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Saudi Arabia Enters the 21st Century: The Military and Internal Security Dimension

V. The Saudi National Guard

Final Review

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Introduction

This analysis is being circulated for comment as part of the CSIS “Saudi Arabia Enters the 21st Century Project.” It will be extensively revised before final publication.

Those interested in commenting, or in participating in the project, should contact Anthony H. Cordesman at the address shown on the cover sheet at Acordesman@aol.com.

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The CSIS “Saudi Arabia Enters the 21st Century Project”

The CSIS is undertaking a new project to examine the trends shaping the future of Saudi Arabia and its impact on the stability of the Gulf. This project is supported by the Smith Richardson Foundation and builds on the work done for the CSIS Strategic Energy Initiative, the CSIS Net Assessment of the Middle East, and the Gulf in Transition Project. It is being conducted in conjunction with a separate – but closely related – study called the Middle East Energy and Security Project.

The project is being conducted by Anthony H. Cordesman, the Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy. It uses a net assessment approach that looks at all of the major factors affecting Saudi Arabia’s strategic, political, economic, and military position and future implications of current trends. It is examining the internal stability and security of Saudi Arabia, social and demographic trends, and the problem of Islamic extremism. It also examines the changes taking place in the Saudi economy and petroleum industries, the problems of Saudisation, changes in export and trade patterns, and Saudi Arabia’s new emphasis on foreign investment.

The assessment of Saudi Arabia’s strategic position includes a full-scale analysis of Saudi military forces, defense expenditures, arms imports, military modernization, readiness, and war fighting capability. It also, however, looks beyond the military dimension and a narrowly definition of political stability, and examine the implications of the shifts in the pattern of Gulf, changes in Saudi external relations such changes in Saudi policy towards Iran and Iraq. It examines the cooperation and tensions between Saudi Arabia and the other Southern Gulf states. It examines the implications of the conventional military build-up and creeping proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the Gulf, the resulting changes in Saudi Arabia’s security position. It also examines the security and strategic implications of the steady expansion of Saudi Arabia’s oil, gas, and petrochemical exports.

This project is examining the succession in the Royal Family, the immediate political probabilities, and the generational changes that are occurring in the royal family and Saudi Arabia’s technocrats. At the same time, it examines the future political, economic, and social trends in Saudi Arabia, and possible strategic futures for Saudi Arabia through the year 2010.

This examination of the strategic future of Saudi Arabia includes Saudi Arabia’s possible evolution in the face of different internal and external factors -- including changes in foreign and trade policies towards Saudi Arabia by the West, Japan, and the Gulf states. Key issues affecting Saudi Arabia’s future, including its economic development, relations with other states in the region, energy production and policies, and security relations with other states will be examined as well.

A central focus of this project is to examine the implications of change within Saudi Arabia, their probable mid and long-term impacts, and the most likely changes in the nature or behavior of

Saudi Arabia's current ruling elite, and to project the possible implications for both Gulf stability and the US position in the Gulf.

Work on the project will focus on the steady development of working documents that will be revised steadily during the coming months on the basis on outside comment. As a result, all of the material provided in this section of the CSIS web page should be regarded as working material that will change according to the comments received from policymakers and outside experts. To comment, provide suggestions, or provide corrections, please contact Anthony H. Cordesman at the CSIS at the address shown on each report, or e-mail him at Acordesman@aol.com.

Related material can be found in the "Gulf and Transition" and " Middle East Energy and Security" sections of the CSIS Web Page at CSIS.ORG.

Table of Contents

V. THE SAUDI NATIONAL GUARD	1
THE MANNING OF THE NATIONAL GUARD	2
THE ORGANIZATION OF THE NATIONAL GUARD	3
THE EQUIPMENT OF THE NATIONAL GUARD	6
THE GUARD'S SUPPORT CAPABILITIES	8
THE TRAINING OF THE NATIONAL GUARD	9
THE READINESS AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE NATIONAL GUARD	10
<i>Tribal Forces or Fowj</i>	11
<i>Full-Time Forces</i>	12
<i>Expansion Options</i>	13
<i>Strategic Issues: The Role of the National Guard Relative to the Army</i>	13
ENDNOTES	15

