

The US Military Bases in the Gulf Cooperation Council States: Dynamics of Readjustment

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***Abstract:** Since the end of the Gulf War in 1991, the US military bases in the GCC states have evolved functionally from the dual containment of Iran and Iraq to the consolidation of its predominance in the Gulf region. Since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the US readjustment of its military bases in the GCC states features two attributes. First, the task of the bases has transformed from fighting the Iraq War to the more complex and enduring tasks of maintaining the Gulf security, countering terrorists and containing Iran. Second, the major military base deployment has shifted from Saudi Arabia to Qatar, Bahrain and other GCC states, so a multi-faceted security mechanism under the US leadership has taken shape, which has overshadowed the Iranian-proposed collective security appeal. In Obama's presidency, the deployment of the US military bases in the GCC states has revealed five new and distinct features, i.e. the bases are extending geographically, diminishing in size, increasingly approaching the potential enemies, strong in mobility and being*

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gradually interlinked with other bases in Central Asia, Turkey and Djibouti.

Key Words: *GCC States; Military Bases; Security Cooperation; Military Presence; US Middle East Policy*

The Middle East is one of the regions with the most serious ethnic conflicts, religious discords, terrorist attacks, territorial disputes and various other cross-border problems. However, due to its unique geographic location as a corridor of three continents of Asia, Africa and Europe, and its rich oil and natural gas reserve, the region remains a hot-spot for big-powers' competition and rivalry in the past centuries. The establishment of overseas military bases is, undoubtedly, one of the most effective ways for their power projection.^① At present, the US, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, and Japan have established dozens of military bases near the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Eden. Even India, an emerging developing country is ambitious enough to consider modeling after Japan to build another military base in Djibouti, after the one established in Kirgizstan in recent years.

What is the definition of an overseas military base? And what is the difference between overseas military bases and an overseas military presence? Despite the divergent understandings of overseas military bases, students of international relations seem to have reached a preliminary consensus on its key feature, i.e. an overseas military base refers to "an area on land or on sea beyond the sovereign state's jurisdiction, which has a certain number of armed forces, military activities, organized institutions and facilities" (Harkavy, 2007:

^① For more details on military bases, please refer to: Alexander Cooley, *Base Politics: Democratic Change and the US Military Overseas*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008; Thomas Barnett, *The Pentagon's New Map: War and Peace in the Twenty-first Century*, New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2004; Mark L. Gillem, *America Town: Building the Outposts of Empire*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

2-9). The overseas military bases are by nature geographically and functionally an extension of one country's domestic military bases abroad.

I. The US Readjustment of Its Military Bases in the GCC States after the 9/11 Terrorist Attacks

The United States, located in the western hemisphere is geographically distant from the chessboard of Eurasia, the universally recognized power center. To overcome its geographical disadvantage and intensify its intervention in the peripheral affairs of Eurasia as an off-shore balancer, the US has, for the past seven decades, depended on its overseas military bases to project its military power, exhibit its political resolve to roll back potential enemies and reveal its credibility of military commitment to its allies. Contemporarily, five major US military base conglomerations have come into being, including the vital regions of Europe, Asia-Pacific regions, North America, the Caribbean region and the Middle East. The US military bases in CCC countries are part of the grand deployment under the leadership of its Central Command. In the 21st century, these bases are not static but dynamic. The last two decades can be divided into two periods, with 9/11 terrorist attacks as the watershed.

During the decades-long history before the outbreak of the 1991 Gulf War, the US military presence in the Gulf region was mainly in the form of aircraft-carriers afloat in the offshore areas, and such aircraft carriers were interlinked with the sixth fleet in the Mediterranean Sea with a view to prevent the former Soviet Union from interfering in the Gulf's regional affairs. In the 1950s and 1960s, the UK instead of the US was the predominant power in the Gulf region with supreme military presence, and the US presence was quite limited to sporadic and temporary port-visits (Williams, 1968: 38-55). In 1968, Britain declared that it would withdraw all military forces

from the east of the Suez Canal and terminate its mandate in the Persian Gulf which lasted over two centuries (Cottrell and Bray, 1978: 7-8). In the early 1970s, although the US was ready to fill the vacuum of power in the region, President Richard Nixon hesitated to do that due to the rising Arab nationalism after the Yom Kippur War in 1973, and the US large-scale military presence in the region halted. Hence, during the whole Cold War era, the US military presence in the Persian Gulf revealed two features. First, it mainly relied on aircraft-carriers in the waters nearby instead of permanent military bases; second, its military bases were quite small and sporadic which had more political than military implications.

