuts/story?id=68884449>.

226 Lynn E. Davis, Coordinating the War on Terrorism, RAND Corporation, March 2004, 3, [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/occasional\\_papers/2005/RAND\\_OP110.pdf#page=11](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/occasional_papers/2005/RAND_OP110.pdf#page=11); "Procedures for Approving Direct Action Against Terrorist Targets Located Outside the United States and Areas of Active Hostilities," Presidential Policy Guidance, National Security Council, May 22, 2013, [https://www.justice.gov/oip/foia-library/procedures\\_for\\_approving\\_direct\\_action\\_against\\_terrorist\\_targets/download](https://www.justice.gov/oip/foia-library/procedures_for_approving_direct_action_against_terrorist_targets/download).

- Another option would be to establish a formal “fast track” process to deal with emergencies. A single senior White House official, such as a deputy national security adviser, or a senior State Department official, such as a deputy secretary of state, could be authorized to approve budget reallocations upon request from the CSG. In this way, the CSG would know in advance which individual needed to have all the facts and options associated with an emergency situation.
- Even apart from dealing with urgent situations, the regular budget process by which the Department of State solicits new program ideas from overseas embassies and other departments should be accelerated.
- One virtue of the OPM-MOI concept, discussed above, is that a number of the necessary inter-agency agreements and program infrastructure are used over several years, avoiding a number of bureaucratic steps that would slow down individual programs if separate departmental approval was required at every step.
- The process for complying with the US International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR) often slows down the US ability to provide technology on the United States Munitions List (USML) to partner nations. The Departments of State, Defense, Commerce, and Homeland Security all play a role in implementing ITAR. ITAR compliance is important to achieve the US policy objective that US technology does not fall into the hands of adversaries like Russia or Iran. The ITAR regulations are beyond the scope of this report, however, there may be situations where the urgency of a terrorist threat justifies accelerated action for the export of needed technology.

**16. Better coordinate the three State Department bureaus that provide security-related overseas capacity building programs.**

- Three separate State Department bureaus all provide security-related capacity building programs:

Counterterrorism (State/CT), International Security and Nonproliferation (State/ISN) through the Export Control and Related Border Security Program (EXBS),<sup>227</sup> and International Law Enforcement (State/INL). Each bureau has a different subject-matter focus. US civilian agencies work with each of them, but coordination among them could be considerably improved.

- For example, State/ISN can fund programs to provide a country with backscatter<sup>228</sup> X-ray vans, which are useful for inspecting trucks crossing an international border.<sup>229</sup> Backscatter vans can detect smuggled nuclear material, an obvious priority for a State Department bureau interested in stopping the illegal proliferation of nuclear material. State/ISN would also know that backscatter vans are useful in detecting terrorist groups moving explosives and other illicit materiel across international borders. However, to be most effective, State/CT would also need to fund a program to help screen truckdrivers to find individuals with terrorist connections, and to marry this up with a DHS program that tracks international air movement of terrorist suspects. DHS’s Customs and Border Protection (CBP) has the field officers with the greatest experience using this technology at the US border. DHS Headquarters would have the best sense of which international border crossings were the highest priority in the world for US assistance. While DHS Headquarters and CBP would coordinate on the DHS side to align their priorities, it’s not clear that State/CT and State/ISN would agree on the same priorities as each other, and as DHS and CBP.
- Another example is the State Department’s Personal Identification Secure Comparison and Evaluation System (PISCES), which is given to other governments to help them collect biographical and biometric information about people coming into their countries.<sup>230</sup> CBP’s Automated Targeting System—Global (ATS-G) is the export version of the system CBP uses to collect and analyze airline passenger information.<sup>231</sup> ATS-G also provides other governments means to collect biographical and biometric information on travelers. State and DHS

227 “The Export Control and Related Border Security (EXBS) Program,” Bureau of International Security and Nonproliferation/Office of Export Control Cooperation, US Department of State, accessed July 15, 2020, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/126248.pdf>.

228 Astrophysics, Inc., *4 X-ray Technologies That Will Make You a Security Expert*, accessed July 15, 2020, <https://www.astrophysicsinc.com/4-x-ray-technologies-that-will-make-you-a-security-expert/>.

229 Ibid.

230 “Terrorist Screening and Interdiction Programs (TSI),” *Programs and Initiatives*, Department of State Counterterrorism Bureau, accessed October 13, 2020, <https://www.state.gov/bureau-of-counterterrorism-programs-and-initiatives/>.

231 Paul Koscak, *Working Together – Catching Smugglers, Terrorists and Lawbreakers Works Better Through Partnership*, Customs and Border Protection, accessed October 13, 2020, <https://www.cbp.gov/frontline/cbp-national-targeting-center>.



Then-US Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff visits the border crossing between Kuwait and Iraq, March 24, 2008. *Source:* Thomas Warrick.

officials are each proud of their own system, and each has advantages the other does not. For example, ATS-G was designed for the air domain and does a better job at processing data on arriving air travelers. PISCES is better for processing arrivals at land borders. Foreign governments often have little interest in getting both. It does not make sense in 2020 to have two US cabinet departments offering competing systems.

- As the Stimson Center's Study Group on Counterterrorism Spending said in 2018:<sup>232</sup>

Although the amount of U.S. CT aid has grown substantially over the past 16 years, the government system for shaping and overseeing that aid has not sufficiently evolved. A recent

study by the Open Society Foundations shows that the U.S. government continues to face serious challenges in setting goals and activities, prioritizing these activities, coordinating with itself, and evaluating what types of aid work and what doesn't work [endnote omitted]. These challenges are reflected in the fact that the United States still cannot systematically track the total amount of its proposed CT aid and goals on a global, regional, and country basis, which inhibits U.S. efforts to plan, coordinate, and evaluate CT aid.

- A review of the processes by which the State Department manages counterterrorism-related programs, and how it works with DHS, DOJ, FBI, and Treasury is long overdue.

