

## **The U.S. in the Persian Gulf: Bulwark against or root of aggression?**

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2013-12-07

“We have deployed our most advanced fighter aircraft throughout the region, including F-22’s, to ensure that we can quickly respond to contingencies. Coupled with our unique munitions, no target is beyond our reach.”<sup>1</sup> – U.S. Secretary of “Defense” Chuck Hagel

Against a backdrop of peaceful protests targeting a brutal, dictatorial regime in Bahrain, war ministers from the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations and others have gathered in the capital city of Manama for a 3-day security conference to discuss the future of U.S. involvement in the region. Allaying fears over the recent Geneva agreement between the P5+1 countries and Iran, U.S. war secretary Chuck Hagel assured the attendees that America would remain as a “bulwark against aggression” in the Persian Gulf region.<sup>2</sup>

Despite pending budget cuts, the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), which currently garrisons over 35,000 troops, attack helicopters, tanks and artillery in a region that has witnessed repeated American aggressions since the early 1950s, will not be reducing its forces in the Persian Gulf. On the contrary, Hagel announced that U.S. forces would be maintained at current levels and that a \$580 million project was underway to upgrade the U.S. Fifth Fleet Headquarters facilities in Bahrain to allow docking of larger naval warships.<sup>3</sup> Besides the Patriot missile batteries and advanced surveillance equipment deployed there, the U.S. reportedly has a stockpile of Massive Ordnance Penetrator bunker-buster bombs ready to strike Iran’s nuclear facilities should conflict erupt,<sup>4</sup> or rather, be induced by American aggression at the behest of the Zionist entity.

And as if the region were not sufficiently militarized with 40 U.S. Navy ships in two combined task forces and a carrier strike force regularly on patrol in the Persian Gulf, Hagel has proposed to the GCC member states that they make joint, as opposed to individual, acquisitions of state-of-the-art weaponry as a means of stretching the purchasing power of their respective defense budgets.<sup>5</sup> “Going forward, the Department of Defense will place even more emphasis on building the capacity of our partners in order to complement our strong military presence in the region,” Hagel explained.<sup>6</sup> This is while the U.S. has already sold over \$81 billion in high-tech weapons systems in the Persian Gulf over the past seven years.<sup>7</sup> In some cases, the weaponry sold to foreign “partners” is actually better than its counterpart owned by U.S. forces, as is the case with the F-16 “Desert Falcons” sold to the United Arab Emirates by Lockheed Martin.<sup>8</sup>

To understand how this dangerously volatile situation arose, we must briefly examine the dynamic that exists between the DoD and American weapons manufacturers in order to see how the latter protect their earnings regardless of political vicissitudes. After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1992, the U.S. arms industry, fearing massive funding cutbacks as a result of the “peace dividend,” sought to expand trade through export of their lethal goods to foreign markets. The U.S. Congress stepped in with loan guarantees for arms exports to offset declining DoD orders and increased foreign competition due to the Soviet collapse, with the result that the U.S. rapidly became the leading arms supplier to the so-called Third World.<sup>9</sup>

Richard F. Grimmett, formerly a specialist in international security with the Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade Division of the U.S. Congressional Research Service and now retired,<sup>10</sup> described the evolving dynamic in 1993: "...because of reductions in defense procurement in the United States resulting from the Cold War's end, American arms producers are focusing greater attention on obtaining additional foreign arms sales contracts to compensate, to the degree possible, for lost domestic orders." Contributing also to the scenario was the Persian Gulf War of 1991 against Iraq which convinced most countries in the region of the overwhelming superiority of American-made weaponry. "As a consequence, several Near Eastern countries have sought to purchase advanced U.S. weapons systems in the period since the war," Dr. Grimmett explained.<sup>11</sup> Accurately assessing future developments, Dr. Grimmett predicted "a greater focus on seeking foreign arms market shares by United States [arms] companies,"<sup>12</sup> and this is exactly what happened in the intervening years.

By 2011, the U.S. share of foreign arms sales had risen to \$66 billion, which represented 80 percent of the global market.<sup>13</sup> And in order to maintain earnings due to further DoD budget cuts, the arms makers, among them Lockheed Martin and Honeywell, have lobbied successfully to have foreign arms sales restrictions loosened by moving oversight for licensing exports from the more stringent State Department to the less restrictive Commerce Department.<sup>14</sup> So we see the same dynamic between the DoD and U.S. weapons merchants that began at the end of the cold war persists to this day. If, due to budget cuts, American arms dealers cannot sell sufficient weaponry to the DoD to maintain their earnings, they make up the shortfall by sales in foreign markets. All is with the blessing of the U.S. Congress, which also aids arms sales with their bellicose foreign policy by perpetually creating conflict-ridden situations such as we see in the Persian Gulf, Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen and throughout the Middle East and North Africa.