After the outbreak of the Gulf Crisis in 1990, the US military presence and bases in the Gulf region began to mushroom, which centered on Saudi Arabia together with other lesser powers in the GCC. This kind of posture of distribution came to an end after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, as George W Bush's administration substantially adjusted the base structure in the Gulf and a large scale military presence shifted from then troublesome Saudi Arabia to the new host countries of Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar. Since President Obama entered the White House, the US military bases in the GCC states have shifted in their immediate task from overthrowing Saddam Hussein's regime and safeguarding the post-war reconstruction in Iraq to confronting Iran and combating Taliban militants on the Afghan-Pakistan border. With its task transformed, the US military bases in the Gulf region have exhibited five new attributes, i.e. the bases are expanding geographically, diminishing in size, increasingly approaching the potential enemies, becoming stronger in maneuverability and being gradually interlinked.

First, the US military bases in the GCC states are expanding geographically. Here, "expansion" has dual meanings. On the one hand, the US military personnel have been distributed more evenly in the area; and on the other hand, the military bases themselves have

been distributed more evenly in the region. Before the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the US military bases in the GCC were concentrated in Saudi Arabia, the most powerful state in the GCC, flanked by three golden waters of the Persian Gulf, the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea (Cordesman & Al-Rodhan, 2007: 163). Despite its abundant oil reserve and unique role in the control of the regional sea power, the Saudi government is inherently vulnerable to both internal and external threats. It is a terrorist-torn Monarchy, and its ruling legitimacy is frequently challenged by both the internal and external Islamic radicals. To meet its security needs, the Saudi government was pragmatic and heavily depended on the US military bases which would undoubtedly neutralize the domestic and overseas radicals. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Saudi Arabia was regarded as the hotbed of terrorists, and the US military bases have spread to all the six GCC countries, and its military presence was in each of the member states. For instance, the headquarters of the US Central Command was moved from Saudi Arabia to Qatar in 2002, and Al Udeid air base was one of the largest bases abroad; Bahrain was the headquarters and the home port of the Fifth Fleet with as large as a 60-acre military base in Manama, the capital (Cordesman and Al-Rodhan, 2007: 65-67). During the Gulf War in 1991, Bahrain offered great support and acted as a "bridgehead" in the US military campaign (Blanche, 2002: 24). After the Iraq War, the Fifth Fleet, which was stationed in the Persian Gulf, had one aircraft-carrier fleet, including one aircraft-carrier, six warships, one attack submarine, three amphibious ships and four anti-mine ships (Zhao, 2006: 33).

After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the US also sought military bases in Oman, a state controlling Musandam Peninsula and the waters of Hormuz Strait. The two countries renewed their Collective Defense Treaty in 2002, in which Oman permitted the US to use three air bases of Seeb, Masirah, and Thumrait (Blanche, 2005: 15). In return, the US government offered \$9.4 million military assistance to Oman in 2009, which amounted to as much as \$20.27 million in 2010 (Katzman, 2009:

June 29).

The US built military bases in UAE too in the early 21st century. UAE for a long time, has had an unresolved territorial dispute with Iran over the islands of Abu Musa and The Tunbs. Partly due to the GCC's weakness and reluctance to offer military aid, the UAE pinned a high expectation on the US and allowed the latter to build military bases there in the past decade (Cordesman & Al-Rodhan, 2007: 284). On February 1, 2010, President Obama declared his intention to send the UAE a series of arms, including 80 F-16s and Patriot missiles as well as long-range anti-ballistic missiles.

