CHAPTER IV
CHAPTER IV

FOREIGN AND DEFENCE POLICIES

Our foreign policy is based on the fact that the UAE is an Islamic, Arabian Gulf Country, a major oil exporting country, a part of the Third World and a member of the international community.

Ahmed Khalifa al Suweidi
The then Foreign Minister of the UAE in April 1978.

The United Arab Emirates' foreign policy tries to balance between the ideals the country upholds and its vital national interests. The UAE is opposed to imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, racism and the great power intervention in different parts of the world. It strives for the implementation of the principles embodied in the charter of the United Nations and, in order to realise its objective, it makes use of a wide spectrum of international as well as regional forums including the Arab League, the organisation of the Islamic Conference, the Non-Aligned Movement and the Gulf Cooperation Council.
As in the case of any country, the UAE's history, geography and economy have had a significant bearing on its foreign and defence policies. It is aptly said that a country's foreign policy is a logical extension of its domestic policy.

The basic factors behind the UAE's foreign policy are as follows:

1. Being a colony of the British for nearly a century and a half, the country is naturally concerned with safeguarding its freedom. The withdrawal of the British was announced when many in the former Trucial states had thought it was too early for them to stand on their own. However, the initial uncertainties having been overcome, the newly formed United Arab Emirates had successfully tackled the question of its survival. Two points need to be highlighted here. First, in 1971 when the UAE was formed with six emirates (i.e., excluding Ras al - Khaimah which joined the federation as the seventh member in 1972), there was not much evidence to suggest that the federal experiment would succeed. The two emirates - Qatar and Bahrain - that were to join the federation never joined. The seven emirates that formed the UAE could not thus so far make their union permanent. Second, the fledgling federation inherited territorial disputes with Iran and Saudi Arabia, its two powerful neighbours, and intra-UAE territorial differences were equally distracting. Therefore, it was rightly felt that achieving a broad international recognition as an independent and sovereign state was crucial for its survival. That is why the UAE gave
utmost importance to foreign and defence policies ignoring the advice of the British who held the view that the UAE should concentrate more on domestic front.

2. Its Arab and Islamic roots have helped the UAE to evolve a world view that it shares with other Arab and Islamic countries. However, these ethnic and religious identities are not always identical. Often they stand diametrically opposite to each other. For example, it was easy for any Arab/Islamic country to take a stand on the question of Palestinians' right to self-determination. But issues like Iran - Iraq war - a confrontation between an Arab and a Persian country both of whom are Islamic and the Iraqi invasion and annexation of Kuwait where the parties are both Arab and Islamic exposed the limitations of ethnicity and religion as a dominant ideology of foreign policy. The Islamic virtues of equality of all human beings and a sense of responsibility for less privileged individuals and countries have given a progressive orientation to its attempts to extend economic help to other third world countries. Though priority is given to Arab/Islamic countries, the UAE gives aid to many other developing countries.

3. The UAE's total area is 77,700 sq. kms and its population was 2.2 million in 1994. Though the federation among the seven emirates has enhanced their overall security and bargain power, specific events have exposed the vulnerabilities. Immediately after the withdrawal of Britain from the Gulf in 1971, Iran had occupied the three Islands of Abu Musa, the Greater and Lesser Tumbs which the UAE regards its territory.
Several diplomatic attempts to reclaim the three islands have failed. Other events that adversely affected the security of the UAE are the Iranian revolution in 1979, the Iran - Iraq war in which Iran resorted to attacking commercial oil tankers and the Gulf war in 1990-91.

UAE AND THE WORLD

The UAE joined the United Nations in 1971 itself. It also joined the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). It is a number in several specialised Agencies of the UN, viz., IAEA, WMO, etc.

Soon after its formation, the UAE started maintaining close relations with the Arab countries as well as with others. In August 1971, it signed a friendship treaty with Britain which became an important arms supplier. As of 1994 54 countries maintained diplomatic missions in the country. But the UAE maintains missions in 32 countries only.

In 1971, the UAE was admitted as a member of the organisation of the Islamic Conference and the eighteenth member-state of the Arab League. It joined the Non-Aligned Movement in 1973. It is a member in several regional and international organisations.

1. Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) established in 1960. The UAE is a member with 11 other
countries. Initially Abu Dhabi took membership in 1967, after formation of the federation, it got transferred to the UAE in 1974.

2. Organisation of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC), established in 1968. The UAE took membership with 9 others.

3. Council of Arab Economic Unity (CAEU) established in 1964. UAE is a member of this organisation.

4. Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD), established in 1968, and began operation in 1973. The UAE is a member along with 21 other Arab States.

5. The UAE makes contributions through the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (ABEDA), which was founded in 1973 by the Arab League.

6. Islamic Development Bank (IDB) established in 1975. UAE is a member with 45 other countries.

7. Arab Authority for Agricultural Investment and Development (AAAID) established in 1976. Its aim is to accelerate agricultural development in the Arab world and ensure food security. UAE is one of the AAAID’s 13 member-countries.

8. Arab Monetary Fund (AMF) established in 1977 with headquarters in Abu Dhabi, to encourage Arab Economic integration and development by assisting member countries balance of payments, coordinating their monetary policies.

9. Co-operation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, popularly known as Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) was established by Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE on 25th May 1981.
10. Arab Trade Financing Program (ATFP) established in 1989 with headquarters in Abu Dhabi to develop and liberalise trade between Arab Countries and to enhance competitiveness of Arab Exports.

11. The UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) was established in 1974 by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to provide facilities of a wider scope for those countries previously served by the UN Economic and Social Office in Beirut (UNESOB). The name Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) was adopted in 1985. UAE is a member along with Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, PLO Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen.

The UAE is also a member in the following bodies: International Banking of Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) (World Bank), International Development Association (IDA), International Finance Corporation (IFC), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), International Maritime Organisation (IMO), International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), International Telecommunication Union (ITU), UN Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO), Universal Post Union (UPU), World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) and World Meteorological Organisation (WMO).

DECISION - MAKING PROCESS

It is a difficult task for any newly independent and small country to formulate and execute an effective
foreign policy. In the early 1970s, the total population of the UAE was barely 400,000. The federation remained fragmented. Not until May 1975 did the Federal Security Council (FSC) grant the Foreign Ministry the exclusive right to deal with foreign correspondence and relations. Added to the lack of consensus among the UAE emirates as to what were the main features of their foreign policy, was the absence of well-trained diplomatic corpse. The then minister of state for foreign affairs, Saif Ghubash had said in 1974:

We should not exaggerate the role that the UAE can play in international relations. Our ambassadors are mostly new graduates and hence the broadening of the scope of political representations without qualified cadres would not serve its purpose.¹

A federal law in 1972 empowered the President, the Federal Supreme Council and the Federal Council of Ministers to formulate the country’s foreign policy. Being the head of the executive, the President is more directly concerned with the day to day affairs of the foreign policy. The FSC is the body in which the rulers of all UAE emirates are members and it has the final authority to ratify international treaties and agreements that the country accedes to. It is evident that this arrangement reflects the ground realities of the federation. Any policy, whether related to domestic or foreign policy, has to get the endorsement of all the

emirates. At times, this is both difficult as well as time-consuming process.

Moreover, as per the Article 124 of the constitution, the federal authorities are required to obtain approval from the individual emirates:
Prior to the conclusion of any international Agreement or Treaty which might affect the status of any emirate, the federal authorities concerned shall explore the opinion of this particular emirate before hand and in the event of a dispute the matter shall be referred to the Higher Federal Court for a decision.