List of Maps, Tables, and Figures

TABLE 5.1	5
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V. The Saudi National Guard

Saudi Arabia divides its land force manpower between the Army and the Saudi Arabian National Guard (SANG). The National Guard is the successor of the loyal elements of the Ikhwan or White Army. It is a tribal force forged out of those tribal elements loyal to the Saud family. It was created in 1956, and was originally administered directly by the king until King Faisal appointed Prince Abdullah its commander in 1962. A year later, Abdullah requested a British Military Mission to help modernize the Guard. Since the late 1970s, however, the U.S.-Saudi Arabian National Guard Program (SANG) and US contractors have provided most of the SANG's advisory functions.¹

The National Guard is sometimes viewed as a counterweight to any threat from the regular military forces, and a counterbalance within the royal family to Sudairi control over the regular armed forces. Over time, however, it has become a steadily more effective internal security force, as well as a force that can provide rear area security for the Army and can help defend Riyadh. The five major current missions of the Guard are:

- Maintain security and stability within the Kingdom,
- Defend vital facilities (religious sites, oil fields),
- Provide security and a screening force for the Kingdom's borders.
- Provide a combat ready internal security force for operations throughout the Kingdom, and
- Provide security for Crown Prince Abdullah.

The National Guard was used to deal with the Shi'ite uprising in the Eastern Province, the siege of the Grand Mosque in Mecca in 1979, and put down the Iranian riots in Mecca in 1987. It also helped secure the Eastern Province during the Iran-Iraq War and Gulf War.² The National Guard remains under the command of Crown Prince Abdullah, and his half-brother, Prince Badr Bin Abdul Aziz, the Deputy Commander-in-Chief.³

The Assistant Deputy Commander of the Guard is Sheik Abdul Aziz Bin Abdul Moshin Al Tuwaijiri, who has served with the Guard since its creation as a modern force. The command

structure of the Guard is then divided into three main branches: The primary operational branch is under the Prince Lt. General Mit'eb Bin Abdual Aziz, the Assistant Deputy Commander for Military Affairs.⁴ Lt. General Mit'eb is another son of the Crown Prince, and many feel he will replace his father as the commander of the National Guard. He was educated at Sandhurst, and has excellent relations with the British and US armies. He is well liked in the region, and is one of the few Saudi officers with good relations with the military in both Jordan and Turkey.

The Health Affairs branch is under Dr. Fahad Abdul Jabber, and provides some of the most advanced medical care in the Kingdom. A civil Deputy, Sheik Abdul Rahman Abu Haimid, controls expenditures and the budget. Sheik Haimid's control over expenditures, and the Guard's reliance on US government-supervised FMS buys, is reported to be a major reason why the National Guard has not been accused of the kind of cronyism and commission-granting that has affected the regular services. One observer, who is a strong proponent of the Guard, estimated that the Guard got 93 cents worth of equipment for every procurement dollar (the US charges a 3 cent administration fee), while the regular services got only 70 cents worth.

The Manning of the National Guard

Estimates of the current full time strength of the National Guard differ sharply. The IISS, for example, reported that the Guard had 57,000 actives, and 20,000 tribal levies in 1999, but reported that it had 75,000 actives, and 25,000 tribal levies in 2000.⁵ A senior US expert quoted a strength of 105,000 in February 2001. Regardless of the exact numbers, it is clear that the Guard is now far larger than it was at the time of the Gulf War, and that it has a full-time active strength approaching that of the Saudi Army.

The Guard's manning now includes a much larger proportion of trained, full-time personnel. In the past, the National Guard recruited largely from loyal tribes in the Najd and Hasa. Its recruiting base has steadily expanded, however, to include other regions and urban areas, and it now has some Shi'ites. The Guard now deliberately avoids creating active units based around one tribe or region, and recruits on a central basis with much larger numbers of entrants from urban areas. There are far more qualified applicants for its academy and for enlisted positions than the Guard can accept; sometimes over 20 qualified applicant for each opening.

Retention is high, with only 10-15% losses after the first tour of duty. Most personnel serve out a career of 25-35 years. This, however, has disadvantages. Even though the Guard tends to promote more on the basis of merit than the other services, key personnel stay too long in given ranks and grades. The Guard needs about 17% attrition annually to keep its personnel in the proper age brackets, and does not come close to this goal – particularly at the more senior levels. Early retirement carries a considerable stigma in some levels of Saudi society, and any retirement means a significant loss in status.

