



U.S.-U.A.E. Business Council  
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# An Enduring Partnership

## The U.S.-U.A.E. Defense and Security Relationship

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## PREFACE

While the fundamentals of the U.S.-U.A.E. security and defense relationship are unchanged since the publication of the third edition of this report in October 2017, there are some important changes that warrant mention at the outset of this updated study.

First, the U.A.E.'s experience of the war in Yemen has altered its acquisition priorities. The U.A.E.'s first large deployment of troops in a foreign country has highlighted the U.A.E.'s need for greater sustainment, logistics, and maintenance equipment, particularly when it comes to expeditionary forces. It has also shown the need for more Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities (particularly the tools that help process, store, and utilize data) and a need for force protection equipment. In addition, it has revealed the need to build up the U.A.E. Navy for purposes of logistical resupply. This trend has been reinforced by U.A.E. activities elsewhere in the region, including in the Horn of Africa.

A second trend is the U.A.E.'s renewed emphasis on the development of its national defense industrial base. The U.A.E. has long sought to become more self-sufficient in meeting its aerospace and defense needs by investing heavily in domestic capabilities and, through offsets, forging strategic partnerships with some of the biggest and most respected multinational companies in these industries. This has begun to bear fruit in the creation of a sizable local defense industry, headlined by companies such as Emirates Defense Industries Company (EDIC) and International Golden Group (IGG). Increasingly, the U.A.E. is turning to these domestic companies when awarding lucrative defense contracts.<sup>1</sup>



In keeping with the above, the U.A.E. has encouraged Western defense companies to establish a landed presence in the U.A.E. This practice will be grounded in a revised version of the U.A.E.'s national defense offset policy due to be announced in February 2019. In December 2017, Raytheon formed a wholly owned local subsidiary, Raytheon Emirates, in Abu Dhabi to oversee its operations in the country. This new company is meant to contribute to the country's economic diversification and Emiratization goals.<sup>2</sup> The Emiratis are asking other major firms to consider similar steps.



A third shift is the U.A.E.'s potential willingness to turn to non-Western countries for major military systems such as combat aircraft. In February 2017, the U.A.E. and Russia signed a letter of intent to jointly develop a fifth-generation fighter based on the MiG-29. According to Russia, the U.A.E. also expressed an interest in potentially

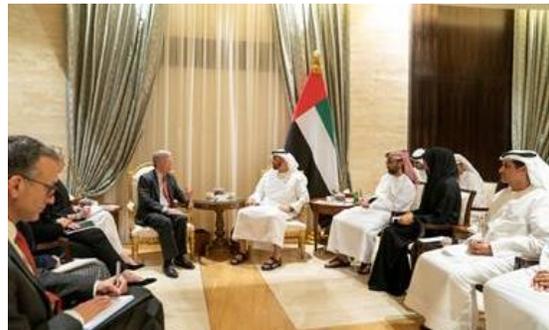
procuring Sukhoi-35 fighters. If this transpires, it would be the first time the U.A.E. has turned to a non-Western ally for the provision of combat aircraft.<sup>3 i</sup> Whether or not this transpires, however, it can be viewed as a reflection of the U.A.E.'s frustration with the U.S. acquisition and technology release process, as the U.A.E. has long expressed an interest in participating in the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter program.



*F-35 Joint Strike Fighter*

A fourth change is the Trump administration's increased willingness to release sophisticated military equipment to allied countries. In April 2018, the Trump administration released an updated version of the U.S. Conventional Arms Transfer Policy, which outlines the strategy and guidelines for American arms sales abroad. This new policy, according to an analysis by the Cato Institute, streamlines the arms sales process, loosens controls on what can be exported, and encourages the U.S. Government to play a more active role in brokering deals.<sup>4</sup>

This new policy could result in the U.A.E. being able to purchase long-sought U.S. military equipment, such as armed Reaper drones. Although the U.S. approved General Atomics to sell an unarmed version of the Predator drone to the U.A.E. in 2013 (the RQ-1E), only recently does new U.S. policy potentially allow the sale of armed U.A.V.s. In this regard, a Department of Defense requirements review and Department of State implementation review are being



*U.S. National Security Advisor John Bolton meets with HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan*

scheduled for the next few months. In the meantime, the U.S. Government continues to evaluate technological security deficits, Israel's Qualitative Military Edge (QME), and military requirements underpinning U.A.E. equipment requests. Previously, the U.A.E. had turned to China for an alternative U.A.V. known as the CH-4.<sup>5</sup>

A final notable trend is increased Congressional scrutiny of arms sales to U.S. allies in the Gulf. In Congress, there has been increased opposition to both arms sales to Saudi Arabia and U.S. support to the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen. Although this opposition has centered on Saudi Arabia, it has spilled over to the U.A.E. as well.