Agreement among all emirates and several functionaries is imperative and, in the opinion of al-Alkim Hassan Hamdan, the UAE example resembles that of the bureaucratic model in which consensus and compromise are the hallmark.²

However, one can not underestimate the role and capacity of the President in this field. The aspects that work in his favour are:

1. The FSC's infrequent meetings allow him to exercise de facto control.
2. He represents the country before foreign states.
3. He appoints the country's diplomatic representatives and accepts the credentials of foreign diplomats to the UAE.

² ibid., p. 96.
4. Most of the foreign-policy decisions are made by him with the help of a close inner circle.

5. Being the ruler of the richest and most powerful emirate in the federation, the President is naturally placed in a better position to have his way.³

The other important organs involved in making foreign policy are the Federal National Council, the Federal Council of Ministers, and the Foreign Ministry. The FNC is only a consultative body with no actual powers. However, the government has to notify the FNC all treaties and agreements it concludes with other countries. The FNC can participate in, or even initiate, a public debate on the country's foreign policy. Over the years, the FNC discussed such matters as the foreign aid policy. In 1983, for example, it called on the President to mediate between Iran and Iraq. The other two bodies, the Federal Council of ministers and the Foreign ministry occupy a less important position. They help the government in formulating policy. The Foreign ministry implements the policy and reports its working to the FCM.

ARAB & ISLAMIC FACTORS

The Palestinian Problem: Analysing Palestinian question and explaining its dimensions, President Zayed said:

³ bid.
Arab States neither want nor seek war. Israel on the other hand, harbours and desires and lusts for war. The proof lies in its perpetual pursuance of its aggressive policy and its persistence on establishing more settlements in Arab territories. The Arab world would never resort to arms except for self-defence.

The UAE's interest in the Palestinian question started much before the independence of the country in 1971. One can trace back the supporting trends during the Palestine revolt of 1936-39. Then it was a unified act by the Omani coast. In 1965, the first office of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) started in Doha. Later, Sheikh Zayed encouraged Palestinian liberation movements to approach the new regime and with the defeat of the Palestinian forces in June 1967 war, he realised the need to accord them material as well as financial support. He instructed his personal advisor Ahmad al-Suwaidi to channel money to the Palestinians. These funds were drawn in favour of Egyptian government through the Arab Bank in Beirut. Zayed saw it as his nationalist duty to support the sister Arab states in the war against Israel. Thereafter, the Abu Dhabi government made payments to the confrontation states viz., Egypt, Syria and Jordan. But the details were never publicised. Further more, though being a British protectorate Abu Dhabi showed sympathy towards the Palestinian cause, by releasing government decrees in 1968. One such decree had held that any condemnation, arrest or deportation of any Palestinian in Abu Dhabi should have prior permission of the ruler. A
1969 decree enforced a 5 percent tax on Palestinians working in Abu Dhabi. The collected money was to be spent for the Palestinian cause. Another decree in the same year held that Abu Dhabi's financial support should go to the Palestinian National Fund (PNF) which represented all Palestinian groups including al Fatah. The PLO opened its representative office in Abu Dhabi in late 1969. As was the case in other Arab countries, the Fatah got the lion's share of the support given by Abu Dhabi. It received aid three times more than the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). In fact, the Fatah's share was commensurate with its popular base.

Three factors were instrumental in shaping the UAE's policy towards Palestine: Islamic Solidarity; Arab Nationalism; Gulf Security.

Islam:
Islam is the main driving force behind the UAE to go with the Muslim countries. President Zayed gives statements regarding the welfare of the fellow brothers. For example, when he visited Bangladesh in May 1984, he declared that the liberation of the holy places was a Muslim's most important duty and this could be fulfilled only through the solidarity of the whole Muslim community. Thus, the Islamic bond is seen as imposing on the UAE an obligation towards Palestine in general and Jerusalem in particular. Jerusalem is regarded as the third holiest place by all Muslims.
Arab Nationalism:
The demand to form new states on the grounds of Arab Nationalist feelings was reflected in 1936-39 Palestinian revolt which directly influenced the Arab population of the Gulf. It ultimately led to the rejection of the colonial policies, and with the outbreak of hostilities in Palestine at the end of the world war II, all countries of the Gulf with the exception of Muscat, had experienced a wide mobilisation of public opinion in favour of Palestine.⁴

The emergence of Israel in the Islamic and Arab West Asia had created nationalist and anti-colonial feelings among many groups in West Asia and the Gulf. Though the people of Omani coast Emirates were regarded as politically backward, even they responded quite surprisingly, when they came to know of the events in Palestine. During the Ramadan (Yom Kippur) war of 1973, President Zayed was prepared to contribute the UAE’s financial and oil power to the struggle to regain Palestine. According to Anthony Cordesman, the issue has put pressure on each Gulf State to build up its forces. It forced the conservative Gulf States to distance themselves from the US and tended to separate the Arab Gulf states from Iran which had tactically supported Israel with oil and showed little interest in the Arab cause.⁵


The UAE officials consistently insisted on the point of Arab Nationalism being one of the main determinants of the country's policy on Palestine. In a speech on 2 December 1972 marking the first National Day, the President stated that "our faith in the Palestine issue is part of our faith in our Arabism, our history and our destiny, as is the case in the Arab world as a whole". The Central focus of the political education of Gulf youth and of the actions of the Gulf's political leaders, to the extent that future relations of the Gulf states with foreign powers will be determined by the latter's willingness to accept the Palestine cause as 'just' and their commitment to the Palestinian self-determination. The UAE regards itself as part of the Arab Nation. It shares the cultural religious and linguistic legacy of the Arabs.

Gulf Security:
In addition to Islam and Arab Nationalism having been the factors for the UAE's policy on Palestine, regional security in the Gulf has also been a primary concern motivating governments in the Gulf to take a special interest in the problem. The "spill-over" effect of the Palestinian problem was regarded as capable of adversely affecting the Gulf-security at least in three ways:

---


7 Bichara, n. 4, p. 179.
1. The Gulf States' unequivocal support to the Palestinian cause invited the attention of Israel. Illustrative of the attendant dangers of this attention was the Israeli bombardment of a nuclear reactor in Iraq in 1981.

2. The continuation of the Palestinian problem would lead to further influx of Palestinian refugees into the Gulf. Known for their radical views and their legacy of political struggle the Palestinians were regarded as a bad influence on the domestic population. According to J.D. Anthony, UAE officials were concerned that, failing a settlement of the conflict, the emirates might become an Arabian outpost of Fatah-land, replete with camps of armed quarrels. Were this to occur, the consensus was that the emirate system would be hard-pressed to withstand the strain. Hence, they had been convinced that the perpetuation of the Palestinian problem was the most persistent and pervasive destabilising force in the region.8

3. With its Islamic and Arab dimensions, the Palestinian cause did not give any option for the Gulf rulers except for extending their full support to it. Failure to do so would have seriously undermined their legitimacy.

Zayed’s Personality:
Even before the formation of the federation, Sheikh Zayed showed deep concern over the problem. He was always recognised in the Arab world as a shrewd and patient mediator who would use all the forces of persuasion at his disposal to bring together other Arab states who might temporarily be at logger heads. He was the first one to impose an oil embargo on the US in retaliation for its unconditional support for Israel during the 1973 war. The UAE exported 12 percent of its oil to the US before the war. Dubai did not comply until few days later. Zayed is reported to have said that ‘Arab Petroleum is no more precious than Arab blood’. Further he said he was ready to sacrifice his life for the Arab cause which indicated the President’s sense of commitment to Arab Nationalism.