Before the outbreak of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the US military forces had mainly concentrated in Saudi Arabia, and as many as 334 thousand troops were stationed in the country during the Iraq War in 2003 (Cordesman & Wagner, 1996: 84). In the early 21st century, the US-Saudi relations went through ups and downs, forcing Bush's administration to seek other alternatives for its troops in the Gulf. Steadily, it withdrew 200 military aircrafts and other supporting troops, and the tiny forces remaining were only 500, mostly for training purposes. The rest of the transferred troops were redeployed in Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, the UAE, and in Central Asian countries. As Hamad Bin Jassim Al-Thani, the Foreign Minister of Qatar put it, "we need the US force to stay here, and the US needs us too." (Jaffe, 2002: June 24). On the eve of the Iraq War in 2003, Kuwait was the most resolute county in the GCC in supporting the US military campaign to topple Saddam's regime. The Kuwait government not only provided free fuel, but also allowed the US military force to occupy as large as one quarter of the nation's territory for military purposes (Cordesman & Al-Rodhan, 2007: 87-88). During Obama's presidency, the US military troops in Kuwait were approximately 5000, which forged one of the largest army bases overseas.

Meanwhile, the US military troops in Bahrain were in the vicinity

of 2000. After the new American campaigns in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the previous force in Saudi Arabia was dispatched to Central Asia to combat the staunch force of Taliban and Al Qaeda (Zuhur, 2005: 32). As John O. Brennan, Obama's senior consultant on anti-terrorism said, "[The] Obama administration would be committed to ending the military action in Iraq and reopen a new battle for countering terrorism on the border of Afghanistan and Pakistan to eliminate the remaining terrorists" (Brennan, 2009: August 6). The scattered military bases there could help the US confront multi-faceted threats in the Gulf region, including the traditional threat of Iran and nontraditional threat of terrorism and social unrest in Iraq, Kuwait and Yemen. By "putting eggs into different baskets", the US could reduce its political risk of setting military bases, and avoid being intimidated by the host nations to close the bases when they were on bad terms with each other.

Second, the US military bases in the GCC states are diminishing in size.

Table 1: US Military Bases at Home and Abroad[®]

Location	Army Bases	Navy Bases	Air Bases	Marine Bases	Washington Command	Total
Homeland	2004	1011	1590	123	14	4742
Overseas Territories	29	72	19	1	0	121
Foreign Countries	293	136	261	26	0	716
Total	2326	1219	1870	150	14	5579

According to the *Base Structure Report, Fiscal Year 2009 Baseline*, the US military bases can be categorized into five types, including the army, navy, air, marine bases as well as the Washington D.C.

[®] Office of the Deputy under Secretary of Defense, *Base Structure Report, Fiscal Year 2009 Baseline*, Washington D.C.: US Department of Defense, 2008, pp. 2-3.

Command sites, which cover 50 states at home, 7 overseas territories as well as 38 foreign countries. There are 716 large-scale bases abroad, including 293 army bases, 136 navy bases, 261 air bases and 26 marine bases, and most of them are located in Germany (235), Japan (123) and South Korea (87).

In terms of overseas military bases, compared with the Pacific and European Command, the US Central Command is responsible for a relatively limited area, i.e. East Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia, and its headquarters is in Florida instead of the Middle East. Since the founding of the African Command in 2008, North-East Africa such as Egypt, Somalia, Djibouti and Ethiopia were excluded from the area of responsibility of the Central Command, which covered only West Asia (excluding Turkey), Central Asia, and Pakistan. Due to the geographical undersize of the Central Command’s area of responsibility, the size of military bases in the GCC countries is shrinking. Since 2008, the US troops in GCC member states have been only 11 thousand in total.