<sup>232</sup> Stimson Study Group on Counterterrorism Spending, 2018, p. 25.



## 17. For the Department of State: Expand capacity of US embassies to support capacity building by DHS, DOJ, FBI, and Treasury.

- As noted above, most US embassies in the Arab Gulf countries were built before 9/11, when the main US national interest after the 1990-1991 First Gulf War was the free flow of oil, trade, and commerce—at the time, counterterrorism was a lower priority.

Location	Date
Bahrain	1990
Iraq	2009
Kuwait	1996
Oman	1989
Qatar	2001
Saudi Arabia	1986
United Arab Emirates	2004

- Expansion of US national security programs after 9/11 put a strain on the capacity of all the US embassies in the region. The only embassy (other than Baghdad) that opened after 9/11 was in Abu Dhabi, in 2004. However, by 2014, a State Department inspector general report said, “The chancery [the main office building] is less than 10 years old but faces major space and infrastructure challenges.”<sup>233</sup>
- In addition to physical office space, expanding overseas capacity building programs also takes embassy support personnel, for example, to provide payroll, travel, and administrative support. State seeks reimbursement from other cabinet departments for these services under National Security Decision Directive-38 (NSDD-38).<sup>234</sup> In addition to the space required for personnel to staff a capacity building program, the need for administrative support personnel adds to both the space burden and the time required to get a program fully operational.
- Building new office space for US embassies takes time and is expensive. A Government Accountability Office (GAO) report in 2018 noted that worldwide, as a result of the 1998 al-Qaeda bombings of the US

embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, State identified the need to replace 180 embassies but by the end of FY 2017 had completed only 77 of them.<sup>235</sup>

- Finding space and staff for overseas counterterrorism capacity building personnel is one of those urgent but “unsexy” problems that gets few headlines and has almost no high-level champions in the bureaucracy or on Capitol Hill. Yet fixing this problem in the Arab Gulf countries and elsewhere on the front lines against terrorism<sup>236</sup> can be vital to preventing the re-emergence of ISIS and other terrorist groups.
- The National Counterterrorism Center and other parts of the US government make projections of future counterterrorism threats. That kind of forward planning needs to be incorporated into building and staffing overseas counterterrorism capacity building programs.
- Recognizing that both Democratic and Republican administrations have called for increased efforts to build the counterterrorism capacity of the United States’ overseas partners, the US Congress, the National Security Council staff, the State Department, and the civilian departments and agencies should work together (1) to project future needs for overseas counterterrorism programs, (2) to shorten the response time from years down to months or weeks before civilian CT capacity can be deployed.

## 18. For DHS: Try to expand Preclearance to other airports around the world, including in the Middle East.

- DHS’s Customs and Border Protection (CBP) runs Preclearance in six countries: Ireland, Aruba, the Bahamas, the United Arab Emirates (Abu Dhabi only), and Canada.<sup>237</sup> Preclearance offers travelers the convenience of being screened for admissibility to the United States at the originating airport, allowing passengers to disembark at regular airports, significantly reducing processing time—and also minimizing the time that arriving passengers

233 “Inspection of Embassy Abu Dhabi and Consulate General Dubai, United Arab Emirates,” Office of Inspector General, May 2014, <https://www.stateoig.gov/system/files/227278.pdf>.

234 “Staffing at Diplomatic Missions and Their Overseas Constituent Posts,” National Security Decision Directive 38, June 2, 1982, <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdd38.htm>.

235 “Embassy Construction – Pace Is Slower Than Projected, and State Could Make Program Improvements,” Government Accountability Office, *September 2018*, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/694723.pdf>.

236 The US missions in Amman, Jordan, and Ankara, Turkey, in countries bordering Syria, also deserve close attention to see if there is additional need for secure embassy offices and support personnel.

237 “CBP Preclearance,” US Department of Homeland Security/Customs and Border Protection, July 6, 2020, <https://www.cbp.gov/border-security/ports-entry/operations/preclearance>.



are exposed to other travelers who might have COVID-19.<sup>238</sup>

- From a security standpoint, Preclearance offers DHS the important advantage of being able to do inspections and screening interviews before a traveler boards the aircraft for the United States.<sup>239</sup> As the experience of the “underwear bomber” showed on December 24, 2009, when a man tried to explode a device on Northwest Airlines flight 253 over North America, an attack on a flight to the United States has the potential to kill US citizens on the ground as well as in the air.<sup>240</sup>
- For the one Preclearance facility in the Middle East, in Abu Dhabi, the airport reimburses CBP for about 85 percent of the cost of Preclearance operations.<sup>241</sup>
- When DHS tried to establish Preclearance at Abu Dhabi, both the US airline industry through Airlines for America and airline labor unions such as the Airline Pilots Association, objected to the Congress, claiming that Preclearance in Abu Dhabi benefited only Etihad Airways.<sup>242</sup>
- Eventually, an understanding was reached, and codified into law, in which Preclearance at Abu Dhabi went forward, with DHS agreeing that future Preclearance facilities would be instituted only at airports served by a US flag carrier (not a code-share).<sup>243</sup> On May 29, 2015, then-US Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh Johnson announced DHS’s intention to enter into negotiations to expand Preclearance to ten new foreign airports in Europe, Japan, and the Dominican Republic.<sup>244</sup> Turkey was

the closest country to the Middle East on the list. On November 4, 2016, Johnson announced the selection of eleven more airports in Europe, South and Central America, and the Caribbean.<sup>245</sup>