When the October War started in 1973, the world was taken aback by a double and simultaneous surprises. First was the overwhelming victory accomplished by Egyptian and Syrian forces across the Suez canal and Golan Heights. Second was the solidarity demonstrated by all Arab states during the conflict. But the greatest surprise of all was the UAE’s decision to use oil as an instrument of policy. On the third day of the war, President Zayed was the first Arab ruler to announce a donation of $100 million to support the Arab war fronts. Egypt received $60 million and Syria $40 million. He imposed war tax on all

9 Emirates News (Abu Dhabi) 6 August 1986.

10 Hamdi Tammam, Zayed Bin Sultan Al-Nuhayyan, Ministry of Information and Culture, United Arab Emirates, (abu Dhabi, No date).
Historically, the Palestinian question was instrumental in sowing the seeds of nationalist tendencies and inspired the anti-British feelings among the people. During the fifties and sixties, whenever an incident occurred which was related to the Palestinian problem, people would march in the streets and shout anti-British and anti-Israel slogans. The relation between the Palestinian question and the Gulf is natural. Israel and the west were regarded as the two faces of imperialism. In a sense, Zayed was responding to the popular sentiments.

The people individually and the governments collectively contributed financial support to the Palestinians. The armed forces donated a half of their salaries to Palestinians and Lebanese fighting Israel, and the staff of Dubai international airport contributed $40,000 in 1982.\(^\text{11}\) In addition to the financial support, people went to PLO office in Abu Dhabi and signed up to go and fight in Lebanon.

In schools and University, local students came in contact with fellow students from other parts of the Arab world. To a large extent, this interaction had made the

youth in the UAE politically more radical and stronger Arab Nationalists than their elders.\textsuperscript{12}

According to Cordesman, the Palestinian issue was a popular cause whose importance was always on the rise. In 1984, virtually every citizen in the Gulf under the age of 25 had grown up in a political atmosphere, that made the Palestinian issue a \textit{sine qua non} of Arab consciousness. It permeated the Gulf media, education and youth movements.\textsuperscript{13}

**Peace Efforts:**
By the end of the 1970s the Arab states of the Gulf and Iran were totally involved in the Arab-Israel problem. The UAE, together with its Gulf neighbours, favoured a negotiated settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict based on the UN resolutions 242 and 348 and acknowledging the right of the Palestinians to self-determination.\textsuperscript{14} The UAE accepted the resolution 242 and called on the world community to take immediate action to stop Israel from continuing to build settlements in the West Bank, Gaza and on the Golan Heights. President Zayed justified the imposition of oil embargo on the grounds that this was the only way-out to assert Arab rights and get the support for the anti-Zionist movement.


\textsuperscript{13} Cordesman, n. 5, p. 78.

\textsuperscript{14} Peck, n. 12, p. 148.
After 1973, there were many peace initiatives by different parties including the Arabs themselves. For the first time the UAE initiated such a process in 1975 and invited the US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger to take part. The Arabs categorically explained their stand and said that the lasting peace could only be achieved if two preconditions were fulfilled:

1. Total withdrawal of Israeli forces from all occupied Arab territories;
2. The recognition of the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people.

During the Camp David Accords, Sheikh Zayed at first attempted to reconcile the opposing camps. This plan failed. Later the UAE followed Saudi Arabia's policy and finally rejected the camp David Accords.\(^\text{15}\) Even then it tried to maintain an evenhanded policy.

The Arab Summit meetings of Algiers 1973 and Rabat 1974 provided the basis for the UAE stand. The UAE attended the 1978 Baghdad Arab summit conference convened in response to Sadat's peace agreement with Israel. The final resolution stressed that "the struggle for the restoration of Arab rights in Palestine and the occupied Arab territories is a Pan-Arab responsibility".\(^\text{16}\) As a member of the Arab League, the UAE accepted the summit decision to expel Egypt and the transfer of League's head quarters from Cairo to Tunis. And all members were bound

\(^{15}\) *Middle East Contemporary Survey* (Tel Aviv), Vol. II 1977-78, p. 456.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., p. 5.
to sever diplomatic relations with Egypt. Regarding financial contributions, they agreed to contribute $400 million annually to support Syria, Jordan and the PLO. Though formal diplomatic relations between the UAE and Egypt severed, but they did not break off all contact with each other. A full UAE diplomatic mission was operating from Cairo, but there was no ambassador. It was operated with a charge 'd affaire.

The UAE found Camp David Accords objectionable on two counts:

1. the agreements disregarded the principle that the annexation of lands by force was illegitimate;
2. they ignored with impunity the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination.

The UAE was the first among Arab countries to criticise the United States' support to Israel. When the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps massacre took place in 1982, the UAE immediately held the US responsible for having sponsored the massacre. The crime was committed by the Christian Phalangists with the connivance of the Israeli army.

President Zayed bluntly declared that "the Israelis would never have been able to perpetrate their savage practices without the tremendous support (Israel) had received from the west, especially the United States".17

---

West Europe:
During the 1973 war UAE urged Britain to support the Arab cause. The then British Prime Minister Edward Heath pointed out that Britain supported UN Security Council resolution 242, which called on Israel to withdraw to the pre-1967 borders. Japan, which imports oil from the UAE, displayed the same attitude as Britain.

However, the Palestinian question did not influence the relations between the UAE and West Europe for the following reasons:

1. The UAE has close historical ties with West Europe in general and Britain in particular.
2. The UAE depends on western Arms, mainly British and French (the first military cooperation agreement between France and the UAE was signed in 1977).
3. Most of the major oil companies operating in the UAE are owned by the West European countries.
4. The UAE has a large economic investment in Europe.
5. The fragmented political situation in the Arab world compelled the UAE to follow a conciliatory policy towards the west.

Third World:
The UAE maintained good relations with almost all third world countries. Among the third world countries, importance is given to Arab and or Muslim countries.
The UAE contributes a substantial part of its GNP in assistance to the developing world. Of course, even in that also the lion’s share goes to the Arab and Islamic countries. At times, the UAE would sever diplomatic relations with any country which went against the wishes of the Palestinian people. There were many instances when it broke off relations with even Arab and Islamic countries:

1. The UAE opposed the Turkish invasion and annexation of Cyprus in 1974. Firstly, it was against the principle of non-interference. Also, Cyprus was a member of non-aligned movement and strong supporter of Palestinian people and Arab cause. On the other hand, being a Muslim state, Turkey joined CENTO and maintained diplomatic relations with Israel.

2. As a result of its policy not to maintain diplomatic relations with countries that maintained relations with Israel, the UAE broke off relations with Costa Rica and Zaire in 1981 and 1982 respectively when these countries established relations with Tel Aviv.

3. The UAE showed support to the African countries, and provided substantial aid to Uganda, Somalia, Mauritania and Mali. Moreover, the UAE constantly condemned the Apartheid system in South Africa, and supported many African National movements.

PLO leader Yasir Arafat praised the UAE for supporting the Palestinian cause and acknowledged the financial help given by the UAE. It may be noted that there were minute
differences of opinion held by the UAE rulers towards the Palestinian question. For example, Dubai opposed the federal government’s decision to allow a PLO office to be opened on its territory. Dubai always preferred to contribute money to Palestinian welfare and social service rather than to military activities of the PLO.