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<sup>i</sup> The U.A.E. currently employs armed Wing Loong U.A.V.s purchased from Chengdu Aircraft Industry Group

Ultimately, while the U.A.E. may be willing to consider non-Western suppliers, it is important to emphasize that the U.A.E. continues to demonstrate a strong preference for U.S.-made defense equipment when it is made available. Not only is this equipment cutting edge, it is also interoperable with its existing weapons systems. In addition, it comes with U.S. training and support, further reinforcing the bilateral defense and security relationship that is so important to the interests of both countries and which is the subject of this report.

**Table of Contents**

PREFACE .....0

HISTORY .....5

HOSTING OF U.S. MILITARY .....6

JOINT TRAINING AND EXERCISES .....6

PURCHASES OF U.S. WEAPONS .....8

JOINT CONFRONTATION OF REGIONAL CHALLENGES ..... 10

COUNTER-TERRORISM COOPERATION ..... 13

SHARED SUPPORT FOR STRONG REGIONAL ALLIANCES ..... 14

2017 DEFENSE COOPERATION AGREEMENT ..... 15

REFERENCES ..... 17

## HISTORY

The United States has enjoyed robust relations with the United Arab Emirates since the country's independence in 1971. Their similar views on a wide range of issues have made them natural partners. Meanwhile, they have developed a thriving commercial relationship marked by approximately \$25 billion in bilateral trade. Moreover, they have built deep and growing defense and security ties.

This defense and security cooperation between the U.S. and the U.A.E. blossomed during the First Gulf War in 1990. An early ally during the war, the U.A.E. allowed American planes and ships to operate out of its territory. The Emirates also carried out airstrikes and participated in the force that liberated Kuwait City.<sup>6</sup>

Following the cessation of combat, the U.S. military maintained a presence in the U.A.E., which hosted the U.S. 763<sup>rd</sup> Expeditionary Air Refueling Squadron in its mission to enforce the no-fly zone over southern Iraq.<sup>7</sup> In 1994, the Emirates and the U.S. signed a Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) that formally provided for U.S. military use of U.A.E. facilities including Al-Dhafra Air Force Base in Abu Dhabi and Jebel Ali Port in Dubai.<sup>8</sup> The two countries negotiated a revised and expanded DCA in 2017.



*U.S. Aircraft Carrier USS George H.W. Bush Pulls into Jebel Ali*

Since the First Gulf War, the U.A.E. has also partnered with the U.S. in every major U.S.-led military coalition, save for the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Indeed, the U.A.E. has joined with the U.S. in actions in Somalia, Bosnia-Kosovo, Afghanistan, Libya, and the campaign against the "Islamic State" (Daesh) in Syria and Iraq. As such, the U.A.E. is the only Arab country to participate in six coalition actions with the United States.<sup>9</sup> In turn, the U.S. provided logistics and intelligence support for U.A.E. operations in Yemen.

In recent years, shared concerns over Iran's regional meddling and the rise of extremism in the region have led to an even further deepening of the relationship between the two countries. Today, the defense relationship includes the hosting of U.S. troops, joint exercises and training, billions of dollars in arms sales, and deep military and intelligence cooperation in the U.A.E. and abroad. In this respect, the U.A.E. has become not just a consumer of security, but also a provider of security and a key U.S.



*HE Mohamed Al Bowardi Speaks at U.S.-U.A.E. Business Council Dubai Airshow Dinner*

partner in a volatile and dangerous region.

## HOSTING OF U.S. MILITARY

Both the U.S. and U.A.E. benefit greatly from the United States' ability to station personnel and preposition equipment in a strategically important location like the U.A.E. The U.S. military presence in the U.A.E. deters would-be aggressors and enhances U.S. rapid response capabilities in the event of hostilities.

