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# UAE To Double Security Budget, Focus on Cyber

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Attendees walk past an armored vehicle at the International Defence Exhibition and Conference in the UAE last February. The country is boosting its homeland security budget. (KARIM SAHIB/AFP via Getty Images)

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**DUBAI** — The United Arab Emirates is set to double its spending on homeland security from \$5.5 billion to more than \$10 billion in the next 10 years, according to a US study. Analysts say a majority of that funding will go toward cybersecurity.

Spending is estimated to reach \$57.7 million by 2015, with a view to increase investment on homeland security, economic development and rapid population growth, to curtail regional unrest and the increased complexity of potential threats. The numbers come from the 2013-2014 annual report by the US Commerce Department's

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International Trade Administration and reported by state news agency WAM.

"The UAE investments in security constantly reflect our quest to overcome the challenges and achieve security and safety for our community and our visitors," said Maj. Gen. Al Ketbi, deputy commander-in-chief of Abu Dhabi Police, according to the news agency.

Ketbi stressed that homeland security is a top priority for the UAE, in light of the social and economic development and growth witnessed by the country.

Details of the allocation of the budget have not been released because the UAE Supreme National Security Council does not make such information public.

The majority of the budget will focus on cyber defense, according to analysts in the UAE.

"For governments in the Gulf Cooperation Council [GCC], cybersecurity is just as important as military hardware," said Theodore Karasik, director of research at the Institute for Near East and Gulf Military Analysis (INEGMA).

Cyber attacks on critical installations in Saudi Arabia and Qatar in 2012 and 2013 provided a wake up call to governments in the GCC, Karasik said. "The attacks on Ras Gas and Aramco showed GCC governments that cybersecurity is key."

"These attacks were much worse than publicly reported," he added. "This signals that these perpetrators are three steps ahead of the cybersecurity specialists in the critical sectors that are being targeted."

The UAE in 2012 announced the creation of the National Electronic



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Security Authority, the first national authority for cybersecurity in the region, to combat online threats to military and critical installations.

The authority will not only monitor the front line of the UAE's war against cyber attacks but also protect the country's communications networks and continue to develop, modify and use devices required in the field of electronic security.

It will also be responsible for proposing and implementing the UAE's national policy on electronic security and developing a national plan to confront any risks, threats or attacks. That includes coordinating with authorities and spearheading operations to combat cyber crimes in the country.

According to Aleksander Mitreski, cybersecurity analyst at INEGMA, this new central national authority for cybersecurity will likely join existing cyber assets and standardize them.

"The investment is likely to be into surveillance and communications monitoring," he said. "This would provide a full spectrum of communications, surveillance and analytics."

However, the main problem would be manpower, Mitreski said. "This is the reason why the program will take 10 years to implement. There is a push for expertise development to make the program an Emirati-run program," he said.

The UAE's demographic, like much of its gulf neighbors, comprises mostly expatriate workers; nationals form less than 16 percent of the population.

Saudi Arabia and Oman are also making significant investments in cybersecurity, Mitreski added. "Oman is developing capabilities with foreign investors to establish itself as a cybersecurity hub and be able to export its knowledge," he said. ■

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