



NATO Foundation  
*Defense College*

## NATO DEFENSE COLLEGE FOUNDATION

### STRATEGIC TRENDS

May 2015

#### **GULF**

##### **The US-GCC Camp David Summit**

On May 13-14, president Barack Obama hosted the Gulf Cooperation Council's leaders for a summit, first in Washington and then in Camp David.

After the 5+1 preliminary agreement with Iran on the nuclear issue, Obama administration wanted to reassure the traditional US Gulf allies about two key points. Firstly, the signature of a framework deal with Teheran (possible by June 30), will not normalise relations between Washington and the Islamic Republic. Secondly, the United States are not going to disengage from Gulf security, and so they will continue providing external security for the Arabian shore of the Gulf.

The final joint statement released by the White House's press office stresses the US and GCC political commitment to enhance defence cooperation, especially in the fields of anti-missile defence and maritime security, cybersecurity, accelerating also procurement procedures. With regard to the last point, during the talks it emerged that the Gulf monarchies could receive the status of major non-NATO (MNNA) allies, as Bahrain already has since 2002. An important point that does not in the official joint text.

Only the emir of Qatar, Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and the emir of Kuwait, Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber al-Sabah took part to the summit, while other parties preferred to send their deputies. The absence of Saudi king Salman bin Abdulaziz fostered rumours of disagreements with Washington. In reality, president Obama had the opportunity to discuss personally with the new generation of Saudi decision-makers: Mohammad bin Nayef, the crown prince and interior minister, and Mohammed bin Salman, one of the king's son, current defence minister and deputy crown prince. Weeks ago, king Salman carried out a

cabinet reshuffle and changed the line of succession to the throne, sending positive signals to Washington. Mohammed bin Nayef, who headed Riyadh's delegation, is responsible for Saudi anti-terrorism policies and is held in esteem by the White House, as well as the new foreign minister, Adel al-Jubeir, who was Saudi ambassador in the United States since 2007.

Yet, despite the public revitalisation of Saudi-American alliance, political frictions are bound to continue: in fact, Riyadh fears Teheran's rising transnational role in the Middle East and Syria remains the main proxy battlefield. United States and Iran share some convergent interests in regional security and they have been co-operating (although indirectly) against the so-called Islamic State in Iraq (Dawla or DAESH), seeking also a political solution for the Yemeni crisis.

Due to a rising perception of the "Iranian threat", Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar seem to have temporarily set aside recent divergences on Doha's support for the Muslim Brotherhood. In the relationship with the United States, the Gulf Cooperation Council has been experiencing the alliance security dilemma: it refuses to get itself trapped by unwanted outcomes (like the détente with Teheran) but fears to be abandoned by their main ally.

Next months will be critical to assess "the state of art" of US-GCC relationship. In the meantime, Gulf monarchies will go on in the effort of differentiate their set of international alliances, within the framework of Riyadh's inevitable partnership with Washington.

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