The Organization of the National Guard

The Saudi Arabian National Guard (SANG) does not have a formal mission statement. It is, however, primarily a combat force, and internal security missions like riot control and guard duty have secondary and declining importance. It does not provide security for the royal family, except for its commander Crown Prince Abdullah, and most internal security missions are the responsibility of the Ministry of the Interior. ARAMCO has its own active guard force for the Saudi oil fields.

The SANG is headquartered at Riyadh, and has separate regional headquarters for an Eastern and Western Region at Dammam and Jeddah. The Guard's full-time professional forces have been organized into modern military formations over the two decades. The Guard held its first significant training exercises for its first 6,500-man Mechanized Brigade, the Imam Mohammed bin-Saud Brigade, during the early 1980s. It deployed a brigade-sized presence, and a limited oil-field security force in the Eastern Province, and the Mohammed bin Saud brigade held its first major exercise in the desert about 250 miles west of Riyadh in early 1983. Units moved to join this exercise from other parts of the Kingdom and from as far away as the Eastern Province, and the key mechanized elements performed relatively well. While the Guard experienced problems in translating tribal discipline into regular military discipline, and the force was below its authorized manning level, the set-piece maneuvers performed were successful.

Since that time the Guard has steadily expanded its combat capabilities. The National Guard inaugurated its second mechanized "brigade" in a ceremony on March 14, 1985. This new unit was called the King Abd al-Aziz Brigade, which was formed after another relatively successful round of set-piece exercises called "Al Areen," which were held near Bisha. Prince

Abdullah then spoke of expanding the Guard to 35,000 men, and succeeded in building up a force of three mechanized "brigades" by 1989. In the mid-1990s, he discussed expanding the Guard to a total manning of 80,000-100,000 by the year 2000, a goal that the SANG largely met.⁶

In 2002, the Guard was organized into four mechanized brigades with a fifth forming, these brigades had modern Light Armored Vehicles (LAVs), and each brigade had some 800 men each and some 360 vehicles. There were also five light infantry brigades, equipped primarily with V-150s. These forces were deployed so that there were two mechanized brigades, and another forming, near Riyadh, plus one light infantry brigade. The Western Sector had three light infantry brigades, and the Eastern sector has one mechanized and one light infantry brigade.

There were combined arms battalions near Arar, Rafha, and Hail, and a ceremonial cavalry squadron at Riyadh. There were training and support bases headquartered at Riyadh, Jeddah, and Dammam.⁷ These Guard battalions were normally assigned only to protect sensitive facilities in the provinces like power generation, desalination, and communications. There also were tribal force elements (or "Fowj") at Arar, Dammam, Rafha, Hail, Buraydah, Hofuf, Medina, Jeddah, Yanbu, Mecca, Taif, Najran, Jizan, Sharawrah, and Riyadh. In early 2002, the Guard had the order of battle shown in Chart 5.1

Table 5.1The Saudi National Guard Order of Battle in Early-2002Headquarters: Riyadh

- Turki Mechanized Brigade (in formation)
- IMBS Mechanized Brigade
- PSAR Mechanized Brigade
- King Khalid Light Infantry Brigade
- Support brigade
- MP battalion
- King Khalid Light Infantry Brigade support battalion.
- Training Base: Signal School, Medical School, NGMS, KKMA, recruiting.
- Support Base: Signal Corps, Medical Corps, Weapons and ammunition, Logistics base, and engineers.

Eastern Region Headquarters: Dammam (Brigades at Dammam and Hofuf)

- KAA Mechanized Brigade (in formation)
- Guard Battalion
- MP battalion
- Recruiting.
- Support Base: Signal Corps, Medical Corps, Weapons and ammunition, Logistics base, and engineers.

Western Sector Headquarters: Jeddah (Brigades at Jeddah, Medina, and Taif)

- KFB Mechanized Brigade
- KSB Mechanized Brigade
- KOKB Mechanized Brigade
- Guard Battalion
- MP battalion
- Recruiting.
- Support Base: Signal Corps, Medical Corps, Weapons and ammunition, Logistics base, and engineers.

