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**The GCC Pivot to Asia:
The Security of US Interests in the Arabian Gulf**

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**The GCC Pivot to Asia:
The Security of US Interests in the Arabian Gulf**

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Dedication

Neither the completion of this thesis nor the completion of my graduate degrees would be possible without the endless love and support from my family. I dedicate my thesis to them. I dedicate this to my mother and father who have been my rock from the beginning and my tireless supporters. To my siblings Anne and Michael, whose encouragement and love have kept me centered and focused on the truly important things in life. Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to all people who have helped me through this journey including my many editors, readers, friends, colleagues, and family members who gave me guidance, direction, and love throughout the process. It takes a village. Thank you to all who cared to make me produce my very best.

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Abstract

The GCC Pivot to Asia: The Security of US Interests in the Arabian Gulf

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The Gulf Cooperation Council's pivot to Asia began as a slow process of economic integration in the early 2000s but significantly accelerated after the US Shale Revolution, beginning in 2008. As US production increased and imports from foreign oil suppliers declined, many expected the relationships between the US and its GCC partners to similarly decline. The emerging markets of Asia and rising demand from China captured GCC interest. The GCC nations took steps to diversify their markets away from the US. Economic cooperation morphed into budding diplomatic and strategic relationships between the GCC and China. Meanwhile, the US, no longer as reliant on GCC energy, restructured its foreign policy toward the GCC around defense cooperation and human rights. Though US-GCC relationships remained relatively strong, the uprisings of the Arab Spring resulted in mounting US criticism of GCC human rights violations, weakening US leverage in the region. The Chinese took advantage of US-GCC tension, offering an alternative model of diplomatic engagement— ignoring human rights. Arab populations saw the economic rise of China as an alternative diplomatic model, one that prioritized economic development without attaching political strings to bilateral relationships. Some GCC nations also viewed Chinese influence as a potential foil to US influence in the region. Despite budding local support for stronger ties with China, the

Chinese are not able to displace US influence in the Gulf yet because China is unable to provide the quality or quantity of defense sales and cooperation the US provides. In the long-term, though, Chinese policies will likely present a challenge to US influence in the Gulf. The US should reexamine its policies on human rights promotion and reevaluate its strategic interests to protect the short and long term interests of the US in a region of great geostrategic importance.

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PART I: INTRODUCTION

At an Australian press conference in the fall of 2012, President Obama officially announced the US pivot to Asia, declaring, “the United States is a Pacific power, and we are here to stay.”¹ President Obama’s speech signaled a shift in US attention and resources to the nations of Asia by extensively expanding diplomatic, security, and economic ties in the Pacific region. As the world anticipated that US policies and attention would shift eastward, the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)² became concerned that the US, their primary ally and security guarantor would become absorbed in the East. The nations of the GCC searched for new partners, initiating a similar pivot toward the East to secure their place in the global economy by “reorienting its oil and natural gas exports away from Western markets towards emerging markets in Asia.”³ The GCC pivot toward the East, however, began as a process of economic integration between the GCC and China in the early 2000s that significantly accelerated after US shale producers exponentially increased their production of oil and gas after the Shale Revolution.

¹ "Remarks By President Obama to the Australian Parliament." *The White House*. The White House, 17 Nov. 2011. Web. 9 Dec. 2014.

² While the GCC is a regional union of Gulf States designed to integrate the political and economic elements of Gulf nations, it is also a term used to generally refer to the Gulf nations. For purposes of clarity, the author refers to the GCC and the Gulf interchangeably. Yemen is not included in this paper, as it is not a member of the GCC nor is its political status reflective of the political or economic situation of the other Gulf nations. Thus, references to the Gulf exclude Yemen.

³ Thottathil, Mahsoom. "Middle East Pivot to Asia for Big Trade & Energy Growth." *Arabian Gazette*, 11 Nov. 2013. Web. 7 Dec. 2014.

Though the reaction of the GCC countries never made headlines in English language media, their focus eastward began to affect the US-GCC political dynamics. The GCC countries began developing stronger political relationships, initiating strategic partnerships, and cementing robust trade relations with China. In diplomatic interactions, China highlighted its dedication to the principle of non-interference in other countries internal affairs to emphasize Chinese deference to its governmental partners, remaining particularly silent on issues of human rights.⁴ The US on the other hand defined its foreign policy, in part, by advocating transparency and democracy with most of its partners,⁵ seen by some as interfering in other countries' domestic affairs.⁶ For instance, during and after the Arab Spring in 2011, the US censured human rights violations and even froze military sales to Bahrain in order to encourage the government to halt human rights abuses. It remained nearly silent on Saudi human rights violations during the same period. Meanwhile, China-GCC partnerships expanded vis-à-vis Chinese investments in Gulf economies and increasingly frequent diplomatic visits. China did not tie its bilateral relationships to human rights. Instead, China pursued a policy of economic engagement with GCC nations, confident that diplomatic and strategic relationships would develop in parallel.

From an economic perspective, demonstrative of shifting global markets, a 2013 report by the Asia Investment Institute found that,

⁴ "China's Foreign Minister Stresses Principle of Non-interference at UN Debate." *UN News Center*. UN, 27 Sept. 2012. Web. 7 Dec. 2014.

⁵ "Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor." *US Department of State*. US Department of State. Web. 7 Nov. 2014.

⁶ US policy is both selective and inconsistent in this regard.

“Asian countries with emerging economies currently import forty-three per cent of the total energy exported from the Gulf states, up from a mere fifteen per cent in 1990. Within the same context, with regard to the major economic blocs in the world (Japan, Europe, and US), indicators for 1990 show that they have imported about forty-five per cent of the total exports of the GCC. However, the shares of these blocs combined have dropped to twenty-three per cent only after more than two decades.”⁷

In other words, GCC exports to the US and Europe halved while GCC trade to Asia doubled, strengthening economic ties primarily with China. During this period, GCC energy imports to the US continued to decline.

This paper assesses how the GCC’s pivot to Asia, specifically China, impacts US economic, strategic, and diplomatic relationships with key GCC nations. Do stronger economic ties with China replace or weaken US influence in the Gulf? To answer this question, this paper explores shifting relationships between the US, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain compared to parallel changes between China, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain. By evaluating these relationships, policymakers can recognize the shifting political landscape and the potential threat posed by China in the Gulf to best protect US interests in the short and long term.

I conclude that in the short term, China poses little threat to the United States in the Arabian Peninsula. Chinese action in the Gulf may even relieve some pressure on the

⁷ Abdullah, Dr. Jamal. "The Shale Gas Revolution and Its Impact on the GCC Economy." *Al Jazeera*, 13 Nov. 2013. Web. 12 Apr. 2015.

US by providing resources to secure the commons and encourage stability through investments and economic development. For the next decade or two, the United States will likely continue its role as protector for the GCC nations, based on a mutually beneficial defense relationship and Saudi and Bahraini reliance on US military systems. US human rights policies, though, are counterproductive in the short run, complicating US relationships and reducing US leverage during periods of instability and tension. GCC populations are frustrated with what they view as US interference in domestic affairs. Calls for strengthened ties with China paired with frustration at US policies are provoking appeals for greater Chinese influence in the Gulf. China is taking advantage of this uptick in popularity, capitalizing on unpopular US policies and presence in the region. China is offering GCC leaders an alternative diplomatic model through which they can engage, based on a transactional relationship.

In the long run, however, China poses a challenge to US leadership in the region. The United States' role as security guarantor in the Middle East is assured only while the US is the primary supplier of high quality weapons to the Gulf regimes. As China builds its defense industry and increases the quality and quantity of weapons sales to the monarchies, China will increase its influence on matters of security in the Gulf.

The United States needs to reassess its strategy in the Arabian Peninsula for both the long and short term to regain favor among leaders and local populations, thus making it politically palatable for the Gulf monarchs to cooperate with the United States. Alleviating disdain for US policies will require a softer application of US strategies in the Gulf. A strategic reassessment of US foreign policy should consider alternative

approaches to maintaining, if not increasing US influence in the Gulf. Though the US may be less dependent on the Gulf for energy resources, the Gulf remains an area vital to the United States to maintain its military presence and influence in the broader Middle East.

THE GCC PIVOT

Six countries, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates, established the GCC in 1981 in an effort to respond to “the challenges of security and economic development”⁸ during the Iran-Iraq War. Nearly 35 years later, the GCC has established itself as an important political and economic actor on the world stage, officially linking the economies and policies of some of the world’s most important energy producers and political actors. The US Department of State has praised the GCC’s growth as “a dynamic business hub, a critical shaper of media and culture in the Muslim world and a force in regional politics,”⁹ in addition to a critical US partner.

Since the first Gulf War, the US and the GCC have worked closely on counterterrorism and joint-military training programs in the Arabian Gulf. This strategic relationship has remained relatively strong throughout the years though paradoxically, over the same period, US-GCC economic dependence on one another gradually lessened. Increasingly, US policies aimed to reach a point of energy independence, with the goal of

⁸ Ahmadian, Alireza. "Is the GCC a Toothless Organization?" *Foreign Policy Association*, 12 May 2014. Web. 14 Apr. 2015.

⁹ Burns, William. "A Renewed Agenda for U.S.-Gulf Partnership." *U.S. Department of State*. U.S. Department of State, 19 Feb. 2014. Web. 14 Apr. 2015.

eventually weaning itself off Gulf energy. This very public US ambition laid the foundation for Gulf unease. The GCC began to accelerate efforts to find new buyers for its energy resources and looked to Asia, where demand had skyrocketed. New economic relations began to necessitate new political partnerships with the gas-guzzling developing nations of Asia.

While the Gulf began shifting its energy exports toward Asia, the GCC, along with the rest of the world, experienced the effects of the global economic crisis in 2008. The Gulf countries' stock markets plummeted and "oil prices dropped from \$110 per barrel at the end of the third quarter to approximately \$40 per barrel; and financing began to dry up."¹⁰ The GCC countries assessed weaknesses and attempted to strengthen their financial sectors by encouraging investment and diversification of their economies from a variety of investors. Improvements were evident until 2011 when the political, military, and economic relationships began to show cracks. In early 2011, the uprisings known as the "Arab Spring" delivered another blow to the Gulf countries, frightening investors, and stalling domestic development in order to reestablish state security. In response to the repressive techniques used by nearly all of the Gulf regimes against their own people, the US placed a hold on Foreign Military Sales (FMS) in Bahrain and increased pressure on the Gulf governments to stop human rights violations and reform existing institutions.

The widely broadcasted political pressure negatively affected the diplomatic relationships between the US and the Gulf countries. Local populations began to

¹⁰ Shediak, Richard, Nabih Maroun, and Jihad Azour. "One Year After The GCC Region's Post-Crisis Prospects." *Booz&Co*, 2009: 1-16. Web. 1 Mar. 2015.

speculate about the necessity of US presence in the region. Though not the first time US policies were unpopular with an Arab audience, the Arab Spring marked the first time that both opposition parties (some of whom the US championed) and the ruling government denounced US interference and influence. Was US policy concerned with human rights or invested in protecting the regimes? For many regional leaders, the two were mutually exclusive. If the United States would not provide them with the weapons and the political support they needed to stay in power, they would turn elsewhere. The East, namely China, India, and Russia began to offer the military and security resources that the US refused to provide. The dubious role of the Gulf security guarantor was open and China began to invest.

In addition to building an economic foundation with the GCC, China invested significant resources into deepening cultural and diplomatic ties with the Gulf nations. Examples of such integration efforts include “Chinese officials...building mosques to attract more Arab traders,”¹¹ and Chinese officials speaking “on Al Jazeera...in Arabic directly to the average Arab household.”¹² The Chinese began extending their hand to the Arabs and the Arab populations began to take hold. Part of this paper explores the extent to which the Chinese government’s efforts are coming to fruition.

¹¹ Simpfendorfer, Ben. "Introduction." *The New Silk Road: How a Rising Arab World Is Turning Away from the West and Rediscovering China*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. 2-3. Print.

¹² Ibid. 4

CASE SELECTION & METHODOLOGY

I organized this paper into three parts. Part one encompasses the introduction, history of the GCC pivot, case selection, methodology, and a brief history of US and Chinese strategies in the GCC. Part two focuses on two case studies: Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. Each case study analyzes three critical relationships: economic, diplomatic, and strategic. Each case reviews the shifting dynamics between the case country and the United States and the case country and China. The analysis focuses on the period beginning with the outbreak of the Arab Spring in January 2011 and ending in March 2015. This period highlights the most recent major political shift in US diplomatic policy, which occurred during the Arab Spring. The revolutions of the Arab Spring were significant because they refocused attention on human rights issues in the Middle East after images from Cairo, Damascus, and Manama brought usually censored dissent to world headlines. The economic sections will cover a longer period to analyze broader economic trends, reaching back to the early 2000s to highlight significant shifts in US economic and trade policies.

In order to present a holistic picture of the GCC pivot eastward and the resulting effects on US and Chinese relations in the GCC, I explore two different case studies; Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. I review the largest and smallest regional players in the GCC; two nations with varying political weights and energy revenues. Both nations have a history of close cooperation with the United States. Contrasting the Saudi and Bahraini approaches to China and the United States provides a useful binary approach through

which to observe the largest and smallest oil producers which both have strong diplomatic and strategic ties to the United States.

The first case looks at Saudi Arabia, the largest GCC member and most powerful regional actor. Saudi Arabia is a politically anomalous actor in the region due to its historic, special relationship with the United States and its vast oil supplies. Saudi Arabia holds significant political sway and bargaining power with the United States due its position as the most important producer in OPEC, controlling a significant share of the oil and gas reserves and production in the world. The second case investigates the intricacies of Bahrain, a small island nation in the Gulf, which has had historically strong strategic and military ties with the United States. Bahrain holds considerably less political weight because it is not an OPEC member country and it does not produce large quantities of oil and gas. However, Bahrain's geostrategic position in the Gulf cements its importance in Gulf affairs and US strategy, as it sits near the Strait of Hormuz and serves as a critical defensive position for observing Iran's actions. Bahrain is a relatively liberal society compared to the highly conservative Saudi culture.

To assess the strength of economic partnerships, I look at significant changes in the quantities of exports and imports, major investments in national companies and infrastructure projects, and changing trade volumes between GCC nations, the US, and China. As Saudi Arabia and Bahrain are dependent on energy sales for government revenue, each cases focuses on how trade patterns and energy products (LNG, oil, and petrochemicals) as well as non-energy commodities have shifted from the US and Western nations eastward. In addition, each case examines significant American and

Chinese investments in the Gulf nations and Gulf investments in the US and China. Have shifts in economic relationships impacted diplomatic relationships in a substantial way?

To illustrate the strength of bilateral diplomatic relationships, I analyze US and Chinese diplomatic engagement vis-à-vis human rights in the Gulf to understand their respective diplomatic approaches. The US Department of State (DoS) defines human rights loosely as “[principles] embodied in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.”¹³ The State Department explains that because “human rights are an important national interest,”¹⁴ the US has an obligation to “hold governments accountable...under universal human rights norms and international human rights instruments.”¹⁵ China, on the other hand, has no official stance on human rights. China firmly supports the principle of non-interference in other countries’ domestic affairs, effectively limiting its ability to comment on internal matters like human rights. China also has no desire for other nations to comment on its internal affairs.

The US employs numerous vehicles to address international human rights violations including official reports, human rights rankings, and arms sale freezes. The different mechanisms attempt to foster open communication, offer suggestions for improvement, and at times, shame governments into compliance with human rights norms. The United States often utilizes international forums like the United Nations to speak to human rights violations around the globe and promote the observance of human rights principles. The US articulates varying degrees of condemnation for human rights

¹³ "Human Rights Reports." *US Department of State*. US Department of State. Web. 8 Dec. 2014.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

violations, depending on its diplomatic relationship with the violating country and the severity of the human rights issue.¹⁶

In order to examine the role of human rights in foreign policy more closely, I explore the three most prominent ways through which the United States officially addresses the human rights violations of other nations. Part of US foreign policy encompasses promoting human rights, albeit selectively. Since 2011, assessments of violations have tended to fall into three categories: reactions to the Arab Spring, US Country Reports, and the promotion of individual human rights cases. To hold foreign governments accountable, the State Department releases annual country reports on human rights abuses in over 200 nations, including the countries of the GCC. The annual report entitled the “Country Report on Human Rights” assesses the most pressing human rights issues in each nation as a means of holding leaders accountable for violations of basic human rights. The language of the reports remains nearly identical every year, except where State Department officers add new evidence or remove comments that are no longer relevant. Political officers in the region contribute new information every year to the Country Reports for Saudi Arabia and Bahrain and send these updates to the Department of State, which then compiles the information. The State Department submits the full reports to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs before releasing them to the public, in accordance with the Foreign

¹⁶ This paper is unable to provide a full analysis of backchannel diplomatic engagement on human rights violations as the State Department protects available information by classification laws. Similarly, limited information was available from the intelligence community.

Assistance Act of 1961 and the Trade Act of 1974.¹⁷ Each case study also reviews speeches and statements in the United Nations, statements, and publications from the State Department or Foreign Ministry, as well as official articles published in the press. To review the impact of these policies from the perspective of Gulf citizens, I also evaluate public reactions to US and Chinese statements on human rights. Do Bahrainis or Saudis publicly promote stronger ties to the US or China because of attention or inattention to human rights?

Finally, to assess changing strategic relationships, I look at defense sales, basing agreements, counterintelligence, and military cooperation apropos joint exercises and initiatives. Since the withdrawal of the British from the Gulf in 1971, the United States stepped into the role of security guarantor, providing numerous regimes with high quality weapons and generous funding to expand existing defense capabilities. The US facilitated these deals to secure access to key geostrategic locations in the Gulf, assure access to energy flows, and stabilize a tumultuous region. The US, however, was not the only arms seller in the Middle East. Russia and China began to supply weapons to the Gulf regimes in the eighties, particularly when the US refused to provide these weapons. In this section, I evaluate current and expected future levels of strategic cooperation between the US, China, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. I explore whether China is poised to take the place of security provider in the Gulf and examine if the Chinese have increased security cooperation with Gulf nations. Most importantly, I assess the extent to which US strategic predominance in the Gulf at risk.

¹⁷ "Human Rights Reports." *US Department of State*. US Department of State. Web. 9 Dec. 2014.

Part three offers concluding remarks by analyzing the research, assessing short and long term threats to the US, and offering possible policy options. By deconstructing shifts in economic, diplomatic, and security relationships between the US, China, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain, this paper concludes that in the short-term, Chinese participation in the Gulf can relieve some burden from the United States. China does not have the military capabilities yet to ‘protect’ the Middle East, so there is little threat of US displacement in the next several decades. In the long-term, however, if China continues to rise, it is likely that the Chinese style of diplomatic and economic engagement could displace the influence of the United States. If China develops a military force that is capable of patrolling the Strait of Hormuz and supplying US-quality arms to Gulf regimes, in addition to safeguarding its own borders and waters, then the United States may have cause for unease.

Current predictions place Chinese development at matching US military levels in about forty years,¹⁸ though at present China has no overseas bases or alliances to count on with the exception of unsteady North Korea. China’s development trajectory suggests that Chinese military development will remain a priority for the Chinese, particularly as they acquire additional resources and assets to defend. In 2014 alone, China increased defense spending by 12%, bringing the Chinese military budget to \$132 billion, the second largest in the world, behind the United States.¹⁹

¹⁸ Capaccio, Anthony. "Chinese Military Shows New Capabilities, Pentagon Says." *Bloomberg*. Bloomberg, 6 June 2014. Web. 12 Apr. 2015.

¹⁹ Shinkman, Paul. "China Increases Military Spending 12 Percent: Should We Worry?" *US News*. U.S.News & World Report, 5 Mar. 2014. Web. 12 Apr. 2015.

In the long term, the United States should explore alternative possibilities for bases in the Gulf and prepare for the possibility of a shift away from US led security agreements, arms sales, and training exercises. In the immediate future, the US should reassess its diplomatic strategies with GCC nations and recognize that the current US approach to human rights has distanced both Gulf governments and publics from supporting the US in the region. US human rights policies have caused tension between diplomats and resulted in local populations denouncing US presence in the Gulf, suggesting a need to reanalyze how the US can integrate human rights into its foreign policy while maintaining healthy strategic relationships. The Chinese diplomatic strategy of non-interference has the potential to edge the US out of the GCC by offering an alternative source of influence in the Arabian Peninsula in the next several decades.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To adequately frame the preceding topics, this section reviews the basic components of US foreign policy, discusses the existing literature on the role of human rights in foreign policy, and finally offers an overview of key works that analyze the linkages in the US relationship with Gulf states. This thesis supports the view that US-GCC relations are multifaceted, not built exclusively on oil but rather on a conglomeration of economic, political, and strategic interests. I echo David Forsythe, arguing that the US can and must find a way to maintain important strategic relationships without turning away from gross human rights abuses. Like Forsythe, I posit that human rights and security policy are not mutually exclusive; though achieving a balance is complicated. Unlike Forsythe, however, this paper argues that inconsistency in US

foreign policy is problematic and at times, counterproductive to US interests. I will offer suggestions for steps that could help achieve a balance between human rights and US foreign policy in the Gulf at the conclusion of the paper.

Foreign Policy

Numerous theorists have debated what characteristics define a nation's foreign policy interests and strategies, though most agree on several key principles. In the 2015 National Security Strategy, the United States government listed four basic tenets of US national security, all of which must be protected, promoted, and in some cases defended: (1) the physical security of our country, borders, and peoples at home and abroad, (2) the prosperity of our nation, (3) the values of our nation, and (4) international order. These four components are critical inputs to a nation's foreign policy decision-making process.²⁰ These components include a fusion of both liberal and realist ideals of the proscribed role of the state. A realist framework presumes that a state must defend its borders, peoples, and assets. In addition, the national security tenets also support liberal ideals like democracy, freedom, and economic prosperity through the promotion of national values and the protection of US economic prosperity. This paper will discuss the three most commonly cited components of foreign policy: economic, diplomatic, and

²⁰ Obama, Barack. "National Security Strategy 2015." *National Security Strategy 2015*. 2015: 7-28. White House. Web. 12 Apr. 2015.

security concerns, as they affect every nation's calculus of its country's national interest and foreign policy.²¹

Human Rights Literature

US State Department Policy Planner Sandra Vogelgesang claimed that “there is no simple or enduring domestic consensus behind concern for human rights in US foreign policy—by the executive branch, the Congress, or the American people.”²² While no simple consensus exists, academics and policymakers have taken sides on the efficacy of human rights promotion in US foreign policy: some argue human rights are an integral component of US policy based on American values while others insist that human rights promotion produces a counterproductive foreign policy strategy, though it may be a noble individual pursuit.

Historically, the US has debated “whether it should have an activist foreign policy on behalf of individual freedom abroad, or should lead by the more introverted model of constructing the good society at home.”²³ Up until the mid-20th century, the US “clung to a commercially inspired neutrality until attacks on its shipping and military installations, respectively, brought it into the two world wars.”²⁴ The US amplified its rhetoric on human rights during the Cold War, constructing its foreign policy partly in opposition to

²¹ I will not discuss international order, as changing one's status in the international order requires a significant period of time and presupposes the ability to exert influence on the existing institutions. While in some cases this may be possible, it is unlikely and irrelevant in the context of this paper.

²² Vogelgesang, Sandy. *American Dream, Global Nightmare: The Dilemma of U.S. Human Rights Policy*. New York: Norton, 1980: 111-112. Print.

²³ Schlesinger, Arthur Jr., "Human Rights and the American Tradition." *Foreign Affairs* 57/2, 1979: 503-526. Web. 12. Apr. 2015.

²⁴ "US Foreign Policy and Human Rights: The Price of Principles after the Cold War." *Human Rights and Comparative Foreign Policy*. Ed. David P. Forsythe. Tokyo: United Nations UP, 2000: 1-22. Print.

the Soviet Union's communist agenda. When human rights entered the national debate, two predominant camps emerged:

“Wilsonian foreign policy liberals presumably take international law and human rights organizations seriously while Kissinger-type realists, considering national power and security to be the important factors in the policy-making process, presumably do not.”²⁵

An advocate for the necessary inclusion of human rights in US foreign policy, David Forsythe argues that, while the existence of the “twin dialectics” (of rights rhetoric and the realistic pursuit of national interests) results in an inconsistent US foreign policy, inconsistency does not necessarily result in strategic policies that are incompatible with human rights.²⁶ Since the Nixon-Kissinger “policy of pure geostrategy,” human rights have become an important component of US foreign policy.²⁷ Forsythe acknowledges that in foreign policy contexts “national security will be trump” but contends that the United States must be an active participant in human rights regimes in order to “exercise leadership or influence on the multilateral dimension of global human rights.”²⁸ US leadership is necessary to maintain influence and geostrategic posturing in critical regions like the Middle East.

²⁵ Forsythe, David P. "US Foreign Policy and Human Rights: Situating Obama." *Human Rights Quarterly* 33.3. 2011: 767-89. Print.

²⁶ Forsythe, David P. "Human Rights in U.S. Foreign Policy: Retrospect and Prospect." *Political Science Quarterly* 105.3. 1990: 435-54. JSTOR. Web. 4 Jan. 2015.

²⁷ Ibid. 452.

²⁸ Ibid. 453-454.

R.J. Vincent, author of *Human Rights and International Relations*, maintains that the very existence of an international dialogue on human rights reveals its universal applicability, concluding that universal human rights is not a concept bound in Western thought but rather a growing universal norm that should be an integral component of foreign policy. After the two world wars, the international community made significantly more space for discourse on human rights as a global norm through the creation of human rights treaties, regimes, and organizations to protect basic human rights. Vincent advocates for the inclusion of basic human rights in American foreign policy, like Forsythe, favoring US leadership in realizing basic human rights for the world's poor.

Michael Ignatieff takes a slightly different approach by acknowledging the necessity of a human rights dialogue, though he admits the current status of human rights in foreign policy is primarily political and inefficient. Ignatieff argues that conversations about human rights “are increasingly seen as the language of a moral imperialism”²⁹ as opposed to legitimate appeals for policy change. While Ignatieff acknowledges the universal framework that human rights dialogue *can* provide, he argues that its current function precludes its universal application, as the United States imposes international human rights constraints on other violators though does not accept similar constraints itself.³⁰ Ignatieff concludes, “we need to stop thinking of human rights as trumps and begin thinking of them as a language that creates the basis for deliberation.”³¹

²⁹ Ignatieff, Michael. "Human Rights as Politics: Human Rights as Idolatry." *Tanner Lectures on Human Values*. 2000: 319. Print.

³⁰ Ibid. 287-349.

³¹ Ibid. 349.

Those who remain more critical of including human rights in US policy cite two main concerns: it is not in the US national interest to do so, and when the US does intervene to alleviate human rights crises, the US aggravates existing problems. Realists like Hans Morgenthau and George Kennan argue that it is inappropriate to include moral considerations into US foreign policy,³² as the primary concern of the US is, first and foremost, to protect its territory and its citizens.³³ Kennan made the case that the obligations of a state inherently “have no moral quality”³⁴ because the concerns of the state include the protection of its citizens and borders. The government accepts the responsibility to protect life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, as agreed in the Declaration of Independence. “For these assumptions the government needs no moral justification, nor does it accept any moral reproach for acting on the basis of them.”³⁵ Unlike Vincent, Kennan argues that there is no universal understanding or standard of morality.³⁶ Further, he argues that pursuing democratic principles as an end is folly, as institutionalizing democracy does not guarantee US interests. The US should examine human rights considerations on a case by case basis, refraining from applying general moral doctrines to all situations.³⁷ Kennan argues that even carefully choosing situations in which the US can intervene can often result in unintended consequences for the United

³² Allendoerfer, Michelle Giacobbe. *When do Human Rights Matter? Finding a Place for Human Rights in Foreign Policy*. Dissertation, University of Michigan, 2010. Ann Arbor: ProQuest (Publication No. 3441140) Web. 14 Apr. 2015.

³³ Morgenthau, Hans J., and William Lee Bradley. “Human Rights & Foreign Policy.” New York: Council on Religion & International Affairs, 1979. Web. 1 Apr. 2015.

³⁴ Kennan, George. "Morality and Foreign Policy." *Foreign Policy*. Foreign Policy. Web. 3 Apr. 2015.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

States, noting “we are demanding... a species of veto power over those of their practices we dislike, while denying responsibility for whatever may flow from the acceptance of our demands.” Finally, Kennan concludes that the inconsistency of US policies “implies a lack of principle in the eyes of the world; whereas morality, if not principled, is not really morality.”³⁸ While there may exist a policy that incorporates elements of morality and human rights, according to Kennan, current and historic US policies have not achieved such a policy.

Key Links in US-GCC Relations

Finally, this section examines the key arguments about which factors are critical in linking US-GCC relations. Academics have published a plethora of literature examining Saudi Arabia’s importance as a lead oil producer as well as other GCC nations role in the global energy market. Similarly, political scientists have studied the political economy of the Gulf nations, though few have chronicled the bilateral relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia at great length. Rachel Bronson opines, “politics and history seem all but absent from the debate over the US-Saudi relationship,”³⁹ seeming to focus more on “feeding public outrage”⁴⁰ than examining the intricacies of this important relationship. Henry Kissinger had similar reflections about the US strategy in the Persian Gulf and noted that,

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Bronson, Rachel. "Prologue." *Thicker than Oil: America's Uneasy Partnership with Saudi Arabia*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006. 5. Print.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

“few subjects matter as much as oil, the Persian Gulf, and American foreign policy. But few subjects are less well understood. Even relatively sophisticated observers will attribute American interests in the Persian Gulf to Uncle Sam’s insatiable thirst for crude, combined with an effort to gain lucrative contracts for American oil firms.”⁴¹

For decades, most assumed the sole basis of US-GCC relations, or bilateral relations with any GCC nation was oil. Saudi Arabian political scientist Naif Bin Hethlain holds a similar view, positing that US-Saudi interests are “characterized by overlapping interests and mutual dependency—the US on the Kingdom for its oil and regional influence, Saudi Arabia on the US for security and legitimacy.”⁴² Only in the last decade have scholars called into question the historically predominant view that the US and the Gulf nations base their relationship on oil agreements. As the global landscape of energy markets shifts, US dependence on oil is no longer (and has not been for some time) the critical factor in US-GCC partnerships.

