Chapter VII

DEFENCE COOPERATION AMONG THE GCC COUNTRIES

Common external threat has been a crucial factor in promoting the process of regional cooperation among the developing countries. Cooperation in the field of defence has been the prime item on the agenda of every scheme of regional cooperation. In this chapter, an attempt has been made to examine the process of defence cooperation among the GCC countries under the patronage of the Council.

It is easy to see why the GCC members did not experience any particular need to enter into defence cooperation during the sixties and the seventies. During the sixties all member countries of the GCC except Kuwait and Saudi Arabia had "protectorate" relationship with Great Britain which was responsible for their security. Even in case of Kuwait, Iraq abandoned its plans to invade it in 1961 only due to timely deployment of British troops. True, there were a number of skirmishes between Yemen and Saudi Arabia during the sixties but this threat to Saudi Arabia was not directed against other GCC members. No doubt during the seventies these countries had uneasy relations with Iraq which until mid-seventies spearheaded the radical faction in the Arab world calling for overthrow of the corrupt, reactionary Gulf monarchies. Iraqi troops often encroached into the Kuwaiti territory during the
late sixties and the early seventies but other GCC members were not exposed to such direct military pressure from Iraq. Therefore, a clear-cut, well-defined external threat did not exist during the seventies which might have prodded these countries into forging a defence-oriented grouping. Though the scenario changed after the eruption of the Iranian revolution and outbreak of the Iraq-Iran conflict during early 1981, the GCC members did not initially apprehend any serious external danger to their sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Significantly enough, article 4 of GCCs basic charter does not even list 'defence' among the large number of areas in which the GCC countries were planning to coordinate their policies. Similarly, no standing sub-committee on defence was established prior to the first summit and the five sub-committees then created were all concerned with economic, cultural and industrial cooperation. The white paper issued by the GCC on the eve of the first summit did not at all speak about defence cooperation among these countries, though it did refer to their apprehensions relating to stability and security.

However, when the tide of the Iraq-Iran war began to turn from mid-1981 creating a distinct possibility of an

2. See the section dealing with the first summit in Pt.I.
Iranian victory, the Council began to concentrate on defence matters. The first meeting of GCC Defence Chiefs of Staff was held on 21 September 1981 to map out a common defence strategy. As the days passed, the military threat posed to these countries by Iran escalated and crystallized especially after May 1984 when Iran began to attack oil tankers plying to and from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. This was accompanied by oft-repeated Iranian threats to close the Gulf of Hormuz and to take punitive action against GCC states which were aiding Iraq. Encirclement and over-running of the strategic Iraqi city of Basrah had been one of the major objectives of Iranian attacks and many a time the fall of Basrah did seem imminent. Had this happened, there would have been nothing to stop the Iranian troops from marching towards Kuwait which is only 200 kms. from Basrah.

As a result of these developments, the GCC began to increasingly focus on the external threat to its stability which becomes evident by reviewing the deliberations of its Defence Ministers.

The first meeting of the GCC Chiefs of Staff was held on 21 September 1981 in Riyadh. According to press reports, two security papers, one by Oman and one by Saudi Arabia, were presented during this meeting for discussion.  

4. Ibid., 22 September 1981.
meeting was followed by the second GCC summit held on 10-11 November 1981. The communique issued at the end of this meeting contained the following paragraph: "The six Heads of State studied a report prepared by the Chiefs of Staff of the GCC States and decided to invite the Defence Ministers to meet to set the priorities (which) the member countries require to secure their independence and sovereignty." This decision of the GCC Heads of State to ask their Defence Ministers to meet was undoubtedly reflective of the deteriorating security situation in the Gulf.

The first meeting of the GCC Defence Ministers was held on 25-26 January 1982. The Saudi Defence Minister commented at the end of the meeting as follows:

"The GCC was in the process of collecting detailed information about the military capabilities of all its member states. Drawing attention to previous GCC summits, he asserted that joint action in the field of defence and security would rest on following principles which were endorsed by the Heads of State, namely, opposition to foreign military bases; adherence to non-alignment; total neutrality and plugging of all (possible) avenues of external infiltration. He added that all this required and called for harmonisation in security and defence fields as well as creation of an independent defence force."  


He added that "we should help ourselves by ourselves and we would depend on our own strength and would not like anybody else to take this responsibility on our behalf."

As regards the threats confronting the Gulf, he clarified that these were difficult to specify. However, he added that these threats would become a reality if the GCC countries failed to achieve security and defence coordination. After the conclusion of this meeting on 26 January 1981, the Saudi Defence Minister said that a proposal for establishing a Gulf arms industry was considered by it.\(^7\)

According to press reports, the above conference had also looked into the feasibility of creation of a joint air defence umbrella based on the Saudi Arabian airborne and control system (AWACS) procured from the USA.\(^8\) It is noteworthy that on 25 January, e.g., when this meeting had commenced, two leading Saudi newspapers had called for the formation of a strike force to combat Iranian threats.\(^9\)

A meeting of the GCC Chiefs of Staff was held on 15 March 1982. According to a report published in Kuwait's Al Anbaa newspaper\(^10\) attributed to unidentified sources, the

10. Al Anbaa, 16 March 1982.
GCC Chiefs of Staff had called for supply of arms to Bahrain as well as to the Sultanate of Oman for upgrading and improving their defence capabilities. It was felt that if Oman obtained substantial military assistance from the GCC countries, it could be persuaded to discontinue the military facilities which it had agreed in 1981 to grant to the USA. It may be mentioned here that earlier a delegation of the GCC Defence officials had visited Oman on 14 December 1981 and Bahrain on 14 February 1982.  

Subsequently, the second meeting of the GCC Defence Ministers was held on 11 October 1982. During the Conference, proposals for creation of a joint air defence network and establishment of a Gulf armament industry were examined. The Saudi Defence Minister at the end of this meeting commented that the GCC countries did not need a rapid deployment force as their armies were already working in close cooperation.  

In a radio commentary during this meeting broadcast by the Saudi State Radio, it was mentioned that "the dangers surrounding us are not slight and the lurking enemies are neither weak nor negligent in their plans to gulp up the Gulf areas and put it to flames at any moment." The commentary signalled out


12. Arab Times, 12 October 1982. Iraq had suffered a series of major reverses from mid-1982 including loss of Khorramshahar (Abadan). Iran had completely turned the tide of war by September 1982 and this was no doubt the reason behind the recommendation of GCC Defence Ministers to integrate their air defences.


Israel and Iran for specific reference "accusing the former of military debauchery in the Middle East and the latter of pursuing and escalating the conflict with Iraq." The commentary added "that the GCC Ministers realised very well that guaranteeing sovereignty and independence hinges on superiority, in all the meanings of the word and that they know that the future is for the strong." The commentary also added "Gulf Arab countries must achieve military supremacy, not just a balance of power in their own region and in the Middle East."\(^{15}\)

Shortly after this meeting, the Crown Prince of the UAE said that if the security needs increase, then the Gulf states will unify their armies to counter any threat.\(^{16}\)

In a statement after the conclusion of the above conference, Abdulla Bishara, Secretary General of the GCC said that the Ministers had agreed on three important precepts: conviction and faith in security cooperation; acceptance on the part of all people in the Gulf that security must be maintained as an indivisible whole; conviction by everybody that security has to be realised within the framework of a unified GCC strategy.\(^{17}\)

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Shortly afterwards the third GCC summit was convened in November 1982. It was expected that this summit would ratify the recommendations of the GCC Defence Ministers, in particular those pertaining to creation of an integrated air defence umbrella.18

Contrary to expectations, however, the third summit did not come forth with any far-reaching decision on the theme of defence cooperation and the communique issued at its end contained the following paragraph on this subject:

"The Council approved the recommendations of the Defence Ministers which aim to build the intrinsic strength of the GCC member countries and coordinate among them to achieve self-reliance in protecting their security and safeguarding their stability."19

The GCC Chiefs of staff met subsequently on 12/13 February 1984. It is worth noting here that not a single meeting of either the GCC Chiefs of Staff or GCC Defence Ministers was held during the entire 1983 despite escalation in Iranian threats to these countries. On the eve of this meeting, in a statement made by the Qatari Chief of Staff to Qatari newspaper Al Rayyah in February 1984, he said that the GCC countries were continuing talks on setting up a Gulf

18. See the section dealing with third summit in Part I.
19. See the section dealing with the third summit in Part I.
armament industry and added that some of them had already entered the initial stage of military industrialisation. He said that the Chiefs of Staff would discuss "a joint defence strategy and tactical responsibilities in strategic defence during their forthcoming meeting."\textsuperscript{20}

During this meeting the Chiefs of Staff discussed reports prepared by specialised committees pertaining to military coordination and integration among the GCC states. According to a statement made by Abdulla Bishara, one of the objectives of this meeting was to "explore the potentials of the six GCC states with a view to achieving self-reliance in military and other fields." He also added that the meeting had adopted recommendations which aimed to enable the GCC to face any challenge that may emerge in the future.\textsuperscript{21}

Subsequently, the Defence Ministers held their third meeting on 20-21 February 1984\textsuperscript{22} and discussed establishment of a Gulf armaments industry, diversification of defence supplies and coordination in the command structure of different national units in the rapid deployment force. Certain proposals like holding of joint naval manoeuvres and establishment of a common naval academy were referred by the Defence Ministers to specialised groups.

