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Enhancing Cooperation on Maritime Security in the Gulf



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The attack on the oil tanker *Pacific Zircon* off the coast of Oman in November 2022 once again highlighted the precarious situation of maritime security around the waters of the Arabian Peninsula. The Gulf continues to be threatened by piracy and attacks on the region’s waters between the Suez Canal and the Strait of Hormuz. These attacks have direct consequences on the global economy as well as maritime safety and transportation, given the Gulf’s pivotal role in maritime trade, particularly in the field of energy supplies. Thus, providing extended maritime security to the Gulf region is in the interests of the broader global community. The United States (US) and the European Union (EU) already play important maritime roles in the Gulf. At the same time, additional support is required as the Gulf waters continue to face threats and attacks. This could include more significant roles by multilateral organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and NATO or even auxiliary roles by powers such as China and India.

This paper argues that maritime security can be a means to both underline core US-GCC defense relations as well as enhance more comprehensive EU-GCC relations as both the US and the EU remain the best options for the Gulf region. First, this paper will provide a contextual analysis of current events and scenarios that threaten the maritime security environment, including attacks from the Houthis, Israel, and Iran. Next, the paper will outline current investments in maritime security in the Gulf, both regionally and internationally. The paper will conclude by looking more closely at how the US and the EU, in cooperation with their GCC partners, can make the maritime security platform a central endeavor of the near-term defense and security relationship. This also includes the merging of currently separate maritime missions and the possibility of trilateral cooperation.

Contextual Analysis

The Gulf region is of strategic importance when it comes to seaborne traded petroleum. In 2018, around 40% of global petroleum liquids trade passed through the Strait of Hormuz (21%), the Bab el-Mandeb Strait (9%), and the Suez Canal (9%) (US Energy Information Administration (EIA), 2019). Moreover, a large share of this goes to EU member states (The Economist, 2021). First, the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow 21-mile-wide channel separating Iran from the Arabian Peninsula, is considered to be the most significant oil chokepoint in the world due to the significant amounts of energy supplies that pass through the strait (US Energy Information Administration, 2019). According to Khalifa Almarar, the Minister of State of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation in UAE, who delivered a speech at the 18th IISS Manama Dialogue, the Strait of Hormuz “is the most important strategic strait in the world, through which about 25% of the world’s oil consumption passes, and about a third of the world’s consumption of LNG (liquefied natural gas).”

Table 1: Strait of Hormuz Global Oil Shipments, 2014-2018 (Million Barrels Per Day)

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Total Oil Flows Through the Strait of Hormuz	17.2	18.4	20.6	20.3	20.7
Global Maritime Oil Trade	56.4	58.9	61.2	62.5	N/A
Global Total Petroleum and Other Liquids Consumption	93.9	95.9	96.9	98.5	99.9
LNG Flows Through the Strait of Hormuz (Tcf Per Year)	4.0	4.2	4.2	4.1	4.1

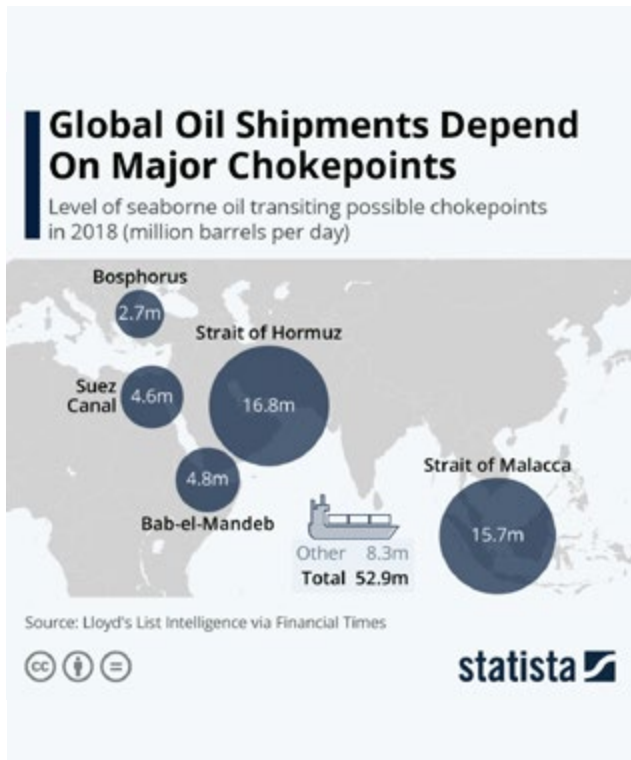
Source: US Energy Information Administration, 2019.



