Emerging Security Environment in the Gulf: US's Interests and Egypt's Security Concern in the Changing Regional Scenarios

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Abstract: **This paper examining the post-war strategic environment in the Gulf region and its implications for future US security planning for the area, because that the Gulf is an area of central geostrategic concern for the United States --- a place where US interests are at stakes conflict is frequent, and demands on US military forces are high. Moreover, the evolution of the region over the longer term is likely to have an important influence on global prosperity and stability, affecting a broad range of issues in which the United States as a global power will have an interest. Developments in all of these dimensions will influence the demands and constraints imposed on the use of American military power, including air and space power, in and around the Gulf. The discussion also extends to areas on the periphery of Egyptian security concern along with US security interests and values. US-Egypt ties have witnessed historic strains in the past few years at a time when the broader Middle East slipped into a state of violent fragmentation that threatens both US interests and Egypt's security concern. Egypt faces a persistent threat of militant violence that is directed primarily at the state and exploits the government's lack of control over the Sinai Peninsula. Since 2011, the Sinai has emerged as a growing staging ground for militants --- including terrorists --- to plan facilitate, and launch attacks. The level of protests and militant violence provide little prospect for any effective foundation for Egyptian security measures.**

Since the end of the 1991 Gulf War, threats to political security in the Middle East have increased. Tensions between states have long threatened to destabilize the region. At times these tensions have resulted in open warfare, disrupting political and economic security and creating humanitarian crises. Today, the threat of interstate aggression is manifested in new and more dangerous ways. The collapse of the Arab-Israeli peace process and the subsequent outbreak of violence have inflamed anti-Western sentiment throughout the region. The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) has also raised the potential for conflict between rival countries. The exportation of Middle East terrorism around the world has contributed to the political and economic isolation of the region.

Oil revenues continue to fuel dysfunctional regional economics while religious extremists lash out against globalization trends and the threats of Western cultural influence. [1] US military operations in Iraq have significantly altered the regional balance of power, but have also been accompanied by improving bilateral security agreements between the United States and the crucial sheikhdoms in the Gulf. As the region faces dangerous reform pressure and deals with the rising tide of terrorism, these relationships become important.

While much of domestic developments over the past decade could also contribute to the destabilization of the region. A new generation of leaders has begun to take power with untested leadership skills and uncertain bases of support. Education among women has increased presenting a challenge to traditional-social hierarchies. Information technologies such as satellite television have become more available, providing populations with diverse views on political and social issues. [2] Together, these developments could bring about major political, social and economic changes. The long-term effects of such changes may be positive from the perspectives of democratization and the advance of human rights. However, the short-term effects could spell political and economic turmoil, increased threats of conflict and unpredictable shifts in policy and behavior of individual states.

However, the deeper divisions, security cooperation from within the region is largely viewed as counterproductive, as best exemplified in the troubled path of the proposed "GCC Plus 2" security arrangement in GCC states in bolstering Gulf security (where Egypt and Syria were to play a direct and active role with the six). [3]

Key Factors Affecting Security in the Gulf Region:

Security in the Gulf region is a complex product of critical drivers affecting the security of different countries and core security threats in the region. Added to it is the decades-old presence of foreign military in the region and its impact on maintaining peace by preventing any direct military conflicts in the region. Any kind of long-term security engagement for US can thus be examined only after taking these factors into account. [4] Before moving ahead, it is worthwhile to examine the critical factors affecting security in the Gulf region, which is invariably affected both US's interests and Egypt's security whether directly or indirectly.

1. Iran's future trajectory remains the overwhelming factor affecting the security in the Gulf region. With its sheer size, military strength and territorial as well as ideological differences with the countries of the region, it forms the biggest security concern for the GCC countries. [5] This perceived ideological threat from Iran is compounded by the GCC states' bilateral integration under the US security umbrella.

2. The threats of the proliferation of nuclear weapons are the next biggest security challenge for the region. Again, Iran is at the core of this concern. [6] whereas the US depicts Iran as a strategic rival and military threat to its interests in the GCC ruling elite in the Gulf's States focus more on the ideological and political threats emanating from Tehran.