Table 2: The Reduction of the US Military Force in GCC Countries since 2008^①

Host Nations	Qatar	Bahrain	Saudi Arabia	Kuwait	UAE	Oman	Total
Number of Stationed Troops	3432	1496	500	About 5000	About 546	about26	About 11000
Main Bases	Air	Navy	Air	Army	Air	Air	

Third, the US military deployment is increasingly approaching its potential enemies. Since the outbreak of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the

^① Jules Dufour, “The Worldwide Network of US Military Bases: the Global Deployment of US Military Personnel,” *Global Research*, July 2007, pp. 2-7; Richard F. Grimmett, “Instances of Use of United States Armed Forces Abroad, 1798-2009,” *Congressional Research Service*, January 27, 2010, pp. 2-3.

strategic task of the US force in the GCC countries has transformed from fighting the Iraq War to multi-dimensional functions of consolidating the US leadership in the Gulf region, countering terrorism, and containing Iran. Particularly for the sake of checking Iran, the US has strengthened its control over the pivot of “the Arc of the Instability” in Eurasia, i.e. the Persian Gulf. Although the stationed troops are smaller in number compared with that in Europe and East Asia, the US military facilities in the GCC states have been consistently updated which have become the forward area in containing Iran, such as Camp as-Sayliyah near Doha, Qatar, which acted as the forward headquarters of the Central Command. Another example is al-Udeid of Qatar, the bridgehead of the US containment of Iran. The airbase boasts a 14760-foot-long runway, the longest in the Middle East. Its huge concrete bunkers have the capacity of stationing 120 aircraft. Moreover, it took \$1.4 billion US in construction with advanced electronic facilities (Calder, 2007: 30). In 2010, the US had 34 key construction projects at al-Udeid airbase, all of which will be finished by December 21, 2011 (Department of Defense, 2010: April 19). The Doha seaport is also under construction to accommodate US aircraft carriers in the future. Apart from Qatar, the US military garrisons in Kuwait, the UAU and Bahrain have also been updated with improved infrastructure, which might play an essential role in challenging Iran.

Fourth, the US military deployment in the GCC states is increasingly strong in mobility. According to the *Strengthening US Global Defense Posture* by the US Department of Defense, its overseas military garrisons can be put into three categories: Main Operating Bases, Forward Operating Sites, and Cooperative Security Locations (Department of Defense, 2004: 10). The Main Operating Bases were overseas, permanently manned, well protected bases, used to support permanently deployed forces, and with robust sea and/or air access; the Forward Operating Sites are scalable, “warm” facilities that can support sustained operations, but with only a small permanent presence of support or contractor personnel, and they will host

occasional rotational forces and many contain pre-positioned equipment; and Cooperative Security Sites (CSS) are host-nation facilities with little or no permanent US personnel presence, which may contain pre-positioned equipment and/or logistical arrangements and serve both for security cooperation activities and contingency access. ^①

Since 2003, the US government has, on the basis of the above-mentioned first and second categories of bases, increased the number of the CSS with a view to substantially make use of the host countries' military bases and facilities in case of emergency. For instance, in 2009, the US contractor personnel participants in Oman were about 26, and the contractor personnel in Saudi Arabia and UAE were only several hundred. Nevertheless, should a crisis erupt, the US would be able to make use of the host states' military facilities and base infrastructure and increase its quick military deployment in such forward areas. Hence, CSS is not only economical but also flexible and maneuvering, and the foreign country could adjust its scale and number of military bases in accordance with practical needs.

Fifth, the US military bases and facilities in the GCC states are increasingly interlinked. According to the changed regional security situation, the US government has integrated all its military facilities and garrisons in the Persian Gulf in function and task, so that it has become a network of containment. On the one hand, the US military bases in the GCC countries were centered in Qatar, Kuwait and Bahrain and meanwhile they received subordinate support from the sites in Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Oman to forge an "arc of containment" after the outbreak of the Iranian nuclear crisis (Winkler, 2007: 181-198). On the other hand, during the Obama administration, the US military bases in GCC countries echoed those in Iraq, Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Pakistan, so that the areas of responsibility of West Asia, Central Asia and Pakistan under the US

^① See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cooperative_Security_Location.

Central Command could be integrated to support its counter-terror campaign in Afghanistan and Pakistan and deter anti-American force in the Middle East (Liu, 2009: 38). These military bases would also echo the US military base in Djibouti as well as other facilities in Egypt, Sudan and East Africa, the designated area of responsibility under the African Command.

