

CENTER FOR AMERICAN AND ARAB STUDIES

# CAN A MILITARY COUP OCCUR IN THE GCC COUNTRIES?

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## A GUIDE TO THE MILITARY COUP

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09/01/2012

**MILITARY COUPS IN THE GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL STATES ARE MORE FACT THAN FICTION**

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# CAN A MILITARY COUP OCCUR IN THE GCC COUNTRIES?

## A GUIDE TO THE MILITARY COUP

### INTRODUCTION:

Earlier this year, an unsuccessful military coup was staged in Qatar against the US-backed Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, according to Saudi-financed *Al-Arabiya* TV channel – April 17, 2012. Furthermore, a number of high-ranking military officers rose against the Qatari Emir, it added, triggering fierce clashes between some 30 military officers and US-backed royal guards outside the Emir's palace. The coup was foiled following the arrest of the officers involved. American helicopters have reportedly transferred the Qatari Emir and his wife to an unknown location. Meanwhile, informed Kuwaiti sources said that mediated recent disputes between Saudi Arabia and Qatar have unveiled a new series of disagreements between the officials of the two Persian Gulf states. The revelation of Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jaber al-Thani's secret phone conversation on the internet intensified internal conflicts between the two Arab states. In a telephone conversation, the Qatari premier envisioned a definite overthrow of the Saudi regime, saying Qatar will step in the al-Qatif and al-Sharqiya regions one day and Saudi Arabia will be disintegrated (Ibid). The Qatari Emir came to power following a US-backed coup against his father in 1995. This news has been reported by "The News Tribe" website on April 17, 2012. There are rumors that this site has association with former U.S. intelligence officers. The scenario advanced by the story could not be verified but the rumors continued lately after reports of deteriorating health conditions of the Emir.

[\(http://www.thenewstribe.com/2012/04/17/attempted-military-coup-against-qatari-regime-fails/\)](http://www.thenewstribe.com/2012/04/17/attempted-military-coup-against-qatari-regime-fails/)

The Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP), in August 26, 2012, highlighted new health concerns of the Saudi Monarch and the royal family. They note, "Having Crown Prince Salman stand in for the monarch is no particular relief. Although he serves as defense minister and is, at seventy-six, significantly younger than Abdullah, some have expressed concerns about his own health and his ability to focus on detail. An additional worry is that the House of Saud has no obvious crown-prince-in-waiting behind him. The need for such a candidate has become more urgent in the past year given the deaths of no fewer than two crown princes. Saudi foreign policy

capacity is already strained due to the ill health of longtime foreign minister Prince Saud al-Faisal. In his absence, the kingdom is being represented at this week's Non-Aligned Movement summit in Tehran by the king's son and deputy foreign minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Abdullah.”

The uncertainty surrounding the transition to a new and young generation of rulers in Saudi Arabia raises the possibility of non-peaceful or orderly change of power, including military takeover.

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, with the exception of protests in Bahrain and Oman, have largely escaped the popular uprisings which swept across Egypt, Tunisia, Syria, Libya and Yemen throughout the first half of 2011.

Demonstrations in Bahrain were brutally put down with Saudi military help, however, some continued sporadically. Across the narrow water way separating the two countries, a series of confrontations occurred in the city of Qatif (eastern coast) between local residents and Saudi security forces. Its residents have long suffered repression and neglect, reflecting discontent with the dire economic conditions. This situation might also have been fueled by the clashes in Bahrain, to the east, where a similar situation is prevailing.

According to a report by *Bank of America Merrill Lynch*, the sweeping unrest has forced the GCC governments to spend \$150 billion, in the first half of 2011, to appease widespread discontent of its populations.

Clear signs of unrest are evident in the GCC states. They have vast populations of underpaid workers, from Pakistan and India, and are governed by ruling families with little consideration for democracy. Bahrain has a Sunni ruling family, but the majority of its citizens are Shi'a. Saudi Arabia has a repressive regime ruled by old and ailing sons of the nation's founder Ibn Saud. Furthermore, there is growing unrest on the southern part of the peninsula in Yemen.

Given these troubling factors, the *Center for American and Arab Studies* has produced a special report on the possibility of a military coup in the GCC countries. It looks at the type of coups that pose the greatest threats to the GCC nations, history of coups in the GCC, social factors, issues of civilian control, population's satisfaction—or lack thereof—with the current government, military capabilities, and outside factors.

## FACTORS FOR A SUCCESSFUL COUP

Although violent changes of government are an historical fact, the modern concept of a coup is quite new. True, the Praetorian Guard of Imperial Rome was able, through its power as the palace guard, to effect changes in the Caesar; their control was only over the palace area. The rest of the Roman Empire was unaffected. Coups in the modern world, however, must be able to extend their control over a greater part of the government and the nation.

The first military coup in the modern Arab World occurred in Iraq, 1936; since then, coup after another wracked many Arab states for the next 40 years. Some states experienced military takeovers on a nearly annual basis. Few escaped military overthrow, and even those that did typically faced numerous plots and near misses. In the 1970s and 1980s, however, this pattern abruptly ended. Heads of several Arab states (often former military officers), devised a complex machinery of governance to prevent further coups. The GCC states escaped this pattern of frequent military coups, due to the nature of the governing system – family-based, some experienced what can be described as a “palace coup,” when a sibling from the ruling family deposed another, or a son unseated his father.

Nowadays, GCC countries may be entering a new phase where military coups pattern is more likely to occur as a venue for change, since other venues are prohibited, including popular uprisings.

Clearly, modern coup leaders must control part of the military and the seat of government just as the Praetorians did. However, there is more complexity in a modern society. A coup leader must be able to control more attributes of communication networks, cell phones, satellite-based telephones, internet, inexpensive radios and transmitters. Control must also descend to the bureaucracy, which maintains order and runs essential services like water, electricity, gas, etc.

Another critical segment is the business community. A coup leader’s ability to be seen as the national leader will hinge upon the opening of grocery stores, gas stations, and other places of business the day after. And, when the private sector owns and operates many of the essential services, like electricity, their support is that much more critical.

Finally, a coup must have the apathy or acquiescence of the population and the international community. So, a basic checklist for the modern coup leader could look like this:

## COUP TO-DO LIST

### MILITARY:

- Friendly military leaders and units that can be counted on;
- Ability to contain unfriendly or unpredictable military units, and leaders known or suspected to oppose the new order; and

- Units and military leaders who do not care.

#### BUREAUCRACY:

- Police;
- Government agencies (Ministries);
- Electric power;
- Gas utilities; and
- Water utilities.

#### COMMUNICATIONS:

- State and Satellite TV and radio stations;
- Land telephone lines;
- Cell phone towers;
- Internet lines;
- Satellite phone service; and
- Key people in government, industry or elsewhere that can help run them

#### BUSINESS COMMUNITY:

- Grocery Stores;
- Gas stations;
- Transportation;
  - Air
  - Land
  - Sea
- Port facilities.

#### CITIZENS:

- Winning support of community leaders and organizations;
- Identify community leaders and organizations that do not support you; and
- Identify community leaders and organizations that are neutral or do not care.

#### INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY:

- Nations that will support the coup and even provide assistance;
- Nations that will oppose the coup and may assist the status quo; and
- Nations or groups that may allow arms to be purchased when faced with a growing rebellion.



There are many factors to be considered by coup leaders: They must carry out the coup; take immediate control of information flow; and receive the benign support of the bureaucracy so they will keep on working. The coup also needs support from the business community so essential services can keep the towns and cities running. And, they will need support from citizens and the international community that will not, at least, oppose their move.

Let us examine some of those factors from the coup leaders' point of view.

## WHO IS FOR AND WHO IS AGAINST – THAT IS THE QUESTION

### MILITARY

Coup leaders usually share some common background elements: They may have gone to school together, and share ethnic or family ties – bonds that have allowed them to openly discuss their problems with the current government and their desire to overthrow it.<sup>1</sup>

The problem is expanding the group to include enough of the military hierarchy to make a coup practical. If the discussion involves the wrong person, the individual's demise is certain. If one fails to expand, the plans never go forward.

So, who does one ask? Obviously, relying on school, ethnic and tribal ties is a good place to start. Ascertain supportive opinions from within the military structure in order to neutralize any potential dissention, and tap their resources and support for later needs. In many nations, the successful officer learns to keep his opinions private.

However, there are ways to examine the officers corps and identify probable defectors. Consider the officer's friends: does he maintain good relations with higher ranking officers? Is he invited to their parties frequently? If so, it would be safe to assume that he is likely to support the current regime.