Independently deployed light infantry battalions

- Arar (?)
- Yanbu
- Rafha
- Hail (?)

Independent Regular National Guard Element or Presence: Arar, Tabuk, Rafha, Hail, Buraydah, Hofuf, Medina, Yanbu, Mecca, Taif, Khamis Mushayt, Najran, Jizan, Sharawrah.

Independent Tribal Forces or "Fowj" Element or Presence: Arar, Dammam, Rafha, Hail, Buraydah, Hofuf, Medina, Jeddah, Yanbu, Mecca, Taif, , Najran, Jizan, Sharawrah, Riyadh.

Source: Author's interviews in Saudi Arabia, April 2000 and February 2001

The Equipment of the National Guard

The guard does not have a complex or sophisticated mix of equipment, but had chosen to standardize on some of the best wheeled armored weapons available. In 2002, the Guard's forces operational forces were equipped with about 1,117 LAV light armored vehicles in its mechanized units. According to the IISS, these included 394 LAV-25s, 184 LAV-Cps, 130 LAV-Ags, 111 LAV-AT, 73 LAV-Ms, 47 LAV, plus 190 LAV support vehicles. It also had 290 V-150 Commando armored vehicles in active service in its light infantry forces, plus 810 more V-150s in storage. The Guard prefers wheeled vehicles because of their superior speed, endurance, and ease of maintenance. The Guard also had a significant number of towed artillery weapons.

The Guard's V-150s have been in service for some time. They are part of an older family of armored vehicles with a number of different configurations and weapons systems, including anti-tank guided missile carriers, cannon turrets, and main guns. While estimates differ, current holdings seem to include 100-120 V-150s configured as AIFVs, 20-30 with 90 mm guns, 130-140 armored command vehicles, 70-80 81 mm mortar carriers, 45-50 armored recovery vehicles, 30 special purpose vehicles, and 325-375 configured as APCs.⁸ Other reports indicate that the SANG has 100 TOW fire units are mounted on its V-150s. The V-150s have been retrofitted to have air conditioning.

Some reports indicate that the SANF also had 440 Piranha light, 8X8 wheeled armored vehicles. These are designed by FAMAE/MOWAG of Switzerland, and made in Switzerland, Canada, and the UK. They have a combat weight of 16,000 kilograms, a maximum crew of 16, a range of 780 kilometers, and a maximum road speed of 100 kilometers per hour. They can be armed with a wide range of weapons, and configured as support vehicles. They have cross-country mobility roughly equivalent to that of tracked vehicles.

The SANG's most important purchase is a buy of some 1,117 LAV-25s (light armored vehicles) from General Motors of Canada through the US Army Tank Automotive Command (TACOM) at a cost of \$3.4 billion. The resulting package included 116 TOW launchers with 2001 missiles, 27 M-198 155mm howitzers, support systems, training, and facilities. The LAV-25 is another 8x8 wheeled armored vehicle that can be configured in a number of different ways.

It has excellent cross-country mobility, and has been used by the US Marine Corps for some years. It is primarily a combat fighting vehicle, rather than a transport, but also has a number of command, reconnaissance, and support variants.

The National Guard has chosen the Delco 120mm Armored Mortar System for installation on the Lav-25s. The Saudi National Guard also ordered 130 90mm turret weapon systems in Cockerill LCTS Mark 8 turrets and 130 M-240 .50 machine guns to upgrade its OAFVs in 1997. It purchased 169,00 rounds of 90mm ammunition and a full range of spares as part of this buy.⁹

These deliveries are giving the National Guard ten variants of the LAV-25, including 111 anti-tank weapons vehicles with TOW, 73 armored mortar systems with 120 mm mortars, 182 command vehicles, 71 ambulances, 417 APCs, together with ammunition carriers, recovery vehicles, engineer vehicles. Some 384 LAVs will be armed with two man turrets with the 25mm McDonnell Douglas chain gun and thermal sights. In late April 1997, Saudi Arabia selected the Belgian LCTS Mk 8 90mm turret, fitted with computerized fire control systems, for the remaining LAVs.¹⁰ The SANG took delivery of the first of 73 120 mm armored mortar systems in 1998.