3. The outcome of the crisis in Syria will be a major factor shaping regional security. If Saudi Arabia-Turkey-Qatar axis is able to bring down the Assad government, it will not only be a major victory for them, but would also result in decreased Iranian influence in the region and especially, break the contiguity of its influence across the region through Iraq, Syria and Lebanon or the so-called "Shitte Crescent" protracted internal conflict in Syria, however, will have a spillover effect in the entire region as well as Egypt.

4. With Iraq no longer a significant military power post the Second Gulf War, the region has lost the natural balance between Iran and Saudi Arabia.[7] The Sunni regime under Saddam Hussein not only acted as a counterweight against the military might of Iran, but also acted as a significant obstacle in the proverbial Shiite Crescent stretching presently from Iran across to the Levant. The region is thus polarized between Saudi Arabia and Iran an opposite side. The smaller nations have to identify space within or between these two very divergent poles.

5. Even among the GCC nations, there is an atmosphere of mutual suspicion and mistrust owing to historical disputes and claim over the islands, oil and gas fields and water channels. Although most of the territorial friction and disputes over islands have been resolved over time, mutual mistrust over the possible recurrence of such issues remains. This manifests itself in the prevailing military tension in the region.

6. The weakness and lack of legitimacy of the lone regional military force in the region, the "Peninsular Shield Force", has resulted in a security deficit in the region. Post the fall of Iraq, it is Saudi Arabia dominated and is seems as enforcer of Saudi Arabia's regional aspirations against Iran than a regional peace force.

7. Iraq therefore remains a perceived source of insecurities and tensions to the GCC. New threats to regional instability come from the continuing lack of human development and indices of human insecurity in Iraq, such as 2.3 million internally displaced persons and high rates of poverty and unemployment. These factors will continue to foster instability so long as they remain unresolved.

8. Foreign military presence in the region, led by the US, has helped in maintaining security, trade flows and in constraining Iran's influence. It has, however, resulted in the Gulf countries being over-reliant on foreign military presence, which vitiates the atmosphere for a stable regional security arrangement in the long term. [8] Likely drawdown of US military presence from the region due to reduced dependence on Gulf oil, economy-driven reduction in military interventions and shift of focus in Asia-Pacific is likely to impact the security dynamics in the region.

9. Al-Qaida, ISIS and cross-border terrorism is afflicting most of the region. Syria, Yemen and Iraq are most affected, while its presence in Saudi Arabia is somewhat controlled but not eliminated. These terror organizations have gained a new lease of life after the onset of the Arab Spring and more specifically, after the eruption of the Syrian crisis. [9] After the Arab uprising, a case of Islamists dominating the regional and domestic political discourse could strengthen the hands of groups favoring radical Islam. If the Muslim Brotherhood regains power in Syria, then Jordan could become more vulnerable and the whole region will get impacted. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are expected to do their best to prevent the Brotherhood from succeeding. [10]

10. In addition, one of the biggest security challenges would be the consideration of regime survival. The Arab Spring has demonstrated how popular revolutions overturned dictatorial regimes. Thus, "regime security" would be one of the primary concerns of the countries in the region. Unlike in countries ruled by secular autocrats, the legitimacy of the monarchies has not been directly challenged so far, except in Bahrain, and wealthier monarchies have used surplus cash to diffuse potential turmoil, but the demand for democracy and / or a greater say in running the affairs of the state by people is bound to rise in future. "Regime Security" will, thus, be one of the major drivers that will affect national security and resultantly, the regional security in the Gulf.

Security of the Gulf and the United States' security interests: A Shared Concern:

Since the fall of 2013, a principle focus of US strategy has been to reaffirm to Gulf States the durability of American support by emphasizing that the United States shares Gulf concerns on regional threats, particularly Iran, and will provide security accordingly. More tangibly, the United States has continued its scheduled arms deliveries to the Gulf (including a recent $11 billion package), announced plans for expanding the US Navy's Fifth Fleet headquarters in Bahrain, and increased the tempo of arms sales to the region under its Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program over the past six years.[11] Although the origins of much of this activity predate the current round of Gulf-US discord, the efforts nonetheless serve to reinforce Washington's message of reassurance.

