Chapter III

EVOLUTION OF A UNIFIED, EXTERNAL PERSPECTIVE -
AN APPRAISAL OF FOREIGN MINISTERS' MEETINGS

The GCC Charter envisaged an all-important position for the Council of Foreign Ministers. This Council was expected to meet four times every year and was required to deal with all facets of cooperation between the GCC countries. The Council of Foreign Ministers was authorised to issue guidelines to other Ministers as well as to oversee the working of the General Secretariat of the GCC and to sanction its expenditure. It would not be incorrect to say that the GCC Charter envisaged a role for the Council of Foreign Ministers only next in importance to that of the Supreme Council consisting of Heads of State.

The first meeting of the GCC Foreign Ministers was held on 14 February 1981 in Riyadh during which a formal declaration about establishment of the Gulf Cooperation Council was made. The statement issued at the end of the meeting pointed out that the GCC would aim towards creation of similar structures in the fields of economy, finance, education, culture, health, communication, information, passport and nationality, travel and transportation, commerce, customs, movement of goods as well as law and legislation. It is significant that there was no mention of the two vital fields of internal security and defence. in the statement issued on the occasion of the first

1. See Appendix 15 for a full text of this statement.
meeting of the GCC Foreign Ministers. No doubt this omission was reflective of the fact that in February 1981, Iraq was expected to achieve a victory over Iran and the GCC countries were not foreseeing any imminent danger to their security, whether internal or external.

The second meeting of the GCC Foreign Ministers was held on 9 March 1981. During this meeting, they approved the basic charter of the Gulf Cooperation Council as well as statutes regulating the functioning of the Supreme Council (consisting of Heads of States) and the Ministerial Council consisting of Foreign Ministers. 2

The third meeting of the GCC Foreign Ministers was held on 23 May 1981 in Abu Dhabi on the eve of the first GCC summit. During this meeting they approved the nomination of Abdulla Bishara as Secretary General of the GCC. The Ministers also agreed upon structure of the organisation for settlement of disputes to be founded by the GCC. 3

The fourth Ministerial Conference of GCC Foreign Ministers was held in Taif in Saudi Arabia between 31 August and 2 September 1981. The main points of the final communique issued at the end of this meeting could be summarised as follows.

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The Ministerial Council reiterated that the security and stability of the Gulf were the responsibility of the member countries of the GCC only. It expressed opposition to interference in the affairs of the region by big powers and said that such attempts may drag this region into conflicts not beneficial to it. The Council discussed the attempts made by other powers to secure a foothold in the Gulf region for threatening its security and sovereignty and affirmed its disapprobation of such attempts. The Council stressed its determination to strengthen political and security cooperation among the members in order to enable them to cope with the dangers surrounding them. Discussing the situation in the Middle East, the Council expressed its total support for the struggle of the Palestinian people as well as for their inalienable rights of self determination and establishment of their independent country on their territory under the leadership of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation. It called for a just solution of the Palestinian problem and expressed its belief that such a solution would not be possible without total Israeli withdrawal from all the occupied territories including east Jerusalem and removal of all Israeli settlements from the Arab territories. The Council expressed its support for the principles enshrined in the Fahd Plan for the Middle East. The Council discussed the situation in Afghanistan and the Iraq-Iran war and reviewed the dangers posed by them. The Council expressed its commitment to Islamic solidarity and to
the doctrine of non-alignment. The Council voiced its opposition to the attempts of big powers aimed at establishing bases in the Gulf region, in the Arabian Sea, in the Red Sea and in the Indian Ocean.4

This first communique issued by the GCC Foreign Ministers is significant for a number of reasons. It eloquently reflects the inability of the GCC to adopt a definite policy vis-a-vis the two major issues then confronting this region e.g. the Iraq-Iran war and the Soviet presence in Afghanistan. The GCC has been split between pro-USA, Saudi Arabia and Oman on the one hand and comparatively neutral Kuwait which alone then had relations with the USSR. There was, therefore, no condemnation of the USSR for its actions in Afghanistan even though the same GCC states had only twenty one months earlier denounced the USSR in harsh terms in the Islamic summit held in Islamabad on 27 January 1980. The Foreign Ministers had merely contented themselves with vague statements expressing their opposition to foreign bases in the Gulf, to external intervention in the Gulf and so on and these statements clearly refer to both the superpowers.

Following the conference in an interview with the newspaper Oman dated 13 September 1981, the Omani Foreign Minister H.E. Quais Abdul Zowawi said that the Foreign Ministers'

Conference in Taif had discussed the Omani paper on security and had adopted it along with another paper tabled by Saudi Arabia. According to press reports, differences had emerged among the GCC countries regarding the stand they should adopt towards the issue of Gulf defence. It was reported that the GCC countries had been pressing Oman not to grant military facilities to the USA and they had not concurred with the Omani view that the Soviet Union constituted the biggest threat to the security of the region.5

The fifth meeting of the GCC Foreign Ministers was held on 10 November 1981 and was a preparatory session for the second GCC summit. No communique was issued at the end of this meeting.6

The sixth meeting of the GCC Foreign Ministers was held in Manama, Bahrain on 6-7 February 1982, in the aftermath of the abortive attempt in Bahrain in December 1981 when a group of eighty saboteurs had made a concerted bid to overthrow the government of the Amir of Bahrain.7 After reviewing the events in Bahrain, the Council declared its total support to Bahrain in guaranteeing its safety and stability and in protecting its sovereignty. It also expressed its determination to oppose the subversive acts of Iran aimed at creating instability in

5. See the section dealing with the first summit in Chapter I.
7. This conspiracy was unearthed on 13 December 1981. Al Watan, 13/14 December 1981. For text of the communique see, n.6.
Bahrain and at spreading chaos and anarchy in that country. The Council also declared that aggression on any member of the GCC would be regarded as an act of aggression on all the member countries. It also affirmed that the responsibility for safety and security of the region would be the collective responsibility of all the member countries.

Reviewing the Iraq-Iran war, the Council took note of the steadfast Iraqi willingness to find a just solution for the war and expressed its support for the various efforts being made to end this war by peaceful means. It called upon Iran to respond positively to the peace overtures being made by the Islamic conference, by the OIC and the UN. The Council also expressed its support for the Iraqi demand that the forthcoming Arab summit should discuss the Iraq-Iran war so that a unified Arab stand could be adopted towards it.

Reviewing the Middle East situation, the Council expressed its support for Syria and for the endeavours of the Arab world directed towards countering zionist expansionism as represented in annexation of Golan Heights by Israel. It reiterated its support for the Palestinian cause and for their inalienable rights.

The sixth session of the GCC Foreign Ministers mentioned above was held in Manama, Bahrain. According to a statement made by Assistant Secretary General of the GCC, Bahrain was
chosen as the venue of this extraordinary session as an expression of GCC's backing for Bahrain which had earlier faced an Iranian-inspired coup. The Foreign Ministers' Council during this meeting accused Iran by name of subversive actions to create instability in Bahrain. This was to be one of the few occasions when Iran would be blamed by name in an official GCC communiqué and this was no doubt reflective of the extreme nervousness generated by the Bahraini coup attempt among Gulf rulers. The doctrine that aggression on one GCC member country would be regarded as an aggression on all the GCC countries which was enunciated during this meeting was to become a cornerstone of the GCC policy.

It is also worth noting that the above mentioned Foreign Ministers' meeting had supported the Iraqi request for discussion of the Iraq-Iran conflict in the Arab summit. No doubt this showed that the GCC countries were hopeful that Syria would change its pro-Iran stand as a result of deliberations during the Arab Summit.

The seventh session of the Foreign Ministers' Council was held in Riyadh on 8-9 March 1982. This meeting was dominated by the dispute between Bahrain and Qatar over ownership of the Hiwar Island. This had been a long-standing

8. According to a statement made by Ibrahim Sabhi, GCC Assistant Secretary General, to the Gulf News Agency on 4 February 1987.
territorial conflict between them and it had erupted a week before the above mentioned session of the Foreign Ministers. After reviewing this conflict, the Council expressed its unhappiness over it. It also voiced its anxiety about the repercussions of this conflict on the region and said that this controversy was not in consonance either with the GCC charter or the spirit of brotherhood which bound these countries to each other.

The Council affirmed that the GCC had provided a constitutional framework for resolving conflicts between members through the body for settlement of disputes. The Council called upon Saudi Arabia to resume its mediatory bid to end this conflict and took note of the agreement between Bahrain and Qatar which provided for freezing the dispute, avoidance of measures which may aggravate it as well as shunning of mutually hostile propaganda.

The Council also reviewed the speech which was earlier delivered by the Libyan President Col. Gaddafi and expressed their sorrow and unhappiness over the stand adopted by the Libyan leader vis-a-vis Saudi Arabia. The Council also reviewed the previous decisions of the Ministers of Interior and concurred that the GCC countries should sign a comprehensive security agreement between them.


See appendix 17 for full text of the statement.
The Council also expressed its approval of the decisions taken earlier by the Ministers of Finance and Oil. It was hoped that the Arab countries would draw an appropriate lesson to avoid internecine enmity among them.

Among the points of significance in this statement are: though a reference to the existence of a body specifically established by the GCC to resolve intra-GCC conflicts was made, the long-simmering Bahrain-Qatar territorial disagreement was never referred to it. Unhappiness expressed over the speech delivered by Libyan President Colonel Gaddafi was an unusual step for GCC Foreign Ministers. Libya's relations with Saudi Arabia and Oman had been far worse than with the UAE and Kuwait. In no future GCC communiqué was the Libyan leader criticised in this manner.

The eighth session of the Council of Foreign Ministers was held on 20 April 1982. This meeting was convened to discuss the situation in the Arab world and especially the growing differences among the Arab countries and how these could be narrowed down. It should be mentioned here that Syria had announced its decision to halt the export of Iraqi crude through its territory in March 1982 and this decision, apart from causing a severe blow to the economic strength of Iraq, meant a clear polarization of the Arab world into two camps, with Syria, Libya and the PDRY being openly on the side of Iran while most other Arab countries especially the GCC,
Egypt, Jordan backing Iraq. It was for this reason that the above session of the GCC Foreign Ministers was devoted to discussion of intra-Arab differences and promotion of Arab unity.