Author Rachel Bronson challenged popular assumptions by arguing that defense, not oil, is the basis for the Saudi-US partnership. Bronson argues in *Thicker Than Oil*, “mutual fear of the Soviet Union’s expanding global influence, predicated on strategic and religious realities, provided a protective political layer that enveloped oil and defense

⁴¹ Kissinger, Henry, and Walter Russel Mead. "Why We're in the Gulf." *Council on Foreign Relations*. Council on Foreign Relations, 27 Dec. 2007. Web. 14 Apr. 2015.

⁴² Hethlain, Naif. *Saudi Arabia and the US since 1962: Allies in Conflict*. London: SAQI, 2010. Print.

interests.”⁴³ Geostrategic interests, primarily the containment of the Soviet Union, defined US-Saudi interests for decades.⁴⁴ It was only the collapse of the Soviet Union that changed the US-Saudi relationship from focusing on the Soviet communist threat to “new issues, including counterterrorism, political reform, and stability in Iraq.”⁴⁵

Similarly, Henry Kissinger and Walter Mead argue that US interests in the Gulf are tied to both defense and oil, though not exclusively so. Kissinger and Mead argue that the most important link to the Gulf is the US intention to “maintain the security of world trade over the seas and air while also ensuring that international economic transactions take place in an orderly way.”⁴⁶ US access to the Suez Canal, the Bab Al-Mandar Strait and the Strait of Hormuz remains crucial for facilitating the free flow of goods, including oil, critical to US national interests and economic prosperity.

The following thesis attempts to move the literature in a different direction, understanding the inherent linkages between human rights and security policy, acknowledging that one can be used to strengthen the other though neither can be blindly pursued.

Theoretically, the idea of incorporating human rights into foreign policy is sound. Realistically, it is imprudent to suggest that the US consistently should place human rights considerations before or instead of US national interests in foreign affairs. While

⁴³ Bronson, Rachel. "Prologue." *Thicker than Oil: America's Uneasy Partnership with Saudi Arabia*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006. 5. Print.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 6

⁴⁶ Kissinger, Henry, and Walter Russell Mead. "Why We're in the Gulf." *Council on Foreign Relations*. Council on Foreign Relations, 27 Dec. 2007. Web. 14 Apr. 2015.

the pursuit of human rights is an ethical endeavor, it should not be the sole responsibility or moral obligation of the United States to enforce. The US cannot defend or pursue every human rights violation abroad at the expense of US interests though it can chose those nations in which US interests and the cessation of human rights abuses are not mutually exclusive. Alternatively, the US can weigh situations where protecting human rights trumps national security interests and decide to take action.

Institutions like the UN and the ICC exist (in part) to defend and protect human rights where the state cannot or will not do so. The US is an important actor in those institutions and should make a point to support the missions by providing substantial aid, intelligence, and support. This thesis distinguishes between the role of the United States as a bilateral actor and the role of the US as an international actor in global institutions. It is worth underscoring that the two are not consistently mutually exclusive. The US can pursue bilaterally what it pursues in a multilateral international context though the two policies are not required to be identical. When the US is forced to prioritize one interest over the other, the primary role of the state is to protect itself and its people.

The current application of human rights poses a problem. The weakness of US human rights policy derives from inconsistency, uneven application, and public shaming, often resulting in accusations of unfairness and hypocrisy in the international sphere. Current policies, like the one in Bahrain, send contradictory diplomatic signals. The US praises developments and criticizes issues simultaneously and publicly, generating resentment against US policies that locals view as prescriptive. If the US does choose to incorporate human rights into its foreign policy, (either in pursuit of US interests and/or

in an effort to protect the human rights of a persecuted group in another country) it should be a consistent component of US policy in the country supported by military, economic, and diplomatic actions as well. Human rights cannot be a moral high ground from which the US creates or discusses its foreign policy or applies it sporadically when it is politically convenient. Inconsistent diplomatic pressure applied to human rights violations is not only ineffective in terms of ending the human rights abuse, but also has created resentment from both allies and enemies abroad who view the United States' irregular efforts to promote human rights as a political stratagem, devoid of humanitarian nature.

The potential strength of US human rights policy, however, lies in the United States' ability to promote universal norms as agreed in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights by backing those values with military strength and international institutions. The US is one of the few nations who have the ability to defend the rights of others abroad. US leadership must recognize this role but use it wisely. The US can leverage its position as an important international actor to initiate a response to human rights abuses through diplomatic backchannels. As previously stated, the US is not able to pursue all human rights abuses abroad. The US should instead focus on using its political leverage to advocate for human rights either privately in a bilateral context or through multilateral institutions.

The literature on human rights acknowledges this disconnect between idealism and practicality in applying human rights principles. This thesis attempts to offer tangible

policy approaches through which US foreign policy can be efficient, appropriate, and cognizant of human rights without sacrificing US national security or interests.

Historical Context

US STRATEGIC POLICY IN THE GULF

Standard Oil of California, a US petroleum company,⁴⁷ struck oil in eastern Saudi Arabia in 1936 quickly launching US involvement in the region. From the 1930s on, as US companies transferred American assets and citizens to Saudi Arabia to expand oil exploration efforts.⁴⁸ Commercial ties quickly turned into diplomatic ones, necessary to facilitate the budding economic developments and interaction between the two nations. The US established official diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia in 1940.⁴⁹ A single, albeit major oil discovery opened the door to American involvement in the Gulf which would eventually solidify access to energy as a critical component of US foreign policy considerations in the region.⁵⁰

At the time, Britain had been the dominant political actor in the Middle East for decades. Its colonial empire reached far into the Arabian Gulf. Britain had close colonial ties with the Hashemite rulers of Iraq and Jordan and the rulers of the Arabian Peninsula. The British cemented their regional influence by establishing “bases [that] encircled the [Saudi] kingdom.”⁵¹ The Saudis viewed the US entry into the Gulf as “a longed-for counterweight to Britain’s regional dominance,”⁵² a role the US readily accepted. The roots of Saudi-US cooperation laid the foundation for a unique and resilient diplomatic

⁴⁷ Standard Oil would later become Saudi Aramaco.

⁴⁸ "Saudi Arabia Fact Sheet." *Chevron*. Web. 10 Dec. 2014.

⁴⁹ "Saudi Arabia" *Saudi Arabia—Countries -- Office of the Historian*. Web. 7 Dec. 2014.

⁵⁰ "What Have Been the Role and Effects of US Foreign Policies and Actions in the Middle East?" *Global Connections*. PBS, 1 Jan. 2002. Web. 9 Dec. 2014.

⁵¹ Pollack, Josh. "Saudi Arabia and the United States, 1931-2002." *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 6.3 (2002): 77-78. Middle East Review of International Affairs. Web. 28 Nov. 2014.

⁵² *Ibid.*

relationship in the years to come. The US increased its involvement in the Gulf after WWII by forging stronger political and military partnerships in the region. In 1946, the US received approval from the Saudis to build an airbase in Dhahran, known as the United States Military Training Mission.⁵³⁻⁵⁴ By permitting American military bases in Saudi Arabia, the Saudi royal family fostered decades of joint military and security cooperation, though would also become a point of contention during periods of tension in the Middle East, particularly when US and Saudi interests diverged.⁵⁵

The start of the Cold War initiated a significant shift in US policy in the Middle East. President Eisenhower's administration began to view the Gulf as a crucial geopolitical nexus and potential buffer zone between the communist East and the democratic West, noting, "The Middle East, which has always been coveted by Russia, would today be prized more than ever by international communism."⁵⁶ The US only truly cemented political relationships with Middle Eastern regimes when President Eisenhower publicly denounced the British attack on the Suez Canal in 1956. The US reaction "enhanced America's image in the region"⁵⁷ and secured a pro-Western and more specifically, pro-American leaning in the Gulf nations, which remained staunch anti-communists throughout the Cold War.

⁵³ The agreement to allow US forces in Dhahran oscillated with the rise and fall of the dyadic partnership between the US and Saudi Arabia.

⁵⁴ Pollack, Josh. "Saudi Arabia and the United States, 1931-2002." *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 6.3 (2002): 80. Middle East Review of International Affairs. Web. 28 Nov. 2014.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 79.

⁵⁶ Eisenhower, President Dwight D. "President Eisenhower's Speech on the U.S. Role in the Middle East (Eisenhower Doctrine), 1957." *Council on Foreign Relations*. Council on Foreign Relations, 5 Jan. 1957. Web. 14 Apr. 2015.

⁵⁷ Pollack, Josh. "Saudi Arabia and the United States, 1931-2002." *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 6.3 (2002): 80. Middle East Review of International Affairs. Web. 28 Nov. 2014.

After the very public British failure to retake the Suez Canal, British influence decreased substantially, paving the way for the Gulf nations to declare independence and US influence to enter. Eisenhower took steps to ensure a US alliance with the regimes of the Middle East when in 1957 he requested that “Congress pass a resolution authorizing him to pledge increased economic and military aid and even direct US protection to any Middle Eastern nation willing to acknowledge the threat posed by international communism.”⁵⁸ The US carried out its commitment to its new anti-communist allies and established diplomatic relations with each Gulf nation the year it declared independence: Kuwait in 1961, Bahrain, the UAE, and Qatar in 1971, and finally Oman in 1972.

This period was not, however, one of perpetual harmony between the US and the Gulf countries, as the newly created republics grew anxious when the British withdrew from the Gulf in 1971, leaving a power vacuum. The Shah of Iran seized the opportunity to fill the resultant power vacuum under the aegis of his American allies. When the Americans failed to intervene to protect the Shah from revolutionaries in 1979, the leaders of the Gulf nations questioned US willingness to protect their regimes if unrest ever ensued, leading to tense diplomatic relations.⁵⁹ Shortly after 1979, the Carter administration attempted to mollify the Gulf rulers by announcing the Carter Doctrine in 1980. The Carter Doctrine declared,

⁵⁸ Yaqub, Salim. "Introduction." *Containing Arab Nationalism: The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina, 2004. 1. Print.

⁵⁹ Pollack, Josh. "Saudi Arabia and the United States, 1931-2002." *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 6.3 (2002): 80. Middle East Review of International Affairs. Web. 28 Nov. 2014.

“An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region [and thereby endanger the flow of oil] will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.”⁶⁰

The Gulf regimes accepted this small assurance from President Carter though they continued to view US promises with caution. The Carter Doctrine cemented the vital linkage between US interests and access to oil in the region and later justified US participation in three wars in the Gulf.⁶¹ Throughout this period, US-GCC relations revolved primarily around oil (for the US) and security (for the Gulf nations).

Fears of Gulf nations turning to communism evaporated at the end of the Cold War, signaling a new focus for US-Gulf relations. No longer focused on the spread of communism, President H.W. Bush outlined his New World Order in an address before a joint session of Congress in March 1991, declaring, “we must work together to create shared security arrangements in the region...Let it be clear: Our vital national interests depend on a stable and secure Gulf.”⁶² The winding down of the Cold War resulted in greater focus on stability and a budding defense relationship between the US and GCC nations. For instance, as the Soviet threat lessened, Western powers “reduced their

⁶⁰ Klare, Michael, and John Feffer. "Repudiate the Carter Doctrine." *Foreign Policy In Focus*. 23 Jan. 2009. Web. 7 Dec. 2014.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Peters, Gerhard, and John Wooley. "George Bush: Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the Cessation of the Persian Gulf Conflict." *The American Presidency Project*. 6 Mar. 1991. Web. 12 Apr. 2015.

procurement budgets”⁶³ while defense contractors ramped up sales to foreign governments, a business that “became a critical profit center,”⁶⁴ for both the US government and the defense industry.

Only two years after the Cold War ended, the US-Gulf relationship was threatened by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. US soldiers arrived to defend Kuwait against Iraqi aggression, solidifying military cooperation and trust between the US and Gulf nations. The Carter Doctrine held strong though the Gulf War revealed the inadequacies of Gulf defense capabilities, leading the US and several GCC states to sign “bilateral defense agreements... including Bahrain in 1991, Qatar in 1992, and the UAE in 1994.”⁶⁵ Access agreements and the establishment of more US military bases quickly followed, substantially bolstering US presence in the Gulf⁶⁶ and facilitating interoperability between US and Gulf military forces.

In sum, throughout the Cold War and the Gulf War, the focus of the US-Saudi relationship was “oil for security.”⁶⁷ In an address to Congress after the declaration of the cease-fire in 1991, President George H.W. Bush declared, “our commitment to peace in the Middle East does not end with the liberation of Kuwait.” The twenty first century would bring with it significant changes to the foundation of the US-GCC relationship,

⁶³ Keller, William, and James Nolan. "The Arms Trade: Business as Usual." *Foreign Policy* 109. Winter 1997-1998 (1997): 113-25. Print.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ El-Katiri, Mohammed. "United States Gulf Cooperation Council Security Cooperation in a Multipolar World." *Strategic Studies Institute* (2014): 9-10. Strategic Studies Institute. Web. 20 Nov. 2014.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Al-Tamimi, Naser. “China Saudi Arabia relations: Economic Partnership or Strategic Alliance?” 2012. Discussion Paper. Durham University, HH Sheikh Nasser Al-Sabah Programme, Durham. 11.

pivoting away from 'oil for security' to focus on security and increasingly, on human rights. US relations with the Gulf regimes developed over time though reached their apex in the days before September 11, when memories of the US liberation of Kuwait still evoked feelings of cooperation and mutual defense.

September 11, 2001 and the Aftermath

The attacks of September 11 forced the US to fundamentally reshape its policy in the Gulf. The 19 terrorists who planned the attacks of September 11 hailed from mostly GCC countries, 15 from Saudi Arabia alone. US citizens, media, and politicians expressed outrage, pointing out "the limits of Saudi cooperation, and attribut[ing] the rise of al-Qa'ida to Saudi decisions to encourage virulent anti-American rhetoric in place of dissent."⁶⁸ Journalists turned their attention toward "the rigid traditionalism of Saudi society, particularly its treatment of women,"⁶⁹ bringing human rights back to the forefront of US foreign policy in the Middle East. In response, in 2003, the Bush administration increased support for democratic reforms that aimed to target the root causes of terrorism throughout the Middle East⁷⁰ stating, "the United States has adopted a new policy, a forward strategy of freedom in the Middle East"⁷¹ adding that democracy

⁶⁸ Pollack, Josh. "Saudi Arabia and the United States, 1931-2002." *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 6.3 (2002): 89. Middle East Review of International Affairs. Web. 28 Nov. 2014.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Out of the public eye, the US initiated strategic cooperation agreements with Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and others in an effort to create a unified approach to terrorism in the Middle East. This strategic relationship, essential to US success in pursuing Al Qaeda, deeply affected US regional relationships. Assessing those classified security relationships are beyond the scope of this paper due to the lack of publicly available information.

⁷¹ "George W. Bush Administration: Speech Laying Out Vision for Democracy in the Middle East." *Jewish Virtual Library*. The American-Israel Cooperative Enterprise, 6 Nov. 2003. Web. 12 Apr. 2015.

“must be a focus of American policy in the decades to come.”⁷² President Bush went so far as to state,

“Sixty years of Western nations excusing and accommodating the lack of freedom in the Middle East did nothing to make us safe, because in the long run stability cannot be purchased at the expense of liberty. As long as the Middle East remains a place where freedom does not flourish, it will remain a place of stagnation, resentment, and violence ready for export.”⁷³

The Bush administration created programs like the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) in 2002 and the Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiatives (BMENA) in 2004 in order to build civil society in the Middle East vis-à-vis bottom up programs designed to embed democratic ideals into Middle Eastern contexts.

These efforts followed the US invasion of Iraq and later Afghanistan, a military venture that the Sunni royal families of the Gulf firmly opposed. As part of its new plan to eradicate terrorism, the US “established military bases in all GCC countries, save [increasing US presence in] Saudi Arabia,”⁷⁴ whose own citizens expressed anger at “American support for Israel, military action in Afghanistan, and detention of Arab prisoners,”⁷⁵ through initiating a “fall-off of tourism, consumer boycotts of American

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Cafiero, Giorgio, and Daniel Wagner. "The U.S. and Bahrain's Increasingly Tense Alliance." *International Policy Digest*. Gulf State Analytics, 7 Oct. 2014. Web. 7 Nov. 2014.

⁷⁵ Pollack, Josh. "Saudi Arabia and the United States, 1931-2002." *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 6.3 (2002): 90. Middle East Review of International Affairs. Web. 28 Nov. 2014.

products, and the divestment of billions of dollars.”⁷⁶ The Saudi government “ruled out attacks on any other Arab country from their soil, and also hinted in advance that any American request to launch sorties against targets in Afghanistan from their bases would not be welcome.”⁷⁷

Bahrain, on the other hand, offered the US a place to base its operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Manama opened its doors to serve as a forward operating base for US NAVCENT and MARCENT. The UAE and Kuwait also offered space for US Air Force bases.⁷⁸ On March 25, 2002, the close strategic relationship with the government of Bahrain led President Bush to call Bahrain a “major non-NATO US ally,” a label the small country accepted proudly.⁷⁹

The increase in US military presence in the Gulf served to fortify the security-oriented nature of the US relationships with the GCC nations. It also intimidated the balance of regional power dynamics. Saudi Arabia had a record of refusing US requests, only publicly allowing US troops to utilize Saudi bases when it was politically feasible. Contrastingly, Bahrain did not have a long record of refusing US requests for military cooperation, nor did Bahrain hold the political sway to deny US requests like its neighbor, Saudi Arabia.

⁷⁶ Ibid. 90.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 89.

⁷⁸ Saudi Arabia’s political support for hosting US military personnel ebbs and flows in relation to the strength of US-Saudi diplomatic relations. See Josh Pollack’s “Saudi Arabia and the United States, 1931-2002” for an in-depth analysis of US-Saudi military cooperation since 2001.

⁷⁹ Terill, Dr. W. Andrew. "The Arab Spring and the Future of US Interests and Cooperative Security in the Arab World." *Strategic Studies Institute*. US Army War College, 2 Aug. 2011. Web. 9 Dec. 2014.

The attacks of September 11 forced Riyadh and Washington to reexamine their special relationship because “it was no longer realistic to imagine that Saudi religious influence could be used to promote US security and political interests within the region.”⁸⁰ Similarly, the American public demanded a tougher reaction to the Saudis, angered by suspected Saudi contributions to financing terrorism against the United States. In this context, Saudi Arabia began to search for alternative political partners.

In 2005, after the death of Saudi Arabia’s King Fahd, King Abdullah ascended the throne of Saudi Arabia and immediately announced a major shift in the oil kingdom’s foreign policy, which he termed Saudi’s “Look East” trade policy.⁸¹ The “Look East” policy aimed for “over half of Saudi oil exports [to be] bound for Asia,”⁸² highlighting Saudi Arabia’s intent to diversify its global alliances, economically but also diplomatically. After the attacks of September 11, “when we [Saudi Arabia] started looking around, nobody was there because we had never built relationships with Russia or China. And we thought, Let’s build bridges with other countries.”⁸³ And so, the slow pivot away from the US began.

From the perspective of the Gulf rulers, President Obama’s inauguration in 2009 seemed to present a hopeful change in US foreign policy, promising a withdrawal of US troops from Iraq and Afghanistan in addition to greater attention to an alienated Middle

⁸⁰ Al-Tamimi, Naser. “China Saudi Arabia Relations: Economic Partnership or Strategic Alliance?”, 2012. Discussion Paper. Durham University, HH Sheikh Nasser Al-Sabah Programme, Durham. 11.

⁸¹ Panda, Ankit. "King Abdullah's Legacy in Asia." *The Diplomat*. The Diplomat, 23 Jan. 2015. Web. 16 Feb. 2015.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ England, Andrew. "Chinese Trade Flows Along New ‘Silk Road’." *Financial Times*. Financial Times, 14 Dec. 2009. Web. 21 Apr. 2015.

East. Indeed, President Obama traveled to Egypt where he spoke at Cairo University and declared,

“I have come here to seek a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world; one based upon mutual interest and mutual respect; and one based upon the truth that American and Islam are not exclusive, and need not be in competition.”⁸⁴

The US and Gulf countries improved their respective bilateral relations until 2011, when the political, military, and economic relationships around the Middle East began to crumble. In early 2011, the uprisings known as the “Arab Spring” destabilized many of the Gulf nations as revolutions spread across the Middle East, toppling regimes and spreading instability across the region. “The GCC countries, with the notable exception of Bahrain, succeeded in largely avoiding mass protest movements as observed in many other parts of the Arab world,”⁸⁵ though remained vulnerable, as “democratization demands”⁸⁶ appeared in Kuwait, Oman, and other GCC states. Success in “avoiding mass protest movements” stemmed from the swift action taken by the Gulf governments against protesters. The Saudis, Bahrainis and Kuwaitis quickly crushed rebellions by using force against those gathered in the streets, killing the momentum of the movements

⁸⁴ "Remarks by the President at Cairo University." *The White House*. The White House, 4 June 2009. Web. 12 Apr. 2015.

⁸⁵ El-Katiri, Mohammed. "The Future of the Arab Gulf Monarchies in the Age of Uncertainties." *Strategic Studies Institute* (2013): 2. Strategic Studies Institute. Web. 5 Dec. 2014.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 1.

before they could gain a strong footing.⁸⁷ In response to the repressive techniques used by nearly all of the Gulf regimes against their citizens, the US placed a hold on its FMS and increased pressure on the Gulf governments to stop human rights violations and reform the existing governments. While some believe Obama sided with corrupt regimes for too long, others claim Obama abandoned long time partners like Hosni Mubarak. In reality, like most presidents before him, Obama attempted to balance contradictory concerns in the Middle East: security and human rights. Unfortunately, the awkward balance failed on both accounts, isolating both Gulf military partners and human rights groups.

Public political pressure negatively affected the political relationships between the US and the Gulf countries. Regional leaders began to speculate about the value of inviting US involvement in the region. If the United States would not provide Gulf leaders with the weapons and the political support they needed to retain their grip on power, they would seek alternative partners. China, India, and Russia began to offer the military and security resources the US refused to provide, a trend that Gulf based political analyst Theodore Karasik suggests emanates from some of the Gulf nations becoming “fed up with what is perceived to be being told what to buy for their threat environment...the UAE and Saudi Arabia are now buying what they need through creative shopping lists...on equipment that not only they need but what their allies in the region require as key neighboring countries disintegrate.”⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Matthiesen, Toby. *Sectarian Gulf: Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the Arab Spring That Wasn't*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2013. 208. Web. 15 Mar. 2015.

⁸⁸ Mustafa, Awad. "Saudi, UAE Influence Grows With Purchases." *Defense News*. Defense News, 20 Mar. 2015. Web. 12 Apr. 2015.

Instead of providing arms to the Gulf regimes, the Obama administration refused to intervene militarily though continued to dedicate funding to democracy and human rights in the broader Middle East, highlighting the need for liberal reforms in the Arabian Gulf, much to the dismay of the Arab leaders. Tense diplomatic relations,

“surfaced strongly in 2011 due to the Saudi king’s anger at Washington’s response to Arab uprisings, especially at its abandonment of Hosni Mubarak, the deposed Egyptian president, who was a long-time Saudi and US Ally, and the American call for political reforms in Bahrain.”⁸⁹

From the point of view of the Gulf leaders, the quick abandonment of long time allies confirmed the need for Gulf rulers to expand their economic and political partnerships, spurring GCC leaders to pursue diplomatic relationships with growing economic partners in the east. Though President Obama’s term began with hope for strengthened relations with its Middle East partners, it devolved quickly. As the revolutions continued to unfold President Obama’s approach to the uprisings coupled with the US response to Syria and later ISIS and Iran fueled distrust between the Gulf monarchs and the US president.

While the US-GCC relationship is no longer predicated on oil, its long, complex history presents a variety of factors that contribute to the current status of US policy in the Gulf.

The Chinese approach, detailed below, reveals a fundamentally different history and approach to GCC relations, critical to understanding contemporary Chinese interactions in the Arabian Peninsula.

⁸⁹ Al-Tamimi, Naser. *China Saudi Arabia Relations: Economic Partnership or Strategic Alliance?*, 2012. Discussion Paper. Durham University, HH Sheikh Nasser Al-Sabah Programme, Durham. 12

CHINESE STRATEGIC POLICY IN THE GULF

Mao Zedong declared the creation of the People's Republic of China in 1949,⁹⁰ and announced its official foreign policy in 1954. Maoist foreign policy emanated from the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" which include, "mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence."⁹¹ China structures its foreign policies vis-à-vis broad principles and slogans, with government statements on human rights revealing careful word choice and intent.⁹² The tendency to speak in broad principles remains the hallmark of Chinese foreign policy.

China established official diplomatic relations with Kuwait (and Iran) in 1971.⁹³ Shortly after, China solidified ties with Oman in 1978, the UAE in 1981, Qatar in 1988, and Bahrain in 1989. ⁹⁴ Outreach to Saudi Arabia came at the end of the Cold War, in 1990.

After the Tiananmen Massacre in 1989, "the Middle East appeared to assume a new importance for China"⁹⁵ because of the warm diplomatic welcome offered by the Arab nations, while much of the rest of the world publicly condemned Chinese actions.

⁹⁰ "The Chinese Revolution of 1949 - 1945–1952." *Milestones*. Office of the Historian. Web. 9 Dec. 2014.

⁹¹ "China's Initiation of the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-Existence." *China's Initiation of the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-Existence*. Web. 9 Dec. 2014.

⁹² Szczudlik-Tatar, Justyna. "China's New Silk Road Diplomacy." Ed. Marcin Zaborowski. *The Polish Institute of International Affairs* 34.82 (2013): 1-2. The Polish Institute of International Affairs. Web. 1 Dec. 2014.

⁹³ Bin Huwaidin, Mohamed. *China's Relations with Arabia and the Gulf, 1949-1999*. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002. 105. Print.

⁹⁴ Ibid. 106.

⁹⁵ Harris, Lillian Craig. "The Turning Point: War in the Gulf." *China Considers the Middle East*. London: I.B. Tauris, 1993. 245. Print.

Oman, the UAE, and Kuwait opened their arms to President Yang Shangkun because “the Gulf countries did not criticize China’s harsh treatment of the demonstrators and considered the matter as part of China’s internal affairs.”^{96,97}

This deepening diplomatic relationship mirrored newly developing economic ties and trade linkages. In the early nineties, as China’s demand for oil skyrocketed the partnership between the GCC nations and China strengthened. “Chinese exports grew 450% between 1992 and 2006.”⁹⁸ Chinese growth skyrocketed, as did its increasing domestic demand and energy consumption. China sought access to resources like oil, gas, copper, and rare-earth metals to fuel its continued growth. By pursuing economic relationships with countries rich in scarce resources, China facilitated its sustained economic progress. China is now the largest energy consumer and producer in the world.⁹⁹ In comparison to the rest of the world, China became the world’s largest consumer of primary materials (like metal ores, fossil fuels, and biomass) with domestic consumption levels four times larger than the US.¹⁰⁰ “The two-way trade between Saudi Arabia and China in the last two decades increased almost 58 times from \$1.28 billion in

⁹⁶ Allen, Calvin H. and W. Lynn Rigsbee. *Oman under Qaboos: From Coup to Constitution, 1970-1996*. 1st ed. London: Routledge, 2000. 210. Print.

⁹⁷ Bin Huwaidin, Mohamed. *China's Relations with Arabia and the Gulf, 1949-1999*. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002. 244. Print.

⁹⁸ Amiti, Mary, and Caroline Freund. "An Anatomy of China’s Trade Growth." (2007) *Global Implications of China's Trade*. International Monetary Fund. Web. 21 Apr. 2015.

⁹⁹ "China: Country Analysis Brief Overview." U.S. *Energy Information Administration (EIA)*. U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), 30 May 2013. Web. 30 Oct. 2014.

¹⁰⁰ Kaur, Satwant. "China Outpacing Rest of the World in Resource Use." *United Nations Environment Programme*. UNEP News Center, 2 Aug. 2013. Web. 6 Feb. 2015.

1990 to about \$74 billion in 2012.”¹⁰¹ Researcher Chietigj Bajpae argues, “China’s primary interest in the Middle East has been to gain access to the region’s vast oil and gas supplies.”¹⁰² In 2012, Qatar supplied China with 34% of its LNG imports; nearly double the amount of any other nation.¹⁰³ In 2013, Saudi Arabia supplied 19% of China’s crude oil imports, though GCC nations cumulatively provided 35%, more than a third of China’s energy demands.¹⁰⁴ Finally, “In 2012 China overtook the US to become Saudi Arabia’s top trade partner.”¹⁰⁵ Chinese investments and burgeoning trade relations with the GCC positioned it to become an alternative source of influence in the Middle East with pundits claiming that China “is becoming a major US competitor for political influence in the Persian Gulf.”¹⁰⁶

Meanwhile by the mid 2000s, the Chinese also began a quiet public relations campaign to flood the media with non-western alternatives, increasing cultural exchange initiatives and encouraging foreign language learning. In a rare move, the Chinese government agreed to partner with Al-Jazeera to produce Arabic and Chinese

¹⁰¹ Al-Tamimi, Nasser. "China-Saudi Relations: Booming Trade." *Al Arabiya News*. 22 Feb. 2013. Web. 8 Dec. 2014.

¹⁰² Bajpae, Chietigj. "China Becomes Increasingly Involved in the Middle East." *World Security Network*. 6 Mar. 2010. Web. 14 Nov. 2015.

¹⁰³ "Independent Statistics and Analysis for China." *Energy Information Agency*. US Energy Information Administration, 4 Feb. 2014. Web. 8 Dec. 2014.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid

¹⁰⁵ Al-Tamimi, Nasser. "China-Saudi Relations: Booming Trade." *Al Arabiya News*. 22 Feb. 2013. Web. 8 Dec. 2014.