The Guard plans to standardize its mechanized brigades to use the LAV. Three mechanized brigades already have the LAV, and a fourth is phasing out its gas-powered V-150s. This conversion to the LAV seems to have been completed in 2001, and all five brigades should be fully manned and converted within the next few years. Conversion was easy enough so that only one battalion set of the LAV-s was in storage in the spring of 2000.

The Guard had 40 M-102 105mm towed artillery weapons, 30 M-198 155mm howitzers, in early-2002, plus 30 M-198 howitzers in 2001. It also have 81mm and 120mm mortars, including 73 120mm mortars mounted in LAV-Ms. The Guard needs more weapons and is short of the artillery support it needs, but has found the US-supplied M-198 to be too heavy and is examining weapons from other countries.

The Guard also had 116 TOW launchers and 2,000 missiles, and HMMWV light transport vehicles on order. It had large numbers of TOW anti-tank guided missiles, rocket launchers, and recoilless rifles.

The Guard has a limited number of helicopters. Its air defenses consist largely of 30 M-40 Vulcan 20 mm anti-aircraft guns. The Guard has sought to buy the US Stinger, but the US insists that US officers have access to the weapons and count regular formal inventories. Crown Prince Abdullah feels this is a violation of Saudi sovereignty. The Guard has also examined the possibility of using a vehicle-mounted version of the AMRAAM anti-air missile.

The National Guard is steadily improving its communications. It now has advanced SINGARS tactical radios. It has a \$52 million contract with the Harris Corporation for RF-5000 Falcon digital high-frequency radios for its vehicles and base stations, and Arabic-language data terminals, turn-key logistical support, and technical assistance.¹¹

The Guard's Support Capabilities

The Guard's support has greatly improved its ability to sustain its deployed forces in recent years, help in part by its standardization on one basic family of mechanized vehicles for each combat unit, and deliberate effort to avoid complicating its "train, maintain, and sustain" efforts with over-sophisticated or complicated mixes of equipment.

Its full-time active forces do remain dependent on outside contractors for some forms of rear area service support, maintenance, and logistics—although both Saudi and foreign observers note that the foreign advisory and the contract support for the SANG has always been performance oriented while the advisory and contract support for the regular forces has often been sales oriented. This support is delivered in part through a modernization program financed by the Saudi government and run by the Office of the Program Manager-Saudi National Guard (OPM-SANG), which is part of the US Army Materiel Command and by contractors like the Vinnell Corporation. In 2000, the OPM had 95 military personnel, 50 US civilians, 43 third country civilians, and 95 local hires. There were 400 subcontractor civilian personnel, 280 US and 500 Saudi contractors, and 250 contractor personnel from other countries. These advisory groups were located in Dammam, Hofuf, Riyadh, Jeddah, and Taif.

This advisory, support, and medical services program is now a quarter of a century old and has cost Saudi Arabia well over \$6 billion. It was the headquarters of this program that was the target of the car bomb in Riyadh on November 13, 1995. Currently, the program is administered through the Office of the Program Manager-Saudi National Guard by the US Army Materiel Command and by the Vinnell Corporation, which signed an \$819 million, four-year contract to provide support services in January 1994.¹² The Guard signed an additional contract with Vinnell, valued at \$163.3 million, for additional training support in 1995.¹³

The Training of the National Guard

The training of the National Guard's full time forces has improved steadily in recent years, and training activity is considerably higher than in the Army. Training has recently been improved by the use of advanced technology systems like MILES, and LAV combat simulators. The US is helping the SANG set up "mini-National Training Centers" to provide realistic combat training at the battalion level and hopes to expand this program to the brigade level. The light infantry brigades have also begun realistic brigade level exercises. The artillery is also receiving better training, although SANG units still lack modern digital fire control systems. The maintenance ethic in the SANG has also improved, and training is improving.

The men in the Fowj forces have less training but are becoming steadily better trained. The core of the SANG's new training efforts are built around the US battle-focused method of training, rather than set piece exercises.

The SANG uses specially modified Arabic editions of US field manuals, and now has well organized training schedules. SANG training for key missions and tasks is now tailored to given regions of the Kingdom because the desert warfare conditions and missions in the northeast are very different from the terrain around its cities near the Red Sea, mountains' and border with Yemen. The Guard is now undergoing realistic combat training at the battalion level and is beginning to expand to brigade-sized battle-focused training.