The U.A.E. currently hosts around 5,000 American military personnel, belonging mostly to the U.S. Air Force's 380<sup>th</sup> Expeditionary Wing stationed at Al-Dhafra Air Base.<sup>10</sup> From Al Dhafra, U.S. airmen have operated refueling tankers, surveillance aircraft, F-15C Strike Eagles, F-22 Raptors, Global Hawk long-range drones, and Airborne Warning and Control Systems.<sup>11</sup>



*U.S. F-22 Raptor in the United Arab Emirates*

The U.A.E. is also home to two key deep harbor ports in the Arabian Gulf that are accessible to U.S. aircraft carriers. More American naval vessels visit Jebel Ali port every year than any other port outside the U.S.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, a number of U.S. military personnel have reportedly been stationed at Fujairah port as well.<sup>13</sup> U.S. Navy ships have also visited Zayed Port and Khalifa Port in Abu Dhabi.<sup>14</sup>

## JOINT TRAINING AND EXERCISES

American and Emirati troops regularly train together and conduct joint exercises in order to advance readiness, ensure interoperability, promote information sharing, and build trust. About 600–800 U.A.E. military personnel travel to the U.S. every year for military training and partnership, largely through the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the U.A.E. annually participates in approximately a dozen U.S.-sponsored military exercises, demonstrating a credible capability to potential adversaries and allies alike.



*U.S.-U.A.E. Military Training*

Some of this training occurs at dedicated facilities in the U.A.E. Since 2003, Al Dhafra has hosted the U.S. Air Forces Central Command (AFCENT) Air Warfare Center (AWC), which helps facilitate training of personnel from throughout the region.

AWC holds biannual seven-week Advanced Tactical Leadership Courses (ATLC) that are designed to train pilots how to become mission commanders.<sup>16</sup> The AWC also operates an Integrated Air and Missile Defense Center (IAMDC) and supports a joint terminal attack controller schoolhouse, combat search and rescue training, and academic courses.<sup>17</sup>

Other training occurs in the United States. Since 2009, U.A.E. pilots have regularly participated in Red Flag training exercises at Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada, considered the best and most realistic air-to-air combat training exercise in the world.<sup>18</sup> Only the best and most capable air forces are invited to participate. U.A.E pilots have also participated in Green Flag training exercises, which are focused on air-to-ground operations.<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile, the U.A.E.'s Presidential Guard has conducted unit enhancement training with partnered U.S. Marine units at the Marine Corp Air Ground Combat Center, and it has trained three times per year at the USMC Mountain Warfare Training Center.



*U.A.E. F-16 at Red Flag Exercise*

In addition to the above, the U.S. and U.A.E. have engaged in a plethora of other bilateral and multilateral military exercises in the U.S., U.A.E., and throughout the region. These exercises have included:

- **Iron Union**: In December 2018, U.S. and U.A.E. ground forces held the latest in a series of joint military exercises in Abu Dhabi named “Iron Union 9,” which was an extension of previous Iron Talon exercises.<sup>20</sup>
- **Iron Magic**: In October 2018, the U.S. and U.A.E. participated in “Iron Magic 19.”<sup>21</sup>
- **Eagle Salute**: In August 2018, as they did two years prior, the U.A.E., the U.S., and Egypt conducted a joint naval exercise in the Red Sea called “Eagle Salute.”<sup>22</sup>
- **Iniohos**: In March 2018, U.S. and U.A.E. forces once again participated in a complex military exercise in Greece named “Iniohos.” Other nations participating in this aerial exercise included Italy, the United Kingdom, Cyprus, and Israel.<sup>23</sup>
- **Native Fury**: In February 2018, U.A.E. and U.S. naval forces conducted a joint military exercise called “Native Fury.”<sup>24</sup>



*U.S., Egyptian, and Emirati ships take part in Eagle Salute*

- Flag 4: In December 2017, the U.A.E., U.S., United Kingdom, and France carried out a joint army training exercise in Abu Dhabi called “Flag 4.”<sup>25</sup>
- Eager Lion: In May 2017, as in previous years, the U.S. and U.A.E. joined 20 other countries in participating in “Eager Lion” military exercises in Jordan.<sup>26</sup>
- Eagle Resolve: In March and April 2017, the U.S. and U.A.E. participated, as they did two years prior, in the “Eagle Resolve” exercise in Kuwait.<sup>27</sup>
- International Mine Countermeasures Exercise (IMCMEX): In April 2016, the U.A.E. participated in IMCMEX, a 30-nation Arabian Gulf exercise hosted by the U.S. that focused on mine countermeasures and other maritime security operations.<sup>28</sup>