One of those countries buying U.S. arms is Bahrain. A major non-NATO ally of the U.S. since 2002 and a recipient of U.S. military aid since 1991,<sup>15</sup> Bahrain has witnessed massive and repeated protests against the dictatorial regime of Hamad Bin Isa Al-Khalifa since February of 2011.<sup>16</sup> The U.S. State Department's Bahrain 2012 Human Rights Report stated, "The most serious human rights problems included citizens' inability to change their government peacefully; arrest and detention of protesters on vague charges, in some cases leading to their torture in detention." The report goes on to list arbitrary deprivation of life, arrests relating to freedom of expression, restrictions on civil liberties, and discrimination against the Shia majority as being among the human rights violations perpetrated by the tyrannical Al-Khalifa monarchy.<sup>17</sup> Despite these human rights abuses, the Obama regime has pressed ahead with military and anti-terrorism assistance and arms sales to Bahrain.<sup>18</sup> It was against this backdrop of blatant human rights violations by Bahrain that the U.S. "defense" secretary made his address in Manama.

The 9th International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) Regional Security Summit, which took place from December 6 to 8 in Manama and whose plenary speaker was U.S. war secretary Hagel, was a small part of the overall U.S. strategy to continue its global dominance. As the DoD made clear in its fiscal year 2013 budget request, "Sustaining America's leadership in the 21st Century will require maintaining and strengthening our robust network of international relationships and capabilities." Describing the role of America's military, the document states, "It will have a global presence emphasizing the Asia-Pacific and the Middle East ... and will be prepared to confront and defeat aggression on several fronts."<sup>19</sup> To be more truthful, the report

should be corrected to read “to confront and carry out aggression on several fronts,” since as Hagel pointed out, “Even with new budgetary constraints, the United States will continue to represent nearly 40 percent of global total [military] spending.”<sup>20</sup>

However, the cost of carrying out aggression in the Persian Gulf and elsewhere is colliding with budget reductions, more of which may be arriving with fiscal year 2014, when according to Hagel, an additional \$52 billion in sequestration cuts may be taking effect.<sup>21</sup> Referring to the budget cuts as “investment shortfalls,” the Aerospace Industries Association, an arms industry lobby group, has already sounded the alarm, warning, “The lost capacity and capabilities resulting from these cuts cannot be rebuilt or brought back quickly if U.S. national security imperatives or budget priorities change in the future.”<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, the report by the bomb builders expressed concern that “most contracts going forward will not provide sufficient profit margin to sustain a viable defense and aerospace industry.” And what would the U.S. do if its war industry could no longer sustain the American ability to wage aggressive wars?

To combat these “investment shortfalls” and maintain the viability of the “industrial base,” U.S. weapons firms will simply have to sell arms more aggressively to Washington’s Persian Gulf client states, as Hagel encouraged in his address to the Manama IISS conference. “Our goal is for our allies and partners in this region to be stronger and more capable in dealing with common threats,” Hagel maintained, while hawking U.S. missile defense systems to the six GCC member states. However, with the Geneva accord between the P5+1 and Iran eliminating the U.S.’s justification for deploying missile batteries, Russia read Hagel’s sales pitch in Manama as a threat against its own national security.<sup>23</sup> Clearly, the U.S. is not a bulwark against aggression; it is the root of aggression not only in the Persian Gulf but also in the world at large.

On January 23, 1948, the great leader and first Governor-General of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, gave an address entitled “Strong defence a bulwark against aggression.” In it, he said, “The best way in which we can serve the cause of peace is by removing temptation from the path of those who think that we are weak, and therefore, they can bully or attack us.”<sup>24</sup> I am confident that Iran’s leaders would not forget these words when dealing with Washington’s warmongers.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Karen Parrish, “Hagel Outlines U.S. Posture, Way Ahead in Middle East,” *American Forces Press Service*, December 7, 2013, accessed December 7, 2013, <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=121299>.

<sup>2</sup> Chris Carroll, “In Bahrain speech, Hagel gives overview of US arsenal on tap in Gulf,” *Stars and Stripes*, December 6, 2013, accessed December 7, 2013, <http://www.stripes.com/news/middle-east/in-bahrain-speech-hagel-gives-overview-of-us-arsenal-on-tap-in-gulf-1.256388>.