The year 1979 was the turning point in relations between PLO and the Gulf countries. Many incidents changed the regimes’ attitudes towards PLO. The Camp David Accords had revealed the split among Arab countries. The Iranian revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan made it imperative for the Gulf countries to re-orient their foreign and defence policies. Another major event of great consequence -- the Iran-Iraq war -- was to follow in a couple of years. These developments increased the importance of regional security as all of them directly affected the security of the Gulf. The recognition of this fact was made formal in 1981 when six countries of the Gulf had established the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC).

Iran (1971-80):
From the beginning, the UAE was conscious enough to maintain good relations with Iran. Same policy was followed upto the downfall of the Shah in 1979. The geographical location of the Gulf States is highly vulnerable. Being a militarily superior in Gulf, Iran occupied three islands which belonged to the UAE on 30 November 1971. This was created an insecurity complex among the UAE emirates. Dubai, which enjoyed good
bilateral relations with Iran, was unwilling to pursue a policy similar to that of the federal government. Indeed, Dubai maintained friendly relations even though the federation did not establish diplomatic relations with Iran until the end of 1972. In turn, the Shah of Iran supported Dubai in pursuing a policy independent of the federation. According to some reports the Shah even favoured the prospect of Dubai going it alone.

Due to this the federal government always wanted to maintain good relations with Iran so that the Shah would view UAE as a state rather than as a group of individual emirates. At the same time Iran did not have access to pipelines and needed uninterrupted routes. This compelled it to adopt a militant and uncompromising attitude towards the maintenance of freedom of navigation in the Gulf.

The Shah was determined to maintain the upper hand in Gulf affairs. This was encouraged by the United States to follow a "Twin Pillar Policy". Iran's policy always favoured regional collaboration, but there was one point that must be made clear, namely, this did not concern countries situated outside the Gulf.\(^\text{18}\) In the changing circumstances which followed the British withdrawal, Iran, in its search for regional security, sought to coordinate its policies with Saudi Arabia. In the autumn of 1968 the Shah paid a state visit to Saudi Arabia. This

apparently marked the starting point of a new relationship between the two countries.\textsuperscript{19}

Iran claimed not only the three islands of UAE, but also claimed parts of Bahrain coast. However, the Iranian-Saudi rapprochement and Riyadh's commitment to safeguard the Arabism of Bahrain apparently prompted the Shah to declare at a Press Conference in India in January 1969 his willingness to accept the right of the Bahraini people to self-determination.\textsuperscript{20} The Shah further stated that if proposal for a referendum in Bahrain were rejected, he would recognise neither a Gulf federation of which Bahrain was a member nor an independent state of Bahrain.\textsuperscript{21}

According to M.S. Agwani, a further reason for the Shah's objection to the federation was based on his apprehension that a union of economically disparate and politically unseasoned emirates might fall an easy prey in future to army officers or radical groups or both. He, therefore, favoured an alternative solution that stipulated independent statehood for the relatively viable emirates such as Abu Dhabi, Bahrain, Dubai and Qatar, and British protection for the rest.\textsuperscript{22} However,

\textsuperscript{19} A.M. Khalifa, \textit{The United Arab Emirates: Unity in Fragmentation} (London, 1979), p. 140.


\textsuperscript{22} Agwani, n. 19, p. 114.
Iran recognised the UAE only two days after its proclamation.

The Island Crisis

Iran, taking note of the "vacuum" created by the British withdrawal in 1971, occupied the three islands - The Abu Musa and the greater and lesser Tumb. Ras al-Khaimah and Sharjah, the two units of the UAE, made claims to these islands. Iran's occupation of the islands created suspicions about its motives in the minds of the smaller Arab states. Thus, Iran was perceived to be a threat to the status quo. Iran was determined to play its self-appointed role as 'police man of the Gulf. Tehran was ready to make a sacrifice and renounce its claim to Bahrain in the interest of stability and of good relations with its Arab neighbours. However, having climbed down once, it would have been very difficult for Iran to renounce its claim over the islands.23

According to Rouhallah Ramazani, the British plan to withdraw forces from the area in 1971 compelled Iran to specify its objectives:

1. to safeguard the Shah's regime against internal subversion sponsored by any hostile state or group;
2. to ensure uninterrupted passage through the strait of Hormuz, the Gulf and Shatt al-Arab waterway;

3. to protect Iranian resources and facilities on and off shore against any deliberate or accidental disruption.\textsuperscript{24}

Iran, therefore, determined to seize the islands due to the following reasons:

1. Freedom of navigation in this waterway at all times was essential for Iran and it depended upon the Gulf as the only outlet for its oil exports.

2. Iran needed to exploit its off shore oil resources and to protect not only its extensive oil installations at Kharq Island and elsewhere but its oil cargoes for the entire length of the waterway.

3. The preservation of the status quo around the Gulf was necessary to prevent take-overs by revolutionary elements that might threaten the survival of the present regime (the Shah) in Iran.\textsuperscript{25}

There were varied responses to this problem within the Arab world and outside. By and large, Arab countries condemned the Iranian seizing the disputed Islands by force. On December 5, 1971, Sheikh Zayed, the UAE President said, "we condemn the aggression by a neighbouring and friendly state. In the early twentieth


\textsuperscript{25} Khalifa, n. 19, p. 139. And also see, Alan R. Taylor, The Islamic Question in Middle East Politics (London; 1988), p. 67.
century, the British had resisted Iran’s claim to the islands and continued to regard Abu Musa and the two Tumbs as unquestionably Arab". The Shah categorically declared that: “we need them (the islands); we shall have them, no power on earth will stop us”.  

During 1974-78, the UAE officials consistently urged on the importance to strengthen the UAE-Iran relations. In 1975, for the first time president Zayed met the Shah in Algiers during the OPEC Summit conference. But the bilateral relations remained strained. In the territorial dispute between Ras al-Khaimah and Oman that lasted from October 1977 to April 1979, Tehran supported the Omani Coast, putting Iran in opposition not only to Ras al-Khaimah but also to the UAE as a whole. Efforts by the senior UAE officials to influence the Shah could not succeed.

The ruler of Ras al-Khaimah Sheikh Saqr was dissatisfied with the outcome and felt that he had been betrayed. Of course Iran had succeeded in influencing mediation in favour of Oman. The fall of the Shah and the success of the Islamic revolution did not, however, end the Iranian influence in the UAE. Instead, it created new problems for the federation.


Iraq (1971-80)

During 1960s, the Dhofar province in Oman became a centre of radical political activities. In 1969 the movement crystalised in the form of Dhofar Liberation Front and later the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman (PFLO). Egypt, South Yemen, Iraq and China assisted the PFLO in a variety of ways. This caused the monarchs of Saudi Arabia and Iran to co-ordinate their politics in an attempt to contain the spread of a radical movement in the region. The Shah sent Qabus Iranian troops to crush the Dhofari revolution. They remained in Oman until the Iranian revolution, when the new Iranian regime ordered the troops to withdraw. In 1968, despite its support for the PFLOAG, Iraq viewed the proposed federation (of the Omani Coast emirates) as a logical step to confront the covert and overt schemes against the Arab Character of the Gulf and its nationalism. On the other hand, Iraq refused to recognise the UAE unless measures were adopted against the Iranian occupation of the three islands. Iraq laid down two conditions for recognising the UAE:

1. the UAE should reject the Sharjah-Iran agreement over Abu Musa. A statement annulling this agreement should be issued.
2. the UAE should refrain from establishing diplomatic relations with Iran unless and until Tehran returned Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tumbs to Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah.

