Monthly Monitor Report
March 2015
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WHAT IS AT STAKE FOR THE UAE IN TRIPOLI?

By Cinzia Bianco

During the 2011 popular upheaval against the Libyan regime that led to Moammar Gaddafi’s ouster, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) joined Qatar in the quest to find Arab solutions to Arab problems. After intense diplomatic activity to secure the support of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the Arab League for the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973, which allowed an international coalition to set up a no-fly zone over Libya, Abu Dhabi extended significant logistical and material support to the rebels. The UAE sent a dozen aircraft to support the fight against Gaddafi and the country was also a major contributor on the humanitarian front.

The UAE also played an active role politically. Abu Dhabi hosted meetings of Libya’s provincial and tribal representatives in May 2011 and the third meeting of the International Contact Group in June. That month, the United Arab Emirates became the second Arab state to recognize the National Transitional Council (NTC) as the sole legitimate representative of the Libyan people. Indeed, the relationship between Abu Dhabi and the new Libya continued to strengthen after Gaddafi’s ouster. When Abdurrahim el-Keib served as Interim Prime Minister (November 2011 – November 2012), links between Libya and the UAE were further cemented. In fact, el-Keib gave up his position as Departmental Chair in the Petroleum Institute in Abu Dhabi to move to Tripoli.

El-Keib’s successor, Ali Zeidan, who was in office until November 2014, frequently visited the Gulf states and sought the Emiratis’ involvement in the establishment of institutionalized security forces capable of providing security to Libya. Providing security in this conflict-ridden state, awash with the world’s largest arms cache and countless warring militias, was indeed a sensitive and strategic issue for Libya and the greater region.

Economic Playground

Initially, the Emirati leadership’s primary interest in post-Gaddafi Libya was reconstruction. Hopes were high that Libya, as the African continent’s most oil-rich state, would attract foreign investment and develop into a modern country. The Libyan political leadership repeatedly invited the Abu Dhabi Investment Council (one of the UAE’s investment vehicles that invest funds in the region) and the Emirati to seize the many opportunities that would surface while reassuring the UAE that it would receive preferential treatment as a sign of gratitude for Abu Dhabi’s backing of the anti-Gaddafi rebels in 2011.

When Dubai’s real estate bubble burst in 2009, the UAE’s developers were particularly interested in such opportunities in Libya. Yet companies from other sectors, such as the Dubai-based conglomerate Al Ghurair Group quickly proposed to double its investments in Libya while also assessing openings across sectors, including contracting, civil, and mechanical engineering. DP World, one of the world’s largest marine terminal operators, rushed to enter talks with Libya’s interim government concerning the management of the North African country’s ports. Etisalat, UAE’s largest telecom operator, considered acquiring an operating license in Libya or investing in an existing operator.

The Rise of Libya’s Islamists

However, as the North African country fell gradually but inexorably into chaos, many of these plans had to be put on hold. After Islamist groups refused to accept their loss in the June 2014 elections, violence intensified, and ultimately they seized Libya’s capital city of Tripoli by force, deciding to form a new government and coalition under the name Fajr Libya (Libya Dawn).

This coalition, led by its president, Nouri Abusahmain, and its proclaimed prime minister, Omar al-Hasi, is diverse. Dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood’s Libyan party, the Justice and Construction Party, and including Salafist parties such as “Al Watan” and other smaller factions allied with the Muslim Brotherhood, its military wing is formed by groups ranging from the
Libya Revolutionaries Operations Room to brigades from the merchants city of Misrata, February 17 Brigade, and Libya Shield Force. The relations between these brigades and extremist jihadist groups including Ansar al-Sharia (an al-Qaeda offshoot that is active throughout North Africa), has long been shadowy, with a few instances of tactical cooperation and several Libya Dawn leaders such as the renowned Abdelhakim Belhadj having a past of jihadism.8

However, contrary to expectations, the UAE did not pull away from Libya after this degeneration. On the contrary, Abu Dhabi increased assistance to factions opposing Libya Dawn, gathered together in a coalition named Operation Dignity.9 This formation was created under the input of General Khalifa Haftar, and is under the political leadership of a new government headed by Prime Minister Abdullah el-Thani, based in Tobruk and formed following the June 2014 elections. Its military wing includes elements from the former Libyan army and brigades from the western mountain town of Zintan – that have received the UAE’s support since 2011 – and their allies in the Fezzan (Libya’s southern-most province).10

The UAE’s Military Enters Libya’s fray

Beyond providing logistical support to its allies on the ground, in August 2014 the UAE conducted an unprecedented military action against Libya Dawn, in coordination with the Egyptian army led by President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi.11 The UAE and Egypt launched bombing raids targeting Libya Dawn targets situated in eastern Libya. This marked Abu Dhabi’s first military strike against a foreign country without international authorization. In October of 2014, Daesh’s Libya division established its presence in Derna, situated near the Egyptian border. Since then the group has spread its influence, though without a stable presence, to Sirte and Benghazi. The Emirati leadership’s rhetoric in support of Egypt’s military operations against Daesh in Derna underscores the seriousness of the UAE’s concerns about such developments. The rise of Islamist extremists in Libya serves to strengthen the UAE’s alliance with Egypt, which is effectively working as the main on the ground bastion against the spread of jihadist militants in North Africa.

The threat of blowback in response to those attacks is deemed so high that in November 2014 the UAE and Egypt closed their embassies in Libya. And yet, no sign of hesitation comes from Abu Dhabi on its Libya policy. To the contrary, the UAE and Egypt appear increasingly determined to act both on the diplomatic front internationally and on the military front, with the Egyptian army standing firm on the border with Libya. Both countries staunchly support General Haftar, even campaigning for the lifting of the arms embargo in order to allow his faction to begin a full-scale military operation against Libya Dawn.

Four years after the UAE, along with Qatar, joined NATO forces in aiding Qaddafi’s enemies during the Libyan civil war, the UAE’s actions in Libya must be understood in a geopolitical, rather than economic, context. However, geopolitical interests alone are not driving Abu Dhabi to become increasingly entangled in Libya’s bloody affairs. Indeed, domestic issues factor into the equation. The UAE’s internal politics and unique state of stability shape Abu Dhabi’s foreign policy vis-à-vis Libya.

Quelling Domestic Dissent

Although Abu Dhabi and Dubai have grown into ultra wealthy global cities, the so-called Northern Emirates - Sharjah, Ras al-Khaimah, Fujairah, Ajman, and Um al-Qaiwain - have suffered from inequalities in living standards, disparities in the quality of public services and infrastructure, and access to educational and employment opportunities.12 In 2011, the combination of these social and economic pressures, led to the emergence in those emirates of hotbeds of political activism, clearly connected with, or fuelled by, similar forces advancing in North Africa.

In March 2011, 132 Emiratis signed a petition requesting that all UAE citizens be given the right to vote and that the Federal National Council be vested with legislative powers. The leadership in Abu Dhabi, in
an attempt to stem all possible causes for instability, responded by working towards the socio-economic development of those Emirates while also arresting high-profile activists for “perpetrating acts that pose a threat to state security, undermining the public order, opposing the government system”\(^\text{13}\).