Comprehensively, the security environment in the Gulf region has always had a direct impact on US's core interests and security concerns. The continued instability in the Gulf region not only threatens peace in the region, but it also a direct threat to US' s

energy supplies.[12] Some of these interests are specific to the region, but most are closely linked to broader, systemic interests in stability, non-proliferation, and evolutionary versus revolutionary change. Some important US interests include;

Ensuring Israel's security and the Peace process:

The United States has been committed to the security and prosperity of Israel since the founding of the state, and this commitment will almost certainly remain a key interest through the period under discussion. US policy over the next decade will, however, be shaped by the paralled national interest in promoting reinforcing, and bringing to completion the Middle East peace process.[13] Success in this arena will have a considerable influence over the region's future propensity for conflict and the demands on US strategy and forces. Achievements of a comprehensive peace will very likely bring increased demands for monitoring and security guarantees. Failures will raise more conventional demands for deterrence and reassurance. At the same time, the increasing prosperity and military capability of Israel --- and economic realities in the United States --- will shape the level of support this enduring interest implies.

Energy Security; Maintaining Stable Oil Supplies and Prices:

Access to (Gulf) oil inadequate amounts and at reasonable prices will almost certainly remain a vital interest. First, the United States and Western countries will continue to depend on the energy recourses of the Gulf. While the United States is far less dependent on Persian Gulf oil than its European and Japanese counterparts (12 percent versus 29 percent and 63 percent, respectively), this dependence is expected to increase during the next decade.[14] Furthermore, to the extent that the oil supply and accompanying pricing are functions of total 'global' market availability irrespective of the oil's origin, the specific level of US dependency on Gulf supplies does not accurately reflect the potential direct consequences to the US economy.

Countering WMD Proliferation:

The United States has a strong interest in preventing, or at least managing, the spread of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons WMD in the region pose a threat to US partners in the Gulf, to Israel, and to US forces. Adversaries employing WMD might offset the vast superiority of the US conventional forces by enabling foes to inflict significant casualties on US forces. As a result, they also threaten to undermine confidence in the US security guarantee.[15]

In the Gulf region as well as the entire Arab region, the use of WMD is not a hypothetical threat. The Iran-Iraq war witnessed the repeated use of chemical weapons by Iraq and their occasional use by Iran. The 2003 war against Iraq was largely justified as an effort to prevent Saddam Hussein from further developing WMD programs. Iran's pursuing nuclear and biological weapons. Syria and Libya posses vast stocks of chemical weapons, which are used as a strategic deterrent against Israel, and more generally, to compensate for the weakness of their conventional forces.

Containing Hegemony:

There continues to be a strong consensus within the US strategic community about the need to prevent the emergence of a regional hegemony or, more precisely, a "hostile" regional hegemonies (i.e., a power capable of and interested in regional domination15).[16] From a strategic planning perspective, this need could be extended to include preventing the emergence of competitors capable of successfully challenging US military power. Such competitors could come from within or outside the region.[17]

Dealing with Terrorism:

After the devastating September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon have reinforced American awareness of terrorism as a security problem. Terrorism is a well-established mode of conflict on the Middle Eastern scene. The US continues to have a keen stake in limiting the threat of terrorism to friendly regimes and Western citizens and assets, as well as preventing the spillover of political violence emanating from the region.[18] A variety of future regional conflict scenarios may stem from terrorist action, and counter terrorism is likely to be a motivating factor in many instances of US and Western military intervention. Terrorism might also emerge as a tactic for regimes bent on more traditional forms of regional aggression. In the future, US strategy will need to address the problem of terrorism, both as a stand-alone threat and as a "fifth column" or "asymmetric" risk in regional conflicts.[19]

Promoting Internal Stability of friendly regimes:

In addition to its longstanding ties to Israel, the United States has developed close relations with several states in the region. After the 1991 Gulf War, the United States augmented, or at times forget, security ties to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, and Oman.[20] Although these states, possession of, or proximity to, large oil reserves were the initial reason for US efforts to build ties, these relations have taken on a life of their own. The United States also has tried to cultivate Jordan, Egypt and Morocco as moderate Arab voices that are willing to cooperate with the United States on counterterrorism and support the US agenda on a range of issues.

