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U.S.-Arab Relations at a Crossroads: What Paths Forward?

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“ARAB-U.S. DEFENSE COOPERATION”

Chair:

Professor David Des Roches - Senior Military Fellow, Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies, National Defense University

Speakers:

Mr. Christopher Blanchard - Specialist in Middle East Affairs in the Foreign Affairs, Defense and Trade Division, Congressional Research Service

Mr. Ronald Perrilloux - Director, Middle East and Africa Region, Lockheed Martin International Business Development

Mr. Jeffrey Kohler - Vice President International Sales & Marketing for Defense, Space, and Security, Boeing

Remarks as delivered.

[**David Des Roches**] Okay, it is my great pleasure to welcome you to the coveted after-lunch spot, the defense panel. Defense occupies a unique point in the relationship between the United States and not just the Arab world, but indeed the overseas world. The reason for this is defense relations between the United States and foreign countries are so heavily regulated that once they get going they're very, very difficult to stop, and I challenge you if you read any article about a troubled relationship between the United States and any foreign country with which it has a military relationship you will always notice this sentence in it - the military to military relationship is good - and that's because of the fundamental structure. Nevertheless, in the Arab world this has been a year of profound turmoil and we are honored to have three guests of distinction to speak to us about it.

My name is Dave Des Roches, and I'm a professor of the Near-East South Asia Institute of the National Defense University. I'm a graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point, and I'm proud to see that there are West Point Cadets here as well as Annapolis Midshipmen, apparently due to the increase in ankle bracelet monitoring roaming, and we have Virginia Military Institute Cadets. For those of you not familiar with military or service academies I should point out just keep your hands away from them while they're eating and you'll be fine.

We have three guests of great distinction. Starting off on my far left, Lieutenant General Jeff Kohler, Retired, former Director of the Defense Security Cooperation Agency. Prior to General Kohler becoming the director of the agency, it dealt as a matter of routine with arms transfers, training packages, and security assistance meant to boost influence. Under his directorship it morphed into a key component of the Defense Department and U.S. Government strategy to build partner capacity. He transformed the agency. He is a command pilot in the U.S. Air Force. He has a masters in Art History from the University of Indiana, a graduate of the U.S. Air Force Academy, but also a graduate of the U.S. Army School of Advanced Military Studies, one of the famed Jedi Knights. He is currently Vice President for International Business Development at Boeing.

On my right, Colonel Ron Perrilloux, a Louisiana native and B-52 pilot with over 3,400 flight hours. One of the only men in Washington who can correctly pronounce my name, he was born in Newfoundland, Canada. Graduate of Louisiana State University and spent a significant portion of his career in Minot, North Dakota. For a Louisianian, I can tell you that that is a sacrifice in the interest of national security.

And then finally, two over from me, the gentleman with the beard, Christopher Blanchard is a Middle East specialist affairs analyst at the Congressional Research Service. His written product is not readily available to the public, but rather is made available to members of Congress who then leak it to various websites, which publish it. He is the man who provides neutral, dispassionate, and impeccable analysis to members of Congress. In effect, his career has been spent casting pearls

before swine. He holds a bachelor in political science from Boston College and like Bashar al-Assad and his wife Asma is a graduate of London University.

Our first speaker will be General Kohler.

[General Jeffrey Kohler] Thank you, David. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for the opportunity. I have one little correction on my introduction. At Fort Leavenworth when you go through the Advanced School of Military Studies there's actually two levels. Majors go through what becomes the Jedi Knight course. I attended the Jedi Master course. So we had all the real secrets of how that was put together. So it's okay.

This morning Ambassador Freeman talked about the political struggles in the region, and Dave alluded to that as well, and I want to highlight that more often than not it is the military relationship that will keep the relations and the bonds between countries very strong. And looking at the cadets that are here, two things for them, never pass up an opportunity in your career to build a relationship with a foreign military officer.

And I hope there's some budding Foreign Service people here too because you never know when you're going to run into that person again. I can probably stand up here for 30 or 45 minutes and go through example after example, and actually General Colin Powell had three or four that he personally got involved in by calling classmates that he knew from his days at Leavenworth or Carlyle and talking them into doing something that needed to be done but they really didn't want to do it, so those relationships are strong.

The other point for all the cadets is it's never too late to go Air Force. You have an opportunity. I will be available later to tell you how to do that.

So as Dave said I've got a lot of experience in the U.S. Government doing the mil-to-mil weapons sales, weapons transfers. I've been on the other side of the equation since I've retired, so for seven and a half years I've been with the Boeing Company, specifically with Boeing Defense, Space, and Security. So I've seen it from both sides.

So I thought today I would just give you a little taste of what I see - these are my personal views, not the company's, not the Air Force's - my own experience of what has worked well and what we need to do to improve. Weapons transfers have been important - they do work. It provides common equipment between our partners and the U.S. military. That equates into common training.

When you sell someone a big platform like an F-15 you build a thirty-plus year relationship with that Air Force. When you sell them M1 tanks you build a 30 year relationship. The Saudi Navy has operated U.S. ships in their eastern fleet. That's been a 40-year relationship. Their CNO has gone to the Naval War College up in Newport. Those are the kind of things that you see with these transfers.

Then that turns into exercises where you get the troops out together working together. Those things have worked brilliantly. At the same time we have high-level dialogue between joint staffs, their leadership comes in. We have great relationships between the senior leadership of all the services - this is chief to chief - in the Middle East now. We have Air Force Central Command, Navy Central Command, Army Central Command. They build relationships on a daily basis with their counterparts, with the next level of leadership that's up and coming.

So you continue to build on that as you go forward. That has always enabled around the world for the U.S. military a way that we have open and very honest dialogue with our partners as we go forward, and it's a very healthy relationship.

