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Syria and the Evolving Politico-Strategic Dynamics in the Gulf

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Syria and the Evolving Politico-Strategic Dynamics in the Gulf

The ongoing crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic is generally seen as an expansion of the Arab Spring Arab Awakening in the Gulf region, particularly ignited by popular support for democratic transition and resolving longstanding socio-economic and governance issues. Its roots, however, are intrinsic to the geo-political and geo-strategic malaise, long simmering between the two dominant regional powers, viz., the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran. The fall of the Ba'athist regime in Iraq, a strategic buffer between Shia Iran and Sunni Saudi Arabia's desire to dominate the Islamic world, has resurrected the hoary hegemonic race. The raging wave of Arab Spring has provided them an opportune pretext to settle their old scores.

In this entire Gulf dynamics, ethno-sectarian instruments have been galvanised to achieve their objectives. This time around, from this author's analogical perspective, Iran is the bull's eye; Syria is the bow-and-arrow; and the GCC member countries, Turkey and some countries across the Red Sea are the archers.

The Arab Spring has been seen through different strategic prisms. But are there other elements to this conflict or has it been propelled by vested Western interests? Is there popular support to the movement against the present Syrian regime or is it a pretext for launching attacks against it? Is it merely a media-managed conflagration? Or is it another step taken by the West to control energy resources of the region? This paper discusses these issues in the light of the ongoing developments and the historical narrative of the ethnic frictions, leading to the Shia Spring in a democratic setup in the region. The paper also builds scenarios for the future and how these can be resolved or managed by the regional and major powers.

Historical Analogies

The end of the Ba'athist regime in Iraq ended the centuries-old ethnic-minority Sunnis' rule over ethnic-majority Shia. Earlier, Salafist-dominated Sunni Arab regimes tacitly supported Saddam and actively supported his eight-year-long war with Shia Iran (September 1980 to August 1988).

In the backdrop of the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq–Iran War, in March 1981 the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) was formed as a sub-regional bloc, to include Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE): the two big regional bullies – Iraq and Iran, were kept out. The hidden agenda of the GCC was to collectively defend its member states from external intervention.[1] The bloc was welcomed by the Western countries.

Earlier, with the fall of the Shah of Iran the US had lost a trusted ally in the region. President Nixon perceived Iran as a cold-war bulkhead against the Soviet Union's possible designs on warm-water ports in the Gulf for Soviet naval power as well as on Iran's oil wealth.[2] After the loss of Iran to the radical anti-American forces and the occupation of Afghanistan in 1979 by the USSR, US policy on Gulf security transformed from "minimal" to "vital". Carter diplomacy pronounced in January 1980 that "any attempt by an outside force to gain control of the Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interest of the United States".[3] Consequently, any initiative from the Gulf oil monarchies was a welcome step for the US and its allies whose vital interests are associated with the region. Building defence capability of the Gulf monarchies became a paramount imperative of US foreign policy.

Militarising the GCC Bloc – Building Mistrust

At some point of time the US and the Western allies conceived of converting the southern Gulf States into "NATO of the Arab Gulf"[4].[5] The GCC countries also built their own comprehensive defence structure under the Peninsular Shield Force (PSF) (*Dira' al Jazeera*)[6] in 1982. The basic aim of PSF was "to deter, and respond to, military aggression against any of the GCC member countries". The PSF was expanded twice, in 1992 and in 2006, and a massive defence infrastructure was built with headquarters in Saudi Arabia.[7] This was followed by massive purchase of latest defence equipment, arms and ammunition, fighter jets, including F16, P3C Orion 30, and

other defence-related items (Table 1, Figures I and II). The military manpower of the GCC was also increased. The emphasis was on boosting air power rather than ground and maritime power. To add to the air power, a variety of long-, medium- and short-range tactical missiles were also acquired.[8] According to SIPRI, during 1988–2010, almost $629 billion was spent by the five member countries of GCC, except Qatar, on defence and defence-related items (Table 2).

Figures I and II show that in the traditional military setup, Iran is undoubtedly a regional heavyweight; however, its presence is countered by the modernisation of Arab Gulf' defence systems

From the five years' average annual defence expenditure of the major countries of the region, it becomes apparent that the defence expenditure in the Arab Gulf region fluctuates according to the relative defence expenditure of the two regional giants, Iran and Saudi Arabia. During 1990-94 and 1995-99, nonetheless, Iran's defence expenditure surpassed that of the rest of the regional players: it rose by 16.3 per cent and 16.5 per cent, respectively, during the two periods, while that of Saudi Arabia and the GCC moved from –4 per cent and –6.5 per cent to 8.0 per cent and 2.7 per cent respectively, much less incremental than that of Iran. This trend continued during 2000-4. Although Iran made a meagre increment in defence expenditure, it maintained the lead. Saudi Arabia's average annual defence expenditure witnessed a meagre increment of 1 per cent, followed by GCC 1.6 per cent, whereas Iran recorded

Table 1: Military Strength of the Gulf States, 2011

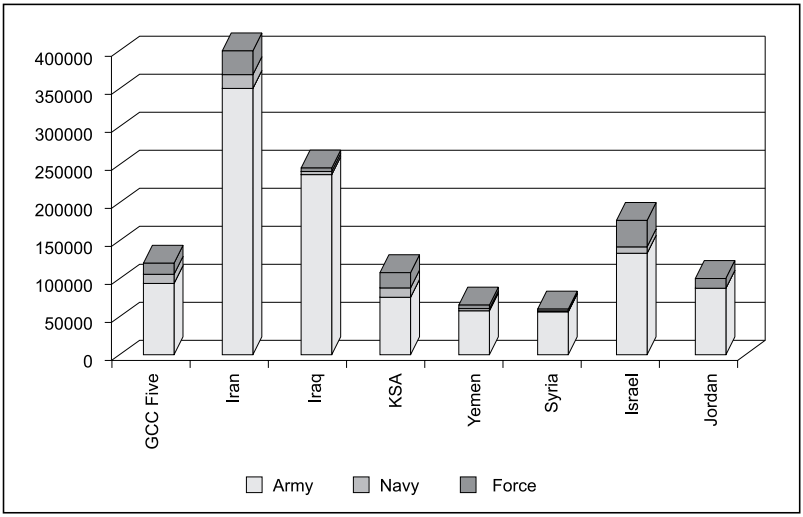
		Bahrain	Kuwait	Iran	Iraq	Oman	Qatar	Saudi Arabia	UAE	Yemen	Syria	Israel	Jordan
Active Force (2011)	Army	6000	11,000	350,000	238,010	25,000	8500	75,000	44,000	60,000	57,000	133,000	88,000
	Navy	700	2000	18,000	2605	4200	1800	13,500	2500	1700	1100	9500	500
	Air Force	1500	2500	30,000	5167	5000	1500	20,000	4500	3000	1000	34,000	12,000
	Total	**8200**	**15,500**	**523,000[a]**	**245,782**	**42,600[b]**	**11,800**	**233,500[c]**	**51,000**	**66,500[d]**	**59,100**	**176,500**	**100,500**
Main Battle Tank		180	293	1613	212	117	30	565	471	790	326	3501	1044
Artillery		92	218	8196	n/a	233	89	855	561	1167	492	5432	1232
Anti-Tank Weapons		45	332	2720	n/a	200	144	2600	717	820	NA	NA	NA
Air Defence Weapons		117	n/a	1882	n/a	58	58	1191	277	234	NA	NA	NA

Source: *Military Balance, 2011*, IISS, London.

Note: The total active forces of Iran, Oman, Saudi Arabia and Yemen include the following categories of trained personnel:

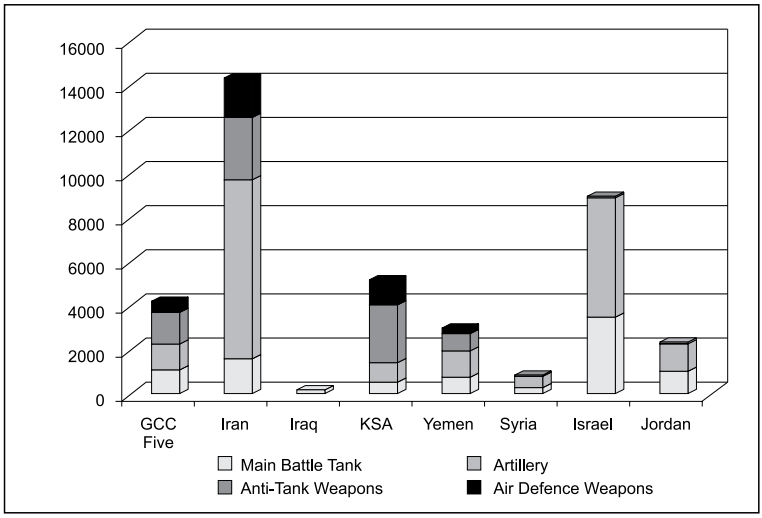
1. *Iran*: Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps 125,000.
2. *Oman*: foreign force 2000; Royal household 6400.
3. *Saudi Arabia*: Industrial Security Force 9000; National Guard 100,000; Air Defence 16,000.
4. *Yemen*: Air Defence 2000.

Figure 1. Iran's Military Assets vis-à-vis Rest of the Gulf Region



Note: GCC Five comprises Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and the UAE.
Source: Table 1.

Figure II. Iran's Military Hardware Profile vis-à-vis Rest of the Gulf Region



Note : Iraqi figures are not available (n/a)
Source: Table 1.

a 3.6 per cent average annual growth rate (Table 3). This was despite the fact that it was not procuring arms from the US and received no military aid from the US.

It is apparent that the continued increment in Iran's defence expenditure worked as a catalyst for an arms race in the region. Consequently, during 2000/4–2005/10 Saudi Arabia and the GCC increased their average annual defence expenditure: from 1 per cent to 28.2 per cent and from 1.6 per cent to 18.1 per cent respectively. It is interesting to note that during this period Iran's defence expenditure declined by –4.9 per cent. The rise in oil prices as well as changing security dynamics, particularly in the aftermath of the two Gulf Wars, may have stirred the GCC countries to resort to heavy arms purchases, while Iranian defence started facing the impact of three decades of arms sanctions. Growing weaknesses in traditional military capability on one hand and modernising defence capabilities of the GCC countries may have forced the Iranian strategists to consider developing nuclear capability for military purposes and balance the increasing imbalances in the region.[10] Besides this, with the rise and growth of ethno-sectarian sentiments in the region, Iran was further emboldened to move ahead with the militarisation programme. In addition to bilateral suspicions between Shia Iran and Sunni Saudi Arabia, the collapse of the former USSR has also been a causative factor in accelerating the arms race in the region. The USSR had provided generous supply of arms to some of these countries. The post-cold war period thus witnessed a sudden increase in the defence budgets

Table 2: Military Expenditure of the GCC Countries vis-à-vis Iran: 1988–2007

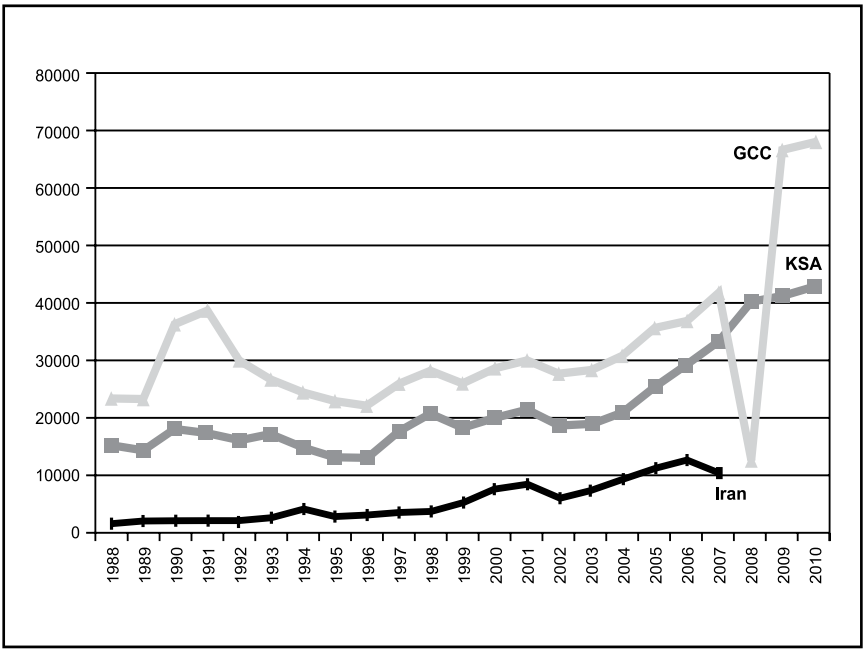
	Bahrain		Kuwait		Oman		Saudi Arabia		UAE		Total GCCTop of Form Bottom of Form		Iran	
Year	**US $ (Mil.)**	**% of GDP**	**US $ (Mil.)**	**% of GDP**	**US $ (Mil.)**	**% of GDP**	**US $ (Mil.)**	**% of GDP**	**US $ (Mil.)**	**% of GDP**	**US $ (Mil.)**	**% of GDP***	**US $ (Mil.)**	**% of GDP***
1988	213	5	2540	8.2	1722	18.3	15,262	15.2	3658	8.6	23,395	12.47	1676	2
1989	222	5.1	3154	8.5	1810	16.7	14,422	13.4	3703	7.8	23,311	11.24	2104	2.4
1990	242	4.8	12,168	48.5	2102	16.5	18,123	14	3637	6.2	36,272	15.70	2279	2
1991	263	5.1	15,857	117.3	1741	14.8	17,283	12.5	3499	6.3	38,643	17.23	2215	1.7
1992	279	5.3	8037	31.8	2085	16.2	16,244	11.3	3395	6.1	30,040	12.37	1971	1.4
1993	271	4.8	3889	12.4	1985	15.4	17,216	12.5	3255	6.1	26,616	11.04	2675	1.5
1994	275	4.6	4126	13.3	2087	15.7	14,860	10.6	3093	5.9	24,441	10.06	4136	2.4
1995	285	4.7	4525	13.6	2028	14.6	13,099	9.3	3011	5.5	22,948	9.22	2979	1.8
1996	303	4.7	3848	10.3	1909	12.5	13,078	8.5	[2982]	[5.1]	22,120	7.05	3310	1.9
1997	297	4.6	2933	8.1	1978	12.5	17,760	11	3016	4.8	25,984	9.19	3689	2.1
1998	304	4.8	2735	8.8	1774	12.5	20,513	14.3	2986	5.1	28,312	11.16	3891	2.4
1999	340	4.9	2658	7.6	1797	11.4	18,260	11.4	2950	4.3	26,005	9.08	5435	3
2000	337	4	3082	7.2	2139	10.6	20,125	10.6	2876	3.4	28,559	8.26	7816	3.7

2001	355	4.2	3029	7.7	2488	12.2	21,434	11.5	2836	3.4	30,142	8.92	8552	3.9
2002	424	4.7	3126	7.4	2562	12.3	18,817	9.8	2862	3.3	27,791	7.92	6162	2.3
2003	487	4.8	3369	6.5	2695	12.1	18,956	8.7	2807	2.8	28,314	7.04	7503	2.7
2004	491	4.3	3626	5.8	3030	12	21,074	8.4	2585	2.3	30,806	6.66	9228	2.9
2005	486	3.6	3509	4.3	3652	11.8	25,393	8	2559	1.9	35,599	6.16	11,444	3.3
2006	528	3.4	3486	3.6	3905	11.3	28,926	8.3	n/a	n/a	36,845	n/a	12,743	3.4
2007	611	3.4	3914	3.9	3956	10.7	33,320	9.3	n/a	n/a	41,801	n/a	10,473	2.5
2008	677	3.0	4336	3.0	4799	7.7	40,159	8.0	13,585	5.5	12,711.2	n/a	n/a	n/a
2009	762	3.2	4334	3.6	4489	10.3	41,273	11.2	1,5774	5.0	66,643.2	n/a	n/a	n/a
2010	731	3.0	4411	3.0	4047	7.7	42,917	8.0	1,5749	5.5	67,863.0	n/a	n/a	n/a

Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), http://www.sipri.org/

Note: 1. Qatar is excluded. 2. Mil. means Million

Figure III: Military Expenditure of Iran, Saudi Arabia and the GCC, 1988–2010



Note: Dip in GCC figure is due to the non-availability of Iranian data for the last three years.

Source: Derived from Table 2.

of countries that were depending upon the former Soviet Union.

Iran's initial increment in defence expenditure was conceivably guided by the apprehensions of the first Gulf War (1990) and the looming dangers on its own boundaries, which it encountered during the long-drawn eight years of cumbersome Iraq-Iran war (1980–1988).

Table 3: Average Defence Expenditure in the Gulf, 1990/94–2000/10

Gross Average Annual Expenditure in Five years ($ million)							
	Bahrain	**Kuwait**	**Oman**	**Saudi Arabia**	**UAE**	**Total GCC**	**Iran**
1990-94	266	8815.4	2000	16,745	3375.8	31,202	2655.2
1995-99	305.8	3339.8	1897.2	16,542	14,945.0	25,074	3860.8
2000-04	418.8	3246.4	2582.8	20,081	2793.2	29,122	7852.2
2005-10	632.5	3998.333	4141.333	35,331.33	–	43,577.07	10,578.2
Average Annual Growth Rate in Five Years (%)							
1990-94	2.7	–13	–1	–4	–3	–6.5	16.3
1995-99	3.9	–41	–2	8.0	0	2.7	16.5
2000-04	9.1	4.0	8	1.0	–2	1.6	3.6
2005-10	8.4	4.3	1.8	28.2	–	18.1	–4.9

Source: Calculated from Table 2.

