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Potential and Challenges of the West's Relations with the Gulf States

Edited by
Riccardo Alcaro and Andrea Dessì

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Preface

In the wake of the Arab uprisings, the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) – Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates – have visibly increased their diplomatic, economic and military involvement in the Arab world. GCC states have, with certain variations, played an important role in the political transformations underway in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Syria while extending significant financial and diplomatic support to the Arab monarchies of Morocco and Jordan and decisively coming out against any political change in Bahrain. In parallel to the GCC's increased role in the region, the United States (US) and the European Union (EU) have suffered a relative loss of influence as a result of the toppling of longstanding Arab allies and the economic crisis. In light of these developments, the deepening relationship between the EU-US and the GCC has emerged as a major dynamic over the past two years. While great potential for cooperation exists and, in some areas, immediate interests do overlap, this relationship is also fraught with significant challenges given the West's necessity to balance its economic and strategic interests in the region with a broader commitment to support the spread of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

The evolving relationship between the West and the GCC was the topic of the fifth edition of the *Transatlantic Security Symposium*, the annual conference series * organised by the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) and held in Rome on 16 November 2012. In line with past editions, the Symposium attracted participants of great experience and seniority from

* Further information about the Transatlantic Security Symposium 2012 is available on IAI's website: http://www.iai.it/content.asp?langid=2&contentid=+434&ritorno=. Information about past editions is available at http://www.iai.it/content.asp?langid=2&contentid=700.

all areas relevant to the topic in discussion: the United States, Europe and the Gulf, including both GCC states and Iran. The event was generously supported by Italy's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which also hosted the event, as well as by other regular sponsors of the Symposium series, such as the Compagnia di San Paolo, the Robert Bosch Stiftung, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (Rome Office), and NATO's Public Diplomacy Division. An additional contribution was provided by the US Embassy in Rome.

This volume collects the revised and updated versions of the papers presented and discussed at the conference. Also included are an introductory chapter and a detailed report of the discussion held at the conference.

As editors, we would like to thank the sponsors and conference participants for contributing to a successful event, and ultimately for making the publication of this volume possible.

(R.A., A.D.)

Table of Contents

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List of Abbreviations

9/11	11 September 2001
AAB	Abdullah Azzam Brigades
AL	Arab League
AML/CTF	Anti-Money Laundering/ Counter-Terrorism Financing
AQAP	al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula
AQIM	al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
AU	African Union
BAM	Bab al-Mandeb (Strait)
BDF	Bahrain Defence Force
BICI	Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry
BTWC	Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention
CERT	Computer Emergency Response Team (UAE)
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy (EU)
CMF	Combined Maritime Forces
CT	Counter-Terrorism
CTF	Combined Task Force
CTF-150	Combined Task Force Maritime Security and Counter-Terrorism
CTF-151	Combined Task Forces Counter-Piracy
CTF-152	Combined Task Forces Arabian Gulf Security and Cooperation
CWC	Chemical Weapons Convention
ECSC	European Coal and Steel Community
EEAS	European External Action Service
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EU NAVFOR	European Union Naval Force
EU	European Union

EUCAP Nestor	European Union Regional Maritime Capacity Building for the Horn of Africa and the Western Ocean
EUTM	European Union Training Mission
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HEU	Highly Enriched Uranium
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
ICI	Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (NATO)
IMB	International Maritime Bureau
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IRENA	International Renewable Energy Agency
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
MD	Mediterranean Dialogue (NATO)
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MENWFZ	Middle Eastern Nuclear Weapons Free Zone
NAC	North Atlantic Council
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPT	Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty
NTC	National Transitional Council (Libya)
NTM-I	NATO Training Mission Iraq
OPEC	Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
OUP	Operation Unified Protector
PCM	Partnership Cooperation Menu (NATO)
PfP	Partnership for Peace (NATO)
SAMA	Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency
SSR	Security Sector Reform
TOW	Tube-Launched, Optically Tracked, Wire-Guided Missile
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
US	United States
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction

Introduction
The West and the Gulf States at the Dawn of the New Millennium

Riccardo Alcaro

The prestige and influence of the West – comprising the United States (US) and the European Union (EU) – and the grouping of six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries have followed quite distinct trajectories since the beginning of the new millennium. At the cost of oversimplifying things, whereas the former has seemed to be declining, at least in relation to other international players, the latter has witnessed a dramatic surge in its international status.

