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# **The United Arab Emirates (UAE): Issues for U.S. Policy**

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## Summary

The UAE has been a significant U.S. partner in Gulf security for more than two decades, and the alliance has deepened further in recent years in order to address multiple regional threats. The two countries sometimes have differed on regional priorities and the optimal means to utilize to counter the perceived threats. The UAE has a long-standing territorial dispute with Iran and has implemented economic sanctions against it, even though doing so has adversely affected some of the UAE's large and politically influential trading community. Suggesting continued wariness of Iranian ambitions in the Gulf, the UAE has sought—and received—U.S. assurances that the United States will maintain its commitment to Gulf security despite the United States' agreeing to a comprehensive nuclear deal with Iran. Under a 1994 U.S.-UAE defense cooperation agreement (DCA), about 5,000 U.S. military personnel are stationed at UAE military facilities, particularly the large Al Dhafra air base. The UAE was the first Gulf state to order the most sophisticated missile defense system sold by the United States (the THAAD), demonstrating support for U.S. efforts to assemble a coordinated regional missile defense network against Iran.

In recent years, the UAE has become increasingly assertive, acting with other Gulf states, to counter Iran's regional influence and extremist Sunni Islamic organizations, sometimes to the point of undertaking military action that is not necessarily coordinated with the United States. The UAE has joined U.S.-led airstrikes against the Islamic State in Syria; financially assisted the military-led government of Egypt that ousted the elected Islamist president in 2013; supported moderate Islamist rebel groups in Syria; and worked against other Muslim Brotherhood-related organizations in the region such as Hamas. In 2011, the UAE joined the Saudi-led GCC intervention to help Bahrain suppress a major uprising by its Shiite majority, and the UAE joined U.S.-led airstrikes that helped oust Muammar Qadhafi of Libya. In August 2015, the UAE, in concert with Saudi Arabia, sent ground troops to Yemen to counter the Zaidi Shiite Houthi rebels there. Since 2003, the UAE has maintained over 200 troops in Afghanistan and participated in close air support missions there.

On domestic politics and human rights issues, the UAE's relatively open borders and economy have won praise from advocates of expanded freedoms in the Middle East. However, the social tolerance has not translated into significant political change; the country remains under the control of a small circle of leaders who allow citizen participation primarily through traditional methods of consensus-building. In 2006, the government began providing some formal popular participation through a public selection process for half the membership of its quasi-legislative body, the Federal National Council (FNC), but it has resisted further opening of the political process. The government is able to use the UAE's substantial wealth to maintain popular support, and it has been able to easily suppress the relatively small opposition consisting of both Islamist and secular dissenters.

Very few policy changes are anticipated should UAE President Shaykh Khalifa bin Zayid Al Nahayyan leave the scene unexpectedly. He suffered a stroke on January 24, 2014, and since then his younger brother, Shaykh Mohammad bin Zayid, has assumed governing responsibilities. President Khalifa has not appeared publicly since his stroke and the extent of his current governing role appears to be minimal, setting up the potential for a succession in the near future.

The UAE is considered among the wealthiest countries in the world because of the ratio between its government revenues and small population requiring services. It has received no U.S. aid since FY2011.

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## Governance, Human Rights, and Reform<sup>1</sup>

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a federation of seven emirates (principalities): Abu Dhabi, the oil-rich federation capital; Dubai, a large commercial hub; and the five smaller and less wealthy emirates of Sharjah, Ajman, Fujayrah, Umm al-Qaywayn, and Ras al-Khaymah. Sharjah and Ras al-Khaymah have a common ruling family—leaders of the Al Qawasim tribe. After Britain announced in 1968 that it would no longer ensure security in the Gulf, six “Trucial States” formed the UAE federation in December 1971; Ras al-Khaymah joined in 1972. The federation’s last major leadership transition occurred after the death of its key founder and first President, Shaykh Zayid bin Sultan Al Nuhayyan, long-time ruler of Abu Dhabi, on November 2, 2004.

Shaykh Zayid’s eldest son, Shaykh Khalifa bin Zayid al-Nuhayyan, born in 1948, was elevated from Crown Prince to ruler of Abu Dhabi upon Zayid’s death. In keeping with tradition, although not formal law, Khalifa was subsequently selected as UAE president by the leaders of all seven emirates who comprise the “Federal Supreme Council.” The ruler of Dubai traditionally serves concurrently as Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE; that position has been held by Shaykh Mohammad bin Rashid Al Maktum, architect of Dubai’s modernization drive, since the death of his elder brother Shaykh Maktum bin Rashid Al Maktum in January 2006. Shaykh Mohammad bin Rashid also continued as federation Defense Minister. At its review of senior leadership posts on November 3, 2009, the Federal Supreme Council decided that Shaykh Khalifa and Shaykh Mohammad bin Rashid would serve another five-year term. The review was mostly a formality because UAE leadership posts almost always change only in the event of death of an incumbent. The Federal Supreme Council meets four times per year to establish general policy guidelines, although the leaders of the seven emirates consult frequently with each other.

The leadership of the UAE was put into some doubt by Shaykh Khalifa’s stroke on January 24, 2014, for which he underwent surgery. He has not appeared publicly since, including at such high-profile events as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, and Oman) summit in Doha in December 2014 or the visit of Iraqi Prime Minister Haydar Al-Abadi later that month. If, as appears likely—and possibly relatively soon—Shaykh Khalifa is declared unable to continue as ruler, his younger brother and the third son of Shaykh Zayid, Crown Prince Shaykh Mohammad bin Zayid al-Nuhayyan (born in 1961) is almost certain to assume all Shaykh Khalifa’s posts. Shaykh Mohammad had already been assuming significant day-to-day governing responsibilities over the past few years. He and Shaykh Mohammad of Dubai have long been considered the key strategists of UAE foreign and defense policy. Several senior UAE officials are other brothers that are close to Shaykh Mohammad, including Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayid, deputy Prime Minister Mansur bin Zayid, Interior Minister Sayf bin Zayid, and UAE national security adviser Hazza bin Zayid.

The Crown Prince of Dubai is Shaykh Mohammad bin Rashid’s son, Hamdan bin Mohammad Al Maktum, who heads the “Dubai Executive Committee,” the equivalent of a cabinet for Dubai emirate. Under a Dubai-level reorganization announced in January 2010, five committees were set up to advise the Executive Committee on major issues.

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<sup>1</sup> Much of this section is from the State Department’s country report on human rights practices for 2013 (released February 27, 2014), <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/220592.pdf>. *International Religious Freedom Report for 2013* (July 28, 2014), <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2013&dliid=222317#wrapper>; and the *Trafficking in Persons Report for 2014* (July 24, 2014), <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/226849.pdf>. See also the Human Rights Watch “World Report 2014.” <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2014/country-chapters/united-arab-emirates>.

**Table I. Some Basic Facts About the UAE**

Population	9 million+, of whom about 1 million (about 12%) are citizens.
Religions	The citizenry is almost all Muslim, of which 85% are Sunni and 15% are Shiite. Of the total population, 76% is Muslim; 9% is Christian; and 15% is other—but primarily Buddhist or Hindu.
Ethnic Groups	11% Emirati (citizenry); 29% other Arab and Iranian; 50% South Asian; 10% Western and other Asian expatriate
Size of Armed Forces	About 50,000
Inflation Rate (2014)	About 1.0%
GDP Growth Rate for 2013	4% estimated by IMF
GDP (2014)	\$417 billion. Per capita is over \$30,000.
Oil Exports	About 2.7 million barrels per day
Foreign Assets/Sovereign Wealth Reserves	About \$575 billion.
U.S. Exports to the UAE (2013)	\$24.5 billion, making UAE the largest U.S. export market in the Arab world and a 50% increase since 2011. Goods sold to UAE are mostly machinery, commercial aircraft, industrial materials, and other high value items.
Imports from UAE by the United States (2013)	\$2.3 billion. None of that amount was crude oil.
U.S. citizens resident in UAE	About 60,000
Major Projects	Dubai inaugurated “Burj Khalifa,” world’s tallest building, on January 4, 2010. Burj al-Arab hotel in Dubai bills itself as “world’s only 7-star hotel.” Abu Dhabi has built local branches of Guggenheim and Louvre museums.

**Sources:** CIA, *The World Factbook*; U.S. Census Bureau, Foreign Trade Statistics.

The leaders of the other individual emirates are Dr. Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qassimi (Sharjah); Saud bin Saqr Al Qassimi (Ras al-Khaymah, see below); Humaid bin Rashid Al Nuaimi (Ajman); Hamad bin Muhammad Al Sharqi (Fujayrah); and Saud bin Rashid Al-Mu’alla (Umm al-Qaywayn). Shaykh Saud of Umm al-Qaywayn, who is about 65 years old, was named leader of that emirate in January 2009 upon the death of his father, Shaykh Rashid Al-Mu’alla. These five emirates, often called the “northern emirates,” tend to be more politically and religiously conservative and homogenous than are Abu Dhabi and Dubai, which are urban amalgams populated by many Arab, South Asian, and European expatriates.

In Ras al-Khaymah, there was a brief leadership struggle upon the October 27, 2010, death of the ailing longtime ruler, Shaykh Saqr bin Mohammad Al Qassim. He was succeeded by Shaykh Saud bin Saqr, who had been crown prince/heir apparent since 2003, when the ruler removed Saud’s elder brother, Shaykh Khalid bin Saqr, from that position. During 2003-2010, using public relations campaigns in the United States and elsewhere, Shaykh Khalid claimed to remain as heir apparent even though the UAE federal government had repeatedly stated that his removal from that position was legitimate and that he held no official position in the UAE. Shaykh Khalid’s home in Ras al-Khaymah was surrounded by security forces the night Shaykh Saqr died, enforcing the succession of Shaykh Saud.

Figure I. Map of United Arab Emirates



Source: CRS Graphics.

## Political Reform and Responses to Opposition

The UAE is not considered by any U.S. or outside organization to be a democracy, but its perceived social tolerance and distribution of ample wealth have apparently rendered the bulk of the population satisfied with the political system. With the exception of some youth and intellectual-led activism that increased during the Arab uprisings of 2011, there has been little public clamor for more rapid political reform in the UAE. The government has moved against the activism with arrests, prosecutions, and monitoring of the Internet and social media—none of which apparently has included significant government use of force.

UAE leaders long argued that Western-style democracy is not needed in UAE because Emiratis are able to express their concerns directly to the leadership through traditional consultative mechanisms. Most prominent among these channels are the open *majlis* (councils) held by many UAE leaders. UAE officials maintain that Western-style political parties and elections for a legislature or other representative body would aggravate schisms among tribes and clans and cause Islamist factions to become radical. Minister of State for Federal National Council (FNC, discussed below) Affairs Anwar Gargash wrote in a UAE paper (*The National*) on August 26, 2012, that “The UAE’s end goal is not a liberal multiparty system. This model does not

correspond with our cultural or historical development.”<sup>2</sup> His comments came following an August 1, 2012, announcement by several Islamists of the formation of a political party called “Al Umma”—a violation of UAE law that forbids citizens from forming political parties.