## **PURCHASES OF U.S. WEAPONS**

The U.A.E. has markedly increased its military spending over the past decade as the country has expanded the size of its military<sup>ii</sup> and made substantial investments in training and equipment modernization.<sup>29</sup> Although the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute omitted the U.A.E. from its latest ranking of global military expenditure due to a lack of data, it believes the U.A.E. is likely among the top 10-15 largest military spenders in the world.<sup>30</sup>

U.S. defense companies have benefitted greatly from this spending, as the U.A.E. is one of the largest customers for the FMS program.<sup>31</sup> As of September 2018, the U.S. Defense Security Cooperation Agency projected that total Foreign Military Sales Agreements with the U.A.E. would amount to over \$27 billion.

Along these lines, the U.A.E. has purchased a wide variety of sophisticated aircraft and associated weapons systems from the United States:

- Fighter Jets: The U.A.E. Air Force has a fleet of around 74 F-16 Block 60 “Desert Falcon” aircraft, which were manufactured by Lockheed Martin in Texas.<sup>32</sup> These highly sophisticated jets are fully interoperable with U.S. systems and have been equipped with advanced missiles and bombs including the Raytheon AIM-120 Advanced Medium Range Air-to-Air Missile (AMRAAM),<sup>33</sup> Raytheon AIM-9 SIDEWINDER tactical missile,<sup>34</sup> Raytheon High-speed Anti-Radiation Missile (HARM),<sup>35</sup> Raytheon AGM-65 Maverick air-to-surface missile,<sup>36</sup> and Boeing Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAM).<sup>37</sup> In November 2017, a U.A.E. Defense Ministry spokesman said that the U.A.E. will pay Lockheed Martin \$1.63 billion to upgrade its F-16 fighters.<sup>38</sup> In August 2018, the U.A.E. signed a Letter of Offer and Acceptance (LOA) for 300 AIM-9X Block II missiles.

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<sup>ii</sup> In 2014, the U.A.E. instituted mandatory military service for males ages 18-30 who are in good health. Emirati women were also given the option to participate in this program.

- **Helicopters:** The U.A.E. has long operated a fleet of Boeing AH-64D Apache Longbow attack helicopters,<sup>39</sup> equipped with Lockheed Martin Hellfire missiles.<sup>40</sup> The country also operates a number of Sikorsky (part of Lockheed Martin) UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters,<sup>41</sup> Boeing CH-47F Chinook helicopters, and Bell 407 light attack helicopters.<sup>42</sup> In December 2016, it was reported that the U.S. State Department approved the sale to the U.A.E. of 28 AH-64E Remanufactured Apache attack helicopters and 9 new AH-64E Apache attack helicopters.<sup>43</sup> In October 2018, the U.S. Department of Defense announced a deal for Boeing to provide the U.A.E. with 17 Apache (8 refurbished and 9 new) AH-64E aircraft.<sup>44</sup>



*Emirati Helicopter Pilots with a Boeing AH-64D Apache Longbow Attack Helicopter*

- **Transport Aircraft:** The U.A.E. has a fleet of advanced Boeing C-17 Globemaster III airlifters,<sup>45</sup> for which the U.S. State Department approved the sale of AN/AAQ-24(V)N Large Aircraft Infrared Countermeasures (LAIRCM) equipment.<sup>46</sup> The U.A.E. also has six Lockheed Martin C-130 Hercules aircraft.<sup>47</sup> These transport aircraft are essential for not only the U.A.E.'s military capabilities, but also its extensive humanitarian relief efforts.
- **U.A.V.s:** The U.A.E. agreed in 2013 to purchase unarmed Predator X-P U.A.V.s from General Atomics, in a deal worth approximately \$200 million.<sup>48</sup> In so doing, the U.A.E. became the first non-NATO customer for this drone, which it acquired commercially. The U.A.E. also operates Scan Eagle and Integrator U.A.V.s, both made by Boeing. The U.A.E. is soon hoping to buy armed U.A.V.s, like the General Atomics Reaper, from the U.S.