Second, the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, which connects the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea, is a sea route chokepoint between the Middle East and the Horn of Africa. In 2018, the EIA estimated that 6.2 million barrels per day (b/d) of crude oil, condensate, and refined petroleum products flowed through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait toward Europe, the United States, and Asia, an increase from 5.1 million b/d in 2014. In total, approximately 9% of seaborne trade in petroleum passed through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait in 2017, with a total of 2.6 million b/d flowing to Asian markets like Singapore, China, and India, and 3.6 million b/d going toward Europe (US Energy Information Administration, 2019). The Bab el-Mandeb Strait is also crucial for international commerce, as over 50 million tons of agricultural products pass through the strait annually (Bailey and Wellesley, 2017).

2021). Specifically, 85% of trade moving northward through the Suez Canal consists of oil exports from the Middle East.

Out of the different scenarios that threaten the maritime security environment, the attacks by the Houthis and Iran are considered the most urgent security risks. The Houthis have launched numerous maritime attacks on the Red Sea since 2015, in addition to numerous drone and missile strikes on Saudi Arabia. From 2021 into 2022, the Houthis escalated their warfare attacks against civilian targets on the Red Sea, especially in Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Although Saudi Arabia was able to intercept the majority of these attacks, the Houthis have repeatedly attacked strategic facilities, including ports, oil installations, and airports in the Kingdom.



Third, the Suez Canal connects the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea, making it a strategic route for shipments to Europe and North America. The Suez Canal transports around 12% of world trade, or 30% of all container traffic, and more than \$1 trillion worth of commodities annually (Topham,

One of the most significant attacks was the strike on Saudi oil facilities in Khurais and Abqaiq in September 2019. The attack is widely considered to be the “single largest daily oil supply disruption in history” (Verrastro and Stanley, 2019). The total supply loss from this attack was around 5.7 million barrels per day (b/d) of oil output, which is more than half of Saudi Arabia’s recent output and about 6% of global supply, as well as 2 billion cubic feet per day of associated gas (Pangea-Risk, 2021).

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Another serious incident was the attack on a major oil pipeline in Saudi Arabia with armed drones in May 2019, for which Houthi rebels, allied with Tehran, claimed responsibility. Two pumping stations were hit at the Saudi East-West pipeline (Petroline) carrying oil from the Eastern Province to the Red Sea port of Yanbu. As a result, there were international repercussions as oil prices soared after this attack, and Brent crude oil contracts rose 1.7% to \$71.39 per barrel. Additionally, Khalifa Almarar, the Minister of State of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation in the UAE, explained that increased acts of maritime piracy threatened the maritime security in the region and consequently disrupted international trade, particularly following the attack on the destroyer USS Cole in the Gulf of Aden in October 2000, and the four oil tankers off the coast of the UAE during May 2019, June 2019, July 2021, and August 2021.