The UAE was unable to fulfill the conditions, although President Zayed was unhappy about Sharjah Iran agreement.
Later on from 1975-80 relations between the UAE and Iraq progressed steadily. There were no confrontations between them and both participated in Gulf conferences and projects.

**Iran - Iraq War**

Throughout the seventies and eighties, both Iran and Iraq, mainly the former, had been accused of interfering in the internal affairs of other states in the region. The 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran caused an insecurity complex, especially in the small but rich Arab Sheikhdoms, which were described by Ayatullah Khomeini as the "satanic regimes" to be thrown into the dustbin of history.

Being the first Shia regime in history, the Islamic Republic of Iran was seen as instigating local Shia populations in various Gulf states where Sunnis have been in power. For example, with over 100,000 inhabitants of Iranian origin, it was natural for UAE to feel uncomfortable with Iran. 29 Khomeini’s public calls to local people to overthrow their governments were widely resented. Known for his mastery of the Qoranic teachings, Imam Khomeini described monarchy as 'un-Islamic'. He criticized the Gulf monarchies for practicing 'American Islam' or 'Golden Islam' and for supporting the US -- the "Great Satan", the number one source of corruption on

---

earth. Khomeini recognized the right of people to overthrow their rulers when the latter became self-serving. Audio-cassettes of his speeches were made available in the entire Gulf. Further more, Iranian radio broadcasts of the same were reaching the people in the region.\textsuperscript{30} He described Iran’s struggle as a holy crusade and said the Islamic government would make war until victory.\textsuperscript{31} On an earlier occasion, Khomeini said: “we should try to export out revolution to the world. We should set aside the thought that we do not export our revolution if we remain in an enclosed environment we shall definitely face defeat”.\textsuperscript{32}

Though the call to export Islamic revolution to other countries sounds purely a religious affair, in doing so Iran sought to promote the ‘cardinal principle’ of its foreign policy. According to Rouhullah K. Ramazani, Khomeini’s world-view regards the existing international system as divided into two camps: the camp of the ‘oppressors’ led by both the US and the Soviet Union – the ‘Great Satan’ and the ‘Lesser Satan’ respectively – and the camp of the ‘oppressed’ consisting mainly but not exclusively, of the people of the Islamic and Third world nations.\textsuperscript{33} This world-view enabled Iran

\textsuperscript{30} Dilip Hiro, \textit{Inside the Middle East} (London; 1982), p. 87.


\textsuperscript{32} Ramazani, n. 24, p. 24.

to seek the overthrow of the status quo. Soon this policy started to have an impact in the Gulf.

1. In 1979, a prominent Iranian religious leader, Ayatollah Ruhani had threatened to lead a revolutionary movement for the “annexation” of Bahrain unless it adopted “an Islamic form of government similar to the one established in Iran”.
2. Iran was accused of supporting a ‘coup plot’ in Bahrain in December 1981.
3. Iranian involvement was suspected in the multiple bombings in Kuwait in December 1983.
4. Iran used the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca as one of the ways to export its revolution. Every year it sends around 100,000 to 150,000 Iranian pilgrims to propagate Khomeini’s brand of Islam.
5. Iran hosted many anti-government organizations of the Gulf. 34

Iran under Khomeini had sought to blunt the Shia edge of its revolution and endow it with a universal Islamic appeal. There are a significant number of Shias in its neighbours: Iraq has 55 to 65 percent Shias, Bahrain has the same number, Lebanon 20 to 35 percent, Kuwait 29 to 33 percent and the UAE has around 6.5 percent of Shias. 35 Surprisingly, there were less violent demonstrations in

the UAE, Oman, Bahrain and Kuwait by the local Shias during the late 1979 and early 1980.36 Even in the case of Iraq, where Shias are in clear majority, there was no serious trouble. However, according to Efrahim F. Karsh, "the view of the Gulf war as part of a larger Shia rural rebellion against the dominant Sunni - urban order remains tantalizing but has yet to be vindicated".37

Khomeini was not opposed to monarchy in the beginning. Until his relations with the Shah became sore in 1963, he came to hold the view that the monarchy could be tolerated provided it had followed the Islamic path.

In the light of these developments, the Iran-Iraq war came as a boon to these small states. Keeping Iran busy 'elsewhere was important for them. Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Oman, the UAE, Bahrain, Qatar and Kuwait immediately extended their moral as well as material support to Iraq. Revolutionary as well as republican nature of Khomeini's Iran forced them to side with Baghdad.

On 22 September 1980, Iraq launched a massive attack on Iran and, initially, occupied some areas. Apart from citing the border dispute, Iraq accused Iran, especially Khomeini, of destabilizing the Baghdad government.


According to Sreedhar four causes can be cited as having led to the war between the two countries:
1. Personal animosity between Khomeini and Saddam Hussain.
2. Iran's call for the overthrow of regimes in the region.
3. Iran's quest for power under the Shah.
4. Unresolved territorial disputes particularly regarding the Shatt al-Arab waterway.\textsuperscript{38}

The boundary dispute is a long standing one. The joint estuary of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers in Southern Iraq on the Iranian border is the actual disputed portion (550 miles) consisting of the Shatt al-Arab waterway (120 miles). Iraq's coastline on the Gulf is only 40 miles long and the only outlet to the Gulf is through the Shatt al-Arab.\textsuperscript{39}

In April 1969 Iran had abrogated the agreement of 1937 and notified that in future any agreement must be based on the median line or Thalweg principle. In early March 1975, the Iraqi leadership accepted the offer by Iran to desist from supporting the Kurds, provided Iraq agreed to a border settlement with Iran to establish the border in the Shatt al-Arab region along the median line.

\textsuperscript{38} Sreedhar, n. 36, p.67.

1. The definite marking of the boundaries according to the Constantinople protocol 1913.
2. The establishment of the river boundaries along the Thalweg line i.e., in mid-river.
3. The re-establishment of security along the common land boundaries.
4. The recognition of all points as unpronounceable conditions of a general settlement of the problem.  

By signing the treaty on 13 June, 1975, Iraq had, for the first time, recognized the principle of Thalweg. On 17 September 1980, President Saddam Hussain unilaterally abrogated the 1975 Algiers agreement. Within five days, the Iraqi army invaded Iran, thus starting the eight year long war.

