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## **EURO-ARABIAN CENTRE FOR STUDIES**

### **THE SECURITY IN THE GULF**

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### **Nuclear Projects and their impact on Arabian Security**

**By**

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HM The Queen's State Visit to the UAE and Oman in November underscores the centuries old relationship between Britain and the Gulf as a whole.

Britain's concerns are not just a strategic and energy issue, but more a personal responsibility by old friends and indeed Protectors to lend wholehearted support in very challenging times. After all, it was Margaret Thatcher who leant upon George Bush Senior to take vigorous action over the invasion of Kuwait. The British do not sit idle. We are participants.

In any case, The Gulf states are important, no longer regionally but have a serious global strategic and economic importance.

Today there are issues which need careful thought. There is a justifiable tension when one country in the region acquires more nuclear capability than necessary for domestic use. Nuclear weapons are intimidating even when silent. Iran is a major strategic country; it does send out alarming messages and the challenge is how to respond. The fact that Russia has been aiding the development of the nuclear reactor is accepted but uncomfortable.

There have been mixed messages. Privately according to the recent Wikileaks exposures Saudi Arabia has been urging military attacks on Iran's nuclear facilities' then publicly taking a much more conciliatory approach. An attack on Iran would be a total disaster with widespread and unpredictable fall out; in any case, I really wonder if in practise there is an appetite for such an adventure after Iraq and Afghanistan.

What is beyond doubt, we have seen as a result how a fierce conventional arms race has accelerated in the region. FT estimates that upgrading defence equipment is amounting to the \$100b mark. A nuclear energy race has started too with Saudi Arabia, and the UAE both planning in this field. Not surprising, for the hope is to restore a local balance of power. This ceased with the two Gulf Wars which neutralised Iraq's strategic weight.

For now, it is the US who are providing the regional 'balancer' as a stabilising power against Iran. Their focus is how to neutralise Iran's missile capabilities both regionally and beyond. Highly sophisticated defence shields have been devised. To bolster them the Americans are building a major naval base in Bahrain and the French have a naval base in Abu Dhabi.

But the US has never proposed to take on the role of a permanent substitute for local security.

### **Strengthened Regional Security and Co-operation**

In an ideal world the GCC will step up its own military co-ordination and indeed integration. This is come challenge as the GCC have still to decide where to place the GCC Central Bank. For all that, some opinion formers have even suggested they embrace a wider family of countries who border the Arabia sea, Yemen, (ignoring Yemen would be madness, far better to hug them close).

Include India and Pakistan: the geopolitical connection between the Gulf and South Asia is too important to ignore. Indeed, India already has maritime security agreements with Qatar and Oman. Broadly sharing data and common threat perception would be helpful all round especially at a time of deepening Gulf-Asia ties in economic development.

And to complete the picture it should include Iraq – and dare I say, Iran!! Much in the same way NATO has brought Russia in from the cold.

I admit this is an extremely tough agenda in the absence of the firm political foundations necessary for implementing any such proposal. The early agenda would undoubtedly have to be low key, crime and border security and start addressing long-standing and ongoing conflicts which have the potential to spiral out of control and come armed confrontation. The dialogue and the hot line will be there.

### **Sanctions? Do they work?**

After a time, they erode in effectiveness. I should make clear I am not a blind hawk – nor do I accept appeasement. I do

not hold with the American approach of tough sanctions on Iran until they blink or have their spirit broken. I prefer the official Gulf approach for constant dialogue. Saudi Arabia has publicly insisted on guaranteeing Iran's rights to nuclear energy while the US continues to drum up more support for fresh sanctions.

Personally, I do not believe that sanctions work in isolation. If changes do happen, it is largely because of internal pressures. Changes happen when a country's political system implodes – or as in the case of South Africa, friendly advice and support was then given to the apartheid regime to hand over to a full democracy. Ukraine gave up their nuclear weapons because they lost the support of the Russians.

Sanctions if anything enhance a country's determination to stand their ground, gaining local support in the process. Tehran is defiant. The Government remains strong and does it matter to them if the people suffer? China, a central player in the crisis is vocal against sanctions. If anything, the US long arm of the law hits their own kind – state owned public pension systems have to divest from companies who have any links at all with Iran. Entitled 'Divest Terror' it is largely supported by influential Jewish lobby groups.

German engineering firm Siemens faced the threat of losing approximately \$300m worth of contracts with the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transportation Authority on the grounds it had sold equipment to Iran which was used to conduct surveillance on dissidents. And so it goes on.