At the same time - just to touch on the industry side a little bit - what we've seen around the world, and particularly now in the Middle East it's starting to really catch on, we've helped establish some very, very viable and productive and profitable companies throughout the region that are owned by local nationals.

In Saudi Arabia there's several very viable companies today that started years ago as an offset project. They're now partners with us on future projects. They bid on our campaigns around the world and are part of our global supply base. There's a partner in the UAE that will now soon be building key parts for our commercial airplanes. So those kinds of relationships starting with mil-to-mil, starting with the weapons transfers often go in different directions.

Now, there are some things that aren't working very well. I started out with weapons transfers is one of the things that is working well; it's also one of the things that's not working well. David alluded to that. We have too many things that are hung up in our process. Too many processes to go through - State Department, the Hill - and I understand that everybody gets a vote, particularly Congress. I worked that for many, many years, and it is very, very important, but our process is taking way too long.

And the other thing that we're not good at is providing definitive answers to our friends and partners. We're not able to tell them how long it's going to take; we're not able to tell them when we'll actually be able to put something on the table. There are too many unknowns, and too often we seem to want to backtrack on technology release. There's one country in particular that we gave some equipment to some years ago and then when they asked for some more equipment we said well you can have it but not at the same technology level, we'll have to come down a little bit. I took that - I assume they did too - as a huge insult.

How do you go back to somebody and say it was okay ten years ago but now nah, I don't think I want to give you the same level of technology? That sends a really, really bad message to people that we call our best partner in the region. So we have

to improve on that. Now, that takes Congress, it takes the Administration, it takes industry, it takes a lot of us on this side to resolve some of those issues.

Language issues still remain a problem, particularly with our enlisted force on both sides. When they come here to the United States for training on a new weapons system they're often unprepared. So we have to help develop those skills early on the other side of the equation whether it's in the Middle East, whether it's in Asia - it doesn't really matter - but we can't take the time to keep sending people back through English language training. And there's actually a military language-training course that they go through as well to learn some of the military lingo that's often in the tech manuals and so forth.

It's one thing to train the pilot or the infantry officer or the armor officer, but if you can't train the enlisted force that maintain the equipment to follow the leadership of those officers then you run into problems.

Visas. Visas are still an issue. I think it's getting better, but years ago we had a lot of problems. I was hosting one group, or getting ready to host one group down in Atlanta and unfortunately it was shortly after 9/11 and the hotel wasn't sure who they were so they called Homeland Security which showed up in the middle of the night. It took a little while to unscrew that one, but we have to do better to allow our partners to come over, have these meetings, have a dialogue, and take care of them while they're here.

Now, I made a note and then I noticed that the next panel's going to really dive into this, but one of the things I put down that is not working well is better cooperation amongst the GCC. One area that we've been trying to work on for years is missile warning and missile defense, and if now is not the time to get that done I don't know when it is. So I hope the next panel will address some of that a little bit more. I won't go into in more detail right now.

So a couple of thoughts on where we go. Obviously I think we need to continue to strengthen those elements that are working well, and we have to work on those that aren't, a fairly obvious statement. But let me offer two things in closing of why I think this is really important.

The first is the U.S. is going to continue to rebalance to the Pacific. It doesn't mean we're pulling out of the Middle East, doesn't mean we're pulling out of NATO, but let's face it - as our budgets are continued to be constrained, the silliness up on the Hill with continuing resolutions and the inability to pass a clear budget - I can say that now that I'm retired - but until we solve some of those things our military is going to be under a lot of pressure. We can't be everywhere at once. So as we rebalance there is going to be an impact in the Middle East.

But His Highness mentioned it, and I'll call it the new big elephant in the room, and that's Russia. So we have dealt with Russia for years in NATO context, I've dealt with

them in Asia, but dealing with them with direct military force on the ground in the Middle East is something new, and I think all of us - our partners in the Middle East, the United States - I think we all need to wake up very quickly and figure out how to deal with this issue.

They're going to deploy S-300s into Iran. That is a very, very sophisticated missile - will cause problems. Given their aggression against NATO and other countries what I think they will do in the Middle East is very worrisome to me. My friends in Japan told me that last year they came literally within about five or six intercepts of their Cold War record of scrambling against Russian incursions into their airspace. So if they're doing that in Japan and they're doing it in NATO I'm concerned about an incident in the Middle East.

There's too much going on in the region over Iraq, over Syria. We have allies flying missions against ISIL and other things, so we have to get this resolved, and I hope that brings the military leadership much closer together for that dialogue that I think is just so important. That may take a little bit longer, but I hope we're dealing with it. So with that I'll conclude. David, thank you, and I look forward to questions from the audience.

[Des Roches] Thank you, General Kohler. General Kohler and I worked extensively in the Pentagon and this is the first time I've seen him in eight years, and I said good morning, General. He said Dave, I'm not in the Pentagon any more, neither are you. You don't have to call me General, just call me sir. And now it's my pleasure to introduce another colleague from the Pentagon, Colonel Ron Perrilloux.

[Colonel Ronald Perrilloux] Thanks Dave. Dr. Anthony, thank you for the invitation to speak here today. First off, I'd like to say I look around the room, there are a lot of folks here who are incredibly qualified to be up here, some of you who've had many more years experience than I've been alive, in the Middle East, so please bare with me. Some of the things I say you may have heard before, you may disagree with, but I'll leave plenty of time for questions at the end. This is not a speech. It's a few points that I think are really good for developing the conversation - call it food for thought.

Disclaimer - I work for Lockheed Martin. I spent 26 years in the U.S. Air Force. This is not the opinion of Lockheed Martin; this is not the opinion of the United States Government. This is the opinion of one person who loves his country dearly and who also has a deep and abiding affection for the people I met in the Middle East over the last 30 years.

