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Summary

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has been a significant U.S. partner in Gulf security for more than two decades, helping to address multiple regional threats. About 5,000 U.S. military personnel are stationed at UAE military facilities, hosted there under a 1994 U.S.-UAE defense cooperation agreement (DCA) that remains in effect. The UAE is a significant buyer of U.S. military equipment and it was the first Gulf state to order the most sophisticated missile defense system sold by the United States (the THAAD), demonstrating support for U.S. efforts to forge a coordinated missile defense network.

As the UAE has gained capability to project force, it has increasingly asserted itself in the region. The UAE is part of a Saudi-led military effort to counter the Iran-backed Zaidi Shiite Houthi rebels in Yemen, an effort to which the United States provides logistical support. In partnership with U.S. special operations forces, UAE forces are combatting Al Qaeda's affiliate in that country. In recent years, UAE forces have been deployed to several bases in East African countries to train allied forces and facilitate UAE operations in Yemen. The UAE is supporting a rebel military commander in Libya who is acting counter to U.N. and U.S. efforts to forge a unified political structure there.

The UAE's opposition to Muslim Brotherhood-linked regional organizations as a regional and domestic threat—a position shared by Saudi Arabia—has driven UAE policy toward Egypt, Syria, the Palestinian territories, and other countries where Brotherhood-linked organizations operate. The UAE stance has also stoked major tensions with Qatar, which supports Brotherhood-related groups as Islamist organizations willing to work within established political processes. These differences erupted in June 2017, when the UAE joined Saudi Arabia in isolating Qatar until it adopts policies closer to those of the three GCC states. U.S. officials have sought to resolve the dispute, thus far unsuccessfully.

The UAE's relatively open borders and economy have generally won praise from advocates of expanded freedoms in the Middle East. The UAE is considered among the wealthiest countries in the world, in part because of the small population that requires services, and the wealth has helped the government maintain popular support. In 2006, the government established a limited voting process for half of the 40 seats in its quasi-legislative body, the Federal National Council (FNC). The most recent such vote was held in October 2015, and resulted in the selection of a female as speaker of the FNC. However, the country remains under the control of a small circle of leaders. And, since the Arab Spring uprisings, the government has become more wary of the potential for regional conflicts to affect domestic stability, and it has sought to suppress the relatively small secular and Islamist opposition.

In part to cope with the effects of the significant fall in oil prices since mid-2014, the government has created new ministries mandated to formulate future economic and social strategies and to try to attract the support of the country's youth. At times when the UAE has received U.S. assistance, the aid—which has been in very small dollar amounts—has generally been provided to qualify the UAE for inclusion in training and other programs that benefit UAE security.

Very few policy changes are anticipated when UAE President Shaykh Khalifa bin Zayid Al Nahayyan, who suffered an incapacitating stroke in January 2014, leaves the scene; his younger brother, Shaykh Muhammad bin Zayid, has been the de facto leader.

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Governance, Human Rights, and Reform¹

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a federation of seven emirates (principalities): Abu Dhabi, the oil-rich federation capital; Dubai, a large commercial hub; and the five smaller and less wealthy emirates of Sharjah, Ajman, Fujayrah, Umm al-Qaywayn, and Ras al-Khaymah. Sharjah and Ras al-Khaymah have a common ruling family—leaders of the Al Qawasim tribe. After Britain announced in 1968 that it would no longer ensure security in the Gulf, six “Trucial States” formed the UAE federation in December 1971; Ras al-Khaymah joined in 1972. The federation’s last major leadership transition occurred in November 2004, upon the death of the first UAE President and ruler of Abu Dhabi, Shaykh Zayid bin Sultan Al Nuhayyan.

Table I. UAE Leadership

Khalifa bin Zayid al-Nuhayyan	UAE President and Ruler of Abu Dhabi Emirate. Incapacitated since 2014 stroke
Mohammad bin Rashid Al Maktum	UAE Vice President, Prime Minister, and Defense Minister, and ruler of Dubai Emirate
Mohammad bin Zayid al- Nuhayyan	Crown Prince/heir apparent of Abu Dhabi, de facto President of UAE due to brother’s incapacitation
Sultan bin Mohammad Al Qassimi	Ruler of Sharjah Emirate
Saud bin Saqr Al Qassimi	Ruler of Ras al-Khaymah Emirate. His elder brother, Khalid bin Saqr, claims his 2003 removal as heir apparent was illegitimate and that he is the rightful ruler of the emirate. That claim is not recognized by UAE.
Humaid bin Rashid Al Nuami	Ruler of Ajman Emirate
Saud bin Rashid Al Mu’alla	Ruler of Umm al-Qaywayn Emirate
Hamad bin Mohammad Al Sharqi	Ruler of Fujairah Emirate
Abdullah bin Zayid al-Nuhayyan	Foreign Minister
Amal al-Qubaisi	Federal National Council speaker. Only female to head a GCC legislative body.
Yusuf al-Otaiba	Ambassador to the United States. Son of former longtime UAE Oil Minister Mani Saeed al-Otaiba

Shaykh Zayid’s eldest son, Shaykh Khalifa bin Zayid al-Nuhayyan, born in 1948, was elevated from Crown Prince to ruler of Abu Dhabi upon Zayid’s death. In keeping with a long-standing agreement among the seven emirates, Khalifa was subsequently selected as UAE president by the leaders of all the emirates, who collectively comprise the “Federal Supreme Council.” The ruler of Dubai traditionally serves concurrently as Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE; that position has been held by Shaykh Mohammad bin Rashid Al Maktum, architect of Dubai’s modernization drive, since the death of his elder brother Shaykh Maktum bin Rashid Al Maktum in January 2006. The Federal Supreme Council meets four times per year to establish general policy guidelines, although the leaders of the emirates consult frequently with each other.

¹ Much of this section is from the State Department’s country report on human rights practices for 2015, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/253163.pdf>; the State Department report on International Religious Freedom for 2014, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238694.pdf>; and the Trafficking in Persons Report for 2015, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/243562.pdf>.

UAE leadership posts almost always change only in the event of death of an incumbent. The leadership of the UAE was put into doubt by Shaykh Khalifa's stroke on January 24, 2014. He has not appeared publicly since and reportedly is incapacitated, but, in order not to cause turmoil within ruling circles, there is unlikely to be a formal succession as long as he remains alive. His younger brother and the third son of Shaykh Zayid, Crown Prince Shaykh Mohammad bin Zayid al-Nuhayyan (born in 1961), is almost certain to succeed him in all posts. Shaykh Mohammad had been assuming day-to-day governing responsibilities prior to Khalifa's stroke and has been de facto leader since. He and Shaykh Mohammad bin Rashid of Dubai have long been considered the key strategists of UAE foreign and defense policy.

Several senior UAE officials are also brothers of Shaykh Mohammad bin Zayid, including Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayid, deputy Prime Minister Mansur bin Zayid, deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sayf bin Zayid, and National Security Advisor Shaykh Tahnoun bin Zayid. The latter was appointed to that post in early 2016. In early 2017, indicating that a younger generation is ascending, Shaykh Mohammad's son, Khalid bin Mohammad, was appointed deputy National Security Adviser. The second son of Zayid, Shaykh Sultan bin Zayid Al Nuhayyan, plays virtually no role in the governing structure.

As shown in the table above, each emirate has its own leader. The five smaller emirates, often called the "northern emirates," tend to be more politically and religiously conservative and homogenous than are Abu Dhabi and Dubai, which are urban amalgams populated by many Arab, South Asian, and European expatriates.

Figure I. UAE at a Glance



Population	9 million+ (U.N. estimate), of whom about 11% are citizens. U.S. population estimate is 5.8 million, and the causes of the discrepancy between U.S. and U.N. estimates are unclear.
Religions	The citizenry is almost all Muslim, of which 85% are Sunni and 15% are Shiite. Of the total population, 76% is Muslim; 9% is Christian; and 15% is other—but primarily Buddhist or Hindu.
Ethnic Groups	11% Emirati (citizenry); 29% other Arab and Iranian; 50% South Asian; 10% Western and other Asian expatriate
Size of Armed Forces	About 50,000
Inflation Rate	About 2.1% (2017).
GDP	Growth Rate: 1.3% (2017.) Below the 3% growth of 2016 and nearly 4% in 2015. Purchasing Power Parity, PPP: \$690 billion (2017) Per capita (PPP): over \$68,000
Oil Exports	About 2.7 million barrels per day
Foreign Assets/Sovereign Wealth Reserves	About \$575 billion
U.S. citizens resident in UAE	About 60,000
Major Projects	Dubai inaugurated "Burj Khalifa," world's tallest building, on January 4, 2010. Burj al-Arab hotel in Dubai bills itself as "world's only 7-star hotel." Abu Dhabi has built local branches of Guggenheim and Louvre museums.

Source: Map created by CRS. Facts from CIA, *The World Factbook*; U.S. Census Bureau, Foreign Trade Statistics, Economist Intelligence Unit..

Governance Issues

UAE leaders argue that the country's social tolerance and distribution of national wealth have rendered the bulk of the population satisfied with the political system, and that Emiratis are able to express their concerns directly to the country's leaders through traditional consultative mechanisms. Most prominent among these channels are the open *majlis* (councils) held by many UAE leaders. UAE officials maintain that Western-style political parties and elections for a legislature or other representative body would aggravate schisms among tribes and clan, cause Islamist factions to become radical, and open UAE politics to regional influence. Minister of State for Federal National Council Affairs (FNC, discussed below) Anwar Gargash wrote on August 26, 2012, that "The UAE's end goal is not a liberal multiparty system. This model does not correspond with our cultural or historical development."² His comments came following an August 2012 announcement of the formation of a political party called Al Umma ("the Islamic community"), a violation of UAE law forbidding political parties.

Federal National Council (FNC) and FNC Elections

The UAE has provided for some formal popular representation through a 40-seat Federal National Council (FNC)—a body that can review and recommend, but not enact or veto, legislation. The FNC can question, but not remove, ministers and it conducts such questionings regularly. Its sessions are open to the public. The seat distribution of the FNC is weighted in favor of Abu Dhabi and Dubai, which each hold eight seats. Sharjah and Ras al-Khaymah have six each, and the others each have four. The government has not implemented calls, such as were expressed in a March 2011 petition signed by 160 UAE intellectuals, to transform the FNC into an all-elected body with full legislative powers.³ Each emirate also has its own appointed consultative council.

First FNC Votes. In 2006, the UAE leadership apparently assessed that it had fallen too far behind its Gulf neighbors on political reform and relented to the suggestion to make at least part of the FNC seats elective. In December 2006, the government instituted a limited election process for half of the FNC seats, with the other 20 FNC seats remaining appointed. The Election Commission approved a small "electorate" of about 6,600 persons, of which about 20% were women. Out of the 452 candidates for the 20 elected seats, there were 65 female candidates. Only one woman was elected (from Abu Dhabi), but another seven were given appointed seats.

The September 24, 2011 FNC election was held in the context of the "Arab spring" uprisings. The government expanded the electorate greatly to 129,000 voters, of which nearly half were female. There were 468 candidates for the 20 seats, including 85 women. However, there was little active campaigning, and turnout was about 25%, which UAE officials called disappointing. Of the 20 winners, only 1 was female (Sheika Isa Ghanem from Umm Al Quwain, a conservative emirate). Other winners were elected along tribal lines; in Abu Dhabi, three of the four winners were from the Al Amiri tribe. Of the 20 appointed seats, six were women. The government selected as FNC Speaker an appointed male writer Mohammad al-Murr, and Amal al-Qubaisi as deputy speaker—the first woman to hold as high a position in a GCC representative body.