While opinions over the United States' supposed decline diverge radically, there is little doubt that the first twelve-odd years of the 21st century have hardly been a golden age of US history. Early predictions of a new American century – still quite widespread at the turn of the century – proved remarkably premature, as the United States has seen its once-uncontested global pre-eminence erode due to the rapid rise of new powers, first and foremost China. In addition, the United States' credibility as the world's benign hegemon has been tainted by two long, controversial and ultimately failed wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Meanwhile, a diminished capacity to mobilise resources in the pursuit of major foreign policy goals, as well as the tarnishing of the liberal economic model of Western capitalism, further stand out among the many side-effects of the devastating recession that engulfed the United States in 2008-09.

The European Union's record is even less encouraging. The ambition, espoused with much fanfare in 2000, to turn an ever more integrated Union into the world's most competitive economy proved illusory well before the financial crisis deteriorated into a fight for the very survival of the Eurozone. Similarly, the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy

(CFSP) has attracted international attention more for its inanity than for its achievements (although this blunt assessment might well be too tough). Against the backdrop of an economy that oscillates between recession and anaemic growth, national budgets under severe strain and deep disagreements about whether European integration should be brought forward or recalibrated along the pattern of a looser union, the European Union seems poorly equipped to cope with the challenges of competition from Asian economies and the growing clout of new rising powers.

If clouds gathered over the West at the dawn of the third millennium, the sun shone brightly over the Arabian Peninsula. Already affluent in their own respect, all six members of the GCC – Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) – enjoyed the double blessing of a steady rise in global energy demand coupled with skyrocketing oil prices. The geographic collocation of the Peninsula, midway between a rising and dynamic East and the wealthy West, only added to the GCC's fortunes. Flooded with revenues originating from energy transactions, the governments of GCC member states enjoyed the rare privilege of having a whole wealth of options as to where to direct their gushing flows of cash. Some of these options made sense as long-term guarantees from an unexpected and abrupt reversal of luck, notably the accumulation of massive reserves of foreign currency or investments in the diversification of an oil-based economy and the modernisation of their education systems. Of a more opportunistic nature were the strengthening of state security apparatuses or the provision of extremely generous welfare benefits (though excluding the large workforce made up of South Asian immigrants) to reinvigorate popular consensus for the ruling regimes. Perhaps more revealing of the *Zeitgeist* in the Gulf, however, are the many extravagancies in which the ruling dynasties indulged in order to lend physical tangibility to their newly acquired mega-rich status. The construction of artificial islands, indoor skiing facilities and skyscrapers so tall to rival the biblical Tower of Babel are but some manifestations of this trend.

One of the by-products of a reduced Western capacity for action, combined with the greater financial power enjoyed by Gulf states, has been a shift in the balance of US and EU relations with the GCC. Links with Europe have been extended beyond the narrow remit of a long-established and mutually satisfying partnership based almost entirely on energy, so as to encompass political and security issues too. The bond

with the United States was of a deeper and more diversified nature from the start, to the extent that it was not uncommon to come across critical descriptions of US-GCC ties as a patron-client relationship. Irrespective of whether this was an accurate assessment, the relationship has certainly undergone a process of transformation, whereby Gulf states – or at least some of them – have now increased their activism on the regional stage, thus emerging as autonomous actors whose behaviour no longer seems to fit into the category of a client state.[1]

A series of critical events have accelerated this shift in the balance of West-GCC relations. The growing threat of terrorism, the collapse of security in the Horn of Africa, Iran's regional ascendancy in the wake of the 2003-11 Iraq war, and – most importantly – the revolutionary changes that have swept the Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) region, have all contributed to a recalibration of relations between the West and the GCC states. These events have made cooperation both indispensable and more complicated, with the West and GCC states struggling to reconcile their short-term interest in maintaining the stability of the Gulf with their different normative backgrounds and potentially diverging longer-term strategic objectives. In order to better appreciate the potential and limits of West-GCC relations, it is first necessary to look at how the GCC's strategic outlook towards the region has changed, sometimes reluctantly, in light of the momentous events that have shaken the Arab world since the early 2000s, from the US-led invasion of Iraq to the toppling of longstanding autocrats in North Africa.