**Arab Response**

One peculiar characteristic in this war was the two mutually antagonistic personalities -- Saddam Hussain and Ayatollah Khomeini -- were facing each other. Khomeini’s main aim was to overthrow conservative regimes in the Gulf. The main aim of Saddam Hussain was that he wanted to become the regional leader. These two opposing intentions made the Gulf states more vulnerable. Some historians describe it as the “biggest and the bloodiest conventional military management after the Second World War except Vietnam war”. In spite of the emergence of a

---

multipolar pattern from the bipolar one, even the remotest regional conflicts are linked to the super-power rivalries, and therefore, any regional conflict, when it manifests, is directly relatable to the super power calculations.\footnote{Christopher S. Raj, "The Iran - Iraq War and the Arab Response", \textit{IDSA Journal} (New Delhi), January-March 1984, Vol. 16, No. 3, p. 233.}

The Arab states, especially the Gulf states, showed more concern about the war. They had enough reasons to do so because of their geographical proximity to the theatre of war, the presence of amorphous social groups lining in political diffusion, weak military infrastructure, a negligible ideological base, feudal political structures, and the repercussions of the war on the native regimes and their relations with super powers.\footnote{Mehrunisa Ali, "The Impact of the Iran - Iraq War", \textit{Pakistan Horizon} (Karachi) October - December 1980, Vol. 33, No. 4, p. 32.} In almost all Gulf states, immigrant labour forms the major part of the work force ranging between 20 to 80 percent.\footnote{Christopher S. Raj, "A Vulnerable Region", \textit{World Focus} (New Delhi) September 1982, pp. 3-4.} These immigrants were from poor Gulf states and other parts of the world. Iran tried to influence Shiite population within the Gulf states. However, Iraq’s Shiite’s community was not influenced even though they are a majority in Iraq.
During this war the Gulf states were divided into two camps: Jordan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar, and the UAE gave financial grants and aid to Iraq. Syria, Libya and South Yemen joined hands with Iran. Due to this war, Egypt had an opportunity to rejoin the Arab fold. It was expelled from the Arab League following its peace treaty with Israel (Camp David) which led to the isolation of Egypt in the Arab World. The Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, apart from describing the war as recklessness of a blood-thirsty boy (Saddam Hussain), also criticised Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates for collaborating with Iraq.\(^44\)

Both Libya and Syria extended support to Iran. As a consequence, Iraq broke off diplomatic relations with Syria and Libya. Saudi Arabia’s relations with Libya were also worsened as both of them supported opposite sides. Bahrain, "the 14th province of Iran" as claimed by Iranians, naturally sided with Iraq not only in view of strengthening the Arab solidarity but also to preserve its sovereignty. As already mentioned, the Iranians were directly involved in the unsuccessful coup in Bahrain in December 1981.\(^45\)

Most of the Gulf states could not give their wholehearted support to Iraq especially in the case of Kuwait. When the war started, it was the first country that

\(^44\) Raj, No. 41, p. 232.

became vulnerable. Till 1963, Iraq claimed Kuwait as an integral part of it. When Kuwait got independence from Britain in June 1961, Iraq tried to march in, but it was prevented by both Saudi Arabia and Britain. Once again it attempted in 1973 but in vain. In July 1990, Iraq actually occupied and annexed Kuwait. But within eight months, it had to withdraw and the sovereignty of Kuwait was successfully restored. The main reason why the Gulf regimes supported Iraq is more a case of supporting an enemy's enemy and hardly because Iraq is a friend "For the Arab Gulf states, an outright Iraqi victory was unwelcome because they still regarded Iraq as a radical Pan-Arab and pro-Soviet Arab state and a dangerous source of regional subversion".46

The UAE Response:
Until the mid-1970s the UAE-Iraq relationship was at best strained. Iraq was unhappy towards UAE when Sharjah signed a pact with Iran over Abu Musa islands. Arab nationalism was invariably against the Iranian (Persian) Nationalism. The UAE and other Arab neighbours feared Iran for its politically destabilising influence and it was a potential hegemonic power in the Gulf. This situation began to change in 1975 when the Iraqi leader Saddam Hussain and the Shah of Iran signed the Algiers agreement to settle their outstanding disputes of land and water (Shatt al-Arab) boundaries.

46 Ibid., p. 8.
The fall of the Shah and the victory of Islamic revolution under the leadership of Khomeini in Iran, presented a threat to Iraq as well as to UAE. Even this crucial situation could not bring them closer. The UAE was officially neutral in the conflict while most of its neighbouring countries leaned towards Iraq. When UAE became a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council, it had to obey the rules and regulations of the Council. In fact, among the GCC States, the UAE maintained the most cordial relations with Iran. The political dynamics within the UAE played a major role in this context. Abu Dhabi took pride in its special relationship with Saudi Arabia while Dubai sought an anti-dote by evolving its own special relationship with Iran. Throughout the war-years the country's trade with Iran remained uninterrupted. Dubai depends for much of its income on trade. Unlike Abu Dhabi whose wealth is almost entirely from oil. The cosmopolitan and tolerant atmosphere prevails in the emirates. Iranian Shiite merchant community settled there and married local people. Foreign trade is also one factor behind the UAE's studied neutrality. It became difficult to maintain the same relations after the Iranian involvement in the bloodshed in Mecca and Iranian missile attacks on Arab brothers especially Kuwait. Still, UAE continued the relationship.

The National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) has its office in Sharjah. All the states of the UAE had to realise the fact that one third of their $ 1.5 billion in

47 Foreign Trade is Dubai's raison d'être see, Hiro, n. 30, p. 18.
re-export trade was with Iran and most of their $8 billion in oil export revenue in 1986 had come from very vulnerable off-shore oil facilities. None could forget that Iran had already hit the Abu al-Buhoosh off-shore oil platform in November, 1986. Dubai imported about $150 million in fruits and vegetables annually from Iran and it alone re-exported about 70 per cent of Iran's non-petroleum civil imports. These are mainly economic relations. One more significant feature is that in Dubai big offices employed Sunnis, Shiites, Arab and Persians who mingled with each other without trouble. Dubai and Ras al-Khaimah were relatively pro-Iranian. They made substantial profits from trade with Iran and needed to pacify large Shi'ite minorities. Some 100,000 Iranian and native Shiites live in the UAE - 30,000 illegally, and most were in Dubai and Ras al-Khaimah - with 50,000 in Dubai alone.

In political terms, surprisingly it was Iraq, rather than the GCC, that took up the issue of islands and made their return one of the conditions for stopping the war. In this regard President Zayed has played a very cautious role and clarified his country's position: "we have announced our stand and proof exists that the islands are Arab ones. We, however, shall not seek to seize these islands in a non-brotherly manner. This is our intention and this is what we have announced to our neighbours.

since the first day. They know our stand. The President has proclaimed that UAE enjoyed close ties with Islamic Iran. Iraq expressed its disenchantment towards Iran and UAE relations, Iraq's the then Prime Minister Tariq Aziz publicly deplored these 'disgraceful' links, but Dubai's traders pointed out the fact that the war had halved their lucrative trade with Iran. Similarly, Iraqi naval units were reported to have been anchored at UAE ports. Iranian threats to destroy them anywhere in any port had the desired effect on the UAE.

Everybody in Abu Dhabi and Dubai was aware of the country's delicate position. Especially officials continuously showed anxiety that the oil installations, especially the off-shore platforms, were particularly vulnerable to sabotage. One local diplomat maintained that, "we stand with the Arabs, but this does not mean that we want to commit suicide". Because of its precarious condition the UAE had opted for mediation. It was not rejected by Iran. The Doha Summit in November 1983, for the first time, proposed a peace formula based on a step-by-step creation of neutralised zones. Iran appeared to soften its demands for the punishment of

---

49 EL Azhary, n. 40, p. 15.


53 Kutschera, n. 51, p. 18.
Saddam Hussain and to modify its stance on reparations from Iraq, agreeing to accept funds from the GCC states. But the whole scheme collapsed after it was prematurely leaked. Also for the first time, Sheikh Zayed proposed a “Marshall Plan” to reconstruct both the countries.

**Saudi Arabia:**
The territorial dispute between Abu Dhabi and Saudi Arabia had resulted in the latter’s refusal to extend recognition to the UAE. In 1974, the dispute had been settled to the satisfaction of Saudi Arabia, paving the way for diplomatic relations which were established in the same year. However, their relations remained cool until King Khalid assumed power in Saudi Arabia. The same trend continued till the Iranian revolution in 1979.