2015 Vote. The 2015 elections were again for half the FNC, but the electorate was expanded to 225,000 voters, about double that in 2011. The 2015 process included "early voting" and out of country voting, culminating on "election day" of October 3, 2015. There were 330 candidates

² Anwar Gargash. "Amid Challenges, UAE Policies Engage Gradual Reforms." *The National*, August 26, 2012.

³ Al Jazeera News Network, March 9, 2011.

(somewhat lower than in 2011), including 74 women (almost as many as in 2011). Turnout was 35%, which government officials stated was a more satisfactory turnout than in 2011. One female was elected, as happened in 2011. The remaining 20 seats were appointed on November 16, and 8 of them were women. Among the women appointed was Abu Dhabi representative and Amal al-Qubaisi, who on November 18, 2015 was named FNC speaker.

The next FNC elections are to be held in the fall of 2019. UAE officials assert that there are plans to eventually make all 40 seats elected, but it is not clear that this will apply to the 2019 vote.

Muslim Brotherhood and other Opposition and Government Responses

There has been little evident clamor for rapid political reform, but some UAE intellectuals, businessmen, students, and others have agitated for greater political space. Some UAE youth tried unsuccessfully to use social media to organize a public protest in March 2011. The government responded by trying five well-known online activists—the so-called “UAE-5” in November 2011. They were convicted, but their sentences were commuted.

The government has particularly targeted Islamists linked to the region-wide Muslim Brotherhood organization, which UAE leaders assert is a threat to UAE and regional stability and recruit and support regional terrorists. The UAE affiliate of the Brotherhood is the Islah (Reform) organization, which emerged in 1974 as an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood and attracts followers mostly from the less wealthy and more religiously conservative northern emirates. UAE authorities accuse Islah of obtaining funding from the Brotherhood’s main chapter in Egypt.⁴

The government stepped up its crackdown on Islah in 2012, the year that Muslim Brotherhood figure Mohammad Morsi was elected President of Egypt. UAE authorities arrested and revoked the citizenship of several senior Islah members, including a member of the Ras al-Khaymah ruling family. In July 2013, the UAE State Security Court sentenced 69 out of 94 UAE nationals (“UAE-94”), all of whom were Islamists arrested during 2011-2013, for trying to overthrow the UAE government. The others were acquitted. In June 2013, UAE authorities referred another 30 persons, of which 20 are Egyptian nationals, to that court for alleged connections to the Muslim Brotherhood organization in Egypt. They were convicted and sentenced in January 2014 to five years in prison. In 2014, the Federal Supreme Court ordered closed all offices of Brotherhood-linked groups in the UAE, even though they do not have a history of violence, and the government identified Islah and the broader Muslim Brotherhood as two of 85 “terrorist” groups. Also on that list were regional radical Islamist groups such as Al Qaeda and the Islamic State organization.⁵

In May 2015, the Federal Supreme Court convicted five persons, allegedly members of Qatar’s intelligence service, of organizing an online campaign to damage the UAE leadership’s reputation. The five were later pardoned. A Saudi-UAE list of “persons to be isolated,” released in connection with the June 2017 intra-GCC dispute, included Muslim Brotherhood-linked Egyptian cleric Yusuf Qaradawi, who resides in Qatar. The disagreements between Qatar and the UAE and other GCC states over the Muslim Brotherhood and other political Islamist movements are discussed further in the section on foreign policy.

The government has also addressed domestic opposition with reforms and economic incentives. In 2011, the government invested \$1.5 billion in utilities infrastructure of the poorer, northern emirates; it raised military pensions; and it began subsidizing some foods. To try to maintain the

⁴ “UAE Targets Muslim Brotherhood in Crackdown on Dissent,” *BBC*, September 26, 2012.

⁵ “UAE Lists Scores of Groups as ‘Terrorists.’” *Al Jazeera*, November 16, 2014.

loyalty of the country's youth, in March 2013, the government announced a "new look" cabinet including several young figures. Cabinet reshuffles in February 2016 and October 2017 appeared intended to attract youth support by adding several young ministers, many of whom are female. The reshuffles included the following:

- Establishing several new minister of state positions—for "tolerance," for "happiness," for artificial intelligence, and for food security.
- Forming an Emirates Foundation for Schools, run by an independent board of directors, as part of an education reform.
- Reducing the mandate of the Ministry of Health to a focus on disease prevention, and forming an independent body to oversee the hospital system.
- Creating a science council with a mandate to promote a new generation of Emirati scientists.

U.S. Democracy Promotion Efforts and UAE Restrictions

Human rights observers assert that U.S. official criticism of the UAE's measures against dissent has been muted because of the close U.S.-UAE strategic alliance. U.S. officials assert that they continue to promote democracy, rule of law, independent media, and civil society in the UAE through State Department programs that are tolerated by the UAE government. Such programs have included the broader Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI). The U.S. Embassy in Abu Dhabi houses a MEPI regional office that runs the MEPI-funded programs in the Gulf region.

On the other hand, the UAE government has expelled some U.S. and Europe-sponsored democracy promotion efforts that the government asserted were too intrusive into UAE politics. In 2012, the government closed the National Democratic Institute (NDI) office in Dubai, which had been working for four years with license from the UAE government and U.S. funding to promote women's rights and enhance municipal governance. The government simultaneously expelled the Germany-based Konrad Adenauer Foundation, which was performing similar work. No U.S. funding for democracy promotion in UAE has been provided in recent years.

Other Human Rights-Related Issues⁶

Recent State Department human rights reports and reports by independent groups such as Human Rights Watch assert that there are unverified reports of torture, government restrictions of freedoms of speech and assembly, and lack of judicial independence. The relatively few UAE organizations that monitor the government's human rights performance include the Jurists' Association's Human Rights Committee, the Emirates Human Rights Association (EHRA), and the Emirates Center for Human Rights (ECHR). In a January 2018 U.N. Universal Period Review, UAE officials highlighted that the UAE had formed a new human rights institution under the "Paris Principles"—response to reports that British police were investigating UAE officials suspected of torturing Qatari nationals detained on suspicion of links to the Muslim Brotherhood.⁷

⁶ Much of this section is derived from: State Department Country Reports on Human Rights: 2016. <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/265736.pdf>.

⁷ UAE Officials Under Investigation for Torture. Al Jazeera, January 22, 2018.

Media and Research Institute Freedoms

The UAE government has increased restrictions on media usage, particularly social media, since the 2011 Arab uprisings, tempering its former commitment to free and open media. A “cybercrimes decree” issued by President Khalifa on November 13, 2012 (Federal Legal Decree No. 5/2012) established a legal basis to prosecute and jail people who use information technology to promote dissent. The decree provides for imprisonment and large fines for anyone who uses information technology to “incite actions that endanger state security or infringe on the public order” and for life imprisonment for anyone using such technology to advocate the overthrow of the government. Several activists have been jailed for violating the decree, including one who was jailed for producing a video parodying youths in Dubai. In May 2015, the government enacted an Anti-Discrimination Law which, among other provisions, criminalizes the broadcasting or publication of “provocative” material—political or religious.⁸

A “National Media Council” directly oversees all media content, and provisions governing media licensing do not clearly articulate government standards in evaluating license applications. Restrictions do not apply to the “Free Zones” in UAE in which foreign media operate. However, some media organizations report that the government has banned some journalists from entering the country, and prohibited distribution of some books and articles that criticize government policies or highlight human rights abuses.

There have also been increasing restrictions on research institutes, several of which had opened in UAE in the 1990s. The government applied increasingly strict criteria to renewing the licenses of some research institutes and some left the UAE entirely as a result. In November 2012, the UAE ordered out the Rand Corporation, and UAE officials have denied entry to some academics and human rights organizations representatives who have been critical of the UAE human rights record.⁹ On the other hand, some new think tanks have opened or become increasingly active in recent years, including the Emirates Policy Center and the TRENDS Institute.

Justice/Rule of Law

The UAE constitution provides for an independent judiciary, but court decisions are subject to review by the political leadership who can review cases and whose decisions supersede those of any court. UAE judicial institutions include Sharia (Islamic law) courts that adjudicate criminal and family law matters, and civil courts that adjudicate civil matters. The civil court system, based on French and Egyptian legal systems, was established in 1973 when the Federal Supreme Court was inaugurated. The sector was later expanded with the formation of Federal First Instance Courts and Federal Appeal Courts. The Federal Supreme Court, which consists of a president and a five judges appointed by the UAE leadership, adjudicates disputes between emirates or between an emirate and the UAE federal government; the constitutionality of federal and other laws; conflicts of jurisdiction between the federal and local judicial authorities; and crimes affecting the UAE federation. It also interprets the provisions of the constitution and questions ministers and senior federal officials for official misconduct. A 2012 amendment to the UAE constitution set up a “Federal Judicial Council” chaired by the UAE President, which human rights groups asserted reflected increased political influence over the judiciary. Foreign nationals hold positions in the judiciary, making them subject to being threatened with deportation for unpopular judgments or judgments against well-connected Emiratis. In 2010, a

⁸ State Department human rights report on UAE for 2015, p. 12.

⁹ CRS conversations with UAE officials, 2012-2017.

UAE court acquitted the UAE president's brother of torturing an Afghan merchant, ruling that he was not liable because he was affected by prescription drugs.

The UAE justice system has often come under criticism in cases involving expatriates. Western expatriates have sometimes been arrested for sexual activity on UAE beaches. In 2007, human rights groups criticized the conservative-dominated justice system for threatening to prosecute a 15-year-old French expatriate for homosexuality, a crime in UAE, when he was raped by two UAE men; the UAE men were later sentenced for sexual assault and kidnapping. In August 2012, a 78-year-old pediatrician from South Africa was imprisoned for two months for alleged issues of malpractice related to his six-week service as a doctor in Abu Dhabi in 2002¹⁰ and he was prevented from leaving the UAE until June 2013. In July 2013, a Norwegian woman was sentenced to 16 months in jail by a Dubai court for having sex outside marriage after she reported being raped. She was released later that month.

Women's Rights

Women's political rights have expanded steadily, and observers say the UAE is perhaps the only Arab country where women are accepted as professionals. As of December 2011, UAE women are allowed to pass on their citizenship to their children—the first GCC state to allow this. Many domestic service jobs are performed by migrant women, and they are denied basic legal protections such as limits to work hours. However, UAE women are still at a legal disadvantage relative to men, for example in divorce cases and other family law issues.

Recent cabinet reshuffles have greatly increased the number of female ministers. Seven women are in the FNC, and one is now its speaker, as noted. About 10% of the UAE diplomatic corps is female, whereas there were no female diplomats prior to 2001. The UAE Air Force has several female fighter pilots.

Religious Freedom¹¹

The UAE constitution provides for freedom of religion but also declares Islam as the official religion. The death penalty for conversion from Islam remains in law, but is not known to be enforced. In practice, non-Muslims in UAE are free to practice their religion. There are at least 35 churches built on land donated by the ruling families of the various emirates, and in 2016 the government donated additional lands for the building of more churches and some new Hindu and Sikh temples. There are no Jewish synagogues or Buddhist temples. In 2016, the government formed a new Ministry of Tolerance, whose core objectives include supporting religious tolerance and diversity, and which has organized public marches by residents of the several non-Muslim faiths present in the country. In September 2016, Shaykh Mohammad bin Zayid met with Pope Francis in the Vatican and the Pope has been invited to visit the UAE.