In terms of quantities and defence expenditures Iran records an impressive number of conventional military hardware (Table 1; Figures I and II). Nevertheless, given that its armed forces suffer from systemic atrophy, maintenance issues, as well as being war-worn, Iran's actual war-fighting capabilities fall short of the regime's bellicose rhetoric. Prolonged weapon embargoes and sanctions have debilitated its defence capability vis-à-vis the US and European security systems and have also considerably checked its procurement.[11] Iran relies primarily on Russia, China and to some extent North Korea[12] for its weapon acquisitions, whilst the Arab Gulf, including Israel, has strong leverages of the US/Western security systems. Iran no longer has a military edge over its Arab Gulf neighbours. Iran's mix of Russian- and Chinese-supplied weapons is qualitatively

inferior to the modern American/Western weapon systems, which have been heavily purchased by the Arab Gulf states (Table 5).[13]

In addition, Iran's combat forces seem fatigued. According to Bernard Kaussler, although Iran once had more combat experience in mobile conventional warfare than its Gulf Arab state rivals, its experienced personnel are rapidly ageing. Those who participated in the Iraq–Iran war are retired. The majority of Iran's population is under 25 years of age and has no personal memory of the Iranian Revolution.[14] They may not respond to the call to stand up and fight against the forces inimical to the vision of the hardcore strategists. This psychology was apparent in the 2009 election, when the overwhelming majority of youth poured out on the roads to support reformist leaders Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi.[15]

It has also been reported that Iran's military is cannibalizing some ground and air force equipment, turning it into spare parts to help keep other units functioning.[16] The Iranians are also reported to be "working strenuously in a clandestine black market to buy spare parts to keep their forces operational. Many attempts by individuals in the United States to smuggle older F-4, F-5 and F-14 aircraft parts to Iran have been uncovered."[17]

The largest contribution to the defence building of the GCC countries came from the US, followed France, United Kingdom and Germany, while Iran continued to rely on Russia, China and North Korea in the later part. Table 5 shows the major

Table 4: Defence Summary of the Middle East, 2009

Total Middle East	Total Defence Expenditure ($)	GDP Share (%) (2009)	Country	Population
Middle East $139.907 billion (5.09% GDP)	742 million	3	**Bahrain**	807,000
	115 million	3.8	**Mauritania**	
	781 million	1.22	**Tunisia**	
	3.91 billion	4.26	**Kuwait**	3.050 million
	13-14 billion	**1.8**	**Iran**	75.077 million
	4.9 billion	6.31	**Iraq**	31.466 million
	15.6 billion	6.91	**Israel**	7.285 million
	4.02 billion	8.71	**Oman**	2.905 million
	9.1 billion	2.54	**Qatar**	1.508 million
	41.3 billion	**10.98**	**Saudi Arabia**	27.0 million
	29.2 billion	3.55	**UAE**	4.707 million
	2.23 billion	4.15	**Syria**	23.0 million
	1.43 billion	4.13	**Lebanon**	4.2 million
	2.02 billion	3.51	**Yemen**	2.4 million
	1.39 billion	5.51	**Jordan**	6.4 million
	4.1 billion	2.2	**Egypt**	84 million
	1.71 billion	2.84	**Libya**	6.7 million
	3.06 billion	3.34	**Morocco**	32.3 million
	5.28 billion	3.78	**Algeria**	35.4 million

Source: IISS, *Military Balance, 2011*.

suppliers of arms to the GCC and Iran during 1988-2010. Iran has received no or very negligible arms from the US during this period, and received only $400 million worth from major European countries. Russia supplied $4800 million worth arms to Iran; China also shared the Iranian arms market, somehow equal to Russian size, $4700 million. During the initial years, China supplied a large amount of arms to Iran, but gradually lost its market to Russia. The net result, however, is that Iran has only limited access to any source of modern arms. [18]

Ever since democratic uprising commenced in the Arab world, the Arab Gulf countries have significantly modernised their defence capabilities, both air power as well as missile defence shield systems. They have both added advanced weaponry to their arsenals and also upgraded the existing ones. Major Arab Gulf countries have concluded arms deals of nearly $75–80 billion with the US – Saudi Arabia ($30 billion), Israel ($30 billion), Iraq ($11.4 billion) and the UAE ($3.5 billion). Saudi Arabia will receive 84 advanced F-15s, three types of helicopters – 70 Apaches, 72 Black Hawks and 36 Little Birds – and new munitions and spare parts. The 70 F15s in the Saudi fleet are also to be upgraded. The current deal is part of a ten-year, $60 billion weapon package for Saudi Arabia that was approved by Congress in 2011. In the same wavelength, Syria has concluded an arms deal of $3.5 billion with Russia.

The US has sold THAAD – Terminal High Altitude Defense – missile defence system worth $3.5 billion to the UAE.

Table 5. Arms Deliveries by the Major Suppliers to the GCC States, Syria and Iran, 1988-2003

(US$ Current Million)

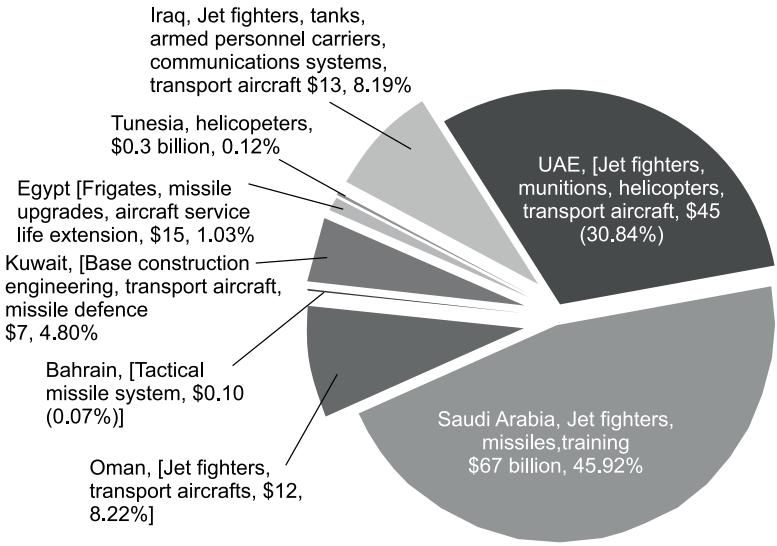
Suppliers	US	Major West European Countries	Other European Countries	Russia	China	All Other Counties	Total
Recipient Countries							
Bahrain							
2007-2010	300	0	0	0	0	0	**300**
2003-2006	300	0	0	100	0	0	**400**
2000-2003	600	0	0	0	0	0	**600**
1996-1999	300	0	0	0	0	0	**300**
1996-1995	300	0	0	0	0	0	**300**
1988-1991	400	100	0	0	0	0	**500**
Kuwait							
2007-2010	1,300	0	0	0	0	0	**1,300**
2003-2006	1,100	0	0	0	200	0	**1,300**
2000-2003	1,100	300	0	100	400	200	**2,100**
1996-1999	2,500	1,400	100	400	0	0	**4,400**
1996-1995	2,400	300	100	200	0	100	**3,100**
1988-1991	500	200	200	200	0	100	**1,200**
Oman							
2007-2010	300	500	0	0	0	0	**800**
2003-2006	500	300	0	0	0	0	**800**
2000-2003	0	0	0	0	0	100	**100**
1996-1999	0	400	0	0	0	0	**400**
1996-1995	0	800	0	0	0	0	**800**
1988-1991	100	100	0	0	0	0	**200**
Qatar							
2007-2010	0.0	100	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	**100**
2003-2006	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	**0.0**
2000-2003	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	**0.0**

1996-1999	0.0	1,800	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	**1,800**
1996-1995	0.0	100	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	**100**
1988-1991	0.0	300	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	**300**
Saudi Arabia							
2007-2010	5,300	2,200	400	0	700	100	**8,700**
2003-2006	4,200	15,400	400	0	200	10	**20,210**
2000-2003	6,300	16,600	1,000	0	0	0	**23,900**
1996-1999	16,600	17,600	3,000	0	0	0	**37,200**
1996-1995	12,400	15,000	1,700	0	200	100	**29,400**
1988-1991	6,600	16,500	900	200	2600	400	**27,200**
UAE							
2007-2010	900	400	300	400	100	0	**2,100**
2003-2006	500	5,500	300	200	0	0	**6,500**
2000-2003	300	1900	200	100	1,900	100	**4,500**
1996-1999	400	3,600	700	300	3,600	100	**8,700**
1996-1995	700	300	100	300	300	100	**1,800**
1988-1991	500	2100	0	0	2,100	400	**5,100**
Iran							
2007-2010	0	0	100	400	0	200	**700**
2003-2006	0	0	100	300	200	200	**800**
2000-2003	0	0	0	200	0	400	**600**
1996-1999	0	100	300	900	700	0	**2,000**
1996-1995	0	100	100	1,400	700	300	**2,600**
1988-1991	0	200	1,400	1,600	3,100	1,500	**7,800**
Syria							
2007-2010	0.0	0.0	0.0	1,200	300	200	**1,700**

Note: 0 stands for less than US$50 million.

Source: Anthony H. Cordersman, *The Military Balance in the Gulf: The Dynamics of Force Developments,* Centre for Strategic Studes and International Studies, Washington, 2011, pp. 55-6. Figures for the year 2003-06 and 2007-10 are taken from Richard F. Grimmett, *Conventional Arms Transfers to Developing Nations, 2003-2010,* CRS Report, 22 September 2011.

Figure IV. Defence Acquisition Plans of West Asian Nations, 2010-2011



Source: *US-Arab Trade Outlook: 2013,* The National US-Arab Chamber of Commerce.

The US has also committed itself to upgrade the Saudi Patriot missile system to reduce the threats from Iranian rockets.

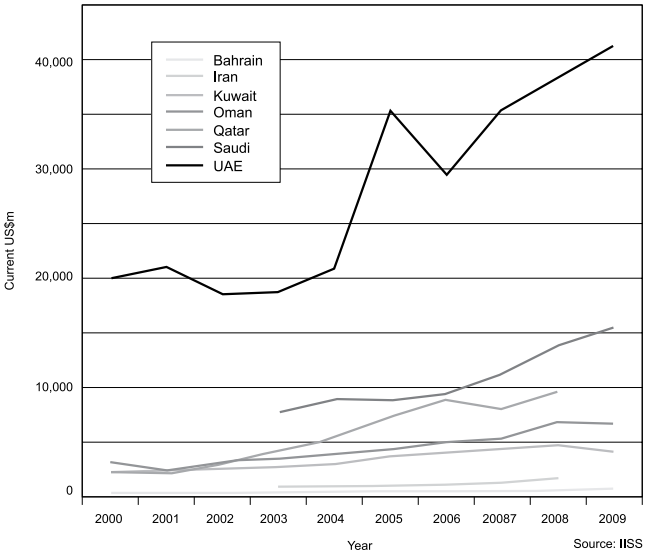
Figure IV shows the 2010-2011 defence acquisition plans of different West Asian countries. These stand at nearly $159.4 billion. Saudi Arabia owns weapon systems worth $67 billion, followed by the UAE, $4.5 billion, Iraq, $13 billion and a small country like Bahrain, $12 billion. Most of the Gulf countries have plans to acquire modern jet fighters, missiles and training and have avoided traditional arms and ammunition, unlike other West Asian countries.

Figure V shows the defence expenditures of the GCC countries and Iran in the current century. It is evident that Saudi

Arabia has consistently maintained a sustained rate of defence expenditure, while Iran has been the second-lowest, only above Qatar. Even the small states like Oman, Kuwait and Bahrain maintained a high level of defence expenditure. According to BBC News, "In 2011 the GCC (excluding Bahrain) spent US $21.3bn on defence procurement."[26]

The current arms deals between the US and the Arab countries are viewed by experts as an "effort to bolster regional powers against Iran". "This sale will send a strong message to countries in the region that the United States is committed to stability in the Gulf and the broader Middle East", said Andrew J. Shapiro, assistant secretary of state for political-military affairs. "It will enhance Saudi Arabia's ability to deter and

Figure V. Defence Expenditures of the Gulf States, 2000-2009



Source: IISS, http://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-comments/past-issues/volume-15-2009/volume-15-issue-9/gulf-states-step-up-defences/.

defend against external threats to its sovereignty", he added. Thomas Lippman from the Council of Foreign Relations comments that this deal is a "reminder to the Iranians, that if Tehran continues down a nuclear path the response will be to so beef up regional rivals and enemies that their overall position will be diminished."[27]

In recent years, Iran has faced potential maritime challenges as well. Although it has large and well-trained marine forces, the presence of the Fifth Fleet of the US Naval Force at Bahrain, which is continuing since World War II, countered its naval capacity while ensuring security to the Arab Gulf countries from the sea as well. At present more than thirty navies of the world, including US, NATO, French, Chinese, Indian and Russian, are present in the Gulf of Aden to combat the pervasive menace of piracy as well as to safeguard the SLOCs (sea lines of communication) passing through the Arabian Sea waters. The presence of a large number of naval fleets will also be a deterrent to the Iranian threat to either block the Strait of Hormuz or oil passage or encourage asymmetric forces to sabotage any major oil terminals like Ras Tanura, the world's largest oil export terminal and the Port of Abqaiq, the world's largest oil processing facility, etc.[28] Terrorists may attempt to sabotage the Saudi oil terminals as well: in May 2006 terrorists attempted to attack the major ARAMCO oil-processing facility at Abqaiq.[29]

The oil-rich Arab monarchies were complacent with the outcome of the Iraq–Iran War and the formation of the sub-

regional GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) bloc. In the war, the two regional bullies, Iraq and Iran, had exhausted their energies upon each other. The US was also tacitly involved in the war and was involved in building Iraq's chemical and biological weapon stockpiles.[30] It is believed that nearly 100,000 chemical shells were used by Iraq against forty Iranian targets.[31] It has been estimated that by 1984 the two countries had suffered casualties of approximately 300,000 (Iran) and 250,000 (Iraq).[32] The economic cost of the war was also enormous, estimated at around $644 billion for Iran and $452.6 billion for Iraq.[33] The war also imposed a heavy toll on the young population of both countries, particularly in terms of creating war-weariness leading to depression and afflictions as a result of war devastation. In response to Saddam Hussein's chemical warfare, Iran used young Pasdaran forces and Basij volunteers as young as 10 to 12 years, to detonate minefields. These boys were fed with the religious fanaticism of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, that if they were killed on the battlefield they would go directly to paradise. "The purest joy in Islam", Khomeini has explained, "is to kill and be killed for Allah." The Iranian defence forces lacked equipment to detonate Iraqi minefields and were unwilling to risk their small battle tanks. The attacks launched by the young soldiers were termed as "human wave" attacks.[34]

Besides the political and economic containment of Iran and Iraq, the war also helped smother the contagious powerful wave of Islamisation unleashed by the Iranian Revolution

in 1979 in the region. It is also believed that to counter the Iranian Revolution, the Taliban was created next door. Since the end of the Iraq–Iran War in 1988, the dynamics have changed to such an extent that rather than the Arab-Gulf countries managing their own affairs internally, the US has been getting involved in the region. During this time the GCC states started relying more on US equipment, and Western involvement in strategic and military affairs of the region became more pronounced.

Gulf Wars and the New Regional Strategic Equations

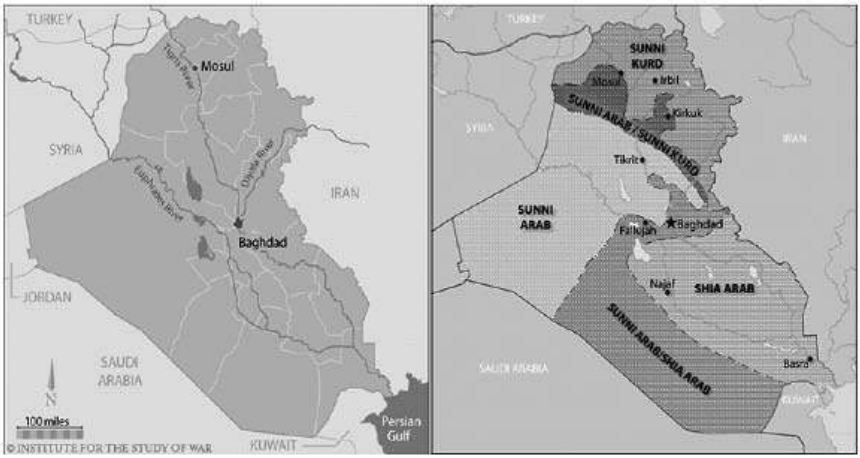
Till 1990, the situation in the Arab Gulf region drifted according to the GCC members' calculations. The strategic lull was broken in August 1990, when Iraq occupied Kuwait, apparently to recover the losses it had suffered in its war with Iran. This event entirely metamorphosed the geo-political and geo-strategic history of the region, perhaps forever. The security arrangements and the balance-of-power equations built laboriously over the past decades crumbled in one stroke. The oil monarchies realised the limitations of their policy options and the weakness of their defence capabilities. The GCC member countries did not respond to Kuwait's call for military assistance against Iraq: they rather preferred the Western allies to intervene. During Operation Desert Storm, more than twenty-eight countries under the US Coalition Command directly intervened in the regional politics. Although this intervention was legitimate, the prolonged stay of the allied forces, particularly of the US, in the region proved perilous to the unity and stability of the region.

This altogether transformed the geostrategic configurations of the region forever. Some of the developments stemming from external intervention in the region, including the second war on Iraq, are as follows.

(a) *Domestic Impact*

- Iraq was devastated in the two Gulf wars. Socially and economically, the country has hit rock bottom and plunged into total chaos. Approximately 4 per cent of the population, i.e. more than one million, were dead by 2007 in just four years; 2.56 million were internally displaced; and around 25 per cent of the nation's families witnessed or experienced the murder of a family member (34 per cent among Shia).[25]

Figure VI. Territorial Divisions of Iraq after the War, 2003



Source: (i) http://www.understandingwar.org/map/iraq-all
(ii) http://www.npr.org/templates/stroy/stroy.php?storyId=5052090.