The final communique issued at the end of this meeting spoke about the resistance of the Palestinian people to the zionist occupation of their territories. It made a fervent appeal for Arab unity and for banishing of intra-Arab differences. The communique also expressed Foreign Ministers' appreciation for the call issued some time ago by King Khaled of Saudi Arabia for a total strike in the Islamic world to express solidarity with the Palestinian people in the occupied territories and to voice its condemnation for the acts of desecration of sacred places being committed by the zionists.  

In the ninth meeting of the Foreign Ministerial Council held in Riyadh on 15 May 1982, no final statement was issued at the end of its one-day session and it was again resumed on 30 May 1982. The Saudi Foreign Minister had commented after the end of the first session that contacts and discussions were taking place among Arab countries and that it was decided to continue these deliberations so that they would lead to emergence of a unified Arab stand towards the situation in the Gulf region generally and specially towards the Iraq-Iran conflict.


He had also then expressed the hope that the forthcoming meeting of the GCC Foreign Ministers would lead to satisfactory results and would contribute towards bringing an end to the Iraq-Iran war. He also added that talks were going on for holding a meeting of the Arab League in order to evolve a unified Arab stand. Referring to the return of Egypt to Arab fold the Saudi Foreign Minister said that this question could be reconsidered only in an Arab summit which had reached a consensus on this issue. He hoped that the return of Egypt to the Arab fold would restore cohesion to the Arab ranks replacing the existing divisions.

The final session of this meeting was held on 30 May and the communiqué issued at its end contained the following points. The Council was of the view that redoubling and intensification of efforts to bring an end to the Iraq-Iran war was called for. The Council felt that achievement of a unified Arab stand would become a major factor in ending this war. The Council expressed the hope that Iran on its side would cooperate for achievement of this objective. The Council also drew attention to the fact that the Islamic countries were facing a virulent zionist plot which aimed at destroying the entire Islamic polity.

12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
The Council reiterated its conviction that an end to the Iraq-Iran war would prove an important factor in stability of the area. The Council again affirmed that security and stability in the Gulf region were the responsibility of its member countries only and that an end to the Iraq-Iran war would prove a crucial factor in preventing super-power intervention. To achieve this goal the Council decided to support the mediatory efforts of the Islamic conference, the NAM and the UN.15

It is indeed of significance that the ninth meeting of the GCC Foreign Ministers was held in two sessions; similarly, the unequivocal reference to the desirability of Egypt joining the Arab fold and continuous emphasis on the theme of Arab unity are also noteworthy. These special features of the ninth meeting can be understood only by reviewing the events unfolding in the Gulf at that juncture.

The Iraq-Iran war had been steadily going against Iraq during the last few months of 1981 and early months of 1982. The Iranians had launched their first successful counter attack on 29 September 1981, breaking the siege of Abadan on 1 October 1981. Iranian aircraft had bombed Kuwaiti oil facilities in September 1981. During major Iranian thrusts into Iraqi

15. Ibid.
territory on 22 March 1982\textsuperscript{16} and 30 April 1982\textsuperscript{17} the Iranians inflicted heavy defeats on Iraqis, taking thousands of prisoners. A distinct possibility of the Iraqi regime collapsing and of an outright Iranian victory had emerged which was a frightening prospect for the GCC states. Syria on its side had mobilized troops on the Syrian-Iraqi border in March 1982 and had cut off flow of Iraqi crude through its territory.\textsuperscript{18}

The GCC countries especially Saudi Arabia war exploring the possibility of Egyptian military intervention on behalf of Iraq. Sultan Qaboos of Oman had visited Egypt in this connection during the first week of May 1982; subsequently, Egypt finally declared its decision of not participating in the war on 29 May 1982. In this backdrop it becomes evident why this session of the GCC Foreign Ministers had put so much stress on the theme of Arab unity as well as why no less personage than the Saudi Foreign Minister had broached the subject of Egypt's return to the Arab fold.

The tenth session of the Foreign Ministerial Council was held on 11-12 July 1982.\textsuperscript{19} This meeting was held in the aftermath of Israeli invasion of Lebanon which took place during June/July 1982. After condemning and denouncing the atrocities

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  \item \textsuperscript{16} \textit{Al-Watan}, 23 March 1982.
  \item \textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 30 April 1982.
  \item \textsuperscript{18} \textit{Arab Times}, March 1982.
  \item \textsuperscript{19} FBIS-MEA-V-82-135, 14 July 1982, pp.C1-C2.
\end{itemize}
committed by Israel in Lebanon, the Council reiterated its support for the Palestinian and Lebanese people who were defending their rights as well as for unity and independence of Lebanon. It also stressed its support for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and their demand for creation of an independent Palestinian state and said that this was the responsibility of the Arab and Islamic world as well as of the international community. The Council while expressing its support for Lebanon also indicated its backing for the efforts being made by the six-nation Committee which was set up by the Arab League during an emergency session in Tunis. The Council called upon the five permanent members of the Security Council to impose economic penalties on Israel in accordance with the relevant provisions of the UN Charter. It condemned the exercise of veto by the USA in the UN Security Council in favour of Israel. It expressed the hope that the situation in Lebanon is resolved in such a manner that the rights of the Palestinian people get protected. It also hoped that reconciliation between different factions in Lebanon takes place in such a way that amity and justice prevail bringing stability to Lebanon. The Council expressed its appreciation over the Iraqi decision of withdrawing its troops from Iranian territories and its willingness to solve this problem through diplomatic negotiations in a way which would guarantee the
rights of both the sides. The Council expressed the hope that Iran would respond to this initiative in the spirit of Islamic brotherhood in order to prevent any escalation of the conflict and to protect this region from being exposed to chaos and instability from which none benefits except foreign powers which are not concerned with the interests of the countries of this area. The Council expressed its happiness over the achievements of various Ministerial Councils of the GCC countries while executing the Unified Economic Agreement. It also expressed its appreciation over the steps taken for establishing the "Gulf Investment Corporation" which was regarded as one of the important landmarks on the way to strengthening cooperation between the GCC countries. 20

The eleventh meeting of the GCC Foreign Ministers was held on 9th and 11th November 1982, as a preparatory meeting for the third Manama summit. The preparatory summit was naturally devoted to consideration and finalisation of the agenda for the third summit. 21

The twelfth meeting of the GCC Foreign Ministers was held on 19-20 February 1983 in Riyadh. 22 The Chairman of the meeting, Foreign Ministry of Bahrain, Mohammed bin Mubarak, said after its conclusion that it had discussed

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20. Ibid.


measures for implementation of the first phase of the Unified Economic Agreement (which was due to come into force from 1 March 1983 according to a decision taken during the Manama summit). The Council reviewed developments relating to oil and approved the formation of permanent ministerial committees for both commerce and agriculture. The meeting had also decided, according to Bahraini Foreign Minister, to ask the GCC Ministers of Finance and Economy to speed up the formation of the Gulf Investment Organisation. 23

According to press reports, during this meeting the proposal for establishing joint military industries in the GCC countries was discussed. 24 On the political front, in the communique issue after the end of the meeting, the tripartite statement which was earlier issued by Iran, Syria and Libya which called upon Arab nations to stop aiding Iraq was denounced. Bahraini Foreign Minister commenting upon this statement said that the tripartite statement served neither the interests of the Arab unity nor contributed towards bringing an end to the Gulf war. The Bahraini Foreign Minister also appealed to the super powers and other permanent members of the UN to shoulder their responsibility towards world peace and security. He also indicated that the GCC was making serious efforts to

achieve comprehensive cooperation in the field of security and for creating a combined Gulf force. 25

Commenting on this session the Tehran radio quoting the Iranian newspaper Sabh-e-Azadegan described the GCC 26 as "dedicated to finding ways to help the zionist-Saddamist regime". This harsh commentary of the Tehran radio was reflective of the tense relations then prevailing between Iran and the GCC.

The thirteenth meeting of the GCC Foreign Ministers was held in Dahran in Saudi Arabia on 16 April 1983. 27 Broad agreement was announced during this meeting on the issues discussed which included collective efforts to combat Gulf oil slick, Iraq-Iran war and the US-Middle East peace initiative. The Bahraini Foreign Minister who presided over it told the press that the six GCC nations held basically identical position on the issues discussed and stressed that no decisions were taken since the meeting was in the nature of consultations. Formal decisions, according to him, would be taken during GCC Ministerial Council's regular meeting to be convened in Riyadh in May 1983.

During the first half of 1983, the Gulf countries were much worried over the likely extent of damage ensuing from an

oil slick formed in the Arabian Gulf as a result of explosion in an Iranian oil well. This oil well was situated in a place called Nowruz and an estimated 2000 to 8000 barrels of oil was seeping from it daily. Due to continuing war this oil well could not be capped and it was feared that the oil seeping from it would soon inundate the coasts of the Gulf countries causing immense damage to their desalination plains, oil refineries, etc. The movement of the oil slick and its size was watched with great concern bordering on panic by all the GCC countries.

The fourteenth meeting of the GCC Foreign Ministers was held on 9 May 1983 and mainly discussed dangers to the Gulf countries posed by the oil slick as well as the ways of dealing with this threat. The Council also heared the report of a GCC mediation team which had earlier visited Baghdad and Tehran and which had floated the idea of a GCC-financed reconstruction fund which both Iraq and Iran would use to rebuild their war-ravaged economies. This proposal was seen by some observers as an attempt to satisfy Iran's demand for reparation payments amounting to 150 billion dollars by Iraq.

The fifteenth meeting of the GCC Foreign Ministers was held in Riyadh on 18-19 May 1983. Earlier Foreign Ministers of the UAE and Kuwait had gone to Baghdad and Tehran in


in connection with the Gulf war. The Bahraini Foreign Minister told a press conference after this meeting that the GCC Ministers had reviewed the mediatory efforts of these two ministers and they had decided to maintain contacts with Iraq and Iran and that, if necessary, similar missions would be undertaken again. In the communique issued at the end of the meeting, a demand was made for withdrawal of Israeli troops from Lebanon in order to ensure that country's sovereignty and independence and it called upon Lebanon to abide by the Arab League's resolutions. The communique called upon the superpowers and in particular the USA to do their best to enable the Palestinians to achieve their legitimate right of self-determination.

It is to be noted that an agreement was signed between Israel and Lebanon in May 1983 which envisaged a permanent military presence for Israeli forces in Southern Lebanon. This agreement was also interpreted as a first step towards establishment of relations between Lebanon and Israel and hence was denounced and condemned by hardline Arab countries like Syria, Libya etc. Kuwaiti National Assembly had also criticised it

31. This mediatory bid took place in early May 1983, and reportedly discussed grant of assistance by the GCC to Iraq and Iran for rebuilding their economies. From Keesing's Volume XXX, January 1984, p.32648.