The Shiite Muslim minority, which is about 15% of the citizen population and is concentrated largely in Dubai emirate, is free to worship and maintain its own mosques. However, Shiite mosques receive no government funds and there are no Shiites in top federal posts. At times, the government has acted against non-UAE Shiite Muslims because of their perceived support for Iran and Iran's regional allies. The government has at times closed Shiite schools and prohibited

¹⁰ Lydia Polgreen. "Emirates' Laws Trap a Doctor Just Passing Through." *New York Times*, April 12, 2013.

¹¹ The State Department's International Religious Freedom report for 2016, released on August 15, 2017, and from which this section is primarily derived, is available at <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/269162.pdf>.

the holding of conferences for worldwide Shiites. The government has deported some foreign Shiites in recent years.

Labor Rights/Foreign Worker Rights

UAE law prohibits all forms of compulsory labor, but enforcement is assessed by U.S. officials as inconsistent. On several occasions, foreign laborers working on large construction projects have conducted strikes to protest poor working conditions and nonpayment of wages. There have been numerous and persistent allegations that foreign workers are housed in cramped “labor camp” conditions, have their passports held, are denied wages or paid late, are forced to work long hours, are deported for lodging complaints, and are subjected to many other abuses. In May 2014, the government arrested foreign laborers striking to protest many of the conditions discussed above in the course of building a facility for New York University’s (NYU’s) branch in Abu Dhabi.¹² NYU apologized to the workers for being excluded from a labor “code of conduct” that covers migrant workers in the UAE and compensated several hundred of them.

The Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation (MOHRE, formerly the Labor Ministry) has addressed problems such as those above by penalizing employers and requiring that workers’ salaries be deposited directly in banks. In 2011 the UAE reformed its “kafala” system to allow migrant workers to switch employers without first receiving their original employer’s permission. The reform has reportedly led to higher earnings by immigrant laborers in the country. In May 2016, MOHRE began issuing a yearly “Worker Welfare Report” that details the ministry’s enforcement activities against employer abuses.

Human Trafficking¹³

The UAE is considered a “destination country” for women trafficked from Asia and the former Soviet Union. The Trafficking in Persons report for 2017, for the seventh year in a row, rated the UAE as “Tier 2.” The Tier 2 placement was based on the assessment that the UAE does not meet the minimum standards for eliminating human trafficking, but is taking significant efforts to do so. The 2017 State Department report credits the UAE with taking steps over the past year to implement labor reforms that reduce forced labor among foreign workers in the private sector, instituting direct governmental oversight of domestic laborers, and increasing the number of labor trafficking prosecutions. In March 2015, the government put into effect amendments to victim protection clauses of Federal Law 51 of 2006 on Combating Human Trafficking Crimes.

UAE authorities prosecuted and punish sex trafficking offenders. In all of 2015, they prosecuted 17 sex trafficking cases in 2015, up from 15 in 2014. An issue in previous years had been trafficking of young boys as camel jockeys, but that issue was largely alleviated with repatriation of many of those trafficked and the use of robot jockeys. Since 2013, the UAE government, through its “National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking,” has assisted human trafficking victims through the Ewa’a organization, which runs shelters in several UAE emirates. The government opened its first shelter for male sexual trafficking victims in 2013. The government assists victims of human trafficking through a human rights office at Dubai International Airport.

¹² Ariel Kaminer and Sean O’Driscoll. “Workers at N.Y.U.’s Abu Dhabi Site Faced Harsh Conditions.” *New York Times*, May 19, 2014.

¹³ Most of this section is taken from the State Department Trafficking in Persons report for 2017, <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/271345.pdf>.

Foreign Policy and Defense Issues

Despite its small population and territorial size, the UAE is increasingly willing and able to independently project power in the region.¹⁴ At the same time, the UAE maintains its close security partnership with the United States, forged during the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war and strengthened after the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. In late 1981, the UAE and five other Gulf monarchies—Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman—formed a strategic and economic alliance called the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), all of whose members have close defense ties to the United States.

On most foreign policy issues, GCC policies converge, but the GCC has been damaged—perhaps irreparably—by the June 5, 2017, move by Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Bahrain, joined by Egypt and a few other Muslim states, to isolate Qatar by denying it land, sea, and air access to their territories. The rift has, to date, defied mediation efforts by U.S. officials, working with the Amir of Kuwait—a GCC country that, along with Oman, did not join the Saudi-led move against Qatar—and other international officials. The UAE and Saudi Arabia orchestrated the move based on assertions that Qatar supports terrorism by funding Muslim Brotherhood-related movements and that Qatar is politically close to Iran, although many experts attribute the dispute to the Saudi and UAE objections to Qatar’s insistence on pursuing some independent foreign policies. Qatar asserts that the Saudi and UAE position represents support for a “counter-revolution” that resists progress. U.S. officials have called on the Saudi-led bloc to compromise with Qatar and the blockading states have said they will not escalate the dispute. Still, the potential for escalation flared in early 2018 when the UAE, on two occasions, accused Qatar of sending combat aircraft to “intercept” UAE commercial aircraft. The flights were not interrupted and Qatar denied that there was any interception conducted. The rift is expected to be a focus of discussions when President Trump receives de-facto leader Mohammad bin Zayid later in 2018. U.S. officials reportedly hope to mark a resolution of the dispute with a U.S.-GCC summit first planned for May 2018 but postponed until September 2018.

The potential for the dispute to fracture the GCC was evident in the fact that the Saudi, UAE, and Bahrain heads of state did not attend the annual GCC summit, held in Kuwait on December 5, 2017, and which was quickly adjourned. And, that same day, Saudi Arabia and the UAE announced the formation of a “joint cooperation committee”—seemingly an attempt to form a subgroup separate from the GCC.¹⁵ The rift has scuttled plans, announced during at 2015 and 2016 GCC summits, to establish a joint military command and joint naval force to be based in Bahrain, and to be supported by an Abu Dhabi-based “Gulf Academy for Strategic and Security Studies.”

The broader issues dividing Qatar and some of its neighbors had caused rifts in the past, although not as extended or as significant as the current crisis. In March 2014 when the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain recalled their ambassadors from Qatar. The earlier dispute was resolved by November 2014 following an agreement that the GCC countries will not undermine each other’s interests.

Even though it is currently aligned closely with Saudi Arabia, the UAE has had border disputes and other disagreements with Saudi Arabia. A 1974 “Treaty of Jeddah” with Saudi Arabia

¹⁴ Many of these themes are discussed in, Kareem Fahim and Missy Ryan. “In the UAE, U.S. Finds an Ally and a Headache.” *Washington Post*, August 4, 2017.

¹⁵ UAE, Saudi Arabia Announce new Partnership in ‘Rebuff’ to Kuwait’s GCC Efforts. *The New Arab*, December 5, 2017.

formalized Saudi access to the Persian Gulf via a corridor running through UAE, in return for UAE gaining formal control of villages in the Buraymi oasis area. In March 2011, the UAE contributed 500 police officers to a Saudi-led GCC military intervention in Bahrain to support the Al Khalifa regime against a Shiite-led uprising. At least some of the UAE force remained after that time, and one UAE police officer was killed in an opposition bombing in Manama in March 2014.

Iran Policy

UAE leaders assert that it is imperative that the United States and its GCC allies counter Iran's regional policies, which UAE leaders assert are key threats to the UAE and the region. UAE leaders expressed concern that the July 2015 Iran nuclear agreement (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, JCPOA) could reflect a reduction in the U.S. commitment to Gulf security, but GCC leaders now publicly back continuing implementation of the accord. GCC concerns about any potential U.S. "tilt" toward Iran lessened in 2017 as the Trump Administration has returned to earlier U.S. policy that characterized Iran as a major U.S. adversary whose regional activities must be countered.¹⁶ The UAE government issued statements of strong support for President Trump's October 13, 2017, announcement of U.S. Iran strategy that calls on U.S. allies to help curb Iran's regional activities and ballistic missile programs. Still, UAE officials say that the Trump Administration should continue to implement the JCPOA, apparently reflecting an assessment that the JCPOA is constraining Iran's nuclear program and that a collapse of the agreement could lead to increased regional conflict.

The UAE has tended to oppose engagement with Iranian leaders. In January 2016, the UAE withdrew its ambassador from Iran in solidarity with Saudi Arabia's breaking relations with Iran over issues related to the Saudi execution of a dissident Shiite cleric. Because of Hezbollah's affiliation with Iran, in February 2016, the UAE barred its nationals from travelling to Lebanon, downgraded its diplomatic relations with Lebanon, and joined the other GCC states in a joint declaration that Hezbollah is a terrorist organization. UAE officials say that Lebanon's Christians, Sunni Muslims, and other communities should not serve to legitimize tacit Hezbollah hegemony in Lebanon—a position that aligns with failed Saudi efforts in late 2017 to try to isolate Hezbollah within Lebanon. As noted in sections below, UAE policy in east Africa, Yemen, Syria, and elsewhere is driven largely by the UAE's strategy of seeking to weaken Iran. UAE and other Gulf states accuse Iran of supplying the Houthi rebels in Yemen with ballistic missiles that have been launched at Saudi Arabia and reportedly also on the UAE. The Saudi-led bloc cited Qatar's engagement with Iran as one cause of the move to isolate Qatar.

One additional factor motivating UAE policy toward Iran has been a territorial dispute over several Persian Gulf islands. In 1971, Iran, then ruled by the U.S.-backed Shah, seized the Greater and Lesser Tunb islands from the emirate of Ras al-Khaymah, and intimidated the emirate of Sharjah to reach an agreement for shared control of another island, Abu Musa. In April 1992, Iran asserted complete control of Abu Musa. The UAE has called for peaceful resolution of the issue through direct negotiations, referral to the International Court of Justice, or through another agreed forum. The United States takes no position on the sovereignty of the islands, but supports the UAE's call to negotiate the dispute.

In October 2008—after the UAE protested Iran's opening in August 2008 of administrative and maritime security offices on Abu Musa—the UAE and Iran established a joint commission to

¹⁶ Faisal Abbas. "After 8 years of Obama, Trump is breath of fresh air in Gulf States." *CNN.com*, November 22, 2016.

resolve the dispute. Iran later allowed Sharjah to open power and water desalination facilities on the island. The dispute flared again in 2012, when then-President Ahmadinejad visited Abu Musa and spoke to the inhabitants there. UAE officials said the action undermined many months of diplomacy on the issue, including the appointment of negotiators. Iran incurred further UAE criticism with a May 2012 visit to Abu Musa by Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Commander-in-Chief Mohammad Ali Jafari to discuss tourism there. In 2014, the two countries discussed a possible solution under which Iran might cede control of the disputed islands in exchange for rights to the seabed around them.¹⁷ Iran reduced its presence on Abu Musa somewhat as a confidence-building measure. No discussions have been reported recently.¹⁸

Aside from the islands issue, some UAE officials assert that the large Iranian-origin community in Dubai emirate (estimated at 400,000 persons) could pose a “fifth column” threat to UAE stability. Dubai leaders express less concern about Iranian-origin residents, asserting that this population is a product of long-standing UAE-Iran commercial ties.