Since its founding, the UAE leadership has provided formal popular representation in government through a 40-seat Federal National Council (FNC) that can review and recommend, but not enact or veto, federal legislation. The FNC can question, but not impeach, ministers and has conducted such “grillings” in recent years. Its sessions are open to the public. The seat distribution of the FNC is weighted in favor of Abu Dhabi and Dubai, which each hold eight seats, while Sharjah and Ras al-Khaymah have six each, and the others each have four. Each emirate also has its own all-appointed consultative council. The government has not implemented calls—such as a March 2011 petition signed by 160 UAE intellectuals—to transform the FNC into an all-elected body with full legislative powers.<sup>3</sup>

*Elections First Held in 2006.* Until 2006, the seats on the FNC were all appointive. That year, the UAE leadership apparently assessed that it had fallen too far behind its Gulf neighbors on political reform. In December 2006, it conducted a limited electoral process for half of the FNC seats, with the other 20 FNC seats remaining appointive. The 2006 electorate was initially limited to about 100 persons for each FNC seat, appointed or elected, or about 4,000 total electors, but the Election Commission approved a slightly larger 6,595-person electorate (160 persons per seat. Of the total electors, 1,162 were women (less than 20%). Out of the 452 candidates for the 20 FNC elected seats, there were 65 female candidates. Only one woman was elected (from Abu Dhabi), but another seven were given appointed seats.

*September 24, 2011, FNC Election.* In the September 24, 2011, FNC election—which occurred in the context of the “Arab spring” uprisings that inspired demands for more popular input in the Arab states—the government expanded the size of the electorate to 129,000 electors, or “voters” (30 times as many as the 2006 election process). A total of 468 candidates filed to run for the 20 seats up for election on September 24, 2011, including 85 women—little more than the number of candidates who filed to run in the 2006 process. However, the 2011 electorate was nearly half female, in contrast to the fewer than 20% electors in the 2006 process. Candidate spending was not allowed to exceed \$545,000. There was little active campaigning and turnout was about 25%, which UAE officials called disappointing.

Of the 20 winners, only one was female (Sheika Isa Ghanem)—from Umm Al Quwain, one of the more conservative emirates. It was believed that female candidates would have the best chance of winning in the far more liberal Dubai emirate. Other winners were elected along tribal lines; in Abu Dhabi, three of the four winners were from the Al Amiri tribe. Of the 20 appointed seats, six were women, bringing the total number of women in the FNC to seven. The government selected as FNC Speaker an appointed male member, well-known writer Mohammad al-Murr. It also appointed Amal al-Qubaisi as deputy speaker, making her the first woman to hold so high a position in any GCC representative body.

## **Government Handling of Opposition**

Inspired by the 2011 Arab uprisings and dissatisfied with the slow pace of reform, some UAE intellectuals, businessmen, students, and other groups have agitated—using primarily social media—for greater political space. Some UAE youth used various social media outlets to try to

<sup>2</sup> Anwar Gargash. “Amid Challenges, UAE Policies Engage Gradual Reforms.” *The National*, August 26, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Al Jazeera News Network, March 9, 2011.



organize a protest on March 25, 2011, but no significant demonstration materialized. The government blocked some, but not all, of the social media advertisements for the protest.

The government attempted to address the activism and other popular demands. In March 2011, it invested about \$1.5 billion in utilities infrastructure of the poorer, northern emirates; it raised military pensions by 70%; and it introduced subsidies for some foodstuffs. In March 2013, the government announced a “new look” cabinet to bring in youthful figures and ideas. Suhail al-Mazroui, widely considered a dynamic figure, was appointed Energy Minister. Abu Dhabi royal family member, Shaykh Abdullah bin Mubarak al-Nuhayyan, was appointed Minister of Culture, Youth and Social Development with a mandate to reach out to UAE youth. The most prominent female minister, Minister of Foreign Trade Shaykha Lubna Al Qassimi, was given a higher profile role as head of a new Ministry of Development and International Cooperation, responsible for UAE foreign aid and relations with international bodies.

The government also employed some repressive measures, even though public demonstrations did not materialize and the opposition appeared to be of no threat to the government. Five well-known online activists—the so-called “UAE-5”—were arrested and tried during 2011, but human rights organizations said their trials violated basic rights of the accused. The five were given jail terms in November 2011, but their sentences were commuted and they were released.

A prominent tool the government has used against critics, particularly those who use social media to promote their views, is a “cybercrimes decree” issued by President Khalifa on November 13, 2012 (Federal Legal Decree No. 5/2012). It established a legal base to prosecute and jail people who use information technology to promote dissent. According to Human Rights Watch, Article 28 of the decree provides for imprisonment and large fines for anyone who uses information technology to “incite actions that endanger state security or infringe on the public order.” Article 30 provides for life imprisonment for anyone using such technology to advocate the overthrow or change of the system of governance. Several activists have been jailed for violating the decree, including one who was jailed for producing a video parodying youths in Dubai.

### ***Efforts Against Domestic Islamists/Muslim Brotherhood***

The UAE leadership asserts that domestic allies of the region-wide Muslim Brotherhood organization—particularly a UAE affiliate called Islah (Reform)—constitute a threat to the state. Islah is one of the oldest and best organized groups in the UAE, first appearing there in 1974 as a Brotherhood offshoot. It attracts followers who generally live in the poorer and more religiously conservative northern emirates, and it does not have a history of committing violent acts. In November 2014, the government identified Islah and the Brotherhood as two of 85 groups—most of which are regional radical Islamist groups such as the Afghan Taliban, Al Qaeda, and the Islamic State organization—that it considers “terrorist groups” for domestic purposes.<sup>4</sup>

The UAE government began to move against domestic Islamists assertively after Muslim Brotherhood member Mohammad Morsi was elected President of Egypt in 2012. UAE officials accused Islah of obtaining financial and other support from the Brotherhood in Egypt and of having ties to Yusuf Qaradawi, a pro-Brotherhood Egyptian cleric resident in Qatar.<sup>5</sup> In 2012, the UAE arrested and revoked the citizenship of several senior Islah members, including one who belongs to the royal family of Ras al-Khaymah (Dr. Sultan al-Qasimi). In July 2013, the UAE State Security Court sentenced 69 out of 94 UAE nationals “UAE-94”—all of whom were

<sup>4</sup> “UAE Lists Scores of Groups as ‘Terrorists.’” Al Jazeera, November 16, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> “UAE Targets Muslim Brotherhood in Crackdown on Dissent,” BBC, September 26, 2012.

arrested during 2011 to 2013 for allegedly forming a secret Brotherhood-affiliated network to overthrow the UAE government. They received sentences from 7 to 15 years. The other 26 were acquitted. In February 2015, three sisters were detained for protesting the “unfair trial” of their brother, Dr. Issa al-Suwaidi, who was one of the jailed “UAE 94.”

In June 2013, UAE authorities referred another 30 persons, of which 20 are Egyptian nationals, to the same court for alleged connections to the main Muslim Brotherhood organization in Egypt. Their trial started on November 5, 2013, and they were sentenced in January 2014 to five years in prison. On January 21, 2014, the Federal Supreme Court ordered the closure of all offices and branches of the Brotherhood. In August 2014, the government detained ten Libyan businessmen allegedly tied to the Brotherhood, according to the Human Rights Watch annual report for 2014. In August 2015, the government announced that it would try 41 Islamists for allegedly forming a terrorist group in the UAE that intended to establish a so-called caliphate there. The charges appeared to link those arrested to the Islamic State, which has announced a caliphate in parts of Iraq and Syria and is discussed below.

The disagreements between Qatar and the UAE and other GCC states over the Muslim Brotherhood and other political Islamist movements—which have narrowed in 2015—are discussed further in the section on foreign policy.

### **U.S. Democracy Promotion Efforts and UAE Restrictions**

U.S. official criticism of the UAE’s measures against dissent has been episodic and relatively minor – reaction that human rights observers attribute in large part to the close U.S.-UAE strategic alliance. In recent years, official accounts of virtually all high-level U.S.-UAE meetings have focused almost entirely on regional and security issues. Still, the United States continues to promote democracy, rule of law, and civil society in the UAE with State Department programs that are accepted or tolerated by the UAE government. Such programs, funded largely by State Department programs such as the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), promote student and women’s political participation, entrepreneurship, legal reform, civil society, independent media, and international trade law compliance. The U.S. Embassy in Abu Dhabi houses a MEPI office/staff that runs the MEPI programs throughout the Gulf region.

Still, suggesting its sensitivity to activities that could empower domestic opposition groups, the UAE has acted against some U.S. and European democracy promotion groups. In April 2012, the government closed the National Democratic Institute (NDI) office in Dubai, and briefly barred both its American director and Serbian deputy director from leaving the country. NDI had been working for four years, with license from the UAE government and U.S. funding, to promote women’s rights and to advise on municipal governance. The government also shut down the office of the Germany-based Konrad Adenauer Foundation, which was performing similar work. The UAE government asserted that these organizations were unacceptably meddling in UAE internal affairs.

Similarly, international criticism of the UAE crackdown on oppositionists has been muted. On October 26, 2012, the European parliament adopted a resolution criticizing the crackdown. The UAE government claimed the resolution was based on erroneous information from UAE bloggers and other activists. Several European governments publicly disagreed with the European parliament resolution. And, the resolution did not prevent the UAE from assuming a seat on the U.N. Human Rights Council on November 12, 2012.

## **Other Human Rights-Related Issues**

The State Department human rights report for 2014 analyzes the government's actions against dissent, and asserts that there are unverified reports of torture, government restrictions of freedoms of speech and assembly, and lack of judicial independence.<sup>6</sup> Recent years' Human Rights Watch's "World Report," issued each January, present similar findings. There are a relatively few UAE organizations that monitor the government's human rights performance; they include the Jurists' Association's Human Rights Committee, the Emirates Human Rights Association (EHRA), and the Emirates Center for Human Rights (ECHR).

## **Media and Research Institute Freedoms**

In concert with its focused efforts against vocal domestic opponents, the UAE government has increasingly restricted media freedoms since the 2011 Arab uprisings – altering its prior reputation for allowing free and open media. Post-2011 measures go beyond those in a 2009 media law that allowed for penalties against journalists who personally criticize UAE leaders. A "National Media Council" directly oversees all media content, and provisions governing media licensing do not clearly articulate the standards the government will apply in evaluating license applications. Restrictions do not apply to the "Free Zones" in UAE in which foreign media operate. International media organizations report that the government has banned some journalists from entering the country, and prohibited distribution of some books and articles that criticize government policies or highlight human rights abuses.

