

The UAE F-16E “Desert Falcon”

# 20 YEARS OF SUCCESSFUL UAE-US SECURITY COOPERATION

The UAE and the United States form a united front line of defense in a dangerous and turbulent Middle East. US-supplied advanced defense systems help the UAE protect its own and its shared strategic interests with the US.

First approved by President Clinton for sale to the UAE in 2000, the UAE Air Force has operated the most technologically advanced US-made F-16 aircraft — the Block 60, also known as the “Desert Falcon.” In close cooperation with the US, the UAE has used these advanced aircraft against violent extremists, to confront aggression, protect vital shipping routes, and promote regional stability.

This track record of security cooperation demonstrates that a highly-trained and equipped UAE military is a powerful force multiplier for the United States in the Middle East. It frees up US assets, forces and budgets for other missions and priorities.

UAE and US military forces have jointly participated in six coalition actions over the last 30 years. UAE F-16 Air Force pilots participate in regular joint exercises alongside US counterparts. This cooperation is grounded in a shared resolve to preserve security and stability in the Middle East and around the world.



## BACKGROUND

**“The delivery of the F-16 Block 60 and the associated training represent a significant step forward for our strategic relationship with the United Arab Emirates. Together we have worked hard to ensure that the UAE obtains a highly advanced aircraft to meet its security needs and to enhance our interoperability.”**

– Michele J. Sison,  
US Ambassador to the UAE  
(2005-2008)

US-UAE security cooperation has broadened significantly since the 1991 Gulf War. Recognizing shared strategic interests and priorities, the two countries signed a formal defense cooperation agreement in 1994, providing for joint training and exercises, the prepositioning of US military equipment in the UAE and the transfer of advanced weapons systems. An updated defense cooperation agreement came into force in May 2019.

In 2000, the UAE purchased 80 US Block 60 F-16 aircraft at a value of about \$8 billion. The first Block 60 F-16s were delivered to the UAE in 2005.

Built by Lockheed Martin in Texas, the F-16 Desert Falcons are specifically developed for the Arabian Gulf and designed to enhance UAE/US interoperability. The sale of 80 Block 60 F-16s to the UAE generated “100,000 man-years of direct employment at hundreds of companies in 40 states who supply parts for the advanced fighter jet.”





## DESERT FALCON DEPLOYMENTS AND OPERATIONAL HISTORY

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**The Emiratis did a magnificent job [in Afghanistan.] It was not just the service of UAE special operators, or the magnificent ability of UAE pilots – who were truly good – it was the leadership the Emirates brought to the coalition.**

– Gen. John Allen, Commander, ISAF (2011-2013)

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**Global Coalition Against ISIS (Daesh):** The UAE was a contributing member of the Global Coalition beginning in the early days of the military operation against Daesh targets. UAE Air Force F-16 pilot Major Mariam Al Mansouri became the first Emirati woman to fly combat missions, spearheading airstrikes against Daesh positions in Syria.

**International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) – Afghanistan:** From 2012 to 2014, the UAE Air Force committed six F-16s to support the NATO-led security mission in Afghanistan. Gen. John Allen, then the top US commander in Afghanistan, considered UAE pilots to be among the highest trained in the coalition and utilized their skills to fly close air-support missions to protect coalition forces on the ground. Australia was the only other non-NATO nation whose forces were permitted to fly such missions.

**NATO-led Intervention in Libya:** In 2011, the UAE committed six F-16s, among other fighter aircraft, to participate in patrols that enforced the United Nations-imposed no-fly zone over Libya. The UAE Air Force partnered closely with the US 363rd Flying Training Group at Al Dhafra Air Base in Abu Dhabi to prepare for the mission. Well-established relationships with US counterparts enabled the UAE F-16s to deploy to theater within 72 hours, providing timely support to US and coalition forces.

## ADDITIONAL UAE-US COMBINED OPERATIONS

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**“The UAE is one of our most steadfast and capable partners. We value our strong relationship and...will work to expand our collaboration, specifically in the areas of security cooperation and foreign military sales.”**

– Gen. Joseph Votel, Commander, US CENTCOM (2016-2019)

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**Countering Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula:** UAE forces coordinate with the US in Yemen to combat and defeat Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, Al Qaeda’s most dangerous franchise. In April 2016, the UAE led what former Acting CIA Director Mike Morell described as a “textbook” operation to unseat Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula from the Yemeni city of Mukalla. The operation significantly degraded the capacity of the terrorist group and secured an important port.

**Freedom of navigation:** The UAE is a participant in the International Maritime Security Construct (IMSC,) a naval coalition established in 2019 to enhance maritime security in and around the Strait of Hormuz. For more than 20 years the UAE and US have worked together at sea and in the air. The US and the UAE are working together to ensure freedom of navigation in international waters in and around the Arabian Gulf peninsula.

## US/UAE COMBINED TRAINING

**“From the grand strategic to the more tactical immediate issues, the US and UAE share common ground. Our strategic relationship is very broad, very deep and very strong... our military-to-military ties are extraordinary.”**

– Gen. James Mattis, US Secretary of Defense (2017-2019)

**Air Warfare Center – Al Dhafra Air Base, Abu Dhabi:** A shared facility, where UAE and US air forces jointly train with each other and allies at Al Dhafra Air Base in Abu Dhabi. The Air Warfare Center builds partnerships, tactical capabilities and interoperability between US and UAE forces through joint exercises and academic courses. Pilots prepare for combined operations to defend shared strategic interests in the Middle East.

**Exercise Red Flag – Nevada:** In order to enhance combat readiness and communication with allies, UAE Air Force F-16 pilots regularly participate in the Red Flag aerial combat exercise hosted by the US Air Force at Nellis Air Force Base in Las Vegas, Nevada. The UAE is among the small number of non-NATO US allies invited to participate in this exercise, reflecting the strength of the US-UAE security partnership as well as the superior training and capabilities of UAE Air Force pilots.