The U.A.E. has also purchased a range of other military equipment from the United States:

- **Surface-to-Surface Missile Systems:** The U.A.E. operates the Lockheed Martin M142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS), a light multiple rocket launcher that can be mounted on a medium tactical vehicle truck frame. These launchers are paired with Army Tactical Missile Systems (ATACMs), a surface-to-surface missile also created by Lockheed Martin. The U.A.E. also operates Javelin anti-tank guided missiles produced by a joint venture between Raytheon and Lockheed Martin.<sup>49</sup>
- **Surface-to-Air Missile Systems:** In 2008, the U.A.E. signed a contract for the Patriot missile defense system; Raytheon, as the prime contractor, provided radar systems and GEM-T missiles, while Lockheed Martin provided PAC-3 missiles.<sup>50</sup> In May 2017, the State Department approved a possible Foreign Military Sale for 60 more PAC-3 missiles from Lockheed and 100 more GEM-T

missiles from Raytheon at an estimated cost of \$2 billion.<sup>51</sup> Separately, in 2011, the U.A.E. signed an initial order for the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense System (THAAD) from Lockheed Martin, with Raytheon also being a prime contractor.<sup>52</sup> In so doing, the U.A.E. became the first international customer for this advanced system.<sup>53</sup> In addition, the U.A.E. operates HAWK medium-range surface-to-air missile batteries supplied by Raytheon.<sup>54</sup> Raytheon has also integrated Rolling Airframe Missiles and other missile systems onto the U.A.E.'s Baynunah class of ships since 2006.<sup>55</sup>

- **Armored Vehicles:** The U.A.E. operates American-made Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicles supplied by Oshkosh Corporation. In September 2014, the State Department agreed to sell the U.A.E. an additional 4,500 refurbished MRAPs from U.S. Army stock as Excess Defense Articles (EDA).<sup>56</sup>

It is important to note that all of the major systems above are supported by a wide array of subsystems and other defense products made by other U.S. companies. For instance, in 2017, Harris Corporation won a \$189 million contract to provide an integrated battle management system to the U.A.E. Armed Forces.<sup>57</sup>

## **JOINT CONFRONTATION OF REGIONAL CHALLENGES**

U.S.-U.A.E. basing agreements, joint training, and weapons sales are not merely for show. They are key components of a broader bilateral partnership that – through diplomatic and economic as well as military measures – has contributed demonstrably to security in the Arabian Gulf region and the wider Middle East.

The U.S. and the U.A.E. have cooperated to stop Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. Despite historical commercial and financial ties between the U.A.E. and Iran, the Emirates pursued robust implementation of multilateral sanctions on Iran, causing trade between the two countries to drop from around \$23 billion in 2010 to as low as \$4 billion in 2013.<sup>58</sup> This move helped exert the requisite financial pressure on Iran to bring it to the negotiating table, and it helped lead to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) to “ensure that Iran’s nuclear program will be exclusively peaceful.”<sup>59</sup>

Following President Trump’s 2018 decision to withdraw the United States from the JCPOA, the U.A.E. Foreign Ministry expressed support for this stance, encouraging the international community “to respond positively to President Trump’s position to rid the Middle East of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.”<sup>60</sup> In November 2018, Abdullah Al-Saleh, Undersecretary for Foreign Trade and Industry at the U.A.E. Ministry of Economy, proclaimed that the U.A.E. was fully complying with sanctions imposed that month on Iran’s banks, shipping sector, national airline, and 200 individuals.<sup>61</sup>

In addition, the U.S. and U.A.E. have collaborated to expose Iran's regional proliferation activities, such as those in Yemen. The U.A.E. is part of a Saudi-led coalition that has sought to restore Yemen's legitimate government following the military takeover of much of the country by Iran-backed Houthi rebels. In support of the territorial defense of its allies, the U.S. has provided intelligence and logistics assistance, including aerial refueling of aircraft.<sup>62</sup> <sup>iii</sup> It has directly prevented Iranian weapons flows to the Houthis.<sup>63</sup> It has also publicly exposed Iran's proliferation of weapons in Yemen through the Iranian Materiel Display at Fort Bolling.<sup>64</sup>