There have also been increasing restrictions on research institutes, several of which had opened in UAE in the 1990s because of the perceived free expression. The government applied increasingly strict criteria to renewing the licenses of such research institutes and some, such as the Dubai-based Gulf Research Center (GRC), left the UAE entirely. In November 2012, the UAE ordered the Rand Corporation to close its office in Abu Dhabi, which was focused on research in education, public safety, and environmental health. UAE officials also have denied entry to some academics and human rights organizations representatives who have been critical of the UAE human rights record.<sup>7</sup> In February 2013, the American University of Sharjah cancelled a conference on the "Arab Spring" because a speaker from the London School of Economics was denied entry.

## **Justice/Rule of Law**

The UAE constitution provides for an independent judiciary but, according to the State Department, court decision are subject to review by the political leadership. Local rulers review criminal and civil cases before referral to prosecutors as well as specific sentences—the rulers' decisions supersede those of any court. A 2012 amendment to the UAE constitution set up a "Federal Judicial Council" chaired by UAE President Khalifa. His deputy on that body is the chair of the Federal Supreme Court. UAE officials said the additional judicial body was needed to decide on all matters relating to the judiciary, judges, and judicial policies and legislation, but human rights groups objected to President Khalifa's position on the body as increasing political influence over the judiciary. As a possible example of the lack of judicial independence, in January 2010, a UAE court acquitted the UAE president's brother of torturing an Afghan

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<sup>6</sup><http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm#wrapper>

<sup>7</sup> CRS conversations with UAE officials. 2012-2015.

merchant, ruling that he was not liable because he was taking prescription drugs that affected his actions.

The UAE has a dual court system. Sharia (Islamic law) courts adjudicate criminal and family law matters. Civil courts, based on French and Egyptian legal systems, adjudicate civil matters. The federal judiciary in the UAE began in 1973 with the establishment of the Federal Supreme Court. The federal judiciary now comprises the Federal Supreme Court, Federal First Instance Courts, and Federal Appeal Courts. The Federal Supreme Court consists of a president and a maximum number of five judges appointed by a decree issued by the President of the UAE and confirmed by the Federal Supreme Council. That Court adjudicates disputes erupting between emirates or between an emirate and the UAE federal government; the constitutionality of federal and other laws and legislations; conflicts of jurisdiction between the federal and local judicial authorities in the UAE or between emirates; and crimes directly affecting the interests of the UAE federation. It also interprets the provisions of the constitution and questions ministers and senior federal officials for official misconduct. Under the constitution, each emirate has the right to join the federal judiciary system or maintain its own judicial system, and Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Ras al-Khaimah have opted for the latter arrangement. Foreign nationals hold many positions in the judiciary, making them subject to political influence because they can be threatened with deportation.

The UAE justice system has often come under criticism when expatriates are involved. Western expatriates have sometimes been arrested for sexual activity on UAE beaches. Arrests of noncitizens increased during the 2008-2009 financial crisis, possibly out of citizen frustration that globalization and dramatic economic expansion led to bursting of the economic “bubble” in UAE. In 2007, human rights groups criticized the conservative-dominated justice system for threatening to prosecute a 15-year-old French expatriate for homosexuality, a crime in UAE, when he was raped by two UAE men; the UAE men were later sentenced for sexual assault and kidnapping. In August 2012, a 78-year-old pediatrician from South Africa, Cyril Karabus, was imprisoned for alleged issues of malpractice related to his six-week service as a doctor in Abu Dhabi in 2002.<sup>8</sup> He was jailed for two months and prevented from leaving the UAE until June 2013. In July 2013, a Norwegian woman was sentenced to 16 months in jail by a Dubai court for having sex outside marriage after she reported being raped. She was released in late July 2013.

## **Women’s Rights**

Progress on women’s political rights has been steady, and observers say the UAE is perhaps the only country in the Middle East where women are fully accepted socially working in high-paying professions such as finance and banking. There are four women in the cabinet: two ministers and two ministers without portfolio. Seven women are in the FNC and several others serve on consultative councils in some of the individual emirates. About 10% of the UAE diplomatic corps is female, whereas there were no female diplomats prior to 2001; one, Lana Nusseibeh, is the country’s Permanent Representative to the United Nations. The UAE Air Force has four female fighter pilots, one of whom has participated prominently in UAE air operations in Syria.

More broadly, women in the UAE are still at a legal disadvantage relative to men, for example in divorce cases and other family law issues. However, as of December 2011, UAE women are allowed to pass on their citizenship to their children—the first GCC state to allow this. Many domestic service jobs are performed by migrant women, and they are denied basic legal protections such as limits to work hours.

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<sup>8</sup> Lydia Polgreen. “Emirates’ Laws Trap a Doctor Just Passing Through.” *New York Times*, April 12, 2013.

## **Religious Freedom**

According to recent State Department reports on international religious freedom, the constitution provides for freedom of religion but also declares Islam as the official religion of the country. The death penalty for conversion from Islam remains in law, but is not known to be enforced. In practice, non-Muslims in UAE are free to practice their religion; there are at least 35 churches built on land donated by the ruling families of the various emirates, but there are no Jewish synagogues or Buddhist temples. There is a Sikh temple that shares a building with one of two existing Hindu temples. Many Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, and Jews conduct religious ceremonies in private homes and in hotels or other rented locations, apparently without interference.

The Shiite Muslim minority is free to worship and maintain its own mosques, but Shiite mosques receive no government funds and there are no Shiites in top federal posts. At times, the government has acted against non-UAE Shiite Muslims because of their perceived support for Iran, Syrian President Bashar Al Assad, Lebanese Hezbollah, and the Shiite opposition in Bahrain. The government has closed a Shiite madrassa (school) and it has denied permission to UAE Shiites to host meetings of worldwide Shiites. The government has deported some foreign Shiites and the UAE and other GCC states have discussed possibly expelling Lebanese Shiites as retaliation for Lebanese Hezbollah's support for the Assad regime, but the GCC states have not taken such action to date.

## **Labor Rights/Foreign Worker Rights**

UAE law prohibits all forms of compulsory labor, but it is not enforced effectively. On several occasions, foreign laborers working on the large, ambitious construction projects throughout the country have conducted strikes to protest poor working conditions and nonpayment of wages. There have been numerous and persistent allegations that foreign workers—most recently those working on projects on Saadiyat Island in Abu Dhabi—are housed in cramped “labor camp” conditions, have their passports held, are denied wages or paid late, are forced to work long hours, are deported for lodging complaints, and are subjected to many other abuses. In May 2014, the government arrested foreign laborers striking to protest many of the conditions discussed above in the course of building a facility for New York University's (NYU's) branch in Abu Dhabi.<sup>9</sup> NYU apologized to the workers for being excluded from a labor “code of conduct” that covers migrant workers in the UAE and said it would work with Abu Dhabi authorities to rectify their alleged mistreatment. In April 2015, NYU pledged to financially compensate the several hundred migrant workers whose rights were infringed. In the past, the Labor Ministry has addressed similar complaints by penalizing employers and establishing a process (June 2008) to have workers' salaries deposited directly in banks.

## **Human Trafficking**

Other social problems might be a result of the relatively open economy of the UAE. The UAE is still considered a “destination country” for women trafficked from Asia and the former Soviet Union. The Trafficking in Persons report for 2015 again placed the UAE in “Tier 2”—the same level as in the reports for the four prior years.<sup>10</sup> The Tier 2 placement was determined, as it was in

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<sup>9</sup> Ariel Kaminer and Sean O'Driscoll. “Workers at N.Y.U.'s Abu Dhabi Site Faced Harsh Conditions.” *New York Times*, May 19, 2014.

<sup>10</sup> Section on UAE in State Department Trafficking in Persons Report: 2015.  
<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/243562.pdf>



the prior years, on the grounds that the UAE does not meet the minimum standards for eliminating human trafficking, but is taking significant efforts to do so.

The 2015 report notes, as do previous years' reports, that UAE authorities have prosecuted and punished sex trafficking offenders. It prosecuted 14 sex trafficking cases in 2014. However, the UAE efforts against forced labor—including unlawful withholding of passports, restrictions on movement, nonpayment of wages, and physical or sexual abuse of workers—have been less significant. An issue in previous years had been trafficking of young boys as camel jockeys, but that issue was largely alleviated with repatriation of many of those trafficked, and the use of robot jockeys at camel races. Since 2013, the UAE government utilized a government fund to help human trafficking victims rebuild their lives; the funds are channeled through the Ewa'a organization, in conjunction with the UAE's "National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking." Ewa'a runs shelters in several UAE emirates for trafficking victims. The government opened its first shelter for male sexual trafficking victims in late 2013. The government seeks to assist victims of human trafficking through a Human Rights Office at Dubai International Airport.

## Foreign Policy and Defense Issues

In late 1981, after the start of the Iran-Iraq war in 1980 and ten years after its own formation, the UAE entered into an alliance with five other Gulf monarchy states—Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman—to form the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). After the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the UAE and other GCC states determined that they needed a close security relationship with the United States to protect not only from Iraq but from the potential threat from Iran. The U.S.-UAE relationship has since remained central to UAE foreign and security policy, even as it pursues an assertive stance against regional Muslim Brotherhood organizations that diverges somewhat from the Obama Administration.

Beyond securing the UAE itself, the UAE's core foreign policy interest is to secure the GCC as a whole. The GCC leaders have increasing military and political coordination among them as Iran and the international community negotiated an agreement to limit Iran's nuclear program. Most, if not all, the GCC leaders appeared concerned, at least in part, that the deal ("Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, JCPOA, finalized on July 14, 2015) could cause the United States to de-emphasize its commitments to Gulf security. The GCC summit in Doha in early December 2014 agreed to a plan to establish a joint military command and joint naval force to be based in Bahrain, and supported by an Abu Dhabi-based "Gulf Academy for Strategic and Security Studies." Earlier GCC plans to establish joint forces and command structures repeatedly faltered over disagreements within the GCC on details and limitations in manpower. All of the GCC states still apparently prefer to deal with the United States bilaterally rather than adopting the U.S. preference to coordinate with the GCC as a bloc.

On most security and foreign policy issues, as discussed in the sections below, the UAE and de-facto GCC leader Saudi Arabia converge. In March 2011, the UAE contributed 500 police officers to a Saudi-led GCC military intervention in Bahrain to support the Al Khalifa regime against a Shiite-led uprising. At least some of the UAE force remained after that time, and one UAE police officer was killed, along with two Bahrain police, in an opposition bombing in Manama on March 4, 2014. The UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Qatar also have provided financial help to the two least wealthy GCC states, Bahrain and Oman. In May 2013, the UAE pledged \$5 million to a G-8 countries "Transition Fund" to help Bahrain, Oman, and other Arab countries experiencing unrest.