32. This was undoubtedly to express mild disapproval of the Lebanese-Israeli agreement of May 1983.

in extremely strong terms and the reaction of the Kuwaiti Government was also unfavourable.34 On the other hand, the Saudi Arabians had taken the stand that it would respect the free will of the Lebanese people.35 In other words, Saudi Arabia had indicated its tacit acceptance of the Israeli-Lebanese agreement. The fact that the communique by the GCC Foreign Ministers did not criticise this agreement clearly showed that the Saudi view had prevailed over the opposing views held by Kuwait, UAE, etc.

The Foreign and Economic Ministers of the GCC countries met in Taif (Saudi Arabia) for their sixteenth session on 22 August 1983. Among the matters discussed were Iranian threats regarding preventing export of oil through the Gulf of Hormuz, possible dangers posed by the oil slick, economic aid to Yemen and standardization of customs tariff from 1 September 1983 in accordance with the Unified Economic Agreement. In the communique issued after the meeting, it was mentioned that the GCC Foreign Ministers stressed the need to eliminate intra-Arab differences to create an atmosphere conducive for holding an Arab summit. In a clear reaction to resumption of diplomatic relations between Israel and Zaire,36

36. Diplomatic relations between Israel and Zaire were resumed in May 1982.
the communique warned that the GCC countries will sever
political, economic and all other ties with any state which
resumed diplomatic relations with Israel. The communique
also made a fervent appeal for reconciliation in Lebanon,
restoration of unity in the PLO and an end to the Iraq-Iran
war.37

Quoting here from a well known Gulf daily,38 "The six
member countries of GCC are to launch a major initiative to
achieve a consensus on issues facing the Arab nations. This
is the clear signal to emerge from GCC ministerial Council
meeting that concluded in Taif on Wednesday. The meeting was
originally billed as preparing the way for the next GCC summit
scheduled for November but in this it exceeded the expecta-
tions pinned on it and it now seems that an Arab summit is also
to be held in the same month in Riyadh and that the GCC is
determined to make it a success."

"If the GCC initiative now to be launched makes head-
way and an Arab summit really becomes possible, it might be
a good idea for it to make a clear-cut call for an international
conference to discuss a solution (of the Palestinian problem)
on the basis of the Fez plan. Immediately, the Taif meeting's
passionate appeal for national reconciliation in Lebanon and
an end to the Iran-Iraq war and unity in PLO will, it is hoped,

inspire a positive response and help the Arab League's efforts to work for a genuine consensus. The Taif meeting also devoted considerable time to defence and economic issues. The ministerial council underlined defence cooperation among the member states and affirmed the importance of the measures taken in that sphere to serve security and stability in the region. 39

The seventeenth meeting of the GCC Foreign Ministers was held on 9 January 1984. This meeting was mainly devoted to discussion of terrorist attacks on oil installations and USA/Canadian mission in Kuwait 40 which had caused severe damage as well as taken a death toll of more than 40-50 persons. These explosions had shattered the myth of internal stability harboured by the Kuwaitis and had created tremendous panic among them. During this session the Council condemned the "bomb conspiracies" in Kuwait and expressed its complete support for that country. The Council also undertook to place all available resources at Kuwait's disposal so as to be able to confront the conspiracy collectively. 41

The eighteenth session of the GCC Foreign Ministers was held on 10 March 1984. This session was mainly devoted to reviewing the escalation in the Iraq-Iran war. Earlier Ibrahim

41. From Keesing Volume XXXI, January 1985, p. 33370.
Sobhi, Assistant Secretary General of the GCC, in a statement had referred to the possibility of grant of assistance by the GCC to Iraq and Iran, mentioning that Kuwait and Oman could act as GCC's conduit to Iran. 42

The nineteenth session of the GCC Foreign Ministers was convened on 17 May 1984. This was dominated by an ominous flare up in the Iraq-Iran war; Iran for the first time in the history of the Gulf war had bombed two Kuwaiti oil tankers on 13 and 14 May 1984. The Iranians had ten days earlier attacked another Saudi tanker 'Al Ahood' on 7 May 1984. Iranians had begun to attack Kuwaiti/Saudi shipping evidently in retaliation of stepped-up Iraqi air attacks with their exocet missiles on Iranian oil installations on the Kharg Island. The meeting condemned the Iranian aggression on oil tankers. 43

During this session the Iranian attacks were described as violation of international law as well as of the law of the Sea. The Council also reiterated the doctrine that aggression on any GCC state would be regarded as aggression on all.

The twentieth meeting of the GCC Foreign Ministers was held on 12-13 June 1984. This meeting heard a report of a GCC military commission and reviewed certain proposals approved

earlier by the GCC Oil Ministers who had met on 10 June 1984.\textsuperscript{45} The Oil Ministers had deliberated on a strategy to cope with Iranian air attacks on Gulf oil carriers and had discussed coordination of their oil policies, creation of alternate outlets for oil distribution and replacing the oil lost in air attacks on oil tankers. The Foreign Ministers also pledged to implement the resolution sponsored by them in the Security Council on 1 June 1984. This was the first joint resolution introduced by the GCC in the UN Security Council and reaffirmed the right to free navigation in international waters for ships en route to non-belligerent ports and called for cessation of attacks on shipping. The meeting was especially critical of an Iranian attack on the Kuwaiti tanker "Khazimah" which had taken place on 10 June 1984.\textsuperscript{46}

The twenty-first session of the GCC Foreign Ministers was held on 18-19 September 1984. This was a joint session between the Defence and Foreign Ministers and was held at Abha (Saudi Arabia). It is to be noted that this was the first time that such a joint meeting between defence and foreign ministers was held. The Qatari Defence Minister who inaugurated this meeting described it as a new step towards the integration of

\textsuperscript{45} Al-Rai Al-Aam, Al-Anbaa, 11 June 1984.

\textsuperscript{46} From Keesing Volume XXXI, p.33370. See also FBIS-MEA-V-84-116, 14 June 1984, p.C1.
the GCC countries. A resolution on defence matters stressing self-reliance in protecting the region and rejecting foreign intervention was adopted during this session.47

The Council of Foreign Ministers met separately and discussed among other things mining incidents in the Red Sea and the Gulf War. The Council praised Iraq for being responsive to peace mediatory bids. This was also a period when a number of small mines were detected in the Red Sea which had damaged eighteen ships between 9 July and 20 August 1984.48 Though it was not known who had placed these mines, Egypt had put the blame on Libya and Iran. The Council also discussed in addition to these political matters, imposition of tariffs by the EEC on Gulf petrochemical exports.

The twenty-second meeting of GCC Foreign Ministers was held on 20/21 November 1984 which was a preparatory meeting for the fifth summit held in Kuwait between 27-29 November 1984.49 Among the important topics discussed during this meeting were standardization of service charges (telephone, telex, etc.) within the GCC as well as creation of an interconnected gas grid.50

50. It should be mentioned that GCC Finance Ministers' meeting on 10 October 1983 had recommended unification of service charges. The subsequent Doha summit of November 1983 accepted this recommendation though it was not implemented.
The twenty-third session of the GCC Foreign Ministers was held in Riyadh between 16 and 19 March 1985. This session was held against the backdrop of fierce fighting between Iraq and Iran during which the Iranians were trying to encircle Basrah. The final communique issued at the end of this session expressed solidarity with Iraq for preservation of its sovereignty and territorial integrity. It, at the same time, expressed the need to take legitimate interests of Iran into account.51 (The same formulation was employed in the Muscat summit held in late 1985). This communique thus clearly showed existence of two groups within the GCC - one supportive of Iraq and one of Iran.

The twenty-fourth session of the GCC Foreign Ministers was held at Abha, Saudi Arabia, from 8-9 July 1985.52 This meeting was overshadowed by the terrorist attack on the Amir of Kuwait's motorcade on 25 May 1985 from which he escaped unhurt. The session denounced the attempt on Amir of Kuwait's life; it did not, however, accuse Iran of involvement in this conspiracy. The communique accused Iran of violating international law through its detention on 20 June 1985 of a Kuwaiti-registered cargo vessel. The Council made two important recommendations to the Supreme Council in the economic sphere permitting GCC producers to market their products in any member state without local agents and granting equality of treatment to GCC nationals employed in the private


52. Al-Watan, 10 July 1985.
sector. Significantly, the communique did not refer to the Palestinian issue at all.53

The twenty-fifth session of the GCC Foreign Ministers was held on 2/3 September 1985. Among the matters discussed during this meeting were the Casablanca emergency summit, terrorism in the Gulf region, stalemate with the EEC in talks over exemption from tariff duties of the Gulf petro-chemical exports. It would be relevant to add that an emergency Arab summit was held in Casablanca on 7-9 August 1985 to mainly discuss an important accord reached between King Hussein of Jordan and Yasser Arafat on 10 February 1985.54 This accord was vehemently opposed by radical Arab countries like Syria, Libya etc. and the Casablanca summit was not attended at the Head-of-State level by most GCC countries.

The communique issued by the Foreign Ministers merely alluded to the Casablanca summit and expressed no view on the controversial accord between King Hussain and Arafat. Like the previous session, the Foreign Ministers did not mention either the PLO or the Palestinian struggle - this omission was clearly reflective of intra-GCC discard. On the Iraq-Iran war, the Council, while deploring Iran's refusal to respond to peace efforts, stressed the need to protect its legitimate interests.55

It may be mentioned that an Iranian newspaper had published an article in August 1985 describing Kuwait's

support for Iraq as being tantamount to a declaration of war against Iran. This meeting marked the beginning of the Iranian policy to single out Kuwait and to threaten it with retaliation for supporting Iraq.

The twenty-sixth session of the GCC Foreign Ministers was held on 27-30 October 1985 to prepare and finalise the agenda for the sixth GCC summit which was to be convened in Muscat.57

The twenty-seventh session of the GCC Foreign Ministers was held in Manama in Bahrain on 9 February 1986.58 This meeting mainly discussed the recent events in South Yemen when in a violent coup the government of Ali Nasser Mohammed was overthrown. The GCC Foreign Ministers discussed adoption of a unified GCC approach towards the events in the PDRY and towards the new government which had risen to power there.