*U.A.E. Military Personnel*

At the same time, the U.S. and U.A.E. have worked together to combat the threat of Al-Qa'ida. Indeed, the U.A.E., in partnership with U.S. Special Forces, has achieved significant success in halting and reversing the spread of Al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in Yemen. In April 2016, U.A.E. forces helped expel AQAP from their stronghold in the southern city of Mukalla, Yemen's third-largest port.<sup>65</sup> Ahead of this move, the U.A.E. reportedly asked the United States for air power, intelligence, and logistics support, including help regarding medical evacuation and combat search and rescue.<sup>66</sup> More recently, in August 2017, 2,000 Yemeni forces, backed by dozens of U.A.E. advisors and a handful of U.S. Special Operations commandos, began an offensive against AQAP in Shabwa province, in what was the largest military operation against AQAP since April 2016.<sup>67</sup> In August 2018, U.S. officials expressed confidence that Al-Qa'ida master bomb-maker Ibrahim Al-Asiri, who was behind the 2009 underwear bomber plot, was killed in a U.S. drone strike in Yemen.<sup>68</sup>

The U.S. and U.A.E. have also partnered in the fight against Daesh. The U.A.E. was an early supporter of U.S.-led efforts to combat Daesh, and, during the initial part of the coalition air campaign against this group, the Emirati Air Force conducted more air strikes against Daesh targets in Syria than any other country aside from the U.S.<sup>69</sup> Taking part in these strikes was the U.A.E.'s first female combat pilot, Major Mariam al-Mansouri, whose actions dealt a symbolic blow to Daesh by demonstrating a



*U.A.E. Air Force Pilot Mariam Al-Mansouri*

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<sup>iii</sup> In November 2018, Saudi Arabia and the United States decided to suspend U.S. refueling of aircraft to the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen.

powerful contrast with Daesh's own repression of women. The U.A.E. has also hosted substantial numbers of international forces participating in the airstrikes against Daesh.<sup>70</sup>

The U.A.E. and U.S. have also worked together to achieve shared objectives in Iraq. Although wary of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the U.A.E. allowed American military use of its facilities for operations in Iraq.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, in 2008, after sectarian strains had caused many countries to shutter their embassies in Iraq, the U.A.E. became the first Arab country to restore full diplomatic relations with the country.<sup>72</sup> That year, the U.A.E. also forgave \$7 billion in bilateral Saddam Hussein-era debt;<sup>73</sup> in 2012, it forgave an additional \$5.8 billion.<sup>74</sup>

Over the last few years, the U.A.E. has sought to build bridges across the Iraqi political spectrum and counter Iranian influence. Following the departure of former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, U.A.E. leaders engaged more broadly with his successor, former Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, hosting him in December 2014.<sup>75</sup> In August 2017, His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the U.A.E.'s Armed Forces, hosted Iraqi nationalist cleric Moqtada Al Sadr in Abu Dhabi.<sup>76</sup> In November 2018, His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed hosted new Iraqi President and Kurdish politician Barham Ahmed Salih in the U.A.E. capital as well.

Meanwhile, the U.A.E. has supported the reconstruction of the country. In April 2018, the U.A.E. agreed to fund the rebuilding of Mosul's famous 800-year-old Al Nuri Mosque, which was where Daesh leader Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi announced in 2014 that he had established a "caliphate" in Iraq and Syria.<sup>77</sup> Daesh subsequently destroyed this iconic cultural landmark before being expelled from the city.

Finally, the U.A.E. has participated in coalition efforts in Afghanistan. The U.A.E. made its military facilities available to U.S. and other allied forces involved in ousting the Taliban.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, U.A.E. troops were the only Arab combat force to take part in the mission in Afghanistan, and a 250-person contingent of elite Presidential Guards has deployed to the country since 2003, remaining in the country even after the December 2014 transition to Afghan-led combat.<sup>79</sup> In addition to deploying Presidential Guards to Afghanistan, from 2012-2014, as other allies were reducing their commitment in the country, the U.A.E. deployed six F-16s, as well as other fixed-wing and rotor aircraft, to Kandahar, Afghanistan.<sup>80</sup> U.A.E. and Australian pilots were the only non-NATO forces trusted to fly close air support missions to protect coalition troops.<sup>81</sup>

In 2017, tragedy struck the U.A.E. in Afghanistan. In February of that year, the U.A.E. Ambassador to Afghanistan, His Excellency Juma Mohammed Abdullah al-Kaabi, died from wounds sustained during an explosion at the governor's compound in Kandahar.<sup>82</sup> U.S. forces in Afghanistan supported the U.A.E.'s response and recovery teams' efforts after that attack.