\textsuperscript{20} From \textit{Arab News}, 13 February 1984.
\textsuperscript{21} From \textit{Kuwait Times}, 16 February 1984.
\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Al Sabas}, 22 February 1984.
The next meeting of the GCC Chiefs of Staff was held on 23 June 1984 in the aftermath of Iranian air attacks on Kuwaiti and Saudi oil carriers which represented a major escalation of the Gulf war. According to press reports, the GCC Chiefs of Staff advocated greater integration of GCC armed forces as well as improvement of the mode of sharing of information collected by the Saudi-based AWACS with Kuwait. A proposal for creating a protected sea lane in the western half of the Gulf through which the tankers could pass in safety was also considered.

According to a broadcast made by radio Monte Carlo on 24 June 1984, the Chiefs of Staff had approved a defence strategy which called for a joint military command for all the GCC states and staging of naval and air patrols to safeguard the territorial waters of these countries. Similarly, the Chiefs of Staff had recommended a grant to Oman of approximately $2 billion to enable it to improve its air defence capabilities.

However, the APS Diplomat had then reported that the Chiefs of Staff had failed to agree on a joint command structure but had concurred on the need to protect navigation through the Gulf by GCC countries' airforce and naval units.

on a 24-hour basis. 27

A joint meeting of the GCC Foreign and Defence Ministers was held in Abha (Saudi Arabia) on 18-19 September 1984 during which the main topic of discussion was defence cooperation. The meeting was inaugurated by the Qatari Defence Minister Sheikh Hamad Al Thani who described it as a "new step towards the integration of GCC countries". 28 A joint statement issued at the end of the meeting emphasised the importance of adopting a policy of self-reliance in defence matters.

Subsequently, the fifth GCC summit was held in Kuwait on 27-29 November 1984 and the paragraph on defence in the communiqué issued at its end was as follows:

"The Council reviewed the results achieved by specialised committees in security and defence and emphasised their achievements which seek to translate the principle of self-reliance into tangible reality and enable the people of the Council states to shoulder their defence responsibilities." 29

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27. Failure of the GCC to agree on any unified response after the Iranian attacks on Kuwait/Saudi tankers in May 1984 was a clear indication of a rift within these countries in the field of defence cooperation. Al-Watan, 16 May 1984 had editorially called for holding of an emergency GCC Summit or at least an emergency session of its Foreign Ministers and said that otherwise the word "cooperation" would have no meaning.


29. See the section dealing with fifth summit in Part I.
The year 1984 was in a way a crucial year for the GCC as it was in this year that the scope of the Iraq-Iran war had widened perceptibly and it had begun to impinge on the GCC countries. Apart from the constant pressure maintained on the Iraqi front by the Iranians, Iranian aircraft had violated the Saudi air space in June 1984 and this was the first such incident involving Saudi Arabia since the outbreak of this conflict. Further, the Iranians had begun to launch bombing raids against Kuwaiti and Saudi oil tankers.

Despite the fact that since mid-1984, the Iranians had openly began to mount attacks on Kuwaiti/Saudi tankers and were thus directly embroiling them in the Iran-Iraq war, the Defence Ministers did not take any decisive step in 1984 towards boosting defence cooperation within the GCC. Though two exercises of the Peninsula Shield Force were held in 1983 and 1984, this force was far from being an effective deterrent.

No less a dignitary than the Kuwaiti Deputy Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah himself admitted in a press conference on 29 November 1984 that "it had been agreed to establish a

32. These were week-long manoeuvres which were held in October 1983 and 1984. See Al Watan, October 1983-84.
joint defence force as a temporary expedient which would be periodically reviewed.\textsuperscript{33} At the same conference, Mr. Bishara had described the significance of the force as more political and symbolic than military. It was also reported that though this force was theoretically supposed to consist of 6000 personnel drawn from various member countries and was to have permanent headquarters in Hafra al Batin near Kuwaiti-Saudi border, in practice troops from different GCC countries were not being stationed permanently at this location.

The next year of 1985 also was a tense year as far as developments of the Iraq-Iran war were concerned; but no meeting of the GCC Defence Ministers was held during the first half of 1985. The GCC Chiefs of Staff met on 7-8 October 1985 and the Defence Ministers convened their fourth session on 20-21 October 1985. No major decision emerged from this meeting except that it was said to have further considered the establishment of a joint defence force.\textsuperscript{34}

This meeting was followed by the sixth GCC summit in Muscat in November 1985 and the communiqué issued at the end of the meeting contained the following paragraph on defence and security: "The session reviewed the security situation in view of escalation of terrorism in the region and reaffirmed the principle that the security of the GCC countries is

\textsuperscript{33} Keesing's Volume XXXI, p.33371, January 1985.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., volume XXXII, p.34265, March 1986.
 indivisible. It approved the goals of security strategy and emphasised the need to fulfil them quickly and also declared itself in favour of the strategic concept of defence cooperation.  

The fifth meeting of the GCC Defence Ministers was held in Muscat in October 1986. Prior to this meeting, press reports had appeared to the effect that it would take decisions on matters such as creation of a unified air defence network, protection of oil tankers passing through the Arabian Gulf, reinforcing the Peninsula Shield Force, etc.

Interestingly enough, Abdulla Bishara in his inaugural speech for this meeting had said as follows: "The Gulf countries will give to the issue of terrorism its due attention and indicated that increasing terrorism may get drifted by evil winds towards this region which is calm, peaceful and does not know violence or bloodshed." Abdulla Bishara did not specify the nature of terrorism which might engulf the Gulf region but according to informed sources he might have had the tanker war in mind.

Despite earlier expectations raised in the Gulf press about the sixth meeting of Defence Ministers breaking new ground in the field of promoting defence cooperation, the

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35. See the section dealing with fifth summit in Part I.


only decisions which finally emerged from this meeting were the following: 38

i) Holding the third exercise of the Peninsula Shield Force in Oman in March 1987 and staging of joint naval manoeuvres in the UAE in December 1986.

ii) Introduction of unified syllabi in the military academies of the GCC countries.

No other decision was known to have been taken in this meeting. However, Abdulla Bishara made a very significant statement at the end of this meeting which can be regarded as a turning point in the history of GCCs defence cooperation when he said inter alia:

"Free navigation in international waterways in the area is the responsibility of the whole world and not of the GCC alone." 39

It is not difficult to see the profound implications and significance of the above statement. The Defence Ministers had thus openly acknowledged their inability to protect and defend the oil carriers passing through the Gulf waters and they were unabashedly soliciting help of the international community to shoulder this responsibility. It is easy to see that this represented a total and radical

departure from all that the GCC has been saying so far, e.g. their abhorrence of and opposition to the presence of foreign navies in the Gulf waters, their commitment to the principle of self-reliance and so on. This decision of the Defence Ministers was further discussed and endorsed during the seventh Abu Dhabi summit and shortly afterwards Kuwait began to turn to the superpowers as well as the UK, France, etc. to secure naval escorts for its tankers.

The fifth meeting of the GCC Defence Ministers was followed by the seventh GCC summit which had following to say on the subject of defence cooperation: "The Council expressed its satisfaction on what has been achieved in defence and security cooperation and blessed intensive consultations between security apparatuses in member states to strengthen and guarantee security and stability in the GCC."\textsuperscript{40}

This was followed by the sixth meeting of the GCC Defence Ministers which was held on 17 April 1987\textsuperscript{41}. This meeting was convened in the aftermath of the third Peninsula Shield Exercise which was held earlier in Oman.\textsuperscript{42} It would be relevant to mention here that the third Peninsula Shield Exercise was organised on a scale much smaller than the earlier two similar exercises and only the units from

\textsuperscript{40} See the section dealing with the 7th summit in Part I.

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Riyadh Daily}, 18 April 1987.

\textsuperscript{42} These manoeuvres were held near the straits of Hormuz in Oman in the third week of March 1987. From \textit{Arab News}, 25 March 1987.
Oman and Saudi Arabia had participated in it. On the eve of this exercise the Gulf press had gone to the extent of describing the GCC countries as "non-combatant" evidently to avoid any provocation to Iran.

The sixth meeting of the GCC Defence Ministers was held at a time when Kuwait was facing a grave situation. Iran had stepped up its aggressive acts against Kuwait and ships plying with Kuwait had become the main target of Iranian raids. According to reliable media reports, out of 19 ships attacked from mid-September 1986 to April 1987, as many as 15 were trading with Kuwait. To make matters worse for Kuwait, Iran was planning to instal silkworm missiles on the Iranian side of the Hormuz and on the Faw Peninsula and these missiles could threaten the city of Kuwait as well as its port. Kuwait had by then finalised arrangements to lease a part of its tanker fleet to the super powers to protect it from Iranian attacks.