- Iraq's political and territorial structure changed forever. The left-leaning Ba'ath party was crushed, and territorially, ethnicity trifurcated Iraq into Shia Iraq, Sunni Iraq and Kurd Iraq (Figure VI)

- The Shia majority, accounting for 60–65 per cent of the population, was freed from the rule of the Sunni minority (see Table 6).

Table 6: Shia Population in Gulf Demography (%)

Country	Iran	Bahrain	Iraq	Lebanon	Kuwait	Qatar	Saudi Arabia	UAE	Syria
Shia	90	75	65	45	30	16	10	6	1

Source: Wali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future,* W.W. Norton, Washington, 2006.

- With massive loss of property, human lives and natural resources, Iraq began to suffer from food insecurity. The sole purpose of resolutions relating to the Oil for Food Programme (OFP) passed in the United Nations Security Council was to provide Iraq money to take care of the humanitarian disaster that followed the war. Initially, the amount under OFP was $1 billion (UNSC Resolution 986) but later on it was increased to $5.2 billion (Resolution 1153).

- Iraq was plunged into a huge reconstruction cost. According to the UN, World Bank, and the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), the cost of Iraqi reconstruction during 2004-2007 is estimated to have

been around $56 billion. This excludes $320 billion allocated through FY2006 to support US military operations in Iraq.

- The scramble for Iraq's oil resources divided the country into different power enclaves. The oil-rich southern Iraq, predominantly Shia-populated, is estimated to have 120 billion barrel oil reserve. The regional leaders started asking for an oil autonomous region. At some point of time, it was noted that Iran also lobbied for filing a tender in the Basra region

- According to one estimate, approximately 60 per cent of the $60 billion cost of Operation Desert Storm was paid by Saudi Arabia and the rest by Kuwait. Kuwait drew down cash from its Fund for Generation account.

(b) ***Regional and Global Impact***

- The US grip on the Arab region increased. In August 2000, the US established an Air Force base at al-Udeid in Qatar.

- The protracted presence of the US in Iraq generated strong anti-US feelings among the Arabs. This was further amplified by the events of 11 September 2001 and their wide-scale repercussions globally and among the Western countries in particular, and the involvement of the US in Afghanistan and its impact on South Asian dynamics.

- The costs of the war in Iraq and Afghanistan mounted domestic pressure in the US to limit these costs. To pacify the opposition, the administration resorted to propagating the clash-of-civilizations hypothesis. This further deepened the rift between the Islamists and the West.

- Massive loss of life and property took place during the nine years of war (March 2003–December 2011). According to US Defence Secretary Leon Panetta, "To be sure the cost was high – in blood and treasure of the United States and also the Iraqi people." The US spent approximately $3 trillion in its wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Around 37,000 US soldiers were wounded and 5000 died; more than one million civilians died in Iraq alone (Figure VII).

- The downfall of the Sunni-minority regime in Iraq re-established Shia dominance in the Gulf, which disturbed the prevailing balance of power in the region. It is estimated that Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE together have 81.3 million Shia or about 61 per cent of the total Gulf population.

- Despite Saudi Arabia's vehement opposition, the US established an airbase in Qatar and a naval base in Bahrain, which pushed the small resource-rich Arab states under the US security umbrella. This

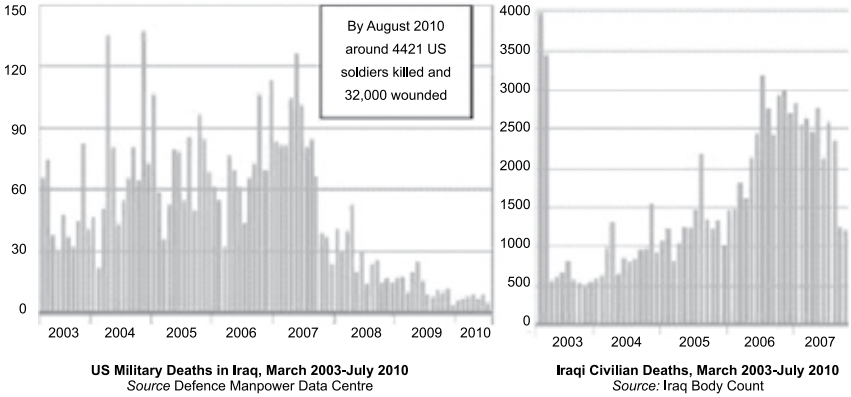
development also brought into focus the growing rift within the GCC.

- The war in Iraq impacted the oil market significantly. Two developments took place. *One*, the war led to a spike in oil prices. Before the 2003 invasion, oil cost less than $25 a barrel and the futures markets expected it to remain around there. The war changed the equation, and oil prices recently topped $100 per barrel. *Second*, Saudi Arabia, followed by Kuwait, tried to increase their earnings by using their spare capacity. Saudi Arabia has the highest spare capacity, almost 70 per cent of the world capacity. This violation of agreed quotas became a cause of friction within the region and the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

- The prolonged war in Iraq leading to high oil prices transferred huge wealth to the Arab Gulf states. This disturbed the financial equilibrium in the world. China, Singapore and many Gulf emirates have become lenders of last resort for the troubled Wall Street. These countries began buying up large shares of other US assets. During the same period, Sovereign Wealth Fund mushroomed in the region.

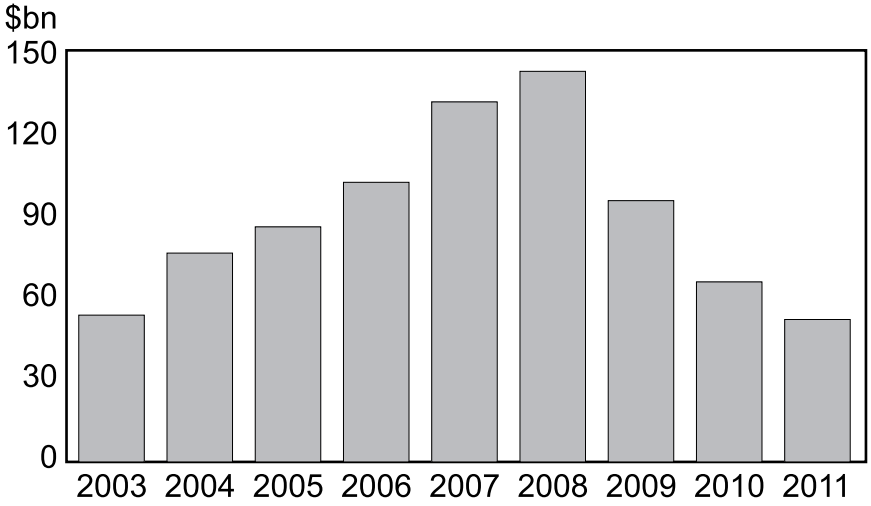
- The US getting involved in the West Asian-Afghan politics gave an opportunity to other players to assert themselves. Pakistan and Iran surreptitiously started

Figure VII. Casualties in the Iraq War, March 2003-July 2010



Source: US flag ceremony ends Iraq operation", BBC News, 14 December 2011. http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-11107739

Figure VIII. Total US Funding of Iraq War, 2003-2011



Source: Same as Figure 7.
Note: *shows pending request.

building their nuclear defence capabilities. Pakistan drew huge amounts of money from both Saudi Arabia and the US in the name of fighting terrorism and the nuclear bogey of Iran. Approximately $10 billion is estimated to have been paid by the US to Pakistan to fight terrorism, which Pakistan is said to have diverted to strengthen its military to be used against India. This ended with the US operation against Osama bin Laden in Abbotabad. The long absence of the US from the global scene also gave China enough elbowroom to grow and assume the size of a powerful challenger to the US in almost every sphere.

New Geostrategic Equations in the Arab Gulf

The post-Gulf War Arab region has been marked by two major events: dismemberment of Iraq in the spring of 2003, leading to the collapse of centuries-old power relationships; and surfacing of the Iranian nuclear conundrum and its geo-strategic nightmares in the region.

In the light of the official US announcement of the end of the Iraq War on 15 December 2011, once again the centuries-old bogey of domination of the Iranian civilisation over the Bedouin Arabs, leading to marginalisation of the Sunni states, has risen in the region. This has also provoked the major regional powers to seek to remould the geo-political map of the region to suit their own interests. Who will fill the power vacuum in the region after the US withdraws? By all accounts,

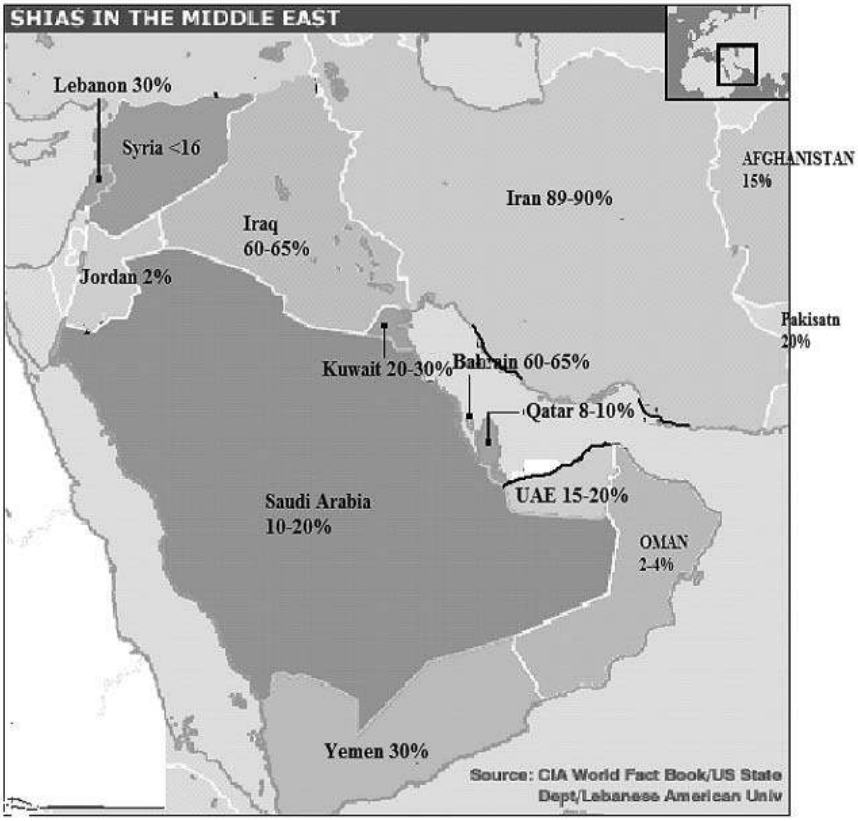
Iran has emerged as a frontline state in the region. The post-cold war and post-Gulf War (18 March 2003–15 December 2011) era has provided Iran a historic opportunity of strategic prerogative on both nuclear and ethnic fronts.

Besides the sectarian prerogative in the Gulf region, Iran enjoys the same ethno-strategic luxury in some of the Central Asian Republics (CAR). The sectarian demography in some CAR states such as Azerbaijan favours Iran (Figure IX). On both the north and the west Iran is now bulwarked by Shia ethnics. Further disintegration of the USSR and the removal of Saddam Hussein in Iraq have secured for Iran both fronts, whereas earlier it was geo-strategically sandwiched between the cold war rivalries. After the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the US lost its foothold in Iran, ending its so-called Two Leg (Iran and Saudi Arabia) Middle East policy. Consequently, the US started concentrating on Saudi Arabia and Israel more seriously. At the peak of the Iranian Revolution, the Gulf monarchs were frightened by the spread of that ideology and came closer to Israel covertly. The move of Qatar in this direction was more pronounced for some time.

Iran: Benefiting from the US Entanglement in the Middle East

The two-decades-long US engagement in the two Gulf wars and launching of the so-called war on terror all around gave Iran time to initiate and develop its nuclear capability. Since Iran is a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), it

Figure IX. Sectarian Composition of Arab Gulf Demography



Source: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/5223210.stm

Note: Some modifications have been made by the author.

successfully misled the world about its civilian nuclear agenda, expanding its nuclear facilities possibly for military purposes. At the same time, Iran was also concentrating on its missile programme, particularly for long-range coverage. Iran's P1 and P2 programme, which according to Simon Henderson denoted initially Pakistan-1 and -2, changed into Persian-1 and -2. These

were directed to develop the long-range Shahab missile based on North Korean Nodong missile, capable of carrying a nuclear payload up to 1000 km.[29] Gradually, Iran has increased the ballistic capacity of the Shahab series from 150 miles to 1200

Table 7: Iranian Rockets and Missiles

Missile	Translation	Fuel Type	Estimated Range (km)	Payload (kg)
Fajr-3	Dawn	Solid	45	45
Fajr-5		Solid	75	90
Fateh-110	Victorious	Solid	20	500
Ghadr-1	Powerful	Liquid	1600	750
Iran-130/Nazeat	Removal	Solid	90-120	150
Kh-55	–	Liquid	2500-3000	400-450
Nazeat-6		Solid	100	150
Nazeat-10		Solid	140-150	250
Oghab	Eagle	Solid	40	70
Sajjil-2	Baked Clay	Solid	2200-2400	750
Shahab-1	Meteor	Liquid	300	1000
Shahab-2		Liquid	500	730
Shahab-3		Liquid	800-1000	760-100
Shahin-1	Hawk	Solid	13	–
Shahin-2		Solid	20	–
Zelzal-1	Earthquake	Solid	125	600
Zelzal-2		Solid	200	600

Source: IISS, Iran's Missile Capabilities: A Net Assessment, 2010.

miles. Table 7 shows the estimated range of various Iranian missiles, their payload and types of fuel used. The Shahab series of missile could effectively target the region beyond the Gulf, including Israel and some European countries.[30]

Syria: Centre of Power Politics of the Gulf Region

Syria's geo-strategic location is significant from the Arab Gulf point of view. This has further been enhanced by its fairly long-term alliance with Iran, Lebanon and the two powerful asymmetric forces, Hamas and Hezbollah, determined for the cause of Palestine. Syria has a Sunni-majority population (74 per cent) and less than 5 per cent are Shia; the rest are Alawis (5–6 per cent), Christians and Druze (Table 8). This makes a fairly good case for the Arab states to win Syria over to their side and compensate for the loss of Iraq, both in terms of political ideology as well as sectarian dominance. Syria is the last bastion of the Ba'athist ideology in the Arab world. The minority Alawis are ruling the Sunni majority.

Table 8: Sectarian Mosaic in the Syrian Arab Republic

Sect	Percentage Share
Sunni Muslims	68.7
Alawis	11.5
Druze	3.0
Ismailis	1.5
Christians	14.1

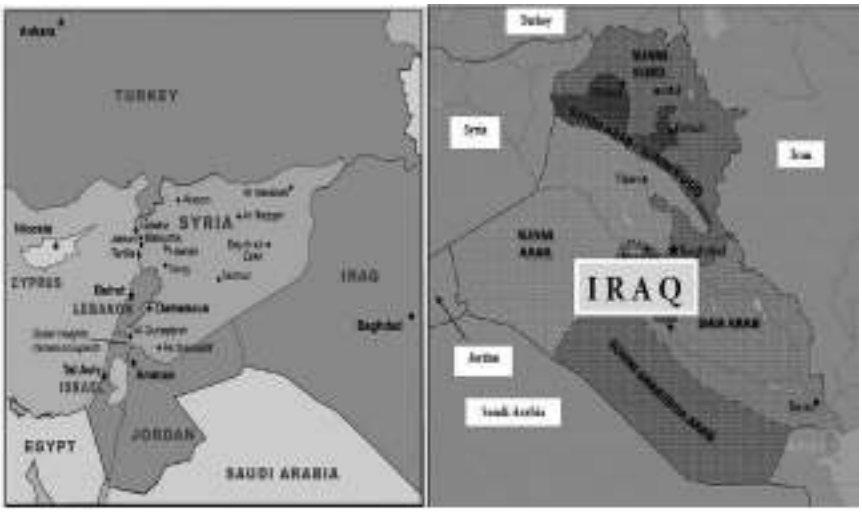
Source: Tareq Y. Ismael and Jacqueline S. Ismael, *Government and Politics of the Contemporary Middle East*, Routledge, London, 2011, p. 244.

In the post-Gulf War scenario, Syria's geo-strategic importance has become more pronounced. Territorially, Iraq is on the verge of ethnic and sectarian polarisation and trifurcation into Shia Iraq, Sunni Iraq and Kurd Iraq. In the post-Saddam era, Syria has become a geo-political force in the region by combining the sectarian advantages in the region. The Sunni habitats are contiguous to Jordan and Syria borders, while the Kurds are mostly settled on the western border of Syria and eastern Iran border. The Shia-dominated Iraqi region is on the eastern Iranian border, which gives Iran an easy transnational interplay in the region (Figure X). In this geo-ethnic-sectarian setup in Iraq, Syria and Jordan hold key significance to the current geo-strategic design of the Sunni Arab Gulf regimes. Jordan has already been invited to join the GCC, while Ba'shar al-Assad of Syria is under pressure to abdicate in the name of the Arab Spring. The new Gulf Game focused on Syria is to obtain twin objectives: *one*, to immediately checkmate Iran and its nuclear ambition; and *second*, to develop a long-term Sunni firewall around the core Sunni states. These territorial arrangements will create buffer states between Sunni-majority Saudi Arabia and the Shia-dominant Tehran-Baghdad axis.

How the Loss of Syria Will Affect Iran

"If the Syrian government were to fall it would be a tremendous blow to the Iranian regime", says Iran expert Karim Sadjadpour. Iran will be isolated in the first place; it will be alone to face the combined pressure as well as possibility of a limited war with the Arabs. Syria

Figure X. Strategic Significance of Syria and Ethno-religious Pockets in Iraq



Sources: http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5052090; CRS Report for Congress RL: 33487, http://assets.opencrs.com/rpts/RL33487_20110428.pdf.