### **EU sanctions**

There is much less support of aggressive sanctions in Europe, believing more in the carrot over sticks approach. Indeed contrary to US wishes, the EU issued a statement in 2001 which still holds that it, 'long opposed unilateral sanctions laws

with extra-territorial effects.’ In any case such laws ‘threaten the open international trading system’.

If anything the EU prefers to follow the lead of the UN on sanctions. Embargoes are more defined – but even so the EU went ahead with a comprehensive arms embargo and freezing of assets on entities and individuals. But within this framework there is individuality. France and the UK taking a firmer line than Austria, Germany, Italy, and Spain.

Sanctions wound but do not break a country. They are not the decisive factor in the final solution although it has been argued they played a part in the past in other parts of the world

In any case, Iran is pressing ahead with its nuclear programme regardless. If anything the more the international community protest, the more pressure they apply, the less Iran wants to even seriously discuss its programme.

However, I see no point at all in constantly referring to Iran as a ‘rogue’ state.

There are however changing dynamics in regard to sanctions. Moscow has used its support for sanctions as a ‘bargaining chip’ designed to influence US policies in other areas. China’s growing dependence on energy dilutes and undercuts the US influence. There are new templates shifting and changing the dynamics regionally, we should listen to them carefully. In short old-fashioned statecraft.

### **After Sanctions, Deter and Engage Iran.**

Dealing with Iran is not remotely the same as the former Soviet superpower or even Russia today. Nobody is at all comfortable with Iran’s growing nuclear capability but to suggest that containment can only be achieved by military

means is unrealistic. Vague threats by the Obama administrations to ‘all options available to prevent a nuclear arms race in the region – and to prevent a nuclear armed Iran.’ These are but as whistling in the wind. There is no clarity as to the trip-wire required to start the process.

These words are dangerous. Israel could be emboldened to take direct action. They must be held back. The consequences do not bear thinking about. The retaliation would reverberate all over the region with a ferocity far outweighing dislike of a nation’s nuclear capability. Bombing Iran will strengthen it; make it even more dangerous.

An attack would be unpopular in Iran, even among the critics of the government.

### **Diplomacy**

The way to weaken a threat is to see peace and prosperity grow in a country.

My view is that sanctions can be regarded as prelude to further and more imaginative diplomacy with Iran. Meanwhile the deprivation of revenues, technologies and materials does have an effect hitting their nuclear programmes, they also do convey a message of the high economic and diplomatic cost the country is paying for continued non-compliance with the IAEA and the UN.

What happens next is the key point. I feel we should support the EU statement on 26 July this year. Their aim is a settlement which would rebuild international confidence that the Iran’s nuclear programme is exclusively peaceful.’

There are other issues which occupy the Americans; Iran’s chemical and biological missile programmes, its support of

terrorism and treatment of its own citizens be it free speech or very rough justice.

I do not think there is any other option but engaging in direct talks with Iran. Turkey and Brazil, both friends of Iran, have offered to assist. In any case the best chance of outcomes is working-level talks away from the media spotlight.

Finally, which is where we began with this conference, is that there should be a co-ordinated regional diplomatic initiative lead by the GCC and include Iraq. They could begin with the GCC statement for a nuclear-free zone and the peaceful use of nuclear energy in the region. Confidence-building mechanisms for economic, environmental, and maritime co-operation in the Persian Gulf and the reconstruction of Iraq should be on the regional agenda. Working groups on counter-narcotic trafficking could be set up

In broad terms, the more contact, and in my own view, the closer we get to Iran, the more likely we can in establishing a rapport. That is not to say that individually GCC countries do not have their own channels of communication, they do; but they should also act as an effective group force.

For my part, judging the mood in Britain, although there is huge dismay at human rights issues in Iran, (highest ratio in the world of executions; no freedom of speech, flawed democracy and so on) we would prefer the sanctions to be more finely tuned; less scatter gun – giving leeway for trade which with its comes contact and greater influence. There is no alternative to real diplomacy.

Finally we have to accept the fact that Iran is a major strategic country in the region; it is there; it is huge; they do not see why their nuclear programme should be up negotiation; they are pressing ahead whatever happens; however its political systems do and will change and the talented people and their

enormous skills remain. I see no point in giving them pariah status. Far better to embrace them in discussions rather than push them away. We certainly do not want to see a nuclear confident Iran stepping up more aggressive Shiite activity in Iraq; creating more unrest in the Shiite population in the Persian Gulf which in turn ferments more terrorist intimidation.

A nuclear stand-off is not an option. It would close doors.

There does have to be more unity in the GCC on security. It is corrosive to them to leave too much security in the hands of the US. The US can assist and support but the GCC must take command and be seen to be doing so.