The twenty-eighth meeting of the GCC Foreign Ministers was held in Riyadh in March 1986. It mainly concerned itself with the earlier Iranian attacks on Iraq and condemned Iran's occupation of the strategic Faw Peninsula which is separated only by a narrow creek having width of hardly ten miles from Kuwait's Bubiyan Island. The Council condemned Iran's occupation of Iraqi territories and asked for withdrawal of its forces to

59. Arab News, 4 March 1986. This was one of the few occasions when the Council had castigated Iran by name. It was also the first and last time when the Foreign Ministers had referred to possible deployment of the Peninsula Shield Force. FBIS-MEA-V-86-042, 4 March 1986, p.C1. See Appendix 22.
the international border. The Council called upon Iran to stop threatening the GCC states and appealed to it to respond to the attempts being made for a peaceful settlement. The Council also reiterated the well-established GCC stand that the defence of the region was the collective responsibility of all the GCC countries and affirmed that the Joint Peninsula Shield Force was ready for military action if the need arose.

The twenty-ninth meeting of the GCC Foreign Ministers was held in Taif (Saudi Arabia) on 28 June 1986. The Council reiterated its determination to support the efforts aimed at finding a peaceful solution for the Iraq-Iran war which would preserve legitimate rights of the combatants. The final communiqué recalled the Security Council's resolutions 540 of 1983 and 552 of 1984 which dealt with freedom of navigation in international waterways and with the maritime freedom of commercial ships plying from and to the ports in the GCC countries. The Council stressed its awareness of its responsibility in defending the legitimate rights of the member countries of the GCC in guaranteeing freedom of navigation and in protecting its shipping. The meeting discussed the situation in the Arab world and expressed its willingness to support all steps aimed at removing intra-Arab differences so as to facilitate holding of an Arab summit. The meeting reviewed the

developments pertaining to cooperation among member countries in military and economic fields and reviewed the decisions of the Ministers of Information as well as the EEC-GCC trade talks. 61

The Council condemned the explosions which had taken place in Kuwait on 10 June 1986 and expressed the view that these criminal acts were aimed at security and peace of all the member countries. The Council avowed its solidarity with Kuwait and affirmed its support for it. It asserted its determination to confront terrorism in a collective way and to resist the acts of subversion in a way which would preserve peace and prosperity of the region. It would be relevant to add here that major explosions in Kuwaiti oil installations had taken place on 19 June 1986. 62 Though there was little doubt that Iran was behind these explosions the GCC communique did not mention Iran by name evidently to avoid provoking it and confined itself to expression of support for Kuwait.

A few weeks prior to this meeting, the long-dormant boundary dispute between Bahrain and Qatar had again erupted. Though this issue was not discussed during this meeting, Bahrain had circulated a note regarding this conflict in this

61. Al-Watan, 29 June 1986
62. Arab Times, 20 July 1986
meeting to which Qatar had not replied. 63

The thirtieth session of the Foreign Ministers of GCC countries was held on 27 August 1986 in Abha (Saudi Arabia). 64 A part of the session was attended by GCC Oil Ministers. According to a communique issued at the end of this meeting, 65 the Council discussed the latest developments in the Iraq-Iran war and reaffirmed its determination to support efforts aimed at finding a quick solution that safeguarded the legitimate rights of the two Muslim neighbours. It welcomed the positive attitude included in the recent Iraqi proposals. The communique regretted the Iranian escalation of threats against the sovereignty of some member states and reiterated its support to any of the member states that may be subjected to threats. The communique said that the Council would invoke the basic system and Supreme Council resolutions that consider a threat against one state as threat against all. The Council expressed its deep regret over the Iranian interception of ships in the Gulf waters and reiterated its responsibilities in defending the member states' legitimate rights in securing navigation according to the UN Resolutions 540 of 1983 and 552 of 1984.

63. Qatar landed its troops on a tiny coral reef "Fasht Al-Dibal" belonging to Bahrain in April 1986. The Qataris took into custody all the personnel who were working there. This incident brought Qatar and Bahrain to the verge of an armed confrontation. Arab Times, 16 June 1986.

64. Arab News, 28 August 1986

which called for freedom of navigation in international waterways and freedom of shipping to and from the ports of the GCC states. The Council called on Iran to stop such illegal actions. The Council also discussed the current Arab situation and expressed readiness in supporting goodwill efforts aimed at clearing the Arab atmosphere and eliminating causes of tension. The Council discussed the oil affairs and welcomed the recent OPEC statement which halted deterioration of prices and increased them. The Council hoped that the agreement will raise price of oil from 17 dollars to 19 dollars a barrel to stabilise the oil market. The Council also reviewed the latest developments in contacts with countries and international economic groups. It welcomed the invitation from the European Community to hold a meeting in New York between the Foreign Ministers of GCC and the EEC during the UN General Assembly's forty-first session. The Council reviewed developments of cooperation between the member states in military and economic fields. 66

The communique issued at the end of this meeting was undoubtedly strongly worded vis-a-vis Iran. During 1986 Iran had intercepted a large number of ships passing through the Arabian Gulf to ascertain that they were not carrying cargo for Iraq. Iran had repeatedly threatened Kuwait during this period and had warned it of serious consequences, if it

66. Riyadh Times, 28 August 1986
persisted in giving assistance to Iraq. Iran was supposed to have a hand in the explosions which had occurred in Kuwait's oil installations in June 1986. Iran had often accused Kuwait of permitting Iraqi forces to use port and airport facilities in the Kuwaiti territories and of leasing the Bubiyan Island to it.67

Due to all these developments the GCC communiqué had employed unusually strong phraseology and had called upon Iran by name to desist from interception of shipping and other illegitimate acts.

The thirty-first meeting of the GCC Foreign Ministers was held in Abu Dhabi on 28 October 1986 to finalise and prepare the agenda for the Seventh GCC Summit held in Abu Dhabi. The Council of Ministers urged Iran to respond to peace efforts and negotiate an end to the war.

The Secretary General of the GCC informed the Emirates News Agency WAM on 29 October 1986 that the Foreign Ministers had considered a report on defence cooperation submitted earlier by GCC Defence Ministers and Chiefs of Staff.68 According to Arab Times dated 28 October 1986 the Foreign Ministers were likely to recommend to the forthcoming GCC summit an increase in joint military manoeuvres and exchange

67. See the section dealing with evolution of relations between the GCC and Iran.

of information among GCC States. Significantly enough, this recommendation of Foreign Ministers was not endorsed by the GCC Heads of State during the Abu Dhabi summit; in fact not a single joint manoeuvre involving participation of armed forces from all the GCC States was conducted in 1987. (In the Peninsula III exercise held in Oman in March 1987 only Omani and Saudi troops participated).

The thirty-second meeting of the GCC Foreign Ministers was held in Riyadh on 7 January 1987. According to Omani Minister for Foreign Affairs,\(^6^9\) the agenda for this session was to be the Iraq-Iran war and the forthcoming Islamic summit which was to be held in the last week of January 1987 in Kuwait. After the first session of the meeting, the UAE Foreign Minister told the press that they had discussed developments in the Gulf and in particular the preparations in Kuwait for hosting the Islamic summit.\(^7^0\)

According to a report published in Oman Observer dated 7 January 1987 some GCC countries had reservations about certain topics in Islamic summit's agenda. It may be added here that despite this summit being held in Kuwait, Sultan Qaboos of Oman did not attend it. This meeting of GCC Foreign Ministers was evidently held so that a unified GCC stand would be adopted during the Islamic summit.

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\(^{69}\) Oman Observer, 7 January 1987.

\(^{70}\) Ibid., 8 January 1987.
The thirty-third meeting of the GCC Foreign Ministers was held in Riyadh on 16 February 1987. According to press reports circulating before convening of this meeting, this session was to be devoted to the Kuwaiti proposals submitted at the recent Islamic summit for ending the Iraq-Iran war. Kuwait had proposed among other things establishment of an Islamic Court of Justice which would arbitrate between warring Islamic nations. The foreign Ministers were expected to review, the "security strategy" which was approved by GCC Interior Ministers in Muscat on 16 February 1987.

The statement issued at the end of the meeting urged Iran to respond positively to peace efforts aimed at ending the six-and-half-year old war. This appeal did not incorporate any new peace initiative as was earlier envisaged. The statement said that the talks also reviewed efforts aimed at healing Arab rifts, including preparations for a long-delayed Arab summit due to be held in Riyadh in 1987. The statement added that the Ministers also discussed progress in economic talks between the EEC and the GCC communities. The meeting as usual discussed a number of reports submitted by technical committees of the GCC on trade, industry and agriculture.

The Council reiterated its support for UN resolutions 582 and 588 of 1986 which called for an immediate ceasefire

73. See Gulf Times (Qatar), 19 February 1987.
between Iraq and Iran and withdrawal of troops to international borders. The Council commended Iraq's positive response to peace bids. The Council expressed its concern over the besieged and starving Palestinian camp dwellers in Lebanon and decided to bolster efforts aimed at lifting the siege of these camps. The Council underscored GCC's support for Lebanon's territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty. 74

Regarding return of Egypt to the Arab fold, Abdulla Bishara said that this issue should be discussed within the framework of the Arab League and not by the GCC. The UAE Foreign Minister who chaired the Ministerial Council expressed the GCC states' appreciation of Egypt on the latter's role in the Arab world. He added that "we have great hope that the day when Egypt returns to the Arab League is near." 76

This session of GCC Foreign Ministers was held against the backdrop of fierce fighting going on between Amal militia backed by the Syrians and the Palestinians; Palestinian refugee camps at Chotila and Bourj-al-Barajneh were surrounded by Amal militiamen who had stopped all outside supplies from reaching these camps. This had created the spectre of large-scale deaths taking place among the hapless Palestinians - men, women and children - trapped in these camps. Despite the gravity of the

74. Gulf Times, 19 February 1987
75. Ibid.
situation, the GCC Foreign Ministers forebore from making any adverse remark against Syria because of whose support alone the Amal militia was able to mount such a sustained attack against the Palestinians. No doubt the Foreign Ministers must have felt that any overt criticism of Syria would prove counterproductive and would hamper the process of bridging intra-GCC differences. 77

The UAE Foreign Minister in his capacity as Chairman of the meeting also lauded the level of military cooperation reached among the GCC States and affirmed the principle that aggression on any GCC state would be tantamount to aggression on all. 78

The thirty-fourth session of the GCC Foreign Ministers was held on 7 and 8 June 1987. 79 During this session the ministers reviewed the threats against Kuwait and affirmed that any threat to a member state would be met collectively. While condemning acts of terrorism, they assured Kuwait of all support in the measures it took to protect its security and stability. 80

This meeting was held against a very threatening and sombre scenario for Kuwait. During the first half of 1987, a

77. Reluctance to displease Syria has always been a factor in the policy pursued by GCC members vis-a-vis developments in the Middle East. See the section dealing with GCC's policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict in part I.