At the same time, the UAE and the other smaller Gulf states remain wary of ceding too much GCC authority to Saudi Arabia. The UAE and the other smaller Gulf states, with the exception of Bahrain, have opposed a plan advanced by Saudi Arabia in 2013 for political unity among the GCC states. The UAE's past border disputes and other disagreements with Saudi Arabia occasionally flare. A 1974 "Treaty of Jeddah" with Saudi Arabia formalized Saudi access to the Persian Gulf via a corridor running through UAE, in return for UAE gaining formal control of villages in the Buraymi oasis area.

## **Main Adversary: Iran**

UAE leaders, as do most of the other GCC leaders, consistently assert that the perceived threat from Iran is a core UAE foreign policy and defense interest. All the GCC states cooperate with U.S. efforts to counter Iran's destabilizing regional activities, although there are differences among the GCC states over how extensively to engage Iran directly. In joint statements, the GCC states publicly backed the JCPOA while calling for increased U.S.-GCC coordination to counter Iran's support for its regional allies and proxies, such as Syrian President Bashar Al Assad and Lebanese Hezbollah.

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

In October 2008—two months after the UAE protested Iran's opening in August 2008 of administrative and maritime security offices on Abu Musa—the UAE and Iran signed an agreement to establish a joint commission to resolve the dispute. Iran later allowed Sharjah to open power and water desalination facilities on the island, but the dispute flared again on April 11, 2012, when then-President Ahmadinejad visited Abu Musa and spoke to the inhabitants there, mostly Iranian fishermen. The UAE withdrew its ambassador from Tehran, and UAE officials said the action undermined many months of quiet UAE-Iran diplomacy on the issue, including the naming of negotiators on both sides. Iran incurred further UAE criticism with a May 2, 2012, visit to the island by Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Commander-in-Chief Mohammad Ali Jafari to discuss making the island a tourist hub.

The JCPOA might improve prospects to resolve the islands issue. Since the implementation of an interim nuclear agreement as of January 2014, the UAE and Iranian foreign ministers have exchanged visits and agreed to bilateral discussions on the status of Abu Musa. Iran also reportedly began reducing its presence on the island. Experts say the two countries are discussing a possible solution under which Iran might cede control of the disputed islands in exchange for rights to the seabed around them.<sup>11</sup>

Aside from the islands issue, UAE officials, particularly those from Abu Dhabi, have long asserted that the large Iranian-origin community in Dubai emirate (estimated at 400,000 persons) could pose a "fifth column" threat to UAE stability. This large population of Iranian expatriates is a product of long-standing UAE-Iran commercial ties; many Iranian firms and individuals—

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<sup>11</sup> Awad Mustafa. "Iran, UAE Close to Deal on Hormuz Islands." *Defense News*, December 9, 2013.

primarily in the import-export business—operate from the UAE, taking advantage of the UAE’s drive to position itself as a global trading and financial hub. At the same time, the UAE seeks to deny Iran any justification for aggression or adverse action against the UAE, and it allowed then Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to hold a rally for Iranian expatriates in Dubai in 2007.

The extensive Iranian commercial presence in the UAE gives the United States ample opportunity to enlist the UAE in a multilateral effort to stiffen international sanctions on Iran. Since 2010, when international sanctions on Iran began tightening dramatically, UAE-Iran trade has dropped from \$23 billion annually to about \$4 billion, a decline that has economically harmed the powerful UAE trading community. Much of the trade between the two consists of re-exportation of U.S. and European goods to Iran. In October 2010, the UAE government directed its banks to fully comply with the restrictions outlined in U.N. Security Council Resolution 1929 (adopted June 9, 2010). In February 2012, the Noor Islamic Bank in Dubai, which Iran used to process much of its receipts of hard currency for its oil sales internationally,<sup>12</sup> announced it would no longer handle transactions with Iranian banks. UAE officials say that Iranian-owned banks that continue to operate in UAE, including Bank Saderat and Bank Melli, do so only in cash and are relatively inactive. Closing them would, according to UAE officials, unduly antagonize Iran.

The UAE and other Gulf oil producers have cooperated with U.S. efforts to reduce Iran’s oil income by offering to sell more oil to countries that want to reduce their buys from Iran. Still, some small firms in the UAE continue to supply gasoline to Iran even though such activity is potentially subject to sanctions under the Iran Sanctions Act (P.L. 104-172, as amended). Some UAE firms have been sanctioned under the act for those sales.

## **Growing UAE Involvement in Regional Issues**

Prior to the 2011 Arab uprisings, the UAE tended to undertake regional action only in concert with the United States and with the other GCC states. Since 2011, the UAE has become more active in the region, particularly in its use of its relatively small military. Politically, the UAE has taken an assertive stand opposed to regional Islamist movements, particularly those linked to the Muslim Brotherhood. This stance has manifested in UAE policies on such diverse regional issues as those affecting Egypt, Libya, Syria, and the Palestinian territories, where factions linked to the Brotherhood operate. The UAE views the Brotherhood as a threat not only to the UAE domestically but also the other GCC states and to regional stability more broadly. Some critics assert that the UAE position represents support for “counter-revolution” that resists progress toward democracy that was hoped for as a product of the 2011 Arab uprisings.

The UAE (and Saudi) assertiveness has sometimes contributed to rifts within the GCC. Saudi Arabia and Bahrain have aligned with the UAE’s position on regional Islamist movements, whereas Qatar supports Brotherhood-linked organizations as representing the future of the Middle East region. The differences caused the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain to recall their ambassadors from Qatar in March 2014. They returned the ambassadors to Doha in November 2014 following an agreement that the GCC countries will strive to better coordinate their foreign policies and not work against each other’s interests. The rift has since largely faded, in part because Saudi Arabia’s new King Salman has de-emphasized combatting regional Islamist movements in favor of more assertive steps to counter Iran and its allies and proxies.

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<sup>12</sup> Alan Cowell. “Dubai Bank Reduces Ties With Iran, It Reports.” *New York Times*, March 1, 2012.



## **Egypt and Libya**

The intra-GCC rift on the Muslim Brotherhood issue emerged during the 2011 uprising in Egypt, in which the UAE and Saudi Arabia opposed the election of a leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, Mohammad Morsi, as President in July 2012. The two countries supported the Egyptian military's ouster of Morsi in July 2013 and subsequent election as president of military leader Abdel Fatah El-Sisi. Within weeks of Morsi's ouster, the UAE pledged \$3 billion to a Saudi-led \$12 billion GCC package (\$5 billion from Saudi Arabia and \$4 billion from Kuwait) to financially stabilize the military-led government in Cairo. At a meeting in Cairo in March 2015, UAE Vice President Shaykh Mohammad bin Rashid stated that the UAE has given Egypt about \$14 billion in loans, grants deposited in Egypt's Central Bank, and investments in Egypt's economy since the ouster of Morsi.

The intra-GCC dispute on Egypt has spilled over into the issue of post-Qadhafi Libya. The UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar all participated in the NATO coalition-led effort that ousted Qadhafi in 2011. As post-Qadhafi Libya descended into chaos, the UAE and Qatar each have supported rival factions. In August 2014, U.S. officials confirmed that the UAE, jointly with Egypt, carried out an airstrike in Libya against a Muslim Brotherhood-linked Islamist militia that reportedly enjoyed support from Qatar.<sup>13</sup> The United States reportedly quietly communicated its disapproval to the UAE of its action on the grounds that additional outside military intervention will not likely produce stability in Libya. In February 2015, Egypt conducted a strike against Islamic State organization loyalists in Libya in retaliation of the Islamic State's killing of 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians who were in Libya. The UAE publicly backed the Egyptian strike.

## **Syria<sup>14</sup>**

At the start of the rebellion in Syria in 2011—well before the Islamic State emerged as a major factor in that conflict—the UAE and the other GCC states argued for U.S. action to oust Syrian President Bashar Al Assad, whose Alawite community practices a religion close to Shiism. The GCC states based their argument on the asserted need to strategically weaken Iran in the Middle East and to defend Syria's Sunni Arabs who form the bulk of the population and the anti-Assad rebellion. As the Islamic State captured large parts of Syrian territory, the UAE has argued that ousting Assad would reduce support within Syria for the Islamic State.

The UAE joined its GCC allies in April 2012 in offering about \$100 million in funds to Syrian rebels—none of which were linked to the Islamic State—for salaries and weapons. In contrast to Saudi Arabia, the UAE has reportedly not supplied any weapons to Syrian rebel factions.<sup>15</sup> The UAE and several other GCC states have joined U.S. air strikes against the Islamic State organization in Syria, while continuing to urge the United States to apply military pressure on the Assad regime to negotiate a transition. The UAE has also sought to alleviate suffering from the Syria crisis through donations to Syrian refugees and grants to Jordan to help it cope with the Syrian refugees that have fled there.

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<sup>13</sup> "U.S. Officials: Egypt, UAE Behind Airstrikes in Libya." Associated Press, August 26, 2014.

<sup>14</sup> For more information on the Syria conflict, see: CRS Report RL33487, *Armed Conflict in Syria: Overview and U.S. Response*, coordinated by Christopher M. Blanchard.

<sup>15</sup> Author conversations with experts in Washington, DC, 2013-2014.

## **Iraq**

UAE officials blamed the Shiite-dominated government of former Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki for provoking Sunni resentment that led to the Islamic State success there in 2014. The UAE praised the change of leadership in Iraq to Prime Minister Haydar Al Abadi, in August 2014 and hosted him in December 2014. While building a positive relationship with Abadi, UAE officials say they remain wary of continuing Iranian influence in Iraq, and in particular the reliance of the Iraqi government on Iran-trained Shiite militia forces. In part because of the close relationship between the Iraqi government and Iran, the UAE and other GCC states have thus far declined to conduct air strikes against the Islamic State organization in Iraq.

The UAE has had an ambassador to Iraq since June 2008. In July 2008, the UAE wrote off \$7 billion (including interest) in Iraqi debt, and Shaykh Mohammad bin Zayid visited Iraq in October of that year. In February 2012, the UAE opened a consulate in the Kurdish region of Iraq administered by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). UAE companies have invested in housing and other projects in Iraq.

## **Yemen<sup>16</sup>**

In Yemen, another state affected by the 2011 Arab uprisings, the UAE joined a high-profile GCC mediation effort that reached an agreement for then President Ali Abdullah Saleh to step down in January 2012. The UAE and other GCC countries have subsequently formed a coalition of Arab states, formed by Saudi Arabia in March 2015, to militarily counter an offensive by the rebel Zaydi Shiite “Houthi” faction. The Houthis took over large parts of the capital, Sanaa, in September 2014 and forced out Saleh’s successor Abdu Rabbu Mansur Al Hadi in January 2015. The GCC asserts that the Houthis are armed by Iran and represent an effort to expand Iranian regional influence. The ten-country Arab coalition, which includes all of the GCC states except Oman, has been conducting air strikes against Houthi positions in an effort to pressure the rebels into a political settlement that might restore Hadi’s government. The UAE air force is conducting strikes as part of the campaign. With the effort floundering, in August 2015, the Arab coalition inserted ground forces, including a 3,000 person UAE armored brigade, which apparently has stalled the Houthi momentum. However, a Houthi attack in early September 2015 killed more than 50 UAE forces near Ma’rib, marking the largest loss of UAE military personnel in any engagement since the UAE’s founding. The UAE and other GCC states also are training anti-Houthi Yemeni fighters. The United States is supporting the Saudi led effort with intelligence and logistical help, but with no direct military action other than helping enforce a naval blockade that prevents Iranian ships from resupplying the Houthis with weapons.