- As CBP Executive Assistant Commissioner Todd Owen testified in September 2017, Preclearance remains “the gold standard in our counterterrorism efforts overseas at last points of departure.”<sup>246</sup>
- Efforts to expand Preclearance have been affected by the shutdown of the international airline and travel industries caused by COVID-19, especially the European Union ban on non-essential flights by US citizens. However, the international travel industry is likely to recover in 2021 if a vaccine becomes widely available. Foreign airports, which are expected to cover a substantial portion of the costs of Preclearance facilities, are hurting financially now, but for a foreign airport a CBP Preclearance facility is likely to be a competitive advantage when international travel to the United States resumes in 2021.
- It would be a security mistake for DHS to give up on expanding Preclearance, even if the international airline industry does not recover to its pre-COVID-19 levels because, for example, businesses switch to teleconferences for international meetings.
- This is because the threat of a terrorist attack on a US-bound flight is not a function of passenger-miles or the number of flights. The risk is dependent on the capabilities and intentions of terrorists, including whether the terrorists have a safe haven from

238 Thomas S. Warrick, “Two days of delays at major US airports show DHS not given the resources to do the job,” *New Atlanticist*, Atlantic Council, March 16, 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/two-days-of-delays-at-major-us-airports-show-dhs-not-given-the-resources-to-do-the-job/>.

239 A detailed assessment of Preclearance as well as related programs like the Immigration Advisory Program and the Joint Security Program are described in the GAO report “Border Security – CBP Aims to Prevent High-Risk Travelers from Boarding U.S.-Bound Flights, but Needs to Evaluate Program Performance,” GAO, January 2017, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/690/682255.pdf>.

240 *United States v. Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab*, Indictment, January 6, 2010, [http://www.cbsnews.com/htdocs/pdf/Abdulmutallab\\_Indictment.pdf](http://www.cbsnews.com/htdocs/pdf/Abdulmutallab_Indictment.pdf); “Underwear bomber Abdulmutallab sentenced to life,” BBC, February 16, 2012, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-17065130>.

241 “Report to Accompany H.R. 998 to Establish the Conditions Under Which the Secretary of Homeland Security May Establish Preclearance Facilities, Conduct Preclearance Operations, and Provide Customs Services Outside the United States, and for Other Purposes,” US Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs (HSGAC), December 15, 2015, <https://www.congress.gov/congressional-report/114th-congress/senate-report/180/1>; Bill Carey, “UAE Pre-clearance Base Opposed by U.S. Congress,” AINonline, November 17, 2013, <https://www.ainonline.com/aviation-news/2013-11-17/uae-pre-clearance-base-opposed-us-congress>.

242 Carey, “Pre-clearance Base Opposed,” 2013.

243 Public Law 114-4, Section 555, 129 Stat. 71, March 4, 2015, <https://www.congress.gov/114/plaws/publ4/PLAW-114publ4.pdf#page=33>.

244 HSGAC, *Report to Accompany H.R. 998*, 2015.

245 DHS press release, *DHS Announces 11 New Airports Selected For Possible Preclearance Expansion Following Second Open Season*, November 4, 2016, <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2016/11/04/dhs-announces-11-new-airports-selected-possible-preclearance-expansion-following>; GAO, *CBP Aims to Prevent*, 2017, 28.

246 “Hearing – Raising the Standard: DHS’s Efforts to Improve Aviation Security Around the Globe,” House Subcommittee on Transportation and Protective Security of the Committee on Homeland Security, September 26, 2017, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-115hhrg28417/html/CHRG-115hhrg28417.htm>.



Abu Dhabi Airports welcomes senior delegation from US Customs and Border Protection, Clint Lamm, left of center; Mohamed Nasser Al-Otaiba, center. *Source: WAM/MOHD AAMIR/Hassan Bashir.*

which to plan an attack and whether local authorities have the capability to disrupt terrorist plots before a terrorist even gets to the airport. For the reasons given above, the terrorist threat to international civil aviation by groups like ISIS and out of places like Yemen is likely to increase in about two to three years.

- Preclearance offers a more subtle deterrent as well. The presence of CBP officers in an airport signals to prospective terrorists the existence of cooperation between the United States and the host nation, including the sharing of terrorist-related information. There is a deterrent value in terrorists presuming that screening of passengers from other flights departing the airport benefit from access to US government terrorism databases.
- DHS and CBP should seek to sustain the idea of expanding Preclearance, including to the Arab Gulf, for security reasons. Encouraging Arab Gulf governments to negotiate agreements to bring US-flag carriers to the Gulf should also be a part of DHS's Middle East strategy. Even if expansion has to slow for the next year because of COVID-19, DHS should be ready to resume expansion of Preclearance facilities as soon as it can.

**19. Consider expanding cooperation with Iraq by increasing the number of CT/homeland security/law enforcement personnel in Iraq.**

- When tensions with Iranian-backed militias increased, the United States withdrew a number of personnel from its embassy in Baghdad. If and when conditions permit, the Department of State and civilian departments and agencies should consider expanding the number of their personnel in Iraq, in order to build up relations and capacities of their Iraqi civilian counterparts. Preventing ISIS's comeback will require civilian law enforcement and border security assistance.
- Of the seven countries in the Arab Gulf studied for this report, Iraq is the only country where the FBI and Treasury have an attaché but DHS does not. During a "rightsizing" review of personnel, the FBI was one of only a few agencies that added staff to its personnel in Baghdad because of the additional law enforcement work it was undertaking.<sup>247</sup> When the COVID-19 and security situation permits, DHS should assign an attaché and a deputy to the Embassy, along with supporting personnel.
- DHS's lack of permanent presence in Iraq is an anomaly. From 2006 until 2011, DHS maintained

247 "The FBI in Iraq: The Work of Our Legal Attaché," FBI, June 29, 2007, <https://archives.fbi.gov/archives/news/stories/2007/june/iraq062907>.

an active presence in Iraq, the history of which through September 2011 is told in an internal CBP publication, *Frontline*.<sup>248</sup> The Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, drawing from language provided by the DHS Attaché, summarized DHS's roles in 2011:<sup>249</sup>

### Department of Homeland Security (DHS)

The DHS Attaché coordinated services to assess operations and security for borders and ports of entry (land, sea, and air) and provided infrastructure protection, terrorist financing investigations, and naturalization services to U.S. military members. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials advised and mentored primarily Iraq's Federal Information and Investigations Agency and Customs Police on the issues of human trafficking, narcotics smuggling, and financial crimes. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) provided nonintrusive inspections equipment to GOI [government of Iraq] customs inspectors. The U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) worked with the GOI to improve port security and with the Department of Transportation (DoT) Attaché to bring the Port of Umm Qasr into compliance with the International Ship and Port Facility Security Code. The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service has interviewed Iraqi refugee applicants who have worked for the U.S. government, U.S. military, or a U.S.-affiliated media or non-governmental organization to determine whether they qualify for consideration for resettlement in the United States.