Israel and Iran’s “regional shadow war” also poses another security threat to the region. Since 2019, Israel has attacked Iranian ships through the eastern Mediterranean and the Red Sea, with Iran responding with its own maritime attacks on Israeli ships. In November 2019, Iran disclosed that three of its oil tankers (*Happiness I*, *Helm*, and *Sabiti*) were allegedly attacked by Israel. On February 25, 2021, the Israeli-owned *Helios Ray* was damaged by two limpet mines in the Gulf of Oman, for which the Israeli government blamed Iran (Nadimi, 2021). The apparent Israeli response came on March 10, 2021, when the Iranian container ship *Shahr e Kord* was hit by an explosive object 50 miles off the Israeli coast (Kingsley et al., 2021). The tit-for-tat nature continued on March 25, 2021, when *Lori*, an Israeli-owned container ship carrying Israeli arms to India, was hit by an Iranian missile in the Arabian Sea (Nadimi, 2021). *Saviz*, an Iranian cargo ship was then attacked on April 6, 2021, followed by the attack on the Israeli-owned *Hyperion Ray* on April 13, 2021, off the Emirati coast. The attack on the oil tanker *Pacific Zircon* off the coast of Oman in November 2022 is the latest known incident. These Iranian and Israeli attacks in the Red Sea can be seen as an example of the internationalization of the issue of maritime security in the Gulf. What is clear is that there is a growing need for additional efforts to protect the region. Consequently, the increase in attacks led to several responses, both regionally and internationally.

International Responses to the Growing Maritime Threat

The United States remains the preeminent force in having the capability to respond to the rising threat to maritime security. The US created the International Maritime Security Construct (IMSC) to protect commercial ships in the Gulf, with the support of Bahrain, the base of the US Fifth Fleet, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Australia, and the UK. This military coalition aims at promoting maritime security and free navigation for commercial vessels crossing international waters in the region.



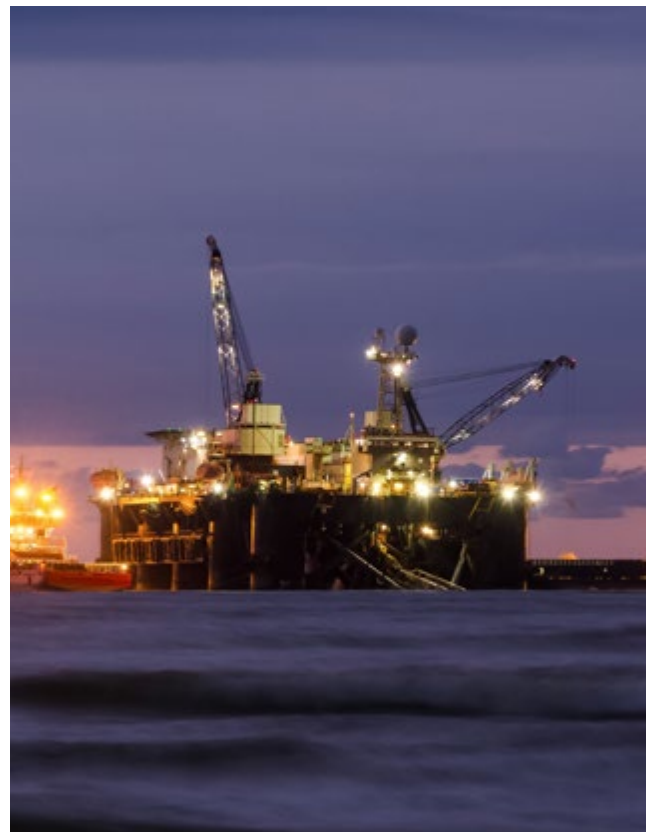
The IMSC also inaugurated its operative arm, the Coalition Task Force (CTF) SENTINEL, and opened its command center in Manama, Bahrain, where the US Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT) is also headquartered. Original IMSC member-states include Albania, Bahrain, Estonia, Lithuania, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Seychelles and Romania became members in October and March 2022, respectively, while Latvia joined in December 2022.