## **Relations with Israel/Israeli-Palestinian Dispute**

The UAE has no official relations with Israel, but the UAE was not founded until 1971 and the UAE did not participate militarily in any of the major Arab-Israeli wars. Currently, Israel and the UAE have similar positions on Iran and there are increasingly frequent reports of informal Israel-UAE diplomatic cooperation and even security cooperation conducted through private firms.<sup>17</sup> In the past several years, Israeli diplomats have attended multilateral meetings in the UAE. On January 19, 2014, the UAE hosted a conference of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), attended by then Israel’s Minister of National Infrastructure, Energy, and Water Silvan

<sup>16</sup> For more information on the conflict in Yemen, see:

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/secret-jet-flying-between-israel-and-uae-567607953>.

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

Still, the UAE's positions on the Israel-Palestinian dispute are similar to those of virtually all other Arab states—support for the Palestinian Authority's bid for statehood recognition and membership in other international bodies. In 2009, the UAE government permitted street demonstrations in support of Hamas during its war with Israel. However, in line with animosity toward Muslim Brotherhood-related movements, the UAE criticized Qatar's support for Hamas in the July 2014 conflict between Hamas and Israel.<sup>18</sup> The UAE has supported Hamas' rival, the Fatah faction of the Palestine Liberation Organization, which runs the Palestinian Authority based on the West Bank. The UAE also has sheltered Fatah figure Mohammad Dahlan since his falling out with PA leader Mahmoud Abbas. Dahlan headed Palestinian security services in the Gaza Strip before the Hamas takeover of Gaza in 2007. In June 2015, the UAE reportedly donated \$12 million to help the Gaza victims of recent wars with Israel, but it channeled the donation through Dahlan, not through Hamas.<sup>19</sup> The UAE opposition to Hamas undoubtedly contributed to an easing of recriminations between the UAE and Israel over an apparent Israeli assassination of a Hamas figure (Mahmoud al-Mabhouh) at a hotel in Dubai in 2010.

Unlike Saudi Arabia and other Arab states, the UAE has not advanced its own proposals to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. In 2007, the UAE joined a “quartet” of Arab states (the others are Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan) to assist U.S. diplomacy on Israeli-Palestinian issues, and it attended the Annapolis summit on the issue that year. Unlike Qatar and Oman, the UAE did not host multilateral Arab-Israeli working groups on regional issues when those talks took place during 1994-1998.

The UAE has been a longtime donor to the Palestinians. According to the UAE government, to date the UAE has provided nearly \$550 million to humanitarian projects for Palestinian refugees in the Palestinian territories, and in Syria; the funds have been channeled in part through the U.N. Relief Works Agency (UNRWA). One major UAE action has been to fund a housing project in Rafah, in the Gaza Strip, called “Shaykh Khalifa City.”

### **Other UAE Foreign Aid<sup>20</sup>**

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

- One fund, the Abu Dhabi Fund for Development (ADFD), established in 1971, has distributed about \$4.0 billion to 207 projects in 53 countries.
- The UAE provided \$100 million to aid victims of the December 2004 tsunami in the Indian Ocean.

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<sup>18</sup> Hamas formed in the late 1980s out of Brotherhood groups in the Palestinian territories.

<sup>19</sup> “UAE Money to Gaza Gives Boost to Former Fatah Leader.” Associated Press, June 17, 2015.

<sup>20</sup> Factsheet provided by UAE Embassy in Washington, DC, June 2011.

- In May 2011, the UAE donated \$30 million to the Australian state of Queensland to fund cyclone shelters.
- In July 2011, UAE foundations responded to a U.N. appeal for aid to the victims of a drought in East Africa. In February 2012, the UAE announced an additional \$2 million donation to the Local Stability Fund that provides relief to victims of conflict in Somalia. In October 2013, the UAE cabinet decided to reopen a UAE embassy in Mogadishu, in part to facilitate the delivery of relief to Somalis.
- The UAE has donated substantial sums for humanitarian causes in the United States, including \$150 million for a cancer center at the University of Texas; \$100 million to assist New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina in 2005; \$150 million to a children's medical center in Washington, DC, in 2009; and \$1 million worth of Apple laptop computers to the Joplin, Missouri, public schools systems in the wake of the May 2011 tornado there.

## **Security Cooperation with the United States**

The UAE's willingness and ability to act militarily in the region is, in part, a product of many years of U.S.-UAE defense cooperation. The UAE has participated in U.S.-led military operations in many different locations, including Somalia (1992), the Balkans (late 1990s), Afghanistan (since 2003), Libya (2011), and the Islamic State (since mid-2014). Some experts say the UAE has joined U.S.-led operations to further bind the United States to UAE security, to prepare its forces for potential combat with adversaries such as Iran, and to increase UAE influence over U.S. regional policy.

Senior U.S. officials, most recently President Obama at a May 13-14, 2015, summit meeting at Camp David, have repeatedly sought to reassure the GCC states of an enduring U.S. commitment to Gulf security, no matter the outcome of nuclear talks with Iran. Shaykh Mohammad bin Zayid represented the UAE at the summit, which came several weeks after a separate visit (April 20) by Shaykh Mohammad during which he met with President Obama and Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter. The joint statement issued after the Camp David meeting announced a new U.S.-GCC strategic partnership and reiterated that it is U.S. policy to use all elements of U.S. national power to secure core U.S. interests in the Gulf and to deter and confront external aggression "against our allies and partners ... " An annex to the joint statement says that the United States will increase security cooperation with the GCC states in the following ways: (1) facilitating U.S. arms transfers to the GCC states; (2) increasing U.S.-GCC cooperation on maritime security, cybersecurity, and counterterrorism; (3) organizing additional large-scale joint military exercises and U.S. training; and (4) stating a renewed commitment to a concept of a Gulf-wide ballistic missile defense capability, which the United States has sought to promote in recent years.<sup>21</sup> The joint statement also highlighted joint efforts to counter Iran's "destabilizing activities" in the region as well as a commitment to defeating the Islamic State and to countering violent extremism more broadly. Some observers suggested that GCC leaders, including Shaykh Mohammad, were relatively satisfied with the outcome of the meeting.<sup>22</sup>

The United States and UAE have established a "Joint Strategic Military Dialogue" to better integrate U.S. capabilities with those of the UAE. The Dialogue is to include UAE development

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<sup>21</sup> The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, Annex to U.S.-Gulf Cooperation Council Camp David Joint Statement, May 14, 2015.

<sup>22</sup> Author conversations with observers from the GCC region. May-June 2015.

of a defense plan that will facilitate joint U.S.-UAE planning in case of attack on the UAE.<sup>23</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin Dempsey headed the session of the Dialogue in May 2014.

## Defense Cooperation Agreement and U.S. Forces in UAE

The framework for U.S.-UAE defense cooperation is a July 25, 1994, bilateral Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA), the text of which is classified.<sup>24</sup> The DCA initially was accompanied by a separate “Status of Forces Agreement” (SOFA) giving U.S. military personnel in UAE certain legal immunities, but several incidents reportedly caused the UAE to void the SOFA and to agree to handle legal incidents on a “case-by-case basis.” Some U.S. personnel reportedly are stationed at naval facilities at Fujairah. Approximately 5,000 U.S. forces are stationed in the UAE—up substantially from 800 before the 2003 U.S. intervention in Iraq – at UAE facilities including Jebel Ali port and Al Dhafra Air Base. Jebel Ali, which is capable of handling aircraft carriers, is the U.S. Navy’s busiest port of call.

About 3,500 of the U.S. contingent, mostly Air Force, are at Al Dhafra air base. That facility at first only hosted U.S. surveillance aircraft such as the U-2 and the KC-10 refueling aircraft, but the UAE later permitted expanded use to include stationing of F-15s (2012) and the “Stealth” F-22 Raptor<sup>25</sup> and the Global Hawk and the AWACS (Airborne Warning and Control System)<sup>26</sup>—Dhafra is the only overseas base where F-22s are stationed. The United States uses all these facilities for major combat operations in Afghanistan and Iraq during 2001-2011, and continues to use them for operations in Iraq and Syria (against the Islamic State) and Afghanistan.<sup>27</sup>

The DCA reportedly includes U.S. training of UAE armed forces; UAE forces are relatively small—about 51,000. The quality of the UAE force has benefitted substantially from the U.S. training, enabling UAE forces to play a substantial role in U.S.-led operations in the region. Since 2000, the UAE has hosted a “Joint Air Warfare Center” (AWC) where UAE and U.S. forces jointly conduct targeting and exercises on early warning, air and missile defense, and logistics.<sup>28</sup> Since 2009, UAE Air Force personnel have participated in the yearly Desert Falcon exercises at Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada.<sup>29</sup> About 600-800 UAE military personnel study and train in the United States each year, mostly through the Foreign Military Sales program, through which the UAE buys most of its U.S.-made arms.

To address the persistent manpower problems, the UAE cabinet has begun drafting legislation to set up a new national defense and reserve force, to include mandatory military training. Another mechanism the UAE has used to compensate for manpower shortfalls has been the use of private security contractors. The UAE confirmed on May 15, 2011, that it had retained the U.S. private firm Reflex Responses, to provide “operational, planning, and training support” to the UAE military. This followed a *New York Times* report that the UAE had hired the firm, which is run by Eric Prince, who founded the Blackwater security contractor, to a \$529 million contract to build a

<sup>23</sup> Author conversations with UAE officials. July 2014.

<sup>24</sup> Some provisions are discussed in Sami Hajjar, *U.S. Military Presence in the Gulf: Challenges and Prospects* (U.S. Army War College: Strategic Studies Institute), March 2002, p. 27.

<sup>25</sup> *Washington Post*, April 28, 2012.

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/dhafra.htm>.

<sup>27</sup> Jaffe, Greg. “U.S. Rushes to Upgrade Base for Attack Aircraft.” *Wall Street Journal*, March 14, 2003.

<sup>28</sup> Rajiv Chandrasekaran. “A Quiet, Potent Ally to U.S.” *Washington Post*, November 9, 2014.

<sup>29</sup> “A Quiet, Potent Ally to U.S.” op. cit.



foreign battalion to help defend the UAE from internal revolt or related threats.<sup>30</sup> The State Department reportedly investigated whether the contract violated any U.S. laws controlling the export of U.S. defense technology and expertise, but no findings were announced. *Defense News* reported on November 25, 2013, that a U.S. firm, Knowledge International, has provided 125 former U.S. Army officers to help improve the organization and performance of UAE land forces.