Both the countries have many similarities in their history, social and religious aspects. Even their socio-political and economic systems are very similar. Even when Saudi Arabia had a border problem with Abu Dhabi, it maintained close relations with other emirates in UAE, viz., Dubai and Ras al-Khaimah.

Saudi Arabia played a very important role in the negotiations for the federation of Omani coast emirates during the three year period from 1968 to 1971. This was

---

54 Peck, n. 12, p. 144.

out of its concern for security of the Gulf and its desire to block any nationalist movement that might possibly be established on the coast, especially when the PFLOAG was gaining ground in Oman and the Gulf.\textsuperscript{56}

Saudis endorsed British withdrawal and proposed a federation of Omani Coast with four objectives in mind:

• First, to ensure Saudi Arabia's hegemonic role in future.
• Second, to prevent the British from changing their policy.
• Third, to oppose 'infiltration' into the Middle East area from outside.
• Fourth, to block any nationalist movement, bearing in mind the progress that had been made by the PFLOAG.

From the beginning, Saudi Arabia was unhappy over the proposal of nine member federation. Once it became impossible, Saudi started showing positive attitude towards the emirates. Riyadh gave more importance to Ras al-Khaimah when the islands problem arose between the UAE and Iran. Ras al-Khaimah gravitated towards Saudi Arabia hoping to enlist its assistance in a possible confrontation with Iran over the Tumbs while continuing to benefit from some developmental projects paid for by Saudi Arabia.\textsuperscript{57} Although there had been an understanding between Saudi Arabia and Iran since 1968 to work together

\textsuperscript{56} Khalifa, n. 19, p. 10.

\textsuperscript{57} Heard-Bey, n. 23, p. 355.
against the spread of communism in the region, competition between them persisted. Saudi Arabia was able to enhance its position among the Gulf rulers who were worried about Iran's expansionist policy and the success of Iraqi revolutionary regime.

The Saudis were aware of the existence of strong relations between Dubai and Iran, on the other hand their territorial dispute with Abu Dhabi. The only option left for them was to influence Ras al-Khaimah.

And the rest of the emirates Ajman, Ummal-Qaiwain and Fujairah were too small and less influential. Sharjah, although another possible ally for Saudi Arabia, was more influenced by Arab nationalism than Ras al-Khaimah. Sharjah was wholeheartedly committed to the establishment of the federation, and had good and close relations with Ras al-Khaimah which remained strong until 1979.

The territorial agreement between Abu Dhabi and Saudi Arabia naturally marked as a turning point in UAE-Saudi relations. Sheikh Zayed in a confident tone described the coming era as one of "great and unlimited co-operation" between the two countries.

King Faisal of Saudi Arabia was assassinated in March 1975, and succeeded by the easy-going personality of King Khalid. He was regarded by some observers as the "guarantor of the federation". This development helped Abu Dhabi to align itself more closely with the Saudi
Arabia. King Khalid paid a state visit to UAE in 1976, the first Saudi monarch’s visit to the UAE after the independence. On this occasion UAE President Sheikh Zayed said that the UAE, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf are one family and share the same heritage, history and a common future.

Since then UAE became a strong supporter of Saudi regional diplomacy as well as of Saudi policies within OPEC. During 1976 OPEC meeting in Doha the UAE was the only OPEC member to support the Saudi stand for an increase of only 10 percent in oil prices, while other nine members asked for a 15 percent increase.

More often, UAE has maintained a more independent posture though it allowed itself to be influenced by Riyadh on diplomatic issues. But there have been occasions when both the countries took different stands. For example, Abu Dhabi’s oil embargo against US in 1973 undoubtedly embarrassed the Saudi government.

**Defence Policy**

We are building an army not with the purpose of aggression or fighting another country nor for eventual expansion, but merely for self defence.

--- President Zayed

The origin of armed forces in the UAE dates back to 1951 with the formation of the Trucial Oman Levies, later

---

58 Cordesman, n. 5, p. 416.
Trucial Oman Scouts, under British supervision and with British officers and Jordanian non-commissioned officers. When the UAE was established each Sheikhdom was assured that its own defence establishment could be retained and, if necessary, expanded. Soon after the independence the federalists' logical choice was for the conversion of existing scouts into armed forces of the new state. The Union Defence Force (UDF) as the Scouts were renamed was not the only armed force in the new federation nor was it even the largest. As per the June 1993 figures the armed forces totalled 57,500 men, an army of 53,000, an air force of 2,500 and navy of 2,000. Competition took place among the seven emirates due to the constitutional provision that individual emirates could expand their armies. Making use of this, the Abu Dhabi Defence Force (ADDF) grew quickly to a size five times greater than that of the federal Defence Force (UDF). This caused concern among other members and fueled internal arms rivalries. In addition, there were also the Dubai Defence Force (DDF), the Ras al-Khaimah Mobile Force, the Sharjah National Guard and the Ajman Defence Force.

The UAE armed forces formally came into being only at the end of 1976. The ADDF became the western command, the DDF the central command, and the Ras al-Khaimah Mobile Force the Northern command; the UDF was renamed


the Yormuk Brigade, and the Sharjah National Guard was merged with the Federal Police Force.61

The UAE’s naval capabilities are minimal, even though plans for expansion of navy were announced before Iran began attacking tankers off the coast of Dubai in mid-1980s. While UAE has a modest air-defence capability, it lacks early warning or tactical air capability to defeat an air attack. UAE officials do not consider themselves covered by a GCC or Saudi defence umbrella and therefore argue within the GCC for a conciliatory rather than a confrontational attitude towards Iran. The UAE armed forces are still heavily dependent on expatriate officers and trainers and require more time to digest the flood of new arms and equipment. On the other hand, the merger of armed forces is still only on paper: the seven states continue separate arms-purchasing policies, and each force is commanded by the respective ruler’s son.

However, the 1976 integration was followed by serious trouble in less than two years. A dispute arose in early 1978 when President Zayed appointed his second son, Sheikh Sultan, as the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. Sheikh Rashid of Dubai claimed that neither he nor any ruler of other emirates was consulted on this appointment. Therefore, armed forces of Dubai and Ras al-Khaimah had refused to take orders from the federal commander.

61 ibid., p. 192.
It is difficult to overestimate the obstacles to the integration of armed forces and the adoption of a national defence policy. According to A.M. Khalifa, two factors are primarily responsible for the inability of emirates to bring together all their armed forces. One, armed forces of each emirate owe their loyalty and allegiance to the ruler who as a consequence, believes that the armed forces are vital to maintain the status quo. There is a real danger of losing control over armed forces once they are put under a federal command. Second, the disparity between various emirates in terms of their economy, manpower and the size of armed forces is proved to be an additional obstacle. For example, the Abu Dhabi Defence Forces is five times larger than the armed forces of all the other six emirates put together. Moreover, the ADDF is the most modern army with the three services. Other emirates naturally felt that integration of armed forces in fact meant that their forces would be submerged into the ADDF.\textsuperscript{62}

The other areas of the UAE federal experiment too faced their dilemma which is a natural result of the huge disparities among member emirates in size and wealth. Fortunately, the same logic that sustained the integration of other sectors -- that it would advance common benefit -- came to the rescue of the integration of armed forces.