¹⁰⁶ Ghafouri, Mahmoud. "China's Policy in the Persian Gulf." *Middle East Policy Council* XVI.2 (2009): 80-92. Print.

broadcasts.¹⁰⁷ In what author Ben Simpfendorfer calls “the new public relations war,” Al Jazeera has been conducting interviews in Arabic with high-level Chinese officials from the Foreign Ministry, Chinese Radio International, and the Cultural Ministry. Al Jazeera recorded a three hour special entitled “Eye on China,” speaking with various Chinese nationals who spoke Arabic about China’s one child policy, tourism, and Muslims in China, at times for over an hour in fluent Arabic.¹⁰⁸ The series even included “images of Muslims praying in mosques and welcoming visiting Arab Imams.”¹⁰⁹

Al Jazeera is not the only news media tapping into potential markets linking the Arab world to China: The People’s Daily, Guangming Daily, and Xinhua have reporters based around the Middle East, reporting in both Arabic and Chinese.¹¹⁰ Also indicative of increasingly interrelated interests is China’s booming translation business. Arab traders routinely visit several business centers in China, including Guangzhou and Yiwu, a province that places the estimate of Arabic translators in the city at one thousand for Yiwu alone.¹¹¹ Simpfendorfer argues, “the Arabic-speaking officials in Beijing are...part of a deliberate government strategy to build bridges in the Arab world. Language is the hidden glue to relations.” Comparatively, only one US government official has appeared speaking on Al-Jazeera in Arabic; Alberto Fernandez, who later stepped down after

¹⁰⁷ Simpfendorfer, Ben. "The New Public Relations War: Al Jazeera in China." *The New Silk Road: How a Rising Arab World Is Turning Away from the West and Rediscovering China*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. 116. Print.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. 116-117.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. 117.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. 116-121.

¹¹¹ Ibid. 137.

making a mistake while speaking in Arabic, describing the US policy in Iraq as mired in “stupidity.”¹¹²

China has also increased efforts to attract Arab tourists, creating “an international tourism destination for the Muslim world.”¹¹³ Chinese officials announced the construction of “World Muslim City” to be completed by 2020. The city will “consist of 23 sub-projects including a World Muslim Folk Culture Street, a convention center and high end hotels.”¹¹⁴ In addition, China hosts an Arabic Arts festival annually, to celebrate art in the Muslim world and invite Muslims from various nations to celebrate their culture and holy language, Arabic.¹¹⁵ Reciprocally, in 2013, Bahrain welcomed a “Chinese painting and calligraphy exhibition, which hosted more than 30 renowned contemporary Chinese artists.”¹¹⁶

Finally, China has opened dozens of international schools that teach the Arabic language, from primary school to university level education. In the Arab world, the University of Dubai opened the Confucius Institute in 2011, designed to increase cultural exchange between the Arab world and China.¹¹⁷ In addition, the Confucius Institute has begun training the Department of Economic Development in Dubai, the Dubai Police Academy, and airport officials in order to facilitate communication with its many

¹¹² Ibid.141.

¹¹³ Qian, Mu. "Arabic Language Opens Doors for Chinese." *China Daily*. China Daily, 5 Aug. 2013. Web. 15 Apr. 2015.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Zulfikar Rakhmat, Muhammed. "China and Bahrain: Undocumented Growing Relations." *Fair Observer*. Fair Observer, 22 May 2014. Web. 14 Apr. 2015.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ "Confucius Institute at the University of Dubai (CIUD)." *Confucius Institute at University of Dubai*, Chinese Language Training, Chinese Testing International. 2011. Web. 15 Apr. 2015.

Chinese visitors and diplomats.¹¹⁸ Students from Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates, among others have studied at numerous universities in China, facilitating exchange programs for Chinese students in the Gulf as well.¹¹⁹ It is clear that China's historic and contemporary diplomatic linkages with the Gulf States extend well beyond economic ties, as the Chinese are working to facilitate not only a transactional relationship, but a partnership based on cultural exchange and understanding.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Zulfikar Rakhmat, Muhammed. "China and Bahrain: Undocumented Growing Relations." *Fair Observer*. Fair Observer, 22 May 2014. Web. 14 Apr. 2015.

PART II: CASE STUDIES

Saudi Arabia

The largest country in the GCC, Saudi Arabia's landmass covers over 80% of the Arabian Peninsula. Saudi Arabia's geographic breadth matches its political reach, as Saudi Arabia's mandate as the protector of the two holy cities of Mecca and Medina solidifies its position as religious leader of the Muslim world. Beyond the Muslim world, Saudi Arabia's strategic use of its natural resources of oil and gas helped establish the newly formed nation as a global leader and strategic economic partner early on. The United States recognized this power in the 1930s and moved quickly to assist the Saudis in building physical, political, and economic infrastructure.¹²⁰ As Saudi power increased over the decades, Saudi Arabia and Iran began to vie for regional predominance, a feud that has dominated much of Middle Eastern conflict in the last three decades. This tension also prompted US strategic support for Saudi Arabia by way of arms sales and defense cooperation agreements.

The Saudi Arabia case study is organized into three parts: the economic, diplomatic, and strategic relationships, focusing on the significant changes in relations between the US and Saudi Arabia and China and Saudi Arabia.

ECONOMIC RELATIONSHIP

الخبز لا يخبز في فرن واحد فقط

“All bread is not baked in the same oven.”

In 1936, when Standard Oil of California struck oil in eastern Saudi Arabia, the United States and Saudi Arabia established a relationship based on mutual oil interests.¹²¹ The United States and Saudi Arabia have continued to boast “a strategic partnership since World War II based on a common understanding -- Saudi Arabia provides the US with oil and the US in turn provides a security umbrella to the Kingdom.”¹²²

While the special oil relationship is significant, conventional wisdom has assumed falsely that the US imports a large majority of its oil from Saudi Arabia. In recent years, Americans have expressed particular concern over the US dependence on Middle Eastern oil and pushed for “oil independence.”¹²³ When polled in 2014, 3 out of 4 Americans thought that the US imported the majority of its oil from somewhere in the Middle East.¹²⁴ 58% stated that the US imports the most oil from Saudi Arabia.¹²⁵

¹²¹ “Saudi Arabia Fact Sheet.” *Chevron*. Web. 10 Dec. 2014.

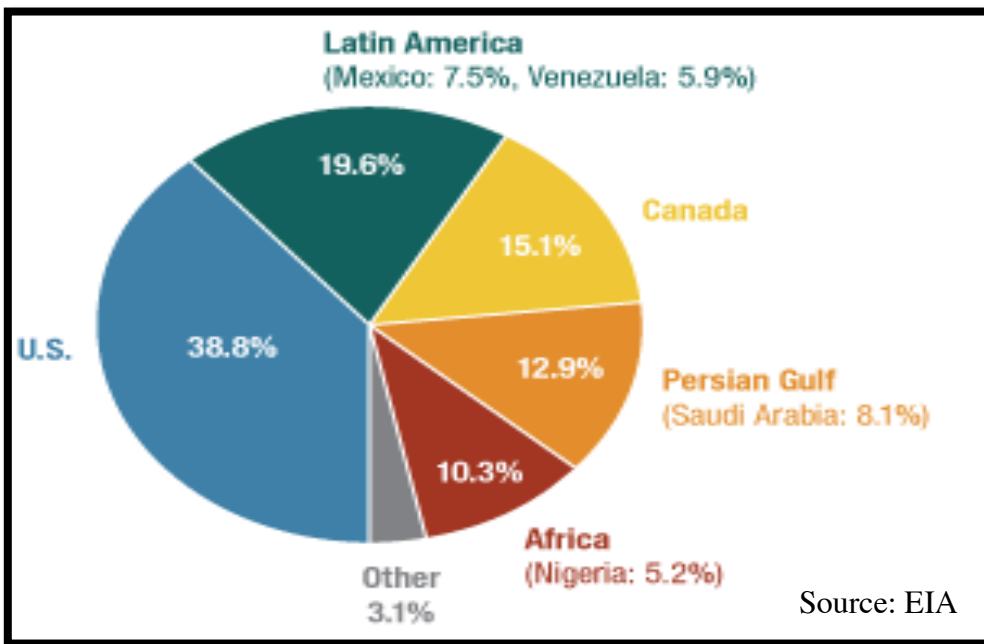
¹²² Wagner, Daniel. “Is the US Losing Saudi Arabia to China?” *The Huffington Post*. 30 Oct. 2013. Web. 18 Feb. 2015.

¹²³ Oil operates in a world market. Increased oil production in the United States, and a subsequent decrease in oil imports, does not free the US from supply shocks or price volatility. The concept of “energy independence” is fundamentally flawed because of the structure of the global oil market.

¹²⁴ Olson, Randal. “Where the U.S. Gets Its Oil From.” *Randal Olson Blog*. 28 Aug. 2014. Web. 12 Apr. 2015.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

Figure 1. Where the US Gets its Oil

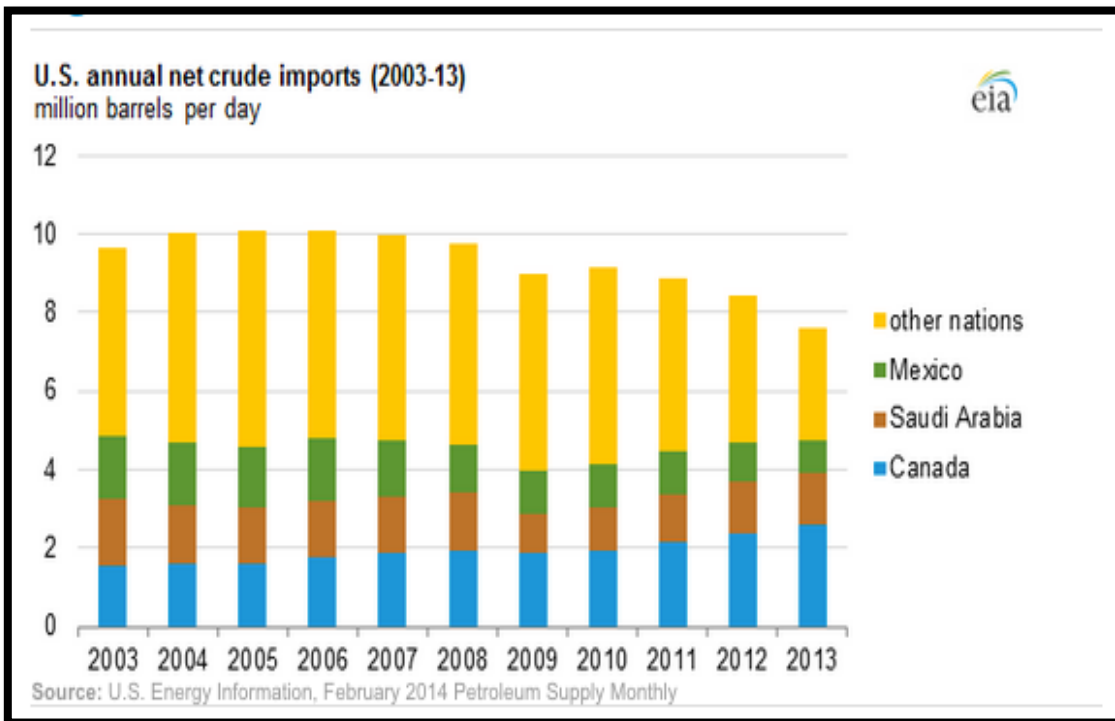


For decades, the United States has imported less than 25% of its oil from all the nations in the Persian Gulf combined.¹²⁶ A quarter of oil imports from the Persian Gulf is a significant number, though should be contextualized with US imports on a broader scale. Canada, for instance, supplies the US with more than a quarter of its oil imports alone. In 2012, Saudi Arabia's exports to the US totaled only 8.1% of all US oil imports overall. Saudi Arabia's oil exports do not impact American markets or strategy to the extent that the media or the general public assumes they do.

¹²⁶ "Monthly Energy Review March 2015." *Energy Information Agency*. Energy Information Agency, 1 Mar. 2015. Web. 12 Apr. 2015.

In 2012, the EIA reported that the United States imported nearly the same amount of crude oil from Africa as it did from the Persian Gulf.¹²⁷ In 2013, the EIA recorded that Saudi Arabia counted for 13% of US petroleum imports, slightly higher than the previous year, though still comparatively small to the quantities imported from North American and Latin American countries. As the graph detailing US annual net crude imports depicts, between 2003-2013, Canada was the single largest exporter of crude oil to the US. Imports from North America (Canada, Mexico, and South America) accounted for half of all US crude imports. Saudi Arabia, while significant, was not the only nor the most important producer for the United States.

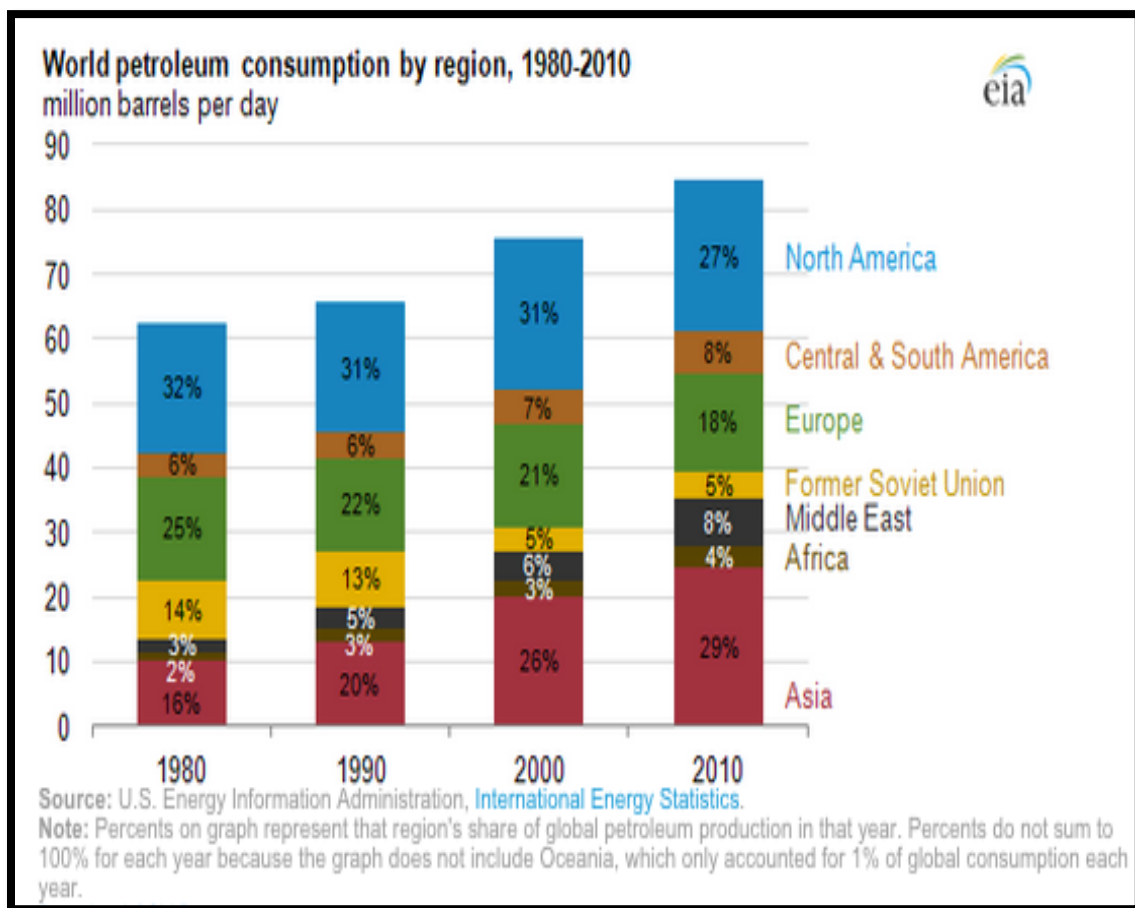
Figure 2. US Annual Net Crude Imports



¹²⁷ Flintoff, Corey. "Where Does America Get Oil? You May Be Surprised." *National Public Radio*, National Public Radio, 12 Apr. 2012. Web. 12 Apr. 2015.

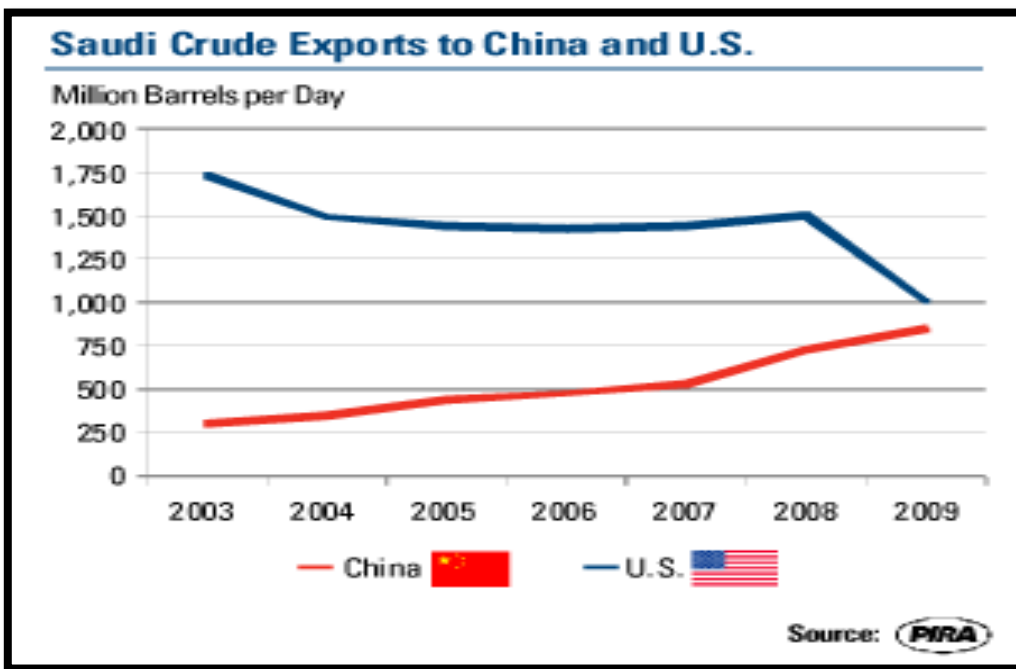
The table below highlights how in the last decade, the nature of the global oil markets have changed considerably. In the last three decades, traditional consumer/producer relationships shifted as petroleum consumption patterns varied; the overall share of Asian demand for oil increased steadily while the share of US and European petroleum demands decreased from 2000-2010. Oil demand began slowly shifting to Asia while US consumption declined simultaneously, representing a fundamental shift in the world energy market.

Figure 3. World Petroleum Consumption by Region



At the same time, new oil and gas production technologies like fracking and horizontal drilling increased production capacity in certain countries, especially the United States and Canada. A slight decrease in US oil demand after 2005 and a soaring increase in demand from Asia led to a shift in the trade patterns of global energy markets. Increased production and declining consumption in North America contrasted with rising demand in Asian industrial nations. This led large oil producers like Saudi Arabia to fundamentally alter their approach to oil sales. In particular, changing demand forced Saudi Arabia to focus on new buyers for its oil. The Saudi government took note of the change in energy markets and took necessary steps to reposition their economic relationships to ensure the steady flow of money into Saudi coffers.

Figure 4. Saudi Arabia's Crude Exports to China and US



As US demand for oil decreased the United States began to restructure its relationship with Saudi Arabia.

Before turning to the Chinese-Saudi partnership, it is critical to examine the components of this shifting economic partnership between the US and Saudi Arabia. While the China-Saudi partnership strengthened, the US-Saudi partnership transitioned from an oil-centric relationship to an economic partnership based on mutually beneficial economic linkages including non-oil trade, cultural exchange programs, and business partnerships. Despite a weakened oil relationship, strong trade continued between the United States and the Kingdom, with both countries devoted to diversifying their bilateral trade. In 2012, Saudi Arabia imported nearly \$12 billion of goods from the US, second only to China.¹²⁸ The Office of the United States Trade Representative noted that Saudi Arabia was the United States' 19th largest goods export market in 2013, with the major products imported including: “Vehicles (\$5.8 billion), Machinery (\$3.6 billion), Aircraft (\$2.1 billion), Electrical Machinery (\$1.4 billion), and Optic and Medical Instruments (\$923 million).”¹²⁹ The State Department reported, “Saudi Arabia is one of the largest US export markets in the Middle East,”¹³⁰ accounting for nearly 1% of US exports worldwide. In fact, US exports to Saudi Arabia in 2013 were \$19 billion, up 5.7% (\$1

¹²⁸ Simoes, Alexander. "Saudi Arabia." *Observatory for Economic Complexity*. Web. 12 Apr. 2015.

¹²⁹ "U.S.-Saudi Arabia Trade Facts." *Office of the United States Trade Representative*. Office of the United States Trade Representative, 6 May 2014. Web. 12 Apr. 2015.

¹³⁰ "U.S. Relations with Saudi Arabia." Bureau of Near East Affairs. *U.S. Department of State*, 23 Aug. 2013. Web. 12 Apr. 2015.

billion) from 2012, and up 313% from 2003,¹³¹ highlighting the serious efforts made by the US and Saudi Arabia to maintain strong economic ties, based on non-petroleum products.

Moreover, numerous US firms operate on Saudi soil, linking the two countries' economies together through mutually beneficial economic partnerships. The International Trade Administration highlights "the fact that the Saudi currency or *riyal* is pegged to the US dollar, [and] the pro-American outlook of Saudi business circles...make Saudi Arabia an indispensable partner for US companies who are serious about doing business in the Middle East."¹³² Even more revealing, the United States Treasury Department created a special bureau "to accommodate Saudi needs, the Office of Saudi Arabian Affairs... the only such office for any foreign country."¹³³ In *The Vital Triangle*, authors Jon Alternman and John Garver note, "it is estimated that the United States receives about 60 percent of Saudi foreign direct investment (FDI),"¹³⁴ a number that contributes to significant economic, technological and personal exchange between the two nations. Saudi Arabia continues to heavily invest in the United States and link its economic development to its American partner.

Saudi Arabia and the United States have also continued to invest in building economic relationships vis-à-vis educational exchanges, exemplified by institutions such

¹³¹ "U.S.-Saudi Arabia Trade Facts." *Office of the United States Trade Representative*. Office of the United States Trade Representative, 6 May 2014. Web. 3 Apr. 2015.

¹³² "Doing Business in Saudi Arabia." Export.gov. *U.S. Department of Commerce's Commercial Service*, 25 Nov. 2014. Web. 12 Apr. 2015.

¹³³ Posner, Gerald. *Secrets of the Kingdom: Inside the Story of the Saudi-US Connection*. Random House, 2005. 67. Print.

¹³⁴ Alternman, Jon, and John Garver. "The Vital Triangle." *Center for Strategic and International Studies* 30.2 (2008): 109. Center for Strategic and International Studies. Web. 12 Apr. 2015.

as New York University, the Cleveland Clinic, and the Guggenheim which serve as centers of cultural exchange, laying the professional and personal foundations for future engagement between the two nations.¹³⁵ The Arab Times reported that in 2010, “the US exported over \$ 5 billion in education, business, and professional consulting services to Saudi Arabia,”¹³⁶ highlighting to the trend of investing in economic and intellectual exchanges. In 2014, over 110,000 students from Saudi Arabia alone studied in the United States, contributing to the economy but more importantly establishing personal and professional relationships in the US.¹³⁷

While the United States maintains a strong economic partnership with Saudi Arabia, the bilateral partners no longer base their relationship on oil imports or energy in general. The US-Saudi economic relationship revolves around trade, investment flows, business, and educational exchanges. The China-Saudi relationship, on the other hand, is beginning to revolve around China’s insatiable oil demand and Saudi Arabia’s seemingly endless supply. As the US-Saudi oil link wanes, the China-Saudi oil link is waxing. “The true winner of economic competition in the Middle East is the power that can maximize its trade with the region (especially in energy resources) while minimizing its political

¹³⁵ Otaiba, Yousef. "The Asia Pivot Needs a Firm Footing in the Middle East." *Foreign Policy*. Foreign Policy, 26 Mar. 2014. Web. 12 Jan. 2015.

¹³⁶ Smith, James B. "US-Saudi Relations: Eighty Years as Partners." *Arab News*, 20 Mar. 2013. Web. 13 Oct. 2014.

¹³⁷ Naffee, Ibrahim. "Number of Saudi Students in US Reaches 111,000." *Arab News*. Arab News, 20 Apr. 2014. Web. 16 Apr. 2015.

and material involvement.”¹³⁸ If that is the case, in the last decade China began to emerge as the true winner.

As early as 2003, Crown Prince Abdullah “supported the diversification of Saudi Arabia’s economy away from the United States,” resulting in US firms losing “lucrative Saudi gas contracts to...major Russian, Chinese, and French companies.”¹³⁹ In 2004, the governments of Saudi Arabia and China began to take previously unimaginable steps towards integrating their economies. 2004 heralded a significant step, when in a rare move Saudi Arabia “granted Sinopec (China’s national oil company) a concession to explore and produce natural gas in Saudi Arabia.” Three years later in 2007, Sinopec and Saudi Aramco signed a deal “to expand capacity of the Quanzhou refinery”¹⁴⁰ in China. Sinopec reported that they were upgrading the refinery specifically to process Saudi Arabia’s oil type, a sour crude.¹⁴¹ The deal was significant because as the Chinese began investing in refinery infrastructure, China effectively guaranteed Saudi Arabia an export market for the near future. The Chinese have continued building facilities to process sour crude at a rapid pace to increase their refining capabilities, linking their oil demands closer with Saudi Arabia’s supply.

In 2005, after the death of Saudi Arabia’s King Fahd, King Abdullah ascended the throne of Saudi Arabia and immediately announced a major shift in the oil kingdom’s

¹³⁸ Alternman, Jon, and John Garver. "The Vital Triangle." *Center for Strategic and International Studies* 30.2 (2008): 109. Center for Strategic and International Studies. Web. 12 Apr. 2015.

¹³⁹ Bronson, Rachel. "Reconfiguring the US-Saudi Strategic Partnership." *Thicker than Oil: America's Uneasy Partnership with Saudi Arabia*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006. 251. Print.

¹⁴⁰ Simpfendorfer, Ben. "Introduction." *The New Silk Road: How a Rising Arab World Is Turning Away from the West and Rediscovering China*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. 35. Print.

¹⁴¹ "Sinopec, Exxonmobil, Saudi Aramco and Fujian Petrochemical Sign Agreements to Progress Fujian Manufacturing and Marketing Projects." *Sinopec Corp.* Sinopec Corp., 26 Aug. 2004. Web. 24 Mar. 2015.

foreign and economic policies, which he termed Saudi's "Look East" trade policy.¹⁴² Consequentially, the Saudi national oil company, Saudi Aramco shifted its oil exports eastward, following the changing flows of trade toward eastern markets. Saudi Aramco's president and CEO, Khalid A. al-Falih affirmed that the dwindling American demand for oil imports paired with "the growing importance of China represent[s] a fundamental shift in the geopolitics of oil... and a long-term transition."¹⁴³ Moreover, in 2007, "Saudi Aramco, Sinopec, and the US' ExxonMobil concluded an agreement to fund a petrochemical complex and refinery in Fujian province to process Saudi heavy crude. There are now proposals for a second refinery."¹⁴⁴ "The writing is on the wall. China is the growth market for petroleum."¹⁴⁵

2009 was another significant year for the global energy market in general and Saudi Arabia specifically, for several reasons: the US shale boom occurred, the global economic downturn shocked the world's financial markets, and the Chinese, for the first time, overtook the United States as the "top buyer of Saudi oil."¹⁴⁶ During this period, the Saudis and the Chinese formalized the importance of their budding energy relationship by signing economic agreements to foster "the growing financial and technical cooperation

¹⁴² Panda, Ankit. "King Abdullah's Legacy in Asia." *The Diplomat*. The Diplomat, 23 Jan. 2015. Web. 16 Feb. 2015.

¹⁴³ Mouawad, Jad. "China's Growth Shifts the Geopolitics of Oil." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 19 Mar. 2010. Web. 10 Feb. 2015.

¹⁴⁴ Bailey, Robert. "China And GCC: Growing Ties - Gulf Business." *Gulf Business*. Gulf Business, 16 Apr. 2013. Web. 8 Dec. 2014.

¹⁴⁵ Mouawad, Jad. "China's Growth Shifts the Geopolitics of Oil." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 19 Mar. 2010. Web. 10 Feb. 2015.

¹⁴⁶ Panda, Ankit. "King Abdullah's Legacy in Asia." *The Diplomat*. The Diplomat, 23 Jan. 2015. Web. 16 Feb. 2015.

in the petrochemicals sector.”¹⁴⁷ The trade agreement’s importance lies in the long lasting impact it launched; establishing energy agreements with China “increased the stakes that others [China] have in Saudi Arabia, which reduces American influence, particularly in the commercial realm.”¹⁴⁸

Two years later, 2011 marked a “hallmark year” for Chinese-GCC trade when “for the first time since the establishment of diplomatic ties between the two countries, China overtook the US to become Saudi Arabia’s top trade partner”¹⁴⁹ overall. Not only was China buying the largest share of Saudi oil, China diversified its purchases from Saudi Arabia to include petrochemicals, plastics, and metals like aluminum. The Kingdom provided China with about 20 per cent of its oil imports in 2013, or around 1.1 million barrels per day. Saudi Arabia became China’s 9th biggest source of imports in 2013, supplying goods and services worth nearly \$54 billion. China has retained the title of the largest supplier of goods and services to the kingdom since 2011 in part by continually entering into new trade deals, and Saudi Arabia remains the largest single oil supplier to China. In early 2013, “a number of potentially significant deals were concluded during the visit [of the Chinese delegation] including a civil nuclear pact with Saudi Arabia for help with the Kingdom’s plan for a \$100 billion program for 16 nuclear

¹⁴⁷ Simpfordorfer, Ben. "Introduction." *The New Silk Road: How a Rising Arab World Is Turning Away from the West and Rediscovering China*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. 35. Print.

¹⁴⁸ Bronson, Rachel. "Reconfiguring the US-Saudi Strategic Partnership." *Thicker than Oil: America's Uneasy Partnership with Saudi Arabia*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006. 251. Print.

¹⁴⁹ Al-Tamimi, Nasser. "China-Saudi Relations: Booming Trade." *Al Arabiya*. Al Arabiya News, 22 Feb. 2013. Web. 10 Feb. 2015.

reactors by 2030.”¹⁵⁰ Chinese cooperation with Saudi Arabia on nuclear program development suggests not only an economic interest, but perhaps implies that the Chinese are beginning to profit from the security dilemma between the Iranians and the Saudis.