The creation of the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), a multinational naval mission, is the latest US military response to the attacks on regional waters. On April 17, 2022, the CTF-153, one of four task forces operated by the CMF, was deployed in the Red Sea, the Bab el-Mandeb, and the Gulf of Aden “to focus on international maritime security and capacity building efforts” (Combined Maritime Forces, 2022). Vice Admiral Brad Cooper, the Fifth Fleet Commander, explained that the task force aims to “ensure a force presence and deterrent posture in the Red Sea, Bab al-Mandab and Gulf of Aden,” stating that “these are strategically important waters that warrant our attention” as they are a significant passageway for global trade, particularly oil supplies (Cornwell, 2022). Moreover, Vice Adm. Cooper explained that the CTF-153 aims to impact the Houthi’s ability to obtain weaponry needed for attacks on these waters, alongside human trafficking, drug trafficking, smuggling, and piracy.

Consequently, the CTF-153 is considered mutually beneficial to the US and the GCC states. On the one hand, the protection and stability of the region means protection and stability of global trade, particularly oil supplies. On the other hand, the recent formation of this new naval task force not only serves to improve maritime security in the Red Sea, the Bab el-Mandeb, and the Gulf of Aden, but also serves as a reassurance to the region who felt abandoned in recent years following the US withdrawal in Afghanistan. In addition to maritime security and consistent energy supply,

a collective security framework will benefit both sides in terms of containing Iranian interventionist policies.

In addition to IMSC, the European-led Maritime Awareness in the Strait of Hormuz (EMASOH) and its military arm, Operation AGÉNOR, operate



out of a French naval base in Abu Dhabi and similarly aims to ensure freedom of navigation. EMASOH, which is a French initiative, was launched in January 2020 to “promote regional de-escalation in the Gulf and ensure freedom of navigation in the seas around the Strait of Hormuz” in the wake of Houthi attacks on commercial ships and tankers in the UAE as well the attacks on the Khurais and Abqaiq oil facilities in Saudi Arabia (Bianco and Moretti, 2022). The maritime surveillance mission includes Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, and Portugal. Its military component, Operation AGÉNOR, includes the eight EU countries as well as Norway. Ambassador Jakob Tange, the Senior Civilian Representative in

EMASOH, explained that the initiative aims to ensure freedom of navigation by maintaining an autonomous situation appreciation, contributing to a stabilized environment, and promoting the European perspective and presence at sea.

In February 2022, the EU extended the Coordinated Maritime Presence (CMP) concept to the North-Western Indian Ocean with the aim to also enhance coordination and cooperation with EMASOH. The EU member states concluded that the region is a “maritime area of interest” (MAI) and that maritime security in the Gulf is a strategic interest for the EU (Bianco and Moretti, 2022). In addition, on May 18, 2022, the European Commission and the High Representative presented a Joint Communication titled “A Strategic Partnership with the Gulf,” outlining a more comprehensive partnership and structured framework between the EU and the GCC countries. Arguing that the EU’s economic and trade relations must be seen as closely related to the geopolitical issues in the Gulf region, one of the “Action Points” of the Joint Communication is to “develop a cooperation mechanism for enhanced maritime security, building on Operation ATALANTA, EMASOH and the Coordinated Maritime Presence in the North-Western Indian Ocean” (EEAS, 2022). This demonstrates the EU’s willingness to enhance and prioritize cooperation with the Gulf region, including in maritime security.

Outside of the formal mechanisms led by the United States and Europe, both South and East Asia have stepped up their efforts in contributing to the protection of the region’s waters. Given the importance of maritime security to China’s Maritime Silk Road (MSR) and, consequently, its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China has built its only foreign military base in Djibouti, near the Bab el-Mandeb Strait (Shinn, 2021). China has also deployed Chinese naval forces and submarines and provided military escorts of ships in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait (Gambino, 2020). According to China’s state-run Xinhua news agency, “in the past ten years, the Chinese Navy has sent out 26,000 officers and soldiers, escorted 6,595 ships,

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and successfully rescued or aided more than 60 Chinese and foreign ships” (Panda, 2018). China also held joint anti-piracy drills in the Arabian Sea with Russian and Iranian navies in January 2022. According to the Chinese Defense Ministry, the joint anti-piracy drills aimed to enhance the “capabilities of the countries’ militaries in safeguarding strategic maritime routes” (Global Times, 2022). A press release by the Russian Defense Ministry stated that China sent the Type 052D guided missile destroyer *Urumqi* and the Type 903 comprehensive supply ship *Taihu* to the drill, which belong to the 39th Chinese Navy escort task force in the Gulf of Aden and the waters off Somalia (Global Times, 2022). In September 2022, China established the 42nd Chinese naval escort taskforce for escort missions in the region and completed the replenishment at sea in December 2022.