80. For full text of the communique see Appendix 23.
number of Kuwaiti ships had become the target of Iranian attacks and Kuwait was forced to fly its oil carriers under the U.S. flag to become eligible for the U.S. naval protection. Every possibility existed of a sudden Iranian aggression on Kuwait. Apart from all this, a number of explosions and other acts of sabotage committed by pro-Iranian organisations had taken place in Kuwait in the few months preceding the meeting.

It is thus quite clear that Kuwait was facing a critical situation and its sovereignty and integrity were being directly threatened by Iran. The Amir of Kuwait, its Prime Minister, as well as other Kuwaiti dignitaries had made statements expressing their profound anxiety over the situation confronting their country.

However, the communique issued by the GCC Foreign Ministers did not even refer to Iran by name and made no particular attempt to emphasise solidarity with Kuwait. The communique did not go beyond saying that the Gulf States were bound by a common fate and if any part of their soil was threatened, they will face it with all their capabilities. This was undoubtedly only a vague statement of pious intentions.

It is interesting to note that during the inaugural session, the UAE Foreign Minister of State, Rashid Abdulla Al Nuamimi, said that "we have always been keen to keep the

81. See the section dealing with evolution of relations between Kuwait and Iran in Part I.
region free from international power rivalry, foreign intervention and presence of foreign powers."  

It is thus seen that the UAE government did not particularly appreciate the Kuwaiti policy of plying their oil carriers under American flags which was likely to lead to entry of American warships on a big way into the Gulf; moreover, the UAE made no attempt to disguise its displeasure over this Kuwaiti decision and made it known during the meeting of Foreign Ministers itself. The Saudis more discreetly gave vent to their reservations vis-a-vis the Kuwaiti policy through Saudi Gazette published on 9 June 1987 e.g. immediately after the conclusion of Foreign Ministers' meeting when it said: "US and Iran might do well to curb their exchange of any words that might push them to a point of no return - a stage where both might feel that they have no other option but to fight."

"The US has said that it is going to form a naval force to patrol the Gulf to protect sea lanes. Protection is one thing; they should be looking for a pretext to get at Iran is another thing. When two beligerent forces face each other in a battle zone a lot of things beyond the control of the governments can happen."  

82. See Arab News, 7 June 1987  
83. Saudi Gazette, 9 June 1987
Evidently, the editorial has adopted a kind of neutral stance between Iran and America and did not welcome the prospect of large-scale presence of US warships in the Arabian Gulf which were being sent there at least partly to protect Kuwaiti ships from Iranian missiles. It should also be stressed here that this meeting of GCC Foreign Ministers was held at a time when the Iraq-Iran war was passing through a critical phase. Iran was in the process of installing silkworm missiles which had a range of more than fifty miles on the Iranian side of straits of Hormuz and the US Government had warned Iran against this move. Tension between Iran and the USA had reached a new plateau and the US Government was drawing up emergency plans for dealing with a possible situation which may arise out of an Iranian attack on an American ship.

The communique of the Foreign Ministers, however, was silent on all these issues and did not even make a passing reference to them.

It is significant that the Foreign Ministers did not applaud Iraq's willingness to accept peace proposals nor did they call upon Iran to show a more conciliatory spirit as they had often done during their previous sessions. This could be taken as another indication of GCC's tendency to move away from Iraq and to adopt a neutral approach in the Iraq-Iran war.

Another important development which had taken place a few weeks before this meeting of Foreign Ministers was the
reunification of various factions of PLO under the leadership of Yasser Arafat and the severing of relations between the PLO and Egypt. No reference to this highly important development was made in the communique.

It has been already noted that this communique voiced backing for Kuwait only in a lukewarm way. However, after the end of this conference, Kuwaiti dignitaries including its Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister went to the extent of expressing their appreciation and gratitude for the support which GCC members had extended to Kuwait. The Kuwaiti dignitaries emphasized lack of differences within the GCC and described the above session as a fitting reply to those who doubted GCC's unity and solidarity.84 The above Al-Qabas report also mentioned that the Foreign Ministers had announced that aggression on Kuwait would be regarded as aggression on all - this was a clear instance of deliberate distorted reporting as the Foreign Ministers' communique did not at all use the phrase 'aggression on Kuwait'.

A one-day meeting of GCC Foreign Ministers was held on 25 July 1987 which was regarded as continuation of the earlier thirty-second session held in Jeddah between 6 and 8 June 1987. This meeting was being held at a critical time. Relations between Kuwait and Iran had reached a new low due to Kuwaiti decision to turn to the USA for protection of its oil carriers.84

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84. See Al-Qabas, 9 June 1987.
Iran had repeatedly warned Kuwait that it would face Iranian retaliation unless it changed its policy. Teheran radio quoted President Khomeini as saying that Iran would strike with surface-to-surface missiles if Kuwait continued what he called its acts of mischief. 85

The Security Council had adopted a unanimous resolution earlier on 20 July 1987, calling for cessation of hostilities between Iraq and Iran. Though this resolution was immediately welcomed by Kuwait, no reaction was expressed on it by the GCC. 86 On the eve of this meeting, the first Kuwaiti oil carrier to enter the Gulf under the protection of US ships was damaged by a floating Iranian mine on 24 July 1987. 87

To assess the outcome of the meeting, it would be relevant to refer to the statement issued at its end. The Foreign Ministers reaffirmed the statement issued after they met in Jeddah on June 8 which expressed support for any moves Kuwait might make to protect its shipping. The Foreign Ministers also praised Iraq for its positive response to the UN ceasefire call. They called for a solution of the conflict that would ensure the legitimate rights of the two combatants within the framework of the international law. 88 They welcomed Security Council

resolution number 598 and affirmed their readiness to cooperate with the UN Secretary General in his quest for creating an atmosphere propitious for peaceful settlement to the Gulf conflict. 89

Among the salient features of this statement are:

i) Lack of explicit endorsement for the Kuwaiti policy of registering its oil carriers with the US to make them eligible for US naval escorts. This was no doubt due to the fact that some GCC countries like the UAE were opposed to this move and had openly indicated their unhappiness over it. 90

ii) Despite mounting Iranian bellicosity vis-a-vis Kuwait any offending reference to Iran was scrupulously avoided as in earlier GCC statements.

iii) Support expressed for the UN Security Council resolution becomes noteworthy in view of the earlier silence of the GCC on it.

Basically, the above statement reflected absence of consensus within the GCC on the policy to be pursued vis-a-vis Iran as well as its dominant desire not to do anything which might displease that country. Interestingly enough, Abdulla Bishara on the eve of this meeting stressed the commitment of

89. See Khaleej Times, 26 July 1987.

90. See the section dealing with evolution of relations between the GCC and Iran in part I.
GCC countries to the principles of peaceful co-existence and
good neighbourliness - clearly indicating their interest in
maintaining amicable relations with Iran. The call given
in this meeting for a solution which meets the legitimate
rights of both combatants is also reflective of pro-Iran stance.

The thirty-fifth meeting of the GCC Foreign Ministers
was held on 12-13 September 1987. During the thirty-fourth
meeting held in July and this meeting, almost a state of war
had come to exist between Iran and Kuwait. Iran had unleashed
three missile attacks against Kuwait during the first week of
September which had led to expulsion of five Iranian diplomats
from Kuwait. An unexpected development which had occurred
during this period was the sudden exacerbation in Saudi-Iranian
tension resulting from the death of more than 400 Haj pilgrims
in Makkah on 1 August 1987 in clashes with Saudi security
personnel. Subsequently, Iranians had denounced the Saudi
regime in vitriolic terms and called for its overthrow.

It is to be noted that until this incident concerned,
relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia were none too bad and
the Iranian press as well as the Iranian leaders used to gener­
ally refrain from criticising the Saudi monarchy. Saudi Arabia

94. Teheran Times, August 1987. Teheran condemned and denounced
the Kingdom in the most abusive language during this month.
on its side was making every effort not to provoke Iran and hardly any article critical of Iran used to appear in the Saudi press. All this changed after the Makkah incident and Saudi Arabia went to the extent of taking precautionary steps to forestall a possible Iranian incursion into its eastern province. It can certainly be said that the situation in the Gulf region on the eve of the thirty-fifth meeting was more grave and full of forebodings that during any other time in the Gulf war. The salient points of the communique issued at the end of this meeting were as follows.

The Conference reviewed efforts of the UN Secretary General to implement the Security Council resolution 598, affirming readiness of the Gulf powers to exert all efforts necessary to facilitate his mission and ensure its success.

The Council of Foreign Ministers affirmed its full support and solidarity with Saudi Arabia and deplored riots committed by Iranians during the last Haj season. The Council condemned the violation of the sanctity of the Haj site. The Council regretted the attacks on the sanctity of the Holy Mosque and supported Saudi Arabia's measures to ensure its security and stability. The Council condemned the attacks on Kuwait and fully supported it taking into consideration that any attack against any member will be treated as an attack on

all Council members. The Council members praised Iraq for its positive response to the UN resolution.96

While inaugurating this conference, the UAE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, said, "The barbaric aggression over Kuwait a few days ago is one of the dangerous results of the continuation of the Iran-Iraq war now entering its eighth year. We herewith condemn once again such unjustified aggression on our non-belligerent sister state of Kuwait."97

It may be noted that the above communique as well as the inaugural statement of the UAE carefully avoided mentioning Iran by name even though it was clearly guilty of aggression on Kuwait and of engineering large-scale riots in Mecca during the Haj season on 30 July 1987.

Moreover, despite the imminence and gravity of the Iranian threat, the GCC Foreign Ministers did not make any attempt to evolve a common strategy nor did they go beyond paying lip sympathy to Kuwait.

The only major decision which was apparently adopted during this meeting related to GCC countries' relations with Egypt. The GCC countries had decided to resume98 diplomatic

relations with Egypt in case the forthcoming Arab summit failed to reach any consensus on this issue.