Identifying “Al Islah” party, the Muslim Brotherhood’s Emirati branch, as a force committed to subverting the UAE’s established order, the leadership in Abu Dhabi began a campaign to antagonize “Al Islah”, as well as the Muslim Brotherhood and its affiliates in the whole region. The aim was to prevent further external fueling of protests and deprive local protesters of regional support or patrons. As a matter of fact, this would explain why the UAE has erected - in tandem with Saudi Arabia and Egypt - a legal, political and military cordon sanitaire against Islamist political mobilization, specifically from the Muslim Brotherhood.\(^\text{14}\)

In many respects the Libyan conflict mirrors political and ideological wedges within the greater Arab/Muslim world and the GCC. On one hand, Libya’s Islamist factions are backed by Qatar and Turkey and – allegedly – have received weapons from Sudan, while on the other hand, Libya’s internationally-recognized government and its military are backed by Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. Within this context, the UAE has endorsed the Libyan government’s narrative that its struggle against Libya Dawn is linked to the so-called “global war on terror.”\(^\text{15}\)

However, for as much as the UAE is justifiably concerned about the rise of Daesh and al-Qaeda affiliates throughout North Africa, no realistic analysis of Abu Dhabi’s foreign policy in Libya can overlook how the Emirati leadership views events that unfold on the distant shores of the Mediterranean primarily through the lens of the UAE’s own domestic stability and prosperity. As Abu Dhabi and Dubai have transformed into symbols of the UAE’s international grandeur, the UAE’s prosperity is an outcome of political stability that the Emirati leadership is determined to defend. In viewing Islamist militias in the Maghreb as a threat to the Gulf state’s security, the UAE will likely continue to play its hand in Libya to counter the Muslim Brotherhood and al-Qaeda-affiliated groups.

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THE STRUGGLE FOR A DEMOCRATIC BAHRAIN

By Amanda Fisher

On February 1, 2015, the tiny Persian Gulf kingdom of Bahrain made a brief interlude onto the world stage after the launch of a new Arab television news station appeared to have failed before it even began.

The Al Arab service, backed by wealthy Saudi prince al-Waleed bin Talal, had claimed to want to steer a middle ground through contentious Middle Eastern politics, making a home for itself in Bahrain on the pretext of achieving greater independence. However, Al Arab was never afforded an opportunity to prove itself. The infant station’s management team made a fatal faux pas within 24 hours of its launch. Bahrain’s government shut down Al Arab after the network aired an interview with Khalil al-Marzooq, a senior official within Bahrain’s dominant Shi’ite opposition movement, about Manama’s decision to revoke the citizenship of 72 Bahrainis. The authorities cited “technical and administrative reasons.”

To the outside world, the news blip was a laughably pitiable event that sums up the status of free press in a region ruled by corrupt and authoritarian regimes. But the event speaks far more about Bahrain’s long-running opposition movement, which has its origins in at least the “Arab Spring”, if not decades before.

A Resilient Opposition Movement

While overshadowed by the Syrian crisis and recent developments in Yemen and Iraq, the complicated and relatively bloody conflict between Bahrain’s Sunni rulers and Shi’ite opposition has entered its fourth year with little indication that tensions will ease in the near-term. Since the uprising began, the Bahrain Center for Human Rights has documented 97 deaths as of November 2014. Yet much of the world has overlooked events in this island kingdom, due to its small size, relative global insignificance, and Bahrain’s lack of an easily-digested narrative. However, Bahrain does serve as an important case study for its fellow Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) monarchies, which are paranoid about indigenous pro-democracy movements within their own borders.

When the Arab Spring erupted in 2011, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE deployed hundreds of security forces to Bahrain to help the Al Khalifa family as ongoing civil strife was erupting and creating a deeper wedge between the island kingdom’s Shi’ite majority and Sunni minority. Many analysts contend that King Hamad has maintained his hold on power in Bahrain due to support from the other GCC members, most importantly Saudi Arabia.

In 2011, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia stated, “[We have] always stood with Bahrain and given her all the support and assistance given the historical relations and deep-rooted ties between the two kingdoms.”

But around the same time the late King of Saudi Arabia was taken into hospital suffering the pneumonia that would eventually lead to his death weeks later on January 23, 2015, another Gulf leader was experiencing a less-publicized ordeal.

In late December 2014, Bahraini authorities arrested the softly-spoken leader of Bahrain’s largest opposition movement, the Shi’ite al-Wefaq National Islamic Society, which has been instrumental in the protest movement. Sheikh Ali Salman has subsequently been charged with “promoting the overthrow and change of the political regime by force” and remains detained despite condemnation from the United Nations, European Union, United States, and various human rights organizations.

Salman is the latest in a long line of Bahraini dissidents to be imprisoned, including the co-founders of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights Abdulhadi Al Khashawa and Nabeel Rajab – whose detention and safety has been the subject of resolutions by the European Parliament.
After a three week arrest in 1994 followed by deportation and a six-year period of exile, Salman’s recent arrest was certainly not his first stint in prison. If the words he spoke during a protest in Bahrain last year are anything to go by, it will not dampen his resolve.

Salman told Gulf State Analytics, “We have thousands of people, nearly 3,000 people in the prison, we will continue. There are tens that are murdered, we will continue. There’s hundreds of people who are dismissed from his job, we will continue. And we will continue peacefully until we reach our goal... We are very sorry for anybody who has died, without any meaning. The demand is simple. They just ask for equality between the people, free elections. This parliament has a duty, [the King] is not an appointed man, they need to elect a Prime Minister of this country. There is nothing else.”

A 2009 Pew Research Centre report estimates Shi’ite Muslims comprise between 65 and 75 percent of Bahrain’s population, though the ruling class, including King Hamad and the royal family, is predominantly Sunni Muslim. Thus, the fault lines of this battle could easily be drawn along sectarian grounds, with the majority Shi’ite protestors calling for the ousting of King Hamad. However, Salman maintained that this was a fight for democracy.

Bahrain’s Role in the Greater Region

While Bahrain’s situation requires an understanding of much local context, the kingdom’s problems parallel a wider set of sectarian tensions that plague the region, often pitting the Persian Gulf’s conservative Arab monarchies against the Islamic Republic of Iran and its allies in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen.

GCC officials are unsettled by Iran’s growing influence in the Arab world, as evidenced by the Iraqi Shi’ite militias’ demonstration of power in recent battles against Daesh (“Islamic State”) for control of Tikrit and the prospects for a rapprochement between Tehran and the West under the leadership of President Hassan Rouhani. Furthermore, the Houthis’ rise to power in Yemen during late 2014 and early 2015, which the GCC condemned as a “coup”, contributes to the Council’s fears of greater Iranian influence in the Arabian Peninsula.

Within this context of geopolitical volatility, Saudi Arabia’s newly enthroned King Salman is spearheading a campaign to unify Sunni-led Arab countries. Since inheriting the throne the Saudi Arabian monarch has sought to ease tensions relating to the Muslim Brotherhood by holding talks with GCC, Egyptian, Jordanian, and Turkish officials. The March 25 launch of the Saudi-led Operation Decisive Storm in Yemen, which deployed hundreds of fighter jets from 10 Islamic countries to combat Houthi troops, preceded a March 29 announcement at an Arab League summit in Egypt of the intention to form a regional force to fight “jihadis” in countries like Iraq, Syria and Libya.

This development undermines the struggle for democracy in Bahrain. From Riyadh’s vantage point, the prospects for democratization in Manama threaten to empower Bahrain’s Shi’ite-majority. Such a development would likely result in Bahrain becoming another Arab country under greater Iranian influence. Therefore, in large part the GCC has backed the ruling Al Khalifa family to prevent such an outcome. But the sectarian issues are only one element of the equation. The fight for democracy, as Sheikh Ali Salman framed it, is not a question unique to Bahrain and it echoes calls mounting across the region.

Al-Wefaq have been campaigning for not a complete reframing of Bahrain’s set-up, but a “proper” – as opposed to nominal – constitutional monarchy in which the ruling family would have to share power with an elected parliament.

This is not dissimilar to debates going on in other GCC countries. For example, in Oman the popular Sultan Qaboos -- the longest serving Arab leader -- has fallen on ill-health with no obvious successor in the wings. Despite a March return to his homeland, after an extended eight-month stay in Germany for cancer treatment, there is still no clarity around who may take
over. This raises the sensitive question about reforming the sultanate’s undemocratic political system. This issue drove Omani youth to take to the streets to demand that Oman’s elected legislative body be empowered, while others, including blogger Said Jadad who was recently imprisoned for three years for calling on US President Barack Obama to help introduce democracy, have fallen foul of authorities.

Indeed, while many analysts concentrate on the sectarian elements of Bahrain’s “Arab Spring” uprising, the Bahraini Shi’ites’ demands for democratic reform parallel those of other opposition movements in Bahrain’s fellow Persian Gulf monarchies. The Al Arab network debacle underscores the Bahraini monarchy’s unwillingness to tolerate demands for democratic reforms. Such censorship highlights the monarchy’s concerns about securing its position of power.

However, as Bahrain’s “Arab Spring” enters its fifth year, it is clear that this issue of democratic reform is not going away. Authorities in Manama would be well-advised to front foot the matter through gradual power sharing rather than attempting to stymie it by reactionary measures which appear coarse and antediluvian to the outside world.

Amanda Fisher is a UAE-based award winning journalist who writes for Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya.

BAHRAIN MONITOR

- Bahrain deploys 15 fighter jets to join the Saudi Arabian-led campaign in Yemen
- Bomb blast near Karrana wounds two policemen
- Authorities seize explosives entering Bahrain via the King Fahd Causeway

March 6

Clash between anti-government protestors and security forces results in injuries

Iran’s state-run media outlet, Press TV, reported that security forces launched a crackdown on anti-government protestors demonstrating against the presence of Saudi Arabian forces in Bahrain. Several injuries resulted from the clashes that took place in the village of Samaheej, in northeastern Bahrain.

March 9

Cuban health professionals arrive in Bahrain

A contingent of Cuban health experts arrived in the Persian Gulf kingdom to commence work agreed upon by the two countries in 2014. The Cuban Foreign Ministry issued the following statement: “The agreement forms the basis for cooperation in the areas of medical services and biotechnology, as well as medical research and other areas of mutual interest.”

March 10

Clashes erupt at Jaw prison

According to the Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights, security forces used tear gas and force to quell clashes with family members of inmates at Jaw prison. The human rights group reported that the disturbance was triggered by the security guards, while the Interior Ministry maintained that the families were responsible for vandalizing the area after their request
to visit their imprisoned relatives was denied. Many of the inmates in Jaw prison are Shi’ites who were detained for their participation in anti-government protests and/or armed assaults on security forces.³⁴

**Energy Ministry estimates Sitra crude oil refinery to cost USD 5 billion**

Bahrain’s Energy Ministry expects the expansion of the Sitra crude oil refinery to cost roughly USD 5 billion, and that the facility may be commissioned by 2019. Capacity is expected to increase from 260,000 bpd (barrels per day) to 360,000 bpd. Financial arrangements for the expansion have yet to be finalized.³⁵

**Government considers imposing higher costs on expatriates and the private sector**

Bahrain’s Finance Minister Sheikh Ahmed bin Mohammed Al Khalifa announced that the government is considering making foreign workers and private firms “pay at least the cost price for government services.” While maintaining that no public benefits will be reduced, the minister suggested that this plan might be a necessary step to help remedy the kingdom’s budgetary challenges caused by the fall in oil prices during 2014/2015.³⁶

**Bahrain’s top Ayatollah warns of a “catastrophe” if the kingdom avoids reforms**

Ayatollah Sheikh Isa Ahmed Qassim accused the Bahraini government of failing to deliver promised reforms and warned that continued failure would lead to a “catastrophe.” The prominent Ayatollah cautioned, “The time for reform is today and surely not tomorrow.” He also demanded that Bahrain release its political prisoners.³⁷

**March 11**

**Public prosecutor charges teachers and student for insulting Islam**

Bahrain’s state-run news agency, BNA, reported that two teachers and a high school student recorded a video of the student reciting Koranic verses to a musical accompaniment. This act violates strict Islamic rules regarding the style in which the text can be spoken. The three individuals were detained after the Ministry of Education investigated the video.³⁸

**March 12**

**Chinese ambassador hails Beijing’s ties with Bahrain**

The Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities (BACA) met with China’s Ambassador to Bahrain, Li Chen. The Chinese diplomat spoke of the Persian Gulf kingdom’s “rich culture” and emphasized the importance of cultural projects linking Middle Eastern and Far East nations, according to Bahrain’s state-run news agency, BNA.³⁹

**March 16**

**Security forces seize explosives en route to Bahrain**

The public prosecutor stated that during a routine check Bahrain’s security forces discovered 140 detonators and dozens of electrical circuits aboard a bus crossing the King Fahd Causeway. Bahrain’s state-run media, BNA, reported that the explosives had come from Iraq and were in a bag that belonged to a young passenger who intended to deliver the explosives to a person in Sitra.⁴⁰

On April 1, Gulf News reported that Bahrain’s advocate general alleged that the bus’ driver knew that the bag contained the explosives. BNA reported, “The investigations revealed that the driver had agreed with a suspect in Iraq to exploit the young age of the juvenile to cover up their crime and avoid suspicion.”⁴¹ The driver and three others were arrested and reportedly pleaded guilty to the charges. According to the advocate general, one of the detained men admitted to ties with a “terrorist group” based in Iraq.

Analysis: According to GCC interlocutors, the announced seizure of materials being smuggled from Iraq to the Shi’ite-majority island of Sitra was tied to supporters of Daesh within Bahrain’s Sunni com-
munity, not to a Shi’ite faction. This development is particularly alarming for Manama, given that several senior religious figures from Bahrain’s Sunni community have joined the ranks of Daesh. Moreover, the terrorist group has recently made direct threats against the ruling Al Khalifa family.

March 19

**Bomb blast injures two policemen**

Bahrain’s Interior Minister announced on Twitter that an explosion near Karrana (situated west of Manama) had wounded two policemen. The minister provided no further details.42

March 22

**Authorities jail 12 for “premeditated murder” and “terrorist purposes”**

A court in Manama issued 15-year jail sentences for 11 people and a seven-year sentence for one for lobbing petrol bombs at a police station. The incident occurred in October 2014 in Aaly, a village situated near Manama. The attack also resulted in a police car being set on fire.43

March 26

**Manama joins Saudi Arabian-led military campaign in Yemen**

Bahrain deployed 15 fighter jets to join Saudi Arabia’s Operation Decisive Storm. Manama joined all other GCC states, except Oman, in Riyadh’s campaign against Houthi fighters in Yemen.44 (See Saudi Arabia Monitor March 26)

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**KUWAIT MONITOR**

- Kuwait deploys 15 fighter jets to Yemen to join Operation Decisive Storm
- Tanzanian Prime Minister visits Kuwait
- Authorities arrest head of Ummah Party
- International donors meet in Kuwait and pledge USD 3.8 billion for humanitarian relief in Syria

March 9

**Opposition activists call for release of former MP from jail**

Hundreds of activists gathered in Kuwait City to demand the release of Mussallam al-Barrak, a former MP who recently began a two-year jail sentence for insulting the Emir of Kuwait. Young protestors called for constitutional reforms and labeled the nation’s parliament a “puppet assembly.” Activists displayed portraits of Barrak, along with those of other political prisoners.45

March 10

**Iran’s Majlis Speaker calls on Iran and Kuwait to improve ties**

In a meeting with the Emir of Kuwait, Ali Larijani, Iran’s Majlis Speaker, called on his country and Kuwait to improve ties in various areas, given their “enormous” bonds rooted in culture and history, according to Iran’s state-run news media outlet, PressTV. In another meeting with Kuwaiti intellectuals, Larijani emphasized the need for multilateral cooperation in the face of increasing regional terrorism.46

March 11

**Kuwaiti preacher joins Daesh (“Islamic State”) in calling on Muslims to destroy Egypt’s pyramids and Sphinx**

_Al-Watan_ (an Egyptian daily) reported that Ibrahim al-Kandari, a Kuwaiti Islamic preacher, declared, “The
fact that early Muslims who were among Prophet Mohammed’s followers did not destroy the pharaoh’s monuments upon entering the Egyptian soil, does not mean that we shouldn’t do it now.” Al-Kandari proclaimed that all images that are worshipped must be destroyed. The statement, which is in sync with Daesh’s ideology, raised eyebrows among those concerned about the extremist group’s influence in the oil-rich Persian Gulf emirate that shares a border with Iraq.47

Tanzania’s Prime Minister praises Kuwait on diplomatic visit to the Gulf state

While meeting with the Kuwaiti ambassador to Tanzania, Prime Minister Mizengo Pinda hailed Kuwait for its contributions to Tanzania’s development. The Tanzanian leader pointed to the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development as having funded numerous projects in Tanzania, primarily related to infrastructure and water. Pinda emphasized that the opening of a Kuwaiti embassy in Dar es Salaam further signaled closer bilateral relations.48

March 12

Authorities arrest head of Ummah Party for remarks about Saudi Arabia

Kuwait arrested Hakem al-Mutairi, the head of the Ummah Party, for a comment he made on television in late 2014, allegedly aimed at insulting Saudi Arabia. The Ummah Party, founded in 2005, is an officially recognized conservative religious group in Kuwait. Mutairi’s remark referenced the death of the head of Ummah Party in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the suspicion that he was actually poisoned while hospitalized in Turkey.49

Analysis: According to the Lebanese news outlet al-Akhbar, Mutairi is a supporter of the al-Qaeda affiliate in Syria, Jabhat al-Nusra. Nonetheless, Kuwaiti authorities did not arrest him for allegations of terrorist ties. His arrest is demonstrative of a recent trend whereby critics of leaders of other GCC states and Egypt are arrested in Kuwait.

March 18

Public prosecutor ends investigations into alleged 2013 coup d’état plot

Prosecutors declared that a video recording, cited as supposed evidence that a number of former Kuwaiti politicians had sought to overthrow the Kuwaiti government, was a fake. The video suggested that former Prime Minister Sheikh Nasser al-Mohammad Al Sabah and former Parliament Speaker Jassem al-Kharafi were behind the supposed coup plot. The case received considerable attention in the Kuwaiti media before the government ordered a blackout of the media’s coverage of the case.50

March 26

Kuwait joins Operation Decisive Storm in Yemen

Kuwait deployed 15 fighter jets to join Saudi Arabia’s Operation Decisive Storm.51 (See Saudi Arabia Monitor March 26)

March 31

International donors meet in Kuwait and pledge USD 3.8 billion in humanitarian relief for Syria

At the international conference held in Kuwait City, the UN Secretary-General stated that 80% of Syrians live with “poverty, misery, and deprivation.” The Emir of Kuwait called the humanitarian crisis in Syria the worst in “modern history.” Participants at the conference included representatives of 78 governments, 38 humanitarian organizations and representatives of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Arab League, the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation, and the EU.52
OMAN MONITOR

• Sultan Qaboos returns to Oman
• Oman avoids military intervention in Yemen
• International Monetary Fund calls on Muscat to implement economic reforms
• Oman pledges USD 500 million to Egypt

March 1

Executive president of Oman’s central bank announces plans to make first sovereign issue of Islamic bonds

Central bank executive president Hamood Sanqour al-Zadjali spoke to reporters at a conference in the UAE, where he discussed Muscat’s plans to make sovereign issue of Islamic bonds, worth USD 520 million, by the middle of 2015. Oman is taking this action to help finance its budget deficit, which has resulted from sliding oil prices. Zadjali stated, “We have Islamic banking units - they would like some liquidity invested in it.” This marks Muscat’s first issuance of an international bond in 18 years. Zadjali expressed the government’s expectations that 2015 would be a good year for Oman’s banks.53

March 3

IMF’s Oman head says oil price decline makes the sultanate’s need for reforms “urgent”

On the final day of the IMF’s mission to Oman for the Article IV consultation, Ananthakrishnan Prasad, who is the mission chief, addressed the problems resulting from sliding oil prices. Prasad stated, “The oil price decline has made undertaking of reforms more urgent for Oman... Without any reforms at this stage the country will either have to use its buffers or increase debt, and there could be spillovers from the fiscal sector to the rest of the economy.”54

March 8

Prominent human rights activist is sentenced to three years in jail on numerous charges

A court sentenced Omani activist Said Jadad to three years in jail for a set of offenses, including “undermining the prestige of the state,” inciting public disorder, and participating in an illegal gathering. The charge of undermining the state was reportedly connected to an open letter of 2013, addressed to U.S. President Barack Obama, regarding human rights in the sultanate of Oman. Jadad wrote, “We expect the United States, being a superpower, to always stand by the people and to support the principles of democracy and human rights.”55

March 13

Muscat pledges USD 500 million to Cairo at Arab conference in Egypt

At an investment conference in Sharm el-Sheikh, the president of Egypt’s state council stated that Oman had committed to giving Egypt USD 500 million over a five year period. The aid will come in the forms of grants “to support liquidity” and investment.56

March 23

Sultan Qaboos returns to Oman

Following an eight-month stay in Germany, where Sultan Qaboos underwent a series of “medical tests,” the leader returned to Muscat “in complete health.” State television announced that Qaboos’ treatment had been successful.57

March 27

Omani leadership outlines Muscat’s strategy vis-à-vis Yemen

Four days Sultan Qaboos’ return to the sultanate, an anonymous government official spoke with the Times of Oman concerning Muscat’s response to Yemen’s de-
teriorating crisis. Unlike the other five GCC states that deployed their militaries to Yemen to strike against Houthi militants, Oman is “concentrating on the humanitarian side, not the offensive.” Six days earlier, 40 wounded Yemenis were transferred to Oman for treatment. The Muscat official said that Oman was prepared to provide assistance to those injured in Operation Decisive Storm. Yemen’s president passed through Oman en route to Saudi Arabia after leaving Aden. Hadi reportedly traveled to Saudi Arabia for a “medical check-up” at the same time Riyadh and its Sunni allies were bombing Yemen under the pretext of restoring his government, which collapsed in February.58

### QATAR MONITOR

- Qatar deploys 10 fighter jets to Yemen and backs Riyadh’s campaign against the armed Houthis
- Speaker of Iran’s Parliament makes diplomatic visit to Doha
- Emir travels to Ankara to meet with Turkey’s President Erdoğan
- Qatar and Pakistan sign a USD 21 billion energy contract
- Doha begins reconstruction effort in Gaza

### March 10 & 11

**Qatari official visits Gaza and announces launch of a reconstruction project**

On March 10, Mohammed al-Amadi, head of the Qatari Committee to Rebuild Gaza, announced Qatar’s pledge to reconstruct 1,000 homes in Gaza as part of an aid package worth USD 1 billion. He made the announcement while standing in the rubble of a hospital destroyed during Israel’s 50-day military campaign against Gaza during 2014. Doha initially pledged the USD 1 billion for the Gaza reconstruction work at a conference held in Cairo during October 2014.59 On March 11, Doha began the effort. Al-Amadi reported that four trucks with cement had entered Gaza from Israel.60

**Analysis:** As Qatar moves faster than its fellow GCC members in efforts to rebuild Gaza, Doha is largely influenced by its interests in maintaining ties with Hamas. The Qataris use these programs to help spread their influence and maintain the loyalty of Hamas’ representatives in Doha. GCC interlocutors note that despite Qatar’s claims that Hamas members are being deported from the emirate, the opposite is true. Put simply, Hamas remains quite active in the emirate and the Palestinian group takes part in the Qatari Foreign Ministry’s foreign policy process.
March 11

**Iran’s Majlis Speaker addresses Arab-Iranian relations on a visit to Doha**

Ali Larijani, speaker of Iran’s Parliament, credited his government with protecting other Middle Eastern nations from threats from Daesh (“Islamic State”) by assisting Iraq in the fight against the group. His press conference followed a meeting with the Emir of Qatar, in which he focused on security crises in Libya, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. In response to accusations made in the Saudi Arabian media that Iran was deploying military personnel to Yemen to aid in the rebels’ overthrow of the Hadi government, Larijani stated that Tehran had not sent any armed ground forces. The Iranian official called on regional actors to resolve the Yemen crisis through dialogue.  

March 12

**Emir meets Turkey’s President**

The Emir of Qatar met Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Ankara. The two leaders met in Erdoğan’s new palace in the Turkish capital for surprise talks. The matters discussed were private, yet the media speculated that the crises in Iraq and Syria were the focus.  

March 13

**Qatar and Pakistan finalize a USD 21 billion liquefied natural gas (LNG) contract**

On the heels of Islamabad signing a major energy deal with Kuwait, Pakistan’s Minister for Petroleum and Natural Resources Shahid Khaqan Abbasi announced that Pakistan and Qatar signed a USD 21 billion LNG deal. Qatar agreed to sell Pakistan 500 million cubic feet of LNG a day at a competitive rate. According to Abbasi, four power plants in Punjab will receive this LNG.  

March 20

**Doha condemns Daesh (“Islamic State”) bombings in Yemeni capital**

After Daesh’s Yemen division bombed the Bader mosque in Sana’a’s al-Saffiah neighborhood and the al-Hashosh mosque in the al-Jaraf neighborhood, the Qatari leadership used strong language to denounce the terrorist attack and extended condolences to the victims’ family members. Qatar Foreign Ministry called on all Yemeni factions to enter into dialogue to end the ongoing violence.  

March 24

**Yemeni factions said to plan on holding talks in Doha**

According to a source in Qatar’s Foreign Ministry, rival groups in Yemen agreed in principle to engage in reconciliation talks in Qatar. However, no date has been set. The source also stated that if a subsequent agreement is reached, it must be signed in neighboring Saudi Arabia.  

March 26

**Qatar joins the Saudi Arabia-led “Operation Decisive Storm”**

In support of Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi -- Yemen’s ousted yet internationally-recognized president -- Doha took part in Riyadh’s military offensive against militant Houthis who have taken over large swathes of Yemen’s territory since September 2014 and caused the central government to collapse in January 2015. Qatar joined four of its fellow GCC members in issuing a statement that their decision was to “answer the call of Hadi to protect his people from the aggression of the Houthi militia.” Qatar has deployed 10 fighter jets to Yemen. Qatar Airways announced that it has temporarily suspended all flights to Yemen, citing security conditions. (See Saudi Arabia Monitor March 26)
March 27

Qatar’s Foreign Affairs Minister speaks about the Yemeni crisis and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict at Arab Summit in Egypt

Foreign Minister Khalid bin Mohamed al-Attiyah addressed the situation in Yemen before the 26th Arab Summit in Sharm el-Sheikh. Al-Attiyah maintained that the Saudi Arabian-led military campaign was launched only after the GCC had attempted to bring Yemen to a peaceful solution that was rejected by Houthi rebels and Yemen’s ousted President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi had called on the Council for help. The Qatari official called on all Arab states to support Hadi. He stated, “We all have to line up for Yemen’s legitimacy and reject the policy of fait accompli to preserve the unity, security and stability of the country. The State of Qatar will spare no effort to achieve that... Arab nations are facing serious political, economic and security challenges which calls us for joint action to address the situation and threats with a new vision that is in consonance with the changes going around us.”

Regarding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Al-Attiyah declared that “the Palestinian issue remains a top priority... We support the peace process, first for our conviction that it is an irreplaceable strategic option in ending the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and of absolute solidarity with the Palestinian people, which had chosen for the negotiations and peace to end the occupation.” He called for an end to the Egyptian/Israeli-imposed siege on Gaza. “We must all work with the international community and all concerned parties to put pressure on Israel to end the blockade as an occupying power.”

SAUDI ARABIA MONITOR

- Riyadh unites nine allies behind its historically unprecedented military campaign in Yemen
- Saudi Arabia pursues plan of establishing an Arab military force to counter regional threats
- US Secretary of State visits Saudi Arabia to reassure Gulf allies of Washington’s commitment to countering Iran as the P5+1 talks progress
- Turkey’s President visits Riyadh to discuss Syria and other regional matters
- Oil Minister defends Riyadh’s policy of not cutting oil production
- Saudi Arabia recalls ambassador to Sweden over human rights comments made by the Swedish Foreign Minister
- King Salman unveils major domestic and foreign policy initiatives

March 3

Turkish president visits Riyadh

Turkey’s President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan visited Saudi Arabia amidst speculation that one of King Salman’s foreign policy priorities is to mediate talks between Ankara and Cairo. The two countries have had troubled relations since the ouster of Egypt’s democratically-elected Islamist government on July 3, 2013. Erdoğan and King Salman reportedly met for 35 minutes and agreed to increase support for rebels in Syria fighting the Damascus regime. However, no major breakthrough agreements were reported. Analysts reported that Erdoğan’s trip was directed largely toward his domestic audience, as he seeks to convince the Turkish public that Ankara is not as isolated as the ruling party’s critics maintain.

Analysis: The visit of the Turkish president to Riyadh, with Egyptian President el-Sisi having visited days before, was an effort on the part of Ankara to
reconcile its differences with Cairo, with King Salman acting as intermediary. According to GCC sources, the attempt was the King’s first foreign policy failure and served only to raise the ire of Riyadh toward Turkey’s foreign and security policy vis-à-vis Daesh. Riyadh’s attempts to reconcile the two sides over the Muslim Brotherhood were also doomed from the start, given Ankara’s ongoing support for the group throughout the Middle East and North Africa. Libya is another particularly sensitive issue that undermines the prospects for reconciliation between Turkey and Egypt, given the two countries’ opposing interests in the fractured state.

March 4

**Saudi Arabia’s Oil Minister addresses criticism of the kingdom’s production policies**

While speaking in Germany, the Saudi Arabian Oil Minister Ali al-Naimi claimed that accusations that Riyadh has waged a “war on shale” are false. He also dismissed the claim that OPEC is experiencing its final days. Al-Naimi maintained that “OPEC and Saudi Arabia have yet again been maliciously -- and unfairly -- criticized for what is, in reality, a market reaction.” The Saudi Arabian official stated that massive changes in oil prices frequently prompts a “frenzy of commentary ascribing various bizarre theories and motives – about collusion or conspiracy to OPEC.” He asserted that “history will prove that [not cutting production levels] was the correct path forward... Demand is gradually rising, global economic growth seems more robust and the oil price is stabilizing.”

March 5

**U.S. Secretary of State visits Saudi Arabia to discuss Iran and Yemen with GCC officials**

During a trip to the Gulf intended to ease Arab concerns about a potential breakthrough between the U.S. and Iran concerning Tehran’s nuclear program, John Kerry met with officials from all GCC members. Kerry sought to assure the Gulf Arab monarchs that Tehran would not be able to develop a nuclear bomb under any deal. He also emphasized Washington’s commitment to countering “Iranian expansion” and “aggressiveness” throughout the Middle East.

Kerry addressed the Yemeni crisis, stating that the U.S. backs the UN’s efforts to urge the warring factions toward dialogue and an eventual political settlement. Additionally, the secretary raised the issue of Daesh (“Islamic State”) and the war in Syria. Kerry stated that Washington does not envision any military solution, yet believes that no political settlement can be reached if Syrian President Bashar al-Assad does not relinquish power.

**Analysis: As U.S. Secretary of State Kerry seeks to convince Saudi Arabian officials that a P5+1 agreement will benefit Riyadh, the Saudi leadership is not sold. According to sources in Riyadh, Saudi Arabian officials are tired of Kerry’s shuttle diplomacy and have communicated to top American officials that Iran can never be trusted.**

**Foreign Minister: Iran is taking over Iraq**

While speaking next to U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, Saudi Arabia’s Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal expressed Riyadh’s unease about expanding Iranian involvement in Iraq in light of developments in the conflict between Shi’ite militias linked to Tehran and Daesh (“Islamic State”) for control of the city of Tikrit. Al-Faisal stated, “The situation in Tikrit is a prime example of what we are worried about. Iran is taking over the country.”

March 7

**Saudi Arabia rejects international criticism on human rights front**

In response to the international community’s harsh condemnation of Riyadh’s human rights record, the Saudi Arabian leadership expressed “intense surprise and dismay at what is being reported by some media about the case of citizen Raif Badawi and his sentence.” The government’s official statement emphasized that Saudi Arabian courts function independently and that
the constitution respects human rights because it is based on Sharia (Islamic) law. The leadership further declared that Riyadh “does not accept interference in any form in its international affairs.”71

March 9

**Saudi Arabia announces plans to host talks aimed at resolving Yemen’s crisis**

Riyadh announced that it would host GCC talks to resolve the crisis in Yemen. The Saudi Arabian state-run media outlet, SPA, stated, “The security of Yemen is part and parcel of the security of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries... The GCC countries have expressed their agreement to the request of Yemen’s president to hold a conference under the umbrella of the GCC in Riyadh.”72

March 10

**King unveils major domestic and foreign policy initiatives**

King Salman set forth his domestic and foreign policy agenda, vowing to “work continually towards the integrated balanced and comprehensive development in all regions of the Kingdom.” The Saudi Arabian monarch proclaimed that he would strive to achieve “justice for all citizens, and provision of opportunities for all to achieve their legitimate aspirations and wishes in accordance with the State’s regulations and procedures... I have instructed the Minister of Interior to emphasize to Governors of Regions the importance of receiving and listening to citizens, and submitting what they voice of ideas and suggestions [that] serve the country and its citizens and provide them with the means of comfort.”

Salman emphasized the importance of eradicating corruption and holding officials accountable for such acts. “We have directed that the systems of regulatory bodies be reviewed to enhance their jurisdiction and the performance to better carry out their duties and responsibilities, to contribute to eradicating corruption, save public money, and ensure negligent accounting,” the king continued.

On the economic front, Salman declared, “We shall be working towards building a solid economy based on strong grounds that will lead to the multiplication of the sources of income. This will lead to better savings and better job opportunities in both the public and private sectors... We are going to encourage and support medium and small enterprises to grow, so that these become a strong economic area for a large segment of society... Though Oil prices are dropping and affecting the Saudi economy, we are working to limit the effects on the development march. And operations for the exploration of Oil and Gas will continue, with the grace of Allah.”

The king addressed security challenges, vowing to protect the kingdom from foreign threats. He voiced his commitment to pan-Arab/pan-Islamic issues, including the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian state.73

**Iraq’s Foreign Minister dismisses Riyadh’s allegations of Tehran seizing control over Iraqi territory**

Following an Arab League meeting in Cairo that addressed Saudi Arabia’s concerns regarding Iran’s actions in Iraq, Iraqi Foreign Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari denied that Iran’s army was operating in his country. Jaafari continued, “We want relations with Saudi Arabia and with Iran ... Our openness to Saudi Arabia does not mean our relations with other countries will flag ... and this does not mean Iraq is becoming Persian.” Regarding the Shi’ite militias fighting Daesh (“Islamic State”) in Tikrit, the Iraqi official added, “It’s no secret that there are countries supporting us.” He did acknowledge that after Daesh seized large swathes of Iraqi territory in 2014, Tehran did help organize volunteers to join the Shi’ite militias. Jaafari also pointed to the opening of a Saudi Arabian embassy in Baghdad as a demonstration of improved Iraqi-Saudi Arabian relations.74
March 11

Riyadh recalls its ambassador to Sweden following statement from Swedish Foreign Minister about human rights in the kingdom

Saudi Arabia’s ambassador to Sweden was recalled following remarks made by Sweden’s Foreign Minister Margot Wallstrom. Wallstrom condemned Saudi Arabia’s human rights record, raising the issues of women’s rights and the lashing of Raif Badawi, while calling Saudi Arabia a dictatorship. The ambassador accused Wallstrom of “interference in [Saudi Arabia’s] foreign affairs.”

March 12

Houthi fighters in Yemen conduct exercise near Saudi Arabian border

Thousands of fighters in Ansar Allah (Yemen’s dominant Houthi militia) held military exercises in Yemen’s al-Buqa area, situated in the Saada province near the Saudi Arabian border. Reuters reported that the drills involved usage of heavy weaponry that was acquired from Yemen’s army.

March 14

U.S. embassy in Riyadh on alert

The embassy stated on its website that consular services in Riyadh, Jeddah, and Dhahran would be canceled and that all U.S. nationals should take extra precautions when traveling throughout the kingdom. The source of the threat was not made clear to the public. The previous day the U.S. embassy in Riyadh had warned against non-specified militants targeting Western petroleum workers.

March 26

Saudi Arabia Ambassador to the US Announces Operation Decisive Storm

In response to the gains made by Ansar Allah (the Houthis’ armed wing) in neighboring Yemen, Riyadh formed a coalition with nine other Sunni states (Bahrain, Egypt, Kuwait, Jordan, Morocco, Pakistan, Qatar, Sudan, and the UAE) to take action in Yemen. The coalition launched its bombing campaign, which is aimed at defeating the armed Houthis who have seized portions of Yemen, including the capital Sana’a, since September 2014 and have been waging an armed rebellion against the central authorities since 2004. The five GCC states involved issued a statement from Riyadh, stating that the call for help from the government of Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi to the GCC had driven them to take such military measures. Shortly after Operation Decisive Storm was launched, Saudi Arabia’s ambassador to the U.S., Adel al-Jubeir, issued the following statement and responded to questions.

Good evening everyone.

I’m Adel al-Jubeir, the Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to the United States.

I wanted to meet with you to inform you that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia launched military operations in Yemen. The objective is to defend the legitimate government of President Hadi from the takeover attempts by the Houthi militias in Yemen.

The use of force is always the last resort, and it is with great reluctance that we took this step along with our partners in the GCC countries as well as outside of the GCC countries.

We have a coalition of over ten countries that will participate in these operations to prevent Yemen from falling at the hands of the Houthis.

As I mentioned, the use of force is always the last resort. We have tried to mediate the situation in Yemen. We have put forth the GCC initiative and worked on establishing the national dialogue in Yemen in order to have a peaceful transition to a new Yemen.

Every attempt that was undertaken by the Yemenis was thwarted by the Houthis who have re-
jected every agreement that they entered into and rather than engage in a peaceful dialogue and in a peaceful transition to a stable and democratic Yemen they have always chosen the path of violence. They moved their forces from Sada towards Sana’a. They captured the capital city. They imprisoned the legitimate President in his own home as well as the Prime Minister and other members of the cabinet.

The Houthis have then taken over the armed forces of the Yemeni state. They are in control of ballistic missiles, heavy weapons, as well as military bases and ports. The Yemeni President, the legitimate President of Yemen, President Hadi was able to escape Sa’ana and relocate to... Other ministers were able to also escape Sa’ana and move to southern Yemen, the city of Aden, where they continue to run the operations as the legitimate government.

The Houthis continued to acquire or seize more territory. They moved and captured the city of Taiz, the airport in Taiz. They bombed the Presidential Palace.

And so we tried in the GCC to respond to a request dated March 7, 2015 by President Hadi in which he requested the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz, convene a conference in Riyadh under the auspices of the GCC in order to bring all Yemeni political factions together who have a desire to see a stable and secure and peaceful Yemen.

The Houthis once again rejected this initiative and continued to embark on the use of force in order to assert their dominance over Yemen.

On the 27th – sorry, in a letter dated the 24th of March, 2015, President Hadi requested on the basis of Article 51 of the U.N. Charter, the assistance and support by all means necessary, including force, to allow his government to defend itself against the Houthis and prevent the takeover of Yemen by the Houthis.

He has also based his decision on the Arab League Charter’s collective self-defense mechanism which allows member states to request assistance from other countries in order to defend themselves, and so in response to this and after an obligation to save the people of Yemen and to save Yemen from a takeover by a radical militant group, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its GCC allies as well as its allies outside the GCC have made the decision to respond to the legitimate request by the legitimate President of Yemen and to provide the assistance needed.

And so the operations have begun in Yemen. The objective is limited to defending and protecting the legitimate government of Yemen and preventing its collapse to the Houthis, and we hope that the wisdom will prevail among the Houthis and that they will become part of the political process rather than continue their radical approach to try to take over Yemen and destroy it.

Having said this, we pray that god almighty will provide support for our brave soldiers and the brave soldiers of the coalition and that he may grant them success in their noble mission.

With that, I will be happy to take a couple of questions and then I will leave you.

Question: Yes Ambassador. Have you consulted with the Obama Administration and what’s the American response on the military action that the GCC and other countries are taking?

Al-Jubeir: As I mentioned, this decision did not come lightly and this decision was thought out very deeply, and we have consulted very closely and very intensely with many of our allies and partners around the world, and in particular the United States.

We have had very fruitful and very productive discussions with the U.S. and we are very pleased with the outcome of those discussions, and I would like to just leave it at this and have
you talk to our American friends about the details of how they see it from their side. But overall we are extremely pleased and extremely appreciative of the support that we have received from our allies around the world, and in particular from the United States.

**Question:** Mr. Ambassador, could you detail the military operations that are underway right now? Are we talking about bombing or troop movements?

**Al-Jubeir:** Let me be very general because there will be military briefings provided by the headquarters of the coalition in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on a regular basis so I don’t want to get into that detail. But what I can tell you is the operations that were launched today were air strikes and I will just leave it at that and let the military explain to you the details.

The objective as I mentioned is to defend and support the legitimate government of Yemen and prevent the radical Houthi movement from taking over the country.

**Question:** Can you confirm to us where President Hadi is and can you tell us if the U.S. is helping you with intelligence for the airstrikes?

**Al-Jubeir:** I’m going to leave the appraisal details to the military and the support that the U.S. is providing to our friends in the Administration to discuss. All I can tell you is that we’re very pleased with the cooperation, the consultation, the exchange of information that exists between us and our coalition partners, and between us and the United States. With regards to the location of President Hadi, I would refer you to the Yemenis on this for now. Yes.

**Question:** Ambassador, you said that the objective is to defend the legitimate government of Yemen, so when will this end? When President Hadi is in control of Yemen?

**Al-Jubeir:** We have a situation in Yemen where we have a legitimate government that has agreed to a process that is supported by the international community, that is enshrined in several United Nations Security Council resolutions that calls for all Yemeni parties to take a certain path that would lead them from where they were to a new state with a new constitution and elections and checks and balances and so forth. Everybody has agreed to this.

We have spoilers who have disrupted this process. These spoilers have been named in a Security Council resolution. The United Nations Security Council has also condemned these actions and asked that they abide by this process, and so until they abide the choice is very simple. They abide by this process and become legitimate players in Yemeni politics, but they certainly will not be allowed to take over the country.

**Question:** So you will bomb them until … in this process?

**Al-Jubeir:** We will do whatever it takes in order to protect the legitimate government of Yemen from falling and from facing any dangers from an outside militia. We have a situation where you have a militia group that is now in control or can be in control of ballistic missiles, of heavy weapons, and of an air force. I do not recall in my reading of history of any militia that had an air force or had control over an air force. So this is a very dangerous situation and we must do everything we can to protect the people of Yemen and to protect the legitimate government of Yemen.

**Question:** Thank you, Mr. Ambassador. Could you tell us specifically what countries are in the coalition outside of the GCC? And which ones are
participating in airstrikes? And are the airstrikes limited to Sana’a or are there other areas?

**Al-Jubeir:** I will wait until our partners in the coalition have an opportunity to make the case themselves. What I can tell you is that we have air assets from a number of countries in the Kingdom and we have military assets that are on their way to the Kingdom to participate in these operations.

With regards to the geographic distribution for where the operations are, they are not limited to one particular city or one particular region.

**Question:** Has Saudi Arabia made moves to protect Hadi or to get him out of the country?

**Al-Jubeir:** This whole operation is designed to protect the legitimate government of Yemen of which President Hadi is the President. We are committed to ensuring the safety and security of Yemen and its people. Yemen is a neighboring country. It is a fraternal country. We have great historical ties with Yemen on all levels.

What happens in Yemen has a direct impact on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Yemen, as you know, faces many challenges and it is our desire and determination to support Yemen in facing all of its challenges whether those challenges pertain to economic underdevelopment, whether they pertain to terrorism, whether they pertain to security, whether they pertain to political stability, we are committed as we have said over the years to helping Yemen move towards a better future.

And so these operations are designed to do that. As you know, Yemen is a country that is very rugged. It is the headquarters of al Qaeda of the Arabian Peninsula. A number of plots that have been disrupted emanated out of Yemen that were a threat to world peace.

Yemen is also a country that has two very long coastlines so it’s very open to the world. And so having Yemen fail cannot be an option for us or for our coalition partners, and so we are determined to protect the legitimate government of Yemen and we are determined to do our best in order to work towards the safety and security of the Yemeni people then towards peace and prosperity in Yemen in the future.

**Question:** Mr. Ambassador, can you be more precise about when the military operations, the airstrikes began? And also are there any U.S. military assets involved in the operations?

**Al-Jubeir:** The operations began approximately 7:00 Washington time, east coast time, PM.

And the U.S. is not participating in military operations.

Thank you very much.⁷⁹

Analysis: Riyadh’s formation of a ten-state Sunni coalition is historically unprecedented. The air strikes against Houthi rebels in the Republic of Yemen have targeted Ansar Allah’s ballistic missiles, air defense, ammunition storage facilities, moving troops, and airfields. Additionally, the coalition is targeting the partisans as well as the assets of former Yemeni President Ali Adbullah Saleh.

Saudi Arabia leads the operation with 100 aircraft, likely including F-15S Strike Eagles and other support aircraft. Bahrain and Qatar are flying 15 and 10 of their F-16s and Mirage 2000s, respectively. The UAE is supplying 30 aircraft, while Morocco and Jordan have each deployed six F-16s. Kuwait has sent 15 F/A-18 Hornets.

Egypt’s aerial contribution is less clear. Cairo’s role seems primarily focused on maritime security and potential land operations. Sudan is the most surprising of the participants, with its three Sukhoi Su-24 Fencers. Interoperability issues immediately come to mind
with Russian-made aircraft operating alongside Western-manufactured fighters.

Special Operation Forces are said to be a major component of possible land operations. Saudi Arabia and Egypt have already begun sea operations, including non-combatant operations entitled Operation Tornado.

Interestingly, the coordination of the air, land, and sea picture by the Saudis is being kept under wraps. The command center is said to be at Prince Sultan Air Base. Yet, Saudi Brigadier General Ahmed bin Hasan Asiri, a “consultant” at the office of the minister of defense, is giving daily press briefings, demonstrating that Saudi Arabia knows how to conduct information dissemination. There are also rumors that Asiri is an American-trained PR specialist.

Washington is providing Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) to the coalition from its airbase in Djibouti.

The nine Arab states in the coalition have participated in bilateral and multilateral military exercises since the “Arab Spring” erupted in 2011. Saudi Arabia conducted the Abdullah Sword military exercise in 2014, featuring at least 120,000 troops and a parade of ballistic missiles. Importantly, leaders of the future Arab Sunni coalition were present at that time.

The military alliance -- formed under the so-called ‘Salman Doctrine’ of uniting Sunni Arab states and Pakistan under Riyadh’s leadership – is to be headquartered in Riyadh, in the same way that Brussels serves as NATO’s center. In the Saudi capital, foreign ministers will meet to formalize vital strategic military decisions.

Manpower requirements are an important part of partnership. The Kingdom will comprise fifty percent of the force; Pakistan fifteen percent; Egypt ten percent, UAE, Jordan and Morocco five percent each, Sudan four percent; and Bahrain, Kuwait, and Qatar two percent each. The total number of soldiers could number between 7,000 and 100,000.

Doctrinal issues will be crucial in the new Arab alliance once it begins to operate. Arab militaries typically learn doctrine and tactics from Western and Russian institutions. Yet, there is a new push for doctrinal manuals to be in Arabic. Regardless of Western and Russian attempts to influence “thinking”, there will always be the Arab approach to warfare.

The prospects for this coalition to achieve true Arab unity may be undermined by disagreements between the various states, particularly with respect to which groups are considered “terrorists”. For example, Qatar maintains ties with the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and Bahrain permits its MB branch to flourish in the island kingdom, whereas Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE consider the MB a terrorist organization. Accusations made by Arab officials that Doha sponsors Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria and Daesh in Libya, as well as Sudan’s ties with Hamas in Gaza, underscore the political divisions that linger behind the coalition’s projected image of Arab unity.

We are presently on the cusp of the formalization of an Arab military alliance as demonstrated at the recent Arab League summit. The lessons learned from Operation Desert Storm will influence future contingencies. In certain respects, the complexities of operations in Yemen mirror some other potential military requirements that the Arab alliance may face in future scenarios. There are rumors that in a year or so the coalition will launch a military campaign in Libya.

March 26

Ousted Yemeni President arrives in Riyadh

Yemen’s President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi fled Yemen by boat and arrived in Saudi Arabia after a brief stop in Oman. Saudi Arabia’s Defense Minister Prince Mohammed reportedly met Hadi as he arrived at an air base in Saudi Arabia’s capital.\(^80\)
March 27

**Riyadh’s military campaign in Yemen receives bipartisan support in the U.S. Congress**

Members of both parties in Washington expressed their backing of the Saudi-led operation in Yemen. House Speaker John Boehner stated, “I applaud the Saudis for taking this action to protect their homeland and to protect their own neighborhood... If America leads, our allies in the region would be tickled to death and would be happy to join a coalition. But America has to lead.”

Republican Senators John McCain and Lindsey Graham issued a joint statement, which emphasized that “Saudi Arabia and [Washington’s] Arab partners deserve our support as they seek to restore order in Yemen, which has collapsed into civil war... We understand why our Saudi and other Arab partners felt compelled to take action. The prospect of radical groups like al-Qaeda, as well as Iranian-backed militants, finding safe haven on the border of Saudi Arabia was more than our Arab partners could withstand.”

The Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Ed Royce, opined, “The takeover of southern Yemen by the Iranian-supported Houthis has led to chaos, threatening the national security interests of our regional partners and the United States... Regional states, led by Saudi Arabia at President Hadi’s request, are taking action from the air. The United States should support our Saudi and Gulf partners with appropriate logistical and intelligence support to combat this threat.”

The top-ranking Democrat on the Intelligence panel, Adam Schiff, commended the White House for making “the right decision” in backing Riyadh’s effort to counter Houthis in Yemen. He stated, “The military action by Saudi Arabia and its partners was necessitated by the illegal action of the Houthi rebels and their Iranian backers... But ultimately, a negotiated end to this crisis is the only way to restore order in Yemen and shrink the space for terrorism — all possible efforts must be made to advance this objective.”

March 29

**Saudi Arabia accuses Russia of hypocrisy**

As Arab officials met in Egypt to discuss ongoing crises in Libya, Syria, and Yemen, President Abdel Fatah el-Sisi asked that a letter from Russian President Vladimir Putin be read aloud to the Arab leaders. The letter stated, “We support the Arabs’ aspirations for a prosperous future and for the resolution of all the problems the Arab world faces through peaceful means, without any external interference.”

Saudi Arabia’s Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal responded, “He speaks about the problems in the Middle East as though Russia is not influencing these problems.” Prince Saud continued, “They speak about tragedies in Syria while they are an essential part of the tragedies befalling the Syrian people, by arming the Syrian regime above and beyond what it needs to fight its own people. I hope that the Russian president corrects this so that the Arab world’s relations with Russia can be at their best level.”
**UAE MONITOR**

- UAE deploys fighter jets to Yemen to counter Houthi militants
- Abu Dhabi deports on Lebanese expatriates under unclear circumstances
- UAE withdraws its ambassador to Sweden to support Riyadh

**March 13**

**UAE deploys a number of Lebanese**

Abu Dhabi ordered the deportation of “some” Lebanese expatriates, mainly Shi’ites. Lebanon’s Foreign Minister quickly responded, “The Lebanese in the Emirates fully merge into the Emirati society and abide by its laws. They are a good factor in this dear country.” In recent years, Emirati authorities have deported hundreds of Lebanese Shi’ites. The wave of deportations has been justified on security grounds. UAE officials have often maintained that the individuals were linked to Hezbollah.83

**March 18**

**In a demonstration of solidarity with Saudi Arabia, the UAE recalls its ambassador to Sweden**

The UAE’s state-run news agency, WAM, reported that Abu Dhabi had recalled its ambassador to Stockholm to protest “abusive remarks” that Sweden’s Foreign Minister Margot Wallstrom made concerning neighboring Saudi Arabia’s human rights record.85

**March 26**

**UAE deploys 30 fighter jets to strike Houthi targets in Yemen**

Of all the smaller GCC states, the UAE made the largest contribution to Riyadh’s coalition in Yemen by deploying 30 fighter jets.86 (See Saudi Arabia Monitor March 26)

**March 14**

**Private investment group in the UAE plans to invest USD 2 billion in Egypt’s economy**

Nabeel Rahman, the CEO of Khalifa Bin Butti Bin Omeir (KBBO), an Abu Dhabi-based private investment firm, announced plans for his company to invest USD 2 billion in various sectors of the Egyptian economy. The CEO affirmed, “We will contribute in investing in health, money exchange, waste management, renewable energy and other fields.”84
ENDNOTES