An officer who has been passed over for promotions or who is behind in his rank ascension is a good prospect. Of course, the reasons may be political or individual incompetence, but no matter the reason, he will blame the leadership and be more willing to support the coup. However, it is probably best not to rely heavily on elements at the lower-half of the class. Rather, rely upon those who may have advancement grievances; they know that their advancement opportunity lies better with the new regime.

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<sup>1</sup> Coup d'état: a Practical Handbook, Edward Luttwak, paperback 1979, pg. 80.

The same thought process can be used to determine officers who are unlikely to help and may take an active role against the coup: They are officers who may have received fast promotions, are members of the ruling tribe or ethnic group, or are protégées of ranking politicians or officers. The best outcome one can hope for is that they will do nothing if faced with a fait accompli. However, if they become aware of the coup or it stumbles, it is likely that they will come out in force to stop the leaders from proceeding.

The largest group will probably be those who will do nothing and wait the outcome. This group may consist of those who favor the coup, but are too cautious to act, and those who probably oppose the coup, but their actions are guarded in time to stop the coup.

In both cases, the opposition and the “neutrals,” their goal is to hinder communications so that they hamper any prompt action, or give them good reason not to act if they wish to remain neutral.

The opposition officer will need clear means of communications to coordinate with other loyal units in terms of locations to secure, or people to arrest. The officer in charge will also need to know what units are rebelling so he will not engage in friendly fire with other loyal units. Without this information, the unit is likely to stay in its barracks and rendered unable to lend support to the loyalist forces.

The cautious officer, who wishes to remain on the sidelines, will actually prefer bad communications. It will provide an excuse to remain in the barracks until the coup has either succeeded or failed.

The key to neutralizing loyalist forces and allowing impartial forces to stay out of the fighting depends on crippling the command, control, and communications (C3) network. Jamming broadcast frequencies, severing land lines and links to antennae will be critical. In addition, locating cell phone towers around critical installations and sabotaging them will help limit communications among the foes.

## BUREAUCRACY

The bureaucracy is an insulated machine with infinite inertia. That means a coup which does not interfere with their lives, policy, or authority should have no problem in winning them over after its completion.

The biggest threat is a close friend or relative of the ruler in charge of the security forces. And, in cases where the perceived threat is internal, the security forces may be larger and better trained than the military. That is why a palace coup is preferable in cases where there is a large internal security force with a member of the royal family at its helm. Internal security forces are also a major problem because they may be the ones to first become aware of the planned actions.

Although the police and security forces are well armed, their inherent weaknesses lie in being deployed in small, one or two man, groups on patrol. If they can be kept in these small group formations, they will be inconsequential even if they find themselves drawn into the fighting.

Unless the head of the security forces is one of the coup leaders, the ultimate goal of the coup is to keep the bureaucracy, including the internal security forces, out of the picture. It is best accomplished by limiting communication streams into headquarters, which will prevent the security force from coalescing into a critical mass with impeding potential.

Jamming radio frequencies, cutting lines to radio antennae, and severing phone lines into police and internal security headquarters is the best way to restrict their response. If word of the coup is received by cell phones, the forces will not have the ability to quickly re-group or to respond.

Rather than taking over the headquarters and guaranteeing a skirmish, it is better to place units outside the building to keep the employees from going anywhere. The police force easily can become the aggressor, and may decide not to interfere since they have little love for the current regime. Thus, by not attacking them, the coup leaders can prevent the spread of hard feelings from the police that might develop into a full military attack on headquarters.

Although utility services may not be centers of opposition, it remains important to send forces to secure these facilities. Loss of utilities often causes people to demand immediate answers. In addition, a coup that causes the power to be shut off has potentially lost popular support. If the overthrow of the government can be achieved without any loss of public services, people will be less likely to rise up in opposition.

Once the coup has taken place, the bureaucracy can best be placated by assuring its components that conditions will not change, no individuals will be fired, and their pay will be maintained or even increased.<sup>2</sup>

## COMMUNICATIONS

Communication structures are particularly critical in times of a coup, which is one reason most coups take place in developing nations with limited communications networks, for the following reasons: they are means to control the coup leader's own military forces; hinder opposing forces movement; inform the nation of its success; and prevent any opposition from reorganizing once the coup has begun.

Half a century ago, this was considerably easier to implement. A small nation might have a single radio station and a telephone exchange. Unless the government was on high alert, a company of soldiers sent to each building would probably secure it.

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<sup>2</sup> Coup d'état: a Practical Handbook, Edward Luttwak, paperback 1979, pg. 166

Today it is more complex, even small nations have several operating radio stations, a modern telephone exchange, viable internet service, and reasonable cell phone coverage. The ability to communicate becomes far more dispersed and the number of targets grown dramatically. As the Libyans and Syrians have discovered, even controlling the central stations does not mean communications are cut off, not to mention communications via satellite, which is virtually impossible to control.

This creates a “good news-bad news” situation. The good news is that the leaders and their units can communicate. The bad news is that the enemy will also be able to remain in contact with its units.

Controlling means of communications cannot be done as easily as sometimes ago; one needs to learn how to adapt communications technologies. By harnessing communications capabilities, the new group can limit the opposition’s effectiveness for long periods of time, communicate over long distances, distribute information to large groups of people, and communicate with the outside world.

In coups of today, being information technology (IT) savvy will be just as important as a battalion commander. Unlike soldiers who can physically occupy a central communications point, the individual assigned to IT tasks can control the central communications hubs in cyberspace.

No matter how skilled the IT people are, the opposition may find a way to get the information out. However, if one delays the flow of this information, it can limit the adversary’s ability to reach all units under its command and the international community.

## TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Similarly, control of the transportation infrastructure and its means is equally critical. Containing the networks allows rebel forces to move quickly, hinder movements of loyalist forces, allow for capture of key government officials who may be fleeing, and guarantee the continued movement of essential supplies, like food and gasoline.<sup>3</sup>

## AIRPORTS

Capture or neutralization of airports around the capital will impede reinforcements of loyalist forces. It also prevents the escape of key government leaders outside the country.

Unless the coup leaders are relying on an airlift of rebel forces, the key is to stop air-borne traffic until declared over. Consequently, the most important tactic is to block airport runways, with

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<sup>3</sup> Coup d’état: a Practical Handbook, Edward Luttwak, paperback 1979, pg. 125

vehicles, and to wrest command of the control tower. This keeps aircraft traffic from taking off or landing, and the tower radio transmission equipment from being used to spread news of the coup to loyalist forces; thus coordinating their would be rescue efforts.

Airports are nearly always protected by army or internal security forces armed with assault rifles or submachine guns. However, they carry little additional ammunition with them, so their ability to continue resisting for a long time is rendered limited if the airport's arsenal is quickly captured or neutralized.

Since airport security is expected to be armed at all times, this is one target where a firefight could occur. Consequently, any attempt to neutralize the force, either by gaining control of one or more of the officers or even bribing a few soldiers who will be on watch, is to be encouraged.

## TRAIN OR BUS STATIONS

Train and bus stations traditionally have fewer security precautions unless they are located near borders with international access. Security is usually provided by local police who may very well be armed only with a side arm. A small, well-armed force with the element of surprise will likely persuade the officers on watch to quietly surrender without a fight.

## PORTS

Security forces size stationed at ports of entry is in direct correlation to the size of the port and the type of cargo it handles. Small ports may only have a few lightly armed customs agents, while larger ports have better armed military or internal security units to protect ships and cargo, and to prevent smuggling.

Since ports are usually fenced off, unless there is a critical need, the best option is not to engage any port security, but leave a force to patrol the gates and fences.

## ROAD NETWORK

In the critical early hours of a coup, the road network will be the most critical transportation hub. Coup leaders must be able to move their units quickly and neutralize any government roadblocks. Then, set up their own roadblocks to stop or hinder any loyalist reinforcements.

There are three types of roads to be controlled: those leading into the capital; around military installations, especially the loyal units; and those stationed around key targets (government buildings, palaces, airports, etc.). Roadblock installation needs to focus on chokepoints like bridges and junctions.

Roadblocks are also three types: First, lightly armed roadblock that can stop civilian traffic and deter military units unwilling to fight; scattering several vehicles across a road; if roadblocks are overrun, they must let the coup leaders know the direction and composition of the attacking force.

Second is one which can engage determined fighters for a short period of time until reinforcements arrive. The physical roadblocks should include concrete structure or heavy equipment that has been disabled. There should also be trenches and other fortifications dug to protect the forces.

Third, is of one that must be able to withstand a major military attack by regime units, for as long as it takes for the coup to gain control. This type of roadblock should be considered a robust defense and have a series of trenches, buildings, and physical roadblocks so the covering forces can retreat without allowing the loyalist force to pass.