Despite the failure of GCC Foreign Ministers' Council to highlight solidarity with Kuwait, the outcome of this meeting was hailed by some Saudi and Kuwaiti newspapers as symbolizing collective condemnation of Iran by the GCC. For example, a leading Saudi daily said, "The thirty-fifth session of the GCC Foreign Ministers held at Jeddah rightly took note of the Iranian aggression and its peace-loving neighbours. The resolution adopted by the GCC officials has condemned the Iranian regime for senseless and dangerous behaviour that seeks to destroy the purity of the Islamic faith and of the Holy places."99

The thirty-sixth meeting of GCC Foreign Ministers was held on 24 October 1987 who met along with the GCC Finance Ministers.100 During the week preceding this meeting, Kuwait was subjected to three missile attacks from Iran - the first two attacks on 14 and 16 October 1987 were directed against two ships (one Kuwaiti and one American) anchored in Kuwaiti territorial waters while the third missile had hit a major Kuwaiti oil terminal.101

101. See the section dealing with evolution of Kuwait's relations with Iran, Part I.
While inaugurating the Ministerial meeting, the UAE Foreign Minister said inter alia, "the repeated attacks against Kuwait constitute a flagrant aggression against the sovereignty and independence of a state not at all involved in the conflict between Iran and Iraq. This attitude and behaviour reflects a violation of international norms and conventions and contradicts the efforts exerted by various politicians and organisations to maintain peace and stability in the area."

"Allow me to express, on your behalf, our denunciation and condemnation of the aggression against Kuwait and our total support and cooperation to Kuwait against any aggression."

The main points occurring in the communique issued at the end of the meeting can be summarised as follows:

The Council reviewed the developments in the Iraq-Iran conflict and took note of escalation of Iranian attacks on Kuwait. The Council called for a settlement of this conflict in terms of the UN Security Council resolution 598 of July 1987. The Council denounced Iranian attacks and affirmed that aggression against any member of the GCC would be tantamount to aggression against all. As regards the future of Arab-Iranian relations, the Council recalled the stand taken by it on this issue in the thirty-fifth session and said that it would be discussed.

102. See Riyadh Daily, 25 October 1987
103. For detailed text of the communique see appendix 24.
during the Arab summit to be held in Amman on 8 November 1987.

There is no doubt that the GCC Foreign Ministers during this meeting had blamed Iran unequivocally for aggression on Kuwait and to this extent there was a shift in their policy as compared to the previous meetings held during 1987. The UAE Foreign Minister, however, while denouncing the aggression on Kuwait had carefully avoided naming Iran as the aggressor. The Foreign Ministers also could not agree on the nature of relations which these countries should have with Iran and left this issue to the forthcoming Arab summit even though Saudi Arabia had called for sanctions against Iran only on 25 October 1987. 104

Commenting on this meeting, an important UAE daily said editorially: "The AGCC States have again rallied to Kuwait's support. In doing so, at the just concluded meeting of their Foreign Ministers, they have come closer so far to accusing openly Iran of aggression.

Even now it should be noted that the GCC Foreign Ministers have not officially and collectively recommended any retaliatory steps. They have said only that they expect next month's Arab summit to define relations with Iran." 105

105. Ibid., 27 October 1987.
It is significant that the GCC Foreign Ministers failed to evolve any common approach towards Iran to be adopted during the forthcoming Amman Arab Emergency Summit which was expected to be dominated by the subject of Iran-Iraq conflict. These intra-GCC differences were highlighted when King Fahd of Saudi Arabia abstained from this summit.¹⁰⁶

The fact that the above meeting of the GCC Foreign Ministers was riven by internal differences had been recognised by international press. A British daily said¹⁰⁷ "that the statement¹⁰⁸ contained no specific condemnation of last Thursday's attack against Kuwait's sea oil terminal and was disguising fundamental differences in GCC's policy with regard to Iran."

"There is still residual anger at Kuwait for internationalising the conflict by calling in the US."

The Financial Times of London said, "The GCC communique lacked whole-hearted support accounted for by the division among its members and that the tortuously-phrased statement only acknowledged the dangerous escalation."¹⁰⁹

The thirty-seventh meeting of the GCC Foreign Ministers was held during the third week of December 1987 to prepare the agenda for the eighth GCC summit which was convened on ¹⁰⁶. International Herald Tribune, 9 November 1987.
¹⁰⁸. This referred to the communique issued by the Foreign Ministers after their thirty-sixth meeting.
26 December 1987. During this preparatory conference, the Foreign Ministers approved the joint security strategy which was to be submitted to the Heads of State for final ratification. The Ministers also enclosed a cultural development plan which was earlier approved by the Education Ministers. They also approved another recommendation of Education Ministers which gave equal status to GCC students in higher educational institutions in terms of housing, transportation, medical treatment, quantum of scholarships, etc.¹¹⁰

The agenda prepared by the Foreign Ministers pertained to defence, economic cooperation and recent political developments, especially the Iran-Iraq war. Quoting from a UAE daily, "The GCC Foreign Ministers have hammered out wide-ranging recommendations for the Heads of States' reconsideration; in fact, high-level talks have been going on for weeks to finalise joint security and defence strategies and to find means of further promoting economic cooperation and achieving greater coordination of policy and action in other key areas of mutual interest."¹¹¹

The thirty-eighth meeting of GCC Foreign Ministers was held on 15 and 16 March 1988.¹¹² This was the first meeting of the Foreign Ministers after the eighth GCC summit held in

111. Ibid., 26 December 1987.
December 1987. During the first quarter of 1988, there was a noticeable relaxation of tension between the GCC countries and Iran which had given an undertaking that oil carriers flying the flags of any of the GCC members would not be attacked by Iranian gunboats. 113 Kuwait was planning to reopen its mission in Teheran which was closed in August 1987 after being ransacked by Iranian mobs. The internal situation in Kuwait had remained tranquil in early 1988 and pro-Iranian sympathisers had not committed any acts of sabotage or terrorism as they had done earlier. Iran had desisted from launching its long-expected offensive against Iraq during the winter of 1988 and there was speculation that the Iran-Iraq war could possibly come to an end in the near future.

There were, no doubt, a number of recent developments, both regional and international, which were of vital concern and interest to the GCC Foreign Ministers. The dialogue which was to have started between the GCC and Iran as a result of deliberations held during the eighth summit had not materialised. 115 There was considerable tension between Saudi Arabia and Iran especially due to latter's insistence on the right of

113. This assurance from Iran was obtained as a result of Syrian mediation. International Herald Tribune, 8 March 1988.

114. The Kuwait Foreign Minister said that Kuwaiti-Iranian relations would become good and that it was planning to send two diplomats to Tehran. Al-Qabas, 23 March 1988.

115. See the section dealing with the eighth summit in Part I.
Iranian Hajis to stage political demonstrations in the Kingdom during the Haj season of 1988. More ominously, breaking the earlier truce, a fierce missile warfare had erupted between Iraq and Iran since the last week of February 1988 in which both sides were hitting each other's civilian targets.

The situation on the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza was extremely tense and the Palestinian population which was in a state of turmoil and ferment was being suppressed with violence by the Israelis. The USA had put forward peace proposals through its Foreign Minister Shultz for settlement of the Arab-Israeli dispute.

The Soviet Union had made known its firm intention to withdraw from Afghanistan and the prospective Afghan settlement was being debated among the super powers, Pakistan, the Mujaheddins, Afghanistan, etc. Saudi Arabia had stepped up its contacts with the USSR and had agreed to sell it 50,000 tonnes of wheat during the first quarter of 1988. There was press speculation about likelihood of diplomatic relations being established between Saudi Arabia and China and the USSR.

There was also improvement in the UAE-China relationship; the

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116. See the section dealing with evolution of Saudi Arabia's relations with Iran in Part I. See also International Herald Tribune, 25 March 1988


120. Ibid.
UAE had acceded to China's request to open a consulate in Dubai which was to go hand-in-hand with the closure of Taiwan's consular office there.121

To see now how the GCC Foreign Ministers dealt with these developments.

The main points in the communique issued by them were as follows:122 While reviewing the situation in the region, the council reiterated its support for the UN Security Council resolution No. 598 of July 1987. It expressed appreciation over the efforts made by Saudi Arabia in connection with its implementation and deemed it advisable that contacts with permanent members of the Security Council should be stepped up for this purpose. The Council voiced its solidarity with the uprising of the Palestinian people.

An analysis of this communique leads to the conclusion that it hardly addressed itself to the various important developments, both at the regional as well as international level, which were of crucial interest to the GCC. The GCC was obviously split on the policy to be followed towards Iran. It could not decide whether Saudi efforts for imposition of an arms embargo on Iran through the Security Council should be

122. See Al-Watan, 17 March 1988. See Appendix 25 for full text.
encouraged or not. The Council, therefore, merely expressed its appreciation over the contacts made by the Saudi Foreign Minister in connection with implementation of the Resolution 598. The Council could not decide as to whether or not a dialogue with Iran should be pursued. The Kuwaiti Foreign Minister had said in a press statement that such a dialogue was acceptable to the Kuwaitis provided Iran agreed not to interfere in the internal affairs of the GCC countries and avoided the path of confrontation with them. Perhaps these conditions were not acceptable to the other GCC members. Perhaps due to lack of agreement on this issue, the communique did not at all allude to the proposed GCC-Iran dialogue.

It has been observed that there was no pan-GCC policy vis-a-vis Iran during 1982-87. This problem continued to bedevil the GCC during early 1988 despite a slight thaw in Kuwaiti Iranian relations. An important journal commented on this rift as follows:

"Meanwhile, there are two parallel dialogues between the six-state GCC and each of Iran and Iraq. The Iran-GCC dialogue, expected to start shortly, is sponsored by Syria and politically puts the southern half of the Gulf on a collision course with Iraq.


125. APS Diplomat, 25 January to 1 February 1988."
The parallel dialogue, just started between Iraq and each of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, puts the northern half of the Gulf on a more serious collision course with Iran - more serious because this might lead to:

- the deepening of the rift between the northern and southern halves of the GCC, in the event of Gulf truce; or

- a Saudi-Iranian confrontation, a possibility feared by some quarters, both in the event of a Gulf truce or in the event of a further escalation of the Iran-Iraq war."

"Iraq's ruling RCC sent its Vice-Chairman Izzat Ibrahim, to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia on January 16-18, to relay this suspicion - that Syria, like Iran, was trying to divide the conflict into a ground sector and a naval sector, and that both Iran and Syria were trying to split the GCC. APS sources say the Iraqi dialogue with northern half of the GCC is progressing on the assumption that 'the neutrality of the southern half' has evolved into a functional 'friendship and cooperation with Iran' against the rest of the Gulf."