Note: Two figures juxtaposed for comparison.

has been Iran's main platform, from which it has built a formidable influence over the Arab-Israel conflict, setting up Hezbollah in Lebanon and supporting Hamas in Gaza. Iran's asymmetric influences ranging from the Mediterranean Sea to the Afghan border to the Gulf and in some pockets in Central Asia will also eclipse. Indeed, Syria and Iran has been the "brother in arms" for the last three decades. They are "locked in a strategic, force-multiplying alliance".

Politically, Syria has been a key player in the region: it blurs the sectarian divide of Shia and Sunni in the region and potentially evokes the feelings of pan-Arabism by providing

effective backup to the Palestinian cause. Moreover, Syria helps Iran to manage its "street politics" by uniting the Arabs on common issues like opposition to the US presence in Iraq and the region, the issue of Palestine and the role of Israel and contesting the leadership in the entire Muslim world. This has troubled Saudi Arabia in managing the Arab street.

On a larger geo-strategic canvas, Syria stands against the designs of Israel and the US, acts as a breakwater against the Russian secessionist movement in Dagestan and buttresses the cause of secularism in the region. Without Assad, the "US and Israel will pull Syria out of Iran's orbit (as well as Syrian-sponsored militant groups like Hamas and Hezbollah)".

The Russians are defending Assad in order to protect their business interest in Damascus and to prevent any knockout effect from a Syrian civil war on Dagestan.

The Turks have turned on Assad, their former ally, in order to bolster their new position as a regional power and diplomatic linchpin; and the Gulf Arab states want to back a Sunni majority against the Shia/Alawi regime.

Strategically, a stable and pro-Turkish regime in Syria would benefit Turkey. Turkey shares a long border with Syria, more than 800 km, on its south-eastern side. A troubled border with Syria, populating the majority of the Kurdish rebels, numbering 13.5 million, who constitute nearly 18 per cent of the Turkish population, has historically been ailing Turkey; an anti-Turkish regime in Syria has never left any opportunity to misuse this "geo-political deficit" against Turkey whenever Syria found Turkey going against its national interest.

In a recent interview to the *Wall Street Journal,* the Paris-based leader of the Syrian National Council, Burhan Ghalioun, stated that the

> current relationship between Syria and Iran is abnormal ... [it] will be revisited.... There will be no special relationship with Iran. This is the core issue—the military alliance. Breaking the exceptional relationship means breaking the strategic military alliance. We do not mind economic relations.[65]

In a possible post-Assad era, Syria's relations with Lebanon, Hezbollah and Hamas are likely to change significantly. According to Burhan Ghalioun, "Our relationship with Lebanon will be of cooperation, and mutual recognition and exchange of interests and seeking with the Lebanese to improve stability in the region." He stated that "after the fall of the Syrian regime Hezbollah will not be the same. Lebanon should not be used as it was used in the Assad era as an arena to settle political scores." According to Karim Sajdapur,

> Not only is Syria Iran's chief regional ally, Syria is the country which allows Iran to supply its "crown jewel" in the Middle East, the Hezbollah movement in Lebanon. Hezbollah in Lebanon is the crown jewel of the Iranian revolution, and Syria has been the key conduit to Iran's patronage of it. If the Assad regime were to fall it would make it logistically very difficult for Iran to continue to support Hezbollah the same way it has over the past few decades.[66]

The fall of the Assad regime will also affect Hamas. Hamas may drift towards Sunni Arabs, which will ultimately affect Iran's geo-strategic and ideological foothold in Arab Gulf. According to Burhan Ghalioun,

> Hamas has shifted to a new policy and they are now working with the PLO to unite the ranks of the Palestinians. It's no longer the Hamas supported by the Syrian regime. Our relationship with Hamas will be through our relationship with the PLO politically and the Palestinian civil society.[67]

Post-Assad contenders have shown adequate inclination to develop intimate relations with the Arab countries. They intend to integrate Syria with the Arab world economically, politically, socially and culturally as well. In his interview Burhan Ghalioun stated:

> A new Syria will be an indispensable part of the Arab League and it will work on improving the role of the Arab League and the role of Arab states regionally, specifically because they took a historic and unprecedented decision to back the Syrian people. Syria is the centre of the Arab Orient. It cannot live outside its relationship with the Arabian Peninsula, the Gulf countries, Egypt and others. We need economic and investment supports from our fellow Arabs in the future. Our future is truly tied to the Arab world and the Gulf in particular. In the future we will need a lot of serious financial and economic support to rebuild Syria.[68]

It is clear that if the Assad regime collapses new political equations will transform the regional dynamics and Iran will have to readjust accordingly. Though the majority view is that the Assad regime will collapse in the next six to eight months, there are reasons to question such prognosis. On account of different geo-political and geo-strategic dynamics, Syria is quite different from Libya. Libya was an isolated case and had the least implication for Arab Gulf politics, while Syria is integrated in the regional politics. Syria enjoys the full backing of Iran and Lebanon, two asymmetric forces Hezbollah and

partially of Hamas and the sympathies of Iraq and Yemen. These geo-political equations have forced the allied powers to postpone the "military option" and contemplate imposing harsh economic sanctions through the Arab League; but Jordan, Algeria and some other nations have not concurred with this move. Amid growing economic isolation, Iran and Syria have signed a free trade agreement (FTA) and plan to promote bilateral economic interactions. Iran has encouraged its business community to invest in Syria. The two countries have underlined four areas of cooperation, namely, economic, trade, investment and housing. It is estimated that the FTA can increase the $400 million volume of commercial exchange between the two countries to $2 billion.[69]

Gazing into the Crystal Ball

As discussed earlier, the ethnic, sectarian, military and strategic dynamics would interplay and turn Syria into a pawn of the two regional powers, viz., the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It is also expected that other major players like Israel, Iraq, and probably Palestine, Turkey and other Gulf states like Oman and Qatar would try to capitalize on the dynamics and would take sides according to their long-term interests and religious and sectarian preferences. More importantly, the media would be projecting this event as a major change of guard and its implications for the evolving security imperatives in the region. In the event that the Assad regime falls, some of the following short- to medium-term consequences are likely to emerge in the region.

Scenario I

Core-Periphery Hypothesis: Evolution of Gulf Security Forum (GSF)

The Syrian Arab Republic is conceived as another first step in the direction of materialising the goal of correcting the perceived geo-strategic imbalances in the Arab Gulf region. It may help postpone the emerging negative dynamics in the region, like Iran going nuclear, but cannot prevent the problems forever. Syria cannot be a solution to maintaining a longer-term balance of power in the region. Iran in alliance with other ethnically favoured nations enjoys geo-strategic advantages. Given the opportunity, it can easily dismantle the laboriously built security architecture of the region, just as happened in the post-Gulf War I era. The Sunni states cannot dismantle the demographic dominance of the Shia community in the region, so they are gradually making way for other Sunni-majority countries in the Arab Gulf security architecture, with the ethnically unbalanced Gulf core seemingly designed to counterbalance Iran and its allies by including Sunni-majority peripheral states in the GCC security architecture. This is evident from the proceedings of the GCC annual meeting in May 2011, in which Morocco and Jordan, both Sunni-majority states, were invited to join the GCC.

In the medium term, it is expected that the Arab Gulf region will succeed in diluting Iran's potential geo-political or geo-sectarian advantages by developing and strengthening

the concept of Sunni core-periphery relationship. This will automatically involve more peripheral nations with Sunni-majority populations in the Arab Gulf security architecture. This may be developed on the pattern of ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), involving more Sunni-majority nations in the Gulf security stakes. Statistically, though Shias account for 60 per cent of the population in the Arab Gulf region, and in four countries they are in majority – Iran, Iraq, Bahrain and Azerbaijan – overall they account for only 10-15 per cent (around 154-200 million) of the world Muslim population, approximately 1.57 billion, living in more than fifty countries. The geo-sectarian advantages potentially enjoyed by Iran in the region will be diluted forever by establishing and promoting the concept of Gulf Security Forum or GCC Security Forum (GSF) on the pattern of ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). States like Libya, Tunisia, Sudan, Mauritania, Somalia and other members of the Arab League across the Red Sea are likely to be included in GSF. Countries from South Asia like Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan and from South East Asia such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei may be adjusted as dialogue partners with active advisory positions, particularly Afghanistan and Pakistan. Qatar is considering opening an embassy in Afghanistan. This is meant to contain the wider influence of Iran in the region. Pakistan and Turkey will likely have a pivotal role in the GSF and their strategic depth will improve further.

Based on their sectarian composition, Table 9 proposes the following potential states to be members of the GSF. These

countries are categorised into three groups – Core Group, Peripheral Group and the Extended Catchment Group. The Core Group consists of mainly the Arab Gulf and the Levant countries. However, demographically, the Core Group is apparently incapable of overcoming the sectarian advantages enjoyed by Iran in the region. In this case, the idea of the Peripheral Group is conceived of. Inclusion of the Peripheral Group in the proposed GSF will effectively counter the sectarian advantages of Iran as this group includes predominantly Sunni dominated countries like Egypt, Turkey, Nigeria, etc. The inclusion of other Muslim majority countries categorised under the Extended Catchment Group (ECG) will give Saudi Arabia and other Sunni Gulf states to unite the entire Sunni world of Islam and gradually minimise the Iranian claim of leadership of the Muslim world. If the concept of the GSF takes off, would enable the Sunni Arab Gulf countries, mainly Saudi Arabia not only to manage the regional security problems, including sectarian but also allow them to nurture a deep and wide 'strategic' network, which may prove more effective than the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), in the region. Figure XI shows the proportion of the Shia population in the Islamic crescent. In Iran and Bahrain, the percentage share of the Shia population is in between 75–95 per cent; in Iraq and Azerbaijan, 50–75 per cent; and in Turkey, Syria, Afghanistan and Pakistan, 25–50 per cent. Obviously, in these countries Iran's ideological influence would be relatively more than in non-Shia countries. Overall, in four countries, namely Iran, Pakistan, India and Iraq, approximately 37-40 percent of the global Shia population of 154-200 million resides.

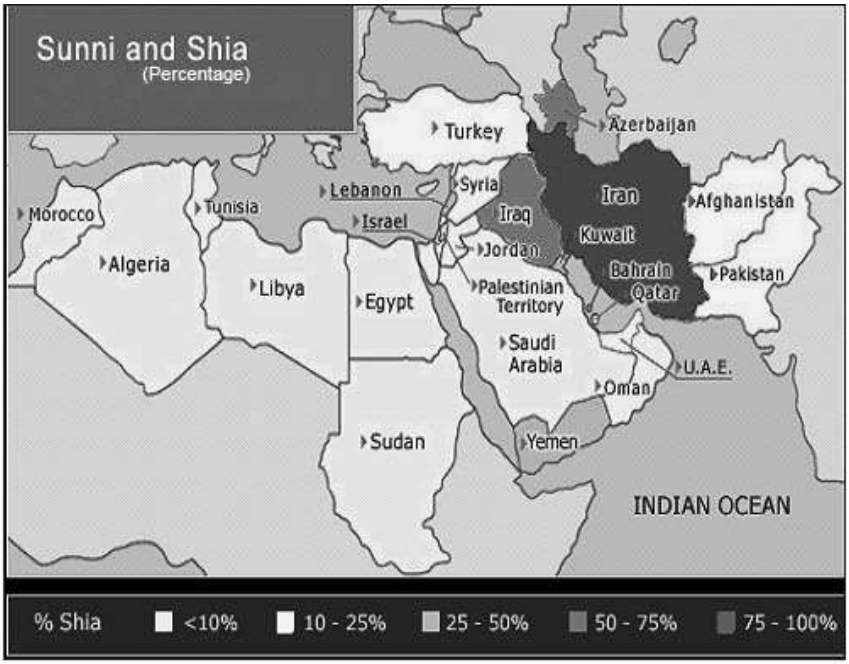
Table 9: Core-Periphery Hypothesis of Balancing the Sectarian Imbalances in West Asia

Country	Total Population (million)	Shia Population (%)	Country	Total Population (million)	Shia Population (%)
Core States			**Peripheral States**		
Bahrain	1.2	70-75	Israel	7.418	<1
Iran	73.9	90-95	Algeria	35.4	<4
Iraq	31.6	65-60	Albania	3.204	<5
Kuwait	2.7	20-25	Comoros	7.35	1
Lebanon	3.0	45-55	Djibouti	0.889	1
Oman	2.7	5-10	Egypt	81.1	<1
Qatar	1.7	10	Libya	6.355	1
Saudi Arabia	27.4	11-15	Mauritania	3.4	1
UAE	4.0	10	Morocco	0.31.9	3
Yemen	24.0	35-40	Somalia	9.0	1
Syria*	23.0	15-20	Sudan	43.5	2
Jordan	6.1	<1	Tunisia	10.481	<1
Palestine	4.0	<1	Nigeria	78.0	5
			Republic of Ethiopia	28.0	<1
			Turkey	74.0	10-15
			Niger	15.0	
Extended Catchment Group (ECG) of GSF					
Afghanistan	3.3	10-15 (20)	Bangladesh	145	<1
Pakistan	173.5	10-15 (20)	Indonesia	230	<1
Maldives	.0316	1	Malaysia	17.0	2
India	161	20	Brunei	0.039	1

Sources: *Mapping the Global Muslim Population (2009)*, Pew Research Centre, pp. 39-41, http://pewforum.org/uploadedfiles/Orphan_Migrated_Content/Muslimpopulation.pdf;

Note: Some data are reached by the author himself. *Figures of Syria* reached at during this author's visit to Syria during 15-19 in October 2011.

Figure XI. Sunni-Shia Distribution in Arab and Islamic Crescent Countries



Source: Pilgrimage to Karbala: Shia and Sunni The World of Islam, http://www.pbs.org/wnet/wideangle/episodes/pilgrimage-to-karbala/sunni-and-shia-the-worlds-of-islam/1737/.

Scenario II

The United States: A U-turn in Middle East Diplomacy – Support to Hardliners

The recent trend of engineering regime changes by the US/West in the name of Arab Spring in some of the Arab states such as Libya, Syria is self-evident. This perhaps is for some of the following reasons:

- Two-decades-long Muslim-bashing policies, based on the clash-of-civilizations hypothesis, have considerably reduced the US/West credibility in Muslim countries. Consequently, these powers have lost their considerable strategic depth in most of the Muslim countries in general and among Muslim masses around the world in particular. This is not a favourable development for the US and its allies, particularly in the medium run. The US/West needs Muslim countries' support mainly to obtain two things at least in the near future. One, to contain China; and second, to bail out their economies from the current crisis. The oil-rich countries are serving their economies in a variety of ways. The oil monarchies have deposited their huge wealth in the US and other Western countries. More than $150 billion of Gaddafi's funds are estimated to have been deposited in the US and other Western banks; Saudi Arabia has deposited $700 billion in US banks. The GCC countries are also well integrated with the Western market: based on their huge purchasing power, massive trade in income-elastic goods is flowing from the Gulf market to the US/West. These countries are also getting from the Gulf cheap and secured supply of energy. Despite all-out efforts of the Bush administration to achieve 'zero dependence' on Gulf-generated energy sources, USA still is deriving 10 per cent of its oil demand from the Gulf region. Export of oil and oil-related equipment and services to the hydrocarbon sector of the oil-producing

countries is another important contribution to the Western/US economies. In addition, the Gulf region provides employment opportunities, particularly to the retired civilians and armed personnel from the West as consultants at a very high remuneration.

- The US and others have shown ample signs of softening their attitude towards the Islamists. This is more evident in the post-Abbotabad operation in Pakistan. The US now wants to send a clear signal of "mission achieved": now there is no logic in carrying the "war on terror" operation further. The US has invited other nations to participate into the capacity building programme of Afghanistan, particularly training and raising the national security forces to take up their security jobs. Tunisia's election results indicate clearly that the erstwhile banned Muslim Brotherhood is likely to emerge as moderate political successors of the ousted dictators in the region. The US and its allies may want to work on a policy of wait and watch rather than jumping the gun and declaring them illegal. Those sections of Muslims who were targeted two decades earlier as potential terrorists are now getting support for regime changes from some of the Arab countries themselves. For instance, in Syria, the secular regime is being threatened by the hardliners, probably Salafists. Similarly, in Libya, once-active alQaida aides and perhaps trained in Afghanistan were actively supported by the NATO forces. Qatar actively

supported them with money, weapons, training, etc. Though some Western media have expressed themselves about the suspicious role of *Al Jazeera*, the Qatar-based electronic channel, promoting hardliner Sunni Islamists, the channel is well received by the authorities.

- During the recently held East Asia Summit at Bali, the US has given ample evidence that now its focus of attention has shifted from the Middle East to Asia-Pacific, including the South China Sea. The treaty with Australia and obtaining of two naval bases at Darwin and Cairns plus its announcement that it will try to patch up with Myanmar sufficiently indicate that the US has shifted its focus from the Middle East and Afghanistan to this part of the world. The Middle East is now no more the United States' major concern, except Iran, which is left to the United States' regional allies. The Obama administration has already declared the 21st century as a "Century of Asia-Pacific".

- From the foregoing analysis, it becomes evident that if the regime in Syria – which has been further weakened by the resignation of President Saleh of Yemen who voted against the Arab League resolution aimed at expelling Syria from the League's membership – collapses, and the Sunni Salafists succeed in winning Hamas over to their side, the immediate likely outcome is that Iran may have to postpone its suspected nuclear militarisation. In case Iran remains adamant, as the statements of President

Ahmadinejad indicate, it will have to pay a heavy price, either in terms of severe and comprehensive fourth round of sanctions, including economic, political and cultural; or it will face a war with an agenda to cripple its power or possibly a regime change for the coming few decades. This time the oil-exporting Gulf countries may take the lead in making the sanctions bite: they may also use oil as a weapon to put pressure on oil-importing non-abiding countries. They may put forward their genuine concern of security and the menace of nuclear proliferation in the region to force cooperation with the sanctions. Saudi Prince Faisal alTurki told a gathering at RAF Molesworth, one of the bases used by American forces in the UK that Iran had "steel claws", which were "effective tools" to interfere in other countries. "Iran [developing] a nuclear weapon would compel Saudi Arabia … to pursue policies which could lead to untold and possibly dramatic consequences", he said.