## BUSINESS COMMUNITY

Support or at least benign indifference from the business community is vital to the post-coup period. If businesses remain open, appearance of normalcy continues and the nation is less likely to suffer and oppose the coup. Shop closings, especially those providing food essentials, will cause unrest and give regime loyalists a chance to regroup.

Obviously, the regime's attitude towards the business community will have a major impact on their support. However, since the GCC nations are generally pro-business, the key to their support may be ethnic in nature.

A considerable number of small business owners, in the GCC nations, are actually non-nationals. Their aggregate concerns will be the ability to remain unhampered in the country; maintain income levels and making profit; and tolerance towards their religious, ethnic and cultural background.

Business leaders, especially foreign nationals, will be reticent to get involved in coup planning, so it is important for coup leaders to know the constituents of the business community and make contact with them as soon as the coup emerges. It is critical that they acquire sufficient levels of confidence to open their shops the next morning in a "business as usual" manner.

## CITIZENS' SUPPORT

The support of the citizenry will depend on several factors:

1. Normalcy and business as usual after the coup,
2. Ethnic makeup and vision for the nation and the new government,
3. Promises to adopt reform and seek a better life for the average citizen,

#### 4. Popular support metrics of the previous regime and national leadership.

The key is to gain support of community leaders who can impact the shaping of public opinion. As was the case to win support of the officer corps, some leaders, who have had problems with the current regime, should be encouraged to come onboard and declare their support of the new order.

In an ethnically diverse nation, leadership elements can be recruited from tribes outside the government's reach. Support can also be gained from leaders in the tribe ruling the government, who have either been ousted by new tribal leadership or are eager to gain more influence.

## FOREIGN SUPPORT

In the past, coups were considered internal affairs and most governments would recognize the new government as soon as they demonstrated the ability to control the country. That "black box" aspect has changed and international political ramifications play a big part.

Most nations harbor a dislike for recognizing a new government for fear that it implies legitimacy for overthrowing a government. There are also commercial and international political ramifications.

With the rising volume of international trade today, foreign countries have a vested interest in their investments abroad. As a result, questions of nationalization of foreign assets, freezing of foreign bank accounts, repatriation of profits and the safety of nationals in the affected region have a major impact on whether or not a foreign country grants formal recognition.

International relations play an additional dimension. A coup by anti-American forces, for example, in a pro-American country may very well not be recognized by several important and powerful countries. And, in fact, they may contact the overthrown leadership and pledge their assistance to restore its authority. Assistance levels could include sending troops to "stabilize the situation and protect civilians." Or, it could supply arms to the forces of the former government.

Of course, for every major power impacted by the overthrow, there is a good possibility that another major power will be please. Although they may be reticent, at first, to provide requested aid if the coup survives, they will eventually come around to providing assistance.

Of course, not all coups are guaranteed international support. In fact, given the good relations that most GCC nations have with other nations, a regime that has gained power through a military coup may find itself without friends and little international support. In that case, any military assistance that is needed will have to be purchased.

## PURCHASING ARMS FROM NATIONS OR GROUPS

Building a military force or purchasing munitions for coup preparations may pose difficulty for reliable sources of munitions. International agreements have limited most sales of munitions to legitimate governments.

The usual process for buying weapons internationally is focused on obtaining an “End User Certificate” by the purchasing government. This document, usually on embassy letterhead, signed and sealed by either the ambassador or military attaché, provides authorization to buy either from a company or government. It also includes the intended use of the munitions and an agreement not to resell the equipment without the express authorization of the source country.

Unfortunately, unless a country or group can produce such a document, most arms dealers are outside the confines of such mandates. Some countries, with arms export industries, may accept a questionable End User Certificate, depending on the nature of the order. However, an expert in the international arms business will be the only person who can identify them.

A paramilitary group, hoping to execute a coup, or a new government not recognized by most nations will be forced to find new sources.

Obviously, some intelligence services are ready to provide arms to paramilitary groups as long as their ideology and political alliances coincide with their interests. These types of shipments were seen during the recent Libyan civil war. There is also evidence that the same is happening in Syria.

There are also several “Black Markets” trading arms. Some developing countries will sell obsolete arms in return for under-the-table payments. This has occurred in Central America, where Mexican drug cartels have purchased military quality arms for their drug wars.

There are also private sources of arms in conflict areas of the world which left surplus of arms. Africa, for instance, still has arms from previous wars and a warlord may decide to sell to an interested group. This equipment is often in poor condition requiring extensive maintenance, and supplies of ammunition are often limited.

Some countries like the United States allow sales of many military grade small arms and ammunition. However, a strict regulation of automatic weapons is observed and market price of these weapons is far above their market value.

Although U.S. citizens can purchase military-grade, semi-automatic firearm, it is illegal to sell them to non-citizens. Multiple sales of semi-automatic firearms to a single person will also be flagged and thoroughly investigated by the government. Consequently, purchasing arms in the United States is not easy.

This only addresses the problem of acquiring arms. Transporting them across international borders is another difficulty because of special documentation requirement. Nor is smuggling them is problem-free, a packaged assault rifle will probably weigh at least 10 pounds. Arming a



battalion of men will require about 1,000 rifles, which would weigh about 5 tons. That does not include the weight of the ammunition, which will probably double the weight.

Additionally, one does not want to forget mortars, anti-tank weapons, general purpose machine guns, and explosives. These difficulties, including the cost of purchasing the arms, are usually why paramilitary groups usually rely on captured weapons.

# COUP SCENARIOS IN THE GCC

## PALACE COUPS

The militaries of all of the GCC nations are each controlled by a senior member of the royal family. Consequently, the greatest military coup threat comes from a member of the family overthrowing the current ruler.

This type has taken place twice in GCC nations. In July 1970, in Oman, soldiers supporting Qaboos bin Said al Said clashed with forces loyal to his father Said bin-Taymur and deposed him. The British government helped to consolidate Qaboos' power. His claimed goal was to end Oman's isolation and to use the country's oil revenue for modernization. However, there was also a civil war on the border with Yemen that was going poorly. The armed opposition forces were eventually defeated with the help of British, Iran's Shah and Jordanian forces.

Qatar's Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani also became that country's ruler through a palace coup. Sheikh Hamad was the appointed heir apparent of Qatar in 1977 and the Minister of Defense. Starting in 1992, Hamad had a growing responsibility for the day-to-day running of the country, including the development of Qatar's oil and natural gas resources. With the support of the royal family, Hamad deposed his father on June 27, 1995 while he was in Switzerland. Hamad became Emir of Qatar and was crowned on June 20, 2000.

An attempted coup took place in the UAE, however. In January 1972, a force of 18 armed supporters of the former ruler of the emirate of Sharjah, Sheikh Saqr bin Sultan (who ruled from 1951 until deposed by British in 1965), attacked and seized the palace. Sheikh Khalid bin Mohammad el Qassimi, ruler since 1965, was killed along with one of his bodyguards in the process. The palace was then surrounded by Sharjah soldiers and troops of the Union Defense Force - UDF. Several UDF troops were wounded, including a British Captain, before the rebels surrendered the next morning. Sheikh Saqr, who participated in the coup, was then exiled.

Both successful coups quickened the pace of modernization within the respective countries. They also retained legitimacy because the royal family remained in control. In many ways, they reflected concern by the other members of the royal family that the current ruler was out of touch. Although there are changes, the underlying structure remains.

## COLONELS' REVOLT

Typically, this would be a revolt by junior grade officers not directly related to the royal family. The best known of these coups in the Middle East was the Egyptian coup in 1952 that led to the overthrow of the Egyptian monarchy and eventually brought Nasser to the forefront.

These coups reflect unrest in the lower ranks of the military. In most cases it reflects poor conditions, corruption of senior officers, and a desire for reform.

Colonels' revolts are riskier because they require several units to take active role in the coup, while others remain in their barracks. They also require several co-conspirators. Obviously, the greater the conspirator numbers, the greater the risk that one of them is passing information to the government.

Since this type of coup is directed at the ruling class, it does not offer the legitimacy of a palace coup initiated by an heir and supported by majority of the royal family. Obviously, a colonels' coup might be able to find a royal family member who may act as a puppet leader, but much of the legitimacy is still lost.

Its success depends on the complacency of the populace, the ability of the coup forces to seize critical points like communications and armories, isolating the current ruler, and continuing the smooth operation of the infrastructure. Failure to control all of these will probably lead to a civil war.

The question, however, is whether the coup planners can seize the political center of the nation. This is one of the weaknesses of GCC monarchies, so if one seizes the hereditary ruler, then government seizure is assured. Nonetheless, as the GCC countries have given advisory councils some marginal power, they have spread the political center of the nation to include them, as well as important tribal leaders.