While the SANG has traditional senior leaders, it now has a modern academy for its officers and trains some 300 cadets a year. This academy is popular enough so that it had some 2,100 applicants in 1999. Some 80 SANG officers a year train in the US, and SANG officers

receive extensive English-language training. They only go to the US if they pass the required tests. Promotion is also increasingly according to merit, and merit-based promotion has reached the level of major, although the SANG has a surplus of lieutenants and promotion is slow. The main leadership and promotion problems exist at the top, and general officer level, which has had roughly the same leadership since 1985.

The Readiness and Effectiveness of the National Guard

The National Guard has had some operational successes. Guard forces helped secure the Eastern Province during the Iran-Iraq War, but their capabilities were never really tested. They were given special training and additional manning during the Gulf War. They were the first force to meet the initial Iraqi assault on Khafji, and deployed within days while the regular army then required weeks. The Guard units were not equipped to take on an Iraqi heavy armored brigade, however, and then required extensive reinforcement by US air and artillery support during the battle to retake the city. They performed well in rear area and screening missions, but did not play a significant role in the armored advance in the liberation of Kuwait.

The National Guard has done a good job since 1991 in dealing with low-level problems with the Shi'ites in the Eastern Province, extremists, border clashes with Yemeni forces and smugglers, and Iranian-sponsored riots during the Haj. There has been little fighting along the Yemeni border since 1997, however, except for incidents with smugglers. Nevertheless, there were still three clashes with armed Yemeni tribesmen in 1999, including one exchange of artillery fire. The Guard has steadily reduced its role in protecting the Haj as Saudi relations with Iran have improved. The SANG has only had to deal with minor protests since the election of President Khatami, and the Ministry of the Interior now handles most security functions. As result, The Guard now only deploy one brigade to provide security for the Haj where it used to provide two. Reports that the Guard deployed elements in Bahrain in the 1990s, during its troubles with its Shi'ite seem to be false.

The SANG has also become a more effective light mechanized force. It has not, however, developed a high capability for sophisticated internal security operations, and it is the forces of the Ministry of the Interior that are intended to deal with well-organized cells or sophisticated hostile groups that hide under political cover. As a result, the SANG and Ministry of Interior

hold weekly anti-terrorism meetings to coordinate their different activities and share a common headquarters during the Haj. The Ministry of the Interior has some 100,000 personnel, including firemen, emergency medical services, and other civil capabilities. It also has anti-terrorist units and forces like SWAT teams. The SANG is just beginning to develop urban SWAT and Special Forces capabilities. It is also still developing its capabilities for military operations in urban terrain (MOUT), and riot and crowd control.

Tribal Forces or Fowj

The tribal forces of the National Guard, or Fowj, are grouped and deployed where they can defend key regions, more to screen the border, and cover every critical urban and populated area in the country. They are useful in securing Saudi Arabia against infiltration and terrorists, and key facilities in a way that limits the ability of the army to conduct a coup, and their leaders are carefully chosen for their loyalty to the regime. They still lack modern combat training but Prince Abdullah is seeking correct this situation over the next few years.

The Guard helps key princes maintain close relations with the tribes, as well as a means of maintaining internal security. The Deputy Commander of the SANG handles the tribes, although it should be noted that the tribes have changed strikingly in the last decade. Most tribes are now heavily urbanized and many small settlements are all but abandoned. This has help the SANG recruit, because tribal members from rural areas are often less well-educated and competitive in the Saudi labor force, and need jobs. It also, however, has meant that the SANG must accept some illiterate recruits, particularly into the Fowj, while the overall intake of tribal youth is better educated and more interested in the full time forces than the Fowj.