Economic linkages between the US and Saudi Arabia and China and Saudi Arabia translate to varying degrees of political influence in the region. Economically, Chinese oil demand is translating into more economic influence for the Chinese in the Kingdom, due to the fact that “Saudi Arabia is China’s major oil partner...and China’s Saudi imports account for more than half its total imports from the Arab world.”¹⁵¹ It is likely that the Chinese pursuit of Gulf resources is a reflection of its quest to acquire nearly unlimited resource access, amongst other things, like strengthened diplomatic partnerships. As Ben Simpfendorfer explains, “China is projecting its economic force in the Arab world, but America is still the region’s most powerful military and political force.”¹⁵² While America still maintains its position as the world’s most powerful military, the economic sway the US once held as primary importer of Saudi oil has decreased significantly in recent years. As former US Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Charles Freeman opined,

“The Arabs see a partner who will buy their oil without demanding that they accept a foreign ideology, abandon their way of life or make other choices they would rather avoid. They see (in China) a country that is far away and has

¹⁵⁰ Bailey, Robert. "China And GCC: Growing Ties." *Gulf Business*. Gulf Business, 16 Apr. 2013. Web. 8 Dec. 2014

¹⁵¹ Simpfendorfer, Ben. "Introduction." *The New Silk Road: How a Rising Arab World Is Turning Away from the West and Rediscovering China*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. 33. Print.

¹⁵² Ibid.

no imperial agenda in their region, but which is internationally influential and likely in time to be militarily powerful.”¹⁵³

Oil is no longer the glue that holds the US-Saudi relationship together.

Policymakers must abandon this flawed assumption. The US-Saudi economic partnership remains important, but is no longer the predominant factor in US-Saudi relations overall.

DIPLOMATIC RELATIONSHIP

إذا تم العقل نقص الكلام
“The smarter you are, the less you speak.”

In general, the United States is silent on Saudi Arabia’s human rights record.

There is little publicly available information that details direct US commentary or criticism of Saudi Arabia’s policies. Historically, the United States has shied from public criticism of Saudi Arabia where “hesitation and caution long prevailed over the confrontation of difficult [diplomatic] issues.”¹⁵⁴ Human rights groups have critiqued the United States for its relative silence surrounding human rights issues in Saudi Arabia in comparison with the vocal condemnation of neighboring countries’ human rights policies. For instance, Human Rights Watch noted, “In Saudi Arabia, 2013 was another bad year for human rights,” but “US public criticism of Saudi Arabia's human rights record has been limited for many years.”¹⁵⁵ Marc Lynch spoke of the sobering reality of

¹⁵³ Bailey, Robert. "China And GCC: Growing Ties." *Gulf Business*. Gulf Business, 16 Apr. 2013. Web. 8 Dec. 2014

¹⁵⁴ Jehl, Douglas. "Holy War Lured Saudis As Rulers Looked Away." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 26 Dec. 2001. Web. 8 Dec. 2014.

¹⁵⁵ Coogle, Adam. "The Deafening US Silence on Saudi Rights." *Human Rights Watch*. Foreign Policy, 28 Jan. 2014. Web. 9 Dec. 2014

“the Saudi exception,” referring to US silence on Saudi human rights abuses, which he argued lessens America’s credibility in the region.¹⁵⁶

On rare occasions, the US directly responded to Saudi human rights violations, though mostly communicated neutral, official reactions through forums like the UN. Public shaming of Saudi human rights violations is extremely rare. The following section seeks to determine how, and if, US and Chinese policies toward human rights differ in the GCC.

US Reactions to the Arab Spring

January 2011 brought about a series of revolutions known as the Arab Spring, fundamentally changing both the regimes and the political dynamics across the Middle East. The uprisings prompted unease and fear from leaders in the Arabian Gulf. Longtime rulers watched, as local protesters demanded the removal of President Hosni Mubarak and were surprised at US inaction to help stabilize the country. When Mubarak stepped down on February 11, 2011, Gulf leaders were stunned, particularly at the lack of US response to save its long time ally, Mubarak. Nervous the US would not intervene if instability ensued in their own countries; the GCC rulers moved to quickly clamp down on any domestic unrest inside their borders and announced that demonstrations and protests of any kind were illegal.¹⁵⁷

Less than a month later, Saudi Arabia sent the GCC’s joint military force, the Peninsula Shield Force (Dir Al-Jazeera) into neighboring Bahrain to assist the

¹⁵⁶ Lynch, Marc. "Silent on Saudi Arabia." *Foreign Policy*. 10 Mar. 2013. Web. 9 Dec. 2014.

¹⁵⁷ "Saudi Arabia Bans Protest Rallies." *Al Jazeera English*. Al Jazeera, 10 Mar. 2011. Web. 14 Apr. 2015.

government in responding to protesters. Created in 1982, the Peninsula Shield Force's entry into Bahrain marked the first time a Gulf nation called on the united forces to "ensure the integrity of Bahrain's territorial borders"¹⁵⁸ and protect the ruling elites from the masses. White House spokesman Jay Carney "carefully avoided direct criticism of the Saudi-led entry of Gulf forces into Bahrain, telling reporters that, in the view of the White House, this is not an invasion of the a country." Carney added,

"We're calling on the Saudis, the other members of the GCC countries, as well as the Bahraini government, to show restraint. And we believe that political dialogue is the way to address the unrest that has occurred in the region in Bahrain and in other countries, and not to, in any way, suppress it."¹⁵⁹

During the Arab Spring, the US instinct was to stick with its allies but that policy quickly evaporated as the US realized intervention would complicate the democratically inspired uprisings. The Obama administration's decision not to intervene resulted in a loss of US credibility in Saudi Arabia's eyes.

Bahrain, with the assistance of Saudi and GCC military forces, blocked the protests by firing nonlethal weapons at protesters, including teargas and bird pellets. The US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute assessed the Arab Spring in Bahrain and concluded, "Pressuring the Saudis on this issue would probably not have a decisive result unless the United States is prepared to provoke a full-scale crisis with Saudi

¹⁵⁸ "Gulf Cooperation Council." *Global Security*. Global Security, 16 Mar. 2014. Web. 19 Feb. 2015.

¹⁵⁹ Sanger, David, and Eric Schmitt. "US-Saudi Tensions Intensify With Mideast Turmoil." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 14 Mar. 2011. Web. 8 Dec. 2014.

Arabia.”¹⁶⁰ The US thus hedged its bets and allowed the GCC force to quell the domestic unrest rather than instigate a direct conflict with either regime. The State Department released a statement justifying its decision, noting, “There are limits to how far Washington can criticize Bahrain, as a sovereign country, for inviting Gulf Cooperation Council troops in.”¹⁶¹ There was no additional evidence of the US government critiquing Saudi involvement in Bahrain or suppressing domestic uprisings during the Arab Spring.

Country Reports on Saudi Arabia

In addition to public statements about current events, the US government publishes annual Country Reports to document improvements or regression in efforts to protect human rights in each nation. Country reports for each year are supposed to reflect changes in the political environment and include new evidence about human rights violations as well as efforts to improve infrastructure, facilities, or governmental approaches to human rights.

The US Country Reports for Saudi Arabia in 2011, 2012, 2013 were nearly identical despite Saudi involvement in suppressing protests in its Eastern province and in Bahrain. The reports cited the same pressing human rights concerns including,

“citizens’ lack of the right and legal means to change their government; pervasive restrictions on universal rights such as freedom of expression, including on the

¹⁶⁰ Terrill, Dr. W. Andrew. "The Arab Spring and the Future of U.S. Interests and Cooperative Security in the Arab World." *Strategic Studies Institute*, 2 Aug. 2011. Web. 11 Apr. 2015.

¹⁶¹ Donbey, Daniel, and Abigail Fielding-Smith. "US Warns against Use of Force in Bahrain." *Financial Times*. 15 Mar. 2011. Web. 9 Dec. 2014.

internet, and freedom of assembly, association, movement, and religion; and a lack of equal rights for women, children, and noncitizen workers.”¹⁶²

Saudi Arabia’s reports became lengthier yet less detailed with each year, repeating the same information from previous years. Saudi Arabia’s 2012 report copied and pasted evidence from previous human rights cases, reaching as far back as 2007. The report inserted old human rights cases into the 2012 report, reusing human rights violations in past years to lengthen the 2012 report. In one example, the 2011 Country Report for Saudi Arabia stated, “In August the Royal Diwan forwarded the case of Rizana Nafeek...[who] had no legal representation at her initial trial in 2007.”¹⁶³ The 2012 report recorded, “In August 2011, the Royal Diwan forwarded the case of Rizana Nafeek...”¹⁶⁴ The report used thirty-nine events from 2011 to give examples of human rights abuses in the 2012 report.¹⁶⁵ In the following year, the 2013 report included statistics that were four years outdated: “Juveniles constitute less than 1 percent of detainees, according to a 2009 estimate.”¹⁶⁶ The 2013 report cited thirty-six references to cases in 2012 and twenty-four examples from 2011.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶² "Saudi Arabia." *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013*. US Department of State, 1 Jan. 2013. Web. 9 Dec. 2014.

¹⁶³ "Saudi Arabia." *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2011*. US Department of State, 1 Jan. 2011. Web. 9 Dec. 2014.

¹⁶⁴ "Saudi Arabia." *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2012*. US Department of State, 1 Jan. 2012. Web. 9 Dec. 2014.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ "Saudi Arabia." *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013*. US Department of State, 1 Jan. 2013. Web. 9 Dec. 2014.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

Moreover, the reports for Saudi Arabia focused on how the Saudi legal institutions functioned as opposed to detailing current Saudi Arabia human rights violations. For example, the 2012 report detailed how “the king, interior minister, defense minister, and national guard commander all have responsibility in law and practice for law enforcement and maintenance of order.”¹⁶⁸ The reports detailed the intricacies of Sharia law, the responsibilities of particular agencies, and rationalizations behind Saudi practices. The reports included human rights violations sparsely throughout. The Country Report of 2013 included one important exception, where the report acknowledged, “there were some reports of human rights abuses by security forces.”¹⁶⁹ Still, the reports of Saudi Arabia lacked the definitive accusation the State Department used in the Bahrain Country Reports, where State reported, “Security forces committed human rights abuses.”¹⁷⁰

In sum, the thirty to forty page Country Reports historicized past human rights violations instead of reporting on new violations. Either information was not available for the State Department to use or the US included overly detailed information and past human rights violations to bolster the annual reports for Saudi Arabia. The reports revealed the US hesitancy to publicly critique human rights violations in Saudi Arabia.

¹⁶⁸ “Saudi Arabia.” *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2012*. US Department of State, 1 Jan. 2012. Web. 9 Dec. 2014.

¹⁶⁹ “Saudi Arabia.” *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013*. US Department of State, 1 Jan. 2013. Web. 9 Dec. 2014.

¹⁷⁰ “Bahrain.” *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2012*. US Department of State, 1 Jan. 2012. Web. 8 Dec. 2014.

US Advocacy for Individual Human Rights Cases

The third measure of changing diplomatic relations involves utilizing major international institutions, like the United Nations to publicly air grievances of other nations. Unlike the Country Reports for Saudi Arabia, the US government officially expressed dissatisfaction with specific Saudi policies and handling of human rights situations at the United Nations, albeit rarely.

During the 2013 session of the UN Human Rights Council, the US was among 13 countries that scrutinized Saudi human rights. The US delegation directly “criticized Saudi Arabia's enforcement of male guardianship for women,”¹⁷¹ highlighting the importance of gender equality in the domestic realm. In the same session, US diplomat Valerie Ullrich commented on Saudi human rights conditions, expressing concern that “Saudi citizens have been harassed, targeted, detained, and punished for simply expressing their beliefs, opinions and views.”¹⁷² In September 2014, US Ambassador to the UNHRC, Keith Harper, commented on the state of international civil societies and noted, “in other parts of the world, bloggers and writers are facing increasingly lengthy prison terms for expressing their opinions, including Raef Badawi in Saudi Arabia.”¹⁷³ Harper’s comment represented the entirety of the US governmental response to Badawi’s imprisonment. These three instances reveal the rare cases in which US officials publicly criticized Saudi Arabian human rights practices. Like the Country Reports, US advocacy

¹⁷¹ Pizzi, Michael. "UN Session Highlights 'Dire' Saudi Human Rights Record." *Al Jazeera America*. Al Jazeera, 21 Oct. 2013. Web. 9 Dec. 2014.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Harper, Ambassador Keith. "US Concerned About Shrinking Space for Civil Society Around the Globe." *US Mission Geneva*. US Mission Geneva, 15 Sept. 2014. Web. 9 Dec. 2014.

efforts for individual human rights abuses failed to adequately or wholly address each case in a manner consistent with the abuse.

China and Human Rights in Saudi Arabia

The Chinese most often broadcast their foreign policy in forums like the United Nations and through state press, though are notoriously vague when describing their foreign policy stances. In 2005, former Secretary General of the Communist Party of China, Hu Jintao, announced China's pursuance of a "harmonious world" (in addition to China's previous declaration of a "harmonious society").¹⁷⁴ While notably nebulous, analysts pointed to China's "harmonious world" as an example of its devotion to stability and non-interference in its foreign and domestic policies, most visible in China's treatment of human rights. China claims to support non-interference in domestic affairs and human rights abroad and expects reciprocal actions from others. Chinese statements about the Middle East confirm the prioritization of stability and economic partnerships over any kind of human rights promotion or protection. China only publicly reacts to domestic problems in other countries when stability threatens Chinese investments or broader political stability. Instead of commenting on human rights violations, Chinese diplomats made an effort to praise positive "developments" and discount human rights violations or areas of concern.

January 2006 marked the first time a Saudi head of State visited China, an important diplomatic gesture the King used to signal growing ties between the two

¹⁷⁴ Bergsten, C. Fred, Bates Gill, Nicholas Lardy, and Derek Mitchell. "China Balance Sheet." *Center for Strategic and International Studies*. CSIS. Web. 12 Nov. 2014.

nations. In March 2013, the new Saudi Crown Prince Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud visited Beijing and met with Chinese President Xi Jinping to discuss the budding bilateral relationship between the two nations. President Xi warmly welcomed the Saudi delegation, “hailing Saudi Arabia as China's good friend, brother and partner in the Middle East and Gulf region.”¹⁷⁵ Xi added that the two sides should “support each other on issues concerning each other's core interests, expressing China's support to Saudi Arabia for choosing a development path that suits its own conditions.”¹⁷⁶ Like Saudi Arabia, China recognizes the fundamental right of the government to respond to domestic human rights issues in ways it deems appropriate. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi expressed, “that as a good friend of Arab states, China supports them in properly resolving issues in the region with their own efforts and concentrating on development. It is in the common interest of Arab states.”¹⁷⁷ Yi’s response once again underscored the Chinese tendency to support the principle of non-interference and prioritize economic development.

Like the US, China utilizes official forums, like the United Nations to critique and praise developments in other countries. Chinese praise results in other countries reciprocally commending China’s progress and development. During the same 2013 session of the UNHRC where the US questioned the Saudi policy of male guardians for women, China joined the majority of nations in applauding Saudi efforts to improve

¹⁷⁵ "Chinese President Meets Saudi Arabia Crown Prince." *Xinhua*. Ed. Mu Xuequan. 13 Mar. 2013. Web. 9 Dec. 2014.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ "Wang Yi Met with Prince Saud Al-Faisal, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia." *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*. 27 Sept. 2014. Web. 9 Dec. 2014.

women's rights. (Only 13 nations called women's rights in Saudi Arabia into question.) In addition, China declared, "We appreciate efforts made [in Saudi Arabia] to protect the rights of children and to have dialogues of religious tolerance."¹⁷⁸ In a reciprocal fashion Saudi Arabia praised China's notable "progress" in developing "ethnic minority regions [like Tibet] at the political, cultural and educational levels."¹⁷⁹ Similarly, in the 2014 Universal Periodic Review report on Saudi Arabia, the Chinese government praised Saudi advances and commended "Saudi Arabia's efforts to promote economic, social and cultural rights [and] welcomed efforts to promote dialogue and tolerance among religious groups."¹⁸⁰ Most recently, in a 2014 bilateral Saudi-Chinese visit to Beijing, President Xi "expressed China's support to Saudi Arabia for choosing a development path that suits its own conditions."¹⁸¹

In conclusion, both the US and the Chinese governments were nearly silent when discussing human rights policies in Saudi Arabia. The US did not directly critique Saudi troops entering Bahrain to quell the uprising during the Arab Spring, nor did the US denounce Saudi Arabia's handling of domestic affairs despite its numerous systemic human rights violations. The United States remained practically silent on Saudi Arabia's human rights record, except when the United States evaluated Saudi Arabia in the UN

¹⁷⁸ "Saudi Arabia Praised in UN Review of Its Human Rights Record." *UN Watch*. 21 Oct. 2013. Web. 9 Dec. 2014.

¹⁷⁹ Neuer, Hillel. "What's Wrong with U.N.'s Human Rights Council." *CNN World*. 31 Oct. 2013. Web. 9 Dec. 2014.

¹⁸⁰ "UN Adopts Report Praising Saudi Arabia's Human Rights Record." *UN Watch*. 20 Mar. 2014. Web. 9 Dec. 2014.

¹⁸¹ Tiezzi, Shannon. "Saudi Arabia, China's 'Good Friend'" *The Diplomat*. The Diplomat, 4 Mar. 2014. Web. 12 Apr. 2015.

and pointed to several areas of concern, and in one case directly criticized human rights violations. Strategic cooperation with Saudi Arabia clearly outweighs human rights monitoring, as the lack of current information in the Country Reports and the lack of public acknowledgement of violations shows.

Since the Arab Spring, the US-Saudi relationship remained unaffected by the infrequent US reactions to human rights violations in Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, Chinese praise of Saudi progress seemed to strengthen diplomatic relations. China announced support for the Saudis at strategic moments when strains were evident in the US-Saudi relationship. Perhaps surprisingly, the Chinese and US responses were similar toward Saudi Arabia: both said little in response to Saudi human rights violations.

STRATEGIC RELATIONSHIP

اتِّكُنَّا مِنْهُ عَلَى خُصِّ الْإِتِّحَادِ قُوَّةٌ
“Unity is power.”

Over the last seven decades, Saudi Arabia and the United States maintained robust diplomatic, economic, and strategic ties, prompting many to refer to the US-Saudi relationship as “special.”¹⁸² Beginning in the 1930s and 40s, burgeoning oil ties initiated closer security cooperation, at the time critical to securing access to and safety of US energy assets in the Gulf. By 1944, Saudi Arabia agreed to the opening of a US military

¹⁸² There was one period when Saudi Arabian and US relations were strained severely. In 2003, there were successive terrorist attacks against US citizens and embassy personnel in Saudi Arabia. Nine Americans died, leading to an accusation that Saudi Arabia’s security did not do enough to prevent such attacks. The flurry of criticism that emerged from the bombing was reflective of strained relations, but was not a direct attack on Saudi Arabian human rights problems.

base in Dhahran, located in eastern Saudi Arabia,¹⁸³ spurring years of security cooperation and familiarity between military forces. Opening the base in Dhahran facilitated communication between political leaders, laying the foundation for shared security concerns between the US and Saudi Arabia. In the last several decades, mutual security concerns include the Gulf War, Iran's nuclear weapons program, Israel, the Iraq War, the War in Afghanistan, the growth of extremism, the protection of energy infrastructure and shipping routes, as well as the maintenance of regional stability. In recent years, fundamentally different approaches to the extensive list of mutual security interests often complicated security cooperation between the two nations.

While historically the Saudi's have been stalwart partners in issues of defense, the attacks of September 11 severely strained US-Saudi strategic relations. Fifteen of the nineteen 9/11 attackers hailed from Saudi Arabia, placing severe pressure on the US government to react publicly and demand retributive justice. In the Gulf, the conservative government of Saudi Arabia "could not risk inciting public outrage by cracking down on donations to these [terrorist] groups" nor could they risk the Saudi public believing Saudi leaders had cowed to US pressure.¹⁸⁴ Tensions remained high between the governments, as neither Saudi nor American leaders had faith in each other's efforts to protect its ally's national interest. It was not until the attacks of 2003 and 2004 in Riyadh when Saudi terrorists targeted nine Americans and dozens of other foreigners that the Saudi

¹⁸³ Bromley, Simon. "Comparative State Formation." *Rethinking Middle East Politics*. Austin: U of Texas, 1994. 144-145. Print.

¹⁸⁴ Staser McGill, Anna-Katherine, and David Gray. "Challenges to International Counterterrorism Intelligence Sharing." *Global Security Studies* (2012): 80. Print.

government officially allied with the US against Islamic extremism. Swift action taken by the Saudi government reestablished some trust between the two nations, and security cooperation began with renewed vigor. Since the attacks, the US-Saudi alliance in the War on Terror has been “based on the shared interest in undermining a common foe,”¹⁸⁵ violent extremism. Though defense cooperation occurred mostly behind the scenes due to public distrust, security cooperation matured in the barracks, bases, and embassies around the Middle East in the years after the Riyadh attacks.

The United States’ military, in particular, has had a special relationship with Saudi Arabia’s armed forces for decades. In addition to an active history of arms sales, the United States Military Training Mission in Saudi Arabia has operated intermittently in Saudi Arabia “under a special bilateral agreement... funded by Saudi [arms] purchases since the 1950s.”¹⁸⁶ USMTM works with Saudi Arabia’s Ministry of the Interior to “protect key infrastructure locations” and provide critical defense support within Saudi Arabia’s borders.¹⁸⁷

Additionally, the United States allocates small amounts of International Military Education and Training (IMET) funds to Saudi Arabia annually. IMET programs expose Saudi military personnel to US training protocols and facilitate “the development of important professional and personal relationships, which have proven to provide US

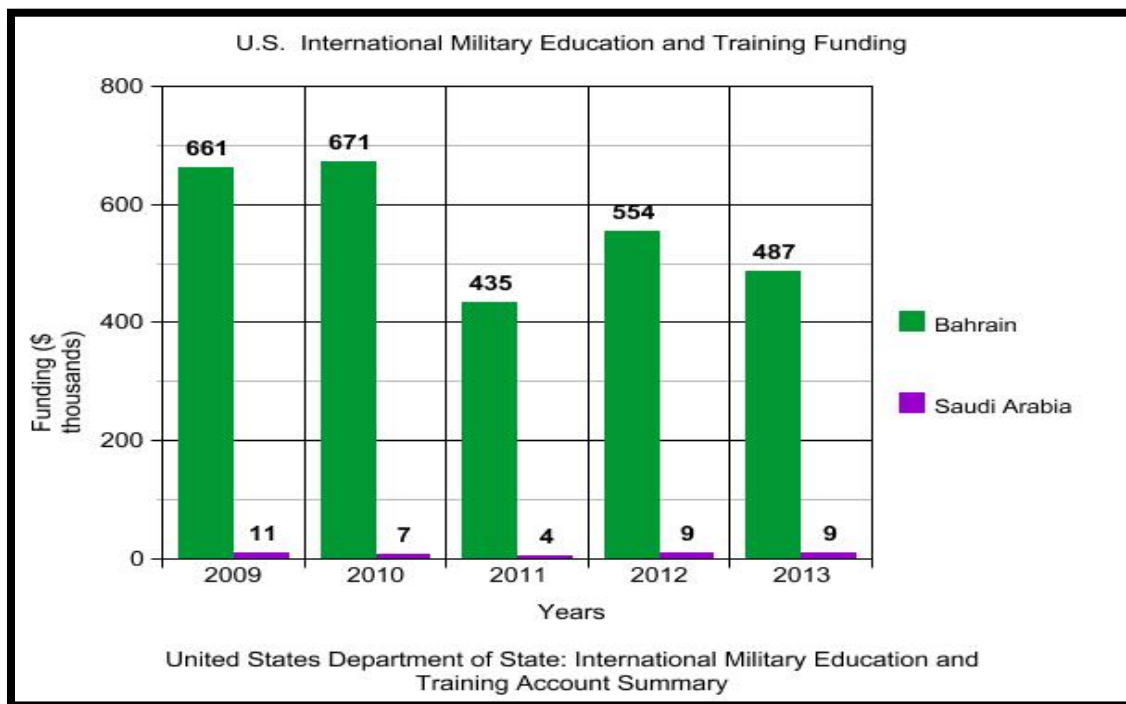
¹⁸⁵ Ibid. 83.

¹⁸⁶ Blanchard, Christopher. "Saudi Arabia: Background and U.S. Relations." *Congressional Research Service* RL33533 (2015): 10. Congressional Research Service. Web. 22 Apr. 2015.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

access and influence in a critical sector of society.”¹⁸⁸ The level of funding the United States provides to Saudi Arabia is quite low compared to neighboring states. The low funding “permits the Saudi government to purchase military training in the United States at a considerably lower cost than is charged in countries that are not eligible for military, education and training funds.”¹⁸⁹ For Saudi Arabia, IMET funding guarantees arms sales and military training, providing both a consistent and trusted customer for the US defense industry. The graph below highlights the significant difference in IMET funding for comparatively small Bahrain to Saudi Arabia between 2009 and 2013.

Figure 5. US IMET Funding for Saudi Arabia and Bahrain between 2009-2013



¹⁸⁸ "International Military Education and Training (IMET)." *U.S. Department of State*. U.S. Department of State. Web. 1 Oct. 2014.

¹⁸⁹ "Saudi Arabia." *CENTCOM Country Notes*. US CENTCOM. Web. 22 Feb. 2015.
http://www.alu.army.mil/ALU_INTERNAT/CountryNotes/CENTCOM/SAUDI ARABIA.pdf.

Perhaps counterintuitive, Saudi Arabia's IMET funding shows the strength of the US-Saudi defense relationship; the US disperses funds to a country that does not have a pressing need for IMET training. Rather, the small amount of US funding allows the Saudis to access cheaper military training and arms from the United States FMS program. This funding benefits the US because it "increases US sales abroad and builds new levels of interoperability with potential coalition government partners, which enhances the effectiveness of US military operations."¹⁹⁰ Levels of IMET assistance remained relatively stable; there have been no major changes in funding for this program in the last six years. IMET sales are but one indication of a mutually beneficial security relationship between the US and Saudi Arabia.

Over time, the two governments also bolstered their strategic relationship through defense sales. US defense sales helped expand Saudi Arabia's offensive and defensive military capabilities, simultaneously facilitating the US goal of strengthening the Saudi military to balance the rising power of Iran. For instance, the US provided military funding to "upgrade regional militaries that might be called upon to counter Iran in any future crisis." The US approach to Saudi Arabia prioritizes its security relationship, highlighting Saudi Arabia's critical role "as something of a counterweight to Iran," and its "important role in containing Iranian influence in Iraq as US troops downsize their presence and prepare to leave."¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ Kazmierczak, Matthew, and Michaela Platzer. "Defense Trade: Keeping America Secure and Competitive." *US Chamber of Commerce* (2007): 17. US Chamber of Commerce. Web. 11 Mar. 2015.

¹⁹¹ Terill, Dr. W. Andrew. "The Arab Spring and the Future of US Interests and Cooperative Security in the Arab World." *Strategic Studies Institute*. US Army War College, 2 Aug. 2011. Web. 9 Dec. 2014.

In 2010 the US and Saudi Arabia “signed a massive \$30 billion sale of 84 F-15 fighter jets to Saudi Arabia” in addition to advanced missiles, “capable of being launched in friendly territory and penetrating with great accuracy far behind an opponent’s borders.”¹⁹² The United States has a vested interest in bolstering the military capabilities in the Gulf, particularly because the US also relies heavily on Gulf cooperation in fighting extremist factions in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, and Syria.

In addition to IMET training and defense sales, the United States works with Saudi intelligence and defense agencies to bolster security within the Kingdom. Al-Qaeda has worked consistently to undermine both US and Saudi security, aspiring to extinguish the Saudi monarchy and the US ‘empire.’ Working from a common goal (cooperating to incapacitate Al Qaeda forces) ultimately strengthened the two nations’ defense relationship. In 2008, The US and Saudi defense agencies provided each other with advisors to enhance domestic security against terrorist threats in the hopes of protecting key infrastructure and public spaces. Christopher Blanchard, analyst at the Congressional Research Service highlighted the agreement and noted that,

“The US-Saudi counterterrorism and internal security cooperation has expanded since 2008, when a bilateral technical cooperation agreement was signed establishing a US-interagency critical infrastructure protection advisory mission to the kingdom... The Office of the Program Manager-Ministry of Interior (OPM-MOI) is a Saudi- funded, US-staffed senior advisory mission that provides

¹⁹² Rettig, Gur. "Saudis, Gulf States 'Unnerved by US Pivot Away from Middle East'." *The Times of Israel*. The Times of Israel, 2 June 2013. Web. 2 Feb. 2015.

embedded US advisors to key industrial, energy, maritime, and cyber security offices within the Saudi government.”¹⁹³

The integration of security advisors enhances essential communication between the two nations and builds trust among security forces. The US and Saudi Arabia assist one other in counterterrorism efforts, recognizing the serious threat that terrorism poses to both nations. A State Department spokesman praised US-Saudi counterterrorism cooperation; telling a Saudi journalist in Washington...“Saudi Arabia has been a key counterterrorism partner and a country that we work with very closely and effectively on counterterrorism issues.”¹⁹⁴ In 2014, the White House declared,

“US and Saudi defense forces enjoy outstanding partnerships and regularly participate in joint exercises to advance shared interests in Gulf security. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is the largest US FMS customer, with active and open cases valued at approximately \$97 billion, as Saudi forces build capabilities across the full spectrum of regional challenges.”¹⁹⁵

US strategic interests became intertwined with its commercial interests after the Cold War, when US government defense purchases dropped from previous levels. The defense industry needed new buyers and found important clients in the Middle East. This fusion

¹⁹³ Blanchard, Christopher. "Saudi Arabia: Background and U.S. Relations." *Congressional Research Service* RL33533 (2015): 10. Congressional Research Service. Web. 22 Apr. 2015.