The aftermath of these coups is more uncertain. There could be a counter-coup. Loyalists of the royal family could launch an insurgency while the family flees into exile. Economic uncertainty could prompt businessmen and capital to flee the country. There could be civil resistance by other members of the military or bureaucracy as well as civilians. Also, international isolation or even intervention by another country is feasible.

## COUP IN RESPONSE TO CIVIL UNREST

This occurs when the military takes action to quell civil unrest. Although its justification would be to "guard the nation," the move is meant to retain control in a country where the military already enjoys an active role in government. In this case, the leader and his supporters are removed by the military in the name of the people. An example is the recent events in Egypt, where the army intervened, not to support the demonstrators, but to ensure that it would retain a major role in the post-Mubarak era.

These types of coups reflect unusual circumstances; economically driven and a consequence to war environment - especially losing a war. However, it also includes political instability as evident in the Arab Uprisings. Historically, losing a war to Israel has also brought about that type of instability in the Middle East.

These can be the bloodiest coups. Once the demonstrators realize that power is being retained by the military, they will once again go to the streets in hope of challenging military control. Since the military has the means to crush rebellion, protestors usually find themselves at the wrong end of a rifle.

## LESS LIKELY COUP SCENARIOS

### VETO COUP

When military leaders view their role as protecting the civil fabric of a nation, and see a civilian leader or a certain policy enacted as not in the best interest of the nation, they may stage a coup to stop the leader from retaining power or instituting certain policies. The Turkish military has seen itself in that role in the past.

### OUTSIDE INTERFERENCE

Very rarely will a foreign entity blatantly execute a coup in another nation. One such example was Afghanistan in 1979. These usually have the habit of unifying disparate internal forces into a powerful opposition.

### MUTINY

Mutiny is indeed possible when signs of dramatic differences in treatment are evident between officers and enlisted ranks, and other issues of food subsidies, pay or living conditions. It is more likely to happen in a nation where numbers of the enlisted ranks are of a different nationality. However, the chances of an enlisted mutiny executing a coup are slim.

### MERCENARIES

The “Dogs of War” scenario is more likely to occur in a small developing nation than a GCC country. However, given the fact that the UAE is hiring mercenaries, this becomes a potential threat. (*The Dogs of War* (1974) a war novel by Frederick Forsyth chronicles a company of European mercenary soldiers hired by a British industrialist to depose the government of the fictional African country of Zangaro.)

Yet, the biggest story recently is the one coming out of the UAE, where there are reports that the nation's leadership has hired an American "industrialist" to assemble a battalion of mercenaries for the Sheikdom.

Mercenaries garner bad reputation – due to their questionable role in post-colonial-era wars in Africa. Their modern breed is often more professional and in great demand throughout the world. The U. S. has been the biggest employer of mercenary forces in recent history who have generally been former US Special Forces soldiers and are now civilians. Private companies also hire these "security services" to protect remote operations in politically unstable parts of the world. Even the United Nations hired the South African mercenary company *Executive Outcomes* to handle logistical support in Africa. Mercenaries also assisted the UN during the 1960s.

In reality, mercenary-backed coups are rare. Several have recently been attempted in the Comoros Islands and Seychelles to no effect.

## COUPS IN THE GCC SINCE 1960<sup>4</sup>

- 1966, Coup in Abu Dhabi. Shakhbut Bin Sultan al Nahyan was deposed by his brother Zayed.
- 1970, Coup in Oman. Qaboos bin Said Al Said overthrows his father.
- 1972, Attempted coup in the Emirate of Sharjah, against Sheikh Khalid bin Mohammad el Qassimi.
- 1981, Attempted coup in Bahrain by a group (allegedly) supported by Iran.
- 1995, Coup in Qatar. Sheikh Hamad became Emir when he seized power from his father.

## ETHNIC DIVERSITY IN GCC MILITARIES

Since several GCC nations have small native populations, the region has relied on a large component of foreign nationals in their respective defense forces. Many of these are Pakistanis, although one can find a mix of groups from around the Middle East.

The reliance on foreign nationals is a nuisance to the GCC nations and they have tried to counter the potential threat. Generally, one strategy has been to develop sophisticated, high technology, forces that require fewer, better paid, professional soldiers. The higher salaries and professional status are, then, meant to encourage more GCC nationals to join their respective defense forces.

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<sup>4</sup> COUP D'ÉTAT EVENTS, 1946-2009 CODEBOOK, Monty G. Marshall and Donna Ramsey Marshall, Center for Systemic Peace, July 30, 2010

This policy is resonating and the number of foreign nationals in GCC defense forces appears to drop recently, although actual figures are shrouded in secrecy.

How each country handles the situation differs slightly. Kuwait, for example, relies on US forces presence, in large numbers, as a stabilizing force. Saudi Arabia is trying to improve military career standards and make it more attractive to its unemployed citizenry (having found Pakistanis to be unreliable from their point of view), and relies on Western experts for critical functions. Bahrain encourages foreign nationals to join their military, providing they are Sunni, not Shi'a. Qatar has a large percentage of Pakistanis in their defense force, and maintains good relations with the Pakistani military. The UAE has aggressively moved to make its officer corps totally UAE nationals. It has also developed a mercenary force, with the active help of Blackwater's Erik Prince, made up of people from South America who would be spared problems faced with Arab or Pakistani military. Oman has relied, nearly totally, on its nationals to join its defense force.

Foreign nationals in a defense force do not necessarily lead to instability or a greater likelihood of a coup. They have family and roots elsewhere and are less interested in local politics than in being paid well. In fact, historically, governments that have problems with their own citizenry have relied on foreign troops to retain control. Well paid and professionally-lead foreign nationals make the greatest bulwark against a coup.

The biggest problem for GCC nations is the Islamic background of the overwhelming foreign soldiers. Consequently, there is a greater threat of a radical Islamic movement within the military. That could very well be one reason which led the UAE military force to recruit in Catholic-dominated South America. They are unlikely to side with a radical-leaning Islamic coup in the UAE.

## SPECIFIC THREATS TO GCC NATIONS

### BAHRAIN

Bahrain is considered most unstable and susceptible to a coup. That is the primary incentive why Saudi Arabia sent its troops to quell protesters.

Bahrain is a constitutional monarchy headed by the King, Shaikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa; the head of government is the Prime Minister, Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman al Khalifa. Bahrain has a bicameral National Assembly (*al-Jamiyah al-Watani*) consisting of the Shura Council (*Majlis Al-Shura*) with 40 seats, and the Council of Representatives (*Majlis Al-Nuwab*) with 40 seats. The 40

members of Shura are appointed by the king. In the Council of Representatives, 40 members are elected by absolute majority vote in single-member constituencies to serve 4-year terms.<sup>5</sup>

Bahrain's major cause of instability is that the royal family is Sunni, while most of Bahrainis are Shi'a. There have been varying levels of unrest from about 1994 until now. The opposition is composed of liberals and Shi'a Islamists. Earlier violence of the 1990s has generally subsided after King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa carried out political reforms when ascended to the throne in 1999.

Protests flared again on February 14, 2011 to coincide with demonstrations in the rest of the Arab world. Again, Shi'a were the majority of the protestors. On March 15, the government began a harsh crackdown. On March 14, troops from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates entered Bahrain with the stated purpose of protecting essential facilities, including oil and gas installations and financial institutions.

The population of Bahrain is 1.2 million, of which about 700,000 are foreigners. Although the majority of native Bahrainis are Shi'a, foreigners included, the reliable number of Shi'a is probably 50% or less. About 20% of the people living in Bahrain are either Christian or of non-Muslim faiths.<sup>6</sup>

Approximately 66% of the indigenous population is originally from the Arabian Peninsula and Iran. Bahrain has a sizeable foreign labor force. The government's strict policies on naturalization remain controversial. In June 2002, the King issued a decree allowing citizens of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to take up dual Bahraini nationality. Opposition political groups charge that the government is granting citizenship to foreign nationals who have served in the Bahraini armed forces and security services to alter the demographic balance of the country. According to passport officials, about 40,000 individuals have been naturalized over the past 50 years.<sup>7</sup>

This large non-Shi'a population limits the chances of a Shi'a-backed coup. Since many of the foreigners are part of the business community, a Shi'a-led coup with a strong anti-foreigner attitude or strong Islamic flavor would face stiff opposition, endangering the business community and bring instability.

Bahrain's military is only about 9,000 strong, but there are about 1,500 US military personnel in the nation and nearly unlimited Saudi forces within a few hours' drive. Although the causeway to

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<sup>5</sup> Bahrain, International Foundation for Electoral Systems, July 26, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> "REMARKABLE GROWTH EXPATS OUTNUMBER BAHRAINIS IN 2010 CENSUS," Bahraini Census 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Background note: Bahrain, State Department, July 8, 2011

Saudi Arabia could easily be closed by coup leaders, the small size of the island makes it possible for rapid reinforcement of pro-government forces.<sup>8</sup>

Military exercises are conducted on a regular basis to increase the Bahrain Defense Force's (BDF) readiness and improve coordination with the U.S. and other GCC forces. The BDF also sends personnel to the United States for military training which includes courses from graduate-level professional military education down to entry-level technical training.