However, despite all these grave threats confronting Kuwait, the sixth meeting of the GCC Defence Ministers was a low-key affair and hardly received any publicity in the Gulf press. According to media reports, this meeting merely reviewed the results of the Peninsula Shield Exercise earlier held in Oman as well as reviewed the reports submitte
by the General Secretariat and considered the feasibility of establishing a joint arms industry. 45

The next meeting (seventh) of the GCC Defence Ministers was held on 21 November 1987,46 which was preceded by a meeting of their Chiefs of Staff on 11 November 1987.47

The period intervening between the sixth meeting of GCC Defence Ministers in April 1987 and the seventh meeting in November 1987 was indeed a tense one for the GCC; Kuwait had been subjected to Iranian missile attacks in September and October 1987 while Saudi Arabia was rocked by bloody riots during the Haj season of July 1987 leaving upwards of 400 dead.48

The dangers confronting the GCC due to possible escalation of the Iran-Iraq conflict were well recognised and a widely-read Gulf newspaper commented as follows: "The war poses a grave danger to the international peace but the way it is imperilling regional stability and economic interests is particularly worrying for the littoral states. Some of them in fact have already been directly affected by the intensified and expanded hostilities and the concomitant tensions; Kuwait has been hit by missiles, Saudi

Arabia has witnessed bloody politically-motivated riots and the UAE territorial waters have been menaced by mines drifting from the war zone."49

Commenting on the likely agenda for defence ministers' meeting, Sheikh Salim, Kuwaiti Defence Minister said that the meeting was to be divided into two sessions - the first session was to deal with Iranian attacks on Gulf shipping while the second session was to be devoted to initiating important intra-GCC military manoeuvres.50 A well-known Gulf daily said editorially that among the topics included in the agenda were "assessment of the defence potential of the GCC states and creation of pan-GCC ordinance authority."51

Abdulla Bishara, GCC Secretary General, struck a rather odd note by saying, "The Council was determined to make the region an oasis of love and co-existence. Nobody wanted to attain hegemony over others."52 He had spoken in a similar vein when he had commented during the earlier meeting of the GCC Chiefs of Staff that these countries had managed to cope with the destructive repercussions of the Iraq-Iran conflict through emphasising the principle of peaceful co-existence.53

While inaugurating the Defence Ministers' Conference on 22 November 1987 the UAE Defence Minister said that "the Iraq-Iran war posed a threat to international peace and stability. He added that dangers have intensified due to the upsurge in military actions in the region. Renewed attempts should be made to bring an end to these hostilities. The UN Security Council Resolution 598 which calls for an end to the war and a resumption of peace negotiations should be implemented."\(^{54}\)

At the conclusion of this meeting, a statement was read out by Abdulla Bishara, Secretary General of the GCC in which no major step for promoting intra-GCC defence cooperation was announced. The statement merely affirmed GCC countries' resolve to step up contacts between them in the defence field and mentioned that the defence ministers had discussed increased military cooperation.\(^{55}\)

It would be of interest to briefly review the highlights of the seventh meeting of the GCC Defence Ministers. It is to be recalled that this conference was held in the aftermath of repeated Iranian missile attacks on Kuwait as well as large-scale violence by Iranian Haj pilgrims in Saudi Arabia in July 1987.

\(^{54}\) Khaleej Times, 22 November 1987.

\(^{55}\) Ibid., 23 November 1987.
It is significant that despite these highly provocative Iranian actions any critical reference to it was scrupulously avoided, both in the statement issued by the Defence Ministers as well as during the inaugural speech delivered by the UAE Defence Minister. Not only was there no blaming of Iran but any expression of solidarity with Kuwait and Saudi Arabia was also not forthcoming. The final statement incorporated an ambiguous reference about the need to promote intra-GCC defence cooperation but it was not elaborated how this was to be achieved.

This meeting was held shortly after all the GCC countries had restored diplomatic ties with Egypt and military cooperation between Egypt and Kuwait was being stepped up.\(^56\) It could have announced some decision in principle about the manner in which military links between the GCC and Egypt were to be promoted but it remained silent on this issue too.

The Kuwaiti Defence Minister had indicated that this meeting was to deal with measures to counter Iranian attacks on Gulf shipping and was also to decide on pan-GCC military manoeuvres.\(^57\) However, no decision on these matters was announced.

\(^56\) See the section dealing with growth of GCC's ties with Egypt in Part I.

\(^57\) From *Arab Times*, 22 November 1987.
To sum up, the deliberations and outcome of the seventh meeting of GCC Defence Ministers, from the published accounts, did not really grapple with the grave situation being encountered by these countries, especially Kuwait.

The eighth meeting of GCC Defence Ministers was held on 23 November 1988. This meeting took place against the background of greatly relaxed atmosphere in the Gulf as a result of the Iraq-Iran ceasefire and not unexpectedly it did not announce any new initiative to boost pan-GCC defence links. It was stated after its conclusion that the member states were agreed on the need to enhance defence cooperation among them through regular consultations and holding of exercises.58

A review of the proceedings of the various meetings of the GCC Defence Ministers and Chiefs of Staff held since 1981 until the end of 1988 brings out their following salient features:

1) No communiques or official statements were issued after most of these meetings unlike the practice followed during GCC summits or meetings of their Foreign Ministers. No doubt the failure of GCC Defence Ministers to issue communiques/final statements reflected intra-GCC disagreements towards defence strategy.

ii) None of these meetings came out with any major or important decision to boost defence cooperation.

iii) Though the first two meetings of the Defence Ministers held in 1982 had agreed on the establishment of a unified air defence network, this was not approved by the third summit held in Bahrain in November 1982. This clearly illustrates the unwillingness of the GCC countries to integrate their air defences and this reluctance was not necessarily due to the fear of adverse reaction of Iran as in 1982 the Iranian military superiority over Iraq was not all that pronounced. Members of the GCC clearly wanted to avoid too close a military relationship with Saudi Arabia and one observes the interplay of the same forces in GCC's failure to adopt a unified command structure for the Peninsula Shield Force.

iv) In the comments made by GCC dignitaries during and after the meetings of Defence Ministers/Chiefs of Staff, every care was taken to avoid mentioning Iran by name and blaming it in any way for the Gulf tension. The Defence Ministers did not cast blame on Iran even during their seventh meeting in November 1987, even though Kuwait was repeatedly struck by Iranian silkworm missiles in the preceding months. Paradoxically, the GCC Foreign Ministers during some of their meetings had unequivocally censured Iran. It appears, therefore, that the GCC Defence Ministers were extremely keen to avoid causing any offence to Iran.
v) A large number of military manoeuvres were held by the GCC countries in 1984 and 1985. No decision about carrying out of these manoeuvres was announced during the meetings of GCC Defence Ministers/Chiefs of Staff held during these years - this reflected inability of GCC Defence Ministers to take long-term decisions.

vi) The main topics of discussion in these meetings continued to revolve around certain themes such as creation of an air defence network, establishment of an arms industry, etc. which pointed to lack of consensus and agreement on them.

vii) Though the eruption of the tanker war in mid-1984 had clearly began to threaten GCC countries' vital interests, the Defence Ministers could not agree on how to cope with this threat until they decided in 1986 to make the international community responsible for the safety of the Gulf navigation.

viii) While the Defence Ministers appeared to be vaguely in agreement over the need to boost intra-GCC defence cooperation, it was never elaborated how this goal was to be achieved.

The main decisions and recommendations adopted during these meetings as well as the issues discussed can be summarized as follows:

i) to create an integrated air defence network.

ii) to establish a joint Gulf force.

iii) to build an armaments industry.
iv) to assist Bahrain and Oman in improving their military capabilities.

v) to hold combined military exercises.

vi) to create a specially-protected sealane on the western side of the Gulf through which oil tankers would traverse to GCC ports and the safety of these oil carriers was to be guaranteed by aircraft and naval ships belonging to GCC countries.

vii) to pursue a common policy towards acquisition of sophisticated weapons.

viii) to promote coordination among the military academies in the GCC.

Creation of an Integrated Air Defence Network

The need to create a unified air defence network among the GCC countries preferably based on the Saudi AWACS was recognised even before the creation of this body.

Three Gulf states have agreed to consider the purchase of a common air defence system from the USA. The system, the Hawk ground-based missile, is already operated by Kuwait and Saudi Arabia and it now seems likely that it will be installed at strategic locations in Qatar, the UAE and Bahrain by 1983. This will enable the Gulf to coordinate a response to an aerial attack. 59

The GCC countries right from the inception of this body had given a serious thought to integrating their air

59. From MEED, 11 April 1980.
defences. As has already been seen in an earlier part of this section, the first meeting of the GCC Defence Ministers held on 25/26 January 1982 had reportedly recommended creation of a collective defence umbrella and this issue was again examined during the second meeting of GCC Defence Ministers held on 11 October 1982.

Apart from GCC Defence Ministers, other GCC dignitaries too had voiced their support for this idea and many reports had appeared in the press indicating that the GCC states were likely to enhance cooperation among them in the field of air defence.

"The daily Washington Post has quoted US Defence Department officials as saying that the Saudis are likely to financially support upgraded air defence for Bahrain, Qatar and Oman. The aim is to create a mutual defence system on the lines of NATO's radar ground environment network which integrated West Europe's military radar chain."60

"The GCC states were in contact with Britain, France, and the USA about installation of a huge radar network around the Gulf."61

"Long-term plans for regional security are thought to include developing an integrated air defence and command,

60. Ibid., 22 January 1982.
control and communications (C.3) system, possibly linked to Saudi Arabia's AWACS aircraft." 62

"The USA has received positive indications that the Saudi Government will agree to a US proposal to extend joint air surveillance of shipping to the lower half of the Gulf." 63

The objective of creating an integrated air defence system remained one of the constant themes of discussion among GCC Defence Ministers and Arab Times dated 5 October 1986 reported as follows:

"The Defence Ministers of the GCC met here (in Muscat) today behind closed doors to discuss a collective defence strategy and the Iraq-Iran war.

"The focus of their deliberations was expected to be development of a unified air defence system."

Even a cursory look at the map of the GCC countries would be enough to show the vital need for the GCC countries to have a unified air defence network for timely detection and interception of enemy aircraft. Most of the major oil facilities, population centres, desalination plants in the GCC countries are situated along the eastern coast and were thus within easy attacking range of Iranian aircraft. Further, a low-flying Iranian aircraft would have been detected by

ground-based radars in the GCC only when it was at a distance of 30 miles and would have thus been able to reach its target within three minutes of being detected. This warning period of three minutes was obviously too short for any effective action to be taken by anti-aircraft defences.