- As the CBP's *Frontline* history noted, with the end of military mission in Iraq at the end of 2011, CBP's teams were moved over to the Police Development Program (PDP), a large project managed by the State/INL bureau. That project fell apart almost immediately in early 2012,<sup>250</sup> for reasons having nothing to do with DHS or CBP. Border security was among the five missions for which the Iraqi principal deputy minister of interior asked for help.<sup>251</sup> The PDP was on the chopping block by May 2012,<sup>252</sup> was the subject of a harsh audit in July 2012 by the special inspector general for Iraq reconstruction (SIGIR),<sup>253</sup> and was cancelled and its last adviser was pulled out of Iraq on March 1, 2013.<sup>254</sup> Even though the DHS training mission on border security was not part of the controversy, DHS left along with the INL trainers, ending DHS's full-time presence in Iraq. From 2013 until now, any DHS personnel in Iraq have been on temporary duty (TDY).
- During many of the intervening years, the Iraqi Ministry of Interior—DHS's logical counterpart—was under the leadership of someone from the Badr Organization, a group that historically received significant funds from the IRGC-QF.<sup>255</sup>
- However, the new Iraqi Minister of the Interior, Othman al-Ghani, is not from the Badr Organization, but is an experienced military officer.<sup>256</sup> This creates an opportunity for DHS to build up a relationship with its Iraqi counterpart in ways that could help Iraq's civilian security services ensure ISIS's comeback is checked.
- DHS should therefore send an attaché at the Senior Executive Service (SES) level, a deputy, and a small

248 Jay Mayfield, "Powerful Presence – CBP Builds on Six Years of Success in Iraq," *Frontline*, vol. 5, issue 1, 8-15, [https://www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/documents/frontline\\_vol5\\_issue1.pdf](https://www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/documents/frontline_vol5_issue1.pdf).

249 "Learning from Iraq – A Final Report from the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction," Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, March 2013, p. 148, [https://cybercemetery.unt.edu/archive/sigir/20131001080029/http://www.sigir.mil/files/learningfromiraq/Report\\_-\\_March\\_2013.pdf](https://cybercemetery.unt.edu/archive/sigir/20131001080029/http://www.sigir.mil/files/learningfromiraq/Report_-_March_2013.pdf).

250 Richard Brennan, Jr. et al., *Ending the U.S. War in Iraq: The Final Transition, Operational Maneuver, and Disestablishment of United States Forces-Iraq*, Rand Corporation, 2013:311-321, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/10.7249/j.ctt5hhwfg.21.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A543b04afa46e006c6309ae61d3e246d5>.

251 Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*, October 30, 2012:33, [https://www.stripes.com/polopoly\\_fs/1.195249/menu/standard/file/Report\\_-\\_October\\_2012.pdf](https://www.stripes.com/polopoly_fs/1.195249/menu/standard/file/Report_-_October_2012.pdf).

252 Tim Arango, "U.S. May Scrap Costly Efforts to Train Iraqi Police," *New York Times*, May 13, 2012, [https://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/13/world/middleeast/us-may-scrap-costly-effort-to-train-iraqi-police.html?\\_r=1&pagewanted=all](https://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/13/world/middleeast/us-may-scrap-costly-effort-to-train-iraqi-police.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all).

253 "US audit: \$200M wasted on Iraqi police training," Associated Press, July 12, 2012, <https://www.deseret.com/2012/7/30/20426803/us-audit-200m-wasted-on-iraqi-police-training>.

254 Spencer Ackerman, "U.S. Quietly Ends Iraqi Police Training, Its Last Major Baghdad Project," *Wired*, March 18, 2013, <https://www.wired.com/2013/03/iraqi-police/>.

255 Garrett Nada and Mattisan Rowan, "Part 2: Pro-Iran Militias in Iraq," *The Islamists*, Wilson Center, April 27, 2018, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/part-2-pro-iran-militias-iraq>.

256 Renad Mansour, "Iraq's New Prime Minister Is Taking Things Slow," *Foreign Policy*, May 18, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/05/18/mustafa-al-kadhimi-iraqs-new-prime-minister-has-a-plan-to-stop-the-chaos/>.

support staff to establish a small, permanent DHS attaché office in Embassy Baghdad or, if security conditions in Baghdad deteriorate for US personnel, then in the US consulate in Irbil.

### For the United States Congress:

#### 20. Support expansion of US embassies to support capacity building by DHS, DOJ, FBI, and Treasury.

- Congress should support expansion of US embassies in the region, for the reasons noted above in recommendation 17.

#### 21. Allow expansion of CBP Preclearance worldwide, including in the GCC states.

- For the reasons noted in recommendation 18, Congress should support the eventual expansion of Preclearance facilities, including in the GCC states, to protect US citizens and others who fly to the Gulf.

### For the Countries of the Region:

In addition to the points discussed above in Recommendations 1 through 11, which are addressed to the United States and the countries of the Arab Gulf together, the following recommendations are addressed to the countries of the Arab Gulf:

#### 22. Support the establishment of an International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) for the GCC.