The U.A.E. has also worked to promote peace and reconstruction in Afghanistan. In December 2018, the U.A.E. hosted talks between Afghan Taliban representatives and U.S. officials in Abu Dhabi to bring an end to the 17-year-old war. The Emirates has also given significant financial support to Afghanistan's reconstruction.

Finally, the U.A.E. and the U.S. have shared an interest in stabilizing the Horn of Africa. Although the U.A.E. currently has strained ties with Somalia's federal government, it has invested heavily in the economic prosperity and security of the Horn writ large, making landmark investments in regional ports and military bases. Notably, in the summer of 2018, the U.A.E. and Saudi Arabia helped broker a landmark rapprochement between Eritrea and Ethiopia, ending 20 years of war.<sup>83</sup> U.S. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo lauded this agreement, which he said will "further the cause of stability, security, and development in the Horn of Africa and Red Sea."<sup>84</sup>

## **COUNTER-TERRORISM COOPERATION**

In addition to helping stabilize the region, U.S.-U.A.E. security cooperation has helped protect against terrorist threats to both countries.

The U.S. and the U.A.E. regularly share counter-terrorism intelligence across various agencies, including the U.A.E.'s State Security Directorate (SSD). In partnership with the U.S., the U.A.E. has foiled terrorist plots directed at the U.S., most notably a 2010 plot by Al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) to send explosives on cargo planes bound for the U.S.<sup>85</sup>

The U.S. and U.A.E. also cooperate closely on combating terror financing. In 2014, the U.S. and U.A.E. set up a joint financial counter-terrorism task force focused on combating extremist fundraising and financial networks in the region. At the time, David Cohen, the U.S. Treasury Department's Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence, lauded both the "very good close relationship with the Emiratis in combating terrorist financing" and the U.A.E.'s "steadfast commitment" in this regard.<sup>86</sup>

Port security is another key area of bilateral cooperation. The U.A.E. was the first country in the region to join the U.S. Customs Department's Container Security Initiative, which permits American and Emirati customs officials to co-locate inside U.A.E. ports to inspect U.S.-bound containers.<sup>87</sup> The country also participates in the U.S. Department of Energy's Megaports Initiative, to improve detection of nuclear materials in cargo containers.<sup>88</sup> In addition, the U.A.E. takes part in the U.S. Department of State's Proliferation Security Initiative, which seeks to improve coordination of efforts to stop shipments of weapons of mass destruction, delivery systems, and related materials.<sup>89</sup>

The U.S. and U.A.E. also have a special aviation security partnership. A joint preclearance program allows U.S. Customs agents to inspect U.S.-bound commercial passengers at Abu Dhabi International Airport (AUH) prior to departure, in a

program that was the first of its kind in the Middle East. The U.S. has also assisted in training Emirati immigration and customs officials.<sup>90</sup> In July 2017, the U.A.E. worked with U.S. authorities to implement extra security measures at U.A.E. airports after the U.S. temporarily instituted a ban on passengers carrying laptops in cabins on flights to the U.S. from the U.A.E. and 7 other countries.<sup>91</sup>

The U.A.E. has also worked closely with the U.S. on terrorist counter-messaging, where the U.A.E. has long played a leading role. In 2012, the U.A.E. launched Hedayah, an international center of excellence based in Abu Dhabi dedicated to facilitating dialogue, advancing research, and providing training for individuals and groups involved in countering violent extremism.<sup>92</sup> Then, in 2014, the U.A.E. became host to the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies, which brings intellectuals and thinkers around the world every year to emphasize the peaceful nature of Islam.<sup>93</sup> Building on this foundation, in 2015, the U.S. and U.A.E. launched the Sawab Center, a multinational program that uses direct online engagement to counter terrorist propaganda.<sup>94</sup> The U.S., U.A.E., and U.K. also co-lead the “Counter-Messaging Working Group” for the Global Coalition against Daesh.<sup>95</sup>