We're talking about security cooperation, defense cooperation, and General Kohler covered most of the salient points that I was going to cover. Thank you sir, I appreciate that, but I think the one thing that you have to understand about security cooperation actually comes from a DOD directive. As it turns out there's a directive for everything in the Department of Defense, but from DOD Directive 5132.03 it is

DOD policy that security cooperation is an important tool of national security and foreign policy and is an integral element of the DOD mission.

What it doesn't state there is that security cooperation is the purview of the Department of State as executed by the Secretary of State through the President of the United States. And so everything that happens, everything that DOD does is at the behest of the President and executed through, or they execute as part of or in support of the Department of State mission.

Probably the biggest - I'll cover maybe some of the things we've done right, some of the things we've done wrong over the years, but probably the biggest challenge we see with defense cooperation in the Middle East is public perception of the Middle East, and it's almost always skewed by media reports, it's mostly patently false. Maybe it's not on purpose, but we do get a different view than what I think people who travel to the region get. Significant distrust of Arab governments in Congress.

They have incomplete information, they have differences of opinion, and they have outright hostile media reports, but they don't go over and see what's going on first-hand. So we spend a lot of time saying to folks hey, we have to continue to do these things and we have to come up with a reason why, we have to have a reasoned argument why, and I think if you look at U.S. military history over the last century you could come up with some really good reasons for doing this.

Number one is clearly common interest, right. We have a great interest in regional stability, stability of the world energy supply, counterterrorism. We've got common enemies - the Islamic State, al-Qaeda, Iranian influence and meddling in their neighbor's affairs. Most of all though it's the positive effect that defense cooperation has on a set of partners. Education, understanding, the building of trade, capacity building in our partners, and the bottom line is we learn to trust each other and work together, and that promotes peace and stability. So we'll continue to engage.

Over the last we'll call it 30 years since I entered government service we've seen some pretty incredible successes in our relationships in the Middle East and the Arab world, but over the last five years it's increased at a pretty amazing rate. We've seen a stand off weapons deal with the GCC countries. We've seen the release of advanced fighter technology to the UAE and to Saudi Arabia. We've seen the President announce that the U.S. would support expedited release of integrated air missile defense technology to countries in the region. We've seen a removal of the hold on FMF funding to Egypt that the General mentioned, which just as an aside it took us 30 years to pry Egypt away from Soviet influence and now we risk letting it go back to Russia if we're not careful.

The President made some significant commitments at Camp David. We're committed to the security of our partners. We won't abandon the region and we'll examine ways to expedite decisions on the release of technology and systems, and most importantly we've seen - and this is not on our side, this is on the side of Arab

nations - when you look at the last 25 years and who has stood next to the United States most often and most diligently it's been our partners in the Gulf - Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the UAE. They've been there for every conflict we have engaged in and they've been better partners to us than some of our NATO allies, and so I think that is a win for the relationship.

However - there's always a however - we've got significant dissatisfaction on the part of our partners based on what they see as a failure to properly recognize that willingness. One thing that didn't come out of Camp David was a formal defense, mutual defense agreement with the UAE and Saudi Arabia. That's something they wanted and we did not sign such a deal.

The Iran nuclear deal. Everybody likes to talk about the deal itself, but it's not the nuclear deal I think that aggravates folks in the region, it's that it seems an enabler to give Iran the resources it needs to continue to meddle in its neighbors' affairs. Continued issues with Q and E laws - I think that's a bit of a moot point, it's the law, but we committed to an expedited release decision process which I think was heard perhaps across the world as an expedited yes, not an expedited decision yes or no.

The General talked about the FMS process, the continued perception that we're not fully committed because of the pivot, and then one thing that I think is a significant irritant is the application of human rights laws in an inconsistent manner with other countries, and so we tend to treat our Middle East partners, hold them to a different standard than we do to countries like China with which I think probably has an as bad or worse record.

So where do we go from here? I think it's very clear we continue to engage, we do everything we can to demonstrate a commitment to the relationship, we nurture our relationships with countries that have stood by us for 20 years. We have to take a balanced approach to advanced technology release. We cannot paint every country in the region with the same brush.

And most importantly we need to understand that military cooperation is probably our most effective tool in achieving our goals in the region. It's effective in ensuring stability, it influences change, and it's our most important diplomatic tool in the region. Thank you very much.

[Des Roches] Thank you, Colonel Perrilloux, and the first man I worked for in the Pentagon was a three-tour veteran of Vietnam in the infantry who was working on a doctorate in English renaissance poetry, and he told me the secret to good government writing is plagiarism. If you wish to follow that advice, our next speaker is man you should plagiarize from. It's my pleasure to give you Christopher Blanchard.

[Christopher Blanchard] Good afternoon. I was going to get up here and say something about always disassociating myself from most of what David has to say,

but with the last - particularly about members of Congress - but with that last one I'll wholeheartedly endorse that. That is what we here at CRS are for. We serve obviously elected representatives but increasingly a wider public.

I'd like to thank the National Council for again having me back. Normally I'm in David's role sort of managing this panel and so I'll keep it brief because I know how it can be with time here. I'm participating as well in my personal capacity and the views I'll share with you are mine alone and not those of the Library of Congress or the Congressional Research Service.

So why are we here? We're here again concerned with defense cooperation because of the tumultuous change in the region's security that continues to unfold, and we all share a deep concern obviously for the people of the region and it's future.

In Washington obviously policymakers continue to very vigorously debate what strategies are most appropriate for adapting U.S. policy to the demands of the region's continuing unrest and shifting politics. Basic U.S. regional security commitments as we've heard are unchanged, and this Administration and many in Congress have repeatedly restated them. I would argue that the statement released at the GCC Summit is perhaps the clearest and most forward-leaning statement of the U.S. security commitment since President Carter's.

