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# BRIDGING A GULF

## *Peacebuilding in West Asia*

Edited by

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- b) Pirouz Mojtahed-Zadeh, *Security and Territoriality in the Persian Gulf*, Section III, Qatar - Bahrain Territorial and Boundary Disputes, Curzon Press, London 1999, pp. 115 to 158.
- c) Pirouz Mojtahed-Zadeh, *A Geopolitical Triangle in the Persian Gulf*, The Iranian Journal of International Affairs, IPIS Publication, Vol. VI, Nos. 1 & 2, Spring/Summer 1994, pp. 47-59.
- d) Pirouz Mojtahed-Zadeh, *The Islands of Tumb and Abu Musa*, CNMES/SOAS University of London publication, 1995.
- e) Pirouz Mojtahed-Zadeh, *Iranian Perspective on the Caspian Sea and Central Asia*, in Iwao Kobori and Michael H. Glantz ed. *Central Eurasian Water Crisis*, United Nations University Press, Tokyo 1998, pp. 105-124.

## CHAPTER 7

## A Russian Perspective on West Asian Security

Vitaly V. Naumkin

The Gulf is one of the pivotal parts of the Middle East region strategically. In the last two decades, it was the scene of the two most dramatic armed conflicts in the world. The first was the Iran-Iraq War, which claimed the lives of almost 1.5 million people, while the second between Iraq and Kuwait prompted an intervention of the entire international community. The current security environment of the subregion is marked by the presence of overlapping conflicts and asymmetrical relations among its states in many respects.

In analyzing the level of conflict, it is useful to distinguish between the objective and subjective conflict-generating factors. As to the objective factors, among them one may, for instance, note the disproportion in the provision of security, the unsettled state of borders, territorial and other disputes, grave differences in approach and position towards the main political problems among the states of the region, competition over resources, demographic and migration processes (e.g. the growing share of foreign workers or migration pressure on a number of states), great gaps in standards of living, social status and amounts of rights enjoyed by various population groups, and the dependence of many state economies on oil production. The subjective conflict-generating factors include the claims and ambitions of individual states and their leaders, the tradition of resorting to violence as a means to resolve disputes, the absence of visible progress in the democratization of societies, the logic of "zero-sum games", by which the protagonists in disputes and conflict situations are still guided, and other factors.

The countries of the subregion, many of which fear and distrust each other, today provide for their security needs through a variety of means. Some rely on their own capacities (Iran), others depend on collective mechanisms (GCC countries, although that organization is

not geared to tackling security issues), and some do it on a treaty basis with foreign partners (mostly the US). At the same time, it is clear that genuine peace, security, and stability in this subregion may only be adequately assured within the framework of a subregional or regional (i.e. Middle Eastern) security regime. Given the character of existing threats, challenges, and risks such a security regime must be based on comprehensive cooperative security, implying guarantees for the defense of the state, nation, and individuals against external attacks and internal challenges.

As suggested by the discussions in the SIPRI Expert Group, designing the concept of a regional security regime in the Middle East involves at least two other issues besides military security. These issues are "social cohesion within states and the region as a whole; and the growing demographic problem and its attendant impact on the resources and environment of the region" (Jones 1998).

On the whole, one may safely assume that the differences and contradictions existing in the region bear a predominantly bilateral character. Some of them—the "softest" contradictions—may find a solution in the framework of an effectively operational organization such as the Gulf Cooperation Council. But at the same time, as Tariq Ahmad al-Haidan, a prominent UAE diplomat, points out in his dissertation written in Russian, the Arab countries of the Gulf may encounter quite a few difficulties in resolving their territorial and interstate disputes with Iraq and Iran. These states generate serious challenges to regional stability not only in terms of territorial claims but also in the economic and political fields. It is a framework of a subregional or regional security zone—within the zone of the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf or the entire Middle Eastern region—that may possibly ensure the solution to antagonisms between member-states of the GCC, Iran, and Iraq. Some analysts even speak of an expanded Middle East in which the states of Central Asia and the Trans-Caucasus are also included. No matter how extensively or limited the region is defined for security purposes, however, the point is that not only Iran and Iraq, but also Yemen must necessarily be included, even if we are dealing with a subregional variant.