Next to China, India has also played a role in providing maritime security in the Gulf. India’s



military cooperation with the GCC has been increasing following the numerous attacks on the region's waters. In February 2019, Saudi Arabia and India released a joint statement following the state visit of HRH the Crown Prince and Prime Minister Prince Mohammed bin Salman to India, in which both countries "agreed to work together with other Indian Ocean Rim Countries for enhancing maritime security, vital for the security and prosperity of both countries and safe passage for international trade" as well as "agreed to cooperate and collaborate in joint defense production of spare parts for Naval and Land systems as well as supply chain development" (Embassy of India, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 2019).

The Indian Navy has carried out numerous maritime drills in the Red Sea, particularly with the UAE and Oman. The UAE and India's navies carry out regular joint exercises such as Gulf Star 1, PASSEX, and IDEX/NAVDEX. Most recently, India and Sudan held a joint naval exercise near the Suez Canal in September 2021. In addition, the Indian Navy's Western and Southern Naval Command have had numerous naval deployments and port visits in the Arabian Sea with more than 30 port calls in the GCC states between September 2013 and September 2018. The most recent was the Indian Navy's first training squadron arriving in Port Rashid in Dubai in October 2022. Both China and India are concerned with maritime security in the gulf, and holding drills is meant to encourage military cooperation, promote understanding, and maintain readiness of the Navies to work together toward a common goal.

Regional Responses to the Growing Maritime Threat

On a regional level, the GCC countries have taken steps to develop their navies in order to deter attacks on their waters. For example, Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Defense has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Navantia, a Spanish company, to build multi-

mission combat ships for the Royal Saudi Naval Forces (Arab News, 2022). The MoU comes at a time where the Kingdom is aiming to strengthen the capabilities of the Saudi defense ministry in order to enhance maritime security in the Gulf and protect the region's interests. HRH Prince Khalid bin Salman bin Abdulaziz, Saudi Arabia's Minister of Defense, asserted that "this MOU represents the latest effort to fulfill the vision of HRH the Crown Prince and Prime Minister to localize our military industry and empower and strengthen the capabilities of the Ministry of Defense, which will help provide security for our country and region" (Arab News, 2022). Furthermore, the MoU intends to promote up to 100% localization in the areas of naval shipbuilding, combat system integration, and ship maintenance in line with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030.

The UAE is similarly seeking to enhance its naval capabilities by becoming a leader in unmanned systems. In May 2021, Abu Dhabi Ship Building (ADSB), a part of the defense firm EDGE Group, announced its largest order so far, a \$982 million arms deal for four Falaj-3 offshore patrol vessels for the navy (Soubrier, 2021). UAE's defense conglomerate EDGE announced in November 2021 a partnership with Israel Aerospace Industries to develop unmanned surface vessels (USVs) (Vidal, 2022). Moreover, ASPIRE, Abu Dhabi's Advanced Technology Research Council's program management pillar, launched the Mohamed bin Zayed International Robotics Challenge (MBZIRC) Maritime Grand Challenge, which will be held in Abu Dhabi in June 2024. The MBZIRC Maritime Grand Challenge aims to bring experts together from around the world "to collaborate on finding a practical solution to global maritime security challenges such as illegal fishing, piracy, smuggling and human trafficking" with a focus on autonomous and unmanned aerial and surface vehicles (Mohamed bin Zayed International Robotics Challenge, 2022).