¹⁹⁴ Gur, Rettig. "Saudis, Gulf States 'Unnerved by US Pivot Away from Middle East'." *The Times of Israel*. The Times of Israel, 2 June 2013. Web. 2 Feb. 2015.

¹⁹⁵ "Fact Sheet: United States-Saudi Arabia Bilateral Relationship." *The White House*. The White House, 28 Mar. 2014. Web. 22 Feb. 2015.

between US commercial and strategic policies led to a fusion of US strategic, economic, and diplomatic interests in Saudi Arabia.

The Congressional Research Service published all pending US defense sales to Saudi Arabia between 2010-2014, including missile sales, engineering services, patrol boats, and air defense systems, to name a few. (See Table 1 on the following page) This list details the government sales between the United States and Saudi Arabia over the last four years, highlighting the income that defense sales bring to the US: upwards of ninety billion dollars since 2010 alone. Saudi Arabia's defense purchases in the last four years demonstrate its heavy reliance on US military technology and training to maintain domestic and regional security. The deals listed below reveal only the last four years of defense sales, which have shown no sign of abating. Saudi Arabia continues to be the most important client for the US defense industry, exemplified by the "extraordinary" arms agreement with Saudi Arabia, represent[ing] by far, the largest share of US agreements in the world in 2011. Deals with Saudi Arabia include "multiple agreements...to provide 84 new F-15SA fighter aircraft, the upgrading of 70 of the existing Saudi F-15S fleet, and a variety of associated weapons, ammunition, missiles, and long-term logistics support for more than \$29 billion."¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁶ Grimmett, Richard, and Paul Kerr. "Conventional Arms Transfers to Developing Nations, 2004-2011." *Congressional Research Service* R42678 (2012): 7. Congressional Research Service. Web. 22 Apr. 2015.

Table 1. Major US Defense Sales to Saudi Arabia, FY 2010-2014

Formal Notification Date	System	Recipient Force	Estimated Cost
October 2010	F-15 Sales, Upgrades, Weaponry and Training	RSAF	\$29.400
October 2010	APACHE, BLACKHAWK, AH-6i, and MD-530F Helicopters	SANG	\$25.600
October 2010	APACHE Longbow Helicopters	RSLF	\$3.300
October 2010	APACHE Longbow Helicopters	Royal Guard	\$2.200
November 2010	JAVELIN Missiles and Launch Units	—	\$0.071
May 2011	Night Vision and Thermal Weapons Sights	RSLF	\$0.330
June 2011	CBU-105D/B Sensor Fuzed Weapons	RSAF	\$0.355
June 2011	Light Armored Vehicles	—	\$0.263
June 2011	Light Armored Vehicles	SANG	\$0.350
September 2011	Howitzers, Fire Finder Radar, Ammunition, HMMWVs	—	\$0.886
October 2011	Up-Armored HMMWVs	RSLF	\$0.033
December 2011	PATRIOT Systems Engineering Services	—	\$0.120
August 2012	RSAF Follow-on Support	RSAF	\$0.850
August 2012	Link-16 Systems and ISR Equipment and Training	RSAF	\$0.257
November 2012	C-130J-30 Aircraft and KC-130J Air Refueling Aircraft	RSAF	\$6.700
November 2012	RSLF Parts, Equipment, and Support	RSLF	\$0.300
November 2012	PATRIOT (PAC-2) Missiles Recertification	RSADF	\$0.130
June 2013	SANG Modernization Program Extension	SANG	\$4.000
July 2013	Mark V Patrol Boats	RSNF	\$1.200
August 2013	RSAF Follow-on Support	RSAF	\$1.200
October 2013	U.S. Military Training Mission (USMTM) Program Support Services	MOD	\$0.090
October 2013	SLAM-ER, JSOW, Harpoon Block II, GBU-39/B Munitions	RSAF	\$6.800
November 2013	C4I System Upgrades and Maintenance	RSNF	\$1.100
December 2013	TOW 2A and 2B Missiles	RSLF	\$0.170
December 2013	TOW 2A and 2B RF Missiles	SANG	\$0.900
April 2014	Facilities Security Forces- Training and Advisory Group (FSF-TAG) Support Services	MOI	\$0.080
August 2014	AWACS Modernization	RSAF	\$2.000
October 2014	Patriot Air Defense System with PAC-3 enhancement	—	\$1.750
Total			\$90.435

Source: U.S. Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA).

Notes: Includes proposed sales to Royal Saudi Air Force (RSAF), Saudi Arabian National Guard (SANG), Royal Saudi Land Forces (RSLF), Royal Guard, Royal Saudi Air Defense Force (RSADF), Royal Saudi Naval Forces (RSNF), Ministry of Interior (MOI), and Ministry of Defense (MOD). Dashes indicate unspecified recipient force in DSCA public notice.

It is no accident that the Saudi Arabian government purchases a majority of their arms from the US, as the US defense industry captures “31% of the global arms market,”

followed by Russia, and quite recently, China rose into the position of the third largest seller of defense articles, surpassing Germany.¹⁹⁷ Though the Chinese rank of third largest arms exporter is significantly less than the US, capturing only 5% of sales, its rise in rank indicates growing Chinese dedication to competing in the defense industry.¹⁹⁸ The chart below, from the CRS paper on *Conventional Arms Transfers to Developing Nations* highlights the consistently important US-Saudi defense sales relationship compared to arms sales from other nations capable of producing advanced weapons.

Political contexts also affected the strength of the US-Saudi defense relationship. Between 2004-2007 Saudi Arabia purchased more than triple the amount of arms from major West European powers (Britain, Germany, France) than they did from the US, coinciding with a period of distrust between the US-Saudi Arabia after 9/11. In the early 2000s, mounting domestic pressure from the US and Saudi publics complicated the strategic relationship. It was only after US-Saudi cooperation after the Riyadh attacks in 2004 that the defense relationship began to improve. It took time, however, to rebuild trust and diffuse public anger directed at Washington and Riyadh. As US-Saudi cooperation recovered from its 9/11 nadir, purchases soared between 2008-2011, with US arms deals more than nine times greater than purchases from major West European producers.

¹⁹⁷ Brown, Frederic J. "China Passes Germany in Worldwide Arms Sales, Study Claims." *CBSNews*. CBS, 16 Mar. 2015. Web. 22 Apr. 2015.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

Figure 6. Arms Transfer Agreements by Buyer, Country, and Source

Figure Nineteen – Part Two: New Arms Transfer Agreements by Buyer Country and Source

(In Millions of Current US Dollars)

Recipient Country	U.S.	Russia	China	Major West European	All Other European	All Others	Total
2004-2007							
Bahrain	400	0	0	100	0	0	500
Iran	0	1,600	300	0	100	100	2,100
Iraq	1,100	100	100	200	600	200	2,300
Kuwait	1,000	0	0	0	0	0	1,000
Oman	100	0	0	2,100	0	0	2,200
Qatar	0	0	0	0	0	100	100
Saudi Arabia	5,000	0	800	16,900	800	100	23,600
UAE	1,400	300	100	1,100	200	0	3,100
Yemen	0	200	0	0	100	100	400

Recipient Country	U.S.	Russia	China	Major West European	All Other European	All Others	Total
2008-2011							
Bahrain	400	0	0	0	0	0	400
Iran	0	100	0	0	100	100	300
Iraq	4,800	300	0	500	900	200	6,700
Kuwait	2,500	700	0	0	0	0	3,200
Oman	1,500	0	0	200	0	0	1,700
Qatar	200	0	0	800	0	0	1,000
Saudi Arabia	45,600	0	0	5,300	1,100	100	52,100
UAE	14,300	100	0	1,600	1,100	100	17,200
Yemen	0	100	0	0	300	100	500

Notes: 0=data less than \$50 million or nil. All data are rounded to the nearest \$100 million.
a. Major West European category includes France, United Kingdom, Germany, and Italy totals as an aggregate figure.

Source: Richard F. Grimmett and Paul K. Kerr, *Conventional Arms Transfers to Developing Nations, 2004-2011*, Congressional Research Service, August 24, 2012. P. 44-45.

This is particularly significant because the shale boom occurred during the same period, when the global financial crisis hit and US oil imports from Saudi Arabia stagnated. The upward trajectory in US arms sales to Saudi Arabia continued when “in 2014, Saudi Arabia replaced India as the largest importer of defense equipment worldwide and took the top spot as the number one [defense] trading partner for the

US.”¹⁹⁹ Despite a significant decline of Saudi oil imports to the United States, the US government found a way to secure Saudi Arabian cooperation—ramping up its defense contracts. Similarly, Saudi Arabia continued to award US companies’ defense contracts, awarding over \$45 billion in defense deals to US companies like Lockheed Martin and Raytheon, as opposed to selling to British, French, or Chinese contractors. Without oil as a binding force, Saudi Arabia and the US continued to link their economies and interests to one another through defense sales.

Cracks began to appear, however, in the once unshakable US-Saudi defense relationship. Kenneth Pollack, Middle East analyst at Brookings’ Saban Center for Middle East Policy noted, “the Saudis in particular are increasingly uncomfortable with the Obama administration’s approach, and we’re beginning to see the Saudis take a stronger role in their security,” including strengthening ties with China.”²⁰⁰ Displeased by what the Saudis saw as Obama’s refusal to act decisively in Syria, in a rare move, Prince Turki al Faisal, the former Saudi intelligence chief critiqued President Obama by stating,

“We’ve seen several red lines put forward by the President, which went along and became pinkish as time grew, and eventually ended up completely white... When

¹⁹⁹ "Saudi Arabia Replaces India as Largest Defence Market for US, IHS Study Says." *IHS*. IHS, 7 Mar. 2015. Web. 6 Apr. 2015.

²⁰⁰ Gur, Rettig. "Saudis, Gulf States 'Unnerved by US Pivot Away from Middle East'." *The Times of Israel*. The Times of Israel, 2 June 2013. Web. 2 Feb. 2015.

that kind of assurance comes from a leader of a country like the United States, we expect him to stand by it.”²⁰¹

Public criticism of US policy sent a strong signal to the Obama administration, underscoring Saudi frustration with what they saw as indecisiveness and inconsistency in the region. In addition, the Saudis increasingly worried about the US negotiations with Iran. The Saudis feared that a US deal would provide Iran with increasing opportunities to push its weight around in the Middle East, challenging Saudi prominence. Most importantly, the Saudis feared that the US and Iran would reach an agreement that could sacrifice Saudi security by allowing Iran to continue to enrich uranium. Heightened tensions persisted between the two nations and began to impact military relationships when in January 2015 *Newsweek* reported,

“Saudi authorities used to grant the US military aircraft near-blanket permission to pass through Saudi territory on their way to East Asia. Now, says one US official who spoke...on the condition of anonymity, they periodically withdraw permission to remind us it’s their airspace. This forces American planes to add hours and thousands of miles to their flights as they weave around the Arabian Peninsula.”²⁰²

²⁰¹ Bergin, Peter. "Opinion: Why the Saudis Unfriended the U.S." *CNN*. Cable News Network, 28 Mar. 2014. Web. 11 Apr. 2015.

²⁰² Broder, Jonathan. "Inside the Saudi-US Rift." *Newsweek*, 27 Jan. 2015. Web. 22 Feb. 2015.

Public censure by Saudi officials and government decisions intended to snub its American ally implied that while US defense sales are critical, they do not buy Saudi silence. The Saudis and the US base their relationship on numerous factors, including reactions to international events. After the US announced a deal with Iran and refused to intervene in Syria, military relations with the Saudis became increasingly strained.

China, on the other hand, began selling arms to Saudi Arabia in the mid-eighties when “the Chinese supplied Saudi Arabia with controversial ballistic missile systems.”²⁰³ Though there is little public documentation about Saudi defense purchase of Chinese materials, Rachel Bronson posited that Saudi Arabia began “diversifying weapons purchases away from the United States, similar to the kingdom’s diversification of its oil industry”²⁰⁴ in 2003, when US-Saudi relations were at a nadir after the attacks of September 11. Rumors circulated of a 2003-2004 Chinese shipment of “new DF-21 ballistic missiles to Saudi Arabia,”²⁰⁵ confirmed later by numerous sources and corroborated by the numbers in the Arms Transfer Agreement graph, pointing to \$800 million in weapons sales from China to Saudi Arabia.

Chinese defense sales have not reached the level of US-Saudi defense cooperation yet, though the Chinese government announced its intention to expand its defense cooperation with Saudi Arabia. Chinese press announced President Xi Jinping’s decision

²⁰³ Bronson, Rachel. "Reconfiguring the US-Saudi Strategic Partnership." *Thicker than Oil: America's Uneasy Partnership with Saudi Arabia*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006. 251. Print.

²⁰⁴ Ibid. 252-253.

²⁰⁵ Lewis, Jeffrey. "Why Did Saudi Arabia Buy Chinese Missiles?" *Foreign Policy*. Foreign Policy, 30 Jan. 2014. Web. 3 Feb. 2015.

to “strengthen military cooperation with Saudi Arabia to jointly safeguard world and regional peace and stability.”²⁰⁶ Chinese and Saudi political leaders reiterated similar intentions over the last two years, signaling greater attention to bilateral defense partnerships, and perhaps Chinese intent to extend their reach to the Gulf peninsula. In November 2014, Deputy Chief of General Staff of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army Wang Ning met with the commander of the Saudi Arabian Army Eid bin Awad Al-Shalawi where they discussed the mutual focus on improving the interoperability of Chinese and Saudi forces.²⁰⁷ Deputy Chief of General Staff Ning

“Stressed that military cooperation is an important cornerstone of the relations between the two countries. In recent years, the two militaries of China and Saudi Arabia have carried out frequent mutual visits, and the two sides have been constantly deepening the pragmatic cooperation in the fields of professional technologies and personnel training.”²⁰⁸

It would be imprudent, however, to paint the US-Saudi defense relationship as broken. While cracks appeared in recent years, the foundation of the Saudi-US relationship remains secure in the short term.

²⁰⁶ “Closer Military Ties between China, Saudi Arabia.” *CCTV News*. Ed. Zheng Limin. CCTV News, 4 Feb. 2013. Web. 14 Apr. 2015.

²⁰⁷ Tao, Zhang. “China, Saudi Arabia Vow to Strengthen Military Ties.” *China Military Online*. China Military Online, 18 Nov. 2014. Web. 10 Feb. 2015.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

“Saudi Arabia has close defense and security ties with the United States anchored by long-standing military training programs and supplemented by ongoing high-value weapons sales and new critical infrastructure security cooperation and counterterrorism initiatives. These ties would be difficult and costly for either side to fully break or replace”²⁰⁹ in the near future.

While China may be a direct competitor to the US for economic and diplomatic relationships, it is not yet capable of providing the quality or quantity of arms or security that the United States provides to Saudi Arabia. This gap guarantees at least cordial security cooperation for the next few decades.

²⁰⁹ Blanchard, Christopher. "Saudi Arabia: Background and U.S. Relations." *Congressional Research Service* RL33533 (2015): 14. Congressional Research Service. Web. 22 Apr. 2015.

Bahrain

A tiny island nation in the Arabian Gulf, Bahrain is an important strategic ally for the United States in the region. Geographically situated between Saudi Arabia and Iran, Bahrain boasts the role of buffer between the two central powers of the Middle East. Reflective of its geographic and political placement, Bahrain is comprised of both Sunni and Shia populations and has experienced intense political tension between the two sects, particularly since the Arab Spring. Bahrain is a monarchy led by the royal, Sunni, Al Khalifa family, who is allied closely with Saudi Arabia and represents the minority population in Bahrain.²¹⁰ Bahrain and the US have maintained a close economic and strategic partnership, exemplified by Bahrain's decision to host the US Navy's Fifth Fleet.

This case study is organized into three parts: the economic, diplomatic, and strategic relationships, focusing on the significant change in relations between the US, China and Bahrain.

ECONOMIC RELATIONSHIP

يد واحدة لا تصفق
"Cooperation is key"

Unlike Saudi Arabia, the US and Bahrain never defined their economic relationship by oil and gas trade. Rather, the US and Bahrain prioritize a relationship

²¹⁰ Gengler, Justin. "Bahrain Drain: Why the King's Sunni Supporters Are Moving Abroad." *Foreign Affairs*. 5 Sept. 2014. Web. 10 Dec. 2014.

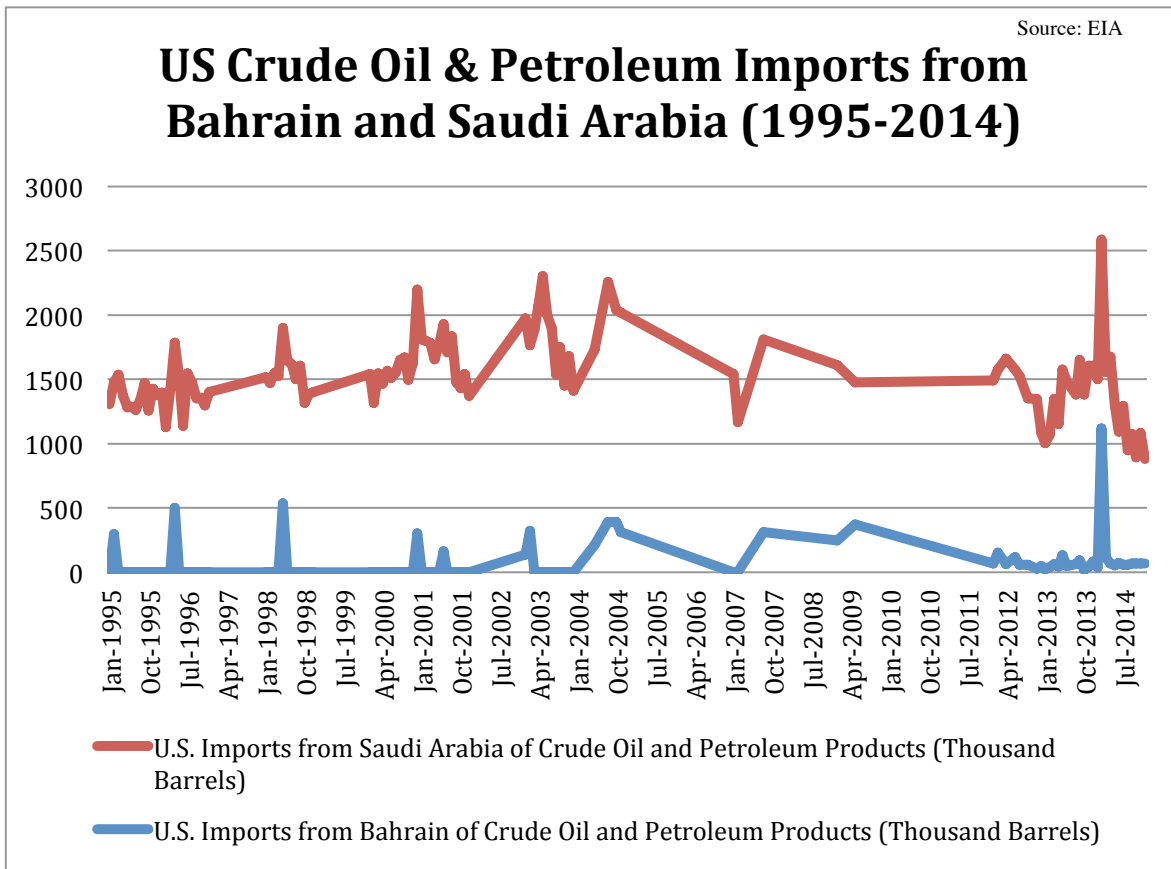
based primarily on security cooperation. The US and Bahrain also boast a robust economic relationship based on trade agreements and strong business ties. The following section will examine the economic relationship between Bahrain and the US as well as highlight the growing economic partnership between Bahrain and the Chinese.

As the following graph demonstrates, US oil imports from Saudi Arabia remained consistently higher than Bahrain throughout the last two decades, though both countries peaked and declined during particular periods, consistent with price variations and fluctuations in the energy market. Before September 11, petroleum imports from Bahrain were nearly nonexistent for several years. After the attacks of September 11, both Saudi and Bahraini energy imports to the US declined though US imports of both Saudi and Bahraini petroleum picked up during the US invasion of Iraq.

By 2009, however, Bahrain exports to the US began declining once again, spurred by the global financial crisis while Saudi exports to the US remained relatively stable though declined slightly. The period between 2008 and 2009 also coincided with the US shale boom, when US producers began drilling large quantities of shale oil, the effects of which became evident in 2012. As the global financial crisis hit and shale exploration soared, US imports from Saudi Arabia stagnated, while Bahraini imports began a steep decline. By 2012, when US shale producers began to significantly increase production imports from Saudi Arabia also began to drop dramatically, while Bahraini imports fell so low that they became almost negligible, back to pre-9/11 levels. Three months in late 2013 and early 2014 demonstrate the one notable exception: huge peaks in oil exports to the US. For Bahrain, the dramatic increase represented a historic level of US imports in

February 2014, exporting 1.12 million bpd to the US. Saudi Arabia also peaked to 2.5 million bpd. Overall, the quantity of imports from Bahrain do not compare to those from Saudi Arabia, though do account for a piece of the US-Bahrain trade relationship.

Figure 7. US Crude Oil and Petroleum Imports from Bahrain and Saudi Arabia



The center of the US-Bahrain economic partnership is the Free Trade Agreement (FTA). In 2006, the US extended a FTA to Bahrain, the first Gulf nation with which the US offered such an agreement. To date, Bahrain and Oman are the only two GCC countries with FTA agreements with the United States. According to the Office of the

United States Trade Representative (USTR), the FTA with Bahrain “promotes the policy of advancing economic reforms and liberalization in the Middle East,”²¹¹ in addition to supporting “Bahrain’s economic and political reforms and enhanc[ing] commercial relations with an economic leader in the Arabian Gulf.”²¹² The FTA offers US investors an advantage in investing in the country.²¹³ The FTA also encourages diversification of the trade relationship between the US and Bahrain, particularly because “the United States buys virtually no oil from Bahrain.”²¹⁴

The majority of US imports from Bahrain include products like fertilizer, aluminum, clothing, and financial services.²¹⁵ A 2015 Congressional Research report noted, “Without the ample oil or gas resources of its neighbors, Bahrain has diversified its economy by emphasizing banking and financial services,” in addition to the export products listed above.²¹⁶ The US also has made an effort to invest in infrastructure in Bahrain, including a contract signed in 2011 in which Bahrain’s “Ministry of Housing awarded a \$57 million contract to American dredging company Great Lakes Dredge and Dock Co. for a land reclamation project” to build new housing units.²¹⁷

²¹¹ "Bahrain Free Trade Agreement." *Office of the United States Trade Representative*. Office of the United States Trade Representative, 2009. Web. 14 Apr. 2015.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ "2012 Investment Climate Statement - Bahrain." *U.S. Department of State*. Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs, 1 June 2012. Web. 14 Apr. 2015.

²¹⁴ Katzman, Kenneth. "Bahrain: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy." *Congressional Research Service* 95-1013 (2015): 34. Congressional Research Service. Web. 22 Apr. 2015.

²¹⁵ "Import and Export Data for Bahrain." *Panjiva*. Panjiva. Web. 14 Apr. 2015.

²¹⁶ Katzman, Kenneth. "Bahrain: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy." *Congressional Research Service* 95-1013 (2015): 34. Congressional Research Service. Web. 22 Apr. 2015.

²¹⁷ Seweryn, Rebecca. "2014 Bahrain Investment Climate Statement." *U.S. Department of State*, 11 Aug. 2014. Web. 14 Apr. 2015.

The imports and exports between the US and Bahrain have ebbed and flowed for years, though have increased overall fairly consistently since 1998. The relative amounts are quite low particularly in comparison to trade volumes with other regional partners. The FTA agreement highlights the uneven trade relationship with Bahrain and the US. Bahrain needs the US as an economic partner. The United States is the fourth largest destination for Bahraini exports globally, capturing 6.2% of all exports.²¹⁸ Tanzania, India, and South Korea are the first, second and third largest export partners for Bahrain, accounting for nearly 30% of exports.²¹⁹

China ranks 13th, with 2.8% of all exports heading to Beijing.²²⁰ Bahrain imports the most products from China (16%), followed by Japan (11%) and the United States (8.5%), respectively.²²¹ It is clear that for Bahrain the United States is an important supplier and consumer. For the United States, however, Bahrain's importance as a trade partner is significantly lower. Since 2000, US exports to Bahrain accounted for .05% of all US exports on average. Approximately .03% of all US imports originated from Bahrain.

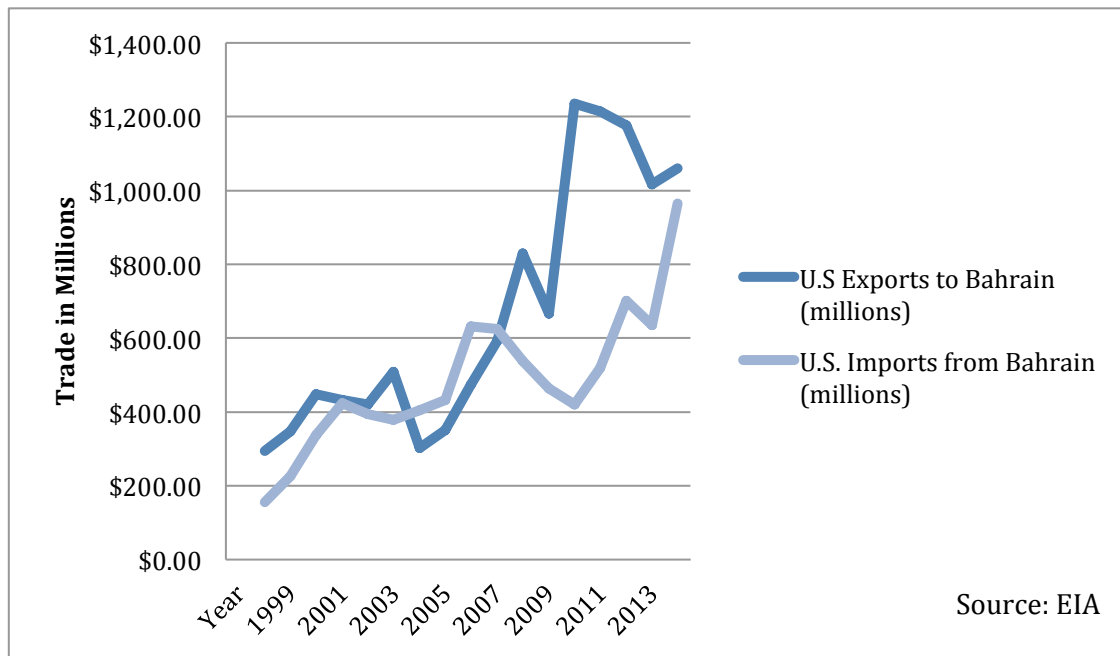
²¹⁸ Simoes, Alexander. "Bahrain." *Observatory for Economic Complexity*. Observatory for Economic Complexity. Web. 12 Apr. 2015.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid.

Figure 8. US-Bahrain Import/Export Patterns between 1999-2013



While the US-Bahrain economic relationship is important, it is not particularly robust compared to other economic partners. Economic development between Chinese and Bahraini businessmen and politicians, however, is growing substantially. In 2011, “China became the largest importer to Bahrain, with non-oil imports totaling more than \$1 billion.”²²² Exports to China and imports from China contributed substantial revenue to the government of Bahrain and laid the foundation for additional investments and trade agreements between the two nations.

In 2013, “22% of all global investment by Chinese companies was directed towards the Gulf region and Bahrain, [whom the Chinese consider to be] the gateway to

²²² "Five Agreements Signed To Promote Trade Between China And Bahrain In Guangzhou." *Bahrain Economic Development Board*, Bahrain Economic Development Board. 27 Oct. 2014. Web. 14 Apr. 2015.

this US \$1.6 trillion market.”²²³ To signal the growing importance of its Chinese partner, the government of Bahrain recently began to allow Chinese nationals to apply for Bahraini visas on arrival, facilitating more frequent business interactions between the two nations,²²⁴ effectively reducing barriers to bilateral and trade visits. This development is particularly notable, as the Saudi government still requires a Saudi company to sponsor Chinese businessmen to apply for a visa to enter the country to do business.

The Bahrainis began seriously pursuing an economic relationship with China in the late 1990s and early 2000s to diversify the economy and find additional regional trade partners. Chinese companies began heavily investing in Bahrain in the mid 2000s. In particular,

“Huawei Technologies Co Ltd, one of China’s major telecommunication companies, moved its Middle East headquarters from Dubai to Manama in 2009...[because] Bahrain offered the most favorable business environment in the Gulf, highlighting its attractive policies for foreign direct investment. This also led to 18 Chinese commercial agencies, including the Bank of China, opening operations in Bahrain.”²²⁵

To facilitate further economic growth between the two nations, the two governments founded the Bahrain-China Joint Investment Forum (BCJIF) in 2010, “to enhance

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ "Bahrain Delegation to Boost China Trade Ties." *Gulf Daily News*. Gulf Daily News, 23 Oct. 2014. Web. 14 Apr. 2015.