Of course, it should be taken into account that the GCC member-states are striving to resolve the disputes amongst themselves either through efforts of their organization, or on bilateral bases, preferring not to submit the discussion of disputed problems to international organizations. But progress towards the formation of a regional security system will not mean a renunciation of bilateral arrangements,

which will be incorporated into a common system to ensure joint, cooperative security. A regional or subregional framework will help neutralize existing asymmetries, conferring on all Gulf states a responsibility for maintaining stability and peace.

Many politicians and experts have repeatedly voiced the need for the creation of an organization for security and cooperation in the Middle East akin to the European one. The path to this is seen as the development of broad international cooperation in the region, dialogue among all parties, including those in conflict, and the creation of various networks to contribute to the resolution of these tasks. Dialogue should not be confined to security issues, which are the hardest of all. At the same time, joint measures directly related to security, such as coordination of border control, joint monitoring of the observance of the rules of navigation, and cooperation in the search and rescue in emergency situations may be discussed at the initial stage. In certain situations, joint peacekeeping cannot be ruled out either. World experience testifies that the states that are not allies at all and have sharply divergent interests and positions may take part in joint peacekeeping activities through an international mandate.

Along with the discussion of possible joint actions, pertaining to the "easiest" category, the parties have to identify common threats, challenges and risks, and establish basic security needs and interests. Naturally, the initial success of actions will depend on the accuracy with which the participants assess all the particular features of the situation in the region, among which, to sum up the aforesaid, one may notably identify the following:

- Discrepancies among states, interests and political goals, and security needs.
- Negative historical memory, particularly in the states that have been involved in bloody armed conflicts.
- The role of pre-existing institutions and alliances, first and foremost the Gulf Cooperation Council.
- Reliance of regional states on external forces, particularly the US, in guaranteeing their security.
- The major overlapping conflictive relationships (Iran-Iraq, Iraq-Kuwait), as well as minor cases (The operation of the Turkish armed forces in the north of Iraq) and unresolved territorial disputes (UAE-Iran, Saudi Arabia-Yemen, etc.).
- The special role of international organizations in monitoring, guarding, patrolling, and implementing the international sanctions regimes against certain states.

In recent years, Russian diplomacy has exerted great effort to resolve the question of improving the enforcement of international sanctions. UN Deputy Secretary-General and Director-General of the UN European headquarters in Geneva, Vladimir Petrovsky, noted in a message to an international conference on sanctions held in Moscow on 4 April 2000 that the present-day practice of enforcing compulsory measures in relation to individual states does not always yield expected results and takes a heavy toll on the mostly civilian population. His fact-finding missions to Libya in 1992 and 1997 led to a report submitted to the UN "citing clear and incontrovertible proofs that the sanctions are in essence selective. By striking against the economic and social sectors of the society, they affect above all the most vulnerable groups of population. All this has strengthened my conviction that the international community has to transform its instruments in a way to ensure the observance of a minimal 'humanitarian threshold'. This threshold is the line beyond which the final political aim of using such means can no longer justify the extent of human suffering it causes." Enlarging the idea in the same sanctions conference, Russia's Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov said, "in enforcing any sanctions regime, it remains the most important task to provide the essential commodities for the civilian population. It must be assured of an untrammelled and indiscriminate access to humanitarian aid. In turn, the international humanitarian organizations must not fall within sanction-based restrictions, which could hinder their work in countries on which sanctions are imposed."