In March 2022, Qatar's Armed Forces, under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar, hosted the Doha International Maritime Defense Exhibition & Conference (DIMDEX). DIMDEX 2022 focused on the theme "Connecting the World's Maritime Defense and Security Community." The event brought together key decision makers from around the world to engage in commercial exchange, maritime showcases, and expert panel discussions that contribute to the global maritime defense and security complex (Doha International

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The naval forces of all six GCC nations actively contribute to regional, national, and international activities and exercises

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Maritime Defense Exhibition & Conference, 2022). Furthermore, during the conference, Italian defense contractor Leonardo and the Qatar Emirati Naval Forces (QENF) signed an agreement in which Leonardo will provide QENF with a "Naval Operation Centre (NOC) to ensure surveillance and control of territorial and adjacent water, Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), and to enhance cooperation with other national agencies in charge of maritime security" (Naval News, 2022).

January 31, 2022, Bahrain hosted the region's largest maritime exercise, the 18-day International Maritime Exercise (IMX) 2022. Led by US Naval Forces Central Command, the maritime exercise included more than 60 nations and international organizations, featuring 9,000 personnel and up to 50 ships operating across the Arabian Gulf, Arabian Sea, the Red Sea, the Gulf of Oman, and off the east coast of Africa in the Indian Ocean (Vavasseur, 2022). More recently, the navies of Saudi Arabia, the US, and the UK completed a maritime exercise called Nautical Defender in the Arabian Gulf in November 2022. The US Naval



Forces Central Command (NAVCENT) joined the British Royal Navy and Royal Saudi Navy's Eastern fleet during the exercise. In addition, Saudi Arabia and Sudan announced the launch of joint naval exercises called Fulk 5 to develop both navies further. Kuwait has also conducted joint drills with Iraq and US naval units.

Furthermore, on March 2022, Saudi Arabia hosted a GCC-US security meeting, which focused on maritime security and missile defense, under the GCC-US Strategic Partnership framework. The two working groups emphasized the significance of improving the GCC states' ability to address these risks by developing a "common vision for deterring the most pressing threats in the region from air, missile and maritime threats" (Aluwaisheg, 2022). According to Dr. Abdel Aziz Aluwaisheg, the GCC Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs and Negotiation, "a more comprehensive and sustained GCC-US dialogue on regional security is needed now more than ever to deal with emerging threats and to bolster cooperation in all areas" (Aluwaisheg, 2022). The Readout of the US-Gulf Cooperation Council Working Groups on Integrated Air and Missile Defense and Maritime Security states:

The United States and the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) convened Working Groups on Integrated Air and Missile Defense and Maritime Security at the GCC's headquarters in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on March 9. The Working Groups affirmed the longstanding defense partnership between the United States and the members of the GCC and reaffirmed a shared commitment to regional security under the framework of the GCC-US Strategic Partnership... The participants reaffirmed the November 2021 statement of the US-GCC Iran Working Group, again condemning Iran's malign behavior through proxies and direct use of advanced ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS)... The United States and GCC member states agreed on the

importance of advancing integrated defense initiatives to defend against and deter air, missile, and maritime threats. The United States and GCC member states welcomed opportunities to work together – including through joint training and exercises to prevent Iran from holding the region at risk through its proliferation and direct use of advanced ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, maritime weapons, and Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS), which pose a clear threat to regional security and stability (US Department of Defense, 2022).

Saudi Arabia has also hosted its second edition of the Saudi International Maritime Forum, in Jeddah, from November 15 to 17, 2022. The Saudi International Maritime Forum was organized by the Royal Saudi Naval Forces under the patronage of HRH Prince Khalid bin Salman bin Abdulaziz, the Kingdom's Minister of Defense. The forum was titled "Protecting Marine Units and Vital Coastal Sites Against the Threat of Unmanned Systems" and included over 37 authorities concerned with the maritime environment, in addition to navies of 15 countries, military specialists, and academics from inside and outside Saudi Arabia (Arab News, 2022). The forum featured many experts to discuss the threats to maritime security in the region and ways to deal with these threats to ensure the safety of sea lanes and the security of the global economy.