The Guard balances tribal factions to reduce the risk of feuding, and provides a means through which the royal family can allocate funds to tribal and Bedouin leaders. This organization makes the tribal portion of the Guard politically vital to ensuring the integration of Saudi Arabia's increasingly urbanized and underemployed tribes into its society. The Kingdom's economic problems have greatly improved SANG recruiting in recent years, and SANG soldiers are often the sole breadwinner in an extended family. US experts estimate that the SANG now supports up a million Saudis by providing income, medical support, and education.¹⁴

Full-Time Forces

The changes in the organization and equipment of the Guard's full-time forces are steadily improving their quality. Unlike the regular Saudi Army, the Guard can also deploy rapidly and begin to move the key elements of its brigades in hours. This is a major advantage of its reliance on wheeled vehicles, and Guard units can deploy for distance of several hundred miles with their existing fuel load and without major service support. The Guard has steadily improved the quality of its training in the field and technical training, and has conducted command post exercises involving up to four brigades. There is some discussion of going to a division-sized structure.

Nevertheless, the Guard has serious force mixture and readiness problems. The Guard's mechanized brigades lack the integral firepower, heavy armor, air defense, and maneuver capability to take on the heavy mechanized infantry or armored forces of Iran and Iraq in head-on combat. The Guard's full-time mechanized and light infantry forces also lack the heavy armor, self-propelled artillery, air mobility, specialized support units, logistics, and maintenance capabilities present in Saudi regular army units.

The Guard has other limitations. There is little real-world cooperation with the regular forces and Ministry of Defense and Aviation, although there is one token liaison meeting a month. There are no meaningful joint exercises with the Saudi regular army and air force, and there has been no effort to develop a common concept of operations or to see if the Saudi Air Defense Force could support the Guard in some contingencies. The Guard and regular forces use different communications systems, and there are no joint war plans. Any cooperation requires each service to send liaison officers to the other service with radios.

The Guard pays little attention to the Gulf Cooperation Council, and its leaders have little respect for either the regular Saudi Army, or other Gulf land forces – including Saudi units. They tend to see Egyptian and Jordanian forces as examples of Arab proficiency.

Expansion Options

Prince Abdullah has asked the Guard's foreign advisors to study an expansion beyond 100,000 regulars by the early 2000s. Such manning levels would allow the Guard's to create another mechanized brigade, and a new mix of battalion sized formations for its part-time forces. This modest expansion seems well within the SANG's capabilities.¹⁵

There have also been a series of examinations of possible options for giving the Guard heavier tracked armor and self-propelled artillery. There were media reports after the Gulf War that Prince Abdullah has considered plans to bring the Guard up to a strength of 11 full time brigades, with tanks, self-propelled artillery and other heavy equipment. It is unclear, however, that Prince Abdullah ever seriously considered such options. Both Prince Abdullah and the other leaders of the SANG seem to have understood that expansion must proceed slowly, and that the Guard was not ready to move beyond the LAV-25 series of vehicles.

There have been studies of a possible purchase of helicopters. At present, however, there are no plans to "heavy up" the National Guard. It does not have the base of skilled manpower, and its entire infrastructure is sized for light armored vehicles. Moreover, the Guard is paying close attention to the US Army's efforts to "lighten up" its heavy armor and create more rapidly deployable forces.

Strategic Issues: The Role of the National Guard Relative to the Army

The National Guard is an effective and well-organized force within the limits imposed by its equipment and organization. It does, however, raise some important strategic issues. While there are no data available on its cost relative to that of the regular Army, it does have roughly the same manpower and has excellent facilities and modern equipment. It also does not have a clearly separate mission from that of the Army, particularly now that Saudi Arabia has improved its relations with Yemen.

In the past, the National Guard acted as a barrier to a coup led by the Army, and gave Prince Abdullah and the rest of the royal family a potential military counterweight to Prince Sultan's control over the regular military forces. It is not clear, however, these rationales really justify maintaining two parallel ground forces today, particularly when Iran and Iraq pose the

most serious threat to the Kingdom and any invasion would require forces capable of dealing with heavy armor. Certainly, Saudi Arabia does not have the budgetary resources to fund a force that is not fully interoperable with the army, which has negligible training in joint operations with the air force, and is so compartmented from the regular forces that a very substantial part of the Kingdom's limited resources in trained manpower cannot be used against its most serious enemies with maximum effectiveness.