\textsuperscript{62} Khalifa, n. 19, p. 82.
As threats to its security increased in the Gulf region, so did the UAE's defence spending. The threat perceptions of the early 1970s were somewhat eased by 1975 with the Algiers Agreement between Iran and Iraq and the end of Doha rebellion. However, new threats which were much more credible than the earlier ones came to haunt the federation as the 1970s came to a close. According to Sreedhar, the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and the Iran-Iraq war that followed it have had considerable impact on the UAE's threat perception.

Gulf Co-operation Council:
With regard to economic and security issues, the degree of cooperation among the GCC member states has been impressive, and UAE has contributed actively to the common cause. The GCC was established to achieve economic integration and common security in the Gulf. The immediate provocation for its formation was the coup attempt against Bahrain in December 1981, which was sponsored by the Shia regime in Iran. The threat perceptions of the Gulf states include:

1. Border incursions by the Yemenis to overland invasions (by Iraq, and possibly Iran)
2. Air-naval assault (by Iraq and Iran)
3. Air strikes (by Iraq, Iran, or Israel).

Each GCC member spends about one-third of its budget on defence, with Saudi Arabia having the highest per capita level of military expenditure in the world, followed closely by the UAE. UAE's failure to achieve greater military strength is due to two reasons: (I) continued
political divisions among the members emirates; (ii) lack of skilled manpower. Both historical factors and the fact that the GCC was formed quite recently have resulted in at least one advantage. As a collective organisation, it does not depend on a single source for weapons: the UAE, Kuwait, and Qatar import weapons mainly from France. Saudi Arabia and Bahrain buy aircraft from the United States; Oman relays on British aircraft. The GCC states have demonstrated their determination to create credible Gulf air-defence.

In mid 1980s a series of aerial exercises was initiated among the GCC states, UAE armed forces engaged in exercises with both Kuwaiti and Saudi Arabian forces. Although its efforts have been focused on creating an effective air defence the decision to do so was made within the wider context of resolutions adopted at a GCC defence ministers meeting to create a GCC arms industry, coordinate military purchases among GCC members, and set up a joint rapid deployment force. The most visible progress was made in setting up GCC’s Rapid Deployment Force. Its first exercise, code-named peninsula shield, was held in 1983 in the western desert region of Abu Dhabi.

Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed, Abu Dhabi heir-apparent and deputy supreme commander of the UAE’s armed forces, declared on that occasion that the GCC states were “fully committed to defend their integrity, sovereignty and national resources”. The set-up of the GCC Joint Military
Force was "a vital necessity" to defend the Gulf against "any foreign threat". 63

The continued dependence of UAE as well as the GCC on western arms suppliers such as the US, France and Britain and on foreign nationals who account for a considerable number in the defence forces is a cause for concern. But, not much improvement can be visualised in the near future. As the Gulf war of 1990-91 demonstrated, any real threat to the Gulf will have to be tackled by outside powers.

Nevertheless, the GCC states have displayed their determination to have meaningful cooperation in economic as well as security areas. What has been achieved may not be great, but it certainly exceeded the predictions of most skeptics.

63 Raghida Dergham "The GCC is now a Reality" The Middle East No. 109, 1983, p. 16.
The Role of the West:
Western Europe and the US form the matrix of the UAE's security policy. Due to its colonial past, the UAE maintains close trade and security ties with Britain. British nationals play an important role in the UAE's armed forces. Britain too supplies weapons. The French and Italians are an additional source of modern weapons. The French Mirage-2000 is the backbone of UAE's air force.

The UAE and the United States have maintained diplomatic relations since 1971. The UAE looks to the US as a prime source of advanced technology and for external security assistance. The nature of the relationship has been set by Saudi Arabia, the second most important ally of the US in the Middle East after Israel. It was widely believed that Saudi Arabia was behind UAE's reluctance to establish diplomatic relations with the then Soviet Union. According to one observer, "Riyadh not only succeeded in preventing the UAE from establishing diplomatic relations with Moscow, but presented itself exclusively as the UAE representative in its relations with Washington". 64

Despite its pro-western tendency, UAE has nonetheless been critical of US policy in the Middle East, particularly on the Arab-Israeli conflict and Gulf security. The Arab-Israeli conflict created the greatest strains in the US-UAE relationship. According to

64 Al-Alkim, n. l, p. 79.
Cordesman, the Arab-Israeli conflict will continue to limit any US strategic ties with the Gulf States.65

The UAE views US action or inaction as dangerous to UAE security and indicative of a lack of concern on the part of Washington for UAEs well-being. The Omissions and commissions of the US on issues related to the security of Middle East have tarnished its image as an honest broker in the eyes of the UAE and other Arab states. For example, the US response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan -- Creation of the Rapid Deployment Force (Now CENTCOM) -- was thought to transform the region into an arena of super power rivalry. As for the other threats to the security of the Gulf and that of the UAE -- the Islamic fundamentalism -- UAE regarded the US more as a part of the problem than a solution. Because, Washington's biased policies in the region clearly fuelled fundamentalist sentiments. Although the Union Defence Force (UDF) is equipped with western armaments, the US, by 1980, became only the forth largest supplier behind France, the UK and West Germany.

UAE arms imports from the US increased from $ 7 million in 1976 to $ 23 million in 1982. In 1984 the UAE was to receive supplies of US arms valued at $ 200 million. Between 1981 and 1982 total UAE arms imports from Britain, France, the US and Switzerland were estimated at approximately $ 547 million.

65 Cordesman, n. 5, p. 946.
CONCLUSION

In contrast with domestic political and economic matters, foreign policy decision making in the UAE is coherent and disciplined. This is not to reject the past differences between Abu Dhabi and Dubai on issues such as Iran-Iraq War. However, the federal president enjoys substantial powers in taking foreign policy decisions.

Iran has been a major security concern for UAE since 1971. The three islands dispute was started by the Shah in that year and it still continues. Since Iran is opposed to arbitration on the dispute and is not receptive to diplomacy, no durable solution is likely in the near future. Because of this concern, UAE considered it prudent to be close to Iraq as a counter to Iran. This strategy seemed to be working as long as Iran and Iraq were caught in a bloody war throughout 1980s. But this strategy reached a dead-end with the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait which had been a close ally of the former and which extended material support to Baghdad in its self-inflicted war against Iran.

The main lesson of the Kuwaiti crisis is that the oil rich but militarily weak countries of the region can not ignore the importance of outside powers like the United States in safeguarding the status quo. But this imperative clashes with the non-aligned policies of the UAE. So far it maintained a balance between the two.
Another strategy of UAE and that of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is to engage other Arab countries especially Egypt and Syria in the security arrangements of the Gulf.

Given the choice, UAE prefers cordial relations with its neighbours. It believes in cooperative security arrangements. It is in the forefront in allowing access to multinational companies and foreign investment. Stability in the region is a pre-requisite for its economic development.

UAE maintains the second largest army among the GCC countries. But most of the army personnel are non-UAE nationals. Moreover, the impact of a large immigrant community can not be underestimated. However, UAE till date has not confronted any internal unrest. This is significant because the society is open and free at least by Middle East standards.

Though UAE is not happy with the partial settlement of the Palestinian problem, the Middle East Peace Process has helped it to moderate its stand towards Israel and the Western countries that are close to Tel Aviv. This is a positive development for UAE because in future it may not have to take the decisions, it took in the past, like imposing oil embargo on whoever supports Israel.

After having lived together for twenty-five years, the seven members of the UAE have come to appreciate the
benefits of their federation and the way it enhanced their security and standing in the comity of nations. As they consolidate the federal polity, its positive impact will be immediately felt in the area of foreign policy.