



Gulf Research Center

Gulf Forum 2008

Gulf Security: Views and Options

Welcoming Remarks

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In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

Ladies and gentlemen,

On the opening day of the *Gulf Forum 2008*, I am pleased to welcome you all to Riyadh, in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

On behalf of the Gulf Research Center (GRC), and on my own behalf, it is my pleasure to extend my thanks to His Royal Highness Prince Faisal bin Saud bin Abdulaziz, Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia, for the support he has provided and for having kindly agreed to the convening of this forum in Riyadh. I would also like to thank the Institute of Diplomatic Studies in the Saudi

Ministry of Foreign Affairs for their commendable efforts to hold this forum in collaboration and coordination with the GRC.

I also want to thank you all for accepting the invitation of the GRC to participate in the *Gulf Forum*, where the GRC intends to examine and discuss one of the most important issues of today, namely Gulf security.

The main objective of the Forum is to highlight the current security situation in the Gulf region and envisage its future horizons in a sound scientific manner. The Forum seeks to shed light on the most important existing and potential sources of danger and threat, and discuss and analyze different viewpoints and approaches to realize security in the Gulf and their common denominators, as well as their feasibility and potential applicability in the light of available opportunities and existing limitations.

Within this framework, part of the proceedings and discussions of the Forum will be devoted to working out a unified vision for a stable security system in the Gulf region that can be adopted and promoted by the GCC states. This part of the Forum will discuss means of reinforcing the role of the GCC states and activating their participation in determining and implementing the defining features of this security system.

Security and stability in the Gulf region is not only in the interest of the GCC states, but of Gulf and regional countries as well. More importantly, it is a matter of global interest because of the Gulf region's economic and strategic importance owing to its oil reserves. Following from this, the prosperity of the global economy depends on security and stability in the Gulf region.

However, the Gulf region has not enjoyed security and stability since the late 1970s. The region has witnessed several wars beginning with the Iraq-Iran war, followed by the catastrophe of the occupation of Kuwait and the war to liberate it, and then the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, which resulted in the overthrow of the Saddam regime and ushered Iraq into a state of anarchy and insecurity. This might yet lead to a civil war resulting in the division of Iraq especially because certain groups are pushing towards this course of action.

If this happens, tattered Iraq will remain a fertile ground for extremist organizations, which will export their violent activities across the borders of Iraq.

If the Iraq issue is viewed as an erupting volcano, there are other smoldering volcanoes in the region. Foremost among these is the issue of the Iranian nuclear file. A military confrontation

over this is likely if the peaceful efforts to solve the issue fail. The gravity of this issue is exacerbated by the conflict between the US and Iran over the nuclear file and other issues. In fact, this is a conflict of wills and interests between a superpower and a regional one. The former suffers from a loss of its prestige and credibility, as well as ebbing influence on others and a distortion of its global image. The latter has ambitions and aspirations specific to the Gulf region.

In this context, the breakout of a new military conflict in the Gulf region will have devastating effects, both direct and indirect, on all the countries of the region. Besides, there are the dangers posed by organized terrorism, which is targeting some countries in the region and their capabilities. All this underlines the importance of discussing the means, requirements and prerequisites of establishing a stable security system in the Gulf region.

Honorable guests,

Perhaps you share my view that the question of Gulf security is currently one of the most complicated and intricate issues because political, economic and security considerations are involved. Domestic, regional and international factors too have an important impact on the region, making it one of the most vulnerable regions in the world with respect to external factors and variables. This aspect of Gulf security has important implications for the existing and potential sources of threat, which can be local, regional or international, or for the parties concerned with the Gulf security and the prerequisites of establishing a stable security environment in the region. Based on this, the issue of Gulf security must be considered in the context of several factors, the most important of which are:

- ◆ the multiple and contradictory viewpoints and perceptions of the Gulf, regional and international parties concerned with this issue
- ◆ the great discrepancies between the countries of the region in terms of capabilities
- ◆ increasing security apprehensions owing to some pending problems such as the problem of the three UAE islands occupied by Iran
- ◆ lack of any serious measures to build confidence on the Gulf level
- ◆ the aspirations of international and regional players exercising hegemony on the destinies of the Gulf countries.

The US policy in the region, marked by confusion and lack of wisdom, is a part of the problem and not part of the solution. Hence, quite frankly, we can say that the issue of foreign military presence in the region represents an important element in any discussion pertaining to Gulf security.

Though many regional and international parties are interested in Gulf security, the GCC states are the most concerned with this vital issue, because their economic prosperity and internal stability hinge on regional stability. These states, relatively small in terms of area, population and military capabilities, cannot isolate themselves from any wars or new military adventures in the Gulf; in fact, the ramifications of past conflicts continue to be felt even today.