So I think it's worth paying attention to the extent to which folks here in Washington have sought to portray a message of continuity, and what they've coupled that with, however, is a message that we seek to emphasize and put our priority on partnership, a partnership approach while redefining some security relationships with key countries in the region.

In the region, however, as policymakers have struggled to meet the challenges of unrest also managing a message from Washington of consistency coupled with evolution has proven difficult, and in this context some in the region and indeed some in the audience have questioned U.S. decision-making. We've seen regional institutions such as the Arab League and the GCC revive a discussion of regional collective defense initiatives, and some U.S. security partners among the closest in the region have also taken newly assertive and independent action through ad hoc coalitions of their own.

Although the landscape in the region has undoubtedly changed relatively few in Washington or in the region are arguing for a wholesale change or a rupture. On the contrary rather we see a continuing and at times acrimonious debate over new rules, new roles and new responsibilities with both the United States and its partners in the region adopting a trial and error approach, trying different options to see which best suits the evolving conditions.

So the main observation I'd like to share with you today is a relatively simple one, and it's the following: both the partnership approach currently favored by U.S.

decision makers and the active yet U.S.-enabled active self defense approach favored by some Arab decision makers increases the importance of factors that have been relatively elusive in U.S.-Arab relations and defense cooperation to date.

As General Kohler described, we have a long history in developing common equipment partnerships, common training, and what is slightly more elusive, however, is a sense of a common purpose. So the first factor I'd like to highlight is dialogue, dialogue in pursuit of mutual interests, truly mutual interests, one that's greater than a least common denominator approach or the laundry list that we often tick off and have ticked off for decades, but one that really seeks to calculate something that's greater than simply as I said a least common denominator approach to parallel interests.

And what that needs to be built on is a second factor - transparency and clear communication. If the path forward is indeed one of partnership, and many of you are here in business and you have no closer relationships than you have of those with your partners, your business partners. That word means - a partner is someone you are clear with, who you share your intentions, your actions, accurately describing your actions, and also you're honest about constraints and red lines.

That dialogue while it occurs at senior levels, and obviously occurs in the military to military channels, I think increasingly if this is to be a true partnership needs to occur on a broader basis and include folks in our respective publics in a way that frankly hasn't necessarily been managed well in the past.

And the third factor is true coordination from the strategic planning level to the development of capabilities that can enable common strategy and indeed to the actual employment of arms in operations. If we are going to see active U.S. partners in the region among our Arab allies that does create new expectations, new conversations, and new challenges to overcome, but I think if either the U.S. or its regional partners sought to take on these challenges in the region alone or ignore certain regional security threats they could ignore these factors that I've described, but they might arguably also have less success.

The truth remains that the U.S. and leading Arab states in the region have chosen a path of partnership and signaled and acted on their intentions to deepen it, so for the U.S. decision makers the key questions center around while they seek to build capable partners and not simply proxies, they grapple with questions raised by the fact that some of our partners' priorities will differ and some of our partners' actions may present new challenges or risks. We see this currently with regard to the Syria training program.

The President has been very clear about the fact that a misalignment frankly of priorities among the United States and its potential Syrian partners led to the failure of that program in his words. In Yemen we see the United States providing logistical and intelligence support to a coalition, but also we see the White House and some in

Congress expressing some concern about the course of the conflict and the need to move toward the political solution that all sides have iterated that they want.

To the extent that those in the region wish to continue to perpetuate the benefits of U.S. defense cooperation they have to grapple with questions raised by the U.S.'s new definition of its role. The United States has clearly articulated it doesn't seek to serve as the police or the governor. Recently - President Obama said this over the weekend - but that they seek to serve as committed enablers of their partners' self defense but consistent with the U.S. laws and standards that are applied not just with respect to the region but in fact around the world, and again we see this in cases.

Most clearly I think in Yemen, but also we've seen it this year with the discussion of the release of holds that were placed on weapons sales to Egypt and Bahrain. The outcome of those policy decisions reflects an evolution in that relationship, not an abrupt rupture or change, and I think it represents at least from the U.S. side a clear articulation of what the standards will be going forward as those relationships move into the future.

Again, just to close up and reiterate here, I think if the United States and its regional security partners are to successfully transform their defense relationships in ways that more fully enable Arab partners to act against emerging threats then decision makers on all sides must recommit to serious dialogue in pursuit of mutual interests, transparent communication, and increased coordination at all levels.

While U.S. and Arab leaders all have domestic responsibilities and rightly pursue their own distinct interests, the complexity of the regional security environment requires I think that type of recommitment. Decision makers on all sides if they fail to make that commitment may face unmet expectations, unpleasant surprises, and unanticipated risks. Thank you.

[Des Roches] Thank you to our panel. Thank you for the brevity. First question goes to General Kohler. How do we balance partners' wants, needs, desires with U.S. national interests of human rights, opportunities for self-governance?

[Kohler] It sounds like one of those ambush questions I used to get. It is a difficult issue, and as Ron and Chris pointed out the Department of Defense sort of decides what technology is releasable. It's the State Department and others that really decide who gets it and when it's delivered. It's always a difficult question, but to me it gets back to training and partnership.

I made the case I don't know how many times that a nation would come to us and say I would like A or B. If we don't sell it to them they'll go find it somewhere else. It's always available somewhere else in the world. As I said if you sell a major piece of equipment or even a minor piece of equipment you often develop a long-term relationship. That allows you to open doors and it allows you to start bringing

people into your schools, your military education schools, your enlisted training schools, and I can't think of a better place to build that sort of capacity in a partner and have discussions about human rights, have discussions about the rule of law, have discussions about the law of war and how things are governed, to have a discussion about how a leader or commander resolves some of those issues when those conflicts arise.