"This meant Iranian fighters could be over the target within three minutes of the time Saudi ground radars detected them. Even under optimal conditions a Saudi intercept based on warning from ground radars could occur ten minutes too late." 64

This difficulty would have been overcome by deploying the AWACS aircraft which would have significantly increased the "warning time", thus permitting effective interception of the intruding aircraft. It is thus observed that the only feasible way in which the GCC could have ensured a reliable defence of its vital installations was through integrating its anti-aircraft detection and interception systems consisting of radars, surface-to-air missiles and interceptor aircraft with the Saudi AWACS. Saudi Arabia since 1980 has been building a highly elaborate and sophisticated system to protect its airspace under the Peace Shield Programme and taking into account the geographical position of the smaller GCC members any realistic air defence strategy would have called for integrating the air defence networks of these countries with those of Saudi Arabia.

"Several squadrons of modern fighter aircraft are available in the various states to combat attackers. The problem is how to alert crews and guide their aircraft to make timely interceptions. Without efficient radar expensive military aircraft are little more than prestige symbols. There is growing recognition among the oil states that their air forces and military communications should be geared to regional rather than individual needs." ⁶⁵

Despite this well-recognised need for unification of anti-aircraft defences of GCC states, in practice hardly any progress was made in this direction. No true integration was developed even between the air defences of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia which hardly reflected any kudos on Kuwaiti-Saudi relations. ⁶⁶ No serious attempt was made to bring about any compatibility, including the ability to exchange communications, between the radars, surface-air missiles and interceptor aircraft in various GCC countries. During the last few years each GCC country has spent huge amounts to expand its air force but there has been little coordination in the manner in which the GCC states have gone about acquiring missiles, aircraft, etc. Each GCC country is so small that it was in their mutual interest to establish common facilities for


⁶⁶. Kuwaiti Foreign Minister himself said in a press interview that its air defences were not based on Saudi AWACS. From Al-Watan, 24 March 1984. It appears that intelligence gathered by these planes was passed on to Kuwait by hotline on telephone. MEED, 22 June 1984.
maintenance of aircrafts, training of crew etc. The GCC thus provided an ideal forum for enhancement of cooperation among these countries in the field of air defence but for various reasons this did not happen and each member country continued to expend colossal sums to expand its airforce at the national level.\textsuperscript{67}

It may be noted that from 1987 onwards, even the talk of establishing a collective air umbrella totally ceased and no speculation to this effect appeared in the Gulf press. It is not difficult to fathom why this should be so.

The intra-GCC rift vis-a-vis the threat perception from Iran became pronounced from end 1985 with Oman and the UAE opting for strict neutrality in the conflict. As pointed out earlier in Part I, the 1986 summit marked the end of GCC's attempts to undertake the defence of this region by itself and, in continuation of this trend, the plan for building a unified air defence system was totally abandoned in 1987.

Though there was persistent speculation since early 1982 about creation of a pan-GCC integrated air defence network, this scheme was never seriously pursued. The fact that

\textsuperscript{67} "The Kuwaiti armed forces are now little more than a hollow shell. While Kuwait has increased its arms imports from around 2.5 million dollars in 1973 to over 400 million dollars annually and its defence budget to about 1.3 billion dollars annually, it is still buying a deterrent whose day-to-day management and operations depend on foreign support, personnel and advisers." (From, 'A.H. Cordeman', n.64, p.571). A major part of Kuwaiti defence budget is spent on its airforce. Similarly, Saudi Arabia spends huge amounts to expand its airforce. It had placed an order worth 30 billion dollars (representing most of its oil revenue) in mid-88 with the UK for purchasing aircraft and related equipment.
the 1982 summit\textsuperscript{68} of Bahrain reached no agreement on this subject shows that the GCC members were divided on it much before their disagreements vis-a-vis the strategy to be followed towards Iran surfaced in 1985.

Paradoxically enough, a high degree of coordination between the airforces of Qatar and Saudi Arabia was in existence long before the GCC came into being. "Saudi Arabia engaged in joint defence planning with Qatar long before the formation of the GCC and encouraged Qatar to order Mirage F.1s to provide an air unit that could cooperate directly with the Saudi airforce. Qatar has since worked closely with Saudi Arabia in planning its land-based air defences and Qatar's Hawk units will be linked with the Saudi $C^3I$ system that will be part of the Air Defence Enhancement Package."\textsuperscript{69}

Establishment of a Joint Gulf Force

The GCC countries since late 1981 have been exploring the possibility of creating a combined armed force which could be used to deter external aggression. The third GCC summit held in Bahrain in 1982 formally approved the concept of establishing a defence force consisting of units drawn from GCC countries and such a force came into existence in

\begin{itemize}
\item [68.] See the section dealing with the third summit in Part I.
\item [69.] A.H.Cordesman, n.64, p.595.
\end{itemize}
October 1983 under the name of 'Peninsula Shield Force' when its manoeuvres were held. During some of the meetings of GCC Defence Ministers, the need to reinforce this form was stressed. A number of statements have been made by GCC dignitaries emphasising the objective of building an integrated Gulf army.

One of the earliest statements on this subject was made by the Bahraini Interior Minister in December 1981 following the coup attempt in that country when in an interview with the Kuwaiti newspaper Al Anbaa70 he called for creation of a pan-GCC rapid intervention force.

The Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi in October 1982 referred71 to the possibility of unification of GCC members' armed forces should the danger to the Gulf region increase. Subsequently, in a press statement Shaikh Hamad, the Crown Prince of Bahrain, said inter alia:

"The Gulf Cooperation Council is seeking to establish a deterrent Gulf force to protect the gains of the peoples of this region and to confront any attempts against the security."72

Shortly afterwards in the same vein, the Saudi Defence Minister said: "The GCC is studying the group's armaments

70. Al Anbaa, 5 December 1981.
industry to form a joint defence force."\(^{73}\)

The Kuwaiti newspaper Al Anbaa reported on 2 November 1983 that the GCC countries were planning to set up a force consisting of 100,000 men within 3 years and a number of articles were published in the Gulf press extolling and commending the creation of such an integrated force. Subsequently, confirming this media report, Kuwait's Defence Minister Shaikh Salim informed the Kuwaiti newspaper \textit{Al Watan}\(^{74}\) that the GCC countries aimed to build a Rapid Deployment Force of almost two brigades strength to react fast to threats against the region which was to be commanded by a Saudi Officer."\(^{75}\) Reaffirming the possibility of creation of a unified Gulf force, Shaikh Khalifa, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi said in a press interview a couple of years later:

"The leaders of the GCC in their forthcoming summit in Abu Dhabi will concentrate their efforts on devising constructive means to set up a Gulf defence force. They will do everything to keep the region safe from all threats and dangers."\(^{76}\)

To examine now how far the GCC countries succeeded in setting up a unified force. The first manoeuvres of the

\begin{itemize}
  \item [\(^{73}\)] \textit{Arab Times}, 29 January 1983.
  \item [\(^{74}\)] \textit{Khaleej Times}, 6 March 1983.
  \item [\(^{75}\)] \textit{Al Watan}, 23 March 1985.
  \item [\(^{76}\)] \textit{Khaleej Times}, 20 September 1986.
\end{itemize}
GCC RDF were held in the UAE in October 1983 and the composition of the RDF then was as follows: Saudi Arabia/Kuwait: 1000 men each; Qatar/Bahrain: 100-300 men each; Oman: 350 and UAE: 1000 men. 77

The second series of exercises of this force were held in Saudi Arabia in the following year in October 1984. No other exercise of the so-called GCC RDF took place during 1985 and 1986; in March 1987 it held manoeuvres in Oman when only the contingents from Oman and Saudi Arabia took part. 78

Apart from lack of participation in this last exercise of the RDF by units from most member countries, hardly any publicity was given to it in the Gulf press. Significantly enough, the Saudi press described the GCC member countries as non-combatant while reporting this exercise 79 and the use of this expression was clearly intended to mollify any Iranian misgivings.

Though a permanent headquarters for this GCC RDF has been built near the Saudi military city at "Hafer Al Batin", units from different member countries were never stationed there.

Oman has been quite articulate in expressing its opposition to deployment of its troops outside the Sultanate as a part of the RDF. This would become apparent from following:

77. Arab Times, 12 October 1983.
79. Ibid.
"Some Gulf nations are promoting the idea of building a joint military force to be under a single command and ready to deploy in any Gulf state at any time. Others have gone as far as to suggest a pact similar to NATO or the WARSaw Pact and this does not conform with Muscat's policy."

"Sultan Qaboos suggested Gulf states strengthen their defences individually and coordinate on military issues. He said a military alliance between them could give Iran the false impression that the Arabs were planning war against it." 80

Speaking with the English newspaper Daily Telegraph on the same issue during the same period, the Sultan said:

"The Sultan was opposed in principle to any permanent co-located joint standing military force of Council Members' units such as was proposed last year to be stationed outside the Sultanate." 81

It has been noted earlier that the Kuwaiti Foreign Minister himself in the aftermath of the Fourth summit had described the RDF as symbolic while Abdulla Bishara had termed its significance as more "political" than military.