Russian politicians and strategic analysts also strive to make their contribution to the idea of creating a collective security system in the Middle East, which has a direct bearing on the Gulf subregion. A. Baklanov, a Russian diplomat specializing in the Middle East proposes to examine confidence-building measures (CBMs) in terms of different dimensions, which include the sphere of application, the extent of legal entrenchment, and functional design.<sup>1</sup>

Since this proposal, which was published in Moscow, comes from an official in the Russian Foreign Ministry, it is worth dwelling upon it in greater detail. In terms of application, the author believes it is appropriate to speak of two main categories and, correspondingly, interpretations of CBMs. The first category concerns the declarative and politico-legal confidence-building measures. The declarative CBMs are statements made by states, which "strictly speaking, do not bear an international legal character and, as a rule, represent a list of the most general principles and norms of behavior of nations in the field of security." These politico-legal CBMs are "called upon

to bolster the declared intentions (principles of behavior) of the parties by the creation of a corresponding system of commitments with a view towards 'leading' the CBMs to the level of international legal norms."

The second category includes CBMs of a technical-organizational and functional character, "creating a specific operational environment for practical implementation of the negotiated security regime". These are the various ways of ensuring transparency (like exchange of data on military doctrines, budgets, concrete military activity, notification on troop movements, the holding of maneuvers, missile launchings etc.), the creation of special security regimes (zones), etc. As the Russian diplomat writes, decisions in the domain of organizational guidance determine "which joint body of states will be carrying out the negotiated 'set' of CBMs and in what form." If we are, however, to speak of other kinds of measures—those of monitoring and control, "they mostly determine the practical, including technical, aspects of monitoring, control over fulfillment of the decisions taken, as well as the range of organizations and persons that are entrusted to perform these functions".

In general, this classification is inspired by the corresponding experience of the European continent of the Cold War era. This experience led to the creation of the CSCE (then OSCE) and now many politicians are proposing to extend it both to the entire Middle Eastern region and to its component part, the Gulf. Often ignored in the process are both the miscalculations contained in the European experience and the difficulties involved in transferring any experience from one region to another. Besides collective security systems in areas lying beyond Europe, notably in Latin America and Southeast Asia, they also have many positive elements requiring examination and careful study in devising an appropriate regime for the Gulf states. Characteristically, regional regimes markedly differ from each other. Thus for the ASEAN an important principle is strict non-interference in each other's affairs, presupposing a renunciation of the forms of pressure practiced in other regions. The European experience, including in CBMs, is peculiar in that it was born in conditions of severe bloc confrontation and, on a broader scale, general global bipolarity.

This does not mean that Europe's valuable experience is not applicable to other areas. The essence of the matter, however, consists in the necessary differentiation between the universal features of this experience (say, the entire classification of CBMs and the worked-out mechanism of its application) and those elements

that have an apparent regional context. The realities of the epoch and the region make us refrain from any mechanical transfer of the entire architecture and individual structural elements, of even the most successfully functioning regional security system, to another region (in this case, the Gulf which possesses many rich singular features in addition). They warn us against copying particular institutions and mechanisms, without rejecting the universality of approaches, goals, tasks, and functions bolstered by globalization.

Correction of experience is necessary in view of a dual set of circumstances: geographic and historical. Let us assume that an exchange of information on the activities of territorial groups as an important CBM reflects the specifics of a region in which there are grounds to speak about the sources of such danger for a number of states. Given terrorism's threat to present-day international security, exchange of information on these groups addresses a global concern as well. In principle, the clear-cut identification of risks and threats to security for the Gulf should underlie the approach towards ensuring security, both on the national and regional levels. This said, for a number of Gulf states one may identify a number of risks and threats, especially of a non-traditional kind, which, for other countries, do not play a significant role or are totally absent. By way of example one may cite reliance on a foreign work force as a risk factor.

Going back to the ideas voiced in the Russian press and stemming from the Russian Foreign Ministry, one can reduce the options and patterns for changing political geography with a view towards building security safeguards for the Middle Eastern states to three:

1. "Drawing" the countries of the region closer to the already existing extraregional security patterns and military-political structures.
2. A "selective" system of mutual guarantees and checks (the formation of various kinds of "axes", "triangles", and so forth).
3. The creation of a regional security system on a universal basis (that is, for all).