The extensive Iranian commercial presence in the UAE gave the United States ample opportunity to enlist the UAE in a multilateral effort to stiffen international sanctions on Iran, but also gave the UAE pause in implementing even stricter sanctions on Iran. In 2010, when international sanctions on Iran tightened dramatically, the UAE government directed its banks to fully comply with them, even though a decline in UAE-Iran trade harmed the powerful UAE trading community. The UAE allowed some UAE-based Iranian banks to continue to operate, including Bank Saderat and Bank Melli, but UAE regulators limited their ability to conduct transactions.

Policy Toward and Intervention in Regional Conflicts

Since the 2011 Arab uprisings, the UAE has become more active in the region, including through the use of its own military forces and establishment of bases and facilities from which to project power. The UAE’s capabilities have been enhanced by the many years of defense cooperation with the United States. The UAE’s opposition to the Muslim Brotherhood has manifested in UAE policies toward countries where Brotherhood-linked groups are strong: Egypt, Libya, Syria, and the Palestinian territories.

Egypt

The intra-GCC rift has played out particularly in the case of Egypt. The UAE and Saudi Arabia opposed the election of a leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, Mohammad Morsi, as president in July 2012, and supported the Egyptian military’s toppling of Morsi in July 2013 and subsequent election as president of military leader Abdel Fatah El-Sisi. The UAE has given Egypt nearly \$20 billion in assistance (including loans, grants, and investments) since the ouster of Morsi, whereas Qatar financially backed Morsi and has had minimal engagement with Sisi-led Egypt. UAE officials denied that they had blocked a potential competitor to President Sisi in March 2018 elections from leaving UAE to return to Egypt in late November 2017.

Libya

Intra-GCC differences—as well as differences between the UAE and U.S. policy—have manifested in post-Qadhafi Libya. Several GCC states, including UAE, conducted airstrikes in

¹⁷ Awad Mustafa. “Iran, UAE Close to Deal on Hormuz Islands,” *Defense News*, December 9, 2013.

¹⁸ Author conversations with UAE representatives, May 2016.

Libya in 2011 to assist in the overthrow of Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi. The UAE Air Force helped NATO enforce a no-fly zone and to strike Qadhafi ground targets, and the UAE armed some Libyan rebels.¹⁹ However, the UAE and Qatar have supported rival groups in the highly fractured post-Qadhafi Libyan political system. In August 2014, U.S. officials confirmed that the UAE, jointly with Egypt, carried out an airstrike in Libya against a Muslim Brotherhood-linked Islamist militia that reportedly enjoyed support from Qatar.²⁰ The United States disapproved of the UAE action as unlikely to contribute to stability in Libya. The UAE, possibly in violation of U.N. Security Council resolutions on Libya, reportedly continues to use an airbase in eastern Libya to fly airstrikes, using U.S.-made aircraft, in support of former Libyan military commander Khalifa Hifter, who is leading an anti-Islamist military campaign in eastern Libya and challenging the U.N.-backed government in Tripoli.²¹ In May 2017, the UAE hosted Hifter and the head of the U.N.-backed government in Tripoli for talks to try to resolve the conflict—a shift in the previous UAE position of refusing to engage with Tripoli.

Islamic State/Iraq/Syria²²

The UAE is a member of the U.S.-led coalition against the Islamic State organization, and it conducted strikes against that group's fighters in Syria in 2014 and 2015. During that period, the UAE conducted more strikes in Syria than any country except the United States, and was the only Arab state that the United States permitted to command strikes there.²³ However, UAE (and other Arab) participation in air operations in Syria diminished substantially after Russia's intervention in Syria in August 2015. Perhaps in recognition of Russia's predominant position in Syria, and its growing involvement in the region more generally, de facto UAE leader Mohammad bin Zayid met with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow on April 20, 2017, to discuss Syria, the Yemen conflict, and Russia's alliance with Iran.

The UAE also hosts forces from other countries that are participating in the anti-Islamic State effort, including nine French jets stationed at Al Dhafra Air Base as well as 600 forces from Australia.²⁴ UAE forces also have participated in the "Eager Lion" annual military exercises in Jordan intended to help insulate Jordan from any Syria conflict spillover.

Syria Civil War

The GCC states, including the UAE, sought to oust Assad in order to settle the Syrian civil war and strategically weaken Iran in the Middle East. However, in contrast to Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the UAE is not known to have armed Syrian rebel factions, instead contributing to a multi-

¹⁹ James Risen, Mark Mazzetti, and Michael Schmidt. "Militant Forces Got Arms Meant for Libya Rebels." *New York Times*, December 6, 2012.

²⁰ "U.S. Officials: Egypt, UAE Behind Airstrikes in Libya." *Associated Press*, August 26, 2014.

²¹ <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/exclusive-uae-pilots-flying-sorties-haftar-skies-over-libya-1145862696>. For more information on Libya, see CRS Report RL33142, *Libya: Transition and U.S. Policy*, by (name redacted)

²² For more information on the Syria conflict, see CRS Report RL33487, *Armed Conflict in Syria: Overview and U.S. Response*, coordinated by (name redacted).

²³ The UAE suspended airstrikes over Syria during December 2014-February 2015 over concerns that the U.S.-led coalition had stationed insufficient search and rescue forces nearby—concerns that were heightened when the Islamic State downed a Jordanian pilot over Syria in December 2014 and executed him. In February 2015, the United States reportedly stationed additional search and rescue assets in northern Iraq, and the UAE resumed its air operations. "A Quiet, Potent Ally to U.S." op. cit.

²⁴ "Islamic State Crisis: Australia to Send 600 Troops to UAE." *BBC News*, September 14, 2014.

country pool of funds to buy arms for approved rebel groups in Syria.²⁵ The UAE participated in the “International Syria Support Group” that attempted to negotiate a political transition in Syria, but which has been largely eclipsed by separate Russia-backed settlement efforts. UAE officials continue to assert that a settlement in Syria needs to result in a reduced Iranian presence there.²⁶ The UAE has also sought to alleviate suffering from the Syria crisis through donations to Syrian refugees and grants to Jordan to help it cope with the Syrian refugees that have fled there.

Iraq

The UAE, like the other GCC states, supported the regime of Saddam Hussein against Iran in the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war, but later broke relations with Iraq after it invaded Kuwait in 1990s. No Arab state, including the UAE, contributed ground forces to the U.S.-led “Operation Iraqi Freedom” that overthrew Saddam Hussein in 2003. The UAE and other GCC states did not conduct air operations against Islamic State forces in Iraq, in part because they view the Iraqi government is receiving military support from Iran as well as the United States. Shaykh Mohammad bin Zayid reportedly refused a request by President Obama at the April 21, 2016, U.S.-GCC summit to increase financial support to Iraq, which is struggling with depressed oil prices.²⁷ However, since mid-2017, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have improved ties to the Iraqi government and its Shiite leaders as part of a U.S.-backed effort to dilute Iranian influence in post-Islamic State Iraq.²⁸

Earlier, in 2008, the UAE posted an ambassador to Iraq, wrote off \$7 billion in Iraqi debt, and Shaykh Mohammad bin Zayid visited the country. It opened a consulate in the Kurdish region of Iraq in 2012. However, the UAE-Iraq relationship deteriorated thereafter as the Shiite-dominated government of former Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki marginalized Sunni Iraqi leaders. UAE officials welcomed the change of leadership in Iraq to Prime Minister Haydar Al Abadi in August 2014 and hosted him in December 2014. The UAE and Germany are leading coalition efforts to reconstruct and stabilize areas of Iraq liberated from the Islamic State, including setting up a joint fund to pay for some of those efforts.²⁹ The UAE donated \$50 million to the fund in late 2016, and UAE companies have separately invested in housing and other projects in Iraq. The UAE-Germany cooperation reprises their joint cooperation in Iraq during 2003-2011, in which the UAE provided facilities for Germany to train Iraqi police and the UAE provided over \$200 million for Iraq reconstruction, including for hospitals and medical treatment in the UAE for Iraqi children.

Yemen³⁰

In Yemen, another state roiled by the 2011 Arab uprisings, the GCC helped mediate an agreement under which then-President Ali Abdullah Saleh resigned in January 2012. After the rebel Zaydi Shiite “Houthi” faction advanced militarily as political order in Yemen disintegrated, forcing into exile Saleh’s successor Abdu Rabbu Mansur Al Hadi in January 2015. Saudi Arabia assembled a coalition of Arab states—including all GCC states except Oman—to militarily counter the

²⁵ Author conversations with experts in Washington, DC, 2013-2014.

²⁶ Author conversations with UAE officials. October 2017.

²⁷ Author conversations with UAE representatives, May 2016.

²⁸ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-uae/iraqi-shiite-leader-visits-uae-strengthening-ties-with-sunni-states-idUSKCN1AT0K6>

²⁹ <http://www.arabianbusiness.com/uae-germany-set-up-joint-fund-stabilise-iraq-after-isil-595060.html>.

³⁰ For more information on the conflict in Yemen, see CRS Report R43960, *Yemen: Civil War and Regional Intervention*, by (name redacted) .

Houthis, which included a 3,000-person UAE armored brigade. The coalition has been conducting air strikes and ground operations against Houthi positions in an as yet unsuccessful effort to pressure them into a political settlement. U.N. expert panel reports indicate that the Houthis receive arms, including ballistic missiles, from Iran as part of what GCC leaders assert are Iran's attempts to expand its regional influence. In October 2016, the Houthis used anti-ship cruise missiles, possibly supplied by Iran, to severely damage a UAE Navy logistics ship in the Bab Al Mandeb Strait. More than 100 UAE military personnel have been killed in the intervention to date—the largest loss of UAE military personnel in any UAE military engagement.

The UAE has come under substantial international criticism for contributing to a humanitarian crisis in Yemen. In June 2017, UAE officials denied allegations by human rights organizations that UAE forces were maintaining a secret network of prisons in Yemen in which detainees were being severely abused. Since 2015, the UAE has contributed over \$1.3 billion in humanitarian aid to Yemen, although not for Houthi-controlled areas. It has pledged \$500 million more for 2018. The UAE's Red Crescent Society has played a major role in reconstituting Aden's public institutions.

The United States is supporting the anti-Houthi effort with intelligence and logistical help under a cross-servicing agreement, as well as with some direct military action, such as preventing Iranian shipments of weapons to the Houthis. According to Administration officials, the U.S. military assists UAE and other coalition forces operating in Yemen, without regard to the specific mission a UAE unit or aircraft is performing. The Trump Administration reportedly considered providing military support to a planned UAE operation to seize the key port of Hodeida, although that operation was not conducted.³¹ In May 2017, UAE forces took over full control of the airport in the southern city of Aden, an action that created tensions with Hadi loyalists (some of whom were occupying part of that airport) who accuse the UAE of supporting secession in south Yemen or attempting to control southern Yemen for the UAE's own economic and political interests. UAE military operations and influence in southern Yemen, including its reported near-total control of the city of Aden, has apparently caused friction between the UAE and its main coalition partner, Saudi Arabia.

Separately, the UAE works closely with U.S. forces and with local Yemeni communities to counter the local faction of Al Qaeda—Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). U.S. Special Operations Forces in Yemen reportedly worked with the UAE to defeat AQAP fighters at the port of Mukalla in April 2016, an operation that also killed the leader of the Yemeni branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. U.S. and UAE forces continue operations against AQAP and other militants in the Mukalla area.³² In January 2017, the Trump Administration authorized a raid in concert with some UAE special forces on allies of AQAP, an operation in which one U.S. special operations forces soldier was killed. In August 2017, both UAE and U.S. special forces reportedly advised about 2,000 Yemen government forces conducting an operation against AQAP sanctuaries in Shabwa Province.³³

³¹ Karen DeYoung and Missy Ryan. "Trump Administration Weights Deeper Involvement in Yemen War." *Washington Post*, March 26, 2017.