- Arab Gulf countries would benefit from working with the US government to establish an International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA), run by the Department of State's Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (State/INL).<sup>257</sup>
- ILEAs provide training to law enforcement personnel from partner nations and offers training on leadership and management, criminal investigations, counterterrorism laws and investigations, counternarcotics investigations, hate crimes, financial crimes, illicit trafficking, and cybercrime. More than sixty thousand officers from eighty-five countries have graduated from ILEAs over the last twenty years.<sup>258</sup>

- Currently, there are ILEAs in Budapest, Hungary; Bangkok, Thailand; Gaborone, Botswana; Accra, Ghana; San Salvador, El Salvador, and Roswell, New Mexico. None of these locations is particularly convenient for Arab Gulf countries to send their officers for training.

- Setting up an ILEA in the Middle East would require an agreement with the US Department of State on location, funding, and what types of training would be of greatest interest.

#### 23. Support the approval of Mutual Legal Assistance Treaties (MLATs) and Customs Mutual Assistance Agreements.

- A Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT) is an agreement between sovereign nations for the purpose of gathering and exchanging information to enforce criminal and civil laws. Although MLATs are negotiated bilaterally, they typically allow signatories:

- To compel private parties in one country to provide documents or physical evidence needed for a judicial proceeding in another country.
- To direct the law enforcement personnel in one country to carry out a search warrant on behalf of an investigation or prosecution in the other country.
- To issue an official and binding initiation of legal proceedings, especially against a corporation located in the other country.
- In terrorist finance cases, they can compel the production of bank records.

- A Customs Mutual Assistance Agreement (CMAA) allows for the exchange of information, intelligence, and documents to enforce customs laws.<sup>259</sup> The World Customs Organization adopted a model agreement to use as a standard basis for international negotiations.

- The United States has MLAT Treaties with many countries in Europe, the Western Hemisphere, and East Asia. Within the Muslim world, the United States has an MLAT with Algeria (entered into force 2017), Egypt (2001), Kazakhstan (2016), and Turkey (1981).

<sup>257</sup> "International Law Enforcement Academies (ILEAs)," US Department of State, accessed July 16, 2020, <https://www.state.gov/international-law-enforcement-academy-ilea/>.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

<sup>259</sup> "Customs Mutual Assistance Agreements (CMAA)," US Department of Homeland Security/Customs and Border Protection, March 3, 2020, <https://www.cbp.gov/border-security/international-initiatives/international-agreements/cmaa#wcm-survey-target-id>.





Armed guard soldier in camouflage uniform on duty in front of VIPs in Abu Dhabi. *Source:* Alamy Stock Photo.

- The United States has CMAA's with many countries in Europe, the Western Hemisphere, and East Asia. Within the Muslim world, the United States has CMAA's with Algeria (2018), Azerbaijan (2007), Bangladesh (2013), Indonesia (2006), Jordan (2004), Kazakhstan (2000), Pakistan (2007), and Turkey (2002).
- The United States does not currently have either an MLAT or a CMAA with any of the Arab Gulf countries, although various proposals have been put forward from time to time, and some are now under active discussion.
- The absence of an MLAT or CMAA does not preclude cooperation between law enforcement and customs agencies. But it often lengthens the time for information to be exchanged that can be used in legal proceedings in the other country.
- There is one important respect in which the countries of the Arab Gulf have an urgent need to enter into negotiations with the United States that relate to what MLATs and CMAAs seek to do. Many of the Arab Gulf countries need information from US-headquartered, internet-based social media companies for evidence of cybercrime, counterterrorism and—especially for some countries—the need to identify and disrupt Iranian influence operations being carried out through social media platforms.
- In the absence of other arrangements, MLATs are the gateway to foreign requests for the formal cooperation of the US government to get information from social media companies in the United States. There have been a number of efforts to significantly re-design the MLAT process for today's high-speed terrorism/cybercrime world.
- The Clarifying Lawful Overseas Use of Data (CLOUD) Act in March 2018, 18 U.S.C. § 2713, allows the United States to work out executive agreements (under US practice, and executive agreement is less formal than a treaty) with foreign governments that will speed up their



U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security John Kelly, meets with Minister of Foreign Affairs Adel bin Ahmed Al-Jubeir, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, at the 2017 Munich Security Conference in Munich, Germany, Feb. 17, 2017. Over the past five decades, the MSC has become the major global forum for the discussion of security policy. Each February, it brings together more than 450 senior decision-makers from around the world, including heads-of-state, ministers, leading personalities of international and non-governmental organizations, as well as high ranking representatives of industry, media, academia, and civil society, to engage in an intensive debate on current and future security challenges. *Source:* DHS photo by Barry Bahler.

access to information held by US companies. A DOJ white paper in April 2019 describes the how the CLOUD Act will work.<sup>260</sup>

- Another, detailed scholarly proposal recommends using the US Visa Waiver Program as a model for a different approach to mutual legal assistance for digital information.<sup>261</sup> Just as the US Visa Waiver Program allows travelers from a country that meets certain criteria to avoid the time-consuming costly process of applying for a visa in person, these authors recommend the Department of Justice—with advice from the

US Department of State and perhaps the US Department of Homeland Security—authorizing a faster, cheaper alternative for data requests from countries whose legal systems meet certain criteria. The CLOUD Act is close to this in spirit, but these authors have included ideas that go beyond what the CLOUD Act provides.

- Another recent scholarly assessment of the status of cross-border access to information by African countries is relevant to some Arab Gulf countries as well.<sup>262</sup>

260 “Promoting Public Safety, Privacy, and the Rule of Law Around the World – The Purpose and Impact of the Cloud Act,” US Department of Justice, April 2019, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/press-release/file/1153446/download>.

261 Peter Swire and Justin D. Hemmings, *Mutual Legal Assistance in an Era of Globalized Communications: The Analogy to the Visa Waiver Program*, 71 New York University Annual Survey of American law, 2016:687-739, [https://annualsurveyofamericanlaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/71-4\\_swirehemmings.pdf](https://annualsurveyofamericanlaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/71-4_swirehemmings.pdf).