The National Guard is currently commanded by Major-General Mohammed bin Isa Al Khalifa, brother of King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa. It consists of about 1,200 personnel many of whom are non-Bahrainis. Pakistanis constitute 7,000 soldiers, at least, of the 25,000 strong Bahrain Police force. In total, almost 10,000 Pakistanis contribute to various Bahrain security forces.<sup>9</sup>

There is also a Special Security Force Command (SSFC), a paramilitary force under the control of Ministry of the Interior. A majority of SSFC personnel are recruited outside of Bahrain, from Arab countries or Pakistan. There are no Bahraini Shi'a reportedly among the ranks of the SSFC.

The major source of unrest in Bahrain comes from the Shi'a community. However, given the size of other non-Shi'a population, the small size of the nation, and the proximity of Saudi forces, the likelihood of a traditional coup is small. However, the chances of a palace coup are greater, especially if moderate forces within the royal family see a failure to modernize as a threat to their nation.

## QATAR

Qatar has to be considered a coup risk given that its current ruler came to power through executing a palace coup. In 1995, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani became Emir when he seized power from his father, Khalifa bin Hamad Al Thani, in a palace coup. The most important positions in Qatar are held by the members of the ruling Al Thani family, or its close confidants. Under Hamad, Qatar has experienced a notable amount of sociopolitical liberalization, including the endorsement of women's right to vote, drafting a new constitution, and the launch of Al Jazeera television network.

Qatar, more than other GCC nations, is ethnically diverse. Foreign workers comprise as much as 85% of the total population and make up about 90% of the total labor force. About 8,000 U.S.

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<sup>8</sup> Wikipedia, Bahrain Defense Force.

<sup>9</sup> Wall Street Journal, Bahrain's Foreign Police Add to Tensions, by ALEX DELMAR-MORGAN and TOM WRIGHT, MARCH 25, 2011.



citizens reside in Qatar;<sup>10</sup> 40% are Arab (about half of them Qatari); 20% Indian; 10% Filipino; 13% Nepali; and 7% Pakistani. About 75% are Muslim, 9% Christian and 10% Hindu.<sup>11</sup>

The country maintains a modest military force of approximately 11,800 men, distributed as follows: 8,500 army; 1800 navy; and 1500 air force. Qatari citizens constitute only 30 percent of army ranks, where more than twenty nationalities are represented. The Emir is, simultaneously, the Minister of Defense.<sup>12</sup>

The Qatari army is heavily mechanized with modern German Leopard 2 battle tanks; a Qatari tank battalion fought in the Gulf War of 1991, its AMX-30 tanks took part in the battle of Khafji. The Qatari contingent, composed mostly of Pakistani recruits, displayed its usefulness during the war. Qatar has supported U.S. military operations critical to the success of "Operation Enduring Freedom" and "Operation Iraqi Freedom." Qatar also hosts CENTCOM Forward Headquarters, and maintains very close relations with the Pakistan military.

The Qatari military is a well-equipped, professional group of soldiers under the tight control of the royal family. There is little unrest, although guest workers have few rights, basis ingredient for unrest. As in the past, a palace coup is the likely route for a change of government.

## OMAN

Oman is also considered a coup possibility since its current ruler came to power through a palace coup. Sultan Qaboos acceded to the throne on July 23, 1970 after deposing his father with the declared aim of ending the country's isolation and using its oil revenue for modernization and development activities.

Oman is, essentially, an absolute monarchy system where its Sultan exercises ultimate authority but its parliament has some legislative and oversight powers. In November 2010, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) listed Oman, from among 135 countries worldwide, as the nation most-improved during the preceding 40 years. According to international indices, Oman is one of the most developed and stable countries in the Arab World.

The head of state and of the government is the hereditary sultān, Qaboos bin Said Al Said, who appoints a cabinet called the "Diwans" to assist him. In the early 1990s, the sultan instituted an elected council, the Consultative Assembly of Oman with an advisory role, until 2011 when

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<sup>10</sup> Background note: Qatar, State Department, Mar. 7, 2011.

<sup>11</sup> CIA World Factbook – Qatar; "Mapping the Global Muslim Population: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Muslim Population," Pew Research Center, 7 October 2009; "US State Department Qatar Page."

<sup>12</sup> Wikipedia, Qatar Armed Forces.

Sultan Qaboos decided to give it legislative powers; allowing the newly elected parliament to question ministers, propose laws and suggest changes to government regulations. A State Consultative Council, established in 1981, consists of 55 appointed representatives of government, the private sector, and regional interests.<sup>13</sup>

In Oman, the natives outnumber foreigners, unlike other GCC nations. Its population stands at 2.7 million, the natives are 2 million strong. Most of the foreigners come from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, India and the Philippines. Around 67% of the population follow Ibadhi sect, a form of Islam distinct from the Sunni and Shi'a denominations; 32% Sunni Muslims and the Shi'a form the remaining 1% of the population; 5% of the non-Omani populations are of other faiths.<sup>14</sup>

The Omani army is qualitatively superior to that of many neighboring countries. Oman's armed forces stood at 120,000 in 2010, consisting of: 105,000 personnel in the Royal Army of Oman (RAO), equipped with over 120 main battle tanks and 37 Scorpion tanks; 8,100 personnel in the Royal Air Force of Oman and 6,200 personnel in the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO). Together, the elite Royal Household brigade, naval unit, and air unit number 6,400, which include two Special Forces regiments. An Omani battalion served in Saudi Arabia, as part of the GCC contribution to the ground war to liberate Kuwait. It formed part of the Saudi Arabian-led Task Force Omar along with the Saudi 10th Mechanized Brigade. It advanced into Kuwait on the second day of the ground offensive and suffered no casualties.<sup>15</sup>

One advantage for the Omani military is the professional military background of the Sultan. Sultan Qaboos attended the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst and served as an officer in the British Army with the 1st Battalion the Cameronians (Scottish Rifles). After the overthrow of his father, Qaboos immediately instituted major social and military reforms throughout the country. As part of a "hearts and minds" campaign to win over the rebelling population of Dhofar district, an amnesty was declared for surrendering rebels. Former rebels formed Firqat irregular units, trained and assisted by teams from the Special Air Service. The Firqats eventually numbered 1,800, and deprived the rebels of local support in their home areas.

## OMAN'S MILITARY RETAINS A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH BRITAIN

As a nation that is ethnically more homogenous than other GCC nations with a successful record of defeating rebels, Oman is unlikely to suffer from a traditional coup. Like other GCC nations, it is more likely to change government via a palace coup.

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<sup>13</sup> Government of Oman website, (Ministry of Information), Sultanate of Oman (accessed 1<sup>st</sup> quarter 2011).

<sup>14</sup> CIA World Factbook – Oman.

<sup>15</sup> Wikipedia, Sultan of Oman's Armed Forces.

## KUWAIT

Kuwait is a constitutional emirate with a parliamentary system of government. Many reforms were involuntarily applied after the Iraqis were forced out of the country in 1991.

The nation's leader is Emir Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. A council of ministers, also known as cabinet ministers, aids the Prime Minister, and appoints and dismisses diplomats. Legislative power is vested in the Emir and the National Assembly in accordance with the Constitution. The National Assembly consists of fifty elected members, chosen in elections held every four years. Government ministers are also granted membership in parliament and can number up to sixteen excluding the fifty elected members. According to the Constitution of Kuwait, nomination of a new Emir or Crown Prince by the ruling Al-Sabah family has to be approved by the National Assembly. If the nominee does not win the votes of the majority of the assembly, the royal family must submit the names of three other candidates to the National Assembly to approve selection for one to hold the post. Any amendment to the constitution can be proposed by the Emir but it needs to be approved by more than two-thirds of the members of the National Assembly before being implemented.<sup>16</sup>

Although Kuwait practices elections, more than two-thirds of those residing in Kuwait are not holders of Kuwaiti citizenship and, thus, cannot vote. Additionally, prior to 2005, only 15% of the Kuwaiti population were allowed to vote, with all "recently naturalized" citizens (i.e. those of less than thirty years' citizenship), and members of the Kuwaiti Armed Forces excluded. On May 16, 2005, the parliament permitted women's suffrage.