It needs to be analysed as to why the GCC Foreign Ministers merely confined themselves to highlighting the Palestinian uprising in the occupied territories and did not even allude to the Shultz Peace proposals which were attracting a great deal of attention in the Arab world. It has been
observed in an earlier section that the GCC members had adopted no unequivocal, unified policy vis-à-vis many crucial aspects of the Palestinian question such as: mode of representation of the Palestinians in the proposed international peace conference - whether this should be in the form of a separate delegation or as a part of a Jordanian-PLO delegation; whether West Bank and Gaza after Israeli withdrawal should be constitute into an independent state or confederated with Jordan; status of Jerusalem, etc. Oman was even refusing to acknowledge any role for the PLO. Though most members of the GCC have been in favour of an international peace conference, Saudi Arabia expressed itself in its favour only in early 1988.

The GCC Foreign Ministers were not in unanimity even on whether these states should attend the Arab summit whose convening was being contemplated to discuss the Palestinian upsurge. In the aftermath of the above meeting, the Saudi Foreign Minister said that each member state should decide for itself whether or not to attend this summit, pointing out that the Kingdom would do so. Kuwait had also expressed itself in favour of participating in such a summit, while Sultan

126. See the section dealing with GCC's policy towards the Middle East conflict in Part I.

127. The first visit to Oman by Yassar Arafat was paid only in January 1989. Oman Observer, 23 January 1989.

128. See the section on GCC's stand vis-à-vis the Arab-Israeli conflict in Part I.


Qaboos said in a press interview that it would prove quite useless.\textsuperscript{131}

Due to these differences probably the Foreign Ministers in their communique contented themselves with extolling the Palestinian upsurge and did not address themselves to any substantive issue. It may be recalled that in many of the communique issued in 1987 the Foreign Ministers had shunned any mention of the Palestinian problem.

On the Afghanistan issue too, there was a serious rift among the GCC members. Saudi Arabia alone among these countries had been giving large-scale financial support to the Afghan Mujahideens and had consistently opposed the Soviet policy in that region.\textsuperscript{132} No wonder these states were not in consonance in their views as to the kind of government which should come into power in Afghanistan after the Soviet withdrawal, the role which the Mujahideens should play in it, and so on. This probably led to omission of any reference to Afghanistan in the communique.

It is worth recalling here that the Afghanistan imbroglio had hardly found a place even in earlier communique of Foreign Ministers and this continued even when it was on the verge of a settlement.

\textsuperscript{131} Oman Observer, 2 April 1988.

\textsuperscript{132} See the section dealing with GCC members relations with Afghanistan in Part I.
The thirty-ninth meeting of GCC Foreign Ministers was held on 4/5 June 1988.\textsuperscript{133} The period intervening between the previous meeting of Foreign Ministers held on 15 March 1988 and this meeting had seen a marked deterioration in Iran's relations with Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, especially with the latter.

Iranian gunboats had fired upon military installations on Kuwait's Bubiyan island on 31 March 1988, injuring some personnel.\textsuperscript{134} Subsequently, a Kuwaiti airliner was hijacked during early April 88 and the Kuwaiti media had unequivocally accused Iran of involvement in the hijacking.\textsuperscript{135} An Iranian "Scud" missile fell on Kuwait on 22 April 1988 though it did not cause any damage. During the months of April and May 1988, three explosions had occurred in Kuwait (10 April, 8 May, 19/20 May 1988) - all of which were attributed to pro-Iranian sympathisers.\textsuperscript{136} These developments no doubt constituted a reversal of the trend seen during the first three months of 1988 when the Kuwait-Iranian relations had began to register some kind of a thaw. Sheikh Sabah in a press interview had described the relations between his country and Iran as good and had alluded to the possibility of Kuwaiti diplomats

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{133} Arab Times, 4 June 1988.
\item \textsuperscript{134} Al-Watan, 1 April 1988.
\item \textsuperscript{135} Arab Times, April 1988.
\item \textsuperscript{136} Al-Watan, April, May 1988.
\end{itemize}
being sent back to Tehran to reopen their Embassy in that country.\textsuperscript{137}

It is, however, with respect to Saudi Arabia that for more grave and potentially explosive developments had taken place. It became known during the third week of March, 1988 that Saudi Arabia was acquiring long-range ballistic missiles with a range of 3000 kms. from China. Saudi Arabia made it quite clear that it was equipping itself with such a formidable weapon system (at a cost of one billion dollars) to deter any hostile Iranian action against the Kingdom. Subsequently, Saudi Arabia declared that it would restrict the number of Iranian Haj pilgrims who would be permitted to enter the kingdom during the Haj season of July 1988 to 45,000 as against 1.5 million Iranian Hajis who had come there in the previous years.\textsuperscript{138} This decision was also endorsed by the OIC in March 1988 and was naturally highly resented by the Iranians. This was followed by Saudi Arabia's severing of diplomatic relations with Iran on 27 April 1988.

Justifying this step, the Saudi government accused Iran of acting in a manner inimical to its interests. King Fahd himself, abandoning his normally cautious stance, in a press interview warned Iran against interpreting Kingdom's "spirit of tolerance" as a sign of weakness.\textsuperscript{139} The Iranians

\textsuperscript{137} Arab Times, 23 March 1988.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., 24/25 March 1988.
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., 30 April 1988.
on their side stepped up their attacks on ships trading with
the kingdom and during the single month of May 1988 four such
ships were hit. 140

Turning to other parts of the world, it may be noted
that momentous events had occurred on the eve of this meeting
and they included: superpower summit held on 2 June 1988;
withdrawal of Soviet troops beginning from mid-May 1988; agreement
on convening of an Arab emergency summit on 7/8 June 1988. It
will be relevant to see how the Foreign Ministers dealt with
the various crucial developments which had taken place during
the two/three months prior to their meeting, whether in the
Gulf or the world in general.

The Saudi Foreign Minister while inaugurating this
collection in his capacity as its Chairman called for: a "well-
studied Arab plan of action that capitalised on the develop­
ments to help the Palestinians attain their national objec­
tives." 141 He added that "the GCC countries were supporting
the uprising with all potential because Palestinians and the
Holy Jerusalem were and would remain a main concern of the
Council." 142 He also praised Iraqi successes in recapturing
certain areas occupied by Iran and said "this had a great

140. Ibid., 28 May 1988.
142. Ibid.
effect in deterring and reining in the Iranian aggression which had been threatening the entire region. 143

Main points of the communique issued by the Foreign Ministers were as follows. 144 The Council emphasized the need to find a peaceful solution to the Iraq-Iran conflict which would preserve the legitimate rights of both the parties. It expressed pride in earlier Iraqi victories and its recovery of territory. While discussing the Palestinian uprising, the council recalled the eighth-summit resolution which had affirmed moral and material support for it.

A close scrutiny of the above communique indicates that this session simply did not address itself to the major developments that had taken place in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia during the previous months. The Saudi decision to acquire long-range ballistic missiles, its severing of relations with Tehran, its decision to restrict the number of Iranian Hajis—all this did not find a place in the communique.

In the same way hijacking of a Kuwaiti airliner, the spate of terrorist bombings experienced by Kuwait, attacks on its military installations by Iran—these again were omitted from the communique.

What is more significant not only such sensitive issues not referred to in the communique, they were not even included

143. Ibid.
144. See appendix 26 for a full text of the communique.
in the agenda. The GCC assistant Secretary-General Al-Maskari openly acknowledged that the question of adopting a unified stand towards Tehran was not on the agenda; similarly, he said, air piracy and terrorism were not included in it.\textsuperscript{145}

The meeting also did not agree on any unified stand which the GCC leaders would adopt during the forthcoming Algiers summit. Incidentally, Sultan Qaboos did not even attend this summit. Despite the strong support for the Palestinians affirmed by the Saudi Foreign Minister in his inaugural speech, the communique dealt with this issue in a rather desultory manner. It is also worth noting that the superpower summit, developments in Pakistan, events in Afghanistan did not elicit any comment from the Council in its communique.

The fortieth meeting of the GCC Foreign Ministers was held on 5 September 1988. It may be observed that this was the first session of the GCC Foreign Ministers after the Iraq-Iran ceasefire went into effect on 28 August 1988. Important points in the statement read out at its end were as follows.

The Ministers noted the positive developments in the region and welcomed Iran's acceptance of the UN ceasefire resolution as well as positive response of that country to the UN efforts in this regard. The Ministers discussed the situation in the Arab world particularly the Palestinian uprising. The

\textsuperscript{145} Arab News, 1 June 1988.
Council expressed pride over the courageous resistance of Palestinians in the face of Israeli brutalities and called for an international peace conference under the auspices of the UN with participation of all involved parties including the PLO.

The situation in Lebanon was reviewed. The Council urged the Lebanese people to put the interests of their country above all other considerations and to exert sincere efforts to restore peace, unity and sovereignty to it.

The Council considered certain economic issues like approving rules for ownership of shares by GCC nationals in public-limited companies, equality of treatment for GCC nationals in matters pertaining to taxation while engaged in economic activities in other member states, etc. 146

It was decided during this meeting that the Saudi Ambassador to the United States would be asked to proceed to Geneva to remain in touch with Iraq and Iran who were then engaged in ceasefire negotiations. 147 In the aftermath of this meeting, the Secretary General of the GCC, Abdulla Bishara, said that no move had been made regarding setting up of a reconstruction fund to help the war-ravaged economies of Iraq and Iran. 148

148. Ibid.
Among the noteworthy features of the above meeting following may be noted. Though the cessation of hostilities between Iraq and Iran must have come as a great relief to all the GCC states, this was hardly reflected in the above statement. There was no indication as to how the GCC members desired to develop their ties with Iran. Death of Zia-ul-Huq, former President of Pakistan, only a month earlier in August 1988 and Qatar's recognition of two communist states of China and the USSR (also in August 1988) were not mentioned in this statement.