One can hardly doubt the numerous advantages of the third option. However, in order to bring it about one should overcome many obstacles and difficulties of both the objective and subjective kind. To surmount the objective obstacles, one has first of all to ensure that the states of the region and global actors become interested in the creation of such a system, and then provide reliable

security safeguards. To remove the subjective obstacles, one has to build first and foremost an atmosphere of trust.

In the 1990s, the Russian leaders repeatedly put forward initiatives dealing with security of the Middle East in general and the Gulf in particular, demonstrating continued interest in the affairs of the region despite changes in the system of Russia's foreign policy priorities compared to that of USSR. It is useful to recall Moscow's activity in the last year of the USSR's existence with respect to the Iraq-Kuwait crisis and its attempt to play an independent role in the settlement of the conflict. Among the initiatives in recent years one may note the proposal of Russia's Foreign Minister of the day, Yevgeni Primakov, expressed in his visit to Cairo in October 1997. The Russian minister proposed the adoption a code of behavior in the domain of security for the Middle East, which would be premised on the following assumptions:

- Lasting and enduring security of each state in the region can only be ensured with a peaceful settlement in all the negotiating avenues of the Middle Eastern peace process.
- The national security of any state in the region cannot be ensured by purely military-technical means.
- The security of some cannot be based on the infringement on the security of others.
- Given the direct or indirect involvement of the countries of the region, the security of conflicting parties cannot be "locked in". It is necessary to get Iran, Turkey, North Africa, the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf, and also Iraq involved in the "Middle East security zone".
- The security of the Middle Eastern countries cannot be based on the opposing strategic alliances and groupings, which rely on outside forces and structures.
- International legality is the foundation of security and stability. What is necessary is commitment and continuity with respect to the bilateral and international treaties and agreements.
- There has to be resolute combat against all forms and varieties of terrorism and extremism for whatever reasons, religious included. Peace must not be hostage to terrorists.
- A renunciation of weapons of mass destruction and the eventual creation of a WMD-free zone.
- Mutual cutbacks on military budgets by the regional states with resources to be channeled towards the needs of development, including multilateral regional economic cooperation. Peace

with neighbors is cheaper and more profitable than the upkeep of first-class armies.

- Unconditional mutual respect towards the unique cultural and religious heritage of any people, freedom of denomination for all confessions, and the provision of untrammelled access of the believers to the holy places in Jerusalem and other parts of the region.
- A just solution to the humanitarian problems of the region, including the settlement of the refugee problem acceptable to all sides.
- Development of regional economic cooperation and the creation of an integrated economic system for the Middle East.

The Russian diplomacy views the adoption of such a code of behavior as a path towards the next stage. This next stage would include the holding of bilateral and multilateral consultations with the aim of working out a general and comprehensive model of Middle Eastern security for the 21st century. The final step would be the entrenchment thereof in a politically and legally binding document—a charter or treaty for Middle Eastern security.

Examining these proposals by the Foreign Minister at a later date, A Baklanov of the Russian Foreign Ministry suggested the possibility of including other questions. Notably, he suggested a conception of defense sufficiency in conformity with the realities of the region, the achievement of agreements on weapons ceilings, and a register of the parties' concrete commitments in the context of the creation of a zone free from WMD. The notion of code of behavior echoes the ideas contained in other conceptions of regional security for the Middle East. Thus a document drafted by the SIPRI Middle East Expert Group speaks of the necessity to elaborate "a set of guiding principles for a regional security regime" (Jones 1998). A great amount of work in that direction was done in the framework of the Arms Control and Regional Security Working Group of the multilateral talks of the Middle East peace process. Such principles are also contained in quite a few other fundamental international documents, starting with the UN Charter. Summarizing them, the SIPRI document mentions the following guiding principles:

- Equal rights for all peoples and recognition of their right to self-determination;
- Non-interference in the internal affairs of others and respect for the sovereign equality of states;

- Settlement of disputes by peaceful means, including the renunciation of the use of threat or threat of use of force to settle disputes;
- Recognition of the right to legitimate means of self-defense within an overall commitment to ensure that military establishments are kept to the lowest level consistent with purely self-defense needs; and
- Commitment to the principle that weapons of mass destruction should be abolished.