³² Thomas Gibbons-Neff and Missy Ryan. "U.S. Forces to Stay Longer in Yemen to Fight al Qaeda." *Washington Post*, June 18, 2016.

³³ "Yemeni Forces Target Qaeda Stronghold." *New York Times*, August 7, 2017.

Related UAE Power Projection Capabilities/East Africa

The UAE has been using its financial and military assets to be able to project power to support its operations in Yemen as well as to counter Iranian influence more broadly. The cornerstone of that effort has been the forging of military basing agreements with and support for friendly leaders and factions in several East African countries.³⁴ During 2015, UAE forces at first deployed to Djibouti to support the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen, but in mid-2015 a UAE-Djibouti dispute caused UAE (and Saudi) forces to begin using facilities in Eritrea instead, in exchange for UAE and Saudi funding of facilities upgrades. The UAE now trains pro government Yemeni forces at a facility there. In mid-2015, the UAE expanded its partnership with the fragile government in Somalia to open a new center at which a few hundred UAE special forces train Somali commandos to counter the terrorist group Al Shabab and other threats. The UAE reportedly provided funds to try to influence the outcome of Somalia's presidential elections that were held in February 2017. The UAE also reportedly has established a base at the port of Berbera, in the breakaway region of Somaliland, triggering a legal complaint from the government of Somalia in February 2017.³⁵ The 30-year basing agreement reportedly includes UAE training for Somaliland military and police forces.³⁶

The UAE has cooperated with the Saudi-led effort to persuade Sudan's leaders to realign with the GCC countries and forgo its erstwhile alliance with Iran. Sudanese troops have joined the Arab coalition effort against the Houthis and Sudan's leader, Omar Hassan al-Bashir, visited the UAE in mid-February 2017.³⁷ UAE firms have also made substantial infrastructure investments—which could eventually benefit UAE military operations—elsewhere in East Africa.

Afghanistan

The UAE has assisted the U.S.-led mission to stabilize Afghanistan by deploying a 250-person contingent of Presidential Guard forces since 2003. The UAE forces, the only Arab combat forces in Afghanistan, operate mainly in the restive south, primarily building ties to local communities and constructing health clinics and mosques. The force remained in Afghanistan after the December 2014 transition to Afghan-led combat. During 2012-2014, the UAE deployed six F-16s for close air support missions for the U.S.-led coalition there.³⁸ The UAE also has donated several hundred million dollars of humanitarian and development aid to Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban regime. The risks of the involvement were evident in January 2017 when five UAE diplomats were killed by a bomb during their visit to the governor's compound in Qandahar. The UAE Ambassador survived.

Before the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States, the UAE apparently did not perceive the Taliban movement that was in power there as a threat. The UAE was one of only three countries (Pakistan and Saudi Arabia were the others) that recognized the Taliban during 1996-2001 as the government of Afghanistan, even though the Taliban regime was harboring Al Qaeda leaders. During Taliban rule, the UAE allowed Ariana Afghan airlines to operate direct service

³⁴ Material in this section is taken from: Alex Mello and Michael Knights. "West of Suez for the United Arab Emirates." *Warontherocks.com*. September 2, 2016.

³⁵ <http://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2017/02/15/510655/Somalia-UAE-military-base-Somaliland-Nur-Jimale-Farah-Berbera-Yemeni-conflict>.

³⁶ UAE to Train Somaliland Forces under Military Base Deal. Reuters, March 16, 2018.

³⁷ <http://www.thenational.ae/uae/government/sheikh-mohammed-bin-zayed-praises-sudans-role-in-arab-coalition>.

³⁸ "A Quiet, Potent Ally to U.S." op. cit.

between the two countries. After the September 11 attacks, the UAE made available its military facilities for U.S. and allied use.

Other Foreign Policy Issues: Israeli-Palestinian Dispute

The UAE has no formal diplomatic relations with Israel, but UAE troops did not participate militarily in any major Arab-Israeli war (two of which, in 1948 and 1967, occurred before the UAE was formed). Israel and the UAE have similar positions on Iran and there are consistent reports of quiet diplomatic cooperation and security cooperation.³⁹ For the past several years, Israeli diplomats have attended multilateral meetings in the UAE, such as the January 2014 conference of the 144-country International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), attended by Israel's then Minister of National Infrastructure, Energy, and Water Silvan Shalom. In November 2015, the UAE gave Israel permission to establish a diplomatic office in Abu Dhabi to facilitate Israel's participation in IRENA, but some observers interpreted the permission as reflecting the common interests between Israel and the UAE.⁴⁰ The UAE has apparently set aside its earlier recriminations over an Israeli assassination of Hamas figure Mahmoud al-Mabhouh at a hotel in Dubai in 2010.

There apparently are unspecified levels of Israel-UAE bilateral trade, even though the UAE formally claims it is enforcing the Arab League primary boycott of Israel. In 1994, the UAE joined with the other Gulf monarchies in ending enforcement of the Arab League's secondary and tertiary boycotts (boycotts of companies doing business with Israel and on companies that deal with companies that do business with Israel).

Still, the UAE's positions on the Israel-Palestinian dispute are similar to those of virtually all other Arab states—support for the Palestinian Authority's bid for statehood recognition and opposition to the Trump Administration's recognition that Israel's capital is in Jerusalem. However, in line with UAE animosity toward Muslim Brotherhood-related movements, the UAE criticized Qatar's support for Hamas in the July 2014 conflict between Hamas and Israel.⁴¹ The UAE has channeled support to Hamas's rival, the Fatah faction of the Palestine Liberation Organization, which runs the Palestinian Authority (PA) that is based on the West Bank. In June 2015, the UAE reportedly donated \$12 million to help the Gaza victims of recent wars with Israel, channeling the funds through Fatah, not Hamas.⁴² The UAE also hosts a senior PLO official, Mohammad Dahlan, reputedly a close ally of de-facto UAE leader Shaykh Mohammad bin Zayid, who the UAE reportedly is financially backing for a major role in the PA (such as successor to PA President Mahmoud Abbas) and in the Hamas-run Gaza Strip as well.

The UAE has tended to defer to Saudi Arabia in formulating Arab or GCC proposals to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. In 2007, the UAE joined a "quartet" of Arab states (the others are Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan) to assist U.S. diplomacy on Israeli-Palestinian issues, and it attended the Annapolis summit on the issue that year. Unlike Qatar and Oman, the UAE did not host multilateral Arab-Israeli working groups on regional issues during 1994-1998.

According to the UAE government, the UAE has provided nearly \$550 million to humanitarian projects for Palestinian refugees in the Palestinian territories and in Syria, sending the funds

³⁹ <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/secret-jet-flying-between-israel-and-uae-567607953>.

⁴⁰ Simon Henderson. "Israel's Gulf Breakthrough." Washington Institute for Near East Policy, November 30, 2015.

⁴¹ Hamas formed in the late 1980s out of Brotherhood groups in the Palestinian territories.

⁴² "UAE Money to Gaza Gives Boost to Former Fatah Leader." Associated Press, June 17, 2015.

through the U.N. Relief Works Agency (UNRWA). The UAE funded a housing project in Rafah, in the Gaza Strip, called “Shaykh Khalifa City.”

UAE Foreign Aid⁴³

The UAE asserts that it has provided billions of dollars in international aid through its government and through funds controlled by royal family members and other elites. Among initiatives outside the Near East and South Asia region:

- The Abu Dhabi Fund for Development (ADFD), established in 1971, has distributed over \$4 billion for more than 200 projects spanning 53 countries.
- The UAE provided \$100 million for victims of the December 2004 tsunami in the Indian Ocean.
- During 2011-2012, UAE foundations responded to U.N. appeals for aid to the victims of a drought in East Africa and provided about \$2 million for victims of conflict in Somalia. In October 2013, the UAE reopened a UAE embassy in Mogadishu, in part to facilitate the delivery of relief to Somalis.
- The UAE has donated to various causes in the United States, including \$150 million for the MD Anderson Cancer Center at the University of Texas; \$100 million to assist New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina; \$150 million to Children’s National Medical Center in Washington, DC; \$5 million to the reconstruction of the new pediatric health care wing at St. John’s Mercy Hospital in Joplin, MO, in the wake of the May 2011 tornado there; and \$10 million to assist with the reconstruction and recovery efforts of communities that were impacted by Hurricane Sandy in 2013. In 2012, Johns Hopkins officials unveiled the Sheikh Zayid Cardiovascular and Critical Care Tower, funded by a 2007 donation by the office of UAE President Khalifa.

Defense Cooperation with the United States

The UAE’s ability to project power in the region is a product, at least in part, of many years of U.S.-UAE defense cooperation that includes U.S. arms sales and training, and joint exercises and operations. Despite the fact that the UAE armed forces are small—approximately 51,000 personnel—the UAE has participated in U.S.-led military operations in many different locations, including Somalia (1992), the Balkans (late 1990s), Afghanistan (since 2003), Libya (2011), and the Islamic State. Some experts say the UAE has joined U.S.-led operations to further invest the United States in UAE security and increase UAE influence over U.S. policy.

Despite its growing capability to act independently, the UAE still depends on significant defense cooperation with the United States, as do the other GCC countries. A joint statement issued after the 2015 U.S.-GCC Camp David meeting announced a new U.S.-GCC strategic partnership and an annex to the statement says that the United States will increase security cooperation with the GCC states by: (1) facilitating U.S. arms transfers to the GCC states; (2) increasing U.S.-GCC cooperation on maritime security, cybersecurity, and counterterrorism; (3) organizing additional large-scale joint military exercises and U.S. training; and (4) stating a renewed commitment to a concept of a Gulf-wide ballistic missile defense capability, which the United States has sought to

⁴³ Factsheets provided by UAE Embassy in Washington, DC, and author conversations with UAE representatives. 2011-2016.

promote in recent years.⁴⁴ A factsheet issued by the Administration during the April 21, 2016, U.S.-GCC summit, in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, indicated that these steps have begun to be implemented, and that additional measures were agreed to, including U.S.-GCC military exercises (held in March 2017) and U.S. training for GCC special forces.⁴⁵

Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) and U.S. Forces in UAE

The United States and UAE have established a “Defense Cooperation Framework” to discuss joint strategic approaches to regional disputes and conflicts and to better integrate U.S. capabilities with those of the UAE. The Framework includes UAE development of a defense plan that will facilitate joint U.S.-UAE planning in case of attack on the UAE.⁴⁶

The Framework builds on the July 25, 1994, bilateral Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA), the text of which is classified.⁴⁷ The DCA was accompanied by a separate “Status of Forces Agreement” (SOFA) giving U.S. military personnel in UAE certain legal immunities, but several incidents reportedly caused the UAE to void the SOFA and to agree with the United States to handle legal incidents on a “case-by-case basis.”⁴⁸ On May 15, 2017, Secretary of Defense James Mattis and de facto UAE leader Shaykh Mohammad bin Zayid Al Nuhayyan confirmed that the United States and the UAE had concluded a new DCA with a 15-year duration.⁴⁹ In accordance with the DCA:

- The United States stations about 5,000 U.S. military personnel at several UAE facilities including Jebel Ali port (between Dubai and Abu Dhabi), Al Dhafra Air Base (near Abu Dhabi), and naval facilities at Fujairah. Jebel Ali, capable of handling aircraft carriers, is the U.S. Navy’s busiest port of call. The number of U.S. forces currently in UAE is substantially higher than the 800 U.S. personnel there prior to the 2003 U.S. intervention in Iraq. The U.S. forces in UAE support U.S. operations in Afghanistan, combat the Islamic State, deter Iran, try to intercept terrorists, and combat smuggling and illicit shipments of weaponry or proliferation-related equipment.
- The U.S. stations combat and other aircraft. About 3,500 of the U.S. contingent are Air Force personnel deployed at Al Dhafra air base. The facility at first only hosted U.S. surveillance aircraft such as the U-2 and the KC-10 refueling aircraft, but the UAE later permitted the stationing of F-15s; the “Stealth” F-22 Raptor;⁵⁰ and the Global Hawk and the AWACS (Airborne Warning and Control System).⁵¹ Dhafra is the only overseas base where F-22s are stationed.
- The United States trains UAE forces. About 600-800 UAE military personnel study and train in the United States each year, mostly through the Foreign

⁴⁴ The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, Annex to U.S.-Gulf Cooperation Council Camp David Joint Statement, May 14, 2015.