Promoting Democracy and Human Rights:

The United States has a broad, worldwide interest in democracy and human rights that have implications for US actions in the Middle East. Given the strength of pressures for change within societies across the region, it might be more appropriate to describe the region as an "arc of change". [21] As a status quo power, the United States has a strong systemic interest in avoiding violent change and encouraging behavior in the line with accepted international norms. However, broad strategic social and political trends are reshaping the region. These changes will pose new challenges and after new opportunities for the US.

Security Environment in the Region and its impact on Egypt's Security Concern:

Egypt, with its image as a benign but growing power that harbors no extra-territorial ambitions, could step in and play a more proactive and participative role in the region's security or can it? Post-9/11, Egypt has made some efforts towards improving its security ties with the countries of the region. Egypt, with critical interests in the region, would always be directly affected by any developments in the Gulf region. A deteriorating or polarized security situation could adversely impact Egypt's core interests in the region-trade, energy and migrant workers coupled with the threat of the spillover effect of terrorism and the spread of religious fundamentalism. [22] Egypt needs to remain vigilant to the developments in the region and take proactive steps to secure its security interests in the region.

Some of the important security situation in the region is likely to have a major effect on Egypt's security are enumerated;

1. Egypt faces serious security threats that endanger its economy and stability. The downing of a Russian airliner over Sinai in October 2015 showed how vulnerable the country's economy remains to terrorism. [23] A heinous attack on a Coptic church in Cairo in December 2016 killed 28 people and wounded many more. [24] Still, despite some high-profile attacks and regular low-level attacks in the country by extremist groups, Egypt's terror problem has failed to metastasize in ways seen regionally --- in itself a measure of relative success.

2. The aftermath of the 2011 Libya intervention continues to reverberate in Egypt and across the region. Several Egyptian officials raised Libya and its long and porous border as Egypt's paramount security challenge. Egyptian is concerned about IS, weapons smuggling via land and sea, Muslim Brotherhood networks and the risk of Libya based extremists infiltrating Bedouin communities in Egypt's western desert. [25]

3. The security threat in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula is a challenge not only for Egypt but also for broader regional security, as the networks of terrorist groups in the Sinai have an effect on events next door in the Gaza Strip and Israel. Indeed, the first quarter of 2016 was the deadliest for Egypt's security forces in the past two years. [26] And although there are sometimes lulled in attacks after major military operations, militants have continued to attack checkpoints assassinate security servicemen, and kill locals accused of working for the government.

4. Differing threat perceptions regarding the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood were a contentious issue in US-Egypt relations during both in the Obama and Trump administration. Since 2013, Egypt has suffered from a wave of violence by armed groups and individuals believed by Egypt's government to have ties to or be taking inspiration from the Muslim Brotherhood. This violence ranges from the sabotage of critical infrastructure to assassinations of security officers. [27] Following former President Morsi's ouster and the violent clearing of Muslim Brotherhood protest camps and anti-government designated the entire Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization, arresting many of its leaders and seizing its assets. [28]

US-Egypt Security Cooperation: The Path Forward

Egypt currently appears tenuously positioned to avoid the worst fates of its neighbors. However, Cairo's new political and economic order remains inchoate and brittle, lacking a concrete plan for defeating terror networks, advancing large-scale job creation, or offering more effective or representative governance. Instead, the country's civic space has been smothered to deny openings for the open exchange of ideas needed to defeat extremism, while Egypt's economy goes from crisis to crisis.