The Evolving Strategic Outlook of the GCC

As Rouzbeh Parsi argues in his contribution to this volume, the Gulf region can be conceptualised as a 'regional security complex', meaning that on the one hand security occupies centre stage in the strategic thinking of regional players, while on the other the primary focus of these states is on each other rather than the 'outer' world. Indeed, mistrust (if not outright suspicion) between Gulf states, with each jealously guarding its dynastic interests and, more broadly, suffering from a tendency to think in terms

[1] See the chapters in this volume by Christian Koch, Claire Spencer and Jane Kinnonmont.

of zero-sum calculations, is among the main factors shaping the mindset of Gulf policymakers. While interstate rivalries run deepest between the Sunni Arab monarchies of the Gulf and Shi'ite Persian Iran, tensions and disagreements are nonetheless present within the GCC itself. At the same time, the Arab Gulf states also feature specific characteristics which, while not always resulting in overlapping policy preferences, make up a common political and societal background that has resulted in similar challenges confronting these regimes.

Chief among these is the challenge of creating a viable system of governance through which the security and welfare of the populations are made strongly reliant on the continued control of the state by the dynasties in power. As the contributors to this volume variously discuss in the following chapters, the ruling families of the Gulf have resorted to tested patterns in their attempts to curb political opposition while bolstering their legitimacy. Thus, repression of internal dissent has been carefully balanced by measures aimed at creating a larger basis of consensus. This is reflected by the aforementioned provision of generous social benefits, but also important are tribal patronage and intermarriage, limited reforms allowing for greater inclusiveness (but more at the consultative rather than deliberative level), as well as the construction of nationalist narratives in which the distinction between state and dynasty is calculatingly blurred.

The sharing of similar concerns about the survival of monarchic rule has contributed to offsetting the most nefarious effects of interstate rivalries, whereby no Arab Gulf state perceives the other as a potential menace to its territorial integrity. In fact, the patronage system established by the ruling families is such that they have come to regard the eventual collapse of one of them as a direct threat to the stability of the others. This has created a sense of mutual solidarity or, at least, the awareness of reciprocal usefulness, which makes intra-GCC infighting an unappealing option. The GCC itself was created in the early 1980s not so much as a military bulwark against an hypothetical aggression by revolutionary Iran (indeed a remote if not fictional possibility), as attested to by the absence of any serious attempt at the time to create a robust joint defence structure. Rather, the Council embodied the political arrangement of ideologically cohesive elites determined to thwart the potential propagation from Iran of religiously fundamentalist ideals both through direct Iranian action and by way of spontaneous popular movements inspired by Iran's revolutionary experience.

This does not mean that the Arab Gulf states were not concerned about Iran's hegemonic ambitions in the region, but simply that the GCC was not their primary response to the challenge. In that regard, GCC states relied on the security guarantee offered by the United States, with which military cooperation was actually expanded in the wake of the 1991 war against Saddam Hussein's Iraq. The choice of sub-contracting their defence to an external guarantor was never seriously questioned during the 1990s, when GCC states could thrive economically under the security umbrella of the United States' policy of 'dual containment' directed against a weakened Iraq and a relatively isolated Iran. It was not until the early 2000s, following the US invasion of Iraq, that GCC policymakers felt compelled to revisit their strategic calculus. It is an irony of history that the cracks in the US-centred system of relations in the Gulf began to show under the presidency of George W. Bush, the son of the man who, in 1991, had devoted so much energy to consolidate that very system.