Finally, the U.A.E. has supported U.S. efforts to reduce the number of detainees at the Guantanamo Bay detention facility. In November 2015, the U.S. Department of Defense transferred five Yemeni detainees from Guantanamo to the U.A.E. Seven months later, the U.S. announced it had transferred another 15 Guantanamo detainees, comprising 12 Yemenis and 3 Afghans.<sup>96</sup> Three additional detainees were transferred to the U.A.E. on the final day of former President Barack Obama’s presidency.<sup>97</sup>

## SHARED SUPPORT FOR STRONG REGIONAL ALLIANCES

At the same time that they have developed a strong bilateral security relationship, both the United States and the U.A.E. have historically pushed for the creation of a strong GCC with close ties to the United States.

U.S. policy has traditionally been supportive of moves toward greater integration and cooperation among GCC states. As such, the U.S. participates in joint military exercises and trainings with the GCC as a group, and American and GCC officials meet jointly at regular GCC policy gatherings including the U.S.-GCC Strategic Cooperation Forum and annual U.S.-GCC Defense Ministerial. The U.S. has also long promoted a coordinated GCC-wide ballistic missile defense network to protect against Iran.



In turn, the U.A.E. has historically contributed to the development of a closely allied GCC with joint military capabilities and interoperability. As mentioned, military forces from all GCC countries, as well as the U.S., train at the U.A.E.'s Air Warfare Center and Integrated Air and Missile Defense Center. In addition, the Emirates agreed in late 2013 to host a GCC-wide Gulf Academy for Strategic and Security Studies,<sup>98</sup> and it volunteered the next year to host a GCC police force known as GCC-Pol.<sup>99</sup>

Moves toward greater GCC integration have been sidetracked by the Gulf crisis, which saw the severing of relations in June 2017 between the U.A.E., Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain, on the one hand, and Qatar, on the other. Gulf and U.S. mediation efforts have, as of early 2019, failed to resolve the crisis.

However, despite the severing of diplomatic relations, some military cooperation has continued. In April 2018, Qatari forces participated in joint military exercises in Saudi Arabia, and Qatari Armed Forces Chief of Staff General Ghanem bin Shaheen Al Ghanim was present at a closing ceremony.<sup>100</sup>

Moreover, the U.A.E. has generally supported the U.S.-led effort to create a "Middle East Strategic Alliance." This "Arab NATO," as it is popularly called, would consist of the six GCC states as well as Egypt and Jordan.

## **2017 DEFENSE COOPERATION AGREEMENT**

In May 2017, the U.S. and U.A.E. signed a new Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) so as to better "reflect the broad range of military-to-military cooperation that the U.A.E. and U.S. enjoy today."<sup>101</sup> The accord, which was originally signed on May 8<sup>th</sup>, was publically revealed on May 15<sup>th</sup> during Abu Dhabi Crown Prince and Deputy Supreme Commander of the U.A.E. Armed Forces His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed's visit to Washington, D.C., where he met with both then-U.S. Secretary of Defense James Mattis and U.S. President Donald Trump.

The new DCA, according to U.S.-U.A.E. Business Council President Danny Sebright, is a "critical, foundational agreement" that facilitates expanded cooperation in a host of areas such as bilateral and multilateral exercises, pre-positioning of personnel and equipment, SOF operations, and disaster and humanitarian relief operations. Key provisions of the agreement involve arrangements with regard to the sovereignty of U.S. forces in the U.A.E.<sup>102</sup>

While the new DCA technically has a 15-year duration, the intent at signing, according to Sebright, is for it to "last indefinitely." This is in keeping with the U.S.'s "long-standing and timeless commitment to the stability and security of the U.A.E. and the Arabian Gulf."<sup>103</sup>

Thanks in part to this revised DCA, the fundamentals of the U.S.-U.A.E. security and defense relationship will likely remain strong for the foreseeable future. Personnel from the U.S. Air Force's 380<sup>th</sup> Expeditionary Wing will likely continue to find a home in Abu Dhabi, and Jebel Ali will still be a frequent port of call for the U.S. Navy. Meanwhile, joint training exercises will take place in both countries, and the U.A.E. will turn to the U.S. for sophisticated military equipment. The U.S. and U.A.E. will also remain united in their opposition to terrorism and Iranian regional meddling, leading to close and sustained military and intelligence cooperation.

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