II. The Dynamics of the US Readjustment of Its Military Bases in the GCC Countries

The dynamics of the US readjustment of its military bases in the GCC countries are four-fold. The first is the change of the US national security strategy. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the US designated terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) as the primary threat and regarded the greater Middle East including Central Asia, West Asia and part of South Asia as the “Arc of Instability” (Moore, 2004: 9).

Unlike Europe, the Asia-Pacific and American continents, the greater Middle East for a long time has been excluded from the international system dominated by the west, and it is often the hotbed of anti-Americanism and home to terrorism. The US military bases in the GCC countries came to form a “triangle” together with that in Turkey and Djibouti; The US military bases in the Greater Middle East also constituted the “five-finger” strategic deployment together with that in the Asia-Pacific, Europe, North America and the Caribbean region, as the cornerstone of the US global power projection. The Obama administration has shifted its focus of anti-terrorism from Iraq to Central Asia, and this kind of strategic transfer has given rise to the readjustment of its military bases in the GCC states. In late 2009, the US National Security Forum in Chicago predicted in a report that the future security challenge to the US includes both sovereign states and non-sovereign entities. The former includes Iran, North Korea and Venezuela, as examples, while the latter includes religious extremists,

ethnic radicals and terrorists. What is more overwhelming, according to the analysis, is the confluence of the two categories of threats. When they converged, such an anti-American coalition might launch an asymmetrical threat to the overseas US facilities (Williams, 2009: 1-3). The US readjustment of its military bases in the GCC countries could better meet the diversity of security threats in the region. After the outbreak of riots in Kyrgyzstan on April 9, 2010, the US government was concerned that the new pro-Russian government might close the US military bases on its territory, and the US military bases in the GCC countries seemed to be more valuable.

Second, the transformation of the US military task in the Persian Gulf also gave rise to its readjustment of its military bases in the GCC countries. Before 2004, the US military deployment in the region had aimed at overthrowing the Saddam regime, and its military bases were concentrated in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, the very frontier of combating the Iraq War. After the new Iraqi leadership was elected under the US supervision, the American force came to target Iran and regarded it as the supreme challenger to US leadership in the Persian Gulf. Consequently, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and the UAE, the very neighbors of Iran, became the major non-NATO allies in the region (Aldinger, 2004: April 1). In 2008, the US and Kuwait signed an arms sales agreement of \$ 328 million, and the Bush administration declared its intention to sell Kuwait Laser-guided missiles (Loony, 2009: 459). Since then, the US has maintained about 10 military bases, and the largest ones are Camp Buehring and Camp Arifjan. The US deployment of the Patriot anti-missile system also targeted Iran (Cordesman, 2004: 343). In April 22 through 26, 2010, for the commemoration of the 31st anniversary of the founding of the Islamic revolutionary guards, Iran initiated a large military maneuver of joint army, navy and air forces near Hormuz Strait, and tested its home-made cruise missiles. Over 300 warships of various kinds participated in the maneuver, which was regarded as a

counter-measure to balance the US influence in the region (Iran: Military Exercise, 2010: April 22). On May 5 of the same year, Iran initiated another eight-day long military maneuver. The US military bases in the GCC countries might cause the escalation of a security rivalry between Iran and Israel, Saudi Arabia and the US.

Third, the evolution of the US-GCC members' bilateral relations also contributed to the readjustment of its military bases in the Persian Gulf. After the 9/11 incident, the US-Saudi relations worsened all of sudden, and Saudi Arabia was charged as the covert sponsor of terrorists in the world. Due to the bilateral discord, Saudi Arabia prohibited the US from using certain military facilities in the country, and the US air force command and communication centers were forced to move to Qatar. After the outbreak of the Iraq War, the US air force in Riyadh and Patriot missile troops eventually withdrew from Saudi Arabia, and the rest of the small-scale troops took only defensive and training tasks (Cordesman, 2004: 312-324). From the Saudi perspective, the rise of domestic anti-Americanism, the emphasis on diplomatic independence as well as the practice of "power balance policy" eventually sabotaged the bases of US-Saudi special relations. As a result, the US had to rely on Qatar, Bahrain and Kuwait for new bases (Perry and Yoshihara, 2004:12).