The lessons of history testify to the fact that it is not possible to depend indefinitely on an external power for security. This is specially so because the policies of such a power are usually governed primarily by its interests and regional and international configurations. Hence, it is important that the GCC states develop plans to reinforce security and protect their interests in the short and long run. This must be based on developing their own military and security capabilities, on the one hand, and reinforcing military and security cooperation, on the other.

It is also important that the GCC states develop a balanced security vision to achieve regional security in the Gulf region taking into account the intricacies of Gulf security issues and the multiplicity of parties that are concerned with this issue.

If one is to employ the jargon of optics, the retina of any vision of the GCC states as regards protecting and realizing their interests, centers around upgrading the level of security and military cooperation to cope with the security challenges and meet the basic requirements in the light of the agreements concluded in this respect.

It is important to coordinate policies of armament and training, activate the systems and mechanisms of information exchange, and develop the forces of the 'Peninsula Shield' in conformity with present facts and developments and taking past lessons into account.

We believe that the development of a joint collective security framework is the most effective and valid option for the GCC states. No GCC country can face present and future risks and threats alone. This necessitates pooling military and security capabilities and coordinating plans and policies.

At this point, we must clearly emphasize that reinforcing security and military cooperation between the GCC states must be based on consensus among member states as regards the sources of danger and threats, and they must coordinate their foreign policies. Prior to this, any pending problems that negatively affect the relations between some member countries must be settled.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Any realistic and balanced vision posited by the GCC states to achieve security in the Gulf must be based on certain foundations and facts. Among these are:

- ◆ finding a solution to the Iraqi question on the basis of guaranteeing Iraq's sovereignty, and the unity and safety of its territories, and non-intervention in its internal affairs
- ◆ encouraging efforts targeting the achievement of a real national reconciliation in Iraq and
- ◆ supporting reconstruction efforts.

All this must be linked to a reasonable timetable for the pullout of foreign troops from Iraq.

The pillars of a stable security system in the Gulf region also include supporting the efforts for a peaceful settlement of the crisis over the Iranian nuclear program to spare the region the afflictions of a new war.

Admittedly, Iran has the right to peaceful use of nuclear energy. But it must respond to the international efforts seeking to settle this issue peacefully and reassure its neighbors of the nature of its nuclear program. Moreover, there is the UAE stance with respect to the solution of the problem of the islands, whether via direct negotiations or by referring it to the International Court of Justice.

Also, security and stability in Yemen is closely related to the security and stability in the Arabian Peninsula. Hence, the importance of intensifying the GCC states' efforts to help Yemen solve its internal problems comes to the fore. These internal problems include scarcity of economic resources, poverty, unemployment, domestic struggles, and the state's inability to enforce security in its territory.

In addition to the above, the issue of energy security must form a main element in any Gulf security system especially because many countries in the world which depend heavily on Gulf oil are also concerned about this issue. It follows that the question of energy security is a reciprocal responsibility between producers and consumers; it can be an area for international cooperation for laying down the props of security in the Gulf.

As we tackle Gulf security, we cannot overlook the connection between Gulf security, on the one hand, and the Arab-Israeli conflict, on the other. Israel has its ambitions and aspirations in the Gulf region.

Iran has close relations with influential parties and in the course of this conflict; Tehran often uses these relations in favor of its own agenda.

Also, the US is the major international power with influence in the Gulf region, especially because it has a direct military presence in the region. At the same time, it is the guarantor of Israel's security, providing it unlimited military, economic and political support. This often embarrasses Arab countries which have close relations with the USA.

In the light of the above, the settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict on the basis of the resolutions of international legitimacy will reinforce the opportunities and possibilities of security and stability in the Gulf.

The continuation of the internal reform process in the GCC states on the basis of thoroughly studied national agendas and programs constitutes an important element in reinforcing the capabilities of these states relating to protecting their security and realizing their interests.

Serious and real reform will include the following:

- ◆ diversifying sources of income,
- ◆ expanding the scope of political participation,
- ◆ firmly establishing state institutions,
- ◆ prevalence of the rule of law and values of citizenship,
- ◆ realizing social justice and,
- ◆ addressing the problems of bureaucracy, corruption and unemployment.

All this would promote the credibility of governing regimes, reinforce internal national unity, and uproot any external attempts to intervene in the domestic affairs of the GCC states.

Honorable guests,

I am quite certain that your participation in the Forum will enrich the discussions. It will ultimately enable us to come up with practical proposals to achieve Gulf security, and contribute to enabling the countries of the region ward off more conflict and ensure that the people of these countries can focus on development and construction efforts in order to overcome existing challenges and provide dignified living opportunities to the coming generations.

Once again I thank you and wish you all a pleasant stay in Riyadh. I hope that we will meet again on future occasions.

Asalamu alaikum wa Rahmatallah wa Barakatu