In itself, the toppling of Saddam's regime in Iraq presented the GCC with both opportunities and challenges. The end of the Baath party's single-handed rule in Iraq was a welcome development because it removed a secular and aggressive neighbour that had once gone as far as to attempt the conquest of a GCC member state, Kuwait. The risks associated with the undertaking were nonetheless so high that few if any GCC countries showed little more than cautious support for America's war effort. They had in fact plenty of reasons to lose sleep. The abrupt removal of Saddam's tyrannical regime bore the risk of exacerbating ethnic (Kurd vs. Arab) as well as sectarian (Sunni vs. Shi'ite) tensions in Iraq, with the prospect of a prolonged civil war being all the more real. Furthermore, the promotion of secular democracy in Iraq, to which the United States had committed, would have made the contrast with religiously conservative, monarchical rule in the Gulf even more strident, thereby stoking the fire of social and political discontent among disenfranchised sections of the populations of the Gulf. Finally, a more inclusive political system could not but result in Iraq's long repressed Shi'ite majority playing a prominent role, which in turn would give Iran privileged access to post-Saddam Iraqi politics.

As it turned out, all of the GCC's fears materialised: Iraq descended into a bloody civil war along sectarian lines, becoming a magnet for numerous al-Qaeda-like groups, hostile to the United States as they were to the GCC ruling dynasties. In the meantime, Iran emerged as the main beneficiary of the war, with a Shi'ite-dominated government

seizing power in Baghdad. In addition, with the erosion of America's post-9/11 international solidarity and with its military bogged down in Iraq and Afghanistan, Iran could feel confident that the gradual advancement of its controversial nuclear programme would not provoke a US military strike.

Confronted with a more unstable and insecure region, GCC states kept cooperating with the United States, as the latter was still seen as their ultimate security guarantor. However, the mismanagement of post-invasion Iraq also weakened their trust in the ability of the US government to handle regional issues, while President Bush's strong democracy promotion rhetoric nurtured doubts about the reliability of the United States as an ally. Such doubts became alarm, especially in Saudi Arabia, when in early 2011 President Barack Obama decided to pull the rug from under Hosni Mubarak, Egypt's autocratic president and a longstanding US ally, in the face of massive popular demonstrations in Cairo and other cities. The toppling of Mubarak was, of course, just one of the many spectacular results achieved by the wave of revolts against authoritarian Arab regimes (swiftly christened 'Arab Spring' by the Western media) that spread from Tunisia to the Middle East and the Arabian Peninsula itself. Much as the war in Iraq, the Arab Spring did not eliminate the need for West-GCC cooperation – it actually reinforced the perception that deeper interaction would be in the interest of all. Yet, US and EU support for Arab democratisation, despite all its idiosyncrasies, confirmed the conviction of GCC rulers that the West could not be entirely relied upon to defend their dynastic interests and that autonomous action was therefore also needed.

The Arab Spring has certainly not been the first occasion in which the GCC states have shown independent initiative. In the run-up to the Iraq war, for instance, Saudi Arabia persuaded its fellow Arab partners (both in the GCC and the Arab League) that they needed to send a strong signal to the Arab masses that they were not in thrall to US foreign policy. This led to what is now known as the Arab Peace Initiative on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Yet, the level of activism shown by some GCC member states on issues related to the Arab Spring – obviously in Bahrain, but also in Yemen, Libya, Syria and to a lesser extent Egypt – is unprecedented.

Saudi Arabia granted asylum to Tunisia's former autocrat Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali – thereby indirectly facilitating the transition of power from the old regime to a provisional democratic-orientated government.

Riyadh was also the main force behind the international mediation that brokered the deal that led Yemen's ruler, Ali Abdullah Saleh, to pass on the presidency to his deputy, an achievement that might have spared Yemen a full-blown civil war. In Bahrain, the deployment of Saudi troops was reportedly instrumental in helping the country's al-Khalifa ruling family quell popular protests. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia and Qatar have supported Syria's opposition groups fighting against President Bashar al-Assad's forces, including by providing them with military equipment. Qatar, along with the Emirates, has participated in NATO's campaign that crucially contributed to ending the forty-year-old dictatorial regime of Muammar Qaddafi in Libya. In the meantime, GCC states – again with Saudi Arabia and Qatar at the forefront – have tightened links with Islamist organisations increasingly active in the new political context created by the uprisings. On the other hand, they have also reached out to the two other monarchies in the MENA region, Jordan and Morocco, by offering them prospective membership in the Council and substantial financial aid.