Compared with Saudi Arabia, other GCC states seemed more "warm-hearted" in accepting the US military bases. On March 25, 2002, US President Bush designated Bahrain as a "major non-NATO ally" (Blanche, 2002: 24), which was a new pro-US partner with Bahrain and Kuwait. In February 2003, Bahrain decided to allow the US to continue to use its air and navy bases, and the bilateral relations were pushed to a new height (Han, 2009: 179). On the eve of the Iraq War, although Qatar was against the war, Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al- Thani, the Emir of the country reportedly told General Tommy Franks, Commander-in-chief of the US Central Command that now the US could have an opportunity to salvage Iraqi people (Franks, 2004: 404). In addition to Qatar and Bahrain, the US also maintained a special

relation with the UAE. Its airbase of al-Dhafra near Abu Dhabi was stationed with about 1500 US military personnel (Cloud, 2006: February 23). The airbase had a “Special Airborne Operation Center of Gulf”, which functioned as the training center for allies’ pilots (Sirak, 2004: 32-37). Boasting the largest seaport of Dubai, UAE was stationed with as many as several hundred warships of various kinds, belittling the rest of the bases in GCC countries. In January 2008, President Bush visited UAE for the first time throughout the American history. President Sheikh Khalifa of UAE remarked that his state was an important US partner in the war against terrorism, and that the UAE would be committed to maintaining the regional and world stability together with the US (Looney, 2009: 387). In May 2009, President Obama ratified the US-UAE Agreement on the Peaceful Use of Nuclear Energy. Similar to the UAE, Oman also kept congenial relations with the US. On January 1, 2009, the US-Oman free trade Agreement began to take effect, signaling a better political and military cooperation in the future.

Finally, the US readjustment of its military bases in the GCC countries resulted from its economic slowdown. The year 2008 witnessed a world-wide financial crisis with the US as the “epicenter”. To leave the shadow of economic recession and reduce national budget, the Bush and Obama administrations attempted to reduce the size and number of military bases to cut the expenditure. By late 2010, the US maintained only 50 military bases in Iraq with less than 50 thousand troops in the country; the Major Operating Bases in the GCC were also cut to minimize their expenditure.

III. Conclusion: Implications of the US Readjustment of Its Military Bases in the GCC States

Since the 1980s, the Persian Gulf has remained the heart of the Islamic world, but the GCC tried in vain to maintain regional peace

and security several times due to the lack of its enforcement power, such as the Iran-Iraq War, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, and the Gulf War. After the outbreak of the Gulf War, the Saudi government even disbanded the GCC troops in Hafr al Batin, symbolizing the failure of GCC integration in keeping regional security and portending the new beginning of the US deployment of armed force in Persian Gulf (Terrill, 2006: 45; 244). The last two decades has witnessed a substantial readjustment of the US military bases in the GCC countries, which would inevitably exert a far-reaching impact on regional security pattern.

First, it would consolidate the US predominance in the Gulf security framework. In recent years, there have been three different ideas on the maintenance of Gulf security order: the first is a west-dominated security framework advocated by the US; the second is Shi'ah security framework advocated by Iran; and the third is Saudi-dominated GCC security framework advocated by the Arab countries. In 2005, the GCC quick response force was formally disbanded, and there was only one headquarters and one air force command system remaining in Saudi Arabia. Hence, the internal security mechanism of GCC was only symbolic instead of substantial (Cordesman and Al-Rodhan, 2004: 11). At present, the Gulf security framework is actually dominated by the US, resembling a pyramid structure. On January 27, 2010, President Obama remarked in his State of the Union Address that the US would tackle with Iran by both means of military containment and diplomatic negotiations. In February 2010, General David Petraeus, the Commander-in-Chief of the Central Command claimed that the US would formally deploy 8 Patriot PAC-3 missile companies in Qatar, the UAE, Bahrain and Kuwait, and each country would have two. The missile defense system of the four countries had basically been finished by July 2010 (Obama, 2010: January 28; Saeedi, 2010: April 21). To foster military integration of the GCC with the US, the Obama administration has actively integrated the six countries into the US economic orbit, and it

is estimated that the US-Greater Middle East Free Trade Area will be built by 2013 (Looney, 2009: 430).