As of 2007, Kuwait's population was estimated to be 3 to 3.5 million people, which included approximately 2 million non-nationals. Kuwaiti citizens are, therefore, a minority among all residents on Kuwait. In 2008, 68.4% of the population consisted of foreigners. 57% of the population of Kuwait is Arab. Half a million residents are Indians and a quarter million are Egyptians. 85% are Muslim, of which 70% are Sunni and 30% are Shi'a. About 5% are Christian, most are foreigners.<sup>17</sup>

The ruling As Sabah family maintains a tight grip over the centers of power, including many senior posts in the military and security services. The military is a product of the post-Gulf War era as most of their pre 1990 equipment was destroyed. It is highly mechanized with Yugoslav and American-made tanks.<sup>18</sup>

Equally important is the American battalion stationed in Kuwait as part of its defense agreement. There are about 5,000 US military troops in Kuwait.

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<sup>16</sup> Kuwait – A Political Snapshot, Meepas website (accessed 1<sup>st</sup> quarter 2011).

<sup>17</sup> U.S. Department of State. "Kuwait: International Religious Freedom Report 2006"

<sup>18</sup> Global Security Dot Org, Kuwait

As an oil rich nation with very good relations with the United States and 5,000 professional American soldiers in the country, the current Kuwaiti leadership is relatively safe from a coup. Since the National Assembly must give the final approval to a new Emir, the traditional palace coup is less likely, although not unthinkable.

## SAUDI ARABIA

Although Saudi Arabia has a stable monarchy, of all the GCC nations, it is the most likely to experience a coup in the near future.

Its choice of picking Nayef as crown prince endures the power of the Sudairi clan – sons of Saud’s favorite wife, Princess Hassa Al-Sudairi. Nayef has been the Minister of the Interior, which controls the police and security apparatus, and is known for his heavy-handedness. As a “traditionalist,” he is a strong supporter of the religious establishment. He opposes reforms and elections and has spoken against the rights of women and minorities. The Saudi Allegiance Commission considered Nayef to be the right man to keep Saudi Arabia stable.

Nayef’s political base is the Wahhabi clerics and the security services. He has, however, become notorious for taking strenuous measures against any threat he perceives to the Saudi Royal Family.

Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy and royal decrees issued form the basis of the country's legislation. The king is also the prime minister and presides over the Council of Ministers, which is made up of the first and second deputies to the prime minister.

The royal family dominates the entire political system. The family’s vast numbers allow it to control most of the kingdom’s important posts and to be involved and present at all levels of government. The number of princes is estimated to be anywhere from 7,000 upwards, with most power and influence being wielded by the 200 or so male descendants of King Abdul Aziz. The key ministries are generally reserved for the royal family, as are the thirteen regional governorships. Long term political and government appointments have resulted in the creation of "power fiefdoms" for senior princes. As a result, there are many accusations of corruption.

There has been mounting pressure to reform and modernize the royal family's rule, an agenda championed by King Abdullah both before and after his accession in 2005. The creation of the Consultative Council, in the early 1990s, did not satisfy demands for political participation. In 2003, an annual National Dialogue Forum was announced that would allow selected professionals and intellectuals to publicly debate current national issues, within certain prescribed parameters. In 2005, the first municipal elections were held. In 2007, the Allegiance Council was created to regulate the succession. In 2009, the king made significant personnel changes to the government by appointing reformers to key positions and the first woman to a ministerial post. However, the changes have been criticized as being too slow or merely cosmetic, and the royal family is reportedly divided on the speed and direction of reform.

The nation has a population of about 26 million, of which 6 million are foreigners. These include 1.1 million Indians and 1 million Pakistanis. No religious but Islam is tolerated.

Beneath the geriatric Saudi monarchy are many conflicting groups. First, the large Saudi royal family represents many differing views of government and society, ranging from adherents to traditional absolute monarchists to advocates of constitutional monarchy. Many members of the royal family were educated in the West and favor a more modern government and society. Some of those differences are based on clan loyalty and to which wife of Ibn Saud's multiple wives they belong.

Under the royal family level lies a network of tribal chiefs. Tribal identity is still running strong in Saudi Arabia, and the chiefs still hold sway in regional affairs. The Saudi royal family continues to consult with them, as well as with Saudi families traditionally associated with commerce.

Some of these tribal chiefs are a source of political opposition to the Saudi royal family. The province of Hejaz was forcibly incorporated into Saudi Arabia and its tribal chiefs form political opposition to the royal family. Other points of opposition are Islamist activists, the Shi'a community and liberal activists.

Saudi Arabia is an increasingly young and restless society, upset with the repression at the hands of Nayef's interior ministry. The Saudi people have seen the unrest in the many parts of the Middle East and want reforms in their own nation. And, despite the massive oil revenue, 40 percent of men and women in the 20-24 age groups are unemployed. Between 60 to 70 percent of the Saudi population is less than 30 years of age and abhor measures of the past as unlikely to work in the future. The social media that stirred the unrest in other Middle East nations is working in Saudi Arabia too.

Security of Saudi Arabia and its royal family rests on the unequivocal loyalty of the military. While the upper command structure is in the hands of the royal members, there are problems with the Saudi officer corps including untold corruption that hasn't been prosecuted by the government and reliance of personal and tribal relationships over the classic chains of command.

Its military consists of the Saudi Army, the Royal Saudi Air Force, the Royal Saudi Navy, the Royal Saudi Air Defense, the Saudi Arabian National Guard - the 'SANG', and paramilitary forces, totaling over 200,000 active-duty personnel. They are highly mechanized and have the most modern equipment. The army is composed of three armored brigades, five mechanized brigades, one airborne brigade, one Royal Guard brigade, and eight artillery battalions. The army also has one aviation command with two aviation brigades.<sup>19</sup>

The Saudi military also relies on contract personnel from foreign militaries, usually from Western nations. Personnel from other Arab nations have been found to be unreliable for Saudi requirements.

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<sup>19</sup> "Country Profile: Saudi Arabia," Sept. 2006 Library of Congress

Saudi Arabian National Guard was established as a counter weight to the regular military. Originally, SANG was perceived as a counter-balance to the Sudairi faction of the royal family when Abdul Aziz was king. It serves both as defense force against external threats and as a security force against internal threats. Its duties include protecting the royal family, guarding against coups, protecting strategic facilities and resources, and protecting the Holy Places of Mecca and Medina. It is both a standing force of 125,000, with a tribal militia of 25,000. The SANG is the King's private army consisting of personnel drawn from tribes loyal to the King and Royal Family. It is commanded by Prince Mutaib bin Abdullah consisting of three mechanized brigades and five motorized infantry brigades. The militia portion consists of around 24 battalions of fowj, tribal warriors on "retainer"<sup>20</sup> basis.

A longstanding security relationship has been a keystone in U.S.-Saudi relations. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers plays an active role in military and civilian construction activities reaching back to the 1950s. A U.S. military training mission established at Dhahran in 1953 provides training and support in the use of weapons and other security-related services to the Saudi armed forces. In 1973, another security assistance organization (SAO) was established to assist in the modernization of the Saudi Arabian National Guard. More recently SAO was authorized to train and equip a Facility Security Force, part of the Ministry of Interior. All three of these SAOs are funded through the U.S. Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program. The United States has sold Saudi Arabia military aircraft (F-15s, AWACS, and UH-60 Blackhawks), air defense weaponry (Patriot and Hawk missiles), armored vehicles (M1A2 Abrams tanks and M-2 Bradley infantry fighting vehicles), and other equipment. In September 2010, the U.S. announced a major new FMS program to sell fighter aircraft and helicopters to the Saudi military services in support of defense modernization plans.<sup>21</sup>

Although the Saudi royal family has protected itself against potential coups through an independent National Guard service, the instability of the Saudi society and subsequent repression must also resonate within the military. The greatest dissent would be within the officer corps which traditionally provided tribal opposition to the Saud family, more progressive members of the royal family, and officers with extensive training in the West, who may not have advanced through the ranks as fast as other peers. Given the heavy reliance on personal relations instead of the chain of command, this group could act in concert if unrest towards the Saudi royal family grows.

The most likely change of government would be a palace coup, where a royal family complex agreement would be attained to support a more moderate Saudi prince, who could take Nayef's place.

A large royal family does provide stability within Saudi Arabia. However, its size also means that dissident members are likely to be placed in positions of responsibility in the military and SANG,

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<sup>20</sup> Global Security Dot Org, Saudi Arabian National Guard

<sup>21</sup> Background note: Saudi Arabia, State Department, May 6, 2011

especially since only a limited faction of the royals (the Sudairi) enjoy majority of power. A traditional coup could occur if progressive royal members, inside the military and SANG, decide to place a more moderate family member on the throne. These, combined with tribal chiefs and liberals could launch a quick strike that wouldn't be opposed by the restless population.

## UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

The federal system of government in the UAE is less susceptible to a coup compared to other GCC nations, primarily due to two parallel military structures – the national army and paramilitary units drawn from other emirates and owes their allegiance to the Emir.

There have been two coups in UAE history. The first took place in 1966 while still under British control. Then, Shakhbut Bin Sultan al Nahyan was deposed by his brother Zayed al Nahyan, who became the first president of the UAE.

In January 1972, an attempted coup by 18 armed supporters of the former ruler of the emirate of Sharjah, Sheikh Saqr bin Sultan (who ruled from 1951 until deposed by British in 1965), attacked and seized the palace. Sheikh Khalid bin Mohammad el Qassimi, ruler since 1965, was killed along with one of his bodyguards. The palace was then surrounded by Sharjah soldiers and troops of the Union Defense Force. Several UDF troops were wounded, including a British Captain, before the rebels surrendered the next morning. Sheikh Saqr, who participated in the coup, was then exiled.

The UAE is a federation of seven emirates, each governed by a hereditary emir, with a single national president (Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan of Abu Dhabi). The emirs choose one of their members to be the president of the federation, but this does not alter the monarchical character of the individual emirates. As a result, much of the power is devolved to the separate emirates. By tradition, the president is the Emir of Abu Dhabi and the Prime Minister is the Emir of Dubai.

The UAE government is composed of three branches: the executive, legislative, and judicial. The executive branch consists of the President, Vice President, Prime Minister, Federal Supreme Council, and a Council of Ministers (the cabinet). The Federal Supreme Council is composed of Emirs head of the seven emirates. It elects the president, vice president, members of the Council of Ministers, and judges of the Federal Supreme Court. The Supreme Council also formulates government policy, proposes and ratifies national laws, and ratifies treaties.<sup>22</sup>

The legislature is the Federal National Council (FNC), with 40 of its members drawn from all areas of the emirates to serve a two-year term. Half of whom are appointed by the rulers of the constituent emirates, and the other half is indirectly elected. The first indirect elections took place in 2006, on the road to achieve a wholly elected council. The council carries out the

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<sup>22</sup> "UAE Government: Political system," UAE Interact website (accessed 1<sup>st</sup> quarter 2011).

country's main consultative duties and has both a legislative and supervisory role, as provided by the constitution. The council scrutinizes and amends proposed legislation, but cannot prevent it from becoming law.

The population of the UAE is about 5 million, about 20% of whom are UAE natives; 23% are non-Emirati Arabs and Iranians; the majority of the population, about 50%, is from India. Approximately 1.75 million Indian nationals reside in the UAE, making them the single largest expatriate community in the country. By 2020, Emiratis are projected to constitute a mere 10% of the population. The UAE population is defined by a skewed gender distribution; males are more than twice as females. 76% of the total population was Muslim, 9% Christian, and 15% other (mainly Hindu).<sup>23</sup>

Although small in number, UAE armed forces are equipped with some of the most modern weapon systems from a variety of sources. In 2009, the U.A.E. was the largest foreign buyer of U.S. defense equipment.

The force is about 65,000 men strong. Most officers are graduates of the United Kingdom's Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, some attended the U. S. Military Academy at West Point; the Royal Military College, Duntroon and St. Cyr, the military academy of France. The military has actively reduced foreign nationals in its ranks, and its officer corps is composed almost entirely of U.A.E. nationals. More nationals are being trained to fill other ranks, with programs underway such as the Technical Trainee Project to try and fill the technical needs of the country. However, the armed forces ranks are made up of former Omanis, Egyptians, and Palestinians; while the various police forces are full of former Yemenis.<sup>24</sup> Their aggregate may add up to one third of the force.

There are two distinct military organizations in the UAE. The UAE federal military force is called the Union Defense Force. Three of the Emirates maintain their own separate forces. They are the Abu Dhabi Defense Force, Dubai Defense force, and the Ras al Khaymah Defense Force.<sup>25</sup>

The U.A.E. Special Operations Command (SOC) is a small but effective force focused on counter-terrorism within the U.A.E. It is well-financed, trained, and equipped; and currently has soldiers deployed in Afghanistan, the only Arab personnel undertaking full-scale operations in the country.<sup>26</sup>

There is also a mercenary battalion in the UAE. Erick Prince, founder of the notorious Blackwater, recruited American, German, British, French, and South African professional warriors to handle logistics and training missions. This battalion leadership is highly qualified. However,

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<sup>23</sup> CIA World Factbook – UAE

<sup>24</sup> Wikileaks, American Embassy, Abu Dhabi cable, Dec. 18, 2005

<sup>25</sup> Wikipedia, Union Defense Force

<sup>26</sup> Background note: Bahrain, State Department, July 8, 2011



the average recruits were less qualified than had been hoped. Most of the recruits were hired from South and Central American nations like Columbia. The recruits were required to have had prior either military or police experience.

The average recruit has neither the skills and background, nor physical conditioning necessary for the missions expected of the force. Many of the trainees had little or no weapons experience, which meant additional training was needed. They came from police backgrounds, which is entirely unsuited to carrying out special military operations. And many were middle aged and not physically capable to carry out the exhausting training or engage in rigorous special operations. There were also issues with drug use or unsuitability for a professional military organization.

The result is that this mercenary force has fallen far behind an overly optimistic schedule. In addition, the planned battalion strength of 800 was reduced to 580 as the pool of qualified recruits was exhausted.

Qualification of the battalion to carry out its mission is questionable. It can surely provide good security for pipelines and key buildings, and provide a force that could control chaos coming from crowds of unarmed foreign workers.

However, it is highly unlikely that it can carry out special operations in the UAE or elsewhere with success. Although all bets are for it to be an operational unit, its members only completed about half the training levels similar to those given to US or UK recruits at the beginning of their enlistment. Nor, is there any plan for them to undergo additional training that experienced soldiers acquire during the course of their career. This is exacerbated by age of the average recruits.<sup>27</sup>

The bottom line is that the UAE mercenary battalion will provide much less security than the leadership had hoped for.

Mercenary force aside, the chances of a traditional coup in the UAE is slight. Not only do the royal families control UAE military, through senior royal officers in key places, there are three separate emirate military forces loyal to that specific emirate and ruler. It is unlikely that coup leaders could effectively infiltrate five different command structures UDF, 3 separate armed forces, and the mercenary force each with differing ethnic backgrounds.

The chances of a palace coup are also slight for each emirate. The UDF would be called upon to support the current ruler. A palace coup would require not only the support of the specific emirate's royal family, but acquiesce by the other ruling families of the UAE.

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<sup>27</sup> New York Times, May 15, 2011, Secret Desert Force Set Up by Blackwater's Founder

# A COUP SCENARIO FOR A GCC NATION

The following is a possible scenario for a successful coup in a hypothetical GCC nation. It is included to demonstrate the considerable logistics necessary to carry out a coup.

## GENERAL SITUATION

A young prince who is a professional soldier, trained at a Western military academy wants to modernize his country's government ruled by an absolute monarch in his late 80s. His goal is to overthrow the current ruler and establish himself as a constitutional monarch. His intent is to grant greater tribal autonomy.

He is a colonel in charge of a battalion of Special Forces stationed outside the capital. Many have had combat experience. His other active military support comes from a mechanized battalion 30 kilometers outside the capital, some tribal militias, and some police stationed in the capital and at the international airport.

He also hires a civilian communications and information technology expert, from the west, to advise him on the validity of the communications network. The rationale is his need for an independent assessment of the system vulnerabilities, to devise a defensive plan. He also sends a trusted aide to Europe to buy equipment that can monitor and jam his country's defense and internal security frequencies. Upon arrival, he creates a special communications unit under his command.

For the month leading up to the coup, trusted officers and troops are entering the capital to find critical vulnerable communication lines. This information would have been provided by the civilian consultant with maps and satellite imagery.

Other officers or soldiers with ties to the business community, meanwhile, rent warehouse space in the capital, along with buses, trucks, and dump trucks. These vehicles are temporarily stored in the warehouses.

## GEOGRAPHIC SITUATION

The capital is located at the tip of a peninsula sticking north into the Arabian Gulf. There are three ports – fenced off commercial, fishing and yacht facilities. The latter also berths the royal yacht and the coup leader's smaller yacht.

The presidential palace on the eastern side was built before much of the economic growth along the shore. Just south of the city is a military base with a mechanized brigade loyal to the ruler. It is also a major command and control center for the nation's military. A few miles south is a

bustling international airport, with round-the-clock activity, also acts as a major hub for flights abroad.

There is a major six-lane divided highway that runs from the port facilities, down the peninsula, and along the military base and airport. At the peninsula base there is a junction of roads going east, west, and into the interior.