⁴⁵ For text of the factsheet, see <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/04/21/fact-sheet-implementation-us-gulf-cooperation-council-strategic>.

⁴⁶ Author conversations with UAE officials, July 2014.

⁴⁷ Some provisions are discussed in Sami Hajjar, *U.S. Military Presence in the Gulf: Challenges and Prospects* (U.S. Army War College: Strategic Studies Institute), March 2002, p. 27.

⁴⁸ Author conversations with UAE representatives, 2010-2016.

⁴⁹ Department of Defense. “SecDef Meets with UAE’s Crown Prince.” May 15, 2017.

⁵⁰ *Washington Post*, April 28, 2012.

⁵¹ <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/dhafra.htm>.

Military Sales program, through which the UAE buys most of its U.S.-made arms. The quality of the UAE force has, by all accounts, benefitted substantially from the U.S. training. U.S. military officers say that UAE fighter pilots, operators of HAWK surface-to-air missile batteries, and special operations forces are highly proficient and have demonstrated their effectiveness in recent combat missions, particularly in Libya and against AQAP in Yemen.

- Since 2000, the UAE has hosted a “Joint Air Warfare Center” (AWC) where UAE and U.S. forces conduct joint exercises on early warning, air and missile defense, and logistics.⁵² Since 2009, UAE Air Force personnel have participated in yearly Desert Falcon exercises at Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada.⁵³

U.S. and Other Arms Sales

U.S. officials assert that arms sales to the UAE enhance U.S. security by building up indigenous GCC capabilities and promoting interoperability. UAE representatives assert that the country would like to work out a mechanism with the United States under which requests for munitions and arms purchases could receive expedited U.S. consideration. Some options might include designating the UAE as a “Major Non-NATO Ally” (MNNAs), or a mechanism UAE officials say they prefer: legislation that would declare the UAE a key U.S. defense partner.⁵⁴ Two Gulf states—Kuwait and Bahrain—are designated as MNNAs. Some defense sales to the UAE might be contingent on the UAE’s joining the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), which UAE officials say they are considering trying to do.⁵⁵ The UAE does not receive U.S. aid to purchase U.S. weaponry. Among major FMS programs with or potential sales to the UAE

- *F-16 Program.* In 2000, the UAE purchased 80 U.S. F-16 aircraft, equipped with the Advanced Medium Range Air to Air Missile (AMRAAM) and the High Speed Anti-Radiation Missile (HARM), at a value of about \$8 billion. Congress did not block the sale, although some Members questioned the AMRAAM as an introduction of the weapon into the Gulf. In November 2017, Lockheed Martin and the UAE agreed to a \$1.6 billion upgrade to its original 80 F-16s. In April 2013, the United States sold the UAE an additional 30 F-16s and associated “standoff” air-to-ground munitions, in conjunction with similar weapons sales to Israel and Saudi Arabia, which U.S. officials indicated were intended to signal resolve to Iran.⁵⁶ The UAE also has about 60 French-made Mirage 2000 warplanes, and is reportedly considering buying French-made Rafales and the Boeing F/A-18.
- *F-35 Joint Strike Fighter.* UAE officials say the country wants to buy the advanced F-35 “Joint Strike Fighter,” asserting that possessing the most sophisticated U.S. aircraft enhances interoperability with U.S. air operations. Even though Israel and the UAE are aligned on many regional policies, U.S. officials have said that the United States would not sell the aircraft to the UAE before Israel receives the weapon; delivery to Israel is expected to begin in late 2016. That apparently is an effort to enforce U.S. law that requires maintaining

⁵² Rajiv Chandrasekaran. “A Quiet, Potent Ally to U.S.” *Washington Post*, November 9, 2014.

⁵³ “A Quiet, Potent Ally to U.S.” op. cit.

⁵⁴ Author conversations with UAE representatives, 2016.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Thom Shanker. “Arms Deal with Israel and 2 Arab Nations Is Near.” *New York Times*, April 19, 2013.

Israel's "Qualitative Military Edge" (QME) in the region. However, it was reported in November 2017 that the Trump Administration has agreed to consider a UAE request to enter into preliminary talks on future UAE procurement of the F-35.⁵⁷ No decision on whether such talks will begin has been announced.

- *JDAMs and other Precision-Guided Munitions.* The United States has sold the UAE precision-guided missiles for the F-16s, including 20 of the advanced ATM-84 SLAM-ER Telemetry missile and 5,000 GBU-39/B "bunker buster" bombs. (The sale of the SLAM-ER represented the first sale of that weapon to a Gulf state.) In 2008, the United States sold the UAE an unspecified number of Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAM) kits (which convert gravity bombs to precision-guided bombs) worth about \$326 million. In 2011, the United States sold the UAE an additional 4,900 JDAM kits at an estimated value of \$304 million. Some experts interpret the sale of JDAMs to the UAE as a signal to Iran, in that the munition might be effective against hard targets such as Iran's nuclear facilities. On several occasions in 2015, the United States sold the UAE precision-guided munitions (Guided Bomb Units—GBU-31s and GBU-12s) and resupplied it with JDAMs for use against the Islamic State and the Houthi rebellion in Yemen.
- *Apache Helicopters.* On November 4, 2010, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) notified Congress of two potential sales, including a \$5 billion sale of AH-64 Apache helicopters (30 helicopters, remanufactured to Block III configuration).⁵⁸
- *Missiles.* The UAE reportedly possesses a small number (six) of Scud-B ballistic missiles obtained from a non-U.S. suppliers.⁵⁹ The United States does not supply or assist the UAE with ballistic missile technology, in part because the country is not an adherent of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR). UAE officials say the country is considering trying to join that convention.⁶⁰
- *Drones.* At a UAE defense show in 2013, the UAE agreed to a commercial sale, worth about \$200 million, for Predator X-P unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), although they are unarmed and for surveillance only. The system arrived in 2017. Were the UAE to join the MTCR, it might be eligible to buy a U.S.-made armed drone, such as the "Guardian," the sale of which to non-MTCR countries is precluded because it is an MTCR "Category One" system. The UAE also reportedly has some Chinese-made UAVs.
- *High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS).* In September 2006, the United States sold UAE High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS) and Army Tactical Missile Systems (ATACMs), valued at about \$750 million.
- *Tanks.* UAE forces still use primarily 380 French-made Leclerc tanks.

Some differences between the UAE and United States emerged in 2015 over apparent purchases of weapons by the UAE's Al Mutlaq Technology Company of weapons from North Korea. The North Korean supplier is said to be Korea Mining Development Trading Corporation (Komid),

⁵⁷ Barbara Opall. "Trump Could Let the UAE Buy F-35 Jets." Defense News, November 6, 2017.

⁵⁸ DSCA transmittal number 10-52. <http://www.dsca.mil>.

⁵⁹ According to the International Institute of Strategic Studies "Military Balance" publication, 2016.

⁶⁰ Author conversations with UAE officials, 2016.

which has been sanctioned by the United States for its involvement in North Korean strategic programs.⁶¹

Missile and Rocket Defenses

A key U.S. objective—and a driving force behind the formation of the “U.S.-GCC Strategic Cooperation Forum” formed in March 2012—has been to organize a coordinated Gulf-wide ballistic missile defense (BMD) network against Iran’s missile force. The concept fits with an overall U.S. shift to try to work with the GCC as a bloc rather than country-by-country, which was enshrined in a December 16, 2013, Presidential Determination to allow defense sales to the GCC as a bloc.⁶²

The UAE has assisted U.S. efforts to coordinate missile defense within the GCC by hosting an Integrated Air and Missile Defense (IAMD) Center—a training facility to enhance intra-GCC and U.S.-GCC missile defense cooperation. A U.S. sale to the UAE of the Patriot Advanced Capability 3 (PAC-3) missile defense system, with an estimated value of \$9 billion value, was announced in December 2007. In 2008, the United States sold the UAE vehicle-mounted “Stinger” anti-aircraft systems with an estimated value of \$737 million.

On May 11, 2017, the Administration notified a potential sale to the UAE of 60 PAC-3 and 100 Patriot Guidance Enhanced Missile-Tactical (GEM-T) missiles, with a total estimated value of about \$2 billion. Because these are defensive systems, the sale was not affected by the June 26, 2017 decision—rescinded in February 2018—by Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Senator Bob Corker to withhold informal clearances on sales of “lethal military equipment” to the GCC states until there is a path to the resolution of the intra-GCC dispute. The UAE was the first GCC state to order the Terminal High Altitude Air Defense System (THAAD), the first sale ever of that sophisticated missile defense system, with an estimated value of about \$7 billion. The delivery and training process for the UAE’s THAAD system took place in late 2015.⁶³

UAE officials also say they seek defenses against shorter-range missiles and rockets, such as those used by the Houthis in Yemen. In 2016, the Administration notified Congress of a potential sale of “Large Aircraft Infrared Countermeasures” to protect UAE head of state aircraft against missile threats.

UAE Defense Cooperation with Other Powers

The United States and other GCC countries are not the UAE’s only defense partners. In 2004, the UAE joined NATO’s “Istanbul Cooperation Initiative,” which was launched that year by NATO as an effort to bolster bilateral security with Middle Eastern countries. The UAE has “observer” status in NATO and, in 2011, the UAE sent an Ambassador to NATO under that organization’s revised alliance policy. In early 2017, NATO established a liaison office in Abu Dhabi under the auspices of the embassy of Denmark there.

Since well before the formation of the anti-Islamic State coalition, the UAE has been hosting other countries’ forces. In January 2008 the UAE and France signed an agreement to allow a French military presence in UAE. The facilities used—collectively termed Camp De La Paix

⁶¹ David Kirkpatrick. “Leaked Emails from Emirati Diplomats Cloud Libya Peace Negotiations.” *New York Times*, November 13, 2015.

⁶² <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/12/16/presidential-determination-gulf-cooperation-council>.

⁶³ Adriane Eliot. “Antiballistic System Shared with International Partner.” <http://www.army.mil> website, January 13, 2016. https://www.army.mil/article/160912/Antiballistic_system_shared_with_international_partner/.

(“Peace Camp”)—were inaugurated during a French presidential visit in May 2009. It includes: a 900-foot section of the Zayid Port for use by the French navy; an installation at Dhafra Air Base used by France’s air force; and a barracks at an Abu Dhabi military camp that houses about 400 French military personnel.