262 Halefom H. Abraha, “How African Countries Can Benefit from the Emerging Reform Initiatives of Cross-Border Access to Electronic Evidence,” Cross-Border Data Forum, July 6, 2020, <https://www.crossborderdataforum.org/how-african-countries-can-benefit-from-the-emerging-reform-initiatives-of-cross-border-access-to-electronic-evidence/>.

- A full discussion of the implications of the CLOUD Act is beyond the scope of this paper. However, most if not all Arab Gulf countries will have difficulty meeting the requirements of the CLOUD Act.
- This is because US law allows CLOUD Act agreements only in countries where “the domestic law of the foreign government, including the implementation of that law, affords robust substantive and procedural protections for privacy and civil liberties in light of the data collection and activities of the foreign government that will be subject to the agreement...”<sup>263</sup>
- Further language requires adherence “to applicable human rights obligations and commitments” and “respect for international universal human rights, including (I) protection from arbitrary and unlawful interference with privacy; (II) fair trial rights; (III) freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly; (IV) prohibitions on arbitrary arrest and detention; and (V) prohibitions against torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment.”
- It is in the interest of the Arab Gulf states, however, to negotiate other ways to work with the United States outside the framework of the CLOUD Act to nevertheless be able to disrupt terrorist plots, prevent cybercrime, and disrupt Iranian influence operations.

#### **24. Support the expansion of DHS Pre-clearance.**

- As noted above in recommendation 18, CBP’s Preclearance program offers considerable advantages to travelers, particularly travelers from the Middle East. It also offers increased security, since

all travelers on flights covered by Preclearance go through both host nation security as well as CBP and TSA security before the flight is allowed to depart for the United States.

- An additional advantage that makes Preclearance an especially attractive option for travelers from the Middle East is that in the event a traveler is not admitted to the United States for any reason, the traveler finds this out at a Preclearance facility *before* traveling all the way to the United States. This saves two days of travel time and avoids considerable inconvenience.
- Although Abu Dhabi was the first Preclearance facility in the Arab Gulf, competition for airline passengers is likely to resume when travel restrictions are lifted in 2021. The list of airports interested in negotiating Preclearance with CBP is likely to change as a result of COVID-19, with some airports opening more quickly than others.

#### **25. The Arab Gulf countries need to be more open about their accomplishments in this area.**

- For the reasons noted above on page 21, few US citizens (or Europeans, for that matter) know the extent of the efforts of the countries of the Arab Gulf in the fight against terrorist groups like ISIS and al-Qaeda. Fewer still know of the sacrifices that have been made by their law enforcement personnel, especially those who lost their lives in the line of duty. Although there is always more that needs to be done to defeat terrorist groups like ISIS and al-Qaeda, the countries of the Arab Gulf have accomplished more than most US citizens know, and they should be more open about their accomplishments.

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<sup>263</sup> 18 U.S.C. § 2523(b)(1).



## Annex 1: Alignment of Security Services of the United States and the Countries of the Arab Gulf

This table shows how security services of the United States align with comparable services of the countries of the Arab Gulf—Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Information is based on public sources, primarily the Internet web sites in the English language of the services in question. Some recent reorganizations of the services or changes in their authorities may not be reflected in this table. In Oman, for example, Sultan Haitham announced a governmental reorganization on August 18; this may not be fully reflected in this table. Also, the security services of Iraq in this table refer to the institutions of the national government in Baghdad. Under Iraq’s federal system, most security institutions in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region are separate and under the authorities of government of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region.

The table focuses primarily on non-military and non-intelligence security services, recognizing that both the United States and the Arab Gulf have services that cut across these lines. For the United States, the Department of Defense and the agencies of the US Intelligence Community are not included, nor are most Arab Gulf militaries, except where they also perform functions that could

be considered civilian in the United States, such as maritime security and guarding national borders from non-military threats.










This table illustrates some of the institutional challenges that civilian security services have in working together. The United States is a constitutional federal republic based on the English legal system as it was in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century of the Common Era. Most of the Arab Gulf countries have their own Gulf Arab traditions and have incorporated aspects of the Ottoman, British, French, and (occasionally) American models for organizing their military, security, and judicial services.












The table uses five symbols to illustrate how closely the respective Arab Gulf security services align with their American counterparts: ○ ◐ ◑ ◒ ◓ (ranging from no-match to a near-perfect) match, using a subjective assessment based primarily on their stated missions.












The table uses “/” to show the hierarchical status of separate sub-units of ministries or services. For example, the Department of Homeland Security’s component Customs and Border Protection would be shown as “Department of Homeland Security/Customs and Border Protection.”

Institution	United States	Arab Gulf Countries	How Close a Match
<b>Police</b>  (civilian uniformed and plainclothes law enforcement)	State and Local Police	<b>Bahrain:</b> Ministry of Interior/Public Security Forces (PSF), whose sub-units include Police Directorates (including the Community Police Directorate), Special Security Force Command (SSFC), Operations Directorate (Najda) and Traffic Police. Ministry of Interior/Criminal Investigation Directorate and the Anti-Corruption and Economic and Electronic Security Directorate. <sup>1</sup>	◑
		<b>Iraq:</b> Ministry of Interior/Federal Police, Provincial Police, and Highway Patrol. <sup>2</sup>	◐
		<b>Kuwait:</b> Ministry of Interior/Police. <sup>3</sup>	◐
		<b>Oman:</b> The Royal Office/Royal Oman Police and Internal Security Service. <sup>4</sup>	◐