It is thus seen that despite the general consensus among the GCC countries on establishing a unified armed force composed of contingents from various GCC countries, in

80. From an interview given by Sultan Qaboos to a Cairo Weekly Al Mussawar as quoted by Kuwait Times, 4 April 1985.

81. As quoted in Kuwait Times, 3 April 1985.
practice, this was far from being achieved. What the GCC succeeded in doing was only to hold two combined army manoeuvres involving not more than 5000 troops. The GCC countries, therefore, certainly did not succeed in setting up an effective unified force; moreover, they were never in a position to assemble a force of respectable size say of 10,000 men within a short time and deploy it effectively. The two exercises of the Peninsula Shield Force were held on a small scale and could hardly be described as realistic. The equipment used by the GCC countries varied widely and this greatly hampered military coordination between them; moreover, they were not able to agree on a unified command structure for the combined force consisting of units from different members.

It may be noted that Sultan Qaboos's statements expressing opposition to deployment of Omani troops on a permanent basis outside Oman were made in 1985; manoeuvres of the RDF scheduled to be held near Saudi Arabia's King Khalid military City towards the end of 1985 never took place and the GCC Defence Ministers merely 'inspected' the units of the Peninsula Shield Force in October 1985 - the year 1985 as has been observed elsewhere marked accentuation of intra-GCC differences especially pertaining to the policy to be followed vis-a-vis Iran. No statements were made by GCC dignitaries from 1987 onwards stressing the need to

82. MEED, 29 June 1985.
create a pan-GCC force and this was consistent with absence of any statements on establishing an integrated air defence network during this period.

It is also significant that no exercises of the Peninsula Shield Force were held either in Kuwait or in Saudi Arabia's eastern province - two regions which were most exposed to the threat of a lightning Iranian strike. If the GCC countries indeed wanted to demonstrate their solidarity with Kuwait, they would have deployed contingents of the Peninsular Shield Force on a permanent basis in that country as was done by the Arab League in June/July 1961 when Iraq was threatening to annex Kuwait.

Though Kuwait was gravely threatened by Iran from early 1986 onwards when it occupied Iraq's Faw Peninsula which brought its forces within striking distance of Kuwait, there was never any move to deploy the Peninsula Shield Force in Kuwait. This was confirmed by the UAE Defence Minister himself in January 1988 when he asserted that no discussion regarding movement of this force had taken place during the eighth summit held in December 1987.

It can, therefore, be safely concluded from what has preceded that the GCC states failed to create even a token


integrated force capable of intervening effectively on behalf of the GCC as a whole during the course of the Iraq-Iran war. Failure of the GCC to establish an integrated armed force can be attributed to following factors:

i) Sharp intra-GCC disagreements vis-à-vis the policy to be pursued towards Iran and strong desire of some member states like Oman and the UAE to avoid displeasing Iran.

ii) A number of operational difficulties such as incompatibility of equipment used by different GCC states, failure to agree on a unified command structure, presence of a large number of expatriate personnel in GCC armed forces etc. GCC's inability to evolve a unified command structure for the Peninsula Shield Force reflected the spirit of rivalry and suspicion which in reality dominated intra-GCC relations rather than the spirit of cooperation and brotherhood as was being claimed.

A well-respected journal reported that the purpose behind establishing the Peninsula Shield Force was to use it for dealing with internal security problems in the GCC. This might be pure press speculation but again any lurking fear that this force might be used for intervention in internal affairs of other states, possibly against their will, would have stood in the way of its creation.

85. A.H. Cordesman, n.64, p.489.
86. From MEED, 20 July 1984.
Building of an Armaments Industry

Plans for establishing an armaments industry in the GCC region to serve the needs of all these countries preceded the establishment of this body. An organisation called "The Arab Authority for Military Industrialisation" was set up in mid-seventies and it envisaged setting up of military industries in Egypt to be partly financed by Saudi Arabia, Qatar, etc. 87

Subsequently, after the GCC came into existence, there was much talk about building of an armaments industry with participation of all the member countries.

The Crown Prince and Defence Minister of Bahrain informed a Kuwaiti newspaper as follows in February 1981: 88

"There is complete coordination among the Gulf states over armaments and the establishment of military industries." It may be noted that this statement was made even before the GCC charter was formally ratified during the first summit. The Saudi Defence Minister said in a press statement in March 1983, "that the GCC was studying the possibility of setting up an arms industry in the region." 89 Qatar's Chief

87. From APS Diplomat, 29 August to 5 September 1989, p, 94. . Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar were Egypt's partners in the AIO in the seventies and its capital outlay was projected at four billion dollars in 1976. The AIO became moribund as a result of Egypt's signing the Camp David accords in 1977.


89. Arab Times, 7 March 1983.
of Staff said in a press interview to the Qatari newspaper Al Rayyah in February, 1984: "that the six member countries of the GCC had already entered the initial stage of military industrialisation." The UAE Chief of Staff said in November, 1986 on the eve of the seventh summit "that the GCC Chiefs of Staff had discussed the possibilities of setting up military industries in member states." According to press reports, the GCC Defence Ministers were expected to discuss this issue during their eighth meeting in November 1988.

Despite the plethora of statements made by GCC dignitaries expressing GCC's desire to go in for building of an armaments industry on a collective basis, not a single step in that direction was taken. In fact, no GCC country has so far set up an indigenous armaments industry though Saudi Arabia has plans on the anvil to manufacture light weapons, ammunition etc. There has been no concerted effort of any kind within the GCC to set up a factory or a unit to produce weapons for GCC countries as a whole and this obviously reflects the failure of this body to break new ground. Quoting here two statements which throw some light on as to why the GCC could not implement the decision on collective production of weapons.

Major General Ali bin Majid Al Mamari, President of the Palace office of Muscat in an interview said inter alia: 94

"It is good to have a joint GCC military industry but that it is no easy matter to establish one. He cited manpower needs and high costs as obstacles to establishment of such an industry."

The Kuwaiti Defence Minister while speaking with a local newspaper said "that the decision to build an arms industry cannot be based on emotion and bravado but has to be based on scientific and well-studied criteria." 95

It is thus easy to envisage some of the obstacles impeding creation of a pan-GCC armaments industry. The GCC countries simply did not possess the technically-qualified manpower or the industrial infrastructure required to manufacture heavy weapons. They could have made a start with production of ammunition, spare parts, etc. but this again must have proved difficult due to widely different kinds of armaments and weapons being used by armed forces belonging to various GCC countries.

Interestingly enough, the GCC countries could not agree until the end of 1988 even on the feasibility of setting up a joint arms industry. This would become evident from the following quotations:

"Prince Sultan, Saudi Defence Minister, disclosed in April 1987 that the military committees of the GCC were studying the possibility of joint military industries among the six member states."96 In another interview in July 1987 Prince Sultan commented as follows:

"GCC member states are conducting a study on setting up joint military industry. It is hoped that the outcome of the study will appear soon."97

In a press statement the Kuwaiti Defence Minister said in December 198898 that the GCC had not until then finalised plans for setting up armaments industries to produce small weapons. He mentioned that the GCC lacked the technical and scientific capability to produce heavy weapons.

There was considerable media speculation during 1988 about establishment of military industries in GCC states under the aegis of the AIO.99 No such step was taken probably because of opposition to it by pro-Iranian GCC members like Oman, the UAE, etc.100

Grant of Financial Assistance by the GCC to Oman and Bahrain to Strengthen Their Defence Capabilities

The decision to grant financial assistance to Bahrain and Oman to enable them to upgrade their defences was taken

97. Ibid., 10 July 1987.
98. Arab Times, 28 December 1988
100. Ibid., 26 September 1988, SP 140.
by the GCC almost immediately after its creation. Delegations of military officials from the GCC had visited Oman and Bahrain during the middle of December 1981 and February 1982\(^{101}\) to assess their military requirements. According to a Kuwaiti newspaper\(^{102}\), the second meeting of the GCC Chiefs of Staff held in March 1982 drew up a plan for supplying Bahrain and Oman with weapons, training their armed forces and bolstering their defence capabilities. The third GCC summit held in Bahrain in November 1982 pledged an amount of 1.8 billion dollars to Bahrain and Oman as defence assistance\(^{103}\).

During a visit to Kuwait in August 1983\(^{104}\), Oman's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs himself mentioned in a press conference that Oman had asked for assistance to the tune of 1.8 billion dollars for expansion of its navy in order to face the Iranian threat. Sultan Qaboos in an interview with London's Financial Times indicated that the GCC had pledged Oman 1.8 billion dollars as defence assistance over a 12 year period.\(^{105}\) However, the same newspaper reported subsequently that certain unhappiness existed in Oman over the attempts made by the GCC to dictate how this "aid" should be expended.\(^{106}\) Following a meeting of GCC

\(^{101}\) These visits took place on 14 December 1981 and 14 February 1982 (From Kuwait News Agency Publication of February 1983).

\(^{102}\) Al Anbaa, 19 March 1982.

\(^{103}\) MEEED, 16 November 1984.

\(^{104}\) Al Qabas, August 1983.

\(^{105}\) Arab Times, 20 March 1984.

\(^{106}\) Al Watan, 6 April 1984.
Chiefs of Staff in July 1984, it was reported that they had recommended a grant of 2 billion dollars to Oman to enable it to improve its air defence capabilities. 107

Despite the above reports, neither Oman nor Bahrain are known to have received financial assistance through any pan-GCC fund. 108 This might have happened partly as a result of differences over how the GCC grant was to be utilised. Since Saudi Arabia was to have contributed a major part of the proposed pan-GCC defence fund, it might have insisted that these funds had to be expended in a certain manner with which Oman and Bahrain, particularly the former, might not have been in agreement. Following media report would be relevant here:

"In June, a GCC military committee invited western companies to do a feasibility study on ways of integrating the various countries' air defence systems through a central command and control centre in Riyadh. The other GCC states may decide to go along with the schemes if the Saudis agree to fund it but only if it does not conflict with their own operational requirements or independence." 109

Whatever may be the real reasons, a pan-GCC defence fund to assist Bahrain and Oman was never established. This


108. This of course does not include the bilateral defence aid which Saudi Arabia has been giving for many years to Bahrain.

no doubt reflected absence of intra-GCC consensus on nature of the defence threat confronting these countries, apart from indicating Oman's unwillingness to accept substantial assistance from Saudi Arabia.