The GCC and the Arab Uprisings

A line of continuity emerges when taking a bird's eye view of the set of actions outlined above. Contrary to what has been the case with the West (with the exception of Libya), GCC activism reflects an attempt to shape events and not only to react to them. This pro-active approach can be better appreciated if it is made immediately clear that it is not premised on the dichotomy between a 'pro' or 'anti' stance on the revolutions. Instead, the GCC's multifaceted action has unfolded along three parallel but also inter-related trajectories: ensuring *dynastic survival*, promoting *regional stability* and expanding *GCC influence* outside the traditional boundaries of the Arabian Peninsula. Only by taking this three-pronged strategy into account does the GCC's apparently schizophrenic approach to the Arab Spring, whereby the Council has supported revolutions in certain places while strongly opposing them elsewhere, become fully intelligible.

To maintain their hold on power, the Gulf ruling families have made a double effort to insulate the GCC from revolutionary contagion. This they have done first and foremost by resorting to the traditional pattern of dispersing oil rents, in the form of munificent allowances, among key

domestic constituents. Secondly, they have smothered the fire of revolt before it could propagate further: the GCC has not hesitated to deploy the Peninsula Shield Force, its tiny multinational force ostensibly created to protect from external aggression, to one of its members, Bahrain, to back the regime's ongoing repression of local protests. Third and more in the long-term, Gulf states have agreed to bring forward political and security cooperation at the GCC level to provide the regimes with a thicker ring of protection and a wider panoply of options to confront mass political mobilisation. Talks on deeper GCC integration have produced no concrete results yet, and some doubt they ever will. Nonetheless, they reflect the conviction of the Gulf ruling families that their fortunes are strongly interconnected.

The need to stabilise their regional environment represents the second priority on which the GCC's post-2011 activism is premised. Here, the GCC has behaved more progressively, as the ruling families have aimed not so much to salvage political regimes which they felt as foreign anyway due to their strong secular and republican (meaning non-monarchical) nature, as to ensure that regime change occurred as quickly and painlessly as possible. Yemen is the main case in point. Facilitating a swift transition of power was all the more important, given the potential of instability there to spill-over into neighbouring Oman and Saudi Arabia as well as to endanger trade routes in the Gulf of Aden and the Bab-el-Mandeb strait. The GCC has consequently – and so far successfully – worked towards ensuring that Saleh's departure from the scene did not usher in a phase of radical political transformation in Yemen, and that the country's commitment to fighting Islamic terrorism and separatist forces would not be compromised.

Several measures in support of rebel forces in Libya and Syria can also be seen as part of the GCC's broader effort aimed at stabilising the MENA region. While neither Qaddafi nor Assad were particularly friendly to the GCC, they were accepted in the region as stability-orientated leaders (Qaddafi had gained the reputation after long years of mercurial and unpredictable rule). Moreover, their hostility to al-Qaeda-like terrorist groups was appreciated. These assets were swiftly lost once the Libyan and Syrian regimes responded to local unrest with an iron fist, as the ensuing civil wars became both a source of instability and a catalyst for extremist groups. Given the circumstances, the forced removal of the two leaders emerged as the most practical way out of the security impasse. In Libya GCC countries – most notably Qatar and the Emirates – rightly

calculated that Qaddafi was a lost cause and that lending political legitimacy to the West's intervention represented the best guarantee against future instability.

That GCC support for anti-Qaddafi and anti-Assad forces derived from stability-based calculations rather than enthusiasm for revolutionary ideals is confirmed by its different approach to states where governments seem to have the power to stifle revolts. GCC states have kept supporting existing regimes in Algeria, Morocco and Jordan, actually trying to bolster the solidity of the two MENA monarchies, Morocco and Jordan, by increasing financial aid and opening talks about their eventual membership in the GCC.

Finally, some GCC member states have tried hard to expand their influence beyond the Arabian Peninsula. Gulf countries have historically been able to punch above their weight on the international stage thanks to their ability to impact global energy markets by raising or curbing oil production. Saudi Arabia, in its capacity as the world's largest producer of crude, has stood out in this respect. From the early 2000s on, the imperative to deal with the side-effects of the jolt given to regional balances by the US-led invasion of Iraq has prompted the GCC to sharpen its profile as a credible manager of regional issues. Qatar has been particularly active in this regard: buoyed by massive inflows