- A shift in the US policy towards Iraq is strongly expected. It appears that now the US is more interested to bait the Shias of Iraq and also the Kurds to increase its presence in Iraq. The increasing intervention of Saudi Arabia and Iran for their respective interests will obviously annoy the Iraqis; during 2006-8, large sectarian carnage took place in Iraq. Now the Iraqis are desperate for peace. The US expects Iraq as

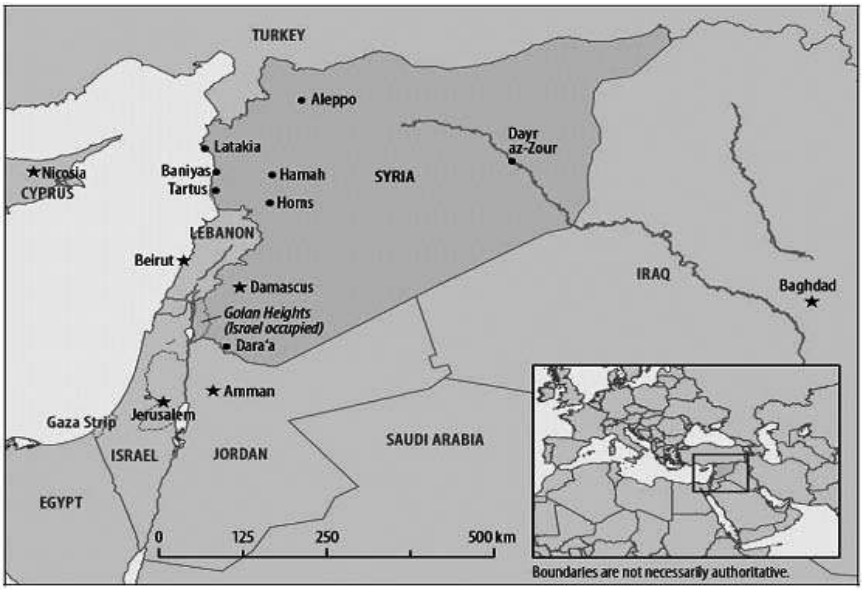
compensation or a bulwark against Iran both in terms of diplomacy and energy-wise. Iraq is the second-largest in oil deposits in the world, next to Saudi Arabia. Iraqi oil will ensure an uninterrupted flow of energy supply to the US and its allies.

- Politically, the new Iraq is conceived as an alternative and compensation for Iran to the US. This will help restore to the US its "twin pillar Middle East" policy. In this game, the position of Saudi Arabia is less secured. If democracy follows in the region, Saudi Arabia has to reconsider its Bahrain policy and its large stakes in that country.

- Another important policy opportunism of the US at this juncture seems to further minimise the presence of Russia in the region. The Russian presence, mainly after the end of the cold war and the demise of Saddam Hussein, is at a nadir; the atrocities, disturbances and instability created by the US in the region, particularly after launching the war in Iraq (2003), have also dwindled US credibility. In these circumstances, the US and its allies may have a policy agenda to push Russia out from its last bastion, i.e. Syria. Geo-strategically, however, Syria is significant to Russia, particularly for the following reasons: (i) Syria's port Tartus in the Mediterranean Sea provides warm water access to Russia. Any loss to the present regime will definitely reduce Russian influence in Syria (Figure XII). (ii) Geographically, Syria directly

links the Arab world to the disturbed regions of Russia like Dagestan, Chechnya, etc. Any unfavourable regime change in Syria may give Islamists a way to intervene in the internal affairs of Russia and may intensify the secessionist movement there. The US may use this as a "give and take" card with Russia and they may form an opinion on Iran and its growing regional potential. However, Alexey Baev, senior correspondent and Bureau Chief of the Russian news agency Izvestia, New Delhi, discounts the view that the Islamists will be able to cross the Mediterranean and infiltrate into Russia's disturbed region. He is of the opinion that Russia has strong enough naval capability to obstruct any such infiltration. Nevertheless, the record shows that President Putin of Russia in 2007 raised the issue of terror finance and the asylum Riyadh provides to these secessionists. The two countries agreed to work together to counter the menace of growing terrorist networks. (iii) Syria is a large arms market of Russia. According to Richard Galpin, BBC World Correspondent, approximately "10 per cent of Russia's global arms sales go to Syria." Since the crisis started in the region, Syria has concluded $3.5 billion worth of arms deals with Russia. Although, according to Alexey Baev, "overnight changing of arms setup from one form to another is not possible, regime change will definitely affect the Russian interest in Syria, which provides a huge market for Russian arms". (iv) Syria is the last bastion of communist/Russian

Figure XII. Geostrategic Significance of Syria



Source: Jeremy M. Sharp and Christopher M. Blanchard, *Unrest in Syria and US Sanctions Against the Asad Regime,* CRS Report, 16 February 2012.

foothold. So the US and the allied forces are using the disturbance in Syria as an opportunity to oust Russia from the region, maybe for the coming few decades.

However, looking at the post-2014 scenario that is marked by the withdrawal of the US and NATO forces from Afghanistan, a new geo-political realignment in South West Asia will be underway, leaving Iran as a powerful regional force. This may possibly undermine the US attempt of "containing" Iran. While the USA remains dogmatic in its policy towards Iran, the gap will automatically be filled by the growing presence of China and Russia, converting Iran into a strong regional ally.

Scenario III

Syrian Domino Effect and Likely Consequences for Iran

- The defeat of Basher al-Assad in Syria, leading to the weakening of Iran and its proxy Hezbollah in Lebanon may develop a lobby in Iran to mend its relations with Israel, and reconcile its relations with the US as well. For the time being the Shia-majority Iraq will also be under their spell as it seeks ideological inspiration from Iran. Thus, there is a possibility of the formation of a Tehran-Tel Aviv-Baghdad-Washington axis.

- Improved Iranian relations with Israel and the US may ultimately boomerang on the Sunni Arab states. The latter, which would have used hardliners and Salafists to defeat Iran, may be the next target of a Tehran-Tel Aviv-Washington axis. This time round Saudi Arabia may pay the price for funding the Jihadi foreign policy, including the Taliban and others all around the world. The disgruntled sections, including the al-Rashid and the Shia-populous eastern region, may dismember the kingdom. Once again the kingdom may recede to the pre-1932 era. The two holy cities may be separated from the kingdom and a new management committee comprising members from around the world may be composed. This has been one of Tehran's longstanding demands.

- In consequence of the demise of the existing regimes in Iran and Saudi Arabia, the genuine cause of Palestine may be lost forever. The Palestinians may become a burden on the Gulf states. Their position will be of "a nation without a state", living on the mercy of brotherhood and Arabism. In this condition, they will take whatever Israel gives them. They would lose their bargaining power, for which they have been struggling for the last seventy years.

- As the situation stabilises in the Arab world, rivalry among four regional powers – Egypt, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Iran – may resurface and intensify. The following could be some of the consequences: (i) Iran will be leader of the 20 per cent Shia population of the world Muslim population and 60 per cent in the Gulf. (ii) Turkey may start interfering in the regional affairs of the Gulf; this may not be liked by the native elites; already Turkey has been accused by the Iraqi leaders of insinuating its influence in the oil-rich region of Iraq. Any wrong move by Turkey may prove counterproductive to its Gulf foreign policy. Its moderate face is already being looked at suspiciously by the Muslim Brotherhood in the region. This may convert Turkey from today's hero into tomorrow's "sick man of the Middle East". (iii) After settling its house, Egypt is likely to consider the foreign affairs seriously. Hosni Mubarak's policies possibly may be reviewed. Egypt may reform its

foreign policy and at the first opportunity it may possibly reconsider its ties with Israel and the US. This may pose a problem to Israel, which may prepare for another showdown in the region. This may again bring Iran closer to Egypt, if Iran still remains a pariah nation. The recent passage of an Iranian ship through the Suez Canal, for the first time after the IInd World War, indicates this possibility. After the declaration of the victory of Mohammad Mursi of the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) as President-elect in Egypt, the situation is gradually transforming towards another conflict with the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) in Egypt, which has assumed most of the legislative and foreign affairs-related powers. The army has upheld its right to wage war, appoint a 100-member constitution-making body, and attempted to retain its stake in the economy through exclusive legislative power.

Scenario IV

Israel: A Catalyst under *Ceteris Paribus*

Israel has shown a tendency of apprehension as well as taking solace in the entire process of the Arab Awakening and the rising tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia. It has taken a shifting stance: first it declared unilateral action against the Iranian nuclear facilities as a necessary step to ensure its national security, as it did with the Iraqi nuclear establishment on 7 June 1981 and

Syrian nuclear complex in 2009, but later on it has become silent. Second, Israel's policy has been to generate suspicion and provoke collision between the two regional giants, Iran and Saudi Arabia, and create space for its own enclaves by winning some of the disgruntled sections in their respective countries.

Regarding Arab Spring, Israel has been ambivalent. First, it had a pessimistic view about the outcome of the entire phenomenon. Now it has started showing apprehension about the rising Sunni-Salafist axis in the region. Israel perceives that the fall of the secular Assad regime in Syria will have its cascading effects on Israel. It is now more concerned about the replacement of a secular regime by a more radical Sunni-Islamist government in Damascus. Issues like water and the Golan Heights, an area of 1295 sq km, which Israel occupied in the 1967 War, may resume their momentum and become a rallying point, coupled with the Palestine cause, in the region and that may again blur the line of sectarian division in the Gulf region.

Nevertheless, it is noted that again the chimera of the Yinon Plan, proposed in the 1980s, has fascinated some of the Israeli strategists. Under this plan, they believe, twin successes have been achieved: in Sudan and in Iraq. Sudan has been bifurcated; Iraq has been trifurcated; Libya is underway to materialise the objectives of the plan; Somalia is on the brink of trifurcation (Somalia in the south, Somaliland, Puntland); Syria, Yemen, etc. are on their way to disintegration and chaos.

The basic aim of the Yinon Plan is to ensure the survival of Israel by balkanising the Muslim Arab world on the basis of sectarian and ethnic divisions and carve its own pockets of influence in the region and assume the status of an arbiter in the balkanised Arab world. The Yinon Plan believes that the British ignored the regional realities and drew unnatural national boundaries, which it avows to correct. It operates on two essential premises:

> To survive, Israel must (1) become an imperial regional power, and (2) must effect the division of the whole area into small states by the dissolution of all existing Arab states. Small here will depend on the ethnic or sectarian composition of each state. Consequently, the Zionist hope is that sectarian-based states become Israel's satellites and, ironically, its source of moral legitimation.[89]

Israel, according to Israeli analysts, should covertly support the ethno-sectarian divisions in the Arab Spring. This is in the interest of the safety and security of Israel in the medium to long run. In the short term Israel is militarily capable enough to defend the nation. Largely, it is noticed that it has a policy to support non-Arabs and non-Muslims in Arab-majority countries. On a larger plank Israel is working to throw a spanner between Shias and Sunnis across the region. It has its own plan to carve out its influence among the Kurds in Iraq, Christians in Syria, and Coptic Christians in Egypt. Country-wise, Israel is developing relations with Kenya, South Sudan and Djibouti and is winning over some big tribes in Libya; in Eastern Europe, it has a plan to carve out niches of influence in Greece, Cyprus, Romania and Armenia. Among non-Arab

Muslim countries Indonesia and Muslims in India are its top priority.

The Yinon Plan basically aims at creating divisions among Muslims at each and every level, seeking to exploit every kind of fissure – sectarian, ethnic and regional. At the global level it targets to divide Muslims between Arab and non-Arab (Azmi/ non-Azmi) and non-Azmis between Barelvis and Wahabis in different parts of the world including India and different sects in Indonesia and Shias Sunnis. Overall, Arabs form only 20 per cent of the world Muslim population; the rest are spread across the world, the majority being in South Asia and South East Asia.

Objectively, however, the kind of thriving on rifts that the Yinon Plan proposes is difficult to sustain. Common interests stabilise rifts, as has happened, for example, between France and Germany. Between Shia and Sunni, the Yinon Plan will also collapse as two possibilities may emerge between the two sects: one, pragmatic political sense may develop a feeling between the two regional powers: Saudi Arabia and Iran would try to live side by side as Catholics and Protestants are living after fighting a bloody thirty years war in Northern Ireland. Second, overall the ideology of Islam has always been a strong undercurrent that cements the feeling of pan-Arabism in the region. History has shown that too much balkanisation sometimes costs its sponsors itself dear.

The proposed GSF (Gulf Security Forum) will also have its effects on Israel, especially when it expands to include

more members. Israel will then have to forgo any unilateral leverage in the Gulf security programme and become amenable to following certain rules. It will rely perhaps more on international forums like the UN, which will increase its dependence on the US. The US may have to frequently use its veto to adjust Israel in the new circumstances. This may also generate a feeling in the US policy circles to persuade Israel to resolve Palestine and other regional issues amicably. The US is currently exiting from the Middle East; it wants peace in the region and wants to concentrate its attention and resources on the trans-Pacific region against the increasing influence of China before it becomes too late. The US administration has already declared this century "America's Pacific Century". The US cannot afford to lose more of its strategic depth in Muslim countries, particularly the Arab Gulf. Arab countries are extended limbs of the US, and Israel needs to accept this reality. In fact, the US has been lost for two decades in the Middle East and the other side of the world has gone out of its grip, bringing into question its superpower status. This feeling has further been amplified by two events: the refusal of the Super Committee to reduce the budget deficit and President Obama's announcement to cut the defence budget by as much as $600 billion. Can the US afford to lose so much in the long term just for Israel? Israel has two options: either minimise its dependence on the US and ensure its own security alone; or abide by the circumstances and suspend its Yinon Plan.

Scenario V

How Real and Sustainable is the Sectarian Division in the Arab Region

The Shia-Sunni division in the region is not as deep and real as it is projected. Basically, the region is passing through a high phase of political suspicion and foreign interference. This, from time to time, intensifies the sectarian undercurrents. This is more likely due to the presence and interference of foreign powers leading to political suspicions, particularly among the ruling elites. The regimes as well as the elites of the region are wary of losing their power, prestige and credibility, particularly in the wake of the Arab Spring, where people's power is sweeping the erstwhile regimented or monarchical forms of governance. Some of the old unsettled issues like Palestine, non-acceptance of Israel by the common Arabs coupled with expansionist policy of Israel, the agony suffered by the common Arabs at the hands of the US and allied powers, including some of the regional states, are silent cementing forces in the Arab society. In peacetime the wide acceptance of Iran, Hamas and Hezbollah among the common Arabs indicates that there is a sharp rift between the interests of the ruling elites and the common Arabs. The political regimes, particularly the monarchies, are more interested in projecting the bogey of Shia dominance in the region.

Another important dimension, which potentially dilutes the Shia-Sunni division, is related to the identity of Arabism

versus sectarianism. Almost all the Arab states except Saudi Arabia have time and again reiterated that they are Arabs first and foremost; their Muslim identity comes only next. Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, identifies itself first as a Muslim state. In this milieu, Arabism as a strong undercurrent prevents any permanent division in the region. Islam itself is also a strong adhesive undercurrent.

Geo-politically too, Iran would not be very successful in developing sharp divisions on the line of Shia dominance. Egypt, Turkey and Libya under the new regimes will never accept anything without Saudi Arabia. For tactical and short-term gain countries may whip up the line of Shia-Sunni schism, but in the medium to long term this analogy of regional domination will find less and less endorsement. The real forces of Islam, Arabism and antagonism towards the presence of foreign powers, including the injustice on the Palestine issue will always unite the Arabs on the street. The increasing wave of democratisation in the region will hardly allow the elites and rulers to go against the popular will.

Another instance of the Shia-Sunni division appears more like the division between Hindus and Muslims in the Indian subcontinent, which Mohammed Ali Jinnah exploited just to secure and satisfy his and his men's ego and interests. The Muslims who migrated to Pakistan are still unable to fully adjust and assimilate there. The rift between Mohajir (migrants) and the native in Pakistan is a current reality just like the apparent Shia-Sunni differences in the Arab region.

Thus, not only the sectarian but also ethnic divisions in the Arab region seem more like an "elite apprehension" rather than a reality on the ground. At this juncture, particularly when the Arab Spring is all determined to change the old guard, these elites possibly want to use sectarian and ethnic cards as a "breakwater" against the mutiny for regime changes in the region.

If the Shia-Sunni Rift Widens: Implications for the Region and the World

However, if the Shia-Sunni division deepens in the region, the net result will perhaps be a new Sykes-Picot accord: "divide the divided on ethnic and sectarian lines". The much-hypothesised theory of "constructive chaos" in the region will follow its automatic acceptance. New national boundaries will be drawn; big nations will be downsized; small nations will be won over; Iran and Saudi Arabia will be the net losers: they will lose their powers for a long time to come. Israel will heave a sigh of relief, having neutralised all the three big regional powers – Iraq, Iran and Saudi Arabia and undoubtedly win Turkey to its side by some cajoling and concessions. This will directly affect the oil economies. Massive economic loss will force them to supply oil at rates much cheaper than currently prevailing. This will affect the interests of both the elites and the common public. Disruption of subsidy-propelled system may ultimately force the common Arabs to rise and agitate against these monarchs and force them to relinquish power. However, forcing these monarchs to leave the powers, who consider the

Gulf States as their personal estates, would not be a smooth and easy affair. Most of the 100,000 members of the House of Saud may prefer to settle in the US; they would migrate with huge booties, just like some of the recently deposed dictators, Zain al Abedin of Tunisia and Abdullah al Saleh of Yemen, have done. The relatives of these dictators are found investing all around the world. At last, there will be a long winter of peace and inactivity in the Middle East.