It may be mentioned in the end that from 1985 onwards there has been no further speculation about any pan-GCC move to strengthen Oman and Bahrain militarily.

**Combined Military Exercises**

No common manoeuvres among the armed forces of the GCC countries were held prior to the establishment of this body and even a proposal for carrying out such manoeuvres was not mooted earlier. This should not cause any surprise when one recalls that prior to 1980, the member countries of the GCC never felt any need to harmonise their defence policies.

The precursor of the manoeuvres carried out later by the GCC can said to be the combined army-airforce exercise organised by Saudi Arabia in June 1979. This exercise was carried out by the Saudi troops but was attended by dignitaries from all member countries of the GCC except Oman. 110

The GCC organised a number of joint military exercises among its members involving army, navy and airforce units and the details of these exercises are as follows:

110. These manoeuvres were held in a place called Khamis Mushayat near the Saudi-Yemeni border on 27 June 1979. See Na'acav Saifran, n.1, p.355.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No.</th>
<th>Date of Exercise</th>
<th>Countries participating</th>
<th>Nature of the exercise</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>October 1983</td>
<td>All members</td>
<td>Army manoeuvres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>November 1983</td>
<td>Kuwait/S.Arabia</td>
<td>Air manoeuvres</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>January 1984</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>February 1984</td>
<td>Oman/UAE</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>April 1984</td>
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<td>-do-</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>August 1984</td>
<td>Oman/S.Arabia</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>October 1984</td>
<td>Oman/Bahrain</td>
<td>4 Omani naval ships visited Bahrain.</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>October 1984</td>
<td>All members</td>
<td>Armed forces exercises</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>December 1984</td>
<td>UAE/S.Arabia</td>
<td>Air manoeuvres</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>January 1985</td>
<td>Kuwait/Qatar</td>
<td>Naval manoeuvres</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>March 1985</td>
<td>Kuwait/Oman</td>
<td>Air manoeuvres</td>
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<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>June/July 1985</td>
<td>Bahrain/Kuwait</td>
<td>Naval manoeuvres</td>
</tr>
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<td>14.</td>
<td>September 1985</td>
<td>Qatar/SA/Oman</td>
<td>-do-</td>
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<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>March 1987</td>
<td>Oman/S.Arabia</td>
<td>Army manoeuvres</td>
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<td>16.</td>
<td>September 1987</td>
<td>All members</td>
<td>Air manoeuvres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>November 1988</td>
<td>All members</td>
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It may first be noted that these exercises began in October 1983 when the first manoeuvres of the Peninsula Shield Force were held and ended towards the end of 1985. It may be recalled that during the third summit held in
Bahrain in November 1982, the GCC had decided to go in for creation of a pan-GCC armed force. This decision was no doubt partly prompted by the continuous deterioration in Iraq's military position vis-a-vis Iran; it is noteworthy that exercises of the Peninsula Shield Force and the first Kuwait-Saudi air manoeuvres came shortly in the wake of Iranian threats to close the Gulf of Hormuz.\(^{111}\)

The closing months of 1983 can be regarded as marking a new plateau in the tempo of military cooperation among the GCC countries. The GCC had taken the first tentative and hesitant step towards welding armed forces of its members, who were no doubt apprehending Iran's embarking on rash military action, against some of them. It would be pertinent to recall here that in the latter half of 1983, Oman had solicited large-scale assistance from the GCC for expanding its navy.\(^{112}\) During 1984, a number of joint air manoeuvres as well as exercises of the Peninsula Shield Force took place.

More significantly, from late 1984 onwards, one finds that a large number of joint naval manoeuvres were organised and the motivation behind them is not difficult to gauge. It may be recalled that Iran had began to attack merchant ships and oil carriers

\(^{111}\) See the Section dealing with evolution of GCC's relations with Iran in Part I.

\(^{112}\) See the earlier section on GCC's assistance to Bahrain and Oman.
plying through the Arabian Gulf from early 1984. The Iranian navy had started to systematically intercept and search merchant ships carrying cargo to Kuwait to ascertain whether or not they were transporting military supplies for Iraq. The GCC countries were examining the possibility of establishing joint naval patrols to protect shipping plying through the sea of Oman and the Persian Gulf and no doubt the combined naval manoeuvres were organised with this end in view.

It is significant that no joint military exercises among the GCC countries were held in 1986. During 1987, no doubt two joint pan-GCC exercises were held but they appear to have only symbolic significance: the third manoeuvres of the Peninsula Shield Force held in Oman in March 1987 were organised on a small scale with participation of only Omani and Saudi troops; as regards "Peninsula Falcon I" pan-GCC air manoeuvres of September 1987, they were held in Thumrait in Southern Oman - a location more distant from the Iraq-Iran war zone could not have been envisaged. If this air exercise was to have any meaning, it should have been held in Kuwait and focussed on repelling a simulated missile attack. It is to be recalled that during the latter half of 1987, Iranian missiles had hit Kuwait a number of times.

It may be mentioned that a joint naval exercise scheduled to be held off the UAE coast towards the end of
1986 never took place. It has already been observed that manoeuvres of the Peninsula Shield Force scheduled for the end of 1985 were also cancelled and these two cancellations were no doubt indicative of intra-GCC disagreements.

The years 1986 and 1987 had witnessed a sharp escalation in Iranian hostile action directed against Kuwait. During February 1986 Iran had occupied Iraq's strategic FAW peninsula which was separated from Kuwait only by a narrow creek of water. This was accompanied by bellicose and intimidating statements by Iran threatening to take punitive action against Kuwait unless it desisted from providing assistance to Iraq. Subsequently, Iranian navy made merchant ships plying to Kuwait a special target of its attacks and bombed and intercepted a number of oil carriers belonging to Kuwait. Kuwait was forced to operate a shuttle service in which its own tankers carried oil to the port of Fujerah off the UAE coast from where it was transported by foreign oil carriers as due to the threat of Iranian attacks oil tankers from other countries had become increasingly reluctant to lift oil from Kuwait directly. In fact, Kuwait had started this practice as early as 1984.

113. The UAE Chief of Staff himself had said in a press statement that such naval manoeuvres would be held (From Khaleej Times, 15 June 1986).

114. See the section dealing with evolution of GCC's relations with Iran in Part I.
"At the outbreak of the Gulf tanker war in 1984, for example, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation quickly started a shuttle service to take its oil outside the straits of Hormuz; it was thus able to retain customers afraid to send their own tankers into the Gulf."\textsuperscript{115}

Subsequently, in early 1987 Kuwait was forced to seek assistance from superpowers to ensure the safety of its tanker fleet. However, despite the highly vulnerable position in which Kuwait was finding itself not a single important naval or air manoeuvre was held by the GCC in 1986 and 1987. Moreover, despite the tense relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran during the first half of 1988, no pan-GCC exercise was organised until the Iraq-Iran ceasefire went into effect in August 1988.

It has been seen earlier that the beginning of 1986 marked a sharp downturn in military cooperation within the GCC and this was naturally reflected in slowing down of the tempo of joint exercises by the GCC. It would be pertinent to recall that the sixth GCC Muscat summit in November 1985 had witnessed a virtual split in the GCC,\textsuperscript{116} when some member countries had reportedly opted for total neutrality vis-a-vis the Iraq-Iran conflict. It may also be recalled here that after the seventh

\textsuperscript{115} MERD, 12 April 1986.

\textsuperscript{116} See Chapter I of this thesis.
Abu Dhabi summit in November 1986 the GCC had decided that each member country would be responsible only for the protection of its own territorial waters and had tacitly expressed its acquiescence in the presence of foreign fleets in the Gulf which marked a total and radical reversal of the policy which the GCC was pursuing until then. In view of all this, the possibility of GCC states acting in concert in the defence field had become extremely remote in the aftermath of the Muscat summit of November 1985.\^117

It is thus seen that virtual cessation of joint military exercises among the GCC members from the end of 1985 onwards was a logical corollary of the events and developments then taking place. Evidently GCC's failure to organise any important military exercise from the end of 1985 to mid-1988 when the Iraq-Iran ceasefire went into effect was mainly due to desire to pro-Iranian members like Oman and the UAE not to undertake any action which may irk Iran. Following report published in a daily in December 1988 would be relevant here:

"The GCC held its biggest joint military exercise last month (November, 1988) in Kuwait, an exercise which would have been rejected by Oman and the UAE during the war out of fear of provoking Iran, the diplomats said."

\^117. The period intervening between the third GCC summit in 1982 in Bahrain and the sixth GCC summit in Muscat in 1985 represented pinnacle of intra-GCC defence cooperation; most joint manoeuvres were held during this period.

Creating a Specially Protected Sea-Lane on the Western Side of the Arabian Gulf Through Which Cargo Ships Trading with the GCC Ports Could Traverse

It has been seen earlier that from early 1984 Iran had began to intercept and attack merchant marine, including oil carriers, traversing through the Arabian Gulf and trading with Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, etc. To meet this threat the GCC countries began to explore the possibility of organising a naval armada to escort merchant ships plying through these waters. It was envisaged that this naval convoy would pass through a specially-designated sealane close to the GCC coast where it would be provided aerial cover by GCC countries.