There's no pat answer to that one, but if you think about it - and I won't mention the country - but there was a country in South America that had been heavily sanctioned by us and by the UN on some of their human rights records, and it reminded me of a young child where you say you go sit in a corner and when you self-correct yourself and you realize what you've done then you can come back to the world community because what often happens is when our Congress comes in and says we're shutting off military aid they also shut off all the military training that goes with it called IMET, International Military Education and Training.

I would go to the Secretary of Defense and others and say instead of doing that you ought to double it, triple it, quadruple it. You need to bring that leadership into the United States for that discussion. Now, maybe selling them military equipment obviously put that on hold, but why cut off the opportunity to build a relationship, to educate, to teach somebody how it's done in an open democracy. If you don't do that then they'll go buy the equipment from the Chinese or from the Russians or from the French, and they'll get what they need but they won't have the other pieces that go with it.

[Des Roches] Okay, next question - thank you, General. By the way we have more questions now than we'll be able to answer if we keep going for three days, so if it makes you feel good to write the questions please write it, but I'm shuffling through them as fast as I can. Next question for Colonel Perrilloux. How can special operations forces be better employed in the region to embrace Arab-U.S. defense cooperation, providing boots on the ground support with very little operational signature?

[Perrilloux] Well the short answer is it's already going on. In the areas where we have ongoing combat operations special operations forces are an integral part of that. In the countries where we are - with whom we're partnered special operations forces are either there as part of Title 22 train and assist forces or they could be working as part of a Title 10 force that's in doing engagement and joint exercises. And so if you're talking about countries with whom we're partnered it's going on as part of an assistance and engagement mission. If you're talking about places where we have troops on the ground special operations forces are already there.

[Des Roches] Thank you, and I'd just like to add that there's a common misconception in the question that special operations have low boots on the ground. That's only true for a training mission in a relatively secure environment, but if they actually do - what the thread of the question was about actual fighting. They have a

huge support requirement and footprint, and the biggest company; T O and E Company in the U.S. Army is a Special Forces group support company.

For Mr. Blanchard, how do you assess Gulf Cooperation Council combat capacity, and how well is U.S.-GCC force integration progressing?

[Blanchard] Well obviously as someone removed from the Pentagon perspective on that I won't comment in detail. I think frankly my impression is that the GCC operations in Yemen have proven to be more robust than many expected they might be. They've shown a capacity to obviously reduce the ability of their adversaries to remain in the field. That's come with a certain degree of cost, and I think what we see now are debates both within the individual coalition members and between those coalition partners and U.S. partners about how to manage those costs and how to shift the focus of the military operation toward a conclusion rather than a continuation.

[John Duke Anthony] Just to add to that, the U.S. has four defense cooperation agreements - one with Kuwait, one with Bahrain, one with Qatar, one with the United Arab Emirates - and a component of each of the four is training and also exercises, bilateral and multilateral exercises, and continuous sharing of information, and to the extent allowable also intelligence.

And in those dialogues and the dynamics of them there is a commonality or consensus that emerges implicitly if not explicitly, as point one.

As point two is that even older than that is the access to facilities agreement with Oman, which has served as an example of how far and how fast one can go in a relationship on a sensitive issue such as defense and intelligence sharing and by implication also security cooperation.

Thirdly, while in the early years of the GCC there were multilateral exercises - the first one was in the United Arab Emirates, there were two smaller ones in Kuwait and Oman, and then they stopped for the remainder of the Iran-Iraq War, and most of the exercises since then have been bilateral, sometimes trilateral - the United States and Bahrain, the United States and the Emirates, the United States and Oman, the United States and Saudi Arabia, et cetera - but last August a year ago 130,000 people were mobilized in Saudi Arabia. This was the largest mobilization and deployment in the history of the GCC countries.

It was in Saudi Arabia, the one country that borders all the other five there, but there were observers and analysts and assessors from all five of the GCC countries, and there is a military assistance secretary general in the GCC Secretariat, and every autumn all of the ministers of defense meet, and every autumn all of the armed forces chiefs of staff meet, and it is in these exchanges of information, analysis, and assessment that a creeping, not a galloping sense of oneness on defense issues is

occurring. Not at the rate that external observers would prefer, but it's occurring nonetheless. They're not idling at the intersection.

[Des Roches] Okay. For all the panelists brief answers please. What is one thing you would change about U.S. strategy and engagement in the Middle East? We'll start with Colonel Perrilloux.

[Perrilloux] Wow. Who asked that?

[Des Roches] Stand up and be ridiculed.

[Perrilloux] I don't know that it's a policy change, but I would like to see a formal statement from the White House recognizing the commitment and the contribution of our partners in the region for the last 25 years of conflagrations around the world. I mean they've been with us from day one.

[Des Roches] Okay. Dr. Anthony?

[Anthony] No, I second that.

[Des Roches] Okay, Blanchard?

[Blanchard] We obviously don't make policy recommendations, but the tone of what I had to say during my remarks is such that I think the U.S. needs to more fully embrace the implications of its chosen approach, particularly in the Middle East. An approach of partnership doesn't rid you of trade offs. We've talked over the last ten years, 15 years about well the U.S. can go big or it can stay home and both of those seem problematic, so this middle approach of partnering with regional governments seems to be the way forward; however, it raises a whole other host of questions.

I think at the root they're really about how do you define common purpose, how do you define common objectives, common interests, and common standards because the way forward - it's not going to be easy if the U.S. is no longer going to play as direct of a role that means its partners in the region are, and again we have to be more honest and candid about what that may mean.

[Des Roches] General Kohler.