### ***UAE Participation in Recent U.S.-Led Combat Missions***

U.S. military officers say that UAE fighter pilots, operators of HAWK surface-to-air missile batteries, and special operations forces are highly proficient and have demonstrated their effectiveness in recent air combat missions, particularly in Libya in 2011 and against the Islamic State. The UAE and other GCC states have not conducted air operations against Islamic State forces in Iraq, in part because doing so could trigger a backlash from Iran. No Arab state, including the UAE, contributed ground forces to the U.S.-led “Operation Iraqi Freedom” that overthrew Saddam Hussein.

*Afghanistan (Since 2003).* The UAE has assisted the U.S.-led mission to stabilize Afghanistan by deploying a 250-person contingent of troops since 2003. The UAE forces, the only Arab combat forces in Afghanistan, have operated in the restive southern part of Afghanistan, particularly Uruzgan Province, where they not only conduct combat but also built health clinics and mosques. UAE representatives say that UAE forces will remain in Afghanistan, even though the mission has transitioned to Afghan-led combat as of the end of 2014. During 2012-2014, the UAE deployed six F-16s to Qandahar Airfield from which they conducted close air support missions for the U.S.-led coalition.<sup>31</sup> The UAE has a counterpart to the Obama Administration’s Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan (SRAP).

The UAE has provided about \$350 million in economic aid for Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban. The projects funded with UAE aid include “Zayed University,” a college serving over 6,000 Afghan students per year; six medical clinics; a major hospital with a capacity of 7,000 patients; the building of “Zayed City” that houses 200 Afghan families displaced by violence; 160 drinking wells; and 38 mosques.<sup>32</sup>

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

*Libya (2011).* To help the United States and allied countries oust Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi in 2011, the UAE Air Force sent six (a squadron) of its U.S.-made F-16s and six Mirage fighters to help NATO enforce a no-fly zone and to strike Qadhafi ground targets. It reportedly also armed some Libyan rebels.<sup>33</sup> In May 2011, the UAE formally recognized the Benghazi-based Transitional National Council (TNC) as the sole representative of the Libyan people and pledged

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<sup>30</sup> [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/15/world/middleeast/15prince.html?\\_r=1&partner=rss&emc=rss](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/15/world/middleeast/15prince.html?_r=1&partner=rss&emc=rss).

<sup>31</sup> “A Quiet, Potent Ally to U.S.” op. cit.

<sup>32</sup> Information provided to CRS by the UAE Embassy in Washington, DC, December 2009.

<sup>33</sup> James Risen, Mark Mazzetti, and Michael Schmidt. “Militant Forces Got Arms Meant for Libya Rebels.” *New York Times*, December 6, 2012.

financial support to it. In March 2012, the UAE transferred 58 aging Mirage 2000 combat aircraft to the post-Qadhafi government. The UAE has provided about \$13 million in aid to post-Qadhafi Libya through the UAE government and UAE charity organizations. As noted above, the UAE has also undertaken some military action against Islamic extremist groups that have emerged as post-Qadhafi governance of Libya has devolved into competing centers of power.

*Operations Against the Islamic State (since mid-2014).* The UAE is emerging as a core member of the U.S.-led coalition to defeat the Islamic State organization that has taken control of significant parts of Iraq and Syria. Upon President Obama's September 10, 2014, formal announcement of the U.S. effort to forge a multilateral coalition to try to defeat the Islamic State in both Iraq and Syria, the UAE and other GCC states joined the alliance. As of September 22, 2014, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain, as well as Jordan, have conducted strikes in partnership with U.S. aircraft in Syria. The UAE has conducted more strikes in Syria than any country except the United States, and is the only Arab state that the United States has permitted to command strikes there.<sup>34</sup> Participating in the strikes is the UAE's first female combat pilot, Mariam al-Mansouri. The United States has, to date, restrained the UAE from conducting more aggressive air operations against Islamic State convoys, in part because the UAE's desired rules of engagement would risk increasing civilian casualties.<sup>35</sup>

The UAE suspended its airstrikes over Syria during December 2014 until early February 2015 over concerns that the U.S.-led coalition had stationed insufficient search and rescue forces near northern Syria. The UAE concerns were heightened when a Jordanian aircraft went down over Syria in December 2014 and its pilot was captured and subsequently killed by the Islamic State.<sup>36</sup> In early February 2015, the United States reportedly stationed additional search and rescue assets in northern Iraq, better positioning the coalition to conduct rescue operations in Syria, and the UAE resumed its air operations over Syria alongside the coalition.

The UAE also hosts forces from other countries that are participating in the anti-Islamic State effort, including the nine French jets stationed at Al Dhafra Air Base as well as 600 forces from Australia.<sup>37</sup> UAE forces also have participated in the "Eager Lion" annual military exercises in Jordan intended to help insulate Jordan from any Syria conflict spillover. The UAE and Germany are leading coalition efforts to reconstruct and stabilize areas of Iraq liberated from the Islamic State, including setting up a joint fund to pay for some of those efforts.<sup>38</sup> The UAE-Germany cooperation appears to revive their cooperation in Iraq during 2003-2011, in which the UAE provided facilities for Germany to train Iraqi police and provided about \$215 million for Iraq reconstruction, including for hospitals and medical treatment in the UAE for Iraqi children.

## **U.S. and Other Arms Sales**

The UAE views arms purchases from the United States as enhancing the U.S. commitment to UAE security, and the United States views the sales as enhancing the U.S.-led Gulf security architecture by building up indigenous GCC capabilities and promoting inter-operability. From 2007 to 2010, the UAE agreed to acquire \$10.4 billion worth of U.S. defense articles and services through the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program—more than any other country in the world

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<sup>34</sup> "A Quiet, Potent Ally to U.S." op. cit.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Helene Cooper. "Key U.S. Ally in ISIS Effort Disengaged in December." *New York Times*, February 4, 2015.

<sup>37</sup> "Islamic State Crisis: Australia to Send 600 Troops to UAE." BBC news, September 14, 2014.

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.arabianbusiness.com/uae-germany-set-up-joint-fund-stabilise-iraq-after-isil-595060.html>.

except Saudi Arabia.<sup>39</sup> The UAE does not receive U.S. military aid on the grounds that it is easily able to afford to buy U.S. systems using national funds.

Earlier, in September 2006, the United States sold UAE High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS) and Army Tactical Missile Systems (ATACMs), valued at about \$750 million.

Among major FMS programs with or potential sales to the UAE:

- *F-16 Program.* In March 2000, the UAE purchased 80 U.S. F-16 aircraft, equipped with the Advanced Medium Range Air to Air Missile (AMRAAM) and the HARM (High Speed Anti-Radiation Missile), a deal exceeding \$8 billion. Congress did not try to block the aircraft sale, although some Members questioned the AMRAAM as an introduction of the weapon into the Gulf. The United States has sold the UAE precision-guided missiles for the F-16s, including 20 of the advanced ATM-84 SLAM-ER Telemetry missile and 5,000 GBU-39/B “bunker buster” bombs. (The sale of the SLAM-ER represented the first sale of that weapon to a Gulf state.) In April 2013, visiting Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel finalized a sale to UAE of an additional 30 F-16s and associated “standoff” air-to-ground munitions. The sale was in conjunction with similar weapons sales to Israel and Saudi Arabia, and which U.S. officials indicated were intended to signal resolve to Iran.<sup>40</sup>
- *JDAMs and other Precision-Guided Munitions.* In 2011, the United States sold the UAE an additional package of 4,900 Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAM) kits (which convert gravity bombs to precision-guided bombs). The sale had an estimated value of \$304 million. Earlier, in 2008, the United States had sold the UAE an unspecified number JDAM kits worth \$326 million. Some experts interpreted the sale of JDAMs to the UAE as a signal to Iran, in that the munition is said to be effective against hard targets such as Iran’s nuclear facilities. On May 29, 2015, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) notified a potential sale of \$130 million worth of precision-guided munitions (Guided Bomb Unit – GBU-31s and GBU-12s) for use against the Islamic State and the Houthi rebellion in Yemen.
- *Apache Helicopters.* On November 4, 2010, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) notified Congress of two potential sales, including a \$5 billion sale of AH-64 Apache helicopters (30 helicopters, remanufactured to Block III configuration).<sup>41</sup>
- *Joint Strike Fighter.* Press reports say the UAE and other Gulf states are interested in purchasing the advanced F-35 “Joint Strike Fighter” if and when the United States approves it for sale to the Gulf states. UAE officials maintain that possessing the most sophisticated U.S. aircraft enhances interoperability with U.S. air forces during joint operations, such as the airstrikes against the Islamic State organization discussed below. However, even though Israel and the UAE are aligned on many regional policies, U.S. officials have said that the United States would not sell the aircraft to the UAE before Israel receives the weapon.

<sup>39</sup> CRS Report: U.S. Arms Sales: Agreement with and Deliveries to Major Clients, 2003-2010.

<sup>40</sup> Thom Shanker. “Arms Deal with Israel and 2 Arab Nations Is Near.” *New York Times*, April 19, 2013.

<sup>41</sup> DSCA transmittal number 10-52. <http://www.dscamilitary.com>.



That apparently is an effort to enforce U.S. law that requires maintaining Israel's "Qualitative Military Edge" (QME) in the region.

- *Possible Drone Sale?* At the IDEX defense show in February 2013, the UAE reportedly agreed to a commercial sale, worth about \$200 million, for Predator unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), although the system apparently would be unarmed and for surveillance only. Still, Defense Department officials say they have not completed formulating a policy for the sale of such equipment to the Gulf states and it is possible that the deal might not be permitted by DOD.

The United States is not the only supplier of major combat systems to the UAE. UAE forces still use previously bought 380 French-made Leclerc tanks and 60 Mirage 2000 warplanes. The UAE is said to also be evaluating the French-made Rafale, in addition to the Boeing-made F/A-18, to augment its air force before it might be eligible to buy the F-35.

### **Coordinated Missile Defense**

A key U.S. objective—and a driving force behind the formation of the "U.S.-GCC Strategic Cooperation Forum"—has been to organize an integrated Gulf-wide missile defense network against Iran's missile force. Then Secretary of State Clinton inaugurated the Forum in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia on March 31, 2012 and pressed the issue at the second ministerial of the Forum on September 28, 2012 on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly meetings in New York. The Forum convened again on September 26, 2013, again during the U.N. General Assembly, but focused mainly on regional issues.