India’s Prime Minister, Narendra Modi visited the UAE in August 2015, the first such visit since 1981. The visit appeared to focus more on trade and economic issues than defense relations, but might have contained a strategic component in light of India’s naval exercises with GCC countries in recent years and India’s interest in securing additional energy supplies. Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Zayid reciprocated by visiting India in January 2017. The visit continued to advance bilateral security cooperation by including the signing of a “Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement” between the two countries.

However, it is the UAE relationship with Russia that attracts significant attention, in part because Russia is challenging U.S. influence in the Middle East. In February 2017, press reports indicated that the UAE and Russia might jointly develop a combat aircraft based on the Soviet-era MiG-29. Some experts interpreted the collaboration—with a partner that is acting against the UAE’s interests in Syria and other parts of the region—as an acknowledgment by the UAE of Russia’s growing role in the region.⁶⁴ The UAE might also be attempting to engage Russia in defense cooperation in order to perhaps try to steer Russian policy in Syria or enlist Russian cooperation in settling regional conflicts.

Additional Measures to Address Manpower Shortages

To address its manpower shortage, the UAE has taken steps that include establishment of a reserve force, mandating military training, and employing private security contractors. As do those of other GCC states, the UAE armed forces have significant numbers of expatriates serving in their ranks, including from such countries as Pakistan. The UAE confirmed in May 2011 that it had retained the U.S. private firm Reflex Responses to provide “operational, planning, and training support” to the UAE military. This followed a *New York Times* report that the UAE had hired the firm, run by Blackwater security contractor founder Erik Prince, to a \$529 million contract to build a foreign battalion to help defend the UAE from internal revolt or related threats.⁶⁵ The State Department reportedly investigated whether the contract violated any U.S. laws controlling the export of U.S. defense technology and expertise, but no findings were announced and Prince later dissociated himself from the effort. *Defense News* reported in November 2013, that a U.S. firm, Knowledge International, provided 125 former U.S. Army officers to help improve the organization and performance of UAE land forces.

Cooperation against Terrorism and Proliferation

The UAE cooperates with U.S. counterterrorism and counter-proliferation policies in the region, not only through operations against terrorist groups but also in seeking to prevent the movement of terrorists, pirates, human traffickers, and proliferation-related technology through UAE borders and waters.

U.S. programs, which have sometimes included providing small amounts of counterterrorism assistance, have helped build the UAE’s capacity to enforce its borders and financial controls. In

⁶⁴ <http://www.upi.com/Defense-News/2017/02/20/Russia-UAE-to-collaborate-on-5th-generation-fighter/4591487612266/>.

⁶⁵ http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/15/world/middleeast/15prince.html?_r=1&partner=rss&emc=rss.

FY 2015, about \$400,000 in DoD funds were provided to the UAE to assist its counter-narcotics capability, and about \$300,000 in similar funding was provided in FY 2016. In FY 2015, about \$260,000 in State Department funds were provided to the UAE to build its capacity to counter terrorism financing (see below). About \$310,000 in such funding was provided in FY 2016.

International Terrorism Issues⁶⁶

During the mid-1990s, some Al Qaeda activists reportedly were able to move through the UAE, and two of the September 11, 2001, hijackers were UAE nationals who reportedly used UAE-based financial networks. Since then, State Department reports on terrorism have credited the UAE with making significant efforts against terrorism and terrorism financing. According to the State Department reports, the UAE has arrested and prosecuted Al Qaeda and Islamic State operatives; denounced terror attacks; improved border security; instituted programs to counter violent extremism; instituted laws to block suspect financial transactions; criminalized use of the Internet by terrorist groups; and strengthened its bureaucracy and legal framework to combat terrorism. Human rights groups allege that UAE counterterrorism law is often used against domestic political dissidents. In 2014, the government, with FNC concurrence, enacted a revised counterterrorism law that makes it easier to prosecute, and increases penalties for, planning acts of terrorism, and authorizes the UAE cabinet to set up lists of designated terrorist organizations and persons.⁶⁷

Recent State Department reports on terrorism credit the UAE with co-chairing the anti-Islamic State-related “Coalition Communications Working Group” along with the United States and Britain, and with partnering with the U.S. government to establish the Sawab Center, an online counter-Islamic State messaging hub.⁶⁸ At the December 2014 GCC summit, the GCC leaders announced the creation of a regional police force to be headquartered in Abu Dhabi. The UAE has also joined the Saudi-initiated GCC “Security Pact” that requires increased information-sharing and cooperation among the GCC states on internal security threats.

Among notable UAE counterterrorism actions, in October 2010, UAE authorities assisted in foiling an Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula plot to send bombs to the United States. In December 2012, the UAE, working with Saudi Arabia, arrested members of an alleged terrorist cell plotting attacks in the United States. In April 2013, UAE authorities arrested seven non-UAE Arab nationals allegedly affiliated with Al Qaeda. In May 2014, the UAE tried nine people on charges of supporting the Al Nusrah Front (renamed Front for the Conquest of Syria), an Al Qaeda-linked faction of Syrian rebels that is named by the United States as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO).⁶⁹ UAE authorities failed to prevent a December 1, 2014, killing of an American teacher by a 38-year-old Emirati woman who allegedly had visited extremist websites, although they defused a bomb she planted outside the home of an American doctor. In 2015, the UAE arrested and prosecuted, or deported, numerous individuals who allegedly planned to join the Islamic State or commit terrorism in the UAE. In March 2016, UAE courts convicted 30 out of 41 individuals (38 of whom were UAE citizens) belonging to a group called Shabab al Manara of plotting terrorist attacks in the UAE. Facilities and assets of the group were closed or seized.

⁶⁶ Much of this section is taken from Department of State, Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, Country Reports on Terrorism 2016; and author conversations with executive branch officials, 1997-2017.

⁶⁷ “UAE Stiffens Counterterror Laws.” *Defense News*, July 26, 2014.

⁶⁸ State Department Country Reports on Terrorism: 2016.

⁶⁹ The group changed its name and claimed to have severed connections to Al Qaeda in mid-2016.

Yet, the United States and the UAE sometimes differ on whether some groups are terrorist organizations. For example, the 85 groups that the UAE government designates as terrorist organizations include some U.S. and Europe-based groups that represent Muslims in those societies and which neither the United States nor any European government accuses of terrorism.⁷⁰ These groups include the U.S.-based Muslim American Society and Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR); the Muslim Association of Sweden; the Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe; and the U.K.-based Islamic Relief. The United States Embassy in Abu Dhabi questioned the UAE government about why it designated these groups.⁷¹ The UAE also identifies as terrorist groups several organizations that the United States has not designated as terrorist groups, including the Houthis in Yemen and the Afghan Taliban. The UAE, as noted above, also considers the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist group; the Trump Administration reportedly considered designating it as a foreign terrorist organization (FTO).

Antiterrorism Financing and Money Laundering (AML/CFT). The UAE Central Bank's Financial Intelligence Unit is credited in State Department terrorism reports with providing training programs to UAE financial institutions on money laundering and terrorism financing, and making mandatory the registration of informal financial transmittal networks (*hawalas*). In September 2012, the FBI Legal Attache established a sub-office at the U.S. consulate in Dubai to assist with joint efforts against terrorism and terrorism financing. In June 2014 the UAE set up a financial task force to better prevent use of UAE financial institutions by terrorist organizations. In October 2014, the country adopted a law (Federal Law No. 9) to strengthen a 2002 anti-money laundering law. The country is a member of the Middle East and North Africa Financial Actions Task Force (MENAFATF), a FATF-style regional body, and it chairs the MENAFATF's Training and Typologies Working Group. The UAE is a participant in the Counter-Islamic State Finance Group chaired by Italy, Saudi Arabia, and the United States.

Countering Violent Extremism. The UAE is a founding member of the the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), which is co-chaired by the United States and Turkey, and was formed in September 2011. In December 2012, during a meeting of the GCTF, the UAE-based "International Center of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism," known as *Hedayah* ("guidance") was inaugurated. The center, which has an annual budget of about \$6 million and a staff of 14, is an institution for training, dialogue, collaboration, and research to counter violent extremism. Its priority is to work to prevent educational institutions from becoming breeding grounds for violent extremism. It also promotes information sharing so that police organizations around the world can receive information from family members who report on relatives who have become radicalized.⁷² Several UAE-based think tanks, including the Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research (ECSSR), the Emirates Policy Center, the TRENDS Institute, the Tabah Foundation, and the Future Institute for Advanced Research and Statuies, also conducted seminars on confronting terrorism and violent extremism.

Transfers from Guantanamo. The UAE cooperated with Obama Administration efforts to reduce the detainee population at the U.S. prison facility in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. In November 2015, the Department of Defense transferred five Yemeni detainees from the facility to the UAE. In August 2016, the Obama Administration transferred another 15 Guantanamo detainees (12 Yemenis and 3 Afghans) to the UAE—the biggest single Guantanamo transfer to date. The day

⁷⁰ "UAE Lists Scores of Groups as 'Terrorists.'" *Al Jazeera*, November 16, 2014.

⁷¹ State Department Bureau of Counterterrorism. Country Reports on Terrorism: 2014. Released June 19, 2015.

⁷² David Ignatius. "A Small Organization Offers a Fresh Approach on Preventing Terrorism" *Washington Post*, op-ed. October 21, 2014.

before it left office in January 2017, the Obama Administration announced that another three were transferred to the UAE. The transferees are kept in a facility where the UAE tries to rehabilitate its own citizens who were drawn into extremist activities.

Port and Border Controls

The UAE has signed on to several U.S. efforts to prevent proliferation and terrorism. These include the Container Security Initiative, aimed at screening U.S.-bound containerized cargo transiting Dubai ports, and the UAE has cooperated with all U.S. measures designed to protect aircraft bound for the United States. Several U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers, co-located with the Dubai Customs Intelligence Unit at Port Rashid in Dubai, inspect U.S.-bound containers, many of them apparently originating in Iran. The UAE is also a party to the Proliferation Security Initiative, the Megaports Initiative designed to prevent terrorists from using major ports to ship illicit material, and the Customs-Trade Partnership against Terrorism. In 2013, a “pre-clearance facility” was established at the Abu Dhabi International Airport for travelers boarding direct flights to the United States. The UAE government supports the Department of Homeland Security’s programs to secure any UAE-to-U.S. flights, including collecting passenger information and employing retina-screening systems.

Export Controls

The UAE effort to prevent the re-export of advanced technology, particularly to Iran, has improved considerably since 2010. As a GCC member, the UAE participates in the U.S.-GCC Counter-proliferation Workshop. Taking advantage of geographic proximity and the presence of many Iranian firms in Dubai emirate, numerous Iranian entities involved in Iran’s weapons and technology programs maintained offices in Dubai. In connection with revelations of illicit sales of nuclear technology to Iran, Libya, and North Korea by Pakistan’s nuclear scientist A.Q. Khan, Dubai was named as a key transfer point for Khan’s shipments of nuclear components. Two Dubai-based companies were apparently involved in transshipping components: SMB Computers and Gulf Technical Industries.⁷³ In 2004, the United States sanctioned a UAE firm, Elmstone Service and Trading FZE, for allegedly selling weapons of mass destruction-related technology to Iran, under the Iran-Syria Non-Proliferation Act (P.L. 106-178). In 2006, the Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) imposed a license requirement on U.S. exports to Mayrow General Trading Company and related UAE-based companies after Mayrow allegedly transshipped devices used to construct improvised explosive devices (IED) in Iraq and Afghanistan.⁷⁴

The UAE has responded to U.S. criticism of lax export control enforcement. In February 2007 the Bush Administration threatened to characterize the UAE as a “Destination of Diversion Control” and to restrict the export of certain technologies to it. A June 2010 Iran sanctions law, the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act (CISADA, P.L. 111-195), formally authorizes countries to be designated as Destinations of Diversion Control an subject to U.S. sanctions. The UAE avoided any such designation by strengthening its export control regime, including a September 2007 law, enacted with FNC concurrence, that tightened export controls. UAE authorities used that law to shut down 40 foreign and UAE firms allegedly involved in dual use exports to Iran and other countries. In September 2012 the UAE (and Bahrain) impounded shipments to Iran of items that Iran could use for its nuclear program.