The GCC countries have further cooperated with regional states to enhance maritime security. For instance, the UAE discussed with Iran maritime border cooperation and the flow of shipping traffic in July 2019. Additionally, Qatar's Ministry of Defense has signed a Memorandum of Cooperation with Pakistan's Ministry of Defense of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan regarding the provision of ships by the Pakistan Navy for the security of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 (The Peninsula, 2022). Additionally, Kuwait has held joint maritime exercises in the Arabian Gulf alongside Iraq and the US to promote regional maritime security. Oman will also establish a joint Maritime Security

Centre with Iran and Pakistan, according to the Chief Commander of the Iranian Army's Navy, Rear Admiral Shahram Irani.

There is no question that strengthening the Gulf's maritime capacities to deter attacks in the region is a top security priority. Gulf security is an international topic that has triggered a multitude of international reactions. However, despite international and regional reactions, there are still pending issues and constant work that needs to be done in order to ensure maritime security in the Gulf. Thus, the plan moving forward should be well devised and take into consideration the evolving complexity of the region.

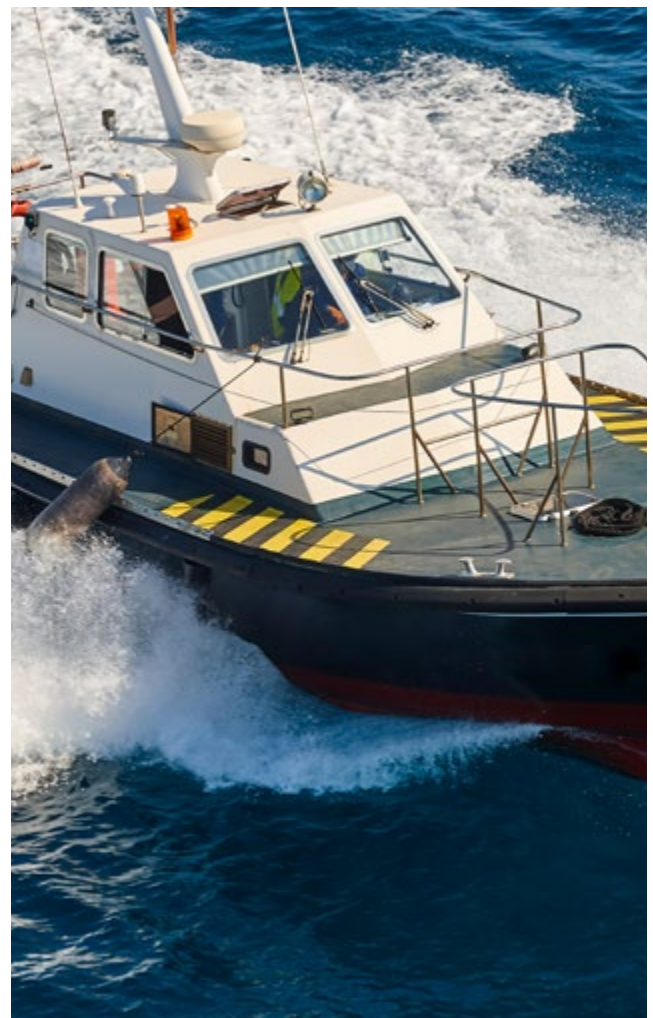
Moving Forward

Despite the region's success in intercepting missiles and drones, both the Houthis and Iran repeatedly demonstrate the threat that they pose to the Gulf region. The use of missiles and drones by the Houthis, as outlined earlier, validates the concerns that regional powers have over maritime security in the Gulf. Fears of hostility have been raised further following the failure of renewing the truce with Yemen, which ended on October 2, 2022. As a result, there is an increasing need to augment security assistance to the Gulf states.