Senior U.S. defense and foreign policy officials have promoted the concept of coordinated GCC missile defense network as part of an overall U.S. shift to try to work with the GCC as a bloc rather than country-by-country. A December 16, 2013, Presidential Determination to allow defense sales to the GCC as a bloc represented an effort to implement that view. The determination was intended to promote the Gulf-wide integrated missile defense network.<sup>42</sup>

The UAE has been spearheaded within the GCC the U.S. effort to coordinate missile defense. The country hosts an "Integrated Air and Missile Defense (IAMD) Center, a training facility to enhance cooperation among the GCC states and with the United States on missile defense. The UAE was the first GCC to order the Terminal High Altitude Air Defense System (THAAD), the first sale ever of that sophisticated missile defense system. A sale of THAAD equipment was first announced September 9, 2008, valued at about \$7 billion. In September 2013, the Defense Department awarded a \$3.9 billion contract to Lockheed Martin for about 300 THAAD missiles, of which about 192 would be exported to the UAE.<sup>43</sup> No THAAD deliveries have begun, to date.

Among significant other recent missile defense sales to the UAE are the advanced Patriot anti-missile systems (PAC-3, up to \$9 billion value, announced December 4, 2007). Also announced on September 9, 2008, were sales to UAE of vehicle mounted "Stinger" anti-aircraft systems (\$737 million value). The UAE hosts the Integrated Air and Missile Defense Center, a major training facility for Gulf and U.S.-GCC cooperation on missile defense.

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/12/16/presidential-determination-gulf-cooperation-council>

<sup>43</sup> National Public Radio, September 23, 2013.

## **Defense Relations with Other Nations and Alliances**

In recent years, the UAE has sought to broaden its defense relationships. In 2004, the UAE joined NATO's "Istanbul Cooperation Initiative," which was launched that year by NATO as an effort to bolster bilateral security with Middle Eastern countries. The UAE has "observer" status in NATO and, in 2011, the UAE sent an Ambassador to NATO under a revised alliance policy approved by NATO in April 2011. In October 2013, the UAE opened a mission to the European Union.

Since well before the formation of the anti-Islamic State coalition, the UAE has been hosting other countries' forces. In January 2008 the UAE and France signed an agreement to allow a French military presence in UAE. The facilities used—collectively termed Camp De La Paix ("Peace Camp")—were inaugurated during a visit by then French President Nicolas Sarkozy to UAE on May 27, 2009, and include (1) a 900-foot section of the Zayid Port for use by the French navy; (2) an installation at Dhafra Air Base used by France's air force; and (3) a barracks at an Abu Dhabi military camp that houses about 400 French military personnel.

## **Cooperation against International Terrorism and Proliferation**

The UAE cooperates extensively with U.S. counter-terrorism and counter-proliferation policies in the region, which extend well beyond military operations against the Islamic State and include efforts to prevent the movement of terrorists, pirates, human traffickers, and proliferation-related technology through UAE borders. U.S. programs, which have sometimes included providing small amounts of counter-terrorism assistance, have helped build the UAE's capacity to enforce its borders and financial controls. No U.S. aid to UAE for these programs has been provided since FY2011.

## **International Terrorism Issues**

During the mid-1990s, some Al Qaeda activists reportedly were able to move through the UAE.<sup>44</sup> Two of the September 11, 2001, attack hijackers were UAE nationals, and they reportedly used UAE-based financial networks in the plot. Since the attacks, State Department "Country Reports on Terrorism," including the latest one for 2014 (released June 19, 2015),<sup>45</sup> have credited the UAE with making significant efforts against terrorism and terrorism financing. According to the State Department, reports say the UAE has arrested senior Al Qaeda operatives; denounced terror attacks; improved border security; instituted programs to counter violent extremism; investigated suspect financial transactions; criminalized use of the Internet by terrorist groups; and strengthened its bureaucracy and legal framework to combat terrorism. In July 2014, the FNC approved a draft counter-terrorism law that makes it easier to prosecute, and increases penalties for, planning acts of terrorism, and authorizes the UAE cabinet to set up lists of designated terrorist organizations and persons.<sup>46</sup> The draft law became law on August 21, 2014. At the December 2014 GCC summit, the GCC leaders announced the creation of a regional police force to be headquartered in Abu Dhabi.

Among notable recent successes, in October 2010, UAE authorities assisted in foiling an Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula plot to send bombs to the United States. On December 26, 2012, the UAE, working with Saudi Arabia, arrested members of an alleged terrorist cell plotting

<sup>44</sup> Department of State. Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism. Country Reports on Terrorism 2014. June 19, 2015. And, author conversations with executive branch officials, 1997-2015.

<sup>45</sup> "U.S. Embassy to Reopen on Saturday After UAE Threat." *Reuters*, March 26, 2004.

<sup>46</sup> "UAE Stiffens Counterterror Laws." *Defense News*, July 26, 2014.

attacks in the United States. In April 2013, UAE authorities arrested seven non-UAE Arab nationals allegedly affiliated with Al Qaeda. In May 2014, the UAE tried nine people on charges of supporting the Al Nusrah Front, an Al Qaeda-linked faction of Syrian rebels that is named by the United States as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). UAE authorities failed to prevent a December 1 killing of an American teacher by a 38 year old Emirate woman who allegedly had visited extremist websites, although they did defuse a subsequent bomb she planted outside the home of an American doctor and arrested her within 48 hours of the attacks.

Yet, the United States and the UAE sometimes differ on definitional and designation issues involving terrorism. For example, the list of 85 groups that the UAE government considers to be terrorist groups (see above) includes some U.S. and Europe-based groups that represent Muslims in those societies or perform charity work and which neither the United States nor any European government has accused of any involvement in terrorism.<sup>47</sup> These groups include U.S.-based Muslim American Society and Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR); the Muslim Association of Sweden; the Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe; and the U.K.-based Islamic Relief. The United States Embassy in Abu Dhabi questioned the UAE government about why it designated the U.S.-based groups.<sup>48</sup> Other organizations listed by the UAE include those that are listed by the United States as FTOs or are widely acknowledged to be using violence, including Al Qaeda; Al Nusrah Front (Syrian rebel group); Boko Haram (Nigerian Al Qaeda affiliate); Hamas; Lebanese Hezbollah; the Islamic State organization; Houthi rebels in Yemen; and the Afghan Taliban.

The UAE Central Bank's Financial Intelligence Unit is credited in recent State Department terrorism reports with providing training programs to UAE financial institutions on money laundering and terrorism financing, and making mandatory the registration of informal financial transmittal networks (*hawalas*). In September 2012, the FBI Legal Attache established a sub-office at the U.S. consulate in Dubai to assist with joint efforts against terrorism and terrorism financing. In June 2014 the UAE set up a financial task force to better prevent use of UAE financial institutions by terrorist organizations. In October 2014, the country adopted a law (Federal Law No. 9) to strengthen a 2002 anti-money laundering law.

On December 13-14, 2012, during a meeting of the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), which is co-chaired by the United States and Turkey, the UAE-based "International Center of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism," known as *Hedayah* ("guidance") was inaugurated. The center, which has a budget of about \$6 million and a staff of 14, is an institution for training, dialogue, collaboration, and research to counter violent extremism. Its priority is to work to prevent educational institutions from becoming breeding grounds for violent extremism. It also promotes information sharing so that police organizations around the world can receive information from family members who report on relatives who have become radicalized.<sup>49</sup> The UAE is a founding member of the GCTF, which was formed in September 2011.

## **Port and Border Controls**

The UAE has signed on to several U.S. efforts to prevent proliferation and terrorism. These include the Container Security Initiative Statement of Principles, aimed at screening U.S.-bound containerized cargo transiting Dubai ports. Under it, three U.S. Customs and Border Protection

<sup>47</sup> "UAE Lists Scores of Groups as 'Terrorists.'" Al Jazeera, November 16, 2014.

<sup>48</sup> State Department Bureau of Counterterrorism. Country Reports on Terrorism: 2014. Released June 19, 2015.

<sup>49</sup> David Ignatius. "A Small Organization Offers a Fresh Approach on Preventing Terrorism" Washington Post, op-ed. October 21, 2014.

officers are co-located with the Dubai Customs Intelligence Unit at Port Rashid in Dubai. The program results in about 25 inspections per week of U.S.-bound containers, many of them apparently originating in Iran. The UAE is a party to the Proliferation Security Initiative, the Megaports Initiative designed to prevent terrorist from using major ports to ship illicit material, and the Customs-Trade Partnership Against Terrorism. In 2013, the United States and UAE established a “pre-clearance facility” at the Abu Dhabi International Airport for travelers boarding direct flights to the United States.

## **Export Controls**

The UAE effort to prevent the re-export of advanced technology, particularly to Iran, has improved considerably since mid-2010. Taking advantage of geographic proximity and long-standing tradition of Iranian firms’ locating in Dubai emirate, numerous Iranian entities involved in Iran’s weapons and technology programs apparently established offices in Dubai that were being used to try to procure Western technology. In connection with revelations of illicit sales of nuclear technology to Iran, Libya, and North Korea by Pakistan’s nuclear scientist A.Q. Khan, Dubai was named as a key transfer point for Khan’s shipments of nuclear components. Two Dubai-based companies were apparently involved in transshipping components: SMB Computers and Gulf Technical Industries.<sup>50</sup> On April 7, 2004, the Administration sanctioned a UAE firm, Elmstone Service and Trading FZE, for allegedly selling weapons of mass destruction-related technology to Iran, under the Iran-Syria Non-Proliferation Act (P.L. 106-178). In June 2006, the Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) imposing a license requirement on U.S. exports to Mayrow General Trading Company and related UAE-based companies after Mayrow allegedly transshipped devices used to construct improvised explosive devices (IED) in Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>51</sup>

In January 2009, the Institute for Science and International Security issued a report entitled “Iranian Entities’ Illicit Military Procurement Networks,” published January 12, 2009. The report asserted that Iran has used UAE companies to obtain technology from U.S. suppliers, and that the components obtained have been used to construct improvised explosive devices (IEDs) shipped by Iran to militants in Iraq and Afghanistan. Other UAE companies the report alleges were involved in this network included not only Mayrow but also Majidco Micro Electronics, Micatic General Trading, and Talinx Electronics.

The UAE has responded when U.S. officials have threatened to sanction the UAE for lax export control enforcement. In February 2007 the Administration threatened to create a new category of countries called “Destinations of Diversion Control”—countries for which there is determined to be re-exportation of controlled technology to Iran and other countries forbidden from receiving such U.S. goods. A June 2010 Iran sanctions law, the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act (CISADA, P.L. 111-195) that formally authorizes countries to be designated as Destinations of Diversion Control and subjected to sanctions. That law appear directed against the UAE, but it has to date avoided that designation because of some of its actions to strengthen its export control regime. In September 2007, the FNC adopted a law strengthening export controls, and UAE authorities immediately used that law to shut down 40 foreign and UAE firms allegedly involved in dual use exports to Iran and other countries. In July Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for International Security and Nonproliferation Vann Van

<sup>50</sup> Milhollin, Gary and Kelly Motz. “Nukes ‘R’ US.” *New York Times* op. ed. March 4, 2004.