[Kohler] I'll offer one which may be one of the hardest to do given the prerogative Congress, but the last three Administrations have told our friends in the Middle East that they will speed up weapons release and capability. It's time to make some changes in our process to do that.

[Des Roches] Excellent. I will abuse the prerogative of the chair and say I would reverse the disestablishment of U.S. information services. That capacity cost us peanuts and not having it has been disastrous. I've never been - I've never spoken to

a person above the age of 30 anywhere from Lahore all the way to the Italian border who hasn't said that was a horrendous mistake.

The next question is for General Kohler. How does the military balance its role as a critical input in U.S. foreign policy with its mandate to remain removed from acting in a political capacity?

[Kohler] That is not that difficult in the environment that I worked in. We have a great interagency team from State Department, Commerce, DOD, and others that are involved in the policy decision working to again the Defense Department technology release decision as well as the State Department policy release. It wasn't that hard to work within that, but it is a difficult balance sometimes. Within the Administration we used to have a saying there's never a good time to notify Congress.

That still seems to be true these days, but I never found it that much of a challenge working with colleagues from the various departments to arrive at a very reasonable solution that supported our friends and allies and still maintain a balance across U.S. policy. It's not just one region; it sometimes covers a lot of different areas.

[Des Roches] Thank you, General. For Mr. Blanchard - what role do you foresee for Turkey in cooperating with the U.S. and Arab states in regional stability? Specifically in Syria, has the role changed with the Russian involvement?

[Blanchard] Well, Syria's decision to grant access to the Incirlik airbase has obviously transformed the capacity of the coalition and the U.S. specifically for operations in Syria. I won't speculate about how Turkey may ultimately respond to an increasingly assertive standpoint or posture from the Russians, but what I will say is that it's clear just from developments over the weekend that the shift in the U.S. approach of engagement with Syrian opposition groups towards equipping certain vetted units involved in the fight against the Islamic State in northeastern Syria carries with it I think the implication of Turkish security interests regarding the Kurds, specifically the YPG.

That's in fact a perfect example of I think some of the integrated trade offs between partner interests, U.S. interests, and priorities. This is exactly the type of issue that I think we have to more directly take on, more candidly discuss, because if we are really going to be working in a partnership role these things can't be surprises and they can't be kept quiet.

[Des Roches] Thank you. Colonel Perrilloux, drawing on your time as the attaché in Riyadh, how can the U.S. help in facilitating the sharing of information between Iran and Saudi Arabia in their joint interest of defeating Da'esh or Fa'esh, as our lunch speaker put it.

[Perrilloux] Absolutely. I think the real issue there is the U.S. doesn't currently have a dialogue with Iran, so when we talk about trying to facilitate a dialogue between Saudi Arabia and Iran we're a bit at a loss. We're relying on other organizations, other states, so at this point I think we're completely reliant on other people.

[Des Roches] Thank you. And for General Kohler, how can we expect Russia - building on this last question - how can we expect Russia to capitalize upon the chaos of the Middle East? How will the U.S. be affected? What mechanisms would increased defense cooperation contribute to our ability to anticipate and response to such an impending event?

[Kohler] That's a nice dissertation subject - I don't know about a short answer.

[Des Roches] I was going to give it to you in the lightning round, but I decided to be merciful.

[Kohler] Very complicated. I think Mr. Putin is using this to again probably strengthen himself back home. I don't believe the Russian economy is as bad as a lot of people believe. He tends to support people that support him and he doesn't really care about the rest, so he's probably a little stronger than some people believe. But their presence, particularly with the forces they have on the land and now in the air I think incredibly complicates the situation.

As I said, I'm concerned we're one incident away from almost the really bad days of the Cold War in the Middle East with them flying and operating on the ground. So I'm not really sure where that's going to lead. I think it deserves a lot of attention by the leaders of the region and the United States as well as many others around the world to persuade him to pull back because it has not helped and all it has done is complicate an already difficult situation.

[Des Roches] Excellent. Mr. Blanchard, how can the United States augment its maritime presence in the Gulf as its military budget shrinks and visits by naval assets to the area decrease?

[Blanchard] Well I'm not a naval officer or a naval expert so I can't really -

[Des Roches] It's easier than you think to pretend to be one.

[Blanchard] Well I think you found the purpose, so if we can't have full carrier battle groups consistently in the region because of budget concerns are there other capabilities that we can deploy in service of some of the items that General Kohler has listed as being the benefits of defense cooperation - continued training, continued engagement between officers, things like obviously keeping waterways clear, minesweeping, maritime border security has become increasingly important.

We've seen some of our Gulf partners engage in maritime security operations in and around Yemen that I think a lighter U.S. footprint or a lighter U.S. approach can still provide some support to that without necessitating the sort of massive and consistent foreign deployments that may however temporarily or potentially temporarily be less possible.

[Des Roches] Better than the CNO could've done. Colonel Perrilloux, how might the United States help GCC countries overcome the limited effectiveness of their inadequate military coordination and interoperability?

[Perrilloux] I wouldn't go so far as to call it inadequate. I think it's certainly not up to the standard that the U.S. is used to, but we are working on that. I think we've got numerous - just my company alone has numerous efforts throughout the region to tie together command and control systems between the states, but as we look at United States Central Command, they have started to pull together partners in the region, bringing them into their command and control systems, bringing them on at a proper classification level and allowing them to - or allowing the U.S. systems to serve as coordinating functions.

The other part of that is the end goal is to help them build their own systems such as the combined air operations center that we're working with the Saudi Arabians in Riyadh in helping them modernize the Peninsula Shield system. So that's actually in work. These are things that are ongoing. It's not that the systems aren't there or that they're inadequate, it's just they haven't been maintained and they have to be brought up to modern standards.