The head of the Defense and Statecraft Program at the Centre for Security, Diplomacy and Strategy (CSDS) of the Brussels School of Governance, Daniel Fiott, has argued that a primary challenge here is the mismatch between the goals for maritime security in the Gulf and available naval assets (Fiott, 2022). For instance, according to Fiott, France is one of the countries that is reported to have witnessed an increase in operations in the Gulf region during a decline in naval capabilities. Studies have reported that European navies experienced a 30% decline in the total number of available frigates and destroyers and more than 20% of available submarines from 1999 to 2018 (Fiott, 2022). Therefore, Europe and the US need to better coordinate their own activities instead

of having purely separate missions. Alternatively, there needs to be a clear division of labor between the two missions. The US could focus on the bigger picture due to its greater military capabilities, while the EU concentrates on capacity-building and setting up a long-term system.

Another viable option would be enhanced trilateral cooperation between the GCC, the EU, and NATO. NATO can play a significant role in enhancing maritime security in the Gulf, with its Standing Naval Forces, capable of rapid deployment in times of crisis. The NATO naval force consists of two naval commands located in Naples, Italy and Northwood, UK, a submarine command located in Norfolk, Virginia, four fighting naval units commanded by France, Italy, Spain, and the UK, and a unit with advanced warfare capability commanded by the US (Keshk, 2021). Additionally,





through the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) between NATO and the Gulf countries, NATO can play a significant role in ensuring maritime safety in the region. NATO would be able to provide the Gulf region with the needed defense forces training and capacity building that the EU does not offer. NATO can provide this through its Operation Sea Guardian (OSG), Security Sector Reform (SSR), and Defense Institution Building (DIB) (Colombo, 2022).

At the 18th Manama Dialogue hosted by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), many prominent speakers called for international cooperation in ensuring maritime security for the Gulf. For instance, Air Marshal Martin Sampson, the Defense Senior Adviser to the Middle East and North Africa in the United Kingdom, stated that: “The best antidote to this challenge is to be found in the strength of our partnerships – military, industrial, academic – and the willingness of responsible nations to leverage our collective technological strengths, and ultimately our military power.” The UK, he explained, “believes the best response to this challenge is to be found in the collective power of our alliances and partners, including industry, academia and science, and to leverage this power to strengthen and defend not just our activities and our equipment, but also the international system.” General Michael Kurilla, Commander of the US Central Command, stated that “we need all of our partners in the region innovating with us. Together, through innovation, we can all do much more to advance the stability in the region.” Additionally, Dr. Ahmad Awad Bin Mubarak, the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Yemen, has also called on all international organizations, such as the United Nations (UN), “to do their duty in this regard and to study the humanitarian and economic impacts of such attacks and to tell the world about them.” Dominic Raab, the British Deputy Prime Minister called on the UN Security Council to “respond to Iran’s destabilizing actions and lack of respect for international law” (Arab News, 2021). In other words, the UN continues to be urged to hold Iran accountable for the attacks on the region.

Conclusion

The precarious situation of maritime security around the waters of the Arabian Peninsula will continue to preoccupy governments so long as the threats from piracy, from Iran or non-state actors such as the Houthis continue. Given that the Gulf is a vital area of maritime trade, in part because of the enormous oil resources, instability in the region has a direct impact on the world economy as well as maritime safety and transportation. Therefore, it is in the interests of the larger global community to assist the Gulf region with expanded maritime security. For the GCC states, developing their maritime security to deter Iranian and other attacks is a top national-security priority. Internationally speaking, the US and the EU should play a larger role, possibly merging their maritime missions. Moreover, the UN and NATO can have a significant impact in providing maritime security for the Gulf, be it through direct involvement or through providing training and support services. China and India can also use their strength and resources to provide additional support to protect the waterways in the region. In sum, maritime security is an international topic that is likely to scale the priority ladder when it comes to Gulf affairs.

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