<sup>51</sup> BIS, “General Order Concerning Mayrow General Trading and Related Enterprises,” 71 *Federal Register* 107, June 5, 2006.

Diepen testified before the House Foreign Affairs Committee's Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation and Trade that the UAE had augmented the staff of the office that implements the 2007 law. He added that the UAE's enforcement bodies—customs, law enforcement, and intelligence services—are functioning to that end.<sup>52</sup> In September 2012 the UAE (and Bahrain) impounded shipments to Iran of items that Iran purportedly sought for use in its nuclear program. As a GCC member, the UAE participates in the U.S.-GCC Counter-proliferation Workshop.

The issue of leakage of technology has sometimes caused U.S. criticism or questioning of UAE investment deals. In December 2008, some Members of Congress called for a review by the inter-agency Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS) of a proposed joint venture between Advanced Micro Devices and Advanced Technology Investment Co. of Abu Dhabi for the potential for technology transfers. In February 2006, CFIUS approved the takeover by the Dubai-owned "Dubai Ports World" company of a British firm that manages six U.S. port facilities. Members of Congress, concerned that the takeover might weaken U.S. port security, opposed it in P.L. 109-234, causing the company to divest assets involved in U.S. port operations (divestment completed in late 2006 to AIG Global Investments). Little opposition was expressed in the United States to a November 2007 investment of \$7.5 billion by the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA) in Citigroup, which was then troubled by the global financial crisis.

## **Nuclear Agreement and Other Technology Issues<sup>53</sup>**

The UAE announced in 2008 that it would acquire its first nuclear power reactors to satisfy projected increases in domestic electricity demand.<sup>54</sup> The United States and the UAE signed an agreement on January 15, 2009, to help the UAE develop its nuclear power program. Some in Congress expressed concerns about the potential for leakage of technology to Iran as well as the potential for regional proliferation of nuclear technology.

UAE officials assert that they have committed to a project that represents a "gold standard" in providing for the UAE's needs while posing no proliferation potential whatsoever. The UAE committed to refrain from domestic uranium enrichment and from reprocessing spent nuclear reactor fuel—both processes could produce fissile material for nuclear weapons. The International Atomic Energy Agency announced December 14, 2011, that a group of experts had reviewed the UAE's regulatory framework for the program; the experts found "noted good practices" and provided suggestions to the Federal Authority for Nuclear Regulation, the UAE's nuclear regulatory authority.<sup>55</sup> In part because of the UAE's extensive commitments that apparently ensure the project can only be for peaceful purposes, the Obama Administration signed an agreement for the United States to assist the program, subject to conditions specified in Section 123 of the Atomic Energy Act of 1954 [42 U.S.C. 2153(b)], on May 21, 2009 (and submitted to Congress that day). Several congressional resolutions approving the agreement (S.J.Res. 18 and H.J.Res. 60) were introduced, as was one disapproving (H.J.Res. 55). No measure blocking the agreement was enacted within 90 days of the submission of the agreement to Congress, and the "123 Agreement" entered into force on December 17, 2009.

<sup>52</sup> Testimony of Mr. Vann Van Diepen before the House Foreign Affairs Committee. July 22, 2010.

<sup>53</sup> This section was prepared by Paul Kerr, Analyst in Weapons of Mass Destruction Nonproliferation, CRS. See CRS Report R40344, *The United Arab Emirates Nuclear Program and Proposed U.S. Nuclear Cooperation*, by Christopher M. Blanchard and Paul K. Kerr.

<sup>54</sup> UAE officials estimate that their country must expand its power generation and transmission capacity from the current level of 16 gigawatts to 40 gigawatts by 2020 in order to meet projected demand increases.

<sup>55</sup> <http://www.iaea.org/press/?p=2572>.



A number of U.S. and European firms have secured administrative and financial advisory contracts with the program. In January 2010, the Emirates Nuclear Energy Corporation (ENEC), the institution that is administering the program, announced that it had chosen the Korea Electric Power Corporation (KEPCO of South Korea) to construct the first of four APR1400 nuclear reactors that would sell electricity to the Abu Dhabi Water and Electricity Authority. The first plant is expected to start operating in 2017 and the other three are scheduled to be completed and operational by 2020.<sup>56</sup> The plant construction is taking place near Abu Dhabi's western border with Saudi Arabia.<sup>57</sup>

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

## **Economic Issues**

The UAE, a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO), has developed a free market economy, but one that is widely considered weakly regulated. The UAE, particularly Dubai emirate, has pursued an economic strategy based partly on attracting investment to construct high-technology, luxurious, and futuristic projects that provide jobs and attract tourism and publicity. The UAE also is participating in Gulf-wide economic infrastructure projects such as a railroad network connecting all the GCC states, to become operational by 2017.

The UAE economy was affected significantly by the 2007-2009 global financial crisis, which caused widespread layoffs and the departure of thousands of foreign workers, and left UAE banks with vast amounts of nonperforming loans.<sup>58</sup> The downturn in real estate prices also affected regional investors, such as those in Afghanistan, who bought into high-end housing such as on the Palm Islands. The fall in value caused a collapse of a major Afghan bank, Kabul Bank, in September 2010. To address the crisis, the federal government took on some public debt and drew upon its "sovereign wealth funds" to inject money into Dubai banks. By the end of 2011, the UAE's worst economic problems were behind it.

As of the end of 2014, the country has over \$600 billion in investments held by sovereign wealth funds—funds which can help the UAE deal with such current difficulties as the precipitous drop in oil prices in 2014. The largest such funds are the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA) and Mubadala ("Exchange").

## **Oil and Gas Sector and "Clean Energy" Initiatives**

The key factor in the UAE's wealth is that it exports large amounts of crude oil while having a small population for which to provide benefits and services. For example, the UAE exports nearly as much oil as Iraq but its citizens number only about 4% of those of Iraq. Abu Dhabi has 80% of the federation's proven oil reserves of about 100 billion barrels, enough for over 100 years of exports at the current production rate of about 2.5 million–2.7 million barrels per day (mbd). Of that, over 2 mbd are exported, and the UAE may have as much as 500,000 bpd of spare capacity.<sup>59</sup> The United States imports negligible amounts of UAE crude oil; the largest share of

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<sup>56</sup> <http://enec.gov.ae/our-nuclear-energy-program/prime-contractor/>.

<sup>57</sup> <http://enec.gov.ae/our-nuclear-energy-program/preferred-site/>.

<sup>58</sup> Worth, Robert. "Laid Off Foreigners Flee as Dubai Spirals Down." *New York Times*, February 12, 2008.

<sup>59</sup> <http://www.thenational.ae/events/areas/abu-dhabi/adnoc-preserves-spare-supplies>.

UAE oil goes to Japan and China. The UAE has vast quantities of natural gas but consumes more than it produces. It has entered into a deal (Dolphin project) with neighboring countries under which a recently constructed pipeline carries natural gas from the large gas exporter, Qatar, to the UAE and on to Oman as well.

The UAE is trying to secure its oil export routes against any threat by Iran to close the strategic Strait of Hormuz, through which the UAE and other major oil exporters transport their oil exports. In July 2012, the UAE loaded its first tanker of oil following completion of the Abu Dhabi Crude Oil Pipeline (ADCOP) which terminates in the emirate of Fujairah, on the Gulf of Oman. The line, which cost \$3 billion, has capacity to transport 1.5 million barrels per day of crude oil—about half of the UAE’s peak production. The UAE is also planning a large refinery near that terminal, and possibly a second oil pipeline exiting there, to further secure its oil exports and value-added petroleum products.<sup>60</sup>

Seeking to reinvest its oil wealth, Abu Dhabi has sought in recent years to outdo Dubai by building local branches of famous U.S. and European museums. However, it has also tried to use its oil wealth to plan for a time when the developed world is no longer reliant on oil imports. It has funded “Masdar City”—a planned city, the first phase of which is to be completed in 2015, that relies only on renewable energy sources. Automobiles that run on fossil fuels are banned from Masdar City. One feature of the city is a system of driverless taxis that use automation to take passengers to their destinations.

## **U.S.-UAE Trade and Trade Promotion Discussions**

U.S. trade with the UAE is a significant issue because the UAE is the largest market for U.S. exports to the Middle East. In 2013, U.S. firms exported about \$24.6 billion worth of goods to the UAE. Over 1,000 U.S. companies have offices there and there are 60,000 Americans working in UAE. U.S. exports to UAE through at least 2018 are expected to be very large because of a spate of orders for U.S. commercial aircraft in 2013 by expanding UAE airlines Emirates Air and Etihad Airlines.

On November 15, 2004, the Administration notified Congress it had begun negotiating a free trade agreement (FTA) with the UAE. Several rounds of talks were held prior to the June 2007 expiration of Administration “trade promotion authority,” but progress was halting. The FTA talks have been replaced by a U.S.-UAE “Economic Policy Dialogue,” involving the major U.S. economic departments and their UAE counterparts. The dialogue, consisting of two meetings per year, began in late 2011 and also included discussion of reform of UAE export controls, an issue discussed above. In addition, as part of the GCC, the UAE is negotiating with the United States a “GCC-U.S. Framework Agreement on Trade, Economic, Investment, and Technical Cooperation,” an umbrella instrument for promoting ties between the two sides in the economic area—essentially a GCC-wide trade and investment framework agreement (TIFA). The negotiations were led by the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR), and an agreement was signed on September 25, 2012.

Because of the UAE’s relative wealth, it has received small amounts of U.S. assistance for the primary purpose of making the UAE eligible for advice and programming to improve its border security and export controls, as shown below. None has been requested since FY2011.

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<sup>60</sup> “Abu Dhabi: In the Pipeline.” *The Middle East*, January 26, 2012.

## “Open Skies” Issue

In 2015, some U.S. airlines asserted that two UAE airlines, Emirates Air (Dubai-based) and Etihad Air (Abu Dhabi-based) as well as Qatar Airways had an unfair competitive advantage because of alleged receipt of subsidies from their respective governments. All three have grown substantially in recent years and are large buyers of U.S. aircraft. The U.S. airlines asserted that these airlines should be subject to limitations in their access to U.S. air routes under an “Open Skies Agreement” with the United States. The airlines assert they are not subsidized and instead create substantial numbers of jobs for American workers building and serving their aircraft and infrastructure in the United States. The Administration has declined to take any action against these Gulf-based airlines.

**Table 2. Recent U.S. Aid to UAE**

(in thousands of dollars)

	<b>FY07</b>	<b>FY08</b>	<b>FY09</b>	<b>FY10</b>	<b>FY11</b>
NADR (Nonproliferation, Anti-Terrorism, Demining, and Related)— Counterterrorism Programs (ATA)	1,409		725		
NADR- Combating WMD	172	300	200	230	230
International Military Education and Training (IMET)				10	
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1,581</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>925</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>230</b>

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