[Des Roches] Excellent. General Kohler, how would the Arab movement to self-sufficiency with regards to producing its own weapons impact the U.S. economy? And how does the selling of U.S. weapons impact Arab nations' economies?

[Kohler] Well as I said if you look at some of the examples of where we've taken offset projects in the Kingdom or in the Emirates and turned them into very viable, self-sustaining industries, I think they're a success story. I don't think they've impacted U.S. industry that much. I know from my company's perspective, especially on the commercial side, we depend greatly on the global supply chain. You cannot do everything out of the United States anymore. It's just impossible. So opening up that world economy and helping support the vision of the leaders whether it's jobs in the Kingdom, whether it's technology in one of the other countries.

It is a challenge sometimes to what we do and how we do it in our industrial base, but I think overall it has strengthened us and again it brings the nations closer together, it brings companies closer together, and it's just another one of those bonds between the militaries sometimes that helps enable cooperation and partnership. So I don't think any of the major defense industries would say it's a challenge to what they're doing.

[Des Roches] Excellent.

[Anthony] I have something.

[Des Roches] Please.

[Anthony] On the U.S. benefits side there are the following, and we've had this since the late 70s with the purchases of the F15s and then in 1981 the AWACs and then additional F15s and beyond. The benefits in numerous cases have been to extend production runs of factories' manufacturing of armaments that would have otherwise shut down, and that's had a direct positive impact on the labor force in wherever that was - Fort Worth with General Dynamics at the time or Boeing or McDonnell Douglas in earlier days, Northrop Grumman and Raytheon and the like.

Secondly, because of the size of these purchases it has lowered the per unit cost. When there are larger numbers of the product being bought the producer can afford to lower the per unit cost and still find it quite profitable. The five companies I just named, and I think I left out Lockheed Martin, these are giants. These are not just Fortune 100 companies. Maybe they're Fortune 20 companies in terms of their profitability and what they contribute to the U.S. revenue flow.

[Kohler] David, let me answer that. What a lot of people don't realize is that those foreign sales have actually kept specific lines open in the United States, and I'll cite two - Tow missiles and Harpoon missiles for the Navy. On the Tow missile for the U.S. Army had it not been for foreign sales that line would have closed years ago, and when we were in Iraq there was a high demand for Tows and had it not been for the international sales there wouldn't have been any. And for the Navy our international partners actually have a more advanced version than they do, and now the Navy's realized that they need to upgrade. So for years it's kept that capability alive for not only our friends but the U.S.

[Des Roches] Exactly, General. I don't know if you've heard that bell, but we've just gone into the lightning round, and in the lightning round the answers to the questions are five sentences or less. Say the magic word Doug gives you 50 dollars.

Mr. Blanchard, how can the United States facilitate the acquisition by Iraq and Yemen of armed drones for use in their battlefields against violent extremists, or should they?

[Blanchard] Well not to comment on the specific cases but the concerns about expediting again I think fold into what I would put forward as the need for a broader conversation. If the United States is going to rely increasingly on Arab partners to provide for regional security then it does I think behoove the Administration and Congress to revisit the processes by which these arms sales are reviewed.

[Des Roches] Excellent. Colonel Perrilloux, how can the United States and Arab nations cooperate in improving intelligence systems, particularly in light of recent cyber attacks?

[Perrilloux] Yeah actually that's another ongoing effort, an ongoing effort, and really not something we can comment on in here, but the bottom-line is that the intelligence community within the United States works very closely with the intelligence communities of our partner nations to share information, and it's actually played quite a big role in thwarting terrorist attacks, both in the U.S. and abroad. I'd say that's one of the successes.

[Des Roches] Excellent. General Kohler, with the recent changes to military structures in Arab nations - I'm sorry. How has the U.S. influenced Arab training and military strategies? That's a tough one.

[Kohler] Well I think on the training side, as I said earlier, opening up schools, just the fact that they're operating equipment has helped transformed that. The strategy discussion I believe is key to some of the joint-to-joint meetings that are held at the very high levels with the Chairman and so forth. It's just an ongoing dialogue of how you have that discussion.

[Des Roches] Excellent. Mr. Blanchard, how will the Arab-U.S. relationship be impacted by the current Yemen, Syria, and ISIS crisis?

[Blanchard] Well it's cut both ways. It's provided new opportunities for experimenting with this partnership approach. We see Arab nations participating in the coalition operation in Syria against the Islamic State, and we also see an ad hoc coalition approaching the conflict in Yemen. A lot of what I said today has had to do with the trade offs that come with that, so again I think there are pros and cons, and this provides the test bed for whether or not this partnership approach will work.

[Des Roches] Excellent. Colonel Perrilloux, how can the U.S. facilitate the cooperation between Arab and non-Arab states in preventing the flow of militants, recruits, Jihadists to the Islamic State, stroke Da'esh, stroke Fa'esh?

[Perrilloux] Depending on where you're talking about, if you're talking about folks moving in from the region I think that's a sovereign issue and we can probably help with technology. If we're talking about movements from the U.S. and other western countries, I mean again you're really talking about identification and tracking of individuals, and that's a much larger and more complicated issue than it is a policy problem. I think the policy issues and the laws against it are there. It's simply a matter of the agencies being able to accomplish the mission, and some of those are technological solutions I think.

[Des Roches] Absolutely. General Kohler, Democrats are holding out selling bombs for the Saudi air campaign in Yemen. How is this going to affect the U.S.-Saudi

security relationship? Why are Saudi's human rights violations in Yemen not debated at the UN and in Washington?

[Kohler] Well, again, under our law the Congress has the final say and they are debating that now. I'm not sure I'll get too deep into that political question, but it is always a challenge. As I said earlier I still believe that transfers and the relationship can overcome a lot of those issues. In this case I think a look at training and other capability could get over that hump.