The deepening sectarian division in the Gulf region would not remain confined to the Arab countries; rather its cascading effect will impact upon the entire global Muslim community. The division may polarise the entire 1.3 billion Muslims on sectarian lines and add one more cracks to the so-called Islamic solidarity and the concept of *Ummah*. In one sense, this division may be good for the common love-laced Muslim; they may start thinking of developing their positions independently and stop looking the Arab monarchies in their traditional sense..

The US will get cheap oil and a peaceful Middle East; this will allow it to concentrate on other issues and other parts of the world. Its efforts to sustain its superpower position will endure. Russia and China will control their behaviour and US allies in other parts like Japan, Australia and South Korea will live in peace.

India will get time to concentrate on its poverty reduction programme. Pakistan will give up its conspiring tendencies since the Gulf oil monarchies would already have fizzled out.

Pakistan will amend its relations with India, something that is very much on the way, and become inward looking, particularly on economic, political and social issues. This will be high time for India to play its cards shrewdly.

Options before Iran: Time is Running Out

A reticent regime in Iran has enormous stakes to lose. A communicative and forthcoming approach on the other hand can resolve most of the problems of this country, which has been a pariah nation for the last thirty years. Iran cannot escape the geographic settings; it has to acknowledge the reality and its own limitations. The announcement of Saudi Prince Faisal alTurki that Saudi Arabia would develop its own nuclear capability in case Iran succeeds in its nuclear ambition will dilute the effect which Iran wants in the region, and again the conventional military balance and existing geo-politics will decide the game of the Gulf. India-Pakistan nuclear relations provide a cue: both countries are now nuclear capable, but in the Kargil War (1999) Pakistan was judged on the basis of its traditional military power; it could not dare to use nuclear weapons.

During the post-Iranian Revolution and eight years' Iraq-Iran war period, Iran was left alone to face Iraq, while Iraq found support even from the US, despite being an ally of the former USSR and the Sunni Arab Gulf monarchies. The cumulative effect of these forces compelled Ayatollah Khomeini to "drink the poison chalice" as he called it, and publicly accept defeat

in 1988. Similar circumstances are building up again in the region against Iran. Anti-Iranian forces are rallying like-minded countries to isolate Iran economically and politically. The moment they succeed, crisis will start mounting on Iran's safety. Iran should act before its allies, for instance Syria, Lebanon and to some extent Iraq, succumb to the pressures as well as inducements of the rich Arab oil monarchies and the US. Iran needs to reconsider its own regional security policy, which is based on ousting the US from the region, preserving the Islamic regime, defending its nuclear ambitions and expanding its influence in the region and the Islamic world. Iran has a high trust deficit in the region, which it needs to improve by shunning its historical claims and improving its own legitimacy quotient in the region and beyond.

Iran itself is not immune to domestic and outside interferences; it may face a threat to its own integrity and unity. In terms of demographic and ethnic composition, it is equally susceptible to ethnic and sectarian rumblings. Though the Persians are in majority in Iran, 61 per cent, the other ethnics also constitute significant percentages, including 16 per cent Azheris, 10 per cent Kurd, 6 per cent Lur, and 2 per cent each Baloch, Arab Turkmen and Turkic tribes.

Externally, Iran is vulnerable on its eastern border, with the presence of the United States in Afghanistan. The Baloch, particularly the Jandullah group and Taliban, are opposed to Iranian and Shia ascendancy in the region. Although Iran has traditionally backed Tajik and Shia

groups opposed to the Taliban, its enmity with the United States and tensions over the nuclear programme have led it to provide "measured" support to the Taliban. Iran suspects the US will support Jandullah, which has killed several senior officers of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps. The recent attacks on Shia gatherings on the eve of Ashura (2011) in Afghanistan, which have been recorded for the first time since 2001, indicate that the regional dynamics is changing and this may go against Iran. With effective intermediation of Qatar and Germany, the Taliban have been persuaded to open an office in Qatar. This amply shows that Iran's encirclement is being actively nurtured. The pressure of the Arab League on the Assad regime to transfer power to the majority forces in Syria also shows that time for Iran is running out. Iran needs effective and pro-active policies on all these issues; else it will be too late to mend and protect its own territorial integrity.

In recent years Iran has shifted its attention towards China. This is a comprehensible policy move. Iran wants to avoid the pressure of the US sanctions and the vagaries of the hard currency (dollar) on its economy, and wants to develop an alternative orbit to minimise the negative consequences of the sanctions. "Proposed new sanctions such as forbidding dealings with Iran's Central Bank, will propel Iran even more towards China ... since 2001, Chinese exports to Iran have increased nearly sixteen-fold, to $12.2 billion, while Iranian exports to China last year [2010] amounted to $16.5 billion,

primarily crude oil." However, this relation is subject to China feeling comfortable in its foreign policy with the GCC countries. The GCC and the Arab League have emerged as a powerful economic and political magnet in West Asia. Hardly any country would like to annoy the band of 22 Arab nations.

Besides this, if we juxtapose Pakistan in the Sino-Iranian orbit, the contours of the foreign policy of both the nations will not be as smooth as perceived. On the geo-political turf Pakistan and China have good relations; but it is to be seen whether Pakistan will be comfortable with Iran's intimacy with China.

Iran has also to reckon with the politics of the 'geo-resources' of the region. The region accounts for approximately two-thirds of the crude oil reserves and one-third of the natural gas reserves of the world, while other energy centres in the world, except Russia, are dwindling; their cost of production is rising, particularly due to the ageing as well as decline of giant and supergiant oil fields. Almost all the big powers lack energy resources and their dependence on the Middle East will increase in the coming years. Therefore the influence of the big powers in the region will not decline at least for the coming decade. Iran cannot materialise its policy aspirations, particularly in the field of evolving its own determined regional security architecture, which excludes exogenous actors, mainly the US. Iran's obduracy on the nuclear issue may even push the Arab countries to openly ally with its enemies, including Israel.

Possible Impact on Energy Market

If a war occurs, there could be serious repercussion on energy security and that will lead to a serious crisis in the global economy. Three scenarios are possible:

i. UN-led NATO intervention spearheaded by Turkey is likely to turn the region into one of the most disturbed ones. If the situation slips and brings about sectarian conflicts, the eastern Shia-dominated region of Saudi Arabia may become a hotbed of insurgency or guerrilla warfare. This will have global repercussions, since the eastern region contributes almost 5 million barrels per day (mbd) of the Saudi oil production of 9 mbd. Another Achilles' heel of the energy market is Ras Tanura, which has the biggest oil-exporting port in the world and supplies 4.5 mbd. No other nation on the globe has spare capacity to compensate this kind of loss. Consequently, oil and gas prices will spiral, which will have massive implications for an already slowing world economy. The only country which may cash the dividend will be Russia, the second-largest oil producer in the world after Saudi Arabia.[103]

ii. Iran may barricade the Strait of Hormuz. This may bring serious repercussions on the global energy scene, because more than 88 per cent of the and around 19 per cent of the global oil passes through this narrow strait, 45 km wide

at chokepoint. Although analysts doubt the capability of the Iranian navy to keep Hormuz disturbed for more than a week, Iran has tactical capability to mine the strait and cut off shipping for as long as three months or even longer. Since 1985, Iran has promoted two navies – the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy (IRIN) and the vaunted Iran Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy (IRGCN). The former is assigned to discharge the traditional role in the Red Sea, Gulf of Oman and as a blue-water navy; the latter is specifically trained to look after the issues of the Gulf, particularly the Strait of Hormuz. The IRGCN has now 20,000 personnel, including about 5000 marines with effective training to execute asymmetric operations with swarms of small boats that overwhelm the defences of large ships in the Gulf. This gives Iran leverage to block the energy artery for a longer period of time, and that will cause the world enormous losses. In addition, the situation in the Gulf of Aden and around may deteriorate, considering that the Yemen-based AlQaeda of Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) has not been fully neutralised even after the death of Anwar al-Awlaki. AQAP may take help from Iran and Syria and mount pressure in the Strait of Hormuz. In this condition the US would have Hobson's choice of taking strong measures, perhaps through joint command of aerial and maritime means.

iii. The withdrawal of the US and development of the democratic process in Iraq has generated some optimistic

scenarios, particularly for the energy market and reconstruction of the war-ravaged country. The Iraqi Oil Minister has planned to increase oil production from the current 2-2.5 mbd to 12.5 mbd by 2017. However, on account of the deteriorating situation in Iraq, particularly the rise of sectarian conflicts between Shias and Sunnis in the post-US withdrawal Iraq and the worsening US-Iran relations, the energy market looks bleak. Potentially, two scenarios may disturb the 2012 energy market predictions and keep oil prices higher, $100-120 a barrel. One is that the rise in sectarian conflicts will potentially hit the investment climate in Iraq, including in hydrocarbons. Second, Iran's blocking the Strait of Hormuz and cutting its own oil supply in return for hostile US actions could be catastrophic for the oil market. How will the global oil market be stabilised after cutting off 3.56 mbd of Iranian oil, i.e. one-sixth of the global oil production? Although militarily the US Navy is capable of clearing the blockade at the Strait of Hormuz, how much time will it take to restore oil supply? And which country will have the capacity to pump and meet the share of Iran oil? Saudi Arabia may work as a swing producer, but if Russia sides with Iran and slows down its share of oil production, the world economy will be in a total mess. The world will, in fact, pay a heavy price if the oil from Syria, Iran and Iraq, due to rise in insurgency, which is possible due to Hezbollah, is stopped. Iran may deploy all possible

means to build a caucus against the designs of the White House.

iv. It is also possible that Iran and Russia can act in tandem in the event of a crisis in future, particularly on the natural gas front and working on establishing a gas cartel in future as both have the largest gas deposits in the world till date.

Aware of the limitations of its clout in making Iran bend, the US has for some time been on a strong persuasion mission to convince countries that import huge amounts of Iranian oil, including India, to curtail these imports. During her recent visit to India, the US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, tried to persuade the Indian authorities to abide by the United States' Iran Threat Reduction Act. India is the second-largest Iranian oil importer, approximately 17.5 million tonnes annually. At this juncture, however, non-oil trade between India and Iran is more crucial. Due to sanctions, Iran is passing through a high phase of economic instability; its economy is facing high rate of inflation, unemployment and depreciation of currency; its foreign exchange reserves are dwindling fast. Iran needs food, pharmaceuticals and other daily commodities to stabilise the apprehensive society at large. The arrangement of barter payment between India and Iran will give much-needed relief to the Iranians pressed with the shortage of hard currency. Both the country have realised the significance of mutual cooperation, as a result they are working together to assist as well as sort out the looming crisis.

India also understands the geo-strategic significance of Iran not only in the Gulf but also in the neighbouring countries such as Afghanistan and in some Central Asian Countries. As a result, medium to long-term understanding as well as the interests of both the countries further persuades them to remain close.

Conclusion

The situation in the Gulf is both volatile and complex. The withdrawal of the US forces from Iraq by December 2011 has further complicated the atmosphere and generated uncertainty and apprehensions across the region. Iran with potential sectarian advantages and nuclear ambition has perturbed the Sunni Arab Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia. The Arab Gulf states are determined to contain Iran's growing geo-strategic potential. For this they are fully prepared to pressurise Assad to surrender Syria. In the coming months, the Assad regime will face increasing pressure; the Arab League will adopt total sanctions to cripple Syria economically and domestically create "social space" for the rebel groups and incite the majority Sunnis to revolt. For the time being, military action against Syria seems not a feasible option, because the geo-political condition of the Gulf is quite different from the Libyan circumstances. Syria is not isolated, unlike Libya; Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen have already showed their disagreement with the decision of the Arab League aimed at expelling Syria; also, more nations like Jordan and Algeria have showed their disagreement on imposing crippling sanctions on Syria, which will directly impact upon the lives of the common Syrians.

Syria and Iran also command two powerful non-state asymmetric organisations, Hamas and Hezbollah, whose reach is felt across the entire Gulf to Afghanistan. Any direct military action against Syria, unlike Libya, might not prove a smooth and easy exit operation. Looking at the complexities in the region, any direct action may prove a disaster not only for the regional players like Saudi Arabia but also the whole world. On the eve of a warlike situation, terror groups such as AQAP may join the forces opposing the US and the Gulf monarchies and target the oil and water desalination plants, creating massive detrimental effects, both regionally and globally. Destruction of water desalination plants may create civil chaos, as 90 per cent of the potable water supply in the Arab Gulf is met through these plants. This will question the efficacy of the states in ensuring and providing security to the citizens. A consequence may be to spark, particularly among the disgruntled youth sitting on the Arab Spring fence, to agitate and launch powerful movements for regime change. Sabotage of the oil establishments by these non-state actors could bring the "fossil fuel civilization" to a standstill: no other oil-producing country in the world is in position to compensate and supplement the loss of the Saudi oil share, i.e. nearly 10 to 12 per cent to the total global oil production.

Syria, an Arab nation with a history of generous sacrifices for the Arab and Islamic causes, shelters around 2 million refugees – 1.2 million Iraqi and 0.5 million Palestinians. An attack or crippling sanctions on Syria may provoke and foster pan-Arabism in the region, as happened when Iraq was

attacked. All calculations of the Bush administration in Iraq went wrong; the Shia population never came out with fanfare to welcome the US; rather they exploited the US to weaken the security structure of the region and enhanced their potential importance in a democratic setup.

Bahrain was the next target for democratic platform in the Gulf. This might help Iran a lot in asserting its position, which it could not do even during the Khomeini era; and the US had to withdraw without any obvious gain from Iraq. The Sunni Arab regimes, determined to check Iran, may consider the formation of GSF, possibly with a covert alliance with Israel. If the Shia-Sunni rift deepens, Israel will gain a lot by becoming an arbiter in the region. In this sectarian war between Iran and Saudi Arabia, Israel will get an ally – either Saudi Arabia or Iran. Turkey's geo-strategic expectation will possibly increase in the region; but it will not go beyond its own Rubicon, i.e. against its own geo-strategic calculations, as well as against its own pronounced foreign policy principle of "zero neighbour problem policy". The role of Turkey in the entire Syrian imbroglio will be the litmus test of this principle in practice. All forces, including the Sunni Arab states, so far having not been able to topple the Assad regime, seem interested in sucking Turkey into the Syrian imbroglio. In case Turkey takes any military position, the situation in the region will polarise into a civil crisis.

Although the apparent aim of dislodging the Assad regime seems to implant and promote "people's regime" in Syria,

the geo-strategic equation tells a totally different story. The main target of the US-Sunni Arab Gulf powers is probably to contain and weaken the growing strategic presence of Iran in the region. These forces want to detach Syria from Iran's sphere of influence, consequently isolating Iran from the Arab fold, leading to the weakening of the two powerful non-state actors, Hamas and Hezbollah, in Lebanon and Palestine. This may lead to the formation of a Riyadh-Tel-Aviv-Washington Axis in the region.

With the formation of this axis, some possibilities emerge:

i. Where Riyadh is concerned, there will be no obvious significant political power in the region to challenge and question the legitimacy as well as existence of the regime, which has troubled the Saud family since the Islamic Revolution (1979). Ayatollah Khomeini had questioned the legitimacy of monarchy under Sharia rules. In the post-weakened Iran era, Riyadh may also perceive itself to be a regional power and enjoy undisputed leadership in the Gulf and across the Muslim world. However, both the propositions may not fully comply with the proposed strategic equations of Riyadh. Two likely scenarios may dezvelop: *One,* the weakening of Iran may persuade these asymmetric forces to wreak havoc in the region that might have a long-term impact in terms of destruction of the hydrocarbon industry, which is the bread and butter of these *rentier* economies. *Second*, despite Iran's geo-strategic attenuation, Saudi

Arabia may not be able to achieve its dream objective of becoming a regional hegemon and supplement ideological (religious) Riyadh into a political seat of Islam, and insinuate the rise of Arabs, which has, historically, been only during the period of Prophet Muhammad and the Caliphs. On the other hand, after the geo-strategic waning of Iran, Saudi Arabia would likely pay the price of being active in fostering, promoting and funding Jihadism and Jihadi-based foreign policy; and regime change in Saudi Arabia might become imminent. Drawing a parallel with Egypt, the US may not provide active support to the Saud family: in which case, the House of Saud may have to go, either gracefully or kicking out. In an alternative scenario, the US-Israel Axis may work to oust the Saud family and promote democracy in the kingdom; a vengeful Iran may covertly join the game plan. The US-Israel axis may do this on two accounts: First, to reduce their trust deficit among the pro-democratic and politically emerging Arab youth and enhance their image; and secondly, to achieve their objectives in the region. Some likely objectives which Tel Aviv-Washington/West may strive for: strategically dwarfing Iran, settling the Palestinian issue on their terms, ousting Russia from the strategic orbit of West Asia in general and the Gulf in particular, minimising or clipping the growing influence of China in the region, and finally crippling the potential of AQAP and ALQIM (al-Qaida in Islamic Magrib). The US/West

axis will likely attempt controlling and exploiting the resources of the trifurcated Iraq (Sunni, Shia and Kurd Iraq) by minimising the interference and influence, both ideological and political, of Iran and Saudi Arabia. There can be other motives. Scaling down of terrorism and weakening of Iran and Saudi Arabia will help bring peace and stability in Iraq and allow the US/Western companies to invest and compensate the loss incurred over the decade-long Iraq War (2003-2011). The expected timeframe for achieving all these goals may be five to ten years. Till then the Tel Aviv-Washington axis would for tactical reasons sustain the House of Saud.