The idea of designating a special sealane on the western side of the Gulf was first mooted during the conferences of GCC Foreign and Oil Ministers held in June 1984.\(^{119}\) This proposal was further deliberated during a meeting of GCC's Chiefs of Staff held on 23 June 1984. The APS Diplomat\(^{120}\) then had reported that an agreement had been reached among the GCC Chiefs of Staff on protecting the merchant shipping by suitably deploying GCC's air force and naval units.

Interestingly enough, Sultan Qaboos in a press inter­view then said that Oman had ordered oil tankers not to remain anchored close to its coastline.\(^{121}\) This statement was indicative of disagreements within the GCC on establishing a specially-protected sea route for oil carriers.

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\(^{120}\) APS Diplomat; 25 June 1984.

\(^{121}\) Oman Observer, 3 July 1984.
This issue was again considered during a combined meeting of GCC oil and Foreign Ministers held on 25/26 August 1986 and in the aftermath of this conference diplomatic sources were quoted as saying that “a network of radar detection and naval escorts was discussed by the Ministers to protect commercial shipping in the region against Iranian attacks.”122 The Arab Times dated 28 October 1986 said that the GCC Foreign Ministers during their meeting held on 27 October 1986 on the eve of the seventh summit in Abu Dhabi had considered the possibility of air and sea patrols being mounted by the GCC countries to protect shipping in this region.

However, as has been noted these discussions did not lead to any concrete results and the very idea of protecting merchant marine passing through the Gulf waters by collective military action on the part of the GCC states was abandoned from 1986 Abu Dhabi summit onwards.123 There was a massive entry of western naval ships, especially of the US, into the Gulf waters during early 1987 which greatly reduced Iran's ability to attack the merchant marine traversing through them.

During early 1987, it was officially confirmed that the GCC countries had abandoned plans to set up a protected sea-lane in the Gulf waters. Ibrahim Sobhi, Secretary General

123. See the section dealing with GCC summits in Part I.
of Oman's Supreme Committee for Conferences, categorically ruled out in a press conference introduction of a sea-lane off the GCC coasts to be defended by the GCC countries, claiming that the GCC countries wished to ensure safety of navigation only in their territorial waters. 124

The GCC countries could not agree on providing collective protection to the merchant marine passing through the Gulf evidently because the Iranian threat appeared to be confined mainly to Kuwait and most member countries did not wish to annoy Iran through participation in a combined naval armada.

Common Policy for Acquisition of Sophisticated Weapons

One of the factors hampering military coordination among the GCC countries has been the lack of compatibility in the equipment and armaments possessed by their defence forces. 125 Defence Ministers and Chiefs of Staff of the GCC have been aware from an early stage of the need for some kind of commonality of approach vis-a-vis their arms procurement policies.


125. "The conservative Gulf states have not designed their forces to cooperate with each other and they now have little interoperability." (From A.H. Cordesman, n.64, p.489).
The first conference of GCC Defence Ministers held on 25/26 January 1982\textsuperscript{126} had recommended diversification of sources of arms procurement for the GCC countries. The Crown Prince of Bahrain and Commander-in-Chief of its armed forces said in an interview a little later that\textsuperscript{127} "reliance upon one source (for obtaining arms) was undesirable in the long run as that may subject us to blackmail from that source." The GCC Chiefs of Staff meeting on 13 February 1984 in Doha again stressed the need to diversify GCC's sources of arms imports.\textsuperscript{128} No doubt the GCC countries' desired to import arms from various countries to obviate undue dependence on a single source as would be evident from the following:

In an interview with Kuwait University Graduates Association, Kuwait's Defence Minister said, "It is in the interest of all of us to see our defence forces cooperate and coordinate in all spheres, notably training, organisation and arms acquisition."

"Diversification of our weapons supplies is a must if we wish to achieve independence and freedom."\textsuperscript{129}

\textsuperscript{126} Gulf Times of Qatar, 27 January 1982.
\textsuperscript{127} Arabic Daily Adhwaa, 6 February 1982.
\textsuperscript{128} Gulf Times, 14 February 1984.
\textsuperscript{129} Kuwait Times, 26 June 1982.
"The Saudi Crown Prince said in an interview that the Kingdom purchased weapons from various sources on the basis of they are suitable for our purposes making sure that political pressures are excluded." 130

The Kuwaiti Defence Minister in a press interview in December 1988 said inter-alia that "Kuwait followed a policy of multiplicity of sources while acquiring arms according to its needs, constraints and interests and that it bought weapons both from the East and the West". 131

Thus there has been a general consensus among the GCC countries in avoidance of arms imports from a single source.

To assess whether the GCC countries were able to pursue any kind of a coordinated policy vis-a-vis arms procurement, its following important aspects would be critically examined:

i) How far the GCC countries were able to implement the principle of diversification of arms supplies and, more important, whether they followed any integrated strategy while doing so.

ii) Whether they had developed any system of mutual consultation before purchasing sophisticated weapons to ensure their compatibility and to facilitate joint operations.

iii) Whether the GCC procured any armaments on a collective basis.

It would be worth examining first whether during the preceding years there was any significant change in the military relationship between the various GCC states and their principal arms suppliers in the Western world. This would elucidate the extent to which these countries succeeded in diversifying their sources of arms supply.

Value of GCC Weapons Transfers by Major Suppliers and Recipient Country, Cumulative 1979-83 (in dollar millions)132

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the country</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>USSR</th>
<th>USA</th>
<th>France</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>West Germany</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bahrain</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuwait</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oman</td>
<td>565</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>430</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qatar</td>
<td>7655</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>440</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>12125</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5100</td>
<td>2500</td>
<td>1900</td>
<td>525</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAE</td>
<td>620</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is seen from this table that the UAE and Qatar have been importing their arms mostly from France while Oman has mainly depended on the United Kingdom. As far as Saudi Arabia was concerned, it was turning to the USA for most of its arms

An analysis of the developments that took place in recent years suggests that there has been no perceptible change in GCC's military ties with the western world. Though Saudi Arabia has been buying advanced weapon systems from the UK and France during the last few years, the USA still retains its pre-eminent and dominant position as a virtual ally of Saudi Arabia in the field of defence. The Saudi dependence on the USA in the military field was enhanced from the beginning of this decade with the deployment of the AWACS aircraft and stationing of hundreds of American military personnel on the Saudi soil for the operation of these aircraft. After the formation of the GCC, the Americans were entrusted with establishing a highly sophisticated anti-aircraft defence system under the "Peace Shield Programme" in the Kingdom.

France remains the major arms exporter to the UAE which had placed an order with it during 1983-85 for purchase of 36 Mirage 2000 aircraft. The military ties between Qatar and France remain as strong as ever and a defence accord was signed between them in June 1987. The Qatari airforce consists of 14 French Mirage F.1 fighters,


134. Saudi Gazette, 6 October 1986.
six Franco-German Alphajets and various French-manufactured helicopters while its navy is equipped with Exocet anti-ship missiles. 135

The military links between the UK and Oman remain strong and this was dramatically demonstrated in the joint Omani-British manoeuvres "swift sword" held in December 1986. 136 These manoeuvres in which 100 military aircraft and 22 warships, including an aircraft carrier from the UK, participated were one of the biggest such exercises carried out by Great Britain in recent years outside the NATO.

Taking all this into account, it can be said that creation of the GCC had no significant impact on the special linkages and relationships between individual GCC members and western powers. No doubt during recent years, Saudi Arabia has been making a determined effort to reduce its dependence on the USA for sophisticated weaponry but this was an exclusive Saudi decision based partly on political considerations.

There has been no understanding among GCC states, even of a vague kind, as to the direction the member states should follow while diversifying their sources of arms imports. This is clearly seen from the fact that GCC members never consulted each other while undertaking

purchases of major weapons systems. These countries acquired weapons from whichever sources they deemed to be best suited to their individual requirements and hardly any importance was attached to examining whether the weapon systems being acquired by a particular member was capable of being integrated with the similar systems in other member countries.

Kuwait had placed an order with the USSR in August 1984 for purchasing anti-aircraft missiles such as Strella-2, Sam-7, Sam-8 valued at 327 million dollars. This was a major and significant decision considering that no other GCC member had ever brought arms from the USSR. There is nothing to show that this Kuwaiti decision reflected any kind of prior understanding among the GCC members.137 During 1988, Kuwait again turned138 to the USSR for arms purchases and again this was not preceded by any kind of consultation with its allies in the GCC.

Quoting now from a statement made by Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Commander-in-Chief of its forces:139

"The UAE would not hesitate, if necessary, to purchase weapons from the East Block or anywhere else to defend the national interest." It is evident from this

137. Kuwait turned to USSR for acquisition of anti-aircraft missiles in mid-1984 after the USA refused to supply it with stinger missiles. MEED, 13 July 1984. Kuwait's Foreign Minister himself affirmed in a press interview in August 1984 that Kuwait's acquisition of Soviet arms was a purely bilateral manner in which the GCC was not involved. FBIS-MEA-V-84-162, 20 August 1984, pp.C1-C3.


139. From Khaleej Times, 12 December 1986.
excerpt that the UAE was going to decide whether or not to buy weapons from Eastern Europe entirely on the basis of its own requirements and considerations, without being bothered with the wider GCC interests. Similar views were expressed in statements made by Saudi and Kuwaiti Defence Ministers dated 21 March 1987 and 13 December 1988 which have been quoted earlier.