[Des Roches] Excellent. Mr. Blanchard, how ought one to analyze and assess the implications for American and other international interests of the unprecedentedly large and diverse display of pan-GCC military cooperation in Yemen?

[Blanchard] Well just to pivot off that last question I think there are some in Washington that are to a certain extent favorably impressed with what the GCC has put on display in Yemen in terms of a willingness to act, to invest, to use military capability in a regional security environment. Looking forward though I think those voices may wish to see what the GCC has to offer with regard to more robustly engaging in the fight against Da'esh, against the Islamic State in both Syria and Iraq.

A lot of the concern I think that regional critics have of the U.S. not wanting to engage more robustly has to do with the fact that the U.S. is asking a lot of what comes next questions. So if the GCC can put together something that helps answer some of those what comes next for security in areas taken back from Da'esh then you may see more opportunity for close U.S.-GCC defense engagement going forward.

[Des Roches] Thank you. Colonel Perrilloux, how likely is it that the United States might withdraw from or downsize its forward-deployed military forces in Qatar and Bahrain and compensate for them by augmenting its presence in Djibouti or elsewhere?

[Perrilloux] It's very unlikely. Djibouti is not a very hospitable place to put the types of headquarters that we have in both Bahrain and in Qatar. They don't have the infrastructure to support it. Fifth Fleet headquarters is a very robust facility, it's been there for a very long time. I don't see it moving. And then the CAOC in Qatar to rebuild that would be quite simply not necessary. So I don't think its going to move.

[Des Roches] Excellent, and I concur forcibly. I would argue that the foremost display of American soft power in the Middle East is the American High School in Bahrain, which is there to facilitate American families who live there, and that's the only place between Italy and Australia where American military with their families can be deployed.

General Kohler, how can the U.S. better assure that arms are not flowing into and enabling the Islamic State?

[Kohler] We went through a similar issue in the Iraq situation trying to make sure we had accountability of things. It is a very, very difficult problem. The U.S. has programs both on the commercial side and the foreign military sales side that deal with I use monitoring. It's easy when it's a big platform; it's incredibly difficult when it's a mortar round or a rifle. So not an easy thing to do. Let's face it; we've made mistakes ourselves, not just our partners. You just need a lot of diligence to work on that.

I'd like to take just a second and go back to a question you asked Chris about some of the release. For years pundits in Washington and some people have said why don't our Arab friends do more and when they actually put together a group led by the Kingdom with three of the other Gulf states, actually go do something to deal with a threat that they perceive to be very near and dear to them, we criticize them. So we need to step back a little bit on that one and say this is exactly why we feel we need to strengthen our capability, continue to strengthen their capability and training, logistics, the strategy you mentioned earlier.

So they can do more, and as I said as we start to pull out of the - if we pull out, if we change, as the forces decrease, as there's more stress on our budget we need them to be ready to step up in there region. So we ought to be encouraging that type of cooperation and facilitating that, and helping them with the gaps instead of just throwing stone.

[Des Roches] Exactly, exactly. Colonel Perrilloux, how can the U.S. and Arab nations collaborate to deter the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East?

[Perrilloux] I'm not aware that there is a proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East.

[Des Roches] I'm sorry, I said deter. Let's say prevent.

[Perrilloux] And again I think that's going on now. I don't think there is a - with the exception of one country I don't see a rush to do such a thing. I think the sanctions that continue to remain in place on Iran are exactly what we need to do. I don't see any of our partner nations trending in that direction. So I think we're doing exactly what we need to do at this time.

[Des Roches] Excellent. General Kohler, how have airstrikes against militant non-state actors been effective, and how can the U.S. and Arab nations collaborate to make them more accurate?

[Kohler] I haven't unlike some of the pundits on TV haven't spent a lot of time in the Pentagon asking that question of old friends, so I'm not sure I really have a great answer to that. It never is an ultimate solution. Even though I'm an Air Force officer

at heart, air power can do a lot - it still takes boots on the ground. We're not there yet, so there - I mean there probably has been some effect. I think we've seen some of that on TV with back and forth, but it is not going to push to an ultimate solution by air power alone, so we've got a lot of work to do there.

[Des Roches] Thank you for that. Mr. Blanchard, how can the United States participate in an international coalition that would help settle the political and security situation in Libya? Isn't that a good one?

[Blanchard] I think before participation in a military coalition to change the situation in Libya moves forward there ought to be more of a consensus about what the political situation in Libya and framework will look like, an across the board agreement among members of that coalition in terms of what they're willing to put on the table in order to ensure that the political arrangement in Libya succeeds rather than an approach that focuses on the myriad security threats that are present in Libya. One might argue that the reason those security threats have multiplied is because the military concerns may have trumped political consideration in the initial move into Libya.

[Des Roches] Excellent. And the final question of the lightning round goes to Colonel Perrilloux. How large of a role should the U.S. play in assisting the GCC with its activities in Yemen?

[Perrilloux] I think we're committed to helping our partners in that campaign, and the bottom-line is we've got - the biggest benefit that we can provide is probably in the area of training, advising, intelligence, those types of things. I mean we're not going to put boots on the ground in Yemen, the coalition has done that. Probably the biggest thing we can do to help them finish this off is to provide them with the benefit of our experiences with the training of their forces and then probably replenishment of their forces. So again I think it's the things that we normally do there through our security assistance activities probably could be more focused, but those are the things that we should be doing.

[Des Roches] Okay, excellent. Ladies and gentlemen, I have been pleased to come to six of these conventions so far. This is the largest number of questions that a panel has answered. Their answers were models of frankness, rigor, and conciseness. Please, let's hear it for your defense panel.

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