⁷³ Milhollin, Gary and Kelly Motz. “Nukes ‘R’ US.” *New York Times*, op. ed. March 4, 2004.

⁷⁴ BIS, “General Order Concerning Mayrow General Trading and Related Enterprises,” 71 *Federal Register* 107, June 5, 2006.

The issue of leakage of technology has sometimes caused U.S. criticism or questioning of UAE investment deals. In December 2008, some Members of Congress called for a review by the interagency Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS) of a proposed joint venture between Advanced Micro Devices and Advanced Technology Investment Co. of Abu Dhabi for the potential for technology transfers. In February 2006, CFIUS approved the takeover by the Dubai-owned “Dubai Ports World” company of a British firm that manages six U.S. port facilities. Members of Congress, concerned that the takeover might weaken U.S. port security, opposed it in P.L. 109-234, causing the company to divest assets involved in U.S. port operations.

Nuclear Agreement and Other Technology Issues⁷⁵

The UAE announced in 2008 that it would acquire its first nuclear power reactors to satisfy projected increases in domestic electricity demand.⁷⁶ As a condition of receiving U.S. nuclear technology, the United States and the UAE reached an agreement that commits the UAE officials to strict standards that ensure that its nuclear program can only be used for peaceful purposes. Among those commitments is that the UAE refrains from domestic uranium enrichment and from reprocessing spent nuclear reactor fuel—both processes could produce fissile material for nuclear weapons. On that basis, the Obama Administration signed an agreement for the United States to assist the program, subject to conditions specified in Section 123 of the Atomic Energy Act of 1954 [42 U.S.C. 2153(b)], on May 21, 2009 (and submitted to Congress that day). Several congressional resolutions approving the agreement (S.J.Res. 18 and H.J.Res. 60) were introduced, as was one disapproving (H.J.Res. 55). No measure blocking the agreement was enacted within 90 days of the submission of the agreement to Congress, and the “1-2-3 Agreement” entered into force on December 17, 2009. Some in Congress expressed concerns about the potential for leakage of technology to Iran as well as the potential for regional proliferation of nuclear technology. The International Atomic Energy Agency announced in December 2011 that a group of experts that reviewed the UAE’s regulatory framework for the program found “noted good practices” and provided suggestions to the Federal Authority for Nuclear Regulation, the UAE’s nuclear regulatory authority.⁷⁷ Still, reflecting UAE concerns about the JCPOA and about a Saudi nuclear program that might not be bound by the same restrictions that the UAE committed to, UAE officials reportedly told U.S. officials in October 2015 that they no longer consider themselves bound by the pledge that the country would not enrich uranium.⁷⁸

A number of U.S. and European firms have secured administrative and financial advisory contracts with the program. In January 2010, the Emirates Nuclear Energy Corporation (ENEC), the institution that is administering the program, announced that it had chosen the Korea Electric Power Corporation (KEPCO of South Korea) to construct the first of four APR1400 nuclear reactors that would sell electricity to the Abu Dhabi Water and Electricity Authority. The first

⁷⁵ This section was prepared by Paul Kerr, Analyst in Weapons of Mass Destruction Nonproliferation, CRS. See CRS Report R40344, *The United Arab Emirates Nuclear Program and Proposed U.S. Nuclear Cooperation*, by (name redacted) and (name redacted).

⁷⁶ UAE officials estimate that their country must expand its power generation and transmission capacity from the current level of 16 gigawatts to 40 gigawatts by 2020 in order to meet projected demand increases.

⁷⁷ <http://www.iaea.org/press/?p=2572>.

⁷⁸ “Post Iran Nuclear Deal, UAE Diplomat Tells Congressman His Country no Longer Feels Bound by Previous Agreement with US.” *AlJazeera.com*, October 16, 2015.

plant is complete and is undergoing pre-operational testing. The other three are scheduled to be operational by 2020.⁷⁹

The United States gives the UAE small amounts of assistance to help safeguard its nuclear program and prevent illicit exports of technology from it. For FY 2015, the Department of Energy provided the country with about \$370,000 for such purposes, and for FY 2016, about \$220,000 was provided for those programs.

On other technology issues, in July 2014 the UAE announced it will form a “UAE Space Agency.” According to the government, by 2021 the agency is to launch an unmanned spaceship from the Arabian peninsula that will probe Mars.

Economic Issues

As are the other GCC states that have long depended on exports of hydrocarbons, the UAE has announced plans and policies (“Vision 2021”) to try to further diversify its economy to a “post-oil” era. Dubai emirate, in particular, has long pursued an economic strategy based on attracting investors to construct luxurious and sometimes futuristic projects that provide jobs and attract tourism and publicity. The UAE, a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO), has developed a free market economy, but its market and financial institutions are weakly regulated.

To help it weather the effect of the sharp drop in oil prices since mid-2014, the government cut some subsidies to reduce the country’s budget deficit in 2015 and 2016. Those deficits contributed to a decision by the government to raise capital on international markets, including an April 2016 bond offering of \$5 billion and an October 2017 bond offering of about \$10 billion. The government budget was roughly balanced for 2017, helping the UAE avoid drawing down its \$600 billion in various sovereign wealth funds overseen by the Emirates Investment Authority (EIA).⁸⁰ The 2016 and 2017 cabinet reshuffles and reform announcements were intended, in part, to reduce the size of the government and to move some its functions of to the private sector.

Oil and Gas Sector and “Clean Energy” Initiatives

The key factor in the UAE’s wealth is that it exports large amounts of crude oil while having a small population that receives benefits and services. The UAE exports nearly as much oil as Iraq, while its citizen population is a small fraction of that of Iraq. Abu Dhabi has 80% of the federation’s proven oil reserves of about 100 billion barrels, enough for over 100 years of exports at the current production rate of about 2.9 million barrels per day (mbd). Of that, over 2.2 mbd are exported, and the UAE has as much as 500,000 bpd of spare capacity.⁸¹ The United States imports negligible amounts of UAE crude oil; the largest share of UAE oil goes to Japan and China. The UAE has vast quantities of natural gas but consumes more than it produces. It has entered into an arrangement (Dolphin Energy) with neighboring countries under which a pipeline carries natural gas from the large gas exporter, Qatar, to the UAE and on to Oman as well. However, political differences with Qatar, discussed throughout this report, have contributed to UAE evaluation of renewable and other alternatives to relying on Qatar-supplied natural gas.

⁷⁹ <http://enec.gov.ae/our-nuclear-energy-program/prime-contractor/>.

⁸⁰ The two largest of the UAE’s sovereign wealth funds are run by the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA) and Mubadala (“Exchange”).

⁸¹ <http://www.thenational.ae/events/areas/abu-dhabi/adnoc-preserves-spare-supplies>.

The UAE is trying to secure its oil export routes against any threat by Iran to close the strategic Strait of Hormuz, through which the UAE and other major oil exporters transport their oil exports. In July 2012, the UAE loaded its first tanker of oil following completion of the Abu Dhabi Crude Oil Pipeline (ADCOP) which terminates in the emirate of Fujairah, on the Gulf of Oman. The line, which cost \$3 billion, has the capacity to transport 1.5 million barrels per day of crude oil—about half of the UAE’s peak production. The UAE is also planning a large refinery near that terminal, and possibly a second oil pipeline exiting there, to further secure its oil exports and value-added petroleum products.⁸²

The UAE government is also attempting to plan for a time when the developed world is no longer reliant on oil imports. The government has set a target of using 21% renewable energy sources by 2021. It has funded “Masdar City”—a planned city, the first phase of which is to be completed in 2015, that relies only on renewable energy sources. Automobiles that run on fossil fuels are banned from Masdar City. One feature of the city is a system of driverless taxis that use automation to take passengers to their destinations.

U.S.-UAE Trade and Trade Promotion Discussions

U.S. trade with the UAE is a significant issue because the UAE is the largest market for U.S. exports to the Middle East. Over 1,000 U.S. companies have offices there and there are over 60,000 Americans working in UAE. U.S. exports to the UAE in 2017 totaled about \$20 billion, about ten percent less than in 2016. U.S. imports from UAE for 2017 totaled about \$4.3 billion, about 20% higher than in 2016. Goods sold to UAE are mostly commercial aircraft, industrial machinery and materials, and other high value items. Virtually none of the U.S. imports is crude oil. U.S. exports to UAE are expected to remain roughly at current levels through at least 2018 to fulfill orders for U.S. commercial aircraft by expanding UAE airlines Emirates Air and Etihad Airlines.

In November 15, 2004, the Bush Administration notified Congress it had begun negotiating a free trade agreement (FTA) with the UAE. Several rounds of talks were held prior to the June 2007 expiration of Administration “trade promotion authority.” The FTA talks were later replaced by a U.S.-UAE “Economic Policy Dialogue,” between major U.S. and UAE economic agencies. The dialogue, consisting of two meetings per year, began in late 2011 and also included discussion of reform of UAE export controls. In addition, as part of the GCC, the UAE negotiated with the United States a September 2012 “GCC-U.S. Framework Agreement on Trade, Economic, Investment, and Technical Cooperation”—a GCC-wide trade and investment framework agreement (TIFA). The agreement was negotiated by the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR).

U.S. Assistance to the UAE

As noted, because of the UAE’s relative wealth, it receives only very small amounts of U.S. foreign assistance. Amounts provided for counter-narcotics, counter-terrorism financing, and nuclear security, are broken down in the sections above. For FY2016, total U.S. aid to the UAE was about \$1.15 million. For FY 2015, U.S. assistance to the UAE totaled about \$840,000.

⁸² “Abu Dhabi: In the Pipeline.” *The Middle East*, January 26, 2012.

“Open Skies” Issue

In 2015, several U.S. airlines asserted that two UAE airlines, Emirates Air (Dubai-based) and Etihad Air (Abu Dhabi-based), as well as Qatar Airways, had an unfair competitive advantage because of alleged receipt of subsidies from their respective governments. All three airlines have grown substantially in recent years and are large buyers of U.S. aircraft. The U.S. airlines asserted that the “Open Skies Agreement” that the UAE and Qatar have with the United States should be renegotiated so as to limit the access the three Gulf-based airlines have to U.S. air routes. The airlines assert they are not subsidized and instead create substantial numbers of jobs for American workers building and serving their aircraft and infrastructure in the United States. UAE officials assert that the country will not agree to renegotiate the Open Skies Agreement. The Obama Administration declined to renegotiate the agreement or to take any action against the Gulf-based airlines. President Trump, following a February 2017 meeting with U.S. airline executives, did not indicate that his Administration would alter the previous Administration’s stance on that issue.

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