The only forces allowed in the capital are the palace guard and police units.

## DAY OF THE COUP

In the early morning hours, busses filled with Special Forces dressed to look like foreign workers enter the city simultaneously with other busses from their immigrant camps. They immediately head to the rented warehouses for mission briefing. The coup is planned to start at 11 pm, so the soldiers rest.

They are joined by armed tribal militias moved into the city by the tribal chieftains. They are older, have prior military experience, and armed with older but effective automatic battle rifles.

Meanwhile, other units of the prince's Special Forces battalion arrive inside the capital using cars and dressed in civilian gear. Their job is to position themselves around the city marks: restaurants, the airport, and other public places to deal promptly with any unusual military movements. They remain in contact with the rest of the command via the newly purchased cell phones.

## THE COUP

At 9 p.m., the coup units begin moving. The focus is to position forces that will be critical to hinder the adversary's communication and transportation networks.

9:00 p.m., commander of the mechanized battalion musters his unit for an unscheduled maneuver to secure the junction at the base of the capital's peninsula.

Special Forces (SF) designated to cut communications lines take their position.

The SF unit designated to secure the military base entry gate, outside the capital, move into position.

9:30 p.m., all SF units arrive at positions.

10:00 p.m., mechanized battalion arrives at junction destination and sets up road blocks.

SF forces in the warehouse board busses heading for the palace.

SF force positions dump trucks at edge of town.

Tribal militias take vans to key communications facilities in the capital and ports.

A few Special Forces soldiers head towards the yacht berth to move the prince's yacht along the eastern side of the peninsula, across from the palace. Others stay behind to keep an eye on the king's yacht.

The SF teams dispatched earlier start to disable cell towers and communications links. The goal is not to disable all of them at the same time, but to make communications for the loyalist forces increasingly difficult over the next hour.

10:30 p.m., the mechanized battalion sends an armored column north up the highway to the capital. It will halt just south of the airport.

Cyber-attacks begin to disable the internet and other civilian communication networks.

10:45 p.m., a SF unit arrives at the palace, disembarks and moves into position.

Friendly police force begins to take up positions at other road junctions in capital to stop and disrupt traffic flow.

Using their authorized access, friendly airport police allow a few SF soldiers into the control tower area.

10:55 p.m., dump trucks arrive at edge of city, set across the road and disabled. The SF soldiers set up positions to prevent loyal forces from entering the city.

Mechanized battalion sets up roadblocks at airport entrances and the highway.

Dozens of newly-purchased cell phones are activated and used to call international destinations. This further cripples the cell nodes and blocks outbound international calling.

11:00 p.m., coup begins at full thrust: Special Forces start their assault on the king's palace; troops armed with anti-tank rockets take out all antennae, satellite dishes, and radio towers in the compound.

SF soldiers take control of the airport tower, with minimal bloodshed. They inform airport authorities that a mechanized unit is stationed outside and will attack if necessary. Airport surrenders. Mechanized battalion stations troops throughout the airport, secures arsenal, rounds up airport police, and places vehicles on runways.

SF communications group begins jamming military frequencies around the military base.

Commercial port is cut off and the yacht berthing falls under the control of the coup leaders.

Tribal militias secure critical communications points in the capital, with minimum gunfire.

11:15 p.m., activity at the military base picks up. SF unit fires anti-tank missiles to destroy satellite dishes, radio towers, and antennae. Thinking that they are under attack, the base

commander orders that the brigade goes into a defensive position rather than relieving the palace guard.

11:30 p.m., although being aware of a fire at the palace, the police are having problems clearing up the streets. Rather than aiding the palace guard, they decide it is a political issue and, instead, focus on relieving traffic congestion.

12:00 midnight, palace guards short of reinforcements and unable to communicate with other military units to counter the coup, ask for terms of surrender. The prince asks for the king's abdication in favor of himself. In return, the king will be allowed to leave using his royal yacht. The king agrees, the royal yacht is re-positioned to accommodate the smooth departure of the royal family. The prince assures the former king that any others will be allowed to go into exile and will be allowed to leave as soon as possible. While the royal yacht is on its way, the king produces a video announcing his abdication. Copies of the video are rushed to the radio and TV stations under the control of the tribal militias.

1:00 a.m., the abdication is broadcast on radio and television. The prince, then, appears on the air to announce that he is now the new ruler and intends to implement several major changes, including democracy and a constitutional monarchy.

## FORMER KING LEAVES FOR EXILE

Officers and soldiers related to the business community make contact with their leaders, and assure them that business-as-usual will continue unimpeded. The leaders are encouraged and keep the stores open the next day.

1:30 a.m., an officer of the new king's SF force approaches the military base carrying a white flag. He informs the base commander that the king has abdicated and asks that he, along with several officers and soldiers, be allowed to enter the base to restore communications. He further requests that the troops be sent back to their barracks, and informs him that a mechanized unit is outside the base and ready to attack if any resistance is forthcoming.

2:00 a.m., the base commander, after receiving assurances, orders his soldiers back to the barracks, and the road blocks are removed from the capital outskirts. Fresh produce and supplies are allowed in to restock grocery stores.

The communications group begins to restore connections around the capital.

Other military units are ordered, by the new ruler, to stay in their barracks.

Obviously, this is a very basic coup scenario where no units but the palace guard decide to fight. The one unit that could have easily stopped the coup was immobilized by lack of communications, and indecision over its priority to reinforce the palace or defend itself. By this time, events become clearer and the coup is successful.

This is not to suggest that the loyal mechanized brigade could have stopped the coup. It would have had to exit the base, in a vulnerable column formation against a smaller, but better deployed unit. It would have then been forced to turn away and move towards the palace, where a roadblock would have delayed its arrival. Also, it would have been too busy to render effective help to the palace guards.

In summary, coup leaders set up roadblocks at the base of the peninsula to stop reinforcements, and used a yacht to stop any quick reinforcement efforts coming over water. The yacht was also well placed to evacuate the coup leadership in case of a failure.

This scenario also chose to ignore air and naval units for the sake of simplicity. They could have hampered the coup progress, but also could have provided the coup leaders with additional power.

The coup scenario illustrates the importance of communication and transportation sectors. Civilian communications was first to be disrupted for fear of sending clues prematurely. It also prevented civilians, who witnessed the erected roadblocks, from warning the government using their cell phones. Communication was only restored after the coup's success and became evident that the military and citizenry will not rise to action against the new leadership.

Under the new leadership, military communications were last to be cut, and first to be restored. This way the military could be deployed rapidly if citizens take their protests to the streets.

Controlling transportation arteries was also critical. The only main road to the capital was cut off even before the coup began. A roadblock was set up with dump trucks to stop a mechanized column from quickly reinforcing palace guards. And, friendly police forces were used to create traffic congestion around the palace.

Finally, a coup needs professional soldiers. As was in Libya, rag-tag militias were quickly routed by ill-trained forces. The same can be expected in a coup. All coup units were current or former experience soldiers. Even the tribal militia consisted of veterans.

## CONCLUSION

The GCC nations represent a wide spectrum of political stability. On one hand, Bahrain a diverse ethnic community and a leadership that refuses to reform. Then, Oman and Qatar, soon after assuming power, their leaders claimed a desire to reform society. Qatar appears to be trying to play a regional political role greater than its true size and capabilities, and may experience a sudden and unexpected “hard landing” from undeserved plateau. Therefore, internal crisis or a palace coup might ensue.

Bahrain and Saudi Arabia clearly are the two most unstable nations. Bahrain, however, enjoys Saudi protection, to some degree, by virtue of its close proximity to Saudi Arabia and the latter’s willingness to intervene and maintain the status quo.

Therefore, Saudi Arabia is the cornerstone. Bahrain will probably become the target of a coup if Saudi Arabia is too unsettled to provide military assistance.

Ingredients necessary for a coup, or even a revolution, are present in Saudi Arabia. All that is lacking is a group with enough military power and desire to force change. The best outcome is for a coup backed by liberal forces within the royal family, who hold some power in the military and National Guard.

Without this sort of change, creating safe areas to launch operations, as was the case in Libya, could be replayed. All what is needed is access to one arsenal for a civil war to begin. Provinces and tribes will break away and the military will be too concerned with controlling the vital oil supply lines to effectively stop the war.

The other GCC countries are more stable and are likely to experience a bloodless palace coup. Large foreign worker communities do add some instability, but these groups are more interested in making money and receiving basic human rights than being involved in major political issues. In fact, they are a factor for stability because any new government is a potential threat.

But, most important is that GCC members are major oil producing nations with super power protection. The US and Britain have their military stationed in the area. An unfriendly coup attempt may very well attract US Marines to land on the nearby beaches; no coup can ignore that possibility.