Institution	United States	Arab Gulf Countries	How Close a Match
<b>Counterterrorism</b> (includes policy, collection, investigation, analysis, enforcement, and arrest—excludes purely military and intelligence organizations)		<b>Qatar:</b> Ministry of Interior/General Directorate of Public Security/Police – sub-units of General Directorate of Public Security also include Rescue (Al-Fahza), Traffic, Juvenile Police, and Internal Security Forces (Lekhwiya). <sup>5</sup>	
		<b>Saudi Arabia:</b> Ministry of Interior/General Directorate of Public Security/Police. State Security Presidency (SSP)/Mabahith.	
		<b>United Arab Emirates:</b> Ministry of Interior/General Directorates (Police). <sup>6</sup>	
	Department of Justice (DOJ)/Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)  Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI)/National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC)  Department of Homeland Security (DHS)	<b>Bahrain:</b> Ministry of Interior/Public Security Forces/Special Security Force Command (SSFC) (Special Operation Group) and The Joint Counter Terrorism Center (JCTC). Ministry of Interior/General Directorate of Criminal Investigation and Forensic Science (GDCIFS) and the General Directorate of Anti-Corruption and Economic and Electronic Security. Counterterrorism Committee (interagency). <sup>7</sup>	
		The National Security Agency (NSA).	
		<b>Iraq:</b> Prime Minister/Counterterrorism Command and Service, and National Security Service (NSS). <sup>8</sup>	
		<b>Kuwait:</b> Ministry of Interior/Kuwait State Security (KSS). <sup>9</sup>	
		<b>Oman:</b> Sultan's Special Forces (SSF) and the Royal Oman Police Special Task Force (Royal Office Liaison and Coordination Service and Internal Security Service also play key roles). <sup>10</sup>	
		<b>Qatar:</b> Ministry of Interior/State Security Bureau (SSB), also known as Qatar Security Services (QSS), and Ministry of Interior/Internal Security Forces (Lekhwiya). National Anti-terrorism Committee (interagency). <sup>11</sup>	
		<b>Saudi Arabia:</b> State Security Presidency (SSP)/Mabahith. Other sub-units of SSP include Directorate of Security Operations (DSO), Special Security Forces and Special Emergency Forces. Ministry of Interior/Public Security Directorate/ Explosives Ordinance Detection (collection and analysis). <sup>12</sup>	

Institution	United States	Arab Gulf Countries	How Close a Match
		<b>United Arab Emirates:</b> State Security Directorate (SSD) (in Dubai, the Dubai State Security Organization (DSS)). Ministry of Foreign Affairs/Counterterrorism Committee. <sup>13</sup>	
<b>Land Border Security</b>	DHS/Customs and Border Protection (CBP)	<b>Bahrain:</b> Ministry of Interior/Customs Affairs Directorate/Bahrain International Airport Police Directorate and King Fahad Causeway Police Directorate. General Directorate for Border Security and Coast Guard Command. Nationality, Passport and Residence Affairs Directorate. <sup>14</sup>	
		<b>Iraq:</b> Ministry of Interior/Department of Border Enforcement and Ports of Entry Directorate. <sup>15</sup>	
		<b>Kuwait:</b> Ministry of Interior/Border Security Affairs/Kuwaiti Land Border Force—a border component of the Kuwaiti Police. Minister of Finance/General Administration of Customs. <sup>16</sup>	
		<b>Oman:</b> The Royal Office/Royal Oman Police/Directorate General of Customs. <sup>17</sup>	
		<b>Qatar:</b> Ministry of Interior/General Directorate of Coasts and Borders Security. Ministry of Finance/General Authority of Customs. <sup>18</sup>	
		<b>Saudi Arabia:</b> Ministry of Interior/General Directorate of Border Guards. Ministry of Defense/Royal Saudi Land Forces. Ministry of Interior/Saudi Customs Authority. <sup>19</sup>	
			
		<b>United Arab Emirates:</b> General Authority for the Security of Ports, Borders and Free Zones. Ministry of Defense/UAE Armed Forces/UAE Border Guard/Frontier Corps. Federal Customs Authority (associated with the Ministry of Finance). <sup>20</sup>	
<b>Maritime Security</b> (inspections of civilian vessels, counternarcotics, and law enforcement at sea—excludes blue water navy functions)	Department of Defense (DOD)/US Navy (USN)	<b>Bahrain:</b> Ministry of Interior/Coast Guard Command. Ministry of Transportation and Communications/Ports and Maritime Affairs. Bahrain Defense Forces/Royal Bahrain Naval Force. <sup>21</sup>	
	DHS/US Coast Guard (USCG)	<b>Iraq:</b> Ministry of Interior/Department of Border Enforcement (DBE)/Coastal Border Guards (CBG). Ministry of Defense/Iraqi Navy. <sup>22</sup>	

Institution	United States	Arab Gulf Countries	How Close a Match
		<b>Kuwait:</b> Ministry of Interior/Border Security Affairs/General Directorate of the Coast Guard (Kuwaiti Coast Guard, a sea-based component of the Kuwaiti Police). Kuwait Ministry of Defense/Kuwait Naval Forces (KNF). <sup>23</sup>	
		<b>Oman:</b> The Royal Office/Royal Oman Police Coast Guard. Ministry of Defense/Royal Navy. <sup>24</sup>	
		<b>Qatar:</b> Ministry of Interior/General Directorate of Coasts and Borders Security. Qatar Armed Forces/ Qatari Emiri Navy, which includes the Coast Guard and coastal artillery. <sup>25</sup>	
			
		<b>Saudi Arabia:</b> Ministry of Defense/Royal Saudi Naval Forces Command. Ministry of Interior/General Directorate of Border Guards and Maritime Infrastructure Protection Force (MIPF). <sup>26</sup>	
		<b>United Arab Emirates:</b> Ministry of Defense/UAE Navy and UAE Coast Guard. <sup>27</sup>	
<b>Aviation Security</b>	DHS/CBP and Transportation Security Administration (TSA)	<b>Bahrain:</b> Ministry of Interior/Police Aviation. Ministry of Transportation and Communications/Civil Aviation Affairs (CAA). <sup>28</sup>	
		<b>Iraq:</b> Ministry of Transport. Iraq Civil Aviation Authority. <sup>29</sup>	
		<b>Kuwait:</b> Ministry of Interior/joint between Airport Police and Kuwait Directorate General of Civil Aviation. <sup>30</sup>	
		<b>Oman:</b> Royal Oman Police, Directorate of Airport Security (and Directorate of Police Aviation that provides only humanitarian services). Civil Aviation Authority (CCA). <sup>31</sup>	
		<b>Qatar:</b> Ministry of Interior/Airport Security and Passports Department (ASPD). Civil Aviation Authority (associated with Ministry of Transport and Communications). <sup>32</sup>	