Regionally, Egypt has charted an independent course, but its influence in lessening regional tensions beyond its borders will depend on its recovery within them. Egypt's leaders promise national renewal. However, absent significant reforms and credible plans to see them through, the Gulf region's most populous nation risks sliding back into stagnation and repression that heighten the chances that it's simmering political, economic, security and societal challenges will once again boil over. Under President Trump, there is also a new risk that cooperation between governments in Cairo and Washington deepens in ways that actually leave both countries worse off, mutually reinforcing their governments' most repressive tendencies, leaving the relationship – and Egypt itself – on shakier foundations for the long term.

Egypt has an opportunity to take proactive steps to address each of these challenges, and the United States can play a meaningful role in helping Egypt succeed – to the benefit of US national interests and the Egyptian people. But this will only happen if both nations demonstrate the vision, and political will to make it so.

However, the key issues for the US and Egypt policy or corporation toward the region, or how both countries can most effectively combat terrorism and extremism in ways that produce real and enduring results.

1. Seek improved ties, but ask for better from Egypt in return.

2. Continue to raise the issues of governance, preservation of open civic space, and government practices towards citizens.

3. Focus security cooperation on the four pillars, plus training – Efforts to refocus military to military cooperation and assistance around four pillars, or priority areas – counter terrorism, the Sinai border security, and maritime security – should continue. A fifth pillar should be training for Egyptian security personnel.

4. Encourage Egypt to craft an integrated, broad-based strategy to counter violent extremism that enhances respect for basic rights of all.

5. Enlist US technical experts and other partners to help Egypt reform economically, but only where Egyptians buy in.

6. Help Egypt meets security threats – but not with overly broad, politicized US terrorism designations.

Conclusion:

Although the Gulf region will remain a turbulent region, the nature of the danger has changed dramatically. Traditional concerns such as a conventional military attack from an aggressive state remain plausible, but they are of far less importance than new challenges such as WMD and terrorism. Us policy must also recognize that the lack of democratic institutions and the individual dependent nature of many regimes may lead to sudden and profound changes in the region's politics.

Not only has the region changed, but so too has the American role. The United States is perhaps more influential in the Middle East than at any other time in its history. US involvement in postwar Iraq and in the ongoing struggle against terrorism requires close cooperative relationships with many countries in the region. Yet a threat to the United States seems likely to continue as long as the United States is perceived as upholding the regional status quo. Efforts to reconstruct Iraq and mediate the Arab-Israeli conflict, therefore take on particular importance.

At the same time, Washington would be advised to look beyond the specifics if military aid to its long term interests. Military aid has significance beyond maintaining the power of the Egyptian military: it demonstrates the depth of US support for an ally and, practically speaking, constitutes a declaration of loyalty to the close bond between the two countries. Any outbreak or curtailment of aid to Egypt will be understood by any moderate and secular wings of the Egyptian regime --- and by the Islamist opposition --- as a US vote of no-confidence in its allies, especially in Egypt but also throughout the Middle East. Such measures by Washington are creating an opening for outside players --- who are neither necessarily moderate nor pro-Western --- to penetrate Egypt and the rest of the region, thereby damaging US interests.

In the short term and in the wake of a reduction in assistance, Egypt will not break decisively with the US government as doing so would achieve precisely the opposite of the goals sought by size and the members of the National Salvation Front, Egypt would be further destabilized, losing its main supplier of military equipment, ammunition, and spare parts, and slide even further down the economic slope it has been on since February 2011. On the other hand, opening the Egyptian gates to the Russians, Saudis, and others would win these countries power and influence that over the long run could distance Egypt from its US patron. For this reason, if Washington wants to continue to influence Cairo's political considerations, it should open its military depots to it, rather than slam the doors shut in its face.

Because of this turbulence, US policy must be flexible and robust. Years of relying largely on military power to achieve interests may have to a wider array of tools, ranging from economic restructuring to counterterrorism training to encouraging the rule of law. Unless it pursues a multidimensional and coordinated policy approach, the United States will be confined to reacting to crises rather than preventing and managing them.

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