During 1988, three GCC members, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the UAE made major acquisitions of aircraft, missiles, etc. but they did so from three different sources, e.g. the UK (the Saudi order was worth 3.0 billion dollars\textsuperscript{140}); the USA (the Kuwaiti order was worth 1.9 billion dollars\textsuperscript{141}) and France (from whom the UAE ordered missiles\textsuperscript{142}).

It thus becomes more than evident that the GCC states in no way were trying to effect coordination in their arms purchases. This was acknowledged in the aftermath of GCC Defence Ministers' meeting in November 1988 when the press statement issued said inter alia: "that these states will pursue separate arms purchases while trying to coordinate weapon systems."\textsuperscript{143}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{140} MEED, 22 July 1988.
\item \textsuperscript{141} Arab Times, 28 August 1988.
\item \textsuperscript{142} Ibid, 23 November 1988.
\item \textsuperscript{143} Ibid., 24/25 November 1988.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Finally to assess whether the GCC purchased any arms on a collective basis following would be relevant. Prior to the 1986 Abu Dhabi summit certain statements were made raising the possibility of GCC's acquiring sophisticated aircraft jointly. Kuwait's army Chief of Staff Abdulla Al Ghanim said: 144

"The GCC will buy one of the progressive and technical planes for early warning. We have found after studies that only one country needs to buy the plane and the GCC would cooperate and share the cost. When there is one plane for the GCC, it would work better."

During this period, a high-ranking US official had expressed interest in supplying weapons to the GCC on a collective basis. 145 It was reported in the media during the same period that the GCC was contemplating the purchase of ten maritime surveillance aircraft worth 1 billion dollars. 146

However, all these reports proved speculative and GCC did not go in for any common purchase of weapons.

Taking into account all that has preceded one can conclude that the GCC did not break any new ground as far as procurement of armaments was concerned. There was no

144. Arab Times, 22 October 1986.
146. MEED, 8 November 1986.
noticeable intra-GCC harmonisation in this field and each country imported weapons as dictated by its own national priorities.

Unifying the Syllabi in Military Academies in the GCC and Fostering Coordination Between Them

The GCC Defence Ministers and Chiefs of Staff have been convinced since the beginning of the need to foster a closer relationship among the military academies within the GCC. Sheikh Salem, Kuwait's Defence Minister, said in an interview to Kuwait Times in 1982 that the GCC Defence Ministers hoped to achieve "full integration in the field of military studies."

During a conference of GCC Defence Ministers in February 1984, in Doha, a proposal for setting up a joint naval academy was discussed. 147 During the combined meeting of GCC Defence and Foreign Ministers held in September 1984, 148 unification of syllabi as well as establishment of common GCC military academies were considered. The same theme was again the topic of discussion during a meeting of GCC Defence Ministers in Muscat held in October 1986. 149

However, it does not appear that anything concrete has been achieved in this field. No formal announcement

about unification of syllabi taught in the GCC military academies has been made and there is nothing to indicate any heightened tempo of interaction between them. It would be safe to conclude that each GCC member country is training its soldiers and officers more or less in the same way as before though each member now may be more aware of the training programmes offered by other members than was the case earlier.

Failure of the GCC countries to effectively coordinate their policies in the defence field was strikingly demonstrated in the following two developments which took place in 1987. It may be recalled that during this year the Iranians had stepped up their attacks on merchant shipping in the Gulf and had began to lay mines on an extensive scale, both inside and outside the Straits of Hormuz. It would have certainly enabled the GCC to cope with the Iranian challenge more effectively if air surveillance could have been carried out over the entire Gulf with the help of US AWACS aircraft based in Saudi Arabia. However, even this measure could not be adopted, no doubt because of refusal of some GCC member countries to allow Saudi AWACS to overfly their territory, even though the USA, according to press reports, was interested in this move. 150

In the middle of 1987, Iran began to mine waters close to the Kuwaiti territorial waters and a number of ships trading with Kuwait were hit by these mines. Minesweepers from no GCC country came to the help of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia even declared openly that their minesweepers would not be deployed outside Saudi territorial waters. Interestingly enough, minesweepers from the JAE and Oman began to participate in minesweeping operations only when Iranian mines were detected off Fujerah outside the Gulf of Hormuz.

Failure of the GCC countries to achieve harmonisation of policies in the defence field can basically be attributed to following factors:

i) Sharp differences existed among the member countries vis-a-vis the policy to be followed towards Iran.

ii) Each member country tried zealously to safeguard its independence of action and wished to retain its freedom to take decisions according to its own national interests and view points. Further, many of the GCC members like Kuwait were probably not willing to accept the Saudi leadership in the defence field. This factor would probably account for GCC's failure to establish a collective air defence system prior to 1982 as well as its failure to make progress in

areas such as adopting a common policy towards acquisition of arms, instituting common syllabi in their defence academies, etc.

iii) Defence forces of the GCC member countries use widely differing equipment and employ a large number of expatriate personnel belonging to various countries. Senior officers in the defence forces of the GCC are often selected not on the basis of professional competence but because of their loyalty and kinship to the ruling dynasty. Lack of a professional corps of defence officials in the armed forces of the GCC as well as the presence of a large number of expatriates holding senior positions from various countries exacerbated the difficulties in the way of defence cooperation.153

iv) Saudi Arabia has a close military relationship with the USA which influences in a very significant manner the Saudi defence policy while the US influence on the defence strategies of other GCC members is much less. Oman too has a special relationship with the UK in the defence field. The close military linkage of Saudi Arabia and Oman with the USA and the UK respectively has been another stumbling block obstructing pan-GCC defence cooperation.

Thus, apart from operational difficulties, growth of intra-GCC defence cooperation was hindered by differences among foreign policies of the members as well as by their desire to safeguard their independence of decision-making in all matters relating to defence to the fullest possible extent.

There has been another factor which though not usually acknowledged strongly discouraged any growth of military coordination among these countries. Though Saudi Arabia is the largest among the GCC countries and has been spending huge amounts on defence, its armed forces suffer from various deficiencies and they were in no position to defend the Kingdom against a sustained Iranian attack for any length of time without American help. It would be worth recalling that the much-vaunted AWACS aircraft in Saudi Arabia were being operated by American personnel. The Saudi navy is very small and poorly equipped while the Saudi air force too by itself totally lacked the capability to protect the vital installations of the GCC countries from a surprise Iranian air attack.

Closer coordination with Saudi Arabia, therefore, would not have increased the defensive capabilities of these countries in any real sense of the word but would have definitely aroused the ire of Iran which could have, if not anything else, fomented acts of terrorism and arson in these countries as it did in Kuwait. One can, therefore,
well understand the reluctance of the GCC countries to

enmesh themselves in an infructulous military alliance with

Saudi Arabia in which their loss would have outweighed

their gain.\textsuperscript{154}

The fact that the GCC countries had failed to

coordinate their military policy has been well recognised

and quoting from well-known daily: \textsuperscript{155}

"The Arabs would like to put everything behind Iraq

than to see themselves overrun by the Iranians. Their

anxiety would certainly heighten if Iranians reached a

major breakthrough in the on-going war. As for wider GCC

counter-measures against Iran, there has been much talk of

a coordinated force called the "Peninsula Shield" which is

supposed to develop into a rapid Deployment force. Despite

joint manoeuvres, some of which were a shambles, there

has been only slow progress towards real GCC military

coordination which has been further weakened by the 'each

for himself' approach. In fact, the lower Gulf states do

not want to give Iran the impression that they are becoming

a part of a hostile Arab military alliance. Also, they

do not want to put their forces under the control of much

longer Saudi army, which could be unavoidable in any combined

\textsuperscript{154}. GCC members have been reluctant to associate themselves

openly even with the USA for the fear of provoking

Iranian ire. From \textit{International Herald Tribune},

24 April 1984.

\textsuperscript{155}. From \textit{The Hindustan Times}, 17 December 1986.
force because the Saudis have their own quarrels with Iran which are not the quarrels of the smaller Gulf states. In addition, Saudi military control would increase the long-held suspicion of the smaller Gulf states that Saudi Arabia's ultimate ambition is to swallow them up into a single united Peninsula State."

It is thus seen that during the long course of the Iraq-Iran war, military coordination among GCC members achieved nothing tangible. Each GCC member strengthened its own defensive capabilities while paying mere lip service to the principle of a pan-GCC approach. Lack of consensus on the nature of the threat posed by Iran as well as the most efficacious way of dealing with it, mutual suspicions especially vis-a-vis Saudi Arabia, existence of formidable operational difficulties in the way of intra-GCC military cooperation - all this ensured that pan-GCC defence cooperation was doomed.

The tempo of intra-GCC defence cooperation further slowed down after cessation of hostilities between Iraq and Iran in August 1988. The meeting of GCC Defence Ministers held in November 1988 did not go beyond reaffirming in a ritualistic way the need for strengthening intra-GCC defence links.156 It called for boosting military cooperation,

exchanging expertise and holding regular exercises. The ninth GCC summit held subsequently in December 1988 was also almost totally silent on this issue. It merely expressed satisfaction with the level of intra-GCC defence coordination.\textsuperscript{157} The was hardly surprising. If the GCC members could not sink their differences while the Iraq-Iran conflict was raging, one could not have expected any initiative by them to boost their military links in the aftermath of the Iraq-Iran ceasefire which had led to considerable relaxation of tension among the countries of the region. The theme of intra-GCC defence cooperation almost went into oblivion during 1989 and until August 1989 not a single meeting of Defence Ministers was held nor even a proposal for holding a combined exercise mooted.

\textsuperscript{157} \textit{Al Sabas}, 22 December 1988.