In a second, totally different geo-strategic picture, the Islamic Republic of Iran may either succumb to or reconcile with the US and likely enjoy the erstwhile Shah's confidentiality and bonhomie with the US. In this case, geo-strategically, the Sunni Arab Gulf states may face massive pressure. Saudi Arabia will likely lose its diplomatic sheen as Iran may relent on its position of abetting and supporting the terror groups and likely help the US manage the menace of terrorism in and around the region. Iran's cooperation will also enable the US to handle Afghanistan and control the drug menace as well as provide a gateway to Central Asia. Iran's reconciliation with the US may also generate different strategic equations, particularly with regard to Saudi Arabia. Gradually, democracy will make its way

in the region and the majority will decide its own fate. In this circumstance, in the medium to long term, the Shia population of the eastern province of Saudi Arabia may assert itself and lobby for a separate "autonomous enclave" just as the Kurds have succeeded in Iraq. In such a situation, Saudi Arabia may look beyond the Gulf and invite Egypt and Turkey to join the GSF in order to balance Iran. Consequently, the seat of power may shift either to Egypt or elsewhere, as used to be in history. Except for brief intermissions, the political seat of Islam has always been in the hands of non-Arab Gulf States. The role and weight of non-Arab Muslim countries, particularly populous ones like Indonesia and also India, will also increase, as after Indonesia, India is the second-largest home of the Muslim population in the world – more than 160 million. The current growing bilateral interactions of India and Saudi Arabia will likely prove a diplomatic *hors d'oeuvre* and facilitate an intimate relation in the coming years.

In case Iran reconciles with the US, it will also weaken Saudi Arabia and create apprehension of a Shia bogey among the Sunni rulers and elites. This may provoke and persuade the Arab Gulf states to form a Gulf federation and pose a joint front on the pattern of the UAE, which was formed in 1971.

ii. Where Tel Aviv is concerned, the fall of Syria leading to weakened Iran will remove the bogey of nuclear Iran and significantly attenuate the agility as well as the

reach of Hamas and Hezbollah. This will perceptibly impact upon their political and social power bases, particularly in Lebanon and Palestine. The proposition of the rise of Shia crescent would also recede but for the time being. This may leverage Israel to increase its domain and influence in the region. Already, the Kurds of Iraq have developed significant attachment to Israel as they received considerable support from that country during the Iraq War (2003). In course of time, Israel will emerge as a powerful pillar in West Asia in general and the Gulf in particular.

iii. As regards Washington, the entire Gulf once again will be under its control. This will pave the way for bringing peace and stability in Iraq. This will also enable the US and the Western companies to exploit the resources and markets of war-ravaged Iraq. A weakened Iran will reduce its interference in Iraq; hence, peace will ultimately prevail. The role of Saudi Arabia will also decline. Saudi Arabia will be more inward looking than pursuing an active neighbourhood policy. The demise of the Ba'athist regime in Syria will minimise Russian influence in the region and also provide the US a free hand to deal with Asia-Pacific policies and to contain China with ease.

Countries like India, which have great stakes in the region, have a minimal role, which is to follow and facilitate the implementation of the international norms and promote and facilitate stability and peace. India has always taken a

principled stand on West Asian issues. Although in recent times, particularly in the case of Syria, India has taken a meticulous stand, which seems more pragmatic and consensual in terms of abiding with international norms, initially it abstained but later on voted in favour of the Arab League-US backed resolution in the UNSC against the Assad regime. While voting in favour of the resolution, India cautioned against its misuse in the light of experience. India's UN permanent representative, Hardeep Puri, outlined that the role of organisations like the UN is to facilitate a "peaceful and inclusive process to address the grievances of all sections of the Syrian society"; that violence committed by any party or "prescriptions from outside" could not lead to an easy and early solution; that these activities did not comply with India's international policy framework. The record shows that India has almost always followed and respected the UN mandates and opposed violation of human rights and foreign intervention in any country's internal affairs. Following the same policy stance will be appropriate, particularly in this hour of instability and spate of regime changes in West Asia. However, India's political system, based on multi-ethnic democracy suited to the eastern culture, has attracted the attention of some of the Arab countries opening out to the democratic process. India should not hesitate to share its experiences but must also clearly underline that it has no intention to export any such ideology to them nor is it interested in carving any such "politico-ideological niche" in the region. Let the people decide what suits them. India should welcome what is welcomed by the people of the Arab region.

A stable and peaceful West Asia in general and the Gulf in particular is desirable to all the stakeholders, including India. Although the current turmoil appears to facilitate the transfer of power from an autocratic regime to the "people", its underlying motives may not be healthy in the medium to long term. The societies will definitely polarise; the new governments will face tough resistance in managing their ethnic and sectarian blocs and the future of democracy is also not going to settle soon. The Bedouin culture, strong tribalism, adherence to their particular culture and traditions and the nostalgia of the leftover loyal groups of the erstwhile authoritarian regimes would strew potholes on the way to the development of democracy and nationalism. Moreover, the fear of the "rule of the majority" in the name of democracy and the political empowerment of the Islamist forces such as the Brotherhood, who are actively partaking in the mission to topple the Syrian regime, are other possible future offsets to democratic and liberal hopes in the region in general and Syria in particular.

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Endnotes

1. In this author's understanding, there is a difference between Arab Spring and Arab Awakening. Basically, Arab Awakening has happened in the light of how the major exogenous powers in collusion with some Arab elites behaved during the Gulf War (1990) and the Iraq War (2003), which in its last phase became the playground of the clash of civilizations. During this phase the people of the Arab region recognised the real faces and motives of their rulers, who wanted to remain in power at any cost. They also realised that despite their huge wealth they were seen as good for nothing by the advanced nations. This aroused a strong anti-US/West feeling. The Arab Spring was the expression of the disgruntlement of the common Arabs against the indisposition of their rulers to address their genuine problems like high unemployment, political suppression, social inequality and appropriation of national wealth leading to crony capitalism, coupled with growing negative perception of the US/West among the Arab youth.
2. A study conducted by the Abu Dhabi-based Arab Monetary Fund, an Arab League agency, estimated that joblessness among Arabs is 13.7 per cent, compared with an international average of 5.7 per cent. The report estimated that if the authorities want to reduce unemployment by half, they will have to create 40 million jobs by 2020; youths account for nearly 50 per cent of jobless Arabs, i.e. 20 million. In some countries, the situation is more pathetic; 2008 data show that in Lebanon medium jobless rates were 8.2 per cent, Syria 8.4 per cent, Egypt 8.8 per cent, Morocco 9.6 per cent, and Saudi Arabia and Libya 10 per cent each. Djibouti had the highest jobless rate of 59 per cent. The figures for some other countries are: Somalia 25 per cent, Mauritania 22 per cent, Palestine 21.6 per cent, and Iraq and Yemen 15.9 per cent each. (Zakir Hussain, "Second Wave of Saudiisation*:* Is it an answer to the domestic discontent in Saudi Arabia", in *India Migration Report 2012*, in press.)
3. Discussions with several experts on the Middle East also reveal that the Kuwaiti occupation could have been a plan between the US, Israel, Saudi Arabia and Qatar to topple the regime and increase the price of oil. Iran and others had started seeking oil payment in currency other than dollar: this was another reason for the first Gulf War.
4. In its Charter containing 22 provisions, nowhere does the GCC mention the word "political". However, the first GCC summit declared its goal to be protection from foreign interference.

5. Richard Russell, "From the War with Iraq until Today", *The Artesh: Iran's Marginalized Regular Military,* Middle East View Point, Middle East Institute, Washington, 2011.
6. Hamid Ansari, *Travelling through Conflict: Essay on the politics of West Asia*, Pearson Longman, New Delhi, 2008.
7. Anthony H. Cordesmann, *Saudi Arabia Enters the Twenty-First Century: The Military and International Security Dimensions* (vol. 2), Praeger, London, 2003.
8. Alternative views also opine that the invasion of Kuwait was orchestrated by the Kuwaitis themselves and the Saudis, so that the US would get permanent military bases in the Gulf and the US would renew its petrodollar deal with Aramco.
9. PSF is a land force, comprised of infantry, armour, artillery, and combat support elements from GCC participating countries. For detailed discussion, see Glenn P. Kuffel, Jr., *The Gulf Cooperation Council's Peninsular Shield Force,* Naval War College, Newport, RI, 2000, http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?Location=U2&doc=GetTRDoc.pdf&AD=ADA378521.
10. For detailed discussion, see J.E. Peterson, Chapter Six, *Defending Arabia*, Croom Helm, London; St. Martin's Press, New York, 1986.
11. Saudi Arabia approached China to acquire $2 billion worth CSS-2 missiles after the United States refused to sell it Lance missiles and F-15s. In late 1987, Saudi Arabia received the first of the CSS-2 missiles, which are alleged to be nuclear-tipped (Source: Timothy V. McCarthy, *A Chronology of PRC Missile Trade and Developments*, Monterey Institute of International Studies, USA, 1992).
12. For details, see Richard F. Grimmett, *Conventional Arms Transfers to Developing Nations, 2002-2009*, 10 September 2010, CRS Report for Congress, R41403, www.crs.gov, pp. 57-8.
13. Iran ratified NPT in 1970 and since February 1992, allowed the IAEA to inspect its nuclear facilities.
14. Bernard Kaussler, "The Iranian Army: Task and capabilities", in *The Artesh: Iran's Marginalized Regular Army*, Middle East Institute.
15. For a detailed discussion, see Kenneth Katzman, *Iran: Arms and Technology Acquisitions,* CRS Report for Congress, updated 22 June 1998, http://www.parstimes.com/nuclear/iranarms98.pdf; also see CRS Report 94-138, *Iran: Conventional Arms Acquisitions*; and CRS Report 98-299, *Russian Missile and Nuclear Reactor Transfers to Iran*.

16. The US/West arms supplied to the GCC countries are suspect on two counts: they were not the latest technology, and the GCC countries lack trained personnel to handle them effectively. Large kickbacks also happened in these arms deals. The Al Yamamah deal between Saudi Arabia and Great Britain is still ailing the Saudi royals in some quarters.
17. Kaussler, "The Iranian Army …", n. 14.
18. In the 2009 election the youth mostly supported the Green Movement of Hossein Mossavi. For details, see Colin Freeman, "Iran Protest Cancelled as Leaked Election Results Show Mahmoud Ahmadinejad came Third", *The Telegraph*, 15 June 2009, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/5540211/Iran-protest-cancelled-as-leaked-election-results-show-Mahmoud-Amadinejad-came-third.html; Saeed Kamali Dehghan, "Iran's opposition green movement calls for renewed street protests", *The Guardian*, 8 February 2011, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/feb/08/iran-opposition-green-movement-tehran-protest.
19. Kaussler, "The Iranian Army …", n. 14.
20. Ibid.
21. Anthony H. Cordesman, *The Military Balance in the Gulf: The Dynamics of Force Developments,* Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, 2005, p. 80.
22. Mark Landler and Steven Lee Myers, "With $30 Billion Arms Deal, U.S. Bolsters Saudi Ties", *New York Times*, 29 December 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/30/world/middleeast/with-30-billion-arms-deal-united-states-bolsters-ties-to-Saudi-arabia.html.
23. Caryle Murphy, "Why is Saudi Arabia stockpiling US weapons?", 23 October 2010. http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/Saudi-arabia/101022/why-Saudi-arabia-stockpiling-us-weapons
24. Landler and Lee Myers, "With $30 Billion Arms Deal, U.S. Bolsters Saudi Ties", n. 22.
25 Theater High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) is the only system designed to destroy short- and intermediate-range ballistic missiles both inside and outside the Earth's atmosphere... The United States, will deliver two THAAD batteries, 96 missiles, two Raytheon Co (RTN.N) AN/TPY-2 radars plus 30 years of spare parts, support and training with contractor logistics support to the UAE. Jim Wolf, " U.S. in $3.5 billion arms sale to UAE amid Iran tensions" (source: Jim Wolf, *The Reuters,*

1 January 2012, http://in.reuters.com/article/2012/01/01/usa-uae-iran-idINDEE80002R20120101).

26. Bill Law, "Analysis: Selling Arms to the Gulf", *BBC News Middle East*, 9 January 2012, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-16396777
27. Arthur Bright, "Eyeing Iran, US details $60 billion arms sale to Saudi Arabia", 21 October 2010, http://www.csmonitor.com/World/terrorism-security/2010/1021/Eyeing-Iran-US-details-60-billion-arms-sale-to-Saudi-Arabia/(page)/2
28. Experts are of the view that since 2007 Iran has trained the IRGC Navy (IRGCN) to manage the Strait of Hormuz and its suburbs, particularly in emergencies. The IRGCN has assumed the nickname of "Gorilla Navy", which is trained in swarming techniques. For details, see Gwadat Bahgat, "Iran's Regular Army: Its History and Capacities" in *The Artesh: Iran's Marginalized Regular Military,* Middle East Institute, Washington, View Point 2011.
29. Background Note: Saudi Arabia, http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3584.htm.
30. It is believed that Iraq made 49 chemical warfare attacks in 40 border locations. Julian Perry Robinson and Jozef Goldblat, "Chemical Warfare in the Iran-Iraq War 1980-1988", SIPRI Fact Sheet, May 1984, http://www.iranchamber.com/history/articles/chemical_warfare_iran_iraq_war.php.
31. Tareq Y. Ismael and Jacqueline S. Ismael, *Government and Politics of the Contemporary Middle East*, Routledge, London, 2011, p. 142.
32. Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/iran-iraq.htm.
33. Kamran Mofid, *The Economic Consequences of the Gulf War*, Routledge, London, 1990.
34. Sergeant Ben Wilson, "The Evolution of Iranian Warfighting during the Iran-Iraq War", *Infantry*, July-August 2007.
35. Islamisation is a belief, ideology, philosophy, movement and thought process, which calls for recasting and re-carving an entire socio-religious structure in the light of Islamic injunctions. It also calls for instrumentalisation of Islam and believes that the role of Islam cannot be confined to ritual practices but must be taken to the whole system as a mode of governance. This definition politicised Islam. Ayatollah Khomeini further amplified the political dimension of Islam by

mooting the concept of *Velyat-e-Faqih,* which is broadly translated as "Philosopher King". *Velayat-e-Faqih*, rule of the religious jurist, served as the central pillar of Iran's theocratic system. Under this, the power of the state is concentrated in the hand of a single jurist appointed by the Assembly of Experts. As a supreme leader he has final say on all matters of governance – foreign relations to domestic policy – and control over all branches of authorities, including army, police and judicatory. The concept of *Velayet-e-Faqih,* which gained momentum after the Iranian Revolution, started questioning the authoritarian regimes of the Arab Gulf. The monarchs were terrified by this contagious ideology, which questioned the embodiment of Islam by the monarchs.

36. For a detailed discussion, see *The Iranian Revolution at 30,* Viewpoint Special Edition, The Middle East Institute, Washington, DC, http://www.mei.edu/Portals/0/Publications/Iran_Final.pdf.
37. Iraq historically objected to the formation of Kuwait in 1961 under the Sabah family. The eight-year-long war with Iran financially bankrupted Saddam Hussein. He thought to cover up this loss by capturing two strategic Islands of Bubiyana and Warba and the Rumailia oilfield of Kuwait.
38. According to Ismael and Ismael, n. 30, the assault upon Iraqi society has had devastating consequences. The annual death rate prior to the invasion was 5.5 per thousand. This rose to 13.2 by 2003 March and to 19.8 in 2006. The American Civil War estimated around 970,000 casualties, or 3 per cent of the population. Besides, around 2,650,000 Iraqis have been internally displaced due to sectarian violence and rise of criminality.
39. For a detailed discussion, see http://www.un.org/depts/oip/index.html.
40. "Cost of Reconstruction", http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/iraq_reconstruction_costs.htm. For detailed discussion, see various CRS Reports for Congress: Curt Tarnoff (12 May 2005), *Iraq: Recent Developments in Reconstruction Assistance*, http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/48612.pdf; Curt Tarnoff, *Iraq: Reconstruction Assistance*, 7 August 2009, http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL31833.pdf.
41. According to James A. Paul, "many experts believe that Iraq has additional undiscovered oil reserves, which might raise the total well beyond 250 billion barrels when serious prospecting resumes, putting Iraq closer to Saudi Arabia and far above all other oil producing countries". *Iraq:*

the Struggle for Oil, Global Policy Forum, http://dspace.cigilibrary.org/jspui/bitstream/123456789/22209/1/Iraq,%20the%20Struggle%20for%20Oil.pdf?1.

42. For detailed discussion, see http://www.usip.org/files/resources/iraq_oil_pw64.pdf; http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/middle_east/02/iraq_key_maps/html/oil_fields.stm.
43. "US formally ends Iraq war with little fanfare", *The Dawn*, 16 December 2011, http://www.dawn.com/2011/12/16/us-formally-ends-iraq-war-with-little-fanfare.html.
44. Linda Bilmes, a budget expert from Harvard, and Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz of Columbia University conclude that the economic cost of the war could be at least $3 trillion. In this estimate $1 trillion of economic loss due to recession has not been included. Linda J. Bilmes and Joseph E. Stiglitz, "The Iraq War Will Cost Us $3 Trillion, and Much More", *The Washington Post,* 9 March 2008, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/03/07/AR2008030702846.html. Also see Steve Schifferes, "The Iraq war: Counting the cost", *BBC News*, 19 March 2011, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7304300.stm.
45. Atul Aneja, "US Military Operation in Iraq Ends", *The Hindu,* 16 December 2011.
46. Bilmes and Stiglitz, "The Iraq War Will Cost us $3 Trillion, and Much More", n. 36.
47. Before invading Kuwait, Saddam Hussein blamed that country for overproduction of oil, which led to decline in oil prices, straining the Iraqi economy. For details, see Ole Gunnar Austinik, "The War over the Price of Oil: Oil and the Conflict on the Persian Gulf", *The International Journal of Global Energy,* 5(2), 1993, Inderscience Enterprises, http://www.kaldor.no/energy/GLOB9205-oil-in-the-pg.pdf.
48. Iraq is planning to increase its export capacity to 12 million barrels per day in the coming years; this has the consent of OPEC. At present, according to Iraq's Minister of Oil, the country is producing 2.6 million barrels.
49. For detailed discussion, see Zakir Hussain, "India Woos GCC's Sovereign Wealth Fund: Policy, Scope and Precautions", *IDSA Policy Brief,* 26 June 2009, http://www.idsa.in/system/files/ZakirHussain26062009.pdf.
50. According to Mohammad Khelvi, the Saudi nuclear scientist relegated to the US, Saudi Arabia paid $14 billion indirectly for the Pakistani nuclear projects. Saudi Arabia promoted Pakistan to develop nuclear weapons for its safety and security.