The forty-first meeting of the GCC Foreign Ministers was held on 1-2 November 1988. The statement issued at its end affirmed GCC's support for the UN Security Council Resolution No. 598 as the basis for a peace settlement between Iraq and Iran. It voiced backing of the GCC for the Palestinian uprising and expressed support for the forthcoming session of the PNC which was scheduled to be held later that month. Regarding Lebanon, the Council affirmed the importance of preparing for an Arab summit to be preceded by a preparatory Arab League session. 149

This meeting of Foreign Ministers was held when the peace negotiations between Iraq and Iran had been stalled but the GCC forebore from commenting on it. Though the PNC was expected to announce formation of an independent Palestinian state in their session to be held shortly afterwards, 150 the

149. Ibid., 3-4 November 1988.

150. The Palestinian national Council met during the middle of November 1988 when it announced establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza
Council refrained from mentioning this likely development. The Saudi Foreign Minister merely said that the GCC always backed the Palestinian brothers in their aspirations.\(^{151}\) Despite the critical situation through which Lebanon was passing and despite the fact that virtually two governments had come into existence there, the Council did not go beyond calling for an Arab summit.

The forty-second session of the GCC Foreign Ministers was held on the eve of the ninth GCC summit which commenced on 19 December 1988.\(^{152}\) Being a preparatory session, no important decision was announced during this meeting.

The forty-third meeting of the GCC Foreign Ministers was held on 7 March 1989. The meeting endorsed the efforts being made by the UN Secretary General to implement Resolution 598. It expressed its relief over the fact that Iraq and Iran had agreed to exchange sick prisoners of war as well as to set up a joint military committee. While discussing the situation in the occupied territories, the Council reaffirmed its support for the Palestinian uprising. The Council welcomed formation of two new unions in the Arab world e.g. the Arab cooperation council and the Mazhreb union.

\(^{151}\) Arab Times, 3-4 November 1988.
\(^{152}\) Al-Watan, 19 December 1988.
\(^{153}\) Khalaej Times, 8 March 1989.
It is significant that the Foreign Ministers did not refer to some of the crucial and highly controversial developments then taking place, such as: rapidly changing situation in Afghanistan and establishment of an interim government by Afghan Mujahideens; call given by Imam Khomeini for assassination of the British author Salman Rushdie over publication of "Satanic Verses"; possible adoption of a unified stand by the GCC in the ICO which was due to meet shortly afterwards.\footnote{154}

The forty-fourth meeting of the GCC Foreign Ministers was held on 7 June 1989.\footnote{155} This meeting took place against the backdrop of a highly important event, e.g. death of Imam Khomeini which had taken place on 3 June 1989. During the forty-third meeting of the Foreign Ministers in March and this meeting a number of important developments had taken place. The Iraq-Iran peace negotiations continued to be stalled. Saudi-Iranian relations had deteriorated again as a result of Saudi refusal to increase the quota of Iranian Haj pilgrims and to allow them to hold political demonstrations in Makkah.\footnote{156} Bahrain had recognised China while the provisional government formed by the Mujahideens was recognised only by Saudi Arabia and Bahrain within the GCC.\footnote{157} The emergency Arab summit held in Casablanca on 25 May had expressed support for the first time

\footnote{154. The ICO met at the level of Foreign Ministers on 10 March, e.g., only three days after the meeting of GCC Foreign Ministers was convened.}

\footnote{155. \textit{Al-Qabas}, 8 June 1989.}

\footnote{156. \textit{Arab News}, 18 May 1989.}

\footnote{157. \textit{Teheran Times}, 20 May 1989.}
for the Iraqi claim over the Shatt Al Arab.\textsuperscript{158} It had also endorsed PLO's acceptance of UN resolutions 242 and 338.

The communique issued by the Foreign Ministers at the end of this meeting, however, was vague and ambiguous and did not allude to most of the major developments which had been taking place earlier, whether regionally or internationally. It made no reference to Imam Khomeini's death, nor did it acknowledge Iraqi sovereignty over the Shatt of Arab as was done by the Arab Heads of State a little earlier. As regards Afghanistan developments in that country were ignored by this meeting as by earlier ones.

The Council merely voiced support for the efforts being made by the UN Secretary General to establish a comprehensive and lasting peace in the region. The Foreign Ministers welcomed the recent resolution of the Arab summit as well as creation of a tripartite committee (consisting of Heads of State of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Morocco) by it to deal with the Lebanese crisis. The Council also reiterated support for the Palestinian uprising.\textsuperscript{159} It did not, however, specifically voice its support for resolutions 242 and 338 as the Casablanca summit had done (probably to avoid offending Syria).

There were expectations that this meeting may give a call for a dialogue between Iran and the GCC as it was held in

\textsuperscript{158} Al-Watan, 29 May 1989.

\textsuperscript{159} Arab Times, 8 June 1989.
the aftermath of Khomeini's death. These expectations were belied. The extremely vague communique issued by this meeting was evidently a cloak for intra-GCC differences vis-a-vis Iraq and Iran as well as other regional issues.

The GCC Foreign Ministers had thus met forty-four times since the inception of this body to August 1989. Salient features of the decisions taken during these meetings can be summarized as follows.

The Foreign Ministers did not take any important decisions whether in the field of external relations, or in any other area during the course of these meetings. The communiques issued by them were marked by a great deal of generality, vagueness and mainly expressed GCC countries' broad policy perspectives vis-a-vis various developments taking place in the Gulf region. The Foreign Ministers scrupulously forebore from alluding to any developments outside the Arab world, however momentous.

Despite the concern felt by the GCC states over Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, this issue was only once referred to in passing during the fourth meeting of Foreign Ministers held on 2 September 1981. The fact that the GCC Foreign Ministers almost never referred to the Soviet role in Afghanistan pointed to their desire to emphasize GCC's neutral character. It was also indicative of intra-GCC rift on this issue.


161. See the section dealing with GCC's relations with Afghanistan in Part I.
The doctrine that the GCC was opposed to big power interference in the region was specifically enunciated only during the fourth session of Foreign Ministers held in September 1981. It is significant that the above doctrine was also not incorporated in any summit communique from 1982 onwards.

Foreign Ministers often reiterated the doctrine that attack on any member of the GCC would be taken as an attack on all. Interestingly enough, in none of the communiques issued after GCC summits was this principle mentioned - this indicates a certain dichotomy between the Council of Foreign Ministers and the Supreme Council. This is also borne out by the fact that the Foreign Ministers in some of their sessions (e.g., 6/7 February 1982; 25 October 1987) had accused Iran explicitly of aggressive actions - something which was never done by the Supreme Council.

Apart from external relations, the Foreign Ministers also discussed various topics such as commercial cooperation, oil, menace of terrorism in the GCC, etc.; however, no major initiative in any of these fields was taken by them.

Though the Foreign Ministers reviewed a number of issues, their main pre-occupation was with the Iran-Iraq conflict and possible threats to the GCC members from Iran. This became especially so after 1983 when Iran began to issue warnings about closing the Gulf of Hormuz.
The GCC region had witnessed a number of acts of terrorism during the period from 1981 to mid-1988 in which Iranian involvement had been widely believed and acknowledged. However, with the exception of the communiqué issued in early 1982 following the coup attempt in Bahrain, in no other communiqué the Foreign Ministers blamed Iran, explicitly or implicitly, for the acts of terrorism.

During the early years of the war, the Foreign Ministers' attitude vis-a-vis the Iran-Iraq conflict consisted of applauding Iraqi stand and calling upon Iran to adopt a more conciliatory approach.

Iran was accused of aggression for the first time by name following its attack on Kuwaiti/Saudi tankers in May 1984. Subsequently, in some of the later communiqués Iran drew harsh criticism from the Foreign Ministers (for example see the communiqué issued after Foreign Ministers' meeting on 25 October 1987).

Iran significantly stepped up its attacks on ships belonging to Kuwait or trading with it in 1986 and 1987. It adopted a highly intimidating attitude towards Kuwait during this period, threatening it with aggression. However, the Foreign Ministers during 1987 scrupulously avoided casting blame on Iran by name except during their last session held in October 1987. Further, even the communiqué issued by the
Foreign Ministers after their October 1987 meeting has to be regarded as somewhat conciliatory if it is recalled that only a few days earlier Iran had inflicted substantial damage on a Kuwaiti oil terminal. The tenor of communiques issued by the GCC Foreign Ministers in 1987 highlights the overwhelming desire of GCC members not to provoke Iran and reasons behind this have been analysed elsewhere.

Expressions of support for Kuwait voiced during 1987 were to some extent less enthusiastic than in earlier years. During the meeting held in early 1984 following the bomb blasts in Kuwait, for example, the member countries had announced their willingness to put all their resources at the disposal of Kuwait; there was no such reference in the communiques issued by Foreign Ministers in the aftermath of their meetings on 3-9 September 1987 and 24 October 1987, both of which were preceded by missile attacks on Kuwait.

The Foreign Ministers devoted considerable attention to the Palestinian issue during the first two years after the inception of the GCC, e.g., 1981 and 1982. The lack of emphasis on this problem during the subsequent years was probably the result of their increasing pre-occupation with the Iraq-Iran conflict.

In the period 1983-88, the Palestinian movement faced many grave challenges and witnessed many crucial developments such as the civil war within the PLO in 1983; rapprochement with Husani Mubarak in December 1983 and with King Hussain of
Jordan in 1984; reunification of PLO factions in mid-1987; severing of links between Jordan and the PLO in mid-1988; creation of an independent Palestinian state in November 1988 and so on. None of the above important events were referred to by the Foreign Ministers.

During the last many communiques issued by the Foreign Ministers, the customary reference to the "inalienable rights of the Palestinian people" and to "creation of an independent state for them" had been lacking. This omission had occurred too frequently to be attributed to casual omission. All this could be understood only in terms of discord among these states vis-a-vis the policy to be pursued towards the Palestinians.\textsuperscript{162}

During the thirty-fifth session held in September 1987 the Foreign Ministers decided that the GCC members would reestablish diplomatic relations with Egypt after the Amman Arab Summit which was to be held on 8 November 1987. This was one of the few major political decisions taken by the Foreign Ministers.

In the four meetings held by the Foreign Ministers after the Iraq-Iran ceasefire until August 1989, there was no indication as to how the GCC as a body envisaged growth of relations with Iran.

\textsuperscript{162} See the section dealing with GCC members' policies vis-a-vis the Palestinian issue in Part I.
If there was one overriding factor which characterised the sessions of GCC Foreign Ministers, it was indecisiveness, vagueness and absence of any coherent pan-GCC policy, whether towards Iran, or the Palestinians or any other important issue. They did not even explicitly reiterate resolutions adopted by Arab summits held prior to some of their meetings. This was no doubt a result of sharp differences in foreign policies of these states. It was also caused by their excessive zeal to avoid antagonizing any faction or group or country in the Arab world.