Second, the US readjustment of its military bases in the GCC countries would cause more uncertainty in the region. With the intensification of the Iranian nuclear issue, the US-Iranian relations would face more challenges. With the renewed deployment of the US military bases closer to Iran, the GCC countries would obviously have been “hijacked” by the US foreign policy. The US-Iranian or Israel-Iranian relations’ intensification may cause a chain reaction and the US military bases in GCC countries might become the potential targets for Iran to launch a counterstrike. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadi-Nejad appealed frequently that GCC countries should not allow the US to set up military bases there. On April 25, 2010, Kazem Jalali a drafter of Iran's Parliament National Security and Foreign Policy Commission said, “the continued presence of foreign military forces in the region has caused insecurity and instability in our region. Under these conditions, Middle East countries, particularly those in the Persian Gulf, should join one another in a collective security treaty to ensure regional safety.” (Iran Calls, 2010: April 26). This proposal showed the Iranian great concern, but has not yet received a positive response from the GCC countries, and the US military bases in these countries might be a potential factor for the outbreak of a war.

Third, the US readjustment of its military bases in the GCC countries would intensify anti-Americanism in the region. Since the end of the Second World War, most of the Muslims in the Islamic world resented the US and Soviet Union for their deployment of armed force on the Muslims’ motherland (Baxter & Akbarzadeh, 2008: 3). After the 1980 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, a great number of Islamic radicals swarmed into the war-torn state and launched “holy war” to force the Soviet force to retreat. Since the 1990s, Al-Qaeda launched a series of attacks including the 9/11 terrorist attacks partly to force the US to close its military bases in Saudi Arabia. Military

bases in the GCC countries could easily be politicized and become the source of anti-Americanism (Cooley, 2008: 10-11). In recent years, Islamic radicals in the region have already expressed their dissatisfaction over the foreign military bases and facilities. On August 28, 2009, Mohammed bin Nayef, the Interior Minister of Saudi Arabia was attacked and injured by suicide bombers (Shihri, 2009: August 28); on April 28, 2010, the supreme court of the UAE ordered the arrest of five natives and one Afghan who were charged of financing the Taliban and attempted to set up a terrorist organization in the Gulf (UAE Jails, 2010: April 28). To lessen domestic resentment and dissatisfaction, the GCC countries began to allow the US to use their military facilities through the CSS to reduce the number of the US troops in their countries.

Finally, the US consolidation and readjustment of its military bases in the GCC countries are bound to cause more fierce competition among big powers. The Middle East is the focal point of the world hot-spot disputes and the Persian Gulf holds the major hot-spot issues in the Middle East, including the Iran-Iraq War in 1980-1988; the Gulf War in 1991; the Iraq War in 2003; and the Iranian nuclear crisis in 2006. Due to its unique geographic location, rich oil and natural reserves as well as the intricate disputes, the Persian Gulf would become a new powder-peg in the world, and the establishment and expansion of military presence is the major way for big powers to project their power and influence. It is reported that the US would reestablish the tenth fleet in the near future, and there would be five aircraft carriers either stationed in the Persian Gulf permanently or concentrated into the region after a crisis erupted (Saeedi, 2010: April 21). In addition to the US, on May 26, 2009, French President Nicolas Sarkozy declared that France would build its first permanent military base in Abu Dhabi, UAE with a capacity of 500 army, navy and air personnel. It seemed to imply that France would play a more essential role in Gulf affairs (Iran Slams, 2009: May 27). The United Kingdom was considering coming back to the Persian Gulf too. In 2010, the UK

was negotiating on reopening a military base in Oman. Moreover, France, the US and Japan have built military bases in Djibouti; Iran is planning to build a navy base at Djask (Fathi, 2008: October 28). It can be predicted that big powers' everlasting rivalry and security competition would be fiercer in the Persian Gulf and the Arab Sea in the second decade of the 21st century. Overseas military bases, as the means of power projection, will be of great significance in Persian Gulf security in the years to come.

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