51. Under the Kerry-Lugar Bill, Pakistan received $1.5 billion aid money annually. "US Senate passes Kerry Lugar Bill to triple aid to Pakistan", *Times of India,* 25 September 2011, http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2009-09-25/us/28101474_1_kerry-lugar-bill-afghanistan-and-pakistan-pakistani-people.
52. Israel will nevertheless remain a major player in the regional geo-strategic dynamics.
53. For a graphic description, see Bill Marsh and Joe Burgess, "Points of Confrontation"*, New York Times, Sunday Review.* 27 August 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2011/08/28/opinion/sunday/20110828_Confrontation.html?ref=sunday.
54. For detailed discussion, see http://www.iaea.org/newscenter/focus/iaeairan/bog112011-65.pdf.
55. Simon Henderson, "Iran's Nuclear Program: 'Credible' Evidence of 'Continuing' Work on a Bomb, *Policy Alert*, 8 November 2011, http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC06.php?CID=1751.
56. Peter Brookes even believes that by 2015 Iran with its intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) capability could reach the USA. Peter Brookes, *Protect America from What?,* The Heritage Foundation, 2012, http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/05/protect-america-from-what
57. Bernard Gwertzman, "Assad Regime in Syria Crucial to Iran", 30 August 2011, http://globalpublicsquare.blogs.cnn.com/2011/08/30/syria-and-irans-power-calculus/.
58 http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2011/04/irans-nightmare-losing-syria.html#ixzz1eo2wYSE8.
59. Emile Hokayam, "Syria and its neighbor", *Survival, Vol. 52(2),* April-May 2012.
60. Mehdi Hasan, "Syria's brave but divided opposition will have to take down Assad on their own", *The Guardian*, 11 December 2011, http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/dec/11/syria-opposition-assad-intervention.
61. Ibid.
62. See for the latest development in Dagestan, Lucy Ash, "Dagestan – the most dangerous place in Europe", 27 November 2011, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-15824831
63. Mehdi Hasan, "Syria's brave but divided opposition …", n. 58.
64. Since the Syrian crisis started in March 2011, Turkey has given shelter to

more than 32,000 Syrian refugees. Also, the rebel Syrian National Army has established an attack base on Turkey's border with Syria to target the Syrian forces. After the shooting down of a Turkish warplane by the Syrian army, the situation has rapidly deteriorated. It is possible that the allied forces will use this opportunity to carve a no-fly-zone on Turkey's border with Syria as they did in Libya, and launch NATO attacks. But such a strategy may not work out in Syria's context. Russia and Iran, coupled with the network of the two asymmetrical forces, Hamas and Hizbullah, are mostly likely to support the current regime in Syria.

65. Syria Opposition Leader Interview Transcript: "Stop the Killing Machine", http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970203833104577071960384240668.html.
66. Gwertzman, "Assad Regime in Syria Crucial to Iran", n. 56.
67. Syria Opposition Leader Interview Transcript: "Stop the Killing Machine", n. 63.
68. Ibid.
69. "Iran, Syria sign free trade agreement", *Press TV*, 20 August 2010, http://www.presstv.ir/detail/139463.html.
70. *Mapping the Global Muslim Population (2009),* Pew Research Center, USA, http://pewforum.org/uploadedfiles/Orphan_Migrated_Content/Muslimpopulation.pdf; Febe Amanois, *Islam: Sunnis and Shiites,* CRS Report for Congress, 2004.
71. *Mapping the Global Muslim Population: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Muslim Population*, Pew Research Center, USA. http://www.pewforum.org/newassets/images/reports/Muslimpopulation/Muslimpopulation.pdf.
72. This author believes that the creation of GCC Federation as proposed by Saudi Arabia in May 2012 will at most work at the regional level, but it would not be effective in achieving its goal of countering Iran, which is a regional heavyweight in terms of population, conventional military force, sectarian advantages and geostrategic and geo- political presence in the region and beyond. See Atul Aneja, "GCC cool to Riyadh's Meet-Iran Threat Plan", 15 May 2012, *The Hindu,* http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/article3422592.ece
73. The Arab League was established at a meeting in Cairo in 1945 by Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Transjordan and Yemen. It is involved in political, economic, cultural and social programmes designed to promote the interests of member states. It has served as

a forum to coordinate policy positions and deliberate on matters of common concern, settling some Arab disputes and limiting conflicts. The League's current membership includes Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Tunisia.

74. Mapping the Global Muslim Population, October 2009, Pew Research Center, Washington, http://www.pewforum.org/newassets/images/reports/Muslimpopulation/Muslimpopulation.pdf

75. Till the writing of this paper, the US has not announced the Iran Threat Reduction Act, December 2011. Under this Act, the Obama administration has imposed severe economic sanction over the Iranian economic and oil businesses. It had put July 2 2012 as the last deadline to all those countries and companies dealing with Iran. In the month of July the Obama administration has once again imposed fresh sanction over Iranian oil export. The effects of these sanctions are deteriorating the economic conditions in terms of rise in inflation, unemployment, decline in foreign exchange and fall in oil export. However, the Iranian authorities have not shown any weaknesses or sign of compromise on nuclear issue with the US/West.

76. *A Saudi National Security Doctrine for the Next Decade*, 11 July 2011, http://www.Sau'dibrit.com/2011/07/11/a-Sau'di-national-security-doctrine-for-the-next-decade/.

77. Jason Burke, "Saudi Arabia worries about stability, security and Iran", http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jun/29/Sau'di-arabia-prince-turki-arab-spring-iran.

78. Richard Galpin, "Russian Arms Shipments Bolster Syria's Embattled Assad", *The BBC News Middle East*, 30 January 2012.http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-16797818

79. Telephonic interview with Alexey Baev, Senior Correspondent, New Delhi Bureau Chief, Izvestia, on 16 May 2012, at 11.36 a.m.

80. Alex Vatanka, *America's Catch 22 Situation: The Iran Question in Afghanistan*, 13 June 2012, Middle East Institute, Washington, http://www.mei.edu/content/americas-catch-22-iran-question-afghanistan

81. All Iraqi oil fields under development are linked to the national pipelines that transfer crude oil from Basra to the Turkish port of Ceyhan. The Mediterranean port has capacity beyond this Iraq target. "Iraq Could Export 2.6 million barrels by 2012", http://www.zawya.com/story.cfm/

sidZAWYA20111128061504/lok061500111127/Iraq_can_export_26_million_barrels_in_2012?weeklynewsletter&zawyaemailmarketing.

82. Already, Syria-Turkey relations have deteriorated seriously, particularly after the shooting down of Turkey's F-4 Phantom plane by the Syrian air force. Turkey has called a NATO meeting to consider possible punitive steps against Syria. It has started deploying missile batteries, and columns of military vehicles are moving towards the border. This author believes that Turkey's belligerence is a miscalculation, for some of the following reasons: (i) Turkey will be seen by the people of the region as an agent of the West for plunging the region into a costly devastating war. (ii) Turkey will be fighting Israel's war. (ii) A war, once begun, will not be easy to wind up. During the four decades of its rule the House of Assad has not only built deep connections with the regional forces but also built up huge arms depots. Turkey shares a long border with Syria, and this borderland is mostly inhabited by disgruntled Kurds. From time to time Syria has been using these Kurd rebels to its own advantage. Thus, Turkey will bleed for the coming few years and this will potentially affect its growing economy. (iii) Waging a war will also be against Turkey's own "zero problem neighbourhood policy". However, several other analysts point out that Russia, which is a major ally of Syria, may like to see US involvement in a possible Turko-Syrian war, which may compel the US to remain in the region for a few more years, bleeding itself economically and consequently enabling Russia to re-emerge as a global power.

83. "Israel's Secret Iran Attack Plan: Electronic Warfare". 16 November 2011, http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2011/11/16/israel-s-secret-iran-attack-plan-electronic-warfare.html. On the Israeli threat to attack the Iranian nuclear facility, US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta opined earlier that such an event could "consume the Middle East in a confrontation and a conflict that we would regret". *U.S., Israel Discuss Triggers for Bombing Iran's Nuclear Infrastructure,* 28 December 2011, http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2011/12/28/u-s-israel-discuss-triggers-for-bombing-iran-s-nuclear-infrastructure.html.

84. "In Israel, speculation grows about Iran strike"*, The Washington Post,* 4 November 2011, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/in-israel-speculation-grows-about-iran-strike/2011/11/03/gIQAjy9AjM_story.html; "Iranian leader warns Israel, U.S. not to attack nuclear sites", *The Washington Post,* 11 November 2011, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/iran-leader-warns-israel-

us/2011/11/10/gIQAno1k8M_story.html; "Leon Panetta warns against Iran strike", *The Guardian,* http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/nov/11/leon-panetta-warns-iran-strike.

85. A CRS Report to Congress noted that Assad may instigate a war with Israel to divert the attention of the anti-regime elements. Jeremy M. Sharp and Christopher M. Blanchard, *Unrest in Syria and U.S. Sanctions Against the Asad Regime,* CRS Report for Congress, 9 November 2011, RL 33487, www.crs.gov.
86. Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya, "Sudan and the Yinon Plan: The Balkanization of Sudan", Global Research, 16 January 2011.
87. On the basis of the Yinon Plan, Israeli strategists have called for the division of Iraq into a Kurdish state and two Arab states, one each for Shia and Sunni Muslims. This has been achieved through the soft balkanization of federalism in Iraq, which has allowed the Kurdistan regional government to negotiate with foreign oil corporations on its own. The first step towards establishing this was a war between Iraq and Iran, which is discussed in the Yinon Plan.
88. Ralph Peters, "Blood Borders: How a Better Middle East Would Look", *Armed Forces Journal,* http://www.armedforcesjournal.com/2006/06/1833899.
89. "The Zionist Plan for the Middle East", translated and edited by Israel Shahak; The Israel of Theodore Herzl (1904) and of Rabbi Fischmann (1947), http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/pdf/The%20Zionist%20Plan%20for%20the%20Middle%20East.pdf.
90. Among the objectives of the Yinon Plan is to divide Lebanon and Syria into several states on the basis of religious and sectarian identities for Sunni Muslims, Shia Muslims, Christians and Druze: http://niqnaq.wordpress.com/2011/01/18/sudan-and-the-yinon-plan/.
91. Discussion with Prof. Efrahim Enbar, BESA-IDSA Annual Bilateral Meeting, New Delhi, 7 December 2011.
92. The US has voted against the Palestinian Statehood in UNESCO; it has also announced to veto the resolution in UNSC. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/09/08/palestinian-statehood-us-_n_954246.html.
93. Dean Cheng and Bruce Klinger, 2011, The Heritage.
94. Pakistan has considered giving India Most Favored Nation status. Both nations have moved towards increasing their trade relations. Right now, out of 8000 items, only 1946 items are traded between the two countries.

This has generated a trade volume of approximately $2.46 billion. By the end of 2012, the two countries have agreed to reduce the negative list to a few hundreds; the potential of total bilateral trade is estimated around $10 billion.

95. Russell, "From the War with Iraq until Today", n. 5.
96. Dennis C. Blair, "Annual Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence", 2 February 2010.
97. CIA World fact Book, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html.
98. Alireza Nader and Jaya Laha, *Iran's Balancing Act in Afghanistan*, Rand National Defense Research Institute, Pittsburg, 2011.
99. Ben Farmer, "Fears Afghanistan is on verge of new sectarian war as 59 people killed in twin bomb attacks", *The Telegraph*, 6 December 2011, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afghanistan/8938246/Afghanistan-Kabul-shrine-suicide-attacks-kills-34.html.
100. Barbara Salvin, "Iran Turns to China, Barter to Survive Sanctions", *Atlantic Council*, November 2011.
101. Zakir Hussain, "Oil Price Volatility and India's Energy Security: Policies and Options", 9 January 2009, http://www.idsa.in/idsastrategiccomments/OilPriceVolatilityandIndiasEnergySecurity_ZHussain_090109.
102. Looking at the profound danger on oil security in Saudi Arabia and its global implications, this author found that many believe that there should be some international security arrangements in protecting these oil terminals and processing facilities.
103. "Saudi Arabia and Oil: What If?" *The Economist,* http://www.economist.com/node/2705562
104. *Economic Effects of Major SLOC Closure,* http://www.slideshare.net/auerswald/effect-ofclosureofthestraitofhormuz-6748310
105. George Fredman, *The Straits of Hormuz Incident and US Strategy,* Stratfor Global Intelligence, 14 January 2008, http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/strait_hormuz_incident_and_u_s_strategy
106. W. Jonathan Rue, *Iran's Navy Threatens the Security of the Persian Gulf: Tehran's New Plan to Dominate its Region and Beyond,* Institute for the Study of War, 2011, http://www.understandingwar.org/otherwork/irans-navy-threatens-security-persian-gulf.

107. Joshua C. Himes, *Iran's Maritime Evolution,* Gulf Analysis Paper, Middle East Programme, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, July 2011.
108. http://www.understandingwar.org/print/1592 (Check it)
109. Clinton paid a three-day state visit to India in May 2012. During her interactions with the media, she said that "the United States is working to secure alternative sources of crude oil for India so it does not have to rely on Iran ..." Though not under pressure, India announced to cut approximately 11 per cent of the Iranian oil import. However, S.M. Krishna, India's Minister for External Affairs, said, "Iran remains an important source of oil for us although its share in our imports is declining and that is well known. Ultimately it reflects the decision that refineries make based on financial, commercial and technical considerations." "Hillary Clinton's India visit focuses on Iran", *Xinhuanet,* 5 May 2012, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/video/2012-05/10/c_131579986.htm; US to fly in expert to cut Indian-Iran link, *Indian Express,* 9 May 2012, http://www.indianexpress.com/news/us-to-flyin-expert-to-cut-indiairan-link/947295/0.
110. For detailed discussion see Zakir Hussain, *Iran Crisis and India's Policy Predicament,* 17 February 2012, http://www.icwa.in/pdfs/VBIndiaIran.pdf
111. At the time of writing, the situation on the ground was not very clear. Some of the Sunni Arab Gulf states, such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar, have openly supported financing for the rebel groups to fight against the Assad regime. The US/West has also endorsed this plan and allocated funds to the "people of Syria" group. This author became aware of this nascent development when he was in Syria in October 2011.
112. The term "fossil fuel civilization" was used Bilahari Kausikan, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Singapore, during his talk on 27 March 2012 at the Indian Council of World Affairs, New Delhi.
113. Damascus was the seat of the Omayyad dynasty. It is also the home of legendary Islamic fighter Sala Din.
114. After the invasion of Iraq in 2003, around 2 million Iraqis have become refugees. Of them, 1.2 million are living in Syria, 450,000 in Jordan, 155,000 in Egypt, Lebanon, Iran and Turkey, and 150,000 in the Gulf states. http://www.brookings.edu/~/media/Files/rc/papers/2007/0611humanrights_alkhalidi/0611humanrights_alkhalidi.pdf.

115. The war, which President Barack Obama officially brought to an end on 31 December 2011, cost the US government around $3 trillion, left 4487 US service members dead and killed more than 100,000 Iraqis. The Pentagon counts 32,226 US service members wounded, but the toll, including cumulative psychological and physiological damage, may be as high as half a million. Dan Froomkin, "Colin Powell's New Book: War with Iraq Never Debated", 5 September 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/09/colin-powell-book_n_1503592.html

116. Discussions with the Israeli delegation at Annual BESA-IDSA dialogue revealed to this author that the beginning and expansion of the Arab Spring took Israel by surprise. They had concluded "cold peace" with the authoritarian rulers and monarchs of West Asia, under which the two sides had a tacit agreement not to bring back the situation of 1967 and Israel would help in sustaining these regimes.

117. However, others argue that Ayatollah Khomeini came to power in 1979 in Iran pledged to amend 'history's mistake. The assassination of Imam Hussein in the battle of Karbala in Iraq in 680 AD and usurpation of power by Umayyad Caliphs established the dynastic Sunni power in Islamic world. (source: Demographic, Sectarianism and Gulf Security, IISS Security Conference 2006, Chapter 6, Saturday December 6, 2006.)

118. Although 200 million Shia Muslims all over the world derive their ideological inspiration from Iran and may not abide with the Saudi monarch's dictates, they have to visit the kingdom for Haj, which is a religious obligation for Muslims.

119. After the visit of King Abdullah to India in 2006, the relations between Saudi Arabia and India have grown rapidly: the frequency of high-level visits has multiplied; the existing areas of cooperation have deepened and expanded; and new areas such as defence, counterterrorism and cooperation in security against non-state actors have also come on the table. The Delhi Declaration (2006) and Riyadh Declaration (2011) give expression to the concerns of each other. The volume of trade between the two countries has grown threefold in the last five years, touching $25 billion.

120. Israel also provided active support to South Sudan in getting independence and also thereafter.

About the Author

Dr. Zakir Hussain is Research Fellow at the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), New Delhi. His area of interest is political economy of West Asia. His doctorate was on India-GCC Political Economic Relations in the Post-1990 Period. Currently, his research is focused on Saudi Arabia. Before joining ICWA, he was associated with reputed research organisations – International Labour Organisation (ILO), National Labour Institute (NLI), Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) and National Maritime Foundation (NMF).

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The idea of writing this paper was conceptualised by the author during his visit to Syrian cities such as Damascus, Aleppo, Homs and Latakia in October 2011. The author had rare opportunity to interact with a wide range of people, officials & Syrians, including the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Advisor to the President, Chief Sunni Mutfi and Head of the Syrian Church in Damascus, besides interacting with journalists & students at the University of Damascus. He can be contacted at: shahabzakir@gmail.com

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