The time may well have come for Saudi Arabia to look beyond its past fears of coup attempts and the rivalries of its senior princes and to consider how to either bring the regular Army and National Guard under common command or restructure and retrain the Guard so that it can be effective in reinforcing the Army as a light mechanized force in the event of an Iraqi or Iranian attack. The latter solution may be more practical, given Saudi Arabia's history and politics, but the Guard has evolved far beyond the status of a royal guard (which now exists as a separate regiment in any case) and it has done so without evolving to become an effective war fighting force for all of the threats the Kingdom faces.

Endnotes

¹ Long, David, The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Gainesville, University Press of Florida, 1997.

² Unless otherwise specified, the military data quoted here are taken from interviews in Saudi Arabia and the relevant country sections of various annual editions of the IISS, Military Balance; CIA, The World Factbook; The Middle East Military Balance, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv.), the author's publications and other sources mentioned at the start of the section on Saudi Arabia, and Dr. Andrew Rathmell, "Saudi Arabia's Military Build-up -- An Extravagant Error," Jane's Intelligence Review, November, 1994, pp. 500-504; Andrew Rathmell, The Changing Balance in the Gulf, London, Royal United Services Institute, Whitehall Papers 38, 1996; Edward B. Atkinson, The Powder Keg, Falls Church, NOVA Publications, 1996; Geoffrey Kemp and Robert E. Harkavy, Strategic Geography and the Changing Middle East, Washington, Carnegie Endowment/Brookings, 1997; USCENTCOM, Atlas, 1996, MacDill Air Force Base, USCENTCOM, 1997; Jane's Sentinel: The Gulf States, 1997 and 1999; London, Jane's Publishing; Jane's Helicopter Markets and Systems (CD-ROM); Jane's All the World's Armies (CD-ROM); Jane's Armor and Artillery (CD-ROM); Jane's Land-Based Air Defense (CD-ROM); Jane's Military Vehicles and Logistics (CD-ROM).

³ Joseph A. Kechichian, Succession in Saudi Arabia, New York, Palgrave, 2001. pp.175-178.

⁴ General Mohammed Bin Abdullah Al Amr retired in 2000.

⁵ IISS, The Military Balance, 1999-2000, London, Oxford, 1999, "Saudi Arabia," The Military Balance, 2000-2001, London, Oxford, 2000, "Saudi Arabia," and The Military Balance, 2001-2002, London, Oxford, 2001, "Saudi Arabia."

⁶ Jane's Defense Weekly, July 10, 1996, p. 33, April 23, 1997, p. 19.

⁷ Based on interviews in Saudi Arabia in 1 2000 and 2001. Other sources indicate that the Guard also has an engineer battalion, and a special security battalion. One source suggests that its strength is two mechanized brigades and two Special Forces units. IISS, Military Balance, 1996-1997, 1999-2000, 2000-2001 and 2001-2002; Jane's Sentinel: The Gulf States, 1997; London, Jane's Publishing 1997.

⁸ Jane's Defense Weekly, July 10, 1996, p. 33, April 23, 1997, p. 19; Jane's Pointer, September 1996, p. 5..

⁹ Defense News, June 6, 1994; Washington Times, July 23, 1997, p. A-6; Jane's Defense Weekly, March 7, 1992, p. 388; January 24, 1996, p. 18, April 23, 1997, p. 19; Military Technology, World Defense Almanac, 1992-1993, Vol. XVII, Issue 1-1993, ISSN-0722-3226. pp. 157-159.

¹⁰ Jane's Defense Weekly, April 23, 1997, pg.19.

¹¹ Author's estimate based on interviews in Saudi Arabia; "Saudi National Guard Fact Sheet," DSAA; FMC data; DMS computer print outs; and the IISS and JCSS military balances.

¹² Chicago Tribune, November 14, 1995, p. I-1; Washington Post, November 14, 1995, p. A-15.

¹³ Baltimore Sun, November 14, 1995, p. 1A; Chicago Tribune, November 14, 1995, p. I-1; Washington Times, May, 4, 1995, p. B-9.

¹⁴ For an interesting Israeli view of the earlier role of the National Guard in the mid-1980s, see Mordechai Abir, "Saudi Security and Military Endeavor", The Jerusalem Quarterly, No. 33, Fall 1984, pp. 79-94. This assessment is based on interviews in Saudi Arabia in April 2000.

¹⁵ Armed Forces Journal, May 1994, p. 39.