As far as the Russian politicians are concerned, the desire to rely on the mechanisms of bilateral and multilateral consultations in the framework of preparatory measures to create a security system is clear. This desire was reflected in the measures taken by the new Russian leadership at the beginning of 2000 to launch the mechanisms of multinational negotiations. The Middle Eastern format of collective security obviously differs from the Gulf format. However, an approach towards the security of the Gulf may be based either on a conception of an autonomous system or a conception that incorporates the Gulf into the Middle Eastern system. From this perspective, the proposals worked out by Russian diplomacy incorporates the Gulf states either through their entry into the Middle Eastern system, or through the extension to the Gulf of the same measures and mechanisms that have been proposed for the larger system.

In this connection, one may still address another concrete idea lodged in the above-mentioned program, namely that of "intermediate" forms of leading the region towards the formation of a collective security system. Here a "useful role", writes Baklanov, "might be played by the holding, possibly under UN aegis, of an international forum on questions of security, confidence-building measures, and lowering the level of military confrontation. A specific feature of such a forum might be the participation in its work of both governmental and non-governmental organizations, as well as the leading experts in the field of regional security. An open, informal character of such a gathering might facilitate the involvement of representatives of such states which until recently had a negative or sceptical view of the idea of forming mechanisms of regional security for building stability and peace in the region. The convocation of the forum could also make it possible to identify and apply the ideas and proposals of specialists from various countries, which might help in finding an optimum working model."

In conclusion, it must be said that the implementation of confidence-building measures, the repudiation of violence as a means to

resolve disputed issues, and commitment to methods of peaceful dialogue and cooperation are priority steps in the creation of a comprehensive collective security regime in the subregion. Russia could play a part in designing and implementing these measures, providing international security guarantees to the states of the region, and the subsequent monitoring and international control over the observance of the understanding reached. As one of the permanent members of the UN Security Council, Russia carries a special responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and stability.

#### Note

1. Baklanov's view on CBMs in the Middle East can be found in articles in 1998 and 1999 issues of *Mezhdunarodnaya Zhissn*. All the quotations in this text from Baklanov are drawn from these issues.

## CHAPTER 8

# American Perspectives on Gulf Security

Stephen Zunes

In the decade since the Gulf War, the United States—with the support of Great Britain—has thrown its immense military, diplomatic, and economic weight behind the monarchies of the Persian Gulf. Though they make up less than 10 percent of the Arab world's total population, they control most of its wealth and some of the most strategically important territory in the globe. Prior to the war, it was difficult for the United States or Great Britain to engage in military exercises or even arrange a port call without asking for permission months in advance. This is not the case anymore. While American and British military personnel wear civilian clothes so as not to offend the local population, they are difficult to miss in the hotels, marketplaces, and restaurants of the Gulf states. The Anglo-American military role is based on a desire to fill in a perceived strategic vacuum, as a staging ground for combat training, and to strengthen military ties with the Arab states. Underlying this is the assumption of both the United States and Great Britain that these countries have an obligation to meet the security needs of the six allied Arab monarchies, which make up the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Underlying this presence is the perceived threat to the Gulf posed by Iraq and Iran, the two largest countries in the region.

This post-Gulf War system led by the United States has given the GCC states an unprecedented role in Middle East security and diplomacy, surpassing the League of Arab States as the leading inter-Arab organization and effectively putting any pretense of pan-Arabism to rest. This has heralded a long-sought triumph for US policymakers who wanted to divide the oil-rich monarchies and their allies from the potentially radical nationalists of the poorer Arab countries. To some, this is a realistic and pragmatic recognition of