Institution	United States	Arab Gulf Countries	How Close a Match
<b>Infrastructure Protection Security</b>  (includes critical cyber infrastructure)	DHS/Office of Infrastructure Protection/Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA)	<b>Saudi Arabia:</b> State Security Presidency/Aviation Security Command. General Authority of Civil Aviation. <sup>33</sup>	
		<b>United Arab Emirates:</b> General Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA). Dubai Civil Aviation Authority (DCAA). <sup>34</sup>	
		<b>Bahrain:</b> Ministry of Interior/ General Directorate of Guards, Special Security Force Command (SSFC), the General Directorate of Anti-Corruption and Economic and Electronic Security. The National Guard of Bahrain (separate from the Bahrain Defense Forces). <sup>35</sup>	
		<b>Iraq:</b> Ministry of Interior/Facilities Protection Service. Ministry of Oil/Energy Police. <sup>36</sup>	
		<b>Kuwait:</b> Kuwait National Guard (separate from MOI and MOD). Central Agency for Information Technology/National Cybersecurity Center. <sup>37</sup>	
		<b>Oman:</b> Royal Oman Police. Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology/ Information Technology Authority/Oman CERT. <sup>38</sup>	
		<b>Qatar:</b> Qatar Armed Forces/Special Forces. Ministry of Transport and Telecommunications/Critical Information Infrastructure Protection (CIIP) unit. <sup>39</sup>	
		<b>Saudi Arabia:</b> Ministry of Interior/ <b>MOI Higher Commission for Industrial Security (HCIS)</b> , Facilities Security Forces and Special Forces for Security and Protection (SFSP). The National Cybersecurity Authority. <sup>40</sup>	
		<b>United Arab Emirates:</b> Ministry of Defense/UAE Armed Forces/Critical Infrastructure and Coastal Protection Authority (CICPA). Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA)/aeCERT, and Signals Intelligence Agency. <sup>41</sup>	



Institution	United States	Arab Gulf Countries	How Close a Match
Terrorist Finance	Department of the Treasury/Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN)	<b>Bahrain:</b> Ministry of Interior/Financial Intelligence Directorate (FID). Central Bank of Bahrain and Ministry of Finance and National Economy. <sup>42</sup>	●
		<b>Iraq:</b> Central Bank of Iraq/Anti-Money Laundering and Countering Financing of Terrorism Office (Iraq's Financial Intelligence Unit - FIU).	◐
	DHS/ Homeland Security Investigations (HIS)	<b>Kuwait:</b> Affiliated with the Central Bank of Kuwait, Kuwait Financial Intelligence Unit (independent). <sup>43</sup>	◑
		<b>Oman:</b> Royal Oman Police/National Center for Financial Information (NCFI). <sup>44</sup>	◐
		<b>Qatar:</b> Qatar Central Bank/Qatar's National Anti-Money Laundering and Terrorism Financing Committee (NAMLC), Qatar's Financial Information Unit. <sup>45</sup>	●
		<b>Saudi Arabia:</b> State Security Presidency/ Saudi Arabia Financial Investigations Unit. Saudi Arabian Monetary Authority (SAMA)/ Anti-Money Laundering Committee. <sup>46</sup>	◐
		<b>United Arab Emirates:</b> Central Bank of the UAE/ Anti-Money Laundering and Suspicious Cases Unit (AMLSCU). <sup>47</sup>	●

## Endnotes for Annex 1

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## About the Authors

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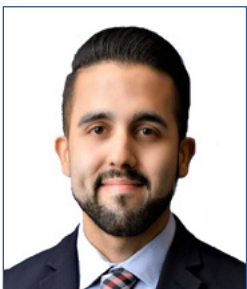


**Thomas Warrick** is a nonresident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council. Prior to joining the Atlantic Council, from August 2008 to June 2019 he was the deputy assistant secretary for counterterrorism policy at the US Department of Homeland Security and a career member of the Senior Executive Service. He was an international lawyer in private practice for 17 years, representing companies in connection with investments in the Middle East and elsewhere.

From 1997 to 2007, he served in the US Department of State on Middle East and international justice issues. From 1997 to 2001, Warrick was deputy in the Office of the Secretary / Office of War Crimes Issues. In 2001, he became special adviser, then senior adviser, to the assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern Affairs, working on Iraq, Iran, and other issues. From 2002 to 2003, he led the State Department's "Future of Iraq" project. From October 2003 to June 2006, he served in both Baghdad and Washington. From July 2006 to July 2007, he was director (acting) for Iraq Political Affairs. He was briefly senior political adviser on the Iran desk in 2007.

Warrick joined the US Department of Homeland Security in August 2007 as director for the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia in the Office of Policy. He became deputy assistant secretary for counterterrorism policy, in the Office of Policy, in August 2008. In February 2015, Warrick was named deputy counterterrorism coordinator for policy by the DHS counterterrorism coordinator and under secretary for Intelligence & Analysis. In July 2018, when the counterterrorism policy mission was returned to the DHS Office of Policy, Warrick resumed his title of deputy assistant secretary for counterterrorism policy in the Office of Policy / Office of Threat Prevention and Security Policy. Warrick concluded his service as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Counterterrorism Policy on June 14, 2019. Warrick received his Juris Doctor degree from Harvard Law School in 1979 and a Bachelor of Science in Public Administration *summa cum laude* from the University of Missouri.

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