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth Katzman, “Bahrain: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy,” *Congressional Research Service*, November 6, 2013, accessed December 7, 2013, <https://www.fas.org/spp/crs/mideast/95-1013.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Chris Carroll, *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Chris Carroll, *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> “‘Bulwark against aggression’? US pushes MidEast militarization despite Iran thaw,” *Russia Today*, December 7, 2013, accessed December 7, 2013, <http://rt.com/news/us-mideast-iran-nuclear-hagel-878/>.

<sup>7</sup> Margaret Brennan, “Hagel reminds Iran that threat of force still an option,” *CBS News*, December 6, 2013, accessed December 7, 2013, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/hagel-reminds-iran-that-threat-of-force-still-an-option/>.

<sup>8</sup> Rowan Scarborough, “U.S. arms to Gulf allies hint of strategy,” *Washington Times*, December 16, 2012, accessed December 7, 2013, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2012/dec/16/us-arms-to-gulf-allies-hint-of-strategy/?page=all>.



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<sup>9</sup> Richard F. Grimmett, "Conventional Arms Transfers in the Post-Cold War Era," *Congressional Research Service*, September 28, 1993, accessed December 7, 2013, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/weapons/transfers-pcw.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Congressional Record Volume 158, Number 120, September 10, 2012, accessed December 7, 2013, [https://www.fas.org/irp/congress/2012\\_cr/grimmett.html](https://www.fas.org/irp/congress/2012_cr/grimmett.html).

<sup>11</sup> Richard F. Grimmett, "Conventional Arms Transfers in the Post-Cold War Era," *ibid.*, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Richard F. Grimmett, "Conventional Arms Transfers in the Post-Cold War Era," *ibid.*, 5.

<sup>13</sup> Cora Currier, "In Big Win for Defense Industry, Obama Rolls Back Limits on Arms Exports," *ProPublica*, October 14, 2013, accessed December 8, 2013, <http://www.propublica.org/article/in-big-win-for-defense-industry-obama-rolls-back-limits-on-arms-export>.

<sup>14</sup> Cora Currier, *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> "Fact Sheet: U.S. Relations With Bahrain," Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, *U.S. Department of State*, September 13, 2013, accessed December 7, 2013, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/26414.htm>.

<sup>16</sup> Kenneth Katzman, "Bahrain: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy," *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> "Bahrain 2012 Human Rights Report," *U.S. Department of State*, April 19, 2013, accessed December 7, 2013, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/204567.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> Kenneth Katzman, "Bahrain: Reform, Security, and U.S. Policy," *ibid.*, 16.

<sup>19</sup> "Overview – Fiscal Year 2013 Defense Budget," *U.S. Department of Defense*, February 2012, accessed December 7, 2013, [http://dcmo.defense.gov/publications/documents/FY2013\\_Budget\\_Request\\_Overview\\_Book.pdf](http://dcmo.defense.gov/publications/documents/FY2013_Budget_Request_Overview_Book.pdf).

<sup>20</sup> Chuck Hagel, "Global Security Priorities for the US," Manama Dialogue 2013 First Plenary Session, *IISS Regional Security Summit*, December 6, 2013, accessed December 7, 2013, <http://www.iiss.org/en/events/manama%20dialogue/archive/manama-dialogue-2013-4e92/plenary-1-a895/chuck-hagel-80d9>.

<sup>21</sup> "Sequester, Defense Budgets and the Industrial Base," *Aerospace Industries Association*, October 2013, accessed December 7, 2013, [http://www.aia-aerospace.org/assets/Sequester\\_Defense\\_Budgets\\_and\\_the\\_Industrial\\_Base.pdf](http://www.aia-aerospace.org/assets/Sequester_Defense_Budgets_and_the_Industrial_Base.pdf).

<sup>22</sup> "Sequester, Defense Budgets and the Industrial Base," *ibid.*, 2.

<sup>23</sup> "Bulwark against aggression'? US pushes MidEast militarization despite Iran thaw," *ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Quaid e Azam, "Strong defence a bulwark against aggression," Address to the Establishment of H.M.P.S. "Dilawar," January 23, 1948, on Pakistan Analysis website, accessed December 7, 2013, <http://www.pakistananalysis.com/en/analysis/national/item/283-strong-defence-a-bulwark-against-aggression.html>.