²²⁵ Zulfikar Rakhmat, Muhammed. "China and Bahrain: Undocumented Growing Relations." *Fair Observer*. Fair Observer, 22 May 2014. Web. 14 Apr. 2015.

financial cooperation in finance, real-estate and banking.”²²⁶ Economic partnerships began snowballing, and in 2013, Bahrain announced the beginning of an official partnership agreement “between Aba Hussain Company for fiber glass production...with Chinese company CPIC, which is one of the largest fiberglass manufacturers in the world”²²⁷ in addition to a memorandum signed between “Diyar Al Muharraq and Chinamex on behalf of Dragon City Project and...Bahrain telecommunications Company Bateclo and Huawei,”²²⁸ one of China’s largest communications companies. In an effort to continue building partnerships, in October 2014, China and Bahrain signed five memorandums of understanding (MoUs) and a letter of intent on an investment trip to Guangzhou, China. Plans included formal links between the Economic Development Board (EDB) of Bahrain and the Guangdong Chamber of Commerce, the Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Guangdong Chamber of Commerce, agreements with a Chinese Interior Design firm, and agreements with Chinamex and Dongguan Elections Products Association to “promote Dragon City Bahrain and attract Chinese tenants.”²²⁹ Commenting on these meetings, Kamal Bin Ahmed, Chief Executive of the EDB declared, “There is no doubt that this visit to China has emphasized the importance of our trade relationship and the need to build on what we already have in place. This trip produced thirteen different agreements with various Chinese companies

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ "Bahrain-China Business Forum." *Ministry of Industry and Commerce*. Ministry of Industry and Commerce, 29 Sept. 2013. Web. 14 Apr. 2015.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ "Five Agreements Signed To Promote Trade Between China And Bahrain In Guangzhou." *Bahrain Economic Development Board*, Bahrain Economic Development Board. 27 Oct. 2014. Web. 14 Apr. 2015.

and trade entities.²³⁰ Chinese investment continued to gather speed when the government of China announced the funding of several investment projects in Bahrain, including the construction of 40,000 residential units and additional retail spaces.²³¹

In January 2015, Chinese delegates arrived in Bahrain to discuss cooperation and investment with Bahrain's national oil company Bapco.²³² The company has not released the outcome of the meetings, though it is clear that both nations focused on reaching energy deals, exemplified by previous meetings in December 2014 in which "high level officials from the China National Energy Administration (NEA) as well as leading companies from the oil, gas and petrochemicals sector"²³³ took place throughout China. While unclear what discussions took place, Bahrain and China have met on numerous occasions to discuss energy cooperation, most likely in relation to Bahrain's oil and gas refineries and rising levels of Chinese production. The Chinese may tap Bahrain's deep knowledge of refining Saudi oil to apply to new Chinese refineries designed to process Saudi crude. In the future, cooperation between China and Bahrain on refining is likely.

In conclusion, the US-Bahrain economic relationship reveals relatively little about the significance of the US-Bahrain relationship. For the US, Bahrain's trade with the US is less meaningful than its defensive geostrategic position and military cooperation. The Free Trade Agreement between the two nations does demonstrate the dedication both the

²³⁰ "Chinese Businessmen Explore Bahrain's Investment Opportunities." *Bahrain News Agency*. Bahrain News Agency, 13 Jan. 2013. Web. 14 Apr. 2015.

²³¹ Zulfikar Rakhmat, Muhammed. "China and Bahrain: Undocumented Growing Relations." *Fair Observer*. Fair Observer, 22 May 2014. Web. 14 Apr. 2015.

²³² "Chinese Businessmen Explore Bahrain's Investment Opportunities." *Bahrain News Agency*. Bahrain News Agency, 13 Jan. 2013. Web. 14 Apr. 2015.

²³³ *Ibid.*

US and Bahrain gives to building closer economic ties though should be considered in context. Growing bilateral trade between China and Bahrain, coupled with Chinese investments in Manama, reveal the extent to which China intends to capture Bahrain's markets and establish critical trade ties. China's strategy of investing heavily in Bahrain continues to match Bahrain's persistent efforts to land Chinese investments and expand trade relations. These actions suggest that Bahrain intends to diversify its economy through diversifying its trade partners. The more China invests in Bahrain, the more clout Chinese businessmen and political figures will develop with Bahraini governmental figures, who are intent on expanding Bahrain's economy and importance on the world stage.

DIPLOMATIC RELATIONSHIP

عدو عدوي هو صديقي

"The enemy of my enemy is my friend"

In 2011, like much of the Middle East, Bahrain experienced its own internal uprising when the majority Shia population poured into the streets and demanded reforms from the Sunni government. The protests resulted in severe clashes between the military and protesters. The government of Bahrain, along with military assistance from the GCC's Peninsula Shield Forces, quickly crushed the rebellion by violently dispersing crowds, firing those who participated in protests, and arresting hundreds of organizers and sympathizers.²³⁴ At least eighty protesters died in the clashes.²³⁵ American officials

²³⁴ "Bahrain." *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2011*. US Department of State, 1 Jan. 2011. Web. 8 Dec. 2014.

demanded a cessation of violence while the government of Bahrain maintained that the protests were internal matters that should not be subject to external pressures. The government's violent reaction to the protests caused significant diplomatic tension between the US and Bahrain.

This section focuses on the state of diplomatic relationships between the US and Bahrain and the US and China, concentrating on the period during and after the Arab Spring, between 2011-2014 to assess changes in the type or frequency of diplomatic engagement.

US Reactions to the Arab Spring

About a month after Lotus revolution erupted in Egypt, Bahrain experienced its own revolution on February 4, 2011. Protesters gathered in Pearl Square, demanded a change in leadership and greater representation for Bahraini Shias. The armed forces of Bahrain forcibly dispersed protesters over the course of the month, resulting in dozens of deaths. GCC troops entered Bahrain to quell the uprising on March 14, 2011 and effectively ended the revolution in Bahrain though unrest persisted.

In Washington, White House officials reported that President Obama called Bahraini King Hamad bin Isa al Khalifa in both February and April to relay that “the United States, as a long-standing partner of Bahrain, believes that Bahrain's stability depends upon respect for the universal human rights of the people of Bahrain.”²³⁶

²³⁵ "Young Bahraini Protester Dies after Clash with Police." *Al Akhbar English*. Al Akhbar English, 20 Feb. 2013. Web. 10 Dec. 2014.

²³⁶ Douglas, William. "Activists Decry U.S. Silence on Bahrain's Crackdown." *McClatchy DC*. McClatchy DC, 13 May 2011. Web. 14 Apr. 2015.

President Obama urged King Hamad bin Isa al Khalifa to show restraint against peaceful protesters and hold violent protesters accountable.²³⁷

After unsuccessful attempts at reaching a diplomatic resolution, the US took a firm stance against Bahrain's violent repression of the Bahraini protests in the summer of 2011 by placing Bahrain "on its list of human rights violators to be scrutinized by the UN Human Rights Council."²³⁸ The list of violators also included China, Cuba, Iran, North Korea and Syria, a list Bahrain was reticent to join. At the United Nations, US Ambassador to the UNHRC Eileen Donohoe reacted to the situation in Bahrain and explained, "the United States is deeply concerned about violent repression of the fundamental freedoms of association, expression, religion and speech of their citizens."²³⁹ The same week, US Assistant Secretary of State for DRL Michael Posner, praised "positive developments in Bahrain" and pointed to "the release of detainees, the restoration of scholarships and reinstatement of workers."²⁴⁰ The Bahraini government did not respond positively to its new position on the list of human rights violators and continued to suppress the uprisings while pointing to contradictory US statements of approval and censure. The lack of clarity in the US posture strained diplomatic relations.

Nearly eight months after the revolution began, after a series of failed diplomatic gestures and Bahrain's perpetuation of violent repression, in October 2011, the US chose

²³⁷ Carey, Glenn, and Jerry Atlas. "Bahrain Vows to Ease Tension; Mideast Unrest Spreads." *Bloomberg*, Bloomberg, 20 Feb. 2011. Web. 12 Apr. 2015.

²³⁸ "US Adds Bahrain to List of Human Right Abusers, as Formula 1 Cancelled." *Risk and Forecast*. Political Capital Policy Research & Consulting Institute, 17 June 2011. Web. 8 Dec. 2014.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ "Bahrain Hits Back." *Gulf Daily News*. 19 June 2011. Web. 24 Oct. 2014.

to freeze Foreign Military Sales (FMS) to Bahrain to prevent the government from acquiring new military weapons to use against its citizens.²⁴¹ The White House announced its reasoning by stating, “We have made the decision not to release additional items to Bahrain mindful of the fact that there are a number of serious unresolved human rights issues that the government of Bahrain must address.”²⁴² As of July 2014, the US government maintained its three year long hold on selling “TOW missiles and Humvees— the type of equipment that had previously been used in crackdowns on protesters.”²⁴³ The US eventually relaxed its freeze on most other weapons. The FMS hold, though, remains a point of contention between Bahraini and US leaders.

Between the outbreak of protests in February 2011 and December 2013, the US Mission in Geneva delivered no less than nine official statements that specifically expressed ‘concern’ over the human rights situation in Bahrain. A 2013 joint statement praised Bahrain’s notable progress though expressed unease over the

“Ongoing violation of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association and the repression of demonstrations...[and] the continued harassment and imprisonment of persons exercising their rights to freedom of opinion and expression, including of human rights defenders.”²⁴⁴

²⁴¹ Rogin, Josh. "Washington Fuming About Bahrain's Human Rights Crackdown." *The Daily Beast*. Newsweek/Daily Beast, 5 Sept. 2014. Web. 8 Dec. 2014.

²⁴² "Senior Administration Officials on Bahrain." *U.S. Department of State*. U.S. Department of State, 11 May 2012. Web. 14 Apr. 2015.

²⁴³ Rogin, Josh. "Washington Fuming About Bahrain's Human Rights Crackdown." *The Daily Beast*. Newsweek/Daily Beast, 5 Sept. 2014. Web. 8 Dec. 2014.

²⁴⁴ Washington: Joint Statement Expresses Concern about Human Rights Situation in Bahrain. (2013, September 9). *US Official News*. Retrieved October 31, 2014.

Three years later in June 2014, the *Kuwait News Agency* reported that US Vice President Biden called King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa of Bahrain to discuss ongoing bilateral issues.²⁴⁵ The two leaders discussed “ongoing efforts at reform and dialogue within Bahrain,”²⁴⁶ where Biden “encouraged the Government of Bahrain, opposition parties, and all segments of Bahraini society to reach agreement on meaningful reforms and a path forward that addresses the legitimate aspirations of all Bahrainis.”²⁴⁷ The US statement was consistent with past US rhetoric that encouraged peaceful and democratic dialogue as key to halting the ongoing conflict. The US publicly and repeatedly expressed concern over the actions taken by the government of Bahrain. Public criticism escalated bilateral tensions and resulted in stalled progress in dialogues between the US and Bahrain.

Country Reports on Bahrain

Every year, the US releases its annual Country Reports on Bahrain. Governmental officials, NGOs, and members of the opposition parties comment on these reports in the press and in Parliament, as they often spark critical responses.

At the end of February 2011, less than a month after the Arab Spring spread to Manama, the State Department released its Country Report on Human Rights in Bahrain. The Country Report listed “the most egregious human rights problems” as

²⁴⁵ "Biden, Bahrain's King Discuss Situation in Iraq." *Kuwait News Agency*. Gulf News, 24 June 2014. Web. 9 Dec. 2014.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

“The inability of citizens to change their government [peacefully]; the dismissal and expulsion of workers and students for engaging in political activities; the arbitrary arrest and detention of thousands, including medical personnel, human rights activists, and political figures, sometimes leading to their torture and/or death in detention; and lack of due process.”²⁴⁸

The 2011 report examined the period of unrest that occurred between February and April in great detail, including the types of torture used on the victims, the locations where unrest occurred, organizations responsible for detention and torture, as well as listed all claims of abuse reported. The reports in 2012 and 2013 also detailed human rights violations, but focused on events that occurred each year.

The substantive content of the 2011, 2012 and 2013 reports differed slightly from year to year. The 2011 report pointed to numerous instances of “alleged acts” of both protesters and police officers. The words “alleged,” “reported,” and “accused” were common throughout the report. The 2011 report highlighted US resistance to condemning specific actors, as State Department officials continued to seek verifiable information.²⁴⁹ The Country Report for 2011 did note, however, the “culture of impunity” that “pervaded the security apparatus,” and accused the government of Bahrain of failing to hold its officers responsible for atrocities committed.²⁵⁰ In the 2011 Country Report, the US

²⁴⁸ "Bahrain." *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2011*. US Department of State, 1 Jan. 2011. Web. 8 Dec. 2014.

²⁴⁹ "Bahrain." *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2011*. US Department of State, 1 Jan. 2011. Web. 8 Dec. 2014.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

government censured the government of Bahrain's actions while continuing to urge domestic reform and call for systemic change.

The publishing of the 2012 Country Report allowed State Department political officers additional time to verify whether the Bahraini government followed through on promised reforms, convened fair trials, tortured prisoners, or held officers accountable for the mistreatment of protesters or prisoners during or after the 2011 uprisings. The 2012 report acknowledged that security forces "showed greater restraint in comparison with its conduct in response to protests in 2011," and dually noted the violent nature of the protesters who "used improvised explosive devices, Molotov cocktails, and other improvised weapons."²⁵¹ In contrast to the 2011 report, the 2012 report exposed US frustration with the government of Bahrain's lack of accountability. While the report included some use of "alleged and reported" incidents, the majority of the report used direct language.²⁵² For example, the 2012 report stated, "Security forces committed human rights abuses."²⁵³ The report cited detailed instances of human rights abuses, in addition to human rights abuses the State Department had not yet verified. The clear change in tone from a neutral, non-accusatory approach to one that directly assigned blame indicated the United States' mounting pressure on the government of Bahrain and its rising expectations for improvements in resolving human rights cases.

²⁵¹ "Bahrain." *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2012*. US Department of State, 1 Jan. 2012. Web. 8 Dec. 2014.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Ibid.

Even stronger, the Country Report for 2013 linked the government of Bahrain to human rights abuses committed by the security forces. Instead of noting “security forces committed human rights abuses,” like the 2012 report, the 2013 report added, “authorities maintained effective control over the security forces. Security forces committed human rights abuses.”²⁵⁴ 2013 marked the first year the State Department directly blamed the government for the breakdown in human rights under the security forces. This report also cited instances of human rights violations more frequently than it cited in the previous two years. The 2013 report used language to highlight the continuity of human rights abuses like “the government *maintained* the revocation of citizenship,” “discrimination *continued* against the Shia population,” and recognized a “*sustained* period of unrest.”²⁵⁵ The notion of continuity in the 2013 report followed the trajectory of increasing tension between the US and Bahraini governments over human rights issues. Over three years, the State Department’s criticisms increased in both number and scope, emphasizing the strained diplomatic relationship between the two countries. Country reports are not yet available for 2014.

US Advocacy for Individual Human Rights Cases

In 2014, the United States government began commenting on individual cases in Bahrain, a diplomatic action the US had refrained from doing in previous years. In the past, the US expressed grievances privately, published them in Country Reports, or officially discussed these criticisms the United Nations. In July 2014, the government of

²⁵⁴ "Bahrain." *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013*. US Department of State, 1 Jan. 2013. Web. 8 Dec. 2014.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

Bahrain publicly declared Assistant Secretary of DRL Tom Malinowski unwelcome in Bahrain and demanded his immediate departure from the country. Though Secretary of State Kerry called the Foreign Ministry to complain, the Bahraini government insisted on his departure.²⁵⁶ On August 21, the government of Bahrain again denied access to prominent US officials, including US Representative Jim McGovern and director at Human Rights First Brian Dooley. In a press release issued by McGovern's office, McGovern noted, "As became evident with the recent expulsion of... Tom Malinowski, the Bahraini government seeks full control over the narrative about their country and does not tolerate any voices of dissent."²⁵⁷ Overt US criticism of Bahrain's policies increased following Tom Malinowski's forced departure.

The US did not officially comment on individual human rights cases in Bahrain in the international media until 2014. In September, the United States advocated for the release of prominent human rights activist, Nabeel Rajab, leader of Bahrain's opposition party, Al Wefaq. Bahraini authorities charged Rajab with insulting the government via Twitter. The State Department publicly advocated for his release and announced that the US government does

"Not agree with the prosecution of individuals for crimes of peaceful political expression and again urge the government of Bahrain to drop the charges and release Mr. Rajab. Obviously we believe he has the right to freedom of

²⁵⁶ Gordon, Michael. "Expelled U.S. Official to Return to Bahrain." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 2 Dec. 2014. Web. 12 Apr. 2015.

²⁵⁷ "US Rep. Jim McGovern Issues Statement on Refusal of Bahrain Government to Grant him Access to Bahrain." *Congressman Jim McGovern*. 21 Aug. 2014. Web. 1 Nov 2014.

expression—it doesn't mean we agree with everything he tweeted but certainly agree he has the right to do it.”²⁵⁸

US Ambassador to the UN, Samantha Powers echoed similar sentiments when she tweeted “human rights advocate @nabeelrajab still jailed in Bahrain. His supposed crime? Insulting a public institution on twitter. Must be released.”²⁵⁹ In the forum of the UN, Samantha Powers also urged Bahrain to release Mr. Rajab,²⁶⁰ while Keith Harper, the US Ambassador to the UNHRC, also tweeted in response to Rajab's arrest, “no one should be jailed for a tweet.”²⁶¹ A month later, Department of State spokesperson Jen Psaki directly responded to the arrest of human rights activist Zainab al Khawaja, who faced charging for tearing up a picture of the king. Psaki stated,

“We've seen reports of Ms. Khawaja's arrest and detention. We're following the case closely, and as in any countries, we call on...Bahrain to ensure equal treatment under the law and to advance justice in a fair way. We again urge the Government of Bahrain to take steps to build confidence across Bahraini society and to create an environment conducive to dialogue.”²⁶²

²⁵⁸ Dooley, Brian. "Is the United States Government Finally Losing Patience With Bahrain?" *The Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost., 20 Oct. 2014. Web. 8 Dec. 2014.

²⁵⁹ Power, Samantha. (Ambassador Power). “Human rights advocate @NabeelRajab still jailed in Bahrain. His supposed crime? Insulting a public institution on twitter. Must be released.” 17 Oct. 2014. 10:19am. Tweet. <<https://twitter.com/AmbassadorPower/status/523131084490698752>>.

²⁶⁰ "Bahraini Court Postpones Trial of Nabeel Rajab until 2 November." *Americans for Democracy Human Rights in Bahrain RSS*. 29 Oct. 2014. Web. 8 Dec. 2014.

²⁶¹ Cornelius, Katie. "Bahrain Weekly Update: Nabeel Rajab's Detention Extended; State Dept Calls for His Release." *POMED*. Project on Middle East Democracy. Web. 8 Dec. 2014.

²⁶² Dooley, Brian. "Is the United States Government Finally Losing Patience With Bahrain?" *The Huffington Post*. The Huffington Post, 20 Oct. 2014. Web. 8 Dec. 2014.

The US reaction to Mr. Rajab and Ms. Khwaja's cases indicated a new willingness of the United States government to comment in the press on individual human rights cases in Bahrain, likely a result of mounting US frustration with the government of Bahrain's lack of commitment to reform and continual arrests of opposition leaders. The statements from US officials reinforce the mounting disapproval of human rights violations, as seen in the Country Reports and the increasingly informal criticisms posted on Twitter.

The government of Bahrain was less than enthusiastic with the new US approach to publicly critiquing the government of Bahrain in both official forums and on social media. Perhaps surprisingly, the Bahraini public, particularly the Shia populations, also expressed disapproval of US policy. Opposition members noted the US tendency to name human rights violations but pointed to the lack of US action to resolve these issues. Former President of the Center for Human Rights in Bahrain and leading Shia activist, Maryam al Khawaja publicly stated, "The United States has done nothing. I don't anticipate the US...changing their international policies anytime soon due to the geopolitical interests they have with Bahrain and Saudi Arabia and other countries in the region."²⁶³ The Bahraini public echoed Ms. Khawaja's sentiment, criticizing what they saw as both the action and inaction of the US government.

Despite the sensitive nature of newspaper publishing in the Gulf, local reactions to US policies in the Gulf were widespread. Statements published in the press reflected a general discontent with US statements, reports, and presence in the region. Harsh

²⁶³ Engelbrecht, Cora. "Bahrain's 'Inconvenient Revolution' Grows Impatient." *GlobalPost*. 13 May 2013. Web. 10 Mar. 2015.

criticism of the US by the locals suggested deep-rooted frustration with what they view as US intervention in domestic affairs. Bahrainis reacted strongly to the Country Reports published during and after the Arab Spring, citing grievances with the facts and challenging the report's neutrality. Popular Bahraini newspaper *Al Watan* reported "Parliament affirmed that this report is tantamount to open interference in our domestic affairs, which does not serve the relations between the kingdom of Bahrain and the US."²⁶⁴ The 2013 report also elicited responses from twitter, echoing frustration with the US. One tweet from an opposition member stated, "[#US Hypocrisy Praised #Saudi Invasion & Killing protesters in #Bahrain](#) Mr [@State_DRL](#) Do U Remember us?"²⁶⁵ The release of the 2013 Country Report, which condemned tacit governmental approval of human rights violations, spurred Bahraini lawmakers to pass an amendment that would limit US ability to "interfere with domestic affairs."²⁶⁶ This proposal, passed into law, highlighted "the sensitivity in relations between the strategic allies, particularly in the wake of Bahrain's displeasure about a US State Department report which was critical of the Gulf Arab country's government."²⁶⁷ An unnamed Bahraini politician noted, "The people were very upset. The public in Bahrain were very upset ... [that] the report wasn't even."²⁶⁸ The Bahraini government rejected the country report for "lacking neutrality and

²⁶⁴ "House Reports: US Secretary Interferes in Bahrain's Human Rights Affairs." *Al Watan News*. Al Watan News, 4 Mar. 2014. Web. 14 Apr. 2015.

²⁶⁵ (Democracy4Bahrain). "[#US Hypocrisy Praised #Saudi Invasion & Killing protesters n #Bahrain](#) Mr [@State_DRL](#) Do U Remember us we Still [#SUMOOD](#)" 3 Mar. 2013, 12:23am. Tweet.

²⁶⁶ "Samira Rajab: Council of Ministers Agreed to Take Action to Stop the Interventions of US Ambassador in Local Affairs." *Al Wasat News*. 5 May 2013. Web. 10 Dec. 2014.

²⁶⁷ Bayoumy, Yara. "Bahraini Lawmakers Call on US Envoy to End Interference." *Reuters*. Thomson Reuters, 6 May 2013. Web. 10 Dec. 2014.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid*.

objectivity.”²⁶⁹ The Minister of the Interior denounced the US report for its “racially charged language.”²⁷⁰ Numerous newspapers concluded that US allegations of excessive force were “utterly baseless.”²⁷¹ Isa Al Kooheji, a prominent Member of Parliament challenged the US report, questioning, "What are these human rights violations that security forces are allegedly committing?"²⁷² Bahraini political commentator Sarah Ashoor noted, “It is evident that this year's report is far from a neutral publication and the accounts reported in it vary widely from factually incorrect to events in some instances that have never occurred.”²⁷³ Even prominent human rights leader, Nabeel Rajab, an opposition leader that the US intervened to assist in his human rights trial declared, "Democracy isn't only for those countries the United States has a problem with,"²⁷⁴ and noted the need for an even application of US criticism on human rights abuses in Bahrain and in the region.

When the government of Bahrain expelled US Assistant Secretary Tom Malinowski in 2014, columnists and politicians in Bahrain and around the Gulf praised

²⁶⁹ "Bahrain Rejects US State Department Report on Violence." *Aharq Alawasat*. 28 May 2014. Web. 10 Dec. 2014.

²⁷⁰ "Samira Rajab: Council of Ministers Agreed to Take Action to Stop the Interventions of US Ambassador in Local Affairs." *Al Wasat News*. 5 May 2013. Web. 10 Dec. 2014.

²⁷¹ *Ibid*.

²⁷² Fountain, Greg. "US Rights Report 'lacks Credibility'" *Gulf Daily News*. 3 Mar. 2013. Web. 10 Dec. 2014.

²⁷³ *Ibid*.

²⁷⁴ Abrams, Elliott. "US Hypocrisy on Bahrain." *The Atlantic*. Atlantic Media Company, 19 Sept. 2011. Web. 9 Dec. 2014.

Bahrain's decision as "courageous."²⁷⁵ This move by the Bahraini government was unprecedented, as no Gulf nation had publicly kicked out a US representative in decades. Prominent Gulf newspapers denounced US interference and demanded further action—some called for the removal of the US Ambassador.²⁷⁶ The public response to the Bahraini decision to expel Malinowski was overwhelmingly positive. Local organizations like Al Asala Islamic Society claimed that the move was "historic and brave."²⁷⁷ Gulf citizens viewed Bahrain's decision as a step in the right direction: separating itself from American influence.²⁷⁸

China and Human Rights in Bahrain

While local populations challenged the role of US influence in the Gulf, Gulf citizens saw China as a viable political alternative. China offered Bahrain a model of what the Bahrainis viewed as economic development free of political constraints and criticism of human rights. Chinese diplomatic policies in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain reflected the same sentiments China expressed elsewhere in the Middle East: China encourages support for national sovereignty, economic development, and non-interference. China does not directly comment on specific human rights violations, but

²⁷⁵ Singh Grewal, Sandeep. "Top US Diplomat's Expulsion Draws Praise." *Gulf Daily News*. 9 July 2014. Web. 10 Dec. 2014.

²⁷⁶ A'Ali, Mohammed. "MPs Condemn US Rights Report." *Gulf Daily News*. 1 May 2013. Web. 10 Dec. 2014.

²⁷⁷ Singh Grewal, Sandeep. "Top US Diplomat's Expulsion Draws Praise." *Gulf Daily News*. 9 July 2014. Web. 10 Dec. 2014.

²⁷⁸ Five months later, the government of Bahrain invited Tom Malinowski back to Bahrain where he met with government officials and opposition members. Malinowski's return was an important step in repairing fractured US-Bahraini relations though still suggested that Bahrain was able to exert more power by standing up to the United States than it had previously. The US did not take reciprocal action against any Bahraini diplomats.

rather praises general improvements in human rights conditions. Chinese foreign policies are essentially a mirror of China's domestic policies. China promotes abroad what it promotes at home, and therefore structures its foreign policy to support its economic development in both the short and long term.

During periods of diplomatic tension between the US and Bahrain, China indirectly criticized US interference in Gulf countries' domestic affairs. In January 2014 while Bahrain continued to grapple with American "interference" in domestic affairs, Beijing announced its support of "GCC efforts to protect their sovereignty and regional stability."²⁷⁹ In July 2014, Chinese newspaper *People's Daily* reported on Bahrain's forced departure of Tom Malinowski though cited no censure or praise of the government's decision.²⁸⁰ Four months later, in November 2014, Chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, Yu Zhengsheng, met with King Hamad in Bahrain. In response to the recent controversies between the United States and Bahrain, Chairman Zhengsheng reemphasized "his country's support for Bahrain's efforts to preserve its sovereignty, underscoring China's support for the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of states."²⁸¹

Determined to distinguish itself politically from previous powerful actors in the region (the United States and Britain), China has released statements supporting Bahrain's sovereignty at opportune moments to contrast the American emphasis on the

²⁷⁹ Xiaokun, Li, and Zhang Fan. "Xi Calls for Early Signing of China-Gulf FTA." *China Daily*. China Daily. Web. 14 Apr. 2015.

²⁸⁰ "Bahrain Expels Top US Diplomat." *People's Daily Online*. Xinhua, 8 July 2014. Web. 10 Dec. 2014.

²⁸¹ "Bahrain Vows to Strengthen China Ties." *Gulf Daily News*, Gulf Daily News. 7 Nov. 2014. Web. 10 Dec. 2014.

human rights agenda. In 2012, in a rare interview with Bahraini newspaper *Al-Wasat*, the Chinese Ambassador to Bahrain spoke candidly about human rights and democracy. The Ambassador explained, “human rights is a good thing... but the concept of human rights differs from one country to the next. It’s also necessary to differentiate between one stage [of democracy] to another...and necessary to apply human rights gradually.”²⁸² Where the US promoted human rights reforms, or encouraged dialogue between the opposition party and the government, China underscored its devotion to principles of non-interference and highlighted its flourishing economic partnership with Bahrain. This distinction better aligned China with GCC countries’ approaches to diplomatic partnerships.

Little information is available on Chinese commentary on specific human rights issues in Bahrain, a reflection of the Chinese propensity to speak in broad principles, not particular cases. In January 2014, China’s tendency to encourage broad principles was evident when Bahrain’s Minister of State for Human Rights Dr. Salah bin Ali Abdulrahman welcomed the Ambassador of the People's Republic of China, Li Chen. Ambassador Chen noted the “opportunity for mutual cooperation and coordination between the two friendly countries in the area of human rights in order to reap the benefit to all.”²⁸³ What exactly human rights ‘coordination’ efforts between China and Bahrain looks like remains unclear. During the 25th anniversary of bilateral relations in April

²⁸² "Chinese Ambassador Rejects the Interference In the Internal Affairs of States." *Al Wasat News*. 23 Sept. 2012. Web. 9 Dec. 2014.

²⁸³ "Human Rights Minister Receives Chinese Ambassador." *Bahrain News Agency*. Bahrain News Agency, 27 Jan. 2014. Web. 14 Apr. 2015.

2014, Chinese Ambassador to Bahrain Mr. Li Xin defined “mutual political trust and cooperation ... and compatibility of views regarding issues of human rights and workers' rights”²⁸⁴ as the heart of the Chinese-Bahraini bilateral relationship. Both nations emphasized that the primary duty of the state is stability, above all else.

To date, China has not made any direct reference to human rights violations in the Middle East. For the Chinese, human rights are a means to strengthen bilateral relations, not weaken them. China sees no benefit in commenting on human rights violations, unless they threaten regional stability or Chinese interests. Similarly, Bahrain has not commented on the Uighur uprisings in China because,

“To some Arab regimes, the bloody images of riot police clashing with Uighur protesters in Xinjiang's capital...were strikingly familiar...how could they criticize the Chinese government? They are in the same boat.”²⁸⁵

Former Chinese Ambassador to the UAE Hua Liming noted, “GCC countries are very important for China in preventing and cracking down on the three evil forces of separatism, extremism, and terrorism.”²⁸⁶ For the Gulf and Chinese governments, “cracking down” on these three “forces” trumps human rights violations. Each government respects and acknowledges the existential threat that supporting revolution abroad may incur at home. Compared with the US approach of criticizing human rights

²⁸⁴ "Bahraini-Sino Relations Praised." *Bahrain News Agency* 7 Apr. 2014. Web. 11 Nov. 2014.

²⁸⁵ Cairo, Abigail. "In the Middle East, Little Outcry Over China's Uighurs." *Time*. Time Inc., 17 July 2009. Web. 9 Dec. 2014.

²⁸⁶ Xiaokun, Li, and Zhang Fan. "Xi Calls for Early Signing of China-Gulf FTA." *China Daily*. China Daily. 18 Jan. 2014. Web. 10 Dec. 2014.

abuses in Bahrain, the Chinese diplomatic strategy of encouragement received significantly more support from both the Bahraini public and the government.

STRATEGIC RELATIONSHIP

الأفعال أبلغ من الأقوال "Actions speak louder than words"

Strategic cooperation between the United States and Bahrain has been the hallmark of their bilateral relationship for decades, providing the two nations with mutually beneficial security arrangements. For the United States, having basing privileges for the 5th Fleet in Bahrain allows the US nearly unfettered access to the Persian Gulf and a strategic foothold in an unstable region. For Bahrain, cooperating with the US military brings in significant revenue, investments, and American companies, though more importantly, provides a security guarantee for the leaders of Bahrain against undue Iranian influence. This section will outline the strategic relationship between the United States and Bahrain, as well as examine Chinese-Bahraini strategic ties.

The US military has maintained a presence in Bahrain since “1949 [when] the Pentagon established a small, permanent Middle East naval force (MIDEASTFOR)”²⁸⁷ in the bay of Manama. Years of military cooperation followed, though challenges in relations have occurred periodically throughout the last seven decades, including during the 1973 Yom Kippur War, when the United States aided Israel against invading Arab armies. During this period of tension, Bahrain’s military requested that the United States

²⁸⁷ Vine, David. "A Permanent Infrastructure for Permanent War." *TomDispatch*, 13 Nov. 2014. Web. 28 Feb. 2015.

remove its forces to the Gulf waters, where the navy stayed for a month until the Amir reconsidered the removal.²⁸⁸ Since the Gulf War, however, the two militaries raised their level of cooperation after Bahrain “acted as a major naval base that hosted 20,000 US troops and served as a hub for air operations against Iraq in Operation Desert Storm.”²⁸⁹ To formalize strengthened military ties after the Gulf War, the US and Bahrain signed a Defense Cooperation Agreement,²⁹⁰ signaling their intention to strengthen military cooperation by “granting US forces access to Bahraini facilities and ensuring the right to pre-position material for future crises.”²⁹¹

Following up on that pledge, after the Gulf War, the government of Bahrain approved the opening of a new US Central Command (CENTCOM) Naval Military base (NAVCENT) in Manama in 1995. The rent amounted to a “\$6.7 million annual lease payment,” in addition to “military aid -- ranging from \$6 million in 2006 to \$18 million in 2010 -- and security pledges.” Foreign Policy reported that the NAVCENT base “contributes about \$150 million annually to Bahrain's economy, or about one percent of GDP. Last May, US officials announced a plan to double the size of the base by 2015, with the intent of spending an additional \$518 million,”²⁹² a significant financial investment in the small country. Economic incentives for defense cooperation certainly

²⁸⁸ Joyce, Miriam. "Independence to Yom Kippur War." *Bahrain from the Twentieth Century to the Arab Spring*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. 54-55. Print.

²⁸⁹ Cooley, Alexander, and Daniel Nexon. "Bahrain's Base Politics." *Foreign Policy*. Foreign Policy, 5 Apr. 2011. Web. 14 Apr. 2015.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ "Military in Manama: Bahrain." *Global Security*. Global Security. Web. 14 Apr. 2015.

²⁹² Cooley, Alexander, and Daniel Nexon. "Bahrain's Base Politics." *Foreign Policy*. Foreign Policy, 5 Apr. 2011. Web. 14 Apr. 2015.

did not hurt US interests in the country, though the US military stationed in Bahrain brings in more than dollars. The US bases brings with it security assistance, military training, weapons, and counterterrorism cooperation.

During the Gulf War, the Iraq War, and the War on Terrorism, Manama acted as a forward operating base for US military missions, providing the critical functions of refueling, posturing, and basing. Bahrain's assistance to the US during military operations solidified its place as a critical partner for the US in the Gulf. After the attacks of September 11 and President Bush's decision to invade Iraq, Bahrain aided the United States in its efforts against terrorists in Afghanistan in 2001 and Sadaam Hussein in 2003, demonstrating that the geostrategic location of "the Fifth Fleet continue[d] to play a crucial role in America's strategic posture in the Middle East."²⁹³

To date, Manama hosts the headquarters for the US Navy's Fifth Fleet, which is "assigned to ensure the free flow of oil and other resources though the Persian Gulf and surrounding waterways,"²⁹⁴ in addition to "patrol[ing] the Arabian Sea, the Red Sea, the western part of the Indian Ocean, and the Persian Gulf, ensuring that sea-lanes remain open, protecting the flow of oil, conducting anti-piracy operations, and acting as a check against Iran's regional influence."²⁹⁵ Commander Richard McDaniel of the US Navy opined, "the most important US strategic base in the heart of the Middle East lies in the

²⁹³ Cafiero, Giorgio, and Daniel Wagner. "The U.S. and Bahrain's Increasingly Tense Alliance." *International Policy Digest*. Gulf State Analytics, 7 Oct. 2014. Web. 7 Nov. 2014.

²⁹⁴ Vine, David. "A Permanent Infrastructure for Permanent War." *TomDispatch*, 13 Nov. 2014. Web. 28 Feb. 2015.

²⁹⁵ Cooley, Alexander, and Daniel Nexon. "Bahrain's Base Politics." *Foreign Policy*. Foreign Policy, 5 Apr. 2011. Web. 14 Apr. 2015.

small island country of Bahrain,²⁹⁶ a country whose security and military cooperation largely defines US strategy in the Middle East.

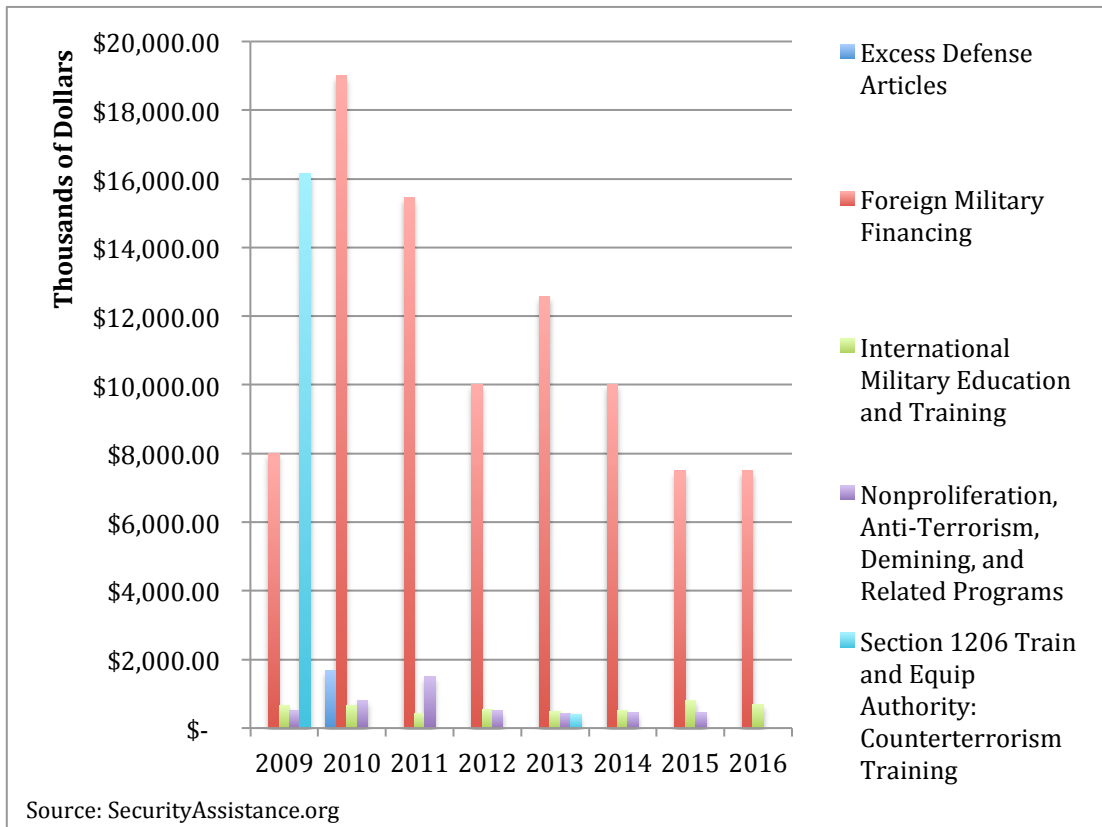
Two major elements define the strong US-Bahraini defense relationship-- defense sales and intelligence cooperation. As the US Chamber of Commerce concluded, defense sales are critical components of US national security because “US military systems and technology are the weapons of choice throughout the world, providing both US strategic and tactical advantage to US war fighters and first-class interoperable systems to our friends and allies.”²⁹⁷ Since 2000 “the US has provided upwards of \$1.4 billion in defense sales to Bahrain,”²⁹⁸ most of which the government of Bahrain used to purchase military weapons from the United States. A major part of the \$1.4 billion US appropriations went to training Bahraini Defense Forces (BDF), Foreign Military Financing (FMF), International Military Education and Training Funds (IMET), Foreign Military Sales (FMS), and Excess Defense Articles (EDA).

²⁹⁶ McDaniel, Richard. "No "Plan B:" US Strategic Access in the Middle East and the Question of Bahrain." *Center for 21st Century Security and Intelligence* (2013). Brookings. 1. Web. 10 Mar. 2015.

²⁹⁷ Kazmierczak, Matthew, and Michaela Platzer. "Defense Trade: Keeping America Secure and Competitive." *US Chamber of Commerce* (2007): 18. US Chamber of Commerce. Web. 11 Mar. 2015.

²⁹⁸ McDaniel, Richard. "No "Plan B:" US Strategic Access in the Middle East and the Question of Bahrain." *Center for 21st Century Security and Intelligence* (2013). Brookings. 9. Web. 10 Mar. 2015.

Figure 9. US Defense Assistance to Bahrain, by Program



Between FY2009 and FY2016, Foreign Military Financing accounted for the largest majority of the budget. Significant funding levels also went to other categories including counterterrorism training, demining and nonproliferation, military training, and technological transfers. Though these programs received smaller financial contributions from the US government, the funding sponsored critical programs. For example, the large spike in 2009 under ‘Section 1206’ refers to US funding for a Biometric Collection Program in Bahrain, most likely used to capture fingerprints or use facial recognition software to bolster the country’s growing counterintelligence program by systematically

tracking those entering and leaving the country.²⁹⁹ The implementation of this technology also assists US efforts to flag terrorist movements in the country and to restrict visas to those with criminal records.

The US also provided support for IMET training, used to train Bahrain's Defense Forces to operate alongside US forces. Not only does IMET training improve the quality of the Bahraini military processes, but also it trains local officers to operate with US personnel, equipment, and procedures, facilitating joint operations between the two militaries. To date, Bahrain is the "only Arab nation to have led one of the coalition task forces that patrol the Gulf,"³⁰⁰ a testament to US trust and cooperation through IMET training with Bahrain's forces. Unlike Saudi Arabia's small IMET appropriations, the government of Bahrain receives a significant amount of annual funding to train its military forces.

In addition, programs dedicated to nonproliferation, demining and counterterrorism also received modest funding. The demining exercises, often led by the US, are critical to ensure the security of the Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz, often littered with mines that pose a threat to both oil tankers and military vessels that pass through the narrow channel. During an International Mine Countermeasures Exercise hosted in Bahrain in 2012 "US Vice Admiral John W. Miller hailed Bahrain's cooperation and

²⁹⁹ Serafino, Nina. "Security Assistance Reform: "Section 1206" Background and Issues for Congress." *Congressional Research Service* RS22855 (2014): 1-27. Congressional Research Service. Web. 28 Jan. 2015.

³⁰⁰ "Bahrain." *Army Logistics University*. Army Logistics University. Web. 14 Apr. 2015. <http://www.alu.army.mil/ALU_INTERNAT/CountryNotes/CENTCOM/BAHRAIN.pdf>.

support to ensure the success of the anti-mine military exercise.”³⁰¹ Ambassador Designate to Bahrain William Roebuck noted in his address to Congress on Sept. 14, 2014; “We work closely with the Bahraini Defense Forces, in particular their Navy and Air Force, on a range of fronts, including counterterrorism and anti-piracy operations.”³⁰²

Financing for counterterrorism programs also went toward tracking terrorist financing around the world. Within these counterterrorism operations,

“Bahrain is... a valuable partner in disrupting illicit finance flows to terrorist organizations... [highlighted by the fact that] Bahrain hosts the Secretariat for the Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force, a regional body that coordinates efforts against terrorist finance.”³⁰³

US leadership continuously praised Bahrain’s cooperation in counterterrorism measures despite breaks in diplomatic relationships. King Hamad bin-Isa Al Khalifa also praised the depth of the US-Bahrain relations in January 2014 in a meeting with CENTCOM General Lloyd Austin III where he “hailed [the] deep rooted historic relations and steadily-growing cooperation between the two allies and partners, affirming Bahrain’s keenness on bolstering multi-level relations, particularly military cooperation.”³⁰⁴As both

³⁰¹ "US Officer Hails Bahrain's Cooperation." *Bahrain News Agency*. Bahrain News Agency, 27 Sept. 2012. Web. 22 Jan. 2015.

³⁰² Roebuck, William. "Testimony of William Roebuck Ambassador-Designate to the Kingdom of Bahrain." *United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations*. United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 10 Sept. 2014. Web. 11 Dec. 2014.

³⁰³ Roebuck, William. "Testimony of William Roebuck Ambassador-Designate to the Kingdom of Bahrain." *United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations*. United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 10 Sept. 2014. Web. 11 Dec. 2014.

³⁰⁴ "HM King Hamad Receives US-CENTCOM Commander." *Bahrain News Agency*. Bahrain News Agency, 29 Oct. 2014. Web. 22 Apr. 2015.

countries consistently face the threat of extremist violence, a close security relationship remains a priority.

However, appropriations for these programs, while strategically important, paled in comparison to the large portion of the budget dedicated to Foreign Military Financing. The US provides FMF “to Bahrain to help it maintain US-origin weapons, to enhance inter-operability with US forces, to augment Bahrain’s air defenses, to support and upgrade the avionics of its F-16 combat aircraft, and to improve counterterrorism capabilities.”³⁰⁵ The graph below highlights the large financial commitment to Bahrain vis-à-vis Foreign Military Financing, which the US provides to Bahrain to purchase US defense products and services. Similar in nature, Foreign Military Sales transfer funds to Bahrain to purchase defense products, but unlike FMF appropriations, Bahrain can use part of the FMS funds to purchase weapons through private defense corporations.

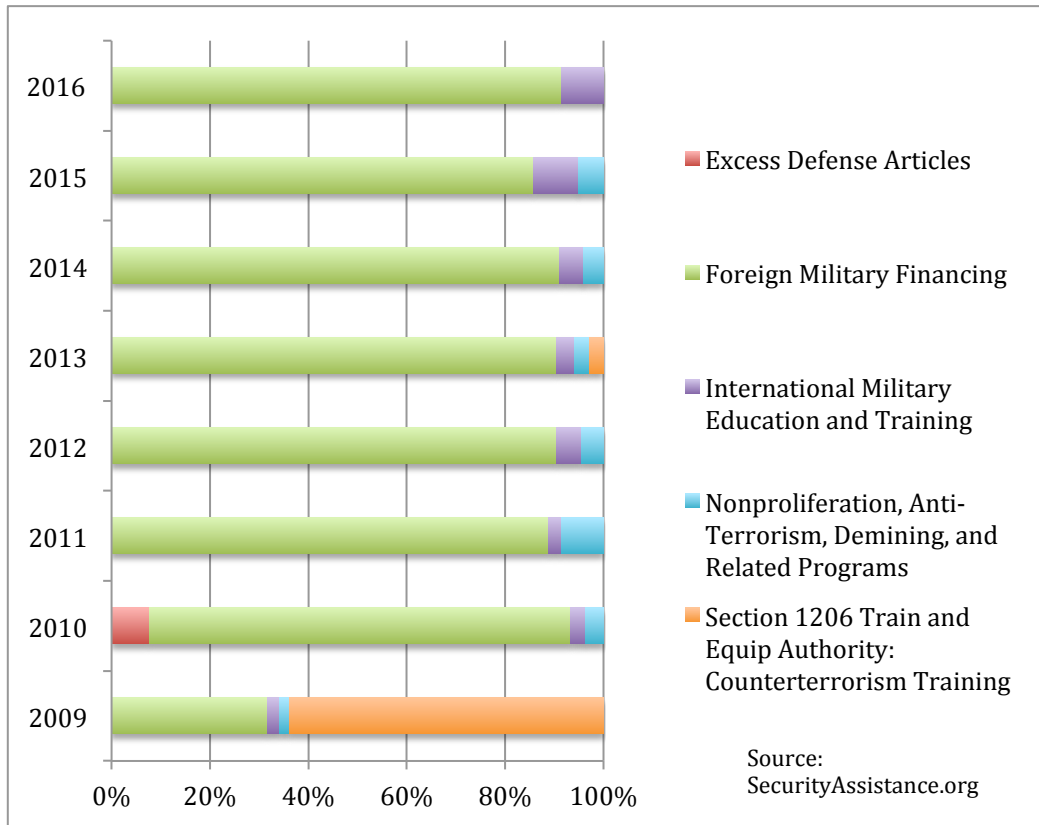
The allocation of FMS funds to Bahrain increased steadily since 2009, though experienced a sharp drop after the uprising in Bahrain in 2011. “Until the recent revolutions in the Middle East, Bahrain's relative stability and loyalty to the United States provided comfort to Pentagon officials,”³⁰⁶ though US officials lost confidence in the stability of the regime after witnessing mass protests and the government using deadly force against the protesters. As a result, the US military suspended some weapons sales to Bahrain, limiting weapons that the regime could use against protesters, including

³⁰⁵ Katzman, Kenneth. "Bahrain: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy." *Congressional Research Service* 95-1013 (2015): 25. Congressional Research Service. Web. 22 Apr. 2015.

³⁰⁶ Cooley, Alexander, and Daniel Nexon. "Bahrain's Base Politics." *Foreign Policy*. Foreign Policy, 5 Apr. 2011. Web. 14 Apr. 2015.

Humvees, tear gas, rifles, and ammunition.³⁰⁷

Figure 10. US Defense Assistance to Bahrain, Percentage of Budget



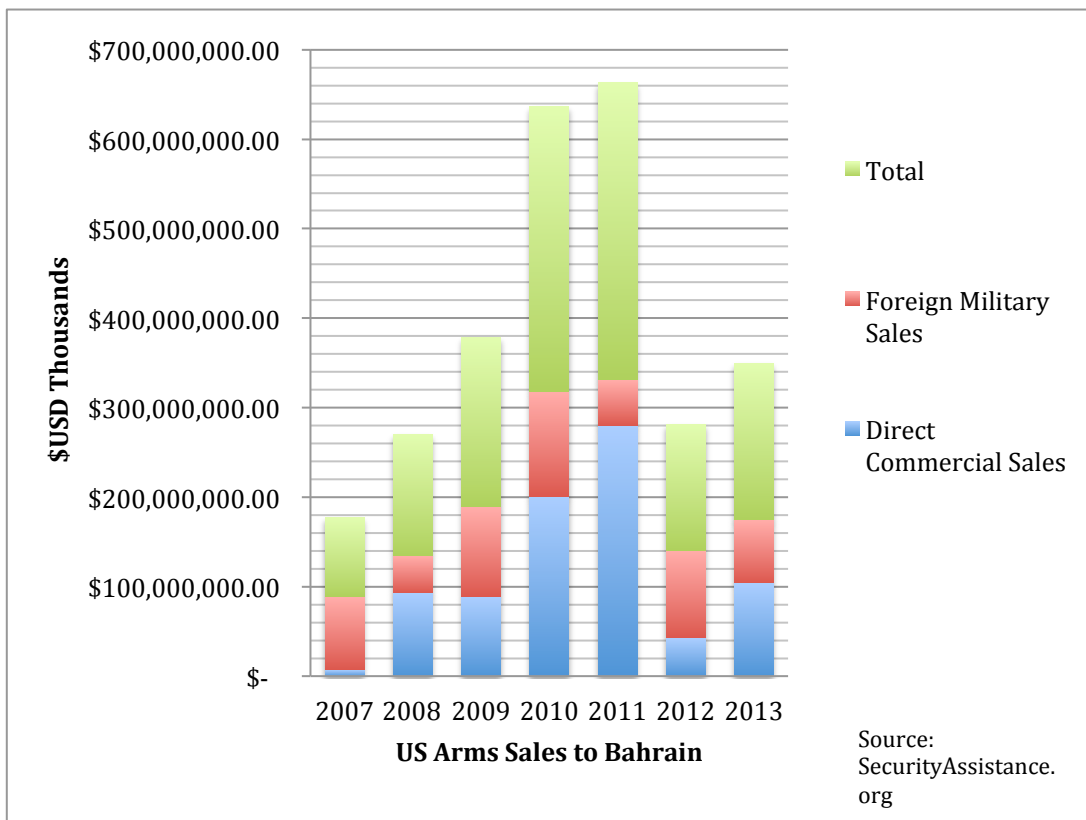
As of January 2015, the US government continued to hold the sales of the weapons to the Ministry of the Interior, though the US continued to supply “equipment that is suited to Bahrain’s external defense capabilities.”³⁰⁸ The graph below depicts the significant drop-off of defense and arms sales to Bahrain between FY2011 and FY2013. This period is particularly important, as the US-Bahrain diplomatic relationship also took

³⁰⁷ Katzman, Kenneth. "Bahrain: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy." *Congressional Research Service* 95-1013 (2015): 27-28. Congressional Research Service. Web. 22 Apr. 2015.

³⁰⁸ Ibid. 25.

a downward spiral after the uprisings of the Arab Spring. While experts often claim the US-Bahrain relationship is unbreakable, the uprisings in Bahrain in 2011 suggest otherwise; when the US publicly condemned the government's use of force against protesters, the stalwart defense relationship also absorbed some strain, evidenced through a \$3 billion dollar reduction in defense assistance. Bahraini and US military leaders also felt the repercussions of the financial hold, as cooperation between the military leaders became a political issue, broadcasted in newspapers across the Arab and Western worlds.

Figure 11. US Arms Sales to Bahrain: 2007-2013



As recently as December 2014, during the annual Manama Dialogue sponsored by the International Institute for Strategic Studies, Bahrain's Crown Prince met with Marillyn A Hewson, the president of Lockheed Martin Corporation where the Prince "stressed the importance of working together with international defense and security companies on enhancing Bahrain's military capabilities."³⁰⁹ The Gulf press that covered the conference praised Bahrain's efforts to combat terrorism, highlighting cooperation with Canada, Singapore, Egypt, and the GCC. The lack of reference to the United States was notable. After three years of increasing pressure from the US to enact human rights reforms, the government of Bahrain used the press to subtly remind the United States that it does not wish to openly associate itself with the US government.

Though the US-Bahrain security relationship has a solid foundation built on decades of cooperation, the uprisings of 2011 called into question the strength of that relationship. Kenneth Katzman, specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs at CRS reported, "US officials say that US- Bahrain differences over Bahrain's handling of the unrest has caused Bahraini officers to become slightly less forthcoming with in-kind support to the US military presence in Bahrain."³¹⁰ As Katzman goes on to suggest, the tension likely emanates from "resentment over the US withholding of some arms sales to Bahrain or retaliation for US criticism of the government's handling of the unrest."³¹¹ Regardless of the cause, the strain the Arab Spring put on the US-Bahrain defense relationship is

³⁰⁹ "Crown Prince Calls for Holistic Approach to Combat Terrorism." *Gulf Daily News*. Gulf Daily News, 7 Dec. 2014. Web. 8 Feb. 2015.

³¹⁰ Katzman, Kenneth. "Bahrain: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy." *Congressional Research Service* 95-1013 (2015): 22. Congressional Research Service. Web. 22 Apr. 2015.

³¹¹ Ibid.

worrying, particularly as the Gulf region continues to experience uprisings and instability.

Defense cooperation between Bahrain and China, however, remains limited due to Bahrain's strong ties with the United States. To date, China has not sold arms to Bahrain, though on occasion Chinese military officials visited Bahrain by invitation of the Bahraini Defense Forces. In November 2008, Chinese Defense Minister Liang Guanglie met with Bahrain's Crown Prince and Prime Minister to discuss boosting military ties. The Chinese Defense Minister announced, "China is willing to deepen pragmatic cooperation in various fields and push ahead its military relations with Bahrain."³¹² Bahrain's Crown Prince echoed similar statements by stating, "Bahrain is committed to building strategic cooperative relations with China which would benefit the people of the two countries...expressing hopes to further bilateral state and military relations with joint efforts of both sides."³¹³ While bilateral military relations have not yet blossomed into a strong partnership, the invitation extended by Bahrain's military to China suggests willingness on the part of the Bahrainis to explore a military partnership in the near future.

³¹² "Defense Minister: China Willing to Boost Military Ties with Bahrain." *People's Daily Online*. Xinhua, 14 Nov. 2008. Web. 14 Apr. 2015.

³¹³ *Ibid.*

PART III: CONCLUSION

The GCC pivot to Asia has accelerated with each passing year, highlighted through increasing trade volumes, diplomatic engagement, and strategic cooperation with China.

As GCC-China trade ties grew in both quantity and quality, US diplomatic tensions with some GCC nations flared. Though increasing trade with China did not *cause* the tension with the US, China deftly used rising tensions to exploit the GCC's frustration with what they saw as misguided and contradictory US human rights policies.

After the Arab Spring spread to Manama in 2011, instead of finding points of commonality, like China ventured to do through expanding economic relations, the US attempted to fix what it saw as underlying issues by encouraging democratic reforms and using FMS appropriations as sticks. Meanwhile, the US remained silent on human rights concerns in Riyadh. Saudi Arabia did not receive nearly the same amount of attention to human rights from the US mainly because the US prioritized the security relationship over human rights reform. In Bahrain, however, US attention to human rights grew exponentially after the Pearl Revolution broke out in 2011. Convinced that US pressure on the regime could alleviate human rights abuses and restore stability, the US continued mounting pressure on Bahrain, publicly shaming Bahrain's human rights problems and freezing FMS sales. Unexpectedly, however, Bahrain began to push back and expelled a senior diplomat who was visiting Manama to record human rights practices. The US response to human rights violations in Bahrain resulted in tension between the US and its

Gulf partners, with regional GCC allies frustrated at what they viewed as US intervention in domestic affairs. Protesters in the streets of Manama exclaimed, “I know there are clashes between your interests and your values. Where is your democracy values? Where is it? We want to see these values [sic]!”³¹⁴ US rhetoric on Bahrain’s human rights abuses was significant compared to its reaction to violations in neighboring Saudi Arabia.

While US ties with Gulf nations have not reached a breaking point, greater political distance between the US, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia made room for the Chinese in the Gulf. The ineffective US human rights strategy in the Middle East after the Arab Spring opened the door for the Chinese to promote a model of economic development free from political obligations. Though the Chinese style of diplomatic engagement comes with its own kind of strings attached, Gulf populations view China as an alternative to the US, who they believe has meddled too often in the affairs of Gulf States. The United States will likely never be able to offer a political relationship with no strings attached because its national values are often integrated with its foreign policies. Even in Saudi Arabia, the US has redlines and at times has spoken out against severe human rights abuse.

Nevertheless, US strategic cooperation with both nations has remained relatively strong throughout the turmoil, with the exception of rising tensions caused by US withdrawal of FMS funds. In part, this is due to a lack of alternative strategic and military partners for the GCC nations. The US is the Gulf’s most consistent, high quality military

³¹⁴ Langfitt, Frank. "Many Bahraini Protesters Angry With United States." *National Public Radio*. National Public Radio, 21 Mar. 2011. Web. 15 Apr. 2015.

partner and arms supplier. The US protection of the Gulf from undue Iranian influence and regional threats like ISIS remains something only the US can offer.

With potential changes in the Iranian-US relationship on the horizon, however, US promises of protecting Saudi Arabia and its regional allies may shift the status quo sooner than expected. Saudi Arabia's reaction to a US-Iranian deal remains unclear; though it is likely that deep Saudi unease could result in Saudi Arabia reaching out to new strategic partners, as it believes US loyalty to Saudi Arabia's regional dominance is wavering.

Though the GCC pivot to Asia began as a series of economic linkages in the early 2000s, its acceleration in recent years has changed the calculus of US military and diplomatic influence in a region historically critical to US interests. The US must find a way of remaining true to its values while balancing important strategic and military relationships with key partners in the Middle East to safeguard its interests in the long run.

ECONOMIC RELATIONSHIP

In the mid 2000s, the West, once the source of rising demand for energy began to see a decline in consumption. The center of gravity shifted to Asia, where quickly developing nations set the bar for global demand. The changes that resulted from shifting consumer/producer relationships in the global energy market resulted in the reconfiguration of economic relationships around the world, spurring similar shifts in political and security dynamics among nations.

The US announcement of a US pivot to Asia in 2012 arrived late compared to its global counterparts. The GCC pivot to Asia began several years earlier as a result of changing trade patterns and the GCC pursuit of alternative consumers for their energy, officially announced by King Abdullah's "Look East" policy in 2005. This pivot only accelerated in 2008 and 2009 when the global economic downturn and the US shale boom reinforced the GCC's need to diversify its economic partnerships.

The relatively new partnerships between China and members of the GCC are significant because historically the Gulf was a vital economic partner for the United States, who received an important share of its oil from the Gulf nations. As US oil production during the "shale boom" increased, US oil and gas trade with Saudi Arabia on average declined. The Shale Revolution reinforced the reality that the US-Saudi relationship was not, and had not been defined by oil for some time.

Though energy trade declined, the United States was determined to preserve economic links with its formerly critical trade partner. The diminishing US reliance on energy as a critical input for both the US and Saudi economies prompted a reevaluation of fiscal commitments between the two nations. Thus, the United States attempted to forge a new economic partnership, based on its commitment to investment, exchanges, strong trade relations, and defense sales. As the once strong US-Saudi oil relationship weakened, the two nations increased bilateral investments and significantly increased defense sales.

The US-Bahrain relationship has a different flavor: it never revolved around oil trade. Their partnership was comprised of a strong defense and diplomatic relationship.

Trade between the US and Bahrain helped facilitate business relationships and meaningful exchange, though it never defined the bilateral relationship. Changes in oil trade patterns also had a negligible effect on the relationship. Over the last seven decades, the level of investment, exchange, and business between the two nations remained substantial, despite fluctuations in diplomatic relations. The economic partnership between Bahrain and the United States was an added benefit to the strong defense relationship though never an integral component. If the United States was not the “protector” of Bahrain, the economic relationship would be negligible, or at least equivalent to trade relations with partners with similar trade volumes.

What did have a significant impact on the economic relationship was China’s attention to the Gulf markets. It is telling that over the last two decades, trade between China and the GCC,

“has improved continuously... According to the National Bureau of Statistics of China, from 2000 to 2009, bilateral trade volume between China and the GCC states increased with an average annual growth of 57.8%. The volume of China’s exports to the GCC states was rising from \$3.68 billion to \$31.25 billion; imports were increasing from \$6.45 billion to \$29.45 billion.”

The massive expansion of trade volumes over the last decade emphasizes the great lengths China and the GCC countries are taking to encourage investment and business cooperation. China’s focus on the Gulf is also evident through its efforts to reach Arab audiences. The Chinese launch of a public relations campaign in the Arab world, including investing in training Arabic speakers in the government, promoting cultural

exchange, arts exhibitions, and translation services all contribute to China's larger goal of building long term relations with its new GCC partners. For China,

“to develop relations with the GCC states is an important part to enhance China's international influence; while for the GCC states, to strengthen cooperation with China is a strategy to confront the pressure from America”³¹⁵ to reform domestic institutions and establish democratic frameworks.

Chinese investment alone is not a threat to the United States. Economic development around the world is beneficial to both the recipient country and the United States. Chinese investments may even promote greater stability in the GCC nations by encouraging development and a stable economy. What is worrying, however, is the amount of political clout Chinese business leaders and politicians are beginning to hold in Bahrain and increasingly, in Saudi Arabia. China's number one position as trade partner with Saudi Arabia, its rising rank with Bahrain, and China's attempts to court the Arab public suggests that the Chinese model of economic development does not end at access to resources. The Chinese are buying their way into Gulf markets and establishing political and military relationships along the way. In the long-term, Chinese influence as number one trade partner could overshadow US economic interests and political leverage.

³¹⁵ Mo, Chen. "Exploring Economic Relations between China and the GCC States." *Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies* 5.4 (2011): 101. Print.

DIPLOMATIC RELATIONSHIP

From the diplomatic angle, the US and China approach human rights policy from two diametrically opposed perspectives: in most cases the US approaches human rights as integral to development and stable long-term partnerships while the Chinese view human rights as inherently disconnected from economic development and diplomacy. The evidence shows, perhaps surprisingly, that US and Chinese policies regarding human rights in Saudi Arabia are quite similar (silent), though differ significantly in Bahrain.

In Saudi Arabia, neither the US nor China openly discuss specific human rights issues. On the rare occasions when the US and China do raise such issues, they are officially addressed in the forum of the United Nations. US statements differed from Chinese statements in that they challenged Saudi policies, while the Chinese focused on praising Saudi progress. Neither approach seemed to directly affect Saudi bilateral relations, nor cause notable diplomatic tension. Between 2011-2014, the Saudi public was not reactive to US or Chinese policies, particularly when compared with the vocal protestations of US policy from Bahraini citizens. The government of Saudi Arabia effectively ignored US censure because the government assumed that strategic and military relationships would trump human rights disputes. Continued US silence on Saudi human rights abuses reinforced these assumptions.

In Bahrain, local reactions to US policies reflected growing frustration with US policies. Both the Bahraini government and the public cared a great deal more about US critiques than their Saudi neighbors. The public reacted strongly to US Country Reports published on Bahrain, as well as to any perceived interference in the country. Local

politicians also responded more vociferously to US policies. Fervent anti-American rhetoric prompted prominent Bahrainis to call for closer alignment with China. While the Bahrainis campaigned for greater ties with China, they also urged the government to rebuke the US for its interference in domestic affairs, going so far as to request the removal of the US ambassador on several occasions.

The level of US pressure on Bahrain, the most liberal and politically inclusive nation in the Gulf, is surprising. Perhaps the aggressive US stance originates from US failures regionally. The US needs ‘a win’ in the Middle East, a country where promises of democracy and liberal reform can come to fruition. US censure also may reflect higher expectations of Bahrain, after demonstrating the capability to institutionalize democratic policies. High expectations, though, resulted in significantly greater diplomatic pressure and soured relations, quite the opposite from the US intent to strengthen a diplomatic and potentially democratic ally in the region.

China, on the other hand, frames its diplomatic cooperation with Bahrain in economic terms by praising economic cooperation in Bahrain and expanding business cooperation, investments, and cultural exchanges between the two countries. The Chinese government continues to subtly criticize US policies in the Gulf, mainly by touting Chinese policies of non-interference at opportune moments in the press. Comparatively, the US has been silent on Chinese behavior in the Gulf, as Chinese involvement in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia thus far revolves around economic cooperation. Neither Bahrain nor Saudi Arabia has yet expressed negative sentiments regarding Chinese investment or presence in the region. The US, therefore, has little to refute. China found a

successful method to frame its influence as mutually beneficial to both populations: Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and China all pursue similar strategies of economic development and stability. All three nations prioritize foreign policies that promote non-interference. The US has not yet found a way to reframe its influence as beneficial to the broader Gulf public.

Reactions to US and Chinese statements from Bahraini and Saudi locals emphasize the Gulf tendency to view regional influence as a zero sum game. Much like the Saudis encouraged US entry in the Gulf to counter British influence in the forties, Bahraini rhetoric seems to intimate a similar desire. Bahrain hopes China may prove to be a counterweight for US influence in the region, particularly in light of recent disputes over human rights, military sales, and unsolicited interference in domestic affairs. Saudi Arabia remains undecided, though undoubtedly enjoys the competition over Saudi products and partnerships. Saudi Arabia hesitates to choose sides because it remains strategically and economically linked to both nations.

Influence in the Arabian Gulf does not need to be a zero sum game, in fact, it should not be. Bahrain's attraction to China as a new partner in the region does not mean that US policies failed unequivocally. Rather, China presents a more politically attractive alternative to a region tired by overt US intervention. As Gulf publics view influence in their sphere as zero-sum game, it is essential that the US alters the Gulf perception and changes the rhetoric to reframe the dialogue away from rising China, failing US and increasingly toward a Gulf characterized by multilateral cooperation.

The US and Chinese approaches to human rights in the Gulf reveal an interesting trend. US leverage in the GCC is limited, even in a small state like Bahrain, a surprising fact given the strong ties the US had with Bahrain in the past. The tense US-Bahrain diplomatic relationship can be viewed as an inevitable result of waning US influence in the Middle East: the legacy of a decade of mismanaged policies in the Middle East and rising disdain for American interference. Once a stalwart ally of the US, the small nation of Bahrain pushed back against the United States for the first time in 2014 by expelling a senior diplomat. Though the Bahrainis finally allowed Malinowski to return, Bahrain's defiance and refusal to assent to US demands reveals shifting power dynamics. Bahrain's successful attempt at standing up to the United States did not cost them in the short or long term as the US took no retributive actions. This example highlights the US inability to exert unilateral influence over its once accommodating partner. In the case of human rights, Bahrain's refusal to enact serious human rights reforms becomes less surprising with each passing year, particularly in light of the US insistence on arms sales freezes for Bahrain's Defense Forces.

In sum, the Chinese model of non-interference created a potential opportunity for the Chinese to move from a primarily transactional relationship to a politically constructive one. If Chinese influence grows and becomes a viable alternative to the American influence, US leverage and ability to unilaterally demand domestic change may decline. Where human rights issues are a source of conflict with the United States, they are a point of common interest and expediency with China. The Chinese government perceives its bilateral relationships with Saudi Arabia and Bahrain as essential to

maintaining stability and critical for deepening economic ties in the region. China expert Shannon Tiezzi explains, “a good relationship with Saudi Arabia would allow China not just to secure oil imports from Riyadh, but to create a partnership dedicated to “stabilizing” the region, ideally keeping all Middle Eastern oil flowing smoothly.”

The US tendency to publicly shame Bahrain’s policies is contributing to analysts’ predictions of a Gulf with limited US influence. The US should not adopt the Chinese policy of non-interference, but rather develop a new approach to support human rights that would not exacerbate existing tensions. It is clear that when competing against the Chinese model of non-interference in the Gulf, the US approach is unsuccessful. The US must begin to shift its policies to retain its influence in a region critical to US national interests.

STRATEGIC RELATIONSHIP

US security appropriations to Saudi Arabia and Bahrain are the foundation for both bilateral relationships. As Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice noted,

“The selling and buying of weaponry is ‘to secure the peace...’ Military sales are among the key threads that run through the conventional narrative about the relationship’s logic and worth; namely, an exceptionally pragmatic search for security and stability.”³¹⁶

It is indicative of the strength and the dependency of the US-Saudi relationship that in 2013, Saudi Arabia officially became “the largest defense market for US weapons

³¹⁶ Conge, Patrick, and Gwenn Okruhlik. "The Power Of Narrative: Saudi Arabia, The United States And The Search For Security." *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* (2009): 359-74. British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies. Web. 29 Jan. 2015.

makers, as the oil sheikdom increased its defense imports 54% from 2013 to 2014. This year is expected to be another strong year for Saudi imports... rising another 52% to \$9.8 billion.”³¹⁷

Though Bahrain spends less on defense than its powerful neighbor, the US remains dedicated to its defense relationship with the small island nation despite rising tensions. The US 5th fleet bases its operations in Bahrain, along with NAVCENT and MARCENT forward bases, critical to supplying and supporting US operations around the Middle East. Bahrain’s geography also allows the US and other regional allies to monitor Iran and patrol the Strait of Hormuz to keep oil and trade sea-lanes open. Basing privileges in Bahrain remain a high priority for the US defense establishment and will continue to be critical in the coming decades. As Commander Richard McDaniel noted in *No Plan B*,

“To say that Bahrain holds immense strategic and operational value is an understatement. Functionally and geographically, the small island state serves as the strategic centerpiece for US maritime strategy, security, and stability in the Persian Gulf.”³¹⁸

The US cannot afford to allow its critical defense relationship to deteriorate in the next several years. In the long run, the US must either search for alternative strategic positions

³¹⁷ Brinkerhoff, Noel. "U.S. Dominates Weapons Export Market as Profits Grow with Sales to the Middle East." *AllGov*. 17 Mar. 2015. Web. 14 Apr. 2015.

³¹⁸ McDaniel, Richard. "No "Plan B:" US Strategic Access in the Middle East and the Question of Bahrain." *Center for 21st Century Security and Intelligence* (2013). Brookings. 14. Web. 10 Mar. 2015.

from which to base US operations in the Middle East or work to ameliorate the existing tensions between the diplomatic and military communities in Bahrain.

Though dissatisfaction with US policies may prompt Gulf locals to call for China as an alternative partner in the region, China is currently unable to provide the military and security partnerships needed to maintain stability. China is quickly building up its military, though cannot yet extend its military arm far past the South China Sea. “What seems most likely, says Daniel Wagner, is that China, Saudi Arabia and the US will practice a rather awkward triangular balance of power in the Persian Gulf, because Saudi Arabia is unwilling to completely abandon its American ally and China cannot yet fulfill the role of security partner.”³¹⁹

While the United States defense relationship with Saudi Arabia and Bahrain is strong, it is not unbreakable. In the long-term, competitors like China may offer a serious alternative to US arms sales and defense cooperation in the region. It is clear that the Chinese “view foreign arms sales as an important market in which it wishes to compete, and has increased the promotion of its more advanced aircraft in an effort to secure contracts from developing countries.” The quality of Chinese arms is not able to currently match those produced in the US defense industry, but the Chinese will not remain far behind for long. Ni Lexiong, director of national defense policy research at Shanghai University estimates that “the speed of the People’s Liberation Army’s modernization has indeed exceeded western countries’ expectation...the gap is between 20 and 30 years, he

³¹⁹ Wagner, Daniel. "Is the US Losing Saudi Arabia to China?" *The Huffington Post*. The Huffington Post, 30 Oct. 2013. Web. 10 Dec. 2014.

said. At the current pace, China may catch up with the US in 40 years, and may start to get ahead in 60 years.”³²⁰

Chinese military growth parallels its economic and political development. A strengthened Chinese military will likely compete with the US for influence in particularly critical regions, like the Gulf, but this does not intimate an inevitable arms race or an escalation in conflict. A rising China does not present an existential threat to the United States. China and the United States can both exert influence, though the US will likely need to compromise on its less significant strategic interests.

³²⁰ Capaccio, Anthony. "Chinese Military Shows New Capabilities, Pentagon Says." *Bloomberg*. Bloomberg, 6 June 2014. Web. 14 Apr. 2015.

What Does this Mean for the US?

SHORT TERM

In the short term, US strategic interests are not in immediate danger. Though US policies are increasingly unpopular in Gulf nations, the Saudi and Bahraini governments recognize the critical role the US plays in their defense. US arms sales and defense cooperation with both Bahrain and Saudi Arabia remain critical elements of their national security. Particularly during an era of rising extremism, no other actor can offer the quality of arms, counterterrorism cooperation, and intelligence sharing that the US can provide. US military supremacy safeguards its role as protector for the Gulf in the short run.

However, US censure of Bahrain's human rights violations paired with its freeze on arms sales will continue to strain diplomatic relations. The Bahraini government does not appreciate the public nature of US criticism, nor do they welcome what they view as unbalanced attention to Bahraini human rights violations. The US stance on human rights violations after the Arab Spring undermined US interests in the long run and did little to stop human rights violations from occurring outright. The US took a middle approach, censuring human rights abuses, though turning its head when Saudi/GCC troops arrived to violently suppress the protests. The US selected particular human rights abuses to publicize, though ignored numerous others. This led to the primarily Shia opposition groups viewing US efforts to promote human rights as underwhelming and hypocritical. The ruling elites, however, viewed US interference as damaging, tainting Bahrain's reputation internationally, and undermining stability at a critical period.

The US desire to remain a balanced actor in the conflict between the ruling Sunnis and the Shia opposition discredited the US in both their eyes. Instead of denouncing human rights abuses across the board, the US government chooses the most important cases. Shia opposition members claim that instead of promoting democracy and human rights full force, the US limits its calls for democracy to politically opportune moments. The Bahraini public views these US policies as hypocritical and overly political. Current US human rights policies have become counterproductive and a source of tension from both segments of Bahrain's population. In the short term this distrust is unlikely to significantly affect the working diplomatic relationship but may seriously impact the perceptions and loyalties of Bahrain's next generation of leaders who will rise to power in the coming years.

LONG TERM

In the long term, if China's economic and political growth continues on its upward trajectory, it is highly likely that the Chinese military will continue its military expansion and began to rival that of the US military.³²¹⁻³²² In the past decade, China significantly increased its defense budget to strengthen its military, exemplified by the construction of a second Chinese aircraft carrier.³²³ In comparison, the US currently owns

³²¹ Long term projections about future behaviors are embedded, inherently, with assumptions. In the future, many other unknown factors will come into play to influence events. This thesis does not attempt to predict future events, but rather to contemplate possible strategies and outcomes the United States must face in order to adequately prepare for possibilities.

³²² This expansion is most likely four or five decades in the future.

³²³ Murphy, Brian. "Iran and China Deepen a 'Blue Water' Friendship." *Washington Post*. Washington Post, 28 Oct. 2013. Web. 14 Apr. 2015.

ten aircraft carriers, the most of any nation.³²⁴ Admiral Robert Willard, former head of US Pacific Command (PACOM) stated that China “has exceeded most of our intelligence estimates of their military capability and capacity every year.”³²⁵

As Chinese financial assets grow in the Gulf and the Chinese ship more oil through the Strait of Hormuz, China may increase its military presence in the region to defend its assets, potentially becoming a ‘protector’ of stability in the region. Currently, China free rides from US protection of the region, which includes 24-hour drone flights across the Strait of Hormuz every three days, manned P-3 surveillance, troop patrols and constant mine sweeps.³²⁶ To date, Chinese-led patrols of the Gulf have been rare because China does not have the capability to project its military force that far beyond Chinese waters. Also, the Chinese have little incentive to do so while the US foots the bill. If China’s partnerships with the GCC nations continue on a similar trajectory however, China will have significantly more to lose from a potential closure of the Strait of Hormuz as Saudi Arabia is currently China’s primary supplier of energy. If Chinese assets in the Gulf become threatened in the coming decades, it is possible China will take action to defend its interests.

Economically, the trajectory of growth between the GCC and China suggests a continued strengthening of diplomatic and economic relations in the coming years. China

³²⁴ Venter, Radu. "4 Ways China's Military Stacks Up Against the U.S." *China News*. PolicyMic, 9 May 2013. Web. 15 Apr. 2015.

³²⁵ Murphy, Brian. "Iran and China Deepen a ‘Blue Water’ Friendship." *Washington Post*. Washington Post, 28 Oct. 2013. Web. 14 Apr. 2015.

³²⁶ Lakshmanan, Indira, and Gopal Ratnam. "China Gets Cheaper Iran Oil as U.S. Pays for Hormuz Patrols." *Bloomberg*. Bloomberg, 12 Jan. 2012. Web. 15 Apr. 2015.

has already eclipsed the US as Saudi Arabia's largest trading partner and shows similar trends across the other GCC nations. Regional dynamics and changing trade relations suggest a rebalance of influence in the long run. Unless the US makes significant changes to its economic and diplomatic policies in the Gulf, the US could find its political influence diluted in the long run.

The US cannot afford to lose influence with the ruling monarchs as they secure access for US troops to bases across the Gulf as well as assist in military and intelligence efforts. US interests in the Gulf would be impacted significantly by losing access to basing privileges and cooperative intelligence gathering, critical for the US to continue fighting the War against Terrorism. The US heavily relies on Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, in addition to many other GCC partners for military support. For instance, Bahrain alone,

“Enables US and coalition maritime forces to maintain a watchful eye on Iran and readily provide a robust maritime response in the highly volatile Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz. Bahrain hosts Naval Support Activity Bahrain and is home to US Naval Forces Central Command, Fifth Fleet Headquarters, and over 5,000 Sailors and Marines. [The] Fifth Fleet oversees and operates all United States and coalition maritime activity in the Persian Gulf, the Arabian Sea, the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea, and much of the waters off eastern Africa.”

Two scenarios should concern US policymakers in the long run. First, the US should worry if China develops a full-fledged military and arms sales program, capable of competing directly with US influence and defense products. While Chinese influence

is currently rising due its position as primary economic partner, this fact alone should not cause significant unease. If, however, China's economic dominance is paired with competitive military forces, arms sales, and a Chinese willingness to act militarily far beyond its borders, the United States could face serious competition for regional influence.

Second, policymakers should worry if there is a significant change in leadership in the Gulf: for instance, if disenfranchised citizens successfully overthrow one of the standing regimes. The historic US relations with the Gulf monarchies stretch back decades. If opposition parties whom the US has not favored seize power, the US would likely face significant hurdles in establishing cordial relationships with the new governments. As noted earlier, the current frustration of opposition parties with US policy would likely hamper US diplomatic efforts to cooperate with opposition-led governments, particularly in the initial transition phases. The US may be able to adapt to the regimes eventually, though it would be unlikely that the US would be the partner of choice due to the mistrust between opposition members and the US government. China would be a likely alternative for new leaders who yearn for a clean slate and a stung partner. China claims to offer economic development without political obligations, unlike the United States, who not only sets high standards on their allies but also comes with a long history of political disapproval in the region.

What Should the US Do?

US policymakers need to reexamine the US approach to the Middle East not only so US policies can be more effective and serve the national interests, but also to guarantee a stable place for the US in the coming decades if China continues to rise. As Prince Turk Al Faisal, former Saudi Arabian Ambassador to the US explained, “China is not necessarily a better friend than the United States but it is a less complicated friend.”³²⁷ This sentiment, now all too common among the regimes in the Gulf, reinforces the need for the United States to redefine its approach to its Gulf partners. The US approach to human rights in the Gulf is not working; a reality that China is exploiting to bolster relations with the GCC and provide a contrasting model of diplomatic engagement more appealing to Gulf leaders. It should be noted, however, that tense relations with GCC partners are not solely the product of ineffective US policies after the Arab Spring. The tension exists in a critical regional context, in which the United States has lost credibility after several failed wars and diplomatic initiatives in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Rising US unpopularity existed for decades though it reached its apex after US silence during the democratic uprisings of the Arab Spring.

Clearly, there are no easy solutions to adequately address the difficulties with often times contradicting US defense and human rights policies in the Middle East. There

³²⁷ Simpfordorfer, Ben. "Introduction." *The New Silk Road: How a Rising Arab World Is Turning Away from the West and Rediscovering China*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. 37. Print.

are, however, four steps that the US can follow to begin to redirect its policies, regain friendships, and position itself strategically for the future.

First, the United States must not frame the Middle East in a strictly zero sum game. A rising China does not necessarily negate US power in the short or long term. Rather, the growth of China opens us the possibility for US influence to decrease in comparison to current levels, though not eliminate it or weaken it to a point of concern. As powerful actors like China establish a presence in the region, framing competition in a zero sum framework will only exacerbate tensions and serve Chinese interests. In fact, Chinese presence in the Gulf could result in US responsibilities becoming less demanding, as China builds its military capabilities and becomes incentivized to patrol the commons. China's rise in the Gulf could be a positive development, freeing the US to reallocate some of its financial or military resources to other critical areas or to focus on other aspects of defense policies, like increasing defense or counterterrorism cooperation.

A rising China is only problematic if US military and strategic influence declines to the point when US military strength is in jeopardy or surpassed by the Chinese. The United States military currently relies on the Gulf regimes for both access and cooperation, particularly in intelligence sharing, counterterrorism operations, and military privilege in the Gulf. The worst-case scenario would result in the US losing basing privileges and military access to the Gulf, leaving the US limited access to the region and fewer regional partners. Such a worst-case scenario is unlikely.

The US should approach China's increasing ties in the Gulf with openness, ready to engage with China and utilize its rising position to maintain stability where the US

cannot. In the next several decades, US interests will likely shift, as will Saudi, Bahraini and Chinese interests. The US is but a single supplier to the Saudis and Bahrainis. As future interests develop and change, similarly, security interests for the US, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and China will evolve as well. Future changing variables are impossible to predict but the US can prepare itself for likely changes to minimize potential consequences or unforeseen challenges. For instance, the US should be prepared to retain less strategic influence in the Arabian Gulf. As China rises, the US should take advantage of China's ability to provide stability in the Gulf and reposition its geostrategic interests to assure that the US can safeguard its most critical assets and interests.

Second, the United States needs to reemphasize its common interests with the governments of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. Despite differences in their approaches to human rights and governance, the governments of Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the United States have numerous mutual interests, including "containing the Iranian nuclear threat, challenging extremism and fighting terrorism, stabilizing the region, ending the violence in Syria, advancing an Arab-Israeli peace, and protecting energy supplies and international shipping."³²⁸ These strategic interests bind the nations together and allow the three states to pursue their national policies.

Counterintelligence and military cooperation are the pillars of these relationships and need to be reemphasized. While the military establishments are generally immune from diplomatic scuffles, in recent years, diplomatic tensions seeped into military

³²⁸ Al Otaiba, Yousef. "The Asia Pivot Needs a Firm Footing in the Middle East." *Foreign Policy*. Foreign Policy, 26 Mar. 2014. Web. 14 Apr. 2015.

partnerships vis-à-vis Foreign Military Sales, affecting cooperation and trust between the parties. Reemphasizing the importance of the strategic relationships is necessary and does not deemphasize the importance of human rights in the Gulf. The US must recognize that its interests in the Gulf (stability, free flow of trade routes, military and intelligence cooperation) are intertwined with Gulf security interests as well. Thus, the United States military and diplomatic corps should take steps to remind its GCC partners about their intertwined interests by creating an annual conference through which critical GCC partners and the United States can meet to address strategies, grievances, and plans for future cooperation. The US should attempt to integrate GCC opinions of regional needs into a long term US strategy in the region. To be clear, GCC strategy should not dictate or overwhelm US strategies. Rather, its incorporation would provide the US with a greater understanding of GCC long term needs and goals, facilitate a cooperative environment focused on long-term cooperation, and provide a venue for addressing diplomatic concerns in a private atmosphere.

Third, the Chinese are accomplishing something the United States has been attempting to do since the Cold War: speak directly to the Arabic speaking populations. Chinese officials, diplomats, and businessmen are studying and speaking Arabic at a level where they are comfortable addressing the Arab public on Al-Jazeera. To date, very few American diplomats speak Arabic and even fewer are comfortable addressing audiences through Arabic mediums. Most Arabic work at embassies is designated to the foreign nationals hired in country or is sent out for translation. Currently, US appeals to the Arabic speaking populations are not made in person or are presented in English. Taking

the significant step of speaking in Arabic in both public and diplomatic settings would go a long way in connecting the US with local populaces. The US must invest more in cultural exchanges and foreign language learning in the United States and abroad if it hopes to control shifting rhetoric in non-English speaking media. As animosity for the US increases in the Middle East, it becomes even more critical to mount a successful public relations campaign for the US in the region.

Finally, it is essential that the United States find an alternative approach to human rights violations in the Gulf. The current US human rights policy in Bahrain is counterproductive and consistently results in tense diplomatic relations. Instead of using shame and blame tactics or publicly advocating for particular individuals, the United States should make a concerted effort to limit its public criticism and encourage private dialogue. The US should also refrain from using arms sales as a stick to force cooperation.

The US should take advantage of the close personal relations that decades of diplomatic and strategic cooperation have created by using its leverage of mutual interests and defense cooperation to privately advocate for human rights cases. US officials should discuss important human rights cases in private meetings with trusted leaders by using leverage to encourage substantive change instead of shaming leaders into compliance. Instead of using sticks to force partial or halfhearted cooperation, US diplomats should pursue a soft application of human rights policies. By including human rights as one of many factors that makes up a bilateral relationship, the US can quietly

encourage leaders to institute particular policies or changes without forcing a government to publicly submit to US pressure.

The US can make human rights an implicit feature of dealing with US diplomacy by should emphasizing that economic and defense policies must also support US diplomatic policies, mentioning that even the US has domestic audiences which it must please. Negotiating as partners privately is more likely to prove effective than publicly shaming governments into compliance. Shaming creates an incentive for governments, particularly those governments in the Middle East where US policies are unpopular to stand up to US pressure and refuse to cooperate. Engaging in private discussions and publicly praising important improvements in human rights policies will prove to be more advantageous for US national interests and more politically tenable to the Gulf regimes.

Not only do US actions provoke animosity between the US and other governments but also they rarely result in meaningful systemic change. In Saudi Arabia, what little criticism the US does voice, the Saudis ignore. In Bahrain, some changes occurred though according to the most recent Country Report the Bahraini forces continue to commit human rights abuses. It is clear the US policy of publicly condemning governmental abuses is counterproductive. The US human rights policies create tension between governments though do little to promote real change.

The largest criticism of US human rights policies abroad is the US tendency to advocate for politically convenient human rights cases and ignore the rest. This policy, while it may appear to be using limited US resources intelligently, is actually counterproductive in many instances. US policies foster animosity from local

populations, tired of what they see as US interference and contradictory policies. When the US publicly advocates for a particular case or group of individuals but not others, it breeds hostility among both the ruling elites who do not desire US interference and among locals who perceive US efforts as favoring particular groups.

Broadly speaking, the US should be consistent in its policy in each country. Naturally, there are practical constraints to consistency: changes in administrations, major international events like September 11, or significant domestic changes in a nation such as the revolutions that took place during the Arab Spring. Critical events should prompt a careful reevaluation of US foreign policy in a particular nation. Excluding extreme mitigating factors though, each administration should strive to either make human rights a consistent factor included in its bilateral relationships. The notion of consistency may sound banal, but the importance of the United States regaining trust and credibility in the Middle East will be an essential step to securing US interests in the long run. This begins with consistency with our allies and partners.

In sum, the GCC began its pivot to China long before the US announced its pivot to Asia in 2012. As China becomes the economic center of gravity, the United States must reexamine the strengths and weaknesses of its foreign policy. In particular, the US must reexamine its approach to the Gulf, a region critical to the United States' interests. Since the Arab Spring, US human rights policies in the Gulf have created both diplomatic and military tensions. Chinese acknowledgement and exploitation of that tension has resulted in GCC populations viewing China as a viable alternative to US influence the Gulf in the long run. The US needs a reevaluation of its diplomatic

approach in the GCC in order to support human rights and safeguard long-term US interests in the Arabian Peninsula. If the US continues on its current path, it may risk losing its influence in a region critical to US national security.

Glossary

BAPCO: The Bahrain Petroleum Company

BDF: Bahrain Defense Forces

BMENA: Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiatives

CENTCOM: US Central Command

CPIC: Chongqing Polycomp International Corp.

CRS: Congressional Research Service

DOD: Department of Defense

DOS: Department of State

DRL: Department of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

EDB: Economic Development Board (Bahrain)

EDA: Excess Defense Articles

EIA: Energy Information Agency

FMF: Foreign Military Financing

FMS: Foreign Military Sales

FTA: Free Trade Agreement

GCC: Gulf Cooperation Council

GDP: Gross Domestic Product

ICC: International Criminal Court

IMET: International Military Education Training

LNG: Liquefied Natural Gas

MARCENT: Marine Corps Force Central Command

MEPI: Middle East Partnership Initiative

MIDEASTFOR: Middle East Force

MoU: Memorandum of Understanding

NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NAVCENT: United States Naval Forces Central Command

NEA: National Energy Administration (China)

OPEC: Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries

OPM-MOI: Office of the Program Manager- Ministry of Interior (Saudi Arabia)

PACOM: US Pacific Command

SAUDI ARAMCO: The Saudi Arabian Oil Company

SINOPEC: China Petroleum and Chemical Corporation

TOW: Tube-launched, optically-tracked, wireless-guided missile

UAE: United Arab Emirates

UN: United Nations

UNHRC: United Nations Human Rights Council

USMTM: United States Military Training Mission

USTR: United States Trade Representative

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