FROM “OVER THE HORIZON” TO THE WATER’S EDGE:
SAUDI ARABIA’S MILITARY PLANNING AND SECURITY RELATIONS
AFTER THE FIRST GULF WAR

A Thesis
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Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait in 1990 set in motion a number of consequential events not only on Kuwait, but also on Iraq’s other neighbors. This study examines the impact of Saddam’s provocation on Saudi Arabia’s security strategy and military planning between 1990 and 2000. The hypothesis specifically tests whether the Gulf war impacted the Kingdom’s military planning in terms of its military expenditures and the manpower strength of its Armed Forces. To do so, the study examines Riyadh’s military expenditures and the manpower strength of its Armed Forces between 1990 and 2000 compared to the period between 1985 and 1990. It also compares those measures in comparison to the military expenditures and the Armed Forces of Iraq’s other neighbors (Turkey, Syria, Jordan, and Egypt). In order to provide a measurable effect of the war on the Kingdom’s relations with western powers, the study examines Saudi Arabia’s arms sales with its key western allies (the United States, United Kingdom, and France) between 1990 and 2000 compared to pre-Gulf war sales. This study informs the political-military decision-making process based on considerations of how Saudi Arabia reacted to the crisis in 1990 vis-à-vis its military planning and its relations with western military powers, and how Riyadh may respond to the security challenges currently being presented by Iran’s reported pursuit of a nuclear weapons program.
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INTRODUCTION

The Middle East is historically one of the most volatile regions in the world. Despite its richness of resources and culture, the regional security dynamics are complicated by wars, coups d'état, intra-Arab alliances that have led to regional conflicts, and the seemingly constant intervention by global superpowers as a way to ensure their economic interests and maintain the regional balance of power in their favor. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait set in motion a number of consequential forces not only on Kuwait, but also on Iraq’s other neighbors: Jordan, Turkey, Syria, Iran, Egypt and Saudi Arabia [See Figure 1. Map of Middle East and Southwest Asia]. Not only so, but Saddam’s provocation against another Arab Muslim state had a strategic geopolitical and security impact on the dynamics of the region.

With a shared border with Iraq, Saudi Arabia had the most at risk from Saddam’s aggression. Despite its close relationships with western powers who provided the Kingdom’s ruling al-Saud family a security guarantee, Saddam was not deterred in 1990 and 1991 from threatening to attack Saudi Arabia as well. For example, in the days after invading Kuwait, Saddam verbally threatened the ruling al-Saud family accusing them of being
“illegitimate” and “unworthy” guardians of Islam’s two holy cities of Mecca and Medina.\(^1\) Iraq also mobilized two of its Republican Guard units within easy striking distance of Saudi oil fields, which would have given Saddam control over a majority of the world’s oil reserves.

**Study Objective:**

The Iraqi invasion of neighboring Kuwait in August 1990 set in motion a number of forces that impacted the regional security dynamics both in the medium and long terms. Although scholars and academics have spoken of that impact for many years, they have not provided a measurable way by which to assess the level of impact or its significance. Further, scholars in the field have failed to adequately dissect the impact of Saddam Hussein’s provocation against a neighboring Arab state on the military planning of Iraq’s neighbors in the years after the war. In particular, the available literature on the topic does not provide a valid and testable consensus on how Saddam’s actions affected the psyche of the neighboring Arab governments, but also their perception of an internal regional threat to their security, and how that may have altered their military planning and their relations with western states. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, a close ally of western power since its inception, provides a dynamic and testable model upon which to assess the impact of Saddam Hussein’s actions on the regional security dynamics.

Saudi Arabia’s ruling family has maintained a close security relationship with the United States since Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud (commonly known as Ibn Saud) founded the

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Kingdom of Saudi Arabia\textsuperscript{2} in 1932. Despite its longevity and historicity, however, the bilateral Saudi-U.S. security relationship has been consistently described in the literature as an “unofficial alliance”\textsuperscript{3} or an “informal security partnership.”\textsuperscript{4} In fact, although the Kingdom has been dependent on the United States for the supply of military hardware, arms sales, military and technical assistance since its founding, scholars like Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and F. Gregory Gause III, Director of the Middle East Studies Program at the University of Vermont, argue that the ruling family has always managed to keep the U.S. connection “at arm’s length”\textsuperscript{5} and “over the horizon.”\textsuperscript{6}

Saudi Arabia’s government walks a tightrope between maintaining this security alliance, that provides for its protection, and public opinion inside the Kingdom, that is leery of the American connection. This connection is perceived inside the Kingdom and perhaps across the Arab world to discredit the ruling family’s claims as being guardians of Islam’s holiest cites - especially in the face of years of Arab conflict with Israel, a close U.S. ally in the region. Nonetheless, despite its close relations with the United States and other European states, Saudi Arabia has not been immune from threats. Saddam’s invasion of Kuwait demonstrated that the Saudi military – with or without the U.S. “over the horizon” presence and the militaries of other Arab governments – could

\textsuperscript{2} The new country was named in Arabic “Al-Mamlakah Al-Arabiyyah al-Sudiyah,” which is translated in English as “the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia” or more literally “the Saudi Arab Kingdom.” The word “Saudi” is derived from “al-Sudiyah” in the Arabic name of the country, which is an adjective based on the founding King’s dynastic name of al-Saud. Its inclusion indicated that the Kingdom was to be considered the possession of the royal family.
\textsuperscript{6} Cordesman, pp. 2-4.
not deter Saddam from invading Kuwait and threatening the Kingdom. Thus, there were no guarantees that a future aggressor would be deterred.

The intent of this study is not to duplicate previous historical narratives of the first Gulf War in 1990 or the history of Saudi Arabia’s relationship with the United States or other western allies. The aim is also not to provide a quantitative or qualitative analysis of the Kingdom’s military capabilities. Rather, the intent and objective of this research study is to present an overarching, testable, and documented analysis of Saudi Arabia’s security environment, its perceived threats and vulnerabilities, and how those challenges affected its military planning and strategic security relations after the Gulf war.

**Hypothesis:**

The hypothesis being tested in this study is: Saudi Arabia’s military planning after the 1991 Gulf war was driven by its strategic security relations with western powers, especially with the United States. A number of other alternative hypotheses may also become evident in the course of this study. These alternatives will be discussed in greater details on the following pages.

The hypothesis tested provides policymakers and academics with a critical policy tool. It is against the backdrop of Saddam’s actions in 1990 that Saudi Arabia’s military and security planning experienced a significant shift. In the wake of threats to the Kingdom’s security – best illustrated by Saddam’s invasion of Kuwait and his subsequent threats against the al-Sauds’ legitimacy – the emergence of the Kingdom as an effective military power in the region was all but inevitable. Because one state transgressed by invading another Arab-Muslim state and challenging its other neighbors, Saudi Arabia became more concerned about its security environment and the future of regional
security. Saddam’s actions demonstrated that the Kingdom’s security environment was not stable by removing Iraqi forces from Kuwait. Riyadh recognized that the ability to project force by using a superior military was the only way to achieve security in the region, and to ensure a viable deterrence from future states that seek to challenge the stability of the Kingdom or the legitimacy of the al-Sauds’ rule.

To achieve that objective, the hypothesis being tested states that the Saudi government altered its military planning post-Gulf war by embarking on a significant shift in its security relationship with the United States. This shift in Saudi military planning was more evident, and more significant, than Iraq’s other neighbors. This new U.S.-Saudi bilateral security relationship was thus subsequently built upon an increase in Saudi military expenditures, a determination to increase the manpower strength of its Armed Forces, and new arms sales and security cooperation activities that were more significant than with the Kingdom’s regional allies or other major western military allies.

However, as a result of this analysis, a number of alternative hypotheses may also become evident, and thus must be considered. First, as opposed to the hypothesis tested in this study, it may become evident through the quantitative analysis of Saudi Arabia’s military manpower and expenditures that Saddam’s invasion of Kuwait had no impact on Saudi Arabia’s security perspective. In hindsight, and in view of Riyadh’s historical progression into a regional power, its military planning as well as its relationships with western powers may have been a part of the natural progression of the Kingdom. A second alternative hypothesis may also be evident as a result of this analysis. Simply put, the second alternative hypothesis is that Riyadh’s shift was not unique in comparison to the other regional players that were affected by the aggression against Kuwait. The Gulf
war may not have had as great, or as unique, of an impact on Saudi Arabia specifically in comparison to Iraq’s other neighbors. These alternatives will be tested to assess the measure of the shift in Saudi Arabia’s military planning after the Gulf war, and its relationships with other states in the region as well as in the west.

**Policy Relevance:**

It is no cliché in this scenario to conclude that – at least in the case of the Middle East – the past is the future. This was perhaps the case with Saudi Arabia after the Gulf war. In large measure, the war was fought to prevent Iraq from becoming a dominant regional power that could threaten the status quo. The multi-national U.S.-led coalition arrayed against Iraq in 1990 testified to the undesirability of that outcome. A “greater Iraq,” has fought a war first with Iran in the 1980s, invaded neighboring Kuwait in 1990, threatened its neighbors, and challenged U.S. and western economic interests in the region. A “greater Iraq” would have been in possession of more than 50 percent of the world’s oil reserves had it not been forced out of Kuwait, and had Saddam not been deterred from overtaking Saudi oil fields as he had threatened to do.

Even though Iraq was militarily weakened after the Gulf War, the world was now aware of the impact potential future aggressors like Saddam may have on destabilizing this strategically and economically critical region. A future aggressor may seek to challenge western economic access in the region by directly challenging the legitimacy of Arab governments allied with the United States. Whether Iraq in 1990 or another aggressor in 2020, a state that is not satisfied with the status quo and is undeterred to act

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upon its un-satisfaction would be in a position to influence events throughout the region and thus threaten the global balance of power.

This study provides testable analytical research to better inform the current and future direction of U.S. military and defense policies towards Saudi Arabia. It informs the political-military decision-making process within the U.S. government based on considerations of how Saudi Arabia reacted to the crisis in 1990 vis-à-vis its military planning and its relations with western military states. This will prove useful in understanding how Riyadh may respond to a potential future regional de-stabilizer. In light of the current policy and security challenges being presented by Iran’s reported pursuit of a nuclear weapons program, this study will test the hypothesis of whether Saudi Arabia’s military planning after the 1991 Gulf war was driven by its strategic security relations with western powers, especially with the United States. The study also seeks to broaden the parameters of the debate on the U.S.-Saudi relationship beyond one component, whether it be economic interests or in the fight against terrorism, to a more holistic approach based on an understanding of the Kingdom’s security vulnerabilities, its shared interests with the United States, and how it responds to threats.
METHODOLOGY

This research study examines whether Saudi Arabia’s military planning after the 1991 Gulf war was driven by its strategic security relations with western powers, especially with the United States. To do so, the analysis will utilize both qualitative and quantitative data as a measure to test whether there was in fact a shift both before and after the Gulf war, and how that shift compares to Iraq’s other neighbors.

First, the study will provide an overview of the available literature by academics and scholars who have studied the impact of Saddam’s invasion of Kuwait on the region, and specifically on the Kingdom’s military planning. An understanding of Saudi Arabia’s vital interests before, during, and after 1990 is necessary here in order to provide a comprehensive overview of the Kingdom’s security environment, and how those interests may have changed as a result of the Gulf war. For example, the literature will provide a brief history of the region in order to paint a portrait of the region’s security challenges from Riyadh’s point of view. The literature will also provide insight into the history of Saudi Arabia’s relations with its allies, to include its western allies (the United States, United Kingdom, and France) and regional allies (Egypt, and Syria).

Second, to adequately comprehend why Saudi Arabia may have been threatened by Saddam’s aggression against Kuwait, this research analysis will examine the motivations of Saddam’s invasion of Kuwait, and how those motivations may have threatened Saudi Arabia to alter its military planning compared to the responses of Iraq’s other neighbors. Understanding Saddam’s motivations and how they were perceived and acted upon by Saudi Arabia after the war will also contribute to the overall implications
of the study by providing policymakers and academics with knowledge on the types of challengers that may alter future Saudi military planning.

Third, to test the hypothesis that Saudi Arabia’s military planning after the 1991 Gulf war was driven by its strategic security relations with western powers, the study will use quantitative data on the Saudi government’s military planning efforts after the war (1990-2000) compared to pre-Gulf war planning levels (1985-1990). To that end, the study will examine Riyadh’s military expenditures and the strength of its Armed Forces between 1990 and 2000 compared to 1985-1990 levels. It will also compare those measures to the military expenditures and strength of the Armed Forces of Iraq’s other neighbors (namely Syria, Jordan, Turkey, and Egypt) during those same time periods.

Assessing the link between Riyadh’s military planning after the Gulf war and its relations with other military powers, however, is perhaps the most challenging task of the research. Data on bilateral exercises, training courses, subject matter or military-to-military exchanges between Saudi Arabia and other states is not readily accessible. The Saudi government – and most states for that matter – does not publicly document its bilateral security cooperation activities. For Saudi Arabia, not publishing the details of its security cooperation with other states, especially with the United States and other western allies, is perhaps an understandable issue. While the Gulf crisis led to a closer security cooperation relationship between Saudi Arabia and the United States, Riyadh has been weary of appearing to be too dependent on foreign western non-Muslim allies for its security, particularly as the ruling al-Saud family is entrusted with being the guardians of Islam’s two holiest cities. Appearing to be entrusting the security of Islam’s holiest sites
to a western ally would be a self-declared proclamation of the al-Saud’s inability to fulfill its own mandate.

As a remedy to this shortcoming, the analysis will assess both major new military arms sales agreements between Saudi Arabia and its key western allies (the United States, United Kingdom, and France) between 1990 and 2000 compared to pre-Gulf war sales period of 1985 and e1990. To measure the link between Riyadh’s military planning after the Gulf war and its relations with other military powers, the analysis will also assess Riyadh’s arms imports during those same time periods. This data will be used as a quantitative measure to test the link between Riyadh’s military planning after the Gulf war and its relations with other military powers.

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8 Data on the weapons and arms sales will be utilized using the Arms Transfers Database provided by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), the Military Balance assessment of the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA), and various military studies by CSIS.
BACKGROUND:
THE VIEW FROM RIYADH

Saudi Arabia emerged as a major global and regional player by the end of World War II. It became clear at the time that the Persian Gulf had a wealth of oil resources and that Saudi Arabia would become a major oil supplier.\(^9\) While the world was recovering from years of war, western and Soviet competition for influence in the region began to materialize. Saudi Arabia aligned its interests with the United States as a way to stand against Egyptian President Jamal Abd al-Nasser’s Pan-Arabism movement. Since, Saudi security, political, and economic interests have been linked to the interests of western powers, who provided a security guarantee and a seemingly viable deterrent to those who threatened the survivability of the al-Saud ruling family.

**Saudi Arabia’s Security Interests:**

Saudi Arabia occupies a pertinent position in the Arab and Muslim world. It is the birthplace of Islam and home of its two holiest shrines in Mecca and Medina. Traditionally, the king is a male descendant of the founding king Abd al-Aziz al-Faysal ibn al-Saud. With insufficient manpower and weaponry for defense against stronger regional powers in the late 1930s and early 1940s, Ibn Saud sought and received support from western powers – namely the United States and Britain – to deter stronger and more powerful aggressors. In the 1950s, Saudi Arabia established closer ties with Great Britain as a way to deter powerful and more ambitious neighbors from threatening the Kingdom’s security and stability. In later years, Saudi Arabia’s special relationship was transferred to the United States, a relationship that continues to this day albeit with some

glitches along the way. Thus began the history of the Saudi monarchy’s balancing of its relations with the western powers for protection with the often arduous task of maintaining legitimacy at home and in the Muslim world.

Since its founding, Saudi Arabia has developed its strategic policies – both in terms of its domestic and foreign policies – with a focus on maintaining political stability at home and managing external threats. The House of Saud has served as the central institution of the government. The Saudi government has also used its position as the birthplace of Islam to support the spread of the religion and support Muslim rights around the world. It has funded the construction of mosques and Islamic schools around the world, and provided financial and political assistance to Arab causes.10

With the increase of revenue coming into the Kingdom from oil production after World War II, Saudi Arabia transitioned into a wealthy state able to finance and promote the economic and social well-being of its citizens. Whereas it had relied on British subsidies up to the mid-1940s, Saudi Arabia began purchasing European and American weapons in cash without foreign subsidies. In mid 1945, the British Foreign Office recommended that the UK government cut back on the steady subsidy to Riyadh. The costs had been rising steadily from £396,582 in 1940 to £1.1 million in 1941, and to almost £3.8 million in 1943 for a grand total of £8.3 million.11 By 1990, and as could be argued even to this day, Saudi Arabia was rich yet vulnerable.

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Saudi vital interests lie within the interaction between two national symbols – the royal family and Islam – which establish legitimacy for the regime in the region.\textsuperscript{12} As the “Guardians of the Two Holy Mosques,” the al-Saud family establishes its legitimacy as rulers both domestically and in the Muslim world by its self-proclaimed standing as the protectors of the Saudi Kingdom, but also of Islam. Thus, Saudi interests lie in the acceptance of its legitimacy by the domestic Saudi population and also the acceptance of other Muslim-majority states in the region.

Saddam’s invasion of Kuwait in 1990 threatened that legitimacy on both fronts. As author Joseph A. Kechichian, visiting fellow at the Center for Near Eastern Studies at the University of California, argues, Saudi Arabia reassessed its national security policy in the aftermath of the Gulf war, and was increasingly reliant on its nascent military power for its security.\textsuperscript{13} Even if Iraq was militarily weakened after the Gulf War, Kechichian argues, Saudi Arabia perceived Iraq and other rogue hostile states, particularly Iran, as potential hegemons and in effect a direct threat to the security of the Kingdom and the rule of the al-Saud family.

**Regional Security Perspective:**

Historically, relations with non-Arab Iran had been filled with suspicion and mistrust. The Kingdom enjoyed an accommodating relationship with the Shah prior to the 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution. However, since the revolution, the Saudi government views Iran and its leaders as over-ambitious and as a threat to regional stability. As early as 1982, Secretary General Abdallah Bishara of the newly created Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) identified Iran as the main source of threat to the

\textsuperscript{12} Sours, pp. 47.
stability of Gulf states. From a Saudi perspective, the rhetoric of some Iranian revolutionary leaders, who called for the overthrow of all monarchies as being “un-Islamic,” presented a serious subversive threat to the Kingdom. Then Saudi Crown Prince Fahd Ibn Abd al-Aziz declared to the daily al-Jazirah newspaper that the situation in Iran was “contrary to the interests of Islam, the entire Muslim world and the stability of the Middle East.” Relations between Riyadh and Tehran went from bad to worse in the 1980s when Iranian pilgrims in Mecca rioted the Grand Mosque resulting in clashes with Saudi security forces that ended in the death of 400 Iranian pilgrims. Tehran questioned the al-Saud family’s credentials and called for the outright downfall of the Saudi regime.

Tensions in Saudi-Iranian relations at the time, however, spurred better relations between Saudi Arabia and Iraq. Saddam pledged military assistance to Riyadh in March 1980 if Soviet troops threatened to invade Saudi territory at the height of cold war tensions. Saudi Arabia was equally cooperative. During the eight years of war between Iran and Iraq (1980-1988), Riyadh conceded on Saddam’s behalf to European arms suppliers, opened its port facilities to help Baghdad receive military supplies, and even committed a portion of its own oil exports to alleviate some of Iraq’s financial war burdens. Further, Arab states were committed to providing Iraq with $14 billion in direct financial assistance in compensation for the war. In the eight years of war, the

14 Kechichian, pp. 234
15 Kechichian, pp. 235.
16 Kechichian, pp. 236.
17 Kechichian, pp. 241.
Saudi monarchy provided Iraq with approximately $25.7 billion in direct financial assistance.\textsuperscript{19,20}

**Relations with U.S. and Europe:**

In 1945, the U.S. State Department described Saudi Arabia as “one of the greatest material prizes in world history.”\textsuperscript{21} King Faisal of Saudi Arabia told American diplomat and author, Parker T. Hart: “Since 1943, I have considered the interests of my country and community to be the same as those of the United States. We differ in nothing basic…after Allah we trust in America.”\textsuperscript{22} Saudi Arabia has maintained close relationships with western states since the 1930s that continued through the years despite having their share of hiccups and differences. A mainly conservative Muslim monarchy, Saudi Arabia shares very little in terms of common values, culture, or beliefs with its western allies. Nonetheless, the relationships have endured through the decades because of the intersection of economic, political, and security interests between those states, and because of the ability of Saudi Arabia to manage its relationship with the west.

Saudi Arabia’s two main sources of revenue – oil production and the Mecca pilgrimage – were significantly reduced with the outbreak of World War II in 1939. Further, Saudi Arabia was concerned about a renewed German offensive in the Middle East. Riyadh was alarmed with reports that the Hashemites – the British installed rules of Transjordan and Iraq – were allied with Germany to expand their domain toward a union

\textsuperscript{19} Kechichian, pp. 242.
of Palestine, Jordan, Iraq, and Syria, thus essentially surrounding the Kingdom. As a result, President Franklin D. Roosevelt wrote his Secretary of State saying “that the defense of Saudi Arabia is vital to the defense of the United States,” thus making Riyadh eligible for $17.5 million in U.S. funds between 1943 and 1946.

The U.S.-Saudi bilateral relationship progressed with the victory of the allied forces in World War II, and the increased influence of the United States after the war. As a symbol of this progression in the relationship, the U.S. approved a military grant aid to Saudi Arabia in 1957 that included: the development, training, and maintenance of the Saudi Air Force, the construction of a new air terminal at Dhahran Air Base, the sale of eight M047 tanks, and eight T-33 aircrafts. The bilateral relationship also extended to U.S. support of Saudi Arabia against other Arab governments. For example, in the face of Nasser’s rising pan-Arabism, the U.S. government – at the behest of Riyadh – made clear to Nasser through its Ambassador in Cairo that while the United States sought good relations with Egypt, a firm U.S. objective in the region was the independence, integrity, and sovereignty of Saudi Arabia, and especially – albeit not exclusively – the rule of the Saud family. Should that be threatened, the U.S. warned it would “react accordingly.”

While cognizant of the historic bilateral relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia, both European and American scholars have pointed out that Saudi Arabia has made some effort to not become reliant on one single source for its security. Riyadh has supplemented its military relationship with the United States

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23 Hart, pp. 34.
24 Storks, pp. 24.
25 Hart, pp. 69.
26 Hart, pp. 166.
28 Storks, pp. 29.
by entering into other agreements with European states for arms supplies, training, and specialized technical expertise. Professor Gerd Nonneman of the University of Exeter in South West England argues that, given Saudi Arabia’s pragmatic awareness of both the opportunities and limitations of its relationship with Washington, Riyadh sought to “obtain great power protection (and sources of technology, arms and other imports) and to balance such dependence by keeping open options and channels towards alternative sources.” Nonetheless, it cannot go without mentioning that Europe has had a significant historic role in the Persian Gulf. European influence in the region – particularly that of the United Kingdom and France – was strongly present long before the United States entered the region as a major player after World War II.

In 1915, under the Darin Treaty, Britain officially recognized Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud as an independent leader of the Najd area in the Arabian Desert. Britain subsequently also acknowledged Ibn Saud’s dependence on Great Britain for protection. In fact, by 1924, the British government supplied Ibn Saud with more than £60,000 a year for military and economic aid. In 1939, the U.K. assured Ibn Saud that it would assist him if Saudi Arabia was the victim of unprovoked aggression by the Axis powers. The British government, Ibn Saud was assured, had “a vital interest” in preserving unimpeded transit for ships moving through the Red Sea; thus giving Ibn Saud a quasi-guarantee of protection. As a symbol of this relationship, the British Foreign Office recommended

30 Nonneman, pp. 632-637.
the approval of an estimated £61,000 deal that would send a small number of warplanes, together with an air mission to train Saudi pilots and to maintain those planes.32

Anthony Cordesman and Gerd Nonneman suggest that military limitations on U.S. arms supplies to Saudi Arabia in the 1970s and 1980s – as a result of the pro-Israeli lobby in the U.S. Congress – led Riyadh to “look elsewhere.”33,34 To capitalize on the gap left by the U.S. limitations, France and Great Britain made determined efforts to supply Saudi Arabia with military hardware and capabilities. After five years of Saudi attempts to buy F-15 fighter-bombers were stalled in the U.S. Congress in 1985, the U.K. signed a £20 billion contract with the Saudi Air Force – the largest single defense contract in British history.35 The history of Saudi relations with both the U.S. and Europe illustrates that, no matter how prominent the U.S. may be in the region, Riyadh has historically valued the benefits of multi-dependence in maintaining its relative autonomy.

34 Nonneman, pp. 649.
35 Nonneman, pp. 650.
The Persian Gulf War of 1991, also known as Operation Desert Storm, was waged by a United Nations’ authorized force from thirty-four nations. It was preceded by the deployment of an American Quick Reaction Force (QFR) to Saudi Arabia at the request of the Saudi monarch, King Fahd Ibn Abd al-Aziz, within weeks of Saddam’s invasion of Kuwait. As it became known, Operation Desert Shield\(^{36}\) was to dissuade Iraq from attacking the Kingdom by confronting it with the threat of unacceptable cost.\(^{37}\) The shift from Desert Shield to Desert Storm was more than an operational shift from defense to offense; it was a strategic and policy shift from deterrence to compellance and from containment to coercion.

Fred Halliday, a Middle East scholar and published author, argues that the Gulf war had three unique defining characteristics.\(^{38}\) First, the war was the first significant armed conflict involving the armies of Arab states fighting together against another Arab state. Because of the inter-Arab division on display in this conflict, the Arab world – including North Africa – was involved both in the war and in any future resolution. Finally, Halliday states that Desert Storm was the first time the U.S. military was involved in significant intervention in the region.\(^{39}\) Perhaps the most telling characteristic of the Gulf war was that – albeit a war to liberate an Arab Muslim state – it

\(^{36}\) Operation Desert Shield began on August 7, 1990, with the deployment of U.S. forces to Saudi Arabia and officially ended on January 16, 1991.

\(^{37}\) Robert Friedman refers to this U.S. response as a case of “classical deterrence,” which he argues pursues a negative aim: to dissuade an adversary from taking action which he may/may not intend to take. Its success is also measured in negative terms: each day an attack does not happen it is deemed effect. Thus, in this example, Desert Shield was deemed successful because Saddam never invaded Saudi Arabia. However, whether Saddam intended to invade Saudi Arabia is inconsequential to the theory of classical deterrence. Freedman, pp. 31.


\(^{39}\) The U.S. was involved in much smaller interventions in Lebanon in 1958 and again in 1982-1984.
involved a mainly external western force with some token Arab political attachments that proved ineffective and incapable during major combat operations.

**Saddam’s Motivations to Invade Kuwait:**

Iraq emerged from its eight-year war with Iran in 1988 politically strong, but financially bankrupt. Saddam emerged from that war with an increase in relative power and prestige; some argue Iraq was “the most powerful state in the Gulf.” However, whatever regional pedigree Iraq had gained after the war, it was undercut by an economic post war debt. The eight-year war left Iraq with an enormous debt burden estimated between $70-$80 billion; approximately $40 billion were owed to the Saudi and Kuwaiti governments alone. Because of that debt, Saddam was facing internal domestic resentment at economic mismanagement and the inability of his government to provide needed food and resource subsidies. The invasion of Kuwait would distract domestic resentment at the economic crisis while also capturing Kuwaiti assets, investments, and oil wells. In the short run, Saddam’s move appeared to solve all of Iraq’s economic problems in one stroke: Kuwait was a quick source of food, consumer goods and cash, and would double Iraq’s oil reserves. The economic crisis is only one explanation posed by the available literature to explain Saddam’s decision to invade Kuwait.

While there is no disputing the fact that Iraq faced serious economic problems in the wake of the Iran war, Professor Gause III argues that the economic crisis is not itself sufficient to understanding Saddam’s motivations to invade. First, there is an unstated

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41 Kechichian, pp. 242.
assumption in this argument that economic problems lead naturally to aggressive policies. If that was the case, the world would have seen many more wars than it has, and Saddam would have perhaps chosen to go to war again. Thus, it is fair to argue that the economic crisis played a role in pushing Saddam to war, but it was not the sole motivation in itself.

Iraq had a long border dispute with Kuwait, on occasion denying the legitimacy of Kuwait as a separate state altogether. At the same time, Saddam’s legitimacy and credibility depended upon his attaining new foreign policy successes and enhancing Iraq’s international position. Iraq’s war decision was thus also partially due to a perception of increasing threats to the Saddam regime’s stability. As Saddam saw it, by refusing to forgive his war debts, the west and the Gulf states were involved in a conspiracy to overthrow him by squeezing and eventually bankrupting the Iraqi economy. An aim of Saddam’s decision was to break up what he perceived to be a regional and international effort to weaken and destabilize him domestically.

Saddam was not only interested in domestic stability, but he believed in his role as a supreme regional leader. He claimed that the eight year war debt should be forgiven because Iraq acted in defense of all Arab states in its war with Iran. Saddam was aspiring to be the new Nasser of the Middle East. Believing that striking at Kuwait would end external pressures against Iraq, Saddam chose the uncalculated decision to invade. Simply put, from a regional security perspective, Iraq sought hegemony and not coexistence.

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43 Freedman, pp. 24.
44 Gause, III (2002), pp. 56.
**Saudi Arabia’s Reaction:**

In many ways, Saddam shared the same grievances against Saudi Arabia that motivated him to invade Kuwait in 1990. Iraq and Saudi Arabia had an unsettled border dispute since the 1922 British Treaty of Muhammarah failed to define the boundaries between the two countries. Iraq also owed $25.7 billion in war debt to Saudi Arabia – relative to the $14 billion debt that Saddam was demanding Kuwait to forgive.\(^{45}\) Further, as a perceived direct threat to Saddam’s aspirations as a regional leader, the Saudi government maintained a strong historic military and political relationship with the United States and other western powers. Saudi Arabia was the only regional challenge to regional hegemony. Thus, it could be argued, that Saudi Arabia was perhaps more of a threat to Saddam than was Kuwait in pursuit of his aspirations.

While there is disagreement on how threatened the Saudi government felt directly from Saddam’s aggression against Kuwait in 1990, the literature on the topic relates the response of Middle Eastern states to a reassessment of their respective security interests and their defense policies. In fact, Saddam himself provided evidence of that notion when he appeared on the Arabic al-Jazirah satellite television in 1999 lambasting Arab Gulf rulers and calling on Arab masses to “revolt and unseat those stooges, collaborators, throne dwarfs and cowards, revolt against those who boast of friendship with the United States, [and] those who are guided by [US Defense Secretary] William Cohen.”\(^{46}\) As a direct consequence, the Kingdom “stiffened its back” and shelved its cherished non-interventionist policies of the past.\(^{47}\)

\(^{45}\) Kechichian, pp. 242.

\(^{46}\) Kechichian, pp. 243.

\(^{47}\) Kechichian, pp. 232.
In 1993, F. Gregory Gause, III authored a scholarly analysis of the impact of the Gulf War in which he argued that the impact of the Gulf War on Saudi Arabia was more internal than external. In “Saudi Arabia: Desert Storm and After,” Gause agrees with the consensus amongst scholars and policymakers at the time that the results of the Gulf war altered the distribution of power in the region and opened the possibility of new security alignments for Saudi Arabia. However, Gause stipulates that the war in itself forced Saudi Arabia to alter its security policies only as a way to respond to the domestic pressures generated by Saddam and the presence of foreign troops in the Kingdom. Up to 1993, Gause believed that “little has changed” in the Saudi approach to security.

In the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf war, Saudi Arabia was weighing three primary sets of interrelated issues in devising its security strategy. First, the Saudi government was forced to reassess the size and structure of its own military. The Armed Forces of Saudi Arabia and other GCC states failed to deter Saddam from invading Kuwait and from threatening the security of the Kingdom. Joseph A. Kechichian in “Trends in Saudi National Security,” argues that Saddam’s invasion of Kuwait demonstrated that the Saudi military – with or without the United States “over-the-horizon” presence – could not deter Saddam from invading Kuwait and threatening the Kingdom. This leads directly to the second primary issue confronting the Kingdom’s security strategy, that is: a reassessment of the extent and visibility of its security relationship with the United States.

Certainly, equipping and training a Saudi force that is capable of deterring aggressors and defending the sovereignty of the Kingdom would require a large-scale

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51 Kechichian, pp. 250-253.
commitment from the United States. Such a commitment would require Saudi Arabia to be more willing than it had been in the past to enter into open, public, and formal long-term security arrangements with the United States. The Saudi government began this step by hosting the more than 70,000 U.S. military personnel as part of Operation Desert Shield. However, this was in fact a curious position for the al Saud government. Being seen as a de-facto colony of the United States would be risky for the Saudis both domestically and regionally. The third aspect of postwar Saudi security policy is the nature of security relations with western powers. Over-reliance on one state for its security could entail serious long-term repercussions for the stability of the country.

There is no disagreement within the published literature on the implications of Saddam’s aggressions on Kuwait and his threats to Saudi Arabia on the Kingdom’s military posture. Kechichian and other scholars argue that even if Iraq was military weakened after the Gulf war, Saudi Arabia continued to perceive Saddam as a long-term regional hegemon.\textsuperscript{52,53,54} In the wake of regional challenges to its national security, the emergence of the Kingdom as an effective military power in the region was all but inevitable. There were continuing challenges posed by Iran and Iraq, the Yemeni revolution and push to promote participatory government, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as well as changes in GCC states’ relations with each other and with global powers. Saudi Arabia was also facing security challenges because of the deployment by Iran of long-range air and missile strike capabilities, not to mention a region-wide build-up of

\textsuperscript{52} Kechichian, pp. 232.
\textsuperscript{53} Sours, pp. 43-51.
\textsuperscript{54} Kenneth M. Pollack. “Securing the Gulf.” \textit{Foreign Affairs}, Vol. 82, No. 4 (July – August, 2003), pp. 2-16.
weapons of mass destruction.\textsuperscript{55} Because of these uncertain security challenges, many of which could not be altered or influenced, the Kingdom was forced into a position of leadership in the region.

The Saudi government could no longer afford to ensure its own security by relying on the good intentions of its Arab and Muslim neighbors. This new leadership position brought both responsibilities and challenges. The issues confronting Saudi military capabilities at the time were:\textsuperscript{56}

- Direct defense against threats from Iran, Iraq, and Yemen;
- The threat of long-range ballistic missiles;
- The need for strong air units to compensate for weak land forces;
- The need for sufficient naval capabilities to protect both its lengthy coasts, as well as the strategic Straits for Hormuz and Bab al-Mandab;
- The need for enough land forces to defend its vast territory;
- Acquisition of strike capabilities to inflict damage to potential aggressors;
- Eventual expansion of a strike capability to deter chemical, biological, and nuclear attacks;
- Reliance on high-technology weapons systems to help compensate for inadequate unit strength;
- The need for improved training and support facilities, even if foreign technicians overwhelm the technical ranks; and,
- The need to disperse combat forces to border areas to limit coup d’etat possibilities.

In large measure, the Gulf war was fought to prevent Iraq from becoming the dominant regional power and threatening the regional balance of power. The coalition arrayed against Iraq testified to the undesirability of that outcome. A “greater Iraq” had fought a war first with Iran and then with the gulf Arab states. A strong Saddam would be in a position to influence the strategic and economic events throughout the region.\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{55} Kechichian, pp. 247.
\textsuperscript{56} Kechichian, pp. 251.
\textsuperscript{57} Sours, pp. 47.
In the aftermath of the Gulf war, Saudi Arabia had no reason to entrust other regional powers or see regional alliances like the GCC or Arab League as a cornerstone to its security. While the multinational coalition that removed Iraqi forces from Kuwait should have produced a renewed sense of collective security and trust in coalition warfare, the war-fighting reality was different. The United States provided virtually all sophisticated communications equipment, conducted battle management, and supplied the required intelligence and electronic warfare capabilities. Only the U.S., UK, and Royal Saudi Air Forces were capable of conducting air defense missions over Kuwait. France did not commit military forces or send its naval carrier group into operation until its Minister of Defense had resigned in protest of the war. Saudi Arabia was the only Arab state to deploy a significant air and ground force to the coalition. Egypt and Syria, the other leading Arab members of the coalition, played a token role in land warfare. The Syrian forces were neither equipped nor capable of engaging in combat missions, and – according to analysis of the war – the Egyptian forces advanced slowly, showed serious political reluctance to engage Iraq, and fell behind the Saudi forces.

**Strength of the Armed Forces:**

In April 1991 – two months after the end of combat operations – King Fahd of Saudi Arabia delivered an address to his nation on Saudi public television. In his

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58 Cordesman, pp. 22.
59 Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) sent battalion sized forces each. According to Cordesman, these forces – although few in numbers – fought reasonably well in some engagements, but did not engage in major combat operations.
60 Cordesman, pp. 20.
statement, the King set the parameters by which the Saudi government would reconfigure its military planning in light of the Gulf war:

Regarding the building of the [Saudi] Armed Forces, the main lesson to be learned from the Gulf crisis and the experience of our forces, who performed extremely well, and our decisive decision to immediately embark on expanding and strengthening our Armed Forces, providing them with the most effective and most advanced land, sea, and air weapons the world has produced as well as advanced military and technical equipment.61

The strength of the Armed Forces became an important part of Riyadh’s analysis of lessons learned from the Gulf war. Even if Saddam was weakened after the war, there were no guarantees that Baghdad had surrendered its hegemonic regional aspirations. Further, there were no guarantees to Saudi Arabia’s security from future aggressors, who – like Saddam Hussein – may seek to tip the balance of power in their favor by threatening to challenge the status quo or invade another neighboring state. As a direct consequence of its decision to reverse a decade old policy of keeping U.S. military relations “at arms length” and “over the horizon,” Riyadh was shelving its faith in regional alliances and Arab Muslim solidarity.

By all comparisons, Saudi Arabia never placed an importance on the strength of its Armed forces, in terms of numbers, prior to the Gulf war in 1991. Based on SIPRI and IISS reporting, the Kingdom maintained a military of approximately 80,000 personnel between 1985 and 1989.62,63 [See Figure 2. Military Strength of Saudi Arabia (1985-2000)].

In contrast to its regional neighbors, for example, Turkey had a military exceeding 800,000 personnel, and Syria and Egypt with 400,000 personnel each during the same

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61 Kechichian, pp. 248.
The strength of the Saudi military between 1985 and 1990 closely compared to that of Jordan’s, a country with approximately a third of the Kingdom’s territory, a third of Riyadh’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and less than 25 percent of Saudi Arabia’s population.\(^\text{64}\)

\(^{64}\) CIA, *World Factbook*, 1985-1990. According to the 1989 CIA World Factbook, the Saudi population in 1989 was approximately 16.1 million (6 million eligible for military service) compared to Jordan’s total population of 3 million (697,000 eligible for military service).
In response to the King’s decision to increase the number of personnel in the Saudi Armed Forces after the Gulf war, Saudi military planning relative to the strength of its armed forces was changing. Riyadh undertook the Malcor Report Joint Security Review in August 1991 with the United States. The resulting plan called for a three corps Saudi force of five divisions by the year 2000. The Joint Review recommended a conversion from a brigade-oriented command structure to a division-oriented structure. Riyadh also planned to develop the capacity to deploy up to three divisions in the north to defend the Kingdom’s Gulf Coast and its border with Iraq. Another division would deploy near the capital, and a fifth division in the south near the border with Yemen.

Between 1990 and 2000, Saudi Arabia increased the strength of its armed forces considerably. In 1990 and 1991 alone, immediately after Saddam’s invasion of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia experienced the most significant increase in personnel serving in the Armed Forces compared to Iraq’s other neighbors. In 1990, Riyadh added 64,000 new soldiers spread throughout the Saudi Army, Air Force, Navy, and National Guard. Again in 1991, Saudi Arabia added another 45,000 personnel for a total of 191,000 by the beginning of 1992. This increase of a total of 109,000 personnel in a period of two years was the largest single increase by any of Iraq’s neighbors. By 2001, the Saudi Armed Forces consisted of a total of 162,500 personnel: 127,000 in the Army and National Guard, 20,000 in the Reserve, and 15,500 in the Royal Paramilitary Force. This plus-up represented an increase of 50 percent compared to the number of personnel in the Saudi military in 1989, the year prior to Saddam’s aggressions against Kuwait.

65 Cordesman, pp. 24 - 25.
Military Expenditures:

In addition to the increase in the manpower strength of the Armed Forces, Saudi military expenditures increased after 1991 [See Figure 4. Saudi Arabia’s Military Expenditures (1985-2000)]. This was in sharp contrast to substantial cuts introduced by the Saudi government in the mid-1980s. Based on SIPRI and IISS reporting, Saudi military expenditures reached a relatively low level of $16 billion in 1989 from a high of $21 billion in 1985, and a peak of $25 billion in 1983 at the height of Riyadh’s support to Saddam during the Iran-Iraq war.\(^{67,68}\) Between 1985-1990, Riyadh spent a total of $110 billion on military expenditures; an annual average of 17.6 percent of its GDP. However, that figure includes the $25 billion that was lent to Iraq during prior to 1988.

![Figure 4. Saudi Arabia's Military Expenditures (1985-2000)](image)

In that same time period prior to Saddam’s invasion of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia’s other neighbors spent approximately the same amount on military expenditures [See Figure 5. Military Expenditures of Iraq’s Neighbors (1985-2000)]. Between 1985 and


1990, Turkey spent a total of $46.5 billion (3.7 percent of average GDP), compared to Egypt’s $21.4 billion (8.9 percent of average GDP), Syria’s $16.6 billion (12 percent of average GDP), and Jordan’s $4.3 billion (12 percent of average GDP).

![Figure 5. Military Expenditures of Iraq’s Neighbors (1985-2000)](image)


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69 Cordesman (2001), pp. 5.
Saddam’s invasion of Kuwait in 1990 demonstrated that the Saudi military – with or without a western and U.S. security guarantee “over the horizon” – could not deter aggressors from invading or threatening the Kingdom. This recognition, perhaps more than any previous intra-Arab conflict, led to an increase in Saudi military expenditures, posture, manpower, and war fighting capability.
The Saudi government’s mandate after the Gulf war was not only to expand the armed forces “in men,” but also in hardware.\textsuperscript{70} ACDA reporting indicates that Saudi Arabia signed a majority of its arms sales and obtained most of its military imports from three nations: the United States, France, and Britain [See Figure 6. Saudi Arabia’s Arms Sales (1985-2000); and, Figure 7. Saudi Arabia’s Military Deliveries (1985-2000)]. The Saudis have long supplemented their military relationship with the United States by entering into arms sales agreements with other western powers as a way not to become too dependent on one source for security. European powers have made determined efforts to capture major arms agreements with Saudi Arabia. From the early 1980s during the Iran-Iraq war, French and British arms contracts were consistently more than those Riyadh signed with the United States. The most striking European arms contract was the al-Yamamah deal, which was signed in July 1985 with the UK, worth an estimated $30 billion over 20 years.\textsuperscript{71}

\textit{Arms Imports Trends 1985-1990:}

ACDA and SIPRI reporting indicate that Saudi Arabia signed new arms agreements worth $12.125 billion of military equipment between the period of 1985 and 1990.\textsuperscript{72,73} This included $5.1 billion worth of sales with the U.S., $2.5 billion with France, $1.9 billion with the UK, $525 million with West Germany, $200 million with Italy, and $1.9 billion of arms sales with other countries. During that time period, Saudi

\textsuperscript{70} Kechichian, pp. 250.
\textsuperscript{71} The deal was signed after five years of failed attempts to buy F-15 fighter jets from the U.S. as a result of opposition to the deal in the U.S. Congress. Nonneman, pp. 649.
\textsuperscript{72} Cordesman (1997), pp. 108.
military sales decreased compared to the 1979-1985 period, which covers the time from the fall of the Shah of Iran through the years of the Iran-Iraq War. This is consistent with the decrease of the Saudi military expenditures discussed earlier during the same timeframe. In terms of actual deliveries of military goods between 1985 and 1990, which covers the period immediately prior to Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia took delivery of $19.5 billion, to include $5.8 billion from the U.S., $7.5 billion from France, $2.5 billion from the PRC, $2.1 billion from the UK, $30 million from Italy, and $1.6 million from other countries (to include Austria, Belgium, Italy, Spain, and Switzerland).

**Arms Imports Trends 1991-1995:**

Between 1991 and 1995 – the period immediately after Saddam’s invasion of Kuwait – Riyadh significantly increased its levels of arms imports than in any time in its history. Between 1991 and 1995, Riyadh signed new arms agreements worth a total of $30.2 billion of military imports. This includes $20.2 billion with the U.S., $9.2 billion with the UK, $525 million with France. This represents a significant shift to U.S. arms from the previous 5 years prior to the Gulf war. In terms of actual deliveries, which were as a result of agreements signed in the mid to late 1980s, Saudi Arabia imported $20.5 billion worth of military goods between 1991 and 1995. This includes $9.6 billion from the UK, $8.6 billion from the U.S., and $525 million from France. However, the figures of British arms deliveries are somewhat misleading as they reflect deliveries of past orders of aircrafts as a result of the al-Yamamah deal signed in 1985.

**Arms Imports Trends 1996-2000:**

More than 5 years after the Gulf war, Saudi Arabia maintained a relatively high level of new arms agreements and deliveries of military goods, albeit at much reduced
levels than in the period immediately following the Gulf war. In the period of 1995-2000, Riyadh signed $8.8 billion worth of new arms agreements. That includes $6.2 billion of new arms with the U.S., $1.93 billion with the UK, and $92 million with France. New arms sales agreements with the U.S. alone during that time period represented more than 70 percent of the total agreements with other countries combined. Although Saudi expenditures had decreased during this time period, which effectively reduced the levels of new arms agreements, Riyadh’s military imports in this period were still relatively high as a result of Saudi Arabia’s spending-spree following the Gulf war. Between 1996 and 2000, Saudi Arabia took delivery of $19.5 billion worth of military imports, including $7.7 billion from the US, $5.8 billion from the UK, and $250 million from France.

![Figure 6. Saudi Arabia's Arms Sales (1985-2000)](image)
FINDINGS

The Gulf war demonstrated that the ability to use force was the only way to achieve security in the region, and Saudi Arabia would only be secure by ensuring its own security as opposed to over-reliance on regional alliances and foreign guarantors. The Kingdom’s increase in the strength of its armed force and military expenditures after the war demonstrate a shift in Saudi Arabia’s military planning. This shift, when put in contrast to the responses of Iraq’s other neighbors, portrays Saudi Arabia’s security vulnerabilities and how the Kingdom responded – for the first time – to an aggression by one Arab Muslim state against another.

The challenges facing Saudi Arabia after the Gulf War led to an increase in the Kingdom’s defense expenditures, military manpower, and capabilities. Between 1990 and 2000, Saudi Arabia increased the strength of its armed forces considerably. In the first two years after Saddam’s invasion of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia added a total of 191,000 new personnel into its military. In terms of military expenditures after the war, the Kingdom also placed a more considerable portion of its budget towards the military. Saudi military expenditures rose to $131 billion between 1991 and 1995, and to $105 billion between 1996 and 2000. These figures represent an increase of approximately 37 percent compared to the military expenditures of Iraq’s other neighbors after the war.

The emergence of Riyadh as an effective military power in the region was all but inevitable. Saudi military requirements needed to be addressed in formulating Saudi national security policy. This plus-up in requirements also highlighted the need for assistance from the United States and other allies.
After the Gulf war, the Saudi government continued to pursue its historic trend of signing arms sales with western powers that not only provided the Kingdom with leading-edge technology, but also brought those powers closer with commercial and economic ties to the ruling al-Saud government in Riyadh. Historically, Saudi Arabia had played a “balancing act” in managing its relations with western powers. In addition, as was previously discussed, military limitations on U.S. arms supplies to Saudi Arabia in the 1970s and 1980s as a result of the pro-Israeli lobby, had led the Kingdom to look to other western powers (notably UK and France) as a way to balance its arms sales with the United States. The most striking European arms contract was the al-Yamamah deal, which was signed in July 1985 with the UK, worth an estimated $30 billion. This deal shifted the entire structure of the Saudi air force from dependence on the United States to dependence on the UK.

Anthony Cordesman of CSIS correctly points out that Saudi arms imports did not increase a result of the Gulf war. However, the new arms agreements reflect a major shift to the U.S. market, and a decline in orders from Europe and China. A study of the arms sales between Saudi Arabia and the United States, in contrast to sales with other European and non-western powers, demonstrates that Saudi military planning in terms of

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76 Nonneman, pp. 649.
77 The deal was signed after five years of failed attempts to buy F-15 fighter jets from the U.S. as a result of opposition to the deal in the U.S. Congress.
its arms sales after the Gulf war heavily shifted away from western European suppliers to the United States. This is perhaps not a perplexing conclusion.

From the Saudi government’s perspective after-all, it was the U.S. military that provided virtually all sophisticated communications equipment, conducted battle management, and supplied the required intelligence and electronic warfare capabilities. British, French, and other members of the multi-national Coalition to liberate Kuwait played a supporting role to U.S. and Saudi forces. Saudi arms sales after the Gulf war were thus perhaps fueled by recognition of vulnerability, but also in part due to admiration for the performance of U.S. weaponry during the war. \(^8\)  

In the years after Saddam’s invasion and the subsequent Gulf war to liberate Kuwait, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia – more specifically its government – deliberately undertook a strategic shift in its military planning. In terms of the strength of its armed forces as well as the dedication of funds and resources to support the standing-up of a stronger military, Riyadh’s security perspective changed as a result of Saddam’s aggressions in 1990. As this study examined, the Kingdom’s shift in its military and strategic planning were not only short lived, but also continued well into the late 1990s.

\(^8\) Freedman, pp. 65.
WHEREAS in the years prior to the war the Saudi ruling family had maintained a close, but “over-the-horizon” relationship with the United States, that security relationship also experienced a strategic shift after the Gulf war. In terms of bilateral arms sales for example, the U.S.-Saudi Arabian relationship transitioned to a closer partnership that brought the former to the Kingdom’s water’s edge through the provision of military hardware, as well as training, exchanges, exercises, and senior level contacts, which extend beyond the scope of this study. The Saudi government had historically walked a tightrope between maintaining this security alliance – that provided for its protection – and the appearance of being too heavily reliant on a western non-Muslim country for its security.

However, the Gulf war proved that Saudi security fears – in this case from a regional Arab Muslim state – triumphed any fear the Saudi royal family may have had from appearing to be too close to the United States. The emergence of Saddam Hussein in 1990 as a challenger to Saudi Arabia’s regional standing was in itself reason enough to transition the bilateral security relationship with the United States from “over-the-horizon” to “the water’s edge.”

**Contributions to the Topic:**

The intent of this study was not to duplicate previous historical narratives of the 1990 Gulf war or the history of Saudi Arabia’s relationship with the United States or other states. The aim was also not to provide a quantitative analysis of the Kingdom’s military planning in terms of its capabilities. To the contrary, the study utilized the available research and data on Saudi Arabia’s military capabilities to provide an
overarching, testable, and documented analysis of the Kingdom’s security concerns, its perceived threats and vulnerabilities, as well as how the Kingdom altered its military planning and relations with western powers in response to a rogue threat to its security.

Although scholars and academics have studied the short-term impact of the Gulf war on Saudi Arabia’s security, previous assessments failed to adequately dissect the impact of Iraq’s provocation in 1990 on Riyadh’s military planning in terms of its military strength, military effectiveness, and relations with other militaries. In particular, the available literature does not provide a testable consensus on how Saddam’s actions affected the psyche of the Saudi government. Understanding Riyadh’s response to Saddam’s actions in 1990 provides policymakers and academics with a predictive measure by which to understand how the Kingdom may respond in the future to those who not only challenge the ruling family’s legitimacy, but also those who seek to destabilize the regional balance of power.

The Gulf war and Saddam’s invasion of Kuwait were in effect only the tools used by this study to assess how Riyadh responds to threats to its security. Further, the events of 1990 and 1991 also were used as a way to examine how the Saudi government might react in the future to potential challengers to its hegemony as a leader in the Arab Muslim world and as a regional power.

**Lessons and Implications:**

By examining whether Saddam’s invasion of Kuwait had an impact on Saudi Arabia’s military planning and its security relations with western powers, this study provides a number of implications for U.S. policymakers to weigh, especially considering
the rise of new powers in the region that, based on Riyadh’s perceptions, present a potential challenge to the Kingdom’s legitimacy and standing in the Muslim world.

The Gulf war and the revamp of Saudi Arabia’s military planning after 1991 were undertaken to prevent the emergence of “a greater Iraq,” which would have been able to step into a powerful position in the region, and undoubtedly be able to influence global events. Today, the Saudi government, as well as the United States and other regional states, are weighing the same scenario based on the emergence of the Islamic Republic of Iran as a regional power player. In light of the current policy and security challenges being presented by Iran’s reported pursuit of a nuclear weapons program, how will Saudi Arabia respond? Seeing Iran as a potential threat to the regional balance of power, but more importantly as a direct threat to the Kingdom’s security, how might Riyadh reassess its military planning, in terms of the strength of its armed forces, its military expenditure, but – more specifically to this case – to its relationship with the United States and other western powers?

It is quite possible that Saudi Arabia will respond to Iran’s emergence as a regional power in the same way it responded to Iraq in 1990. With an increase in military strength, to the allocation of more funds towards its military in order to provide more equipment, supplies, training, and education opportunities for its forces, as well as an increase it’s the number – as well as the dollar value – of its arms sales with other powers, these may be the same solutions pursued by Riyadh in response to Iran’s perceived threat. In fact, the sings are evident that this may be the pursued course of action. In December 2010, the U.S. administration of President Barack Obama announced a new $60 billion arms sales deal with Saudi Arabia. The reported deal
includes the sale of new combat aircrafts, air munitions, surface-to-air missiles, patrol ships, as well as maintenance equipment and training.\textsuperscript{81} The deal is not only intended to increase the capabilities of the Saudi Armed Forces as it essentially does not add significant capabilities than the weapons supplied during the last decade. Most strategically, the new arms deal is intended to contain Iran by displaying a greater capability to deter and defend Saudi territory and any Iranian expansionism in the region. However, deterrence in this case is in the eye of the beholder.

With the increase in Saudi Arabia’s military planning and arms imports after the Gulf war also come some consequences that policymakers must be well aware of. Today, the Persian Gulf is one of the most militarized regions on the world. In 1995, every Gulf state except Iran devoted more of its GDP to military expenditures than the world average of 4.2 percent.\textsuperscript{82} According to the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, between 1992 and 1994 alone, the Middle East imported approximately $34 billion in arms, or about 43 percent of the world’s total.\textsuperscript{83} On one hand this fact is quite comprehensible. The region is widespread with active territorial disputes,\textsuperscript{84} and has witnessed major wars. In addition, the region’s economic and financial impact on the global oil and financial markets are immense. These arms sales and the military build-up were intended to provide the purchaser with a means for deterrence. In the case of Saudi Arabia after the 1991, for example, its increase in military planning and arms sales, as well as its closer

\textsuperscript{83} Gause, III (1997), pp. 12.
\textsuperscript{84} At present there are internal regional border disputes between Iran and UAE, Iran and Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Yemen, and Qatar and Bahrain. This does not specifically include the historic conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, part of which remains the prospect for a “land-for-peace” settlement.
security relationship with the United States, were meant to deter Saddam from threatening the Kingdom’s stability or the security of the al-Saud government. However, what is meant as a means of deterrence for one may be a threat of hostility to another.

Simply put, while the increase in Saudi military planning and its arms sales with the United States after 1991 were meant to deter future aggressors, future increases may be perceived as a sign of hostility by an emerging power, such as Iran. Thus, it is critical for both the U.S. and Saudi governments – as well as other governments that may choose to be involved – to wisely consider the costs, benefits, consequences and implications of future increases in Saudi military planning in response to Iran. Neither increasing the strength and size of a state’s military, nor acquiring new advanced weaponry may in themselves provide the ultimate solution intended.

Finally, there is no guarantee today and in the future that the United States remains be the sole supplier of arms to Saudi Arabia. China, seeking to gain increased access in the region, may very well eclipse the United States in terms of supplying the Kingdom with the equipment, tools, and hardware it requires, especially since the United States was not able to deter or prevent Iran from pursuing a nuclear weapons program. These are but a few considerations that current and future U.S. policymakers must consider. Not only will these implications impact the bilateral U.S.-Saudi relationship, but they will also have an impact on debate of Iran’s nuclear program, the United States’ strategic interests in the region, and – to a greater extent – how current and future U.S. government will conduct the military-to-military contacts and the security cooperation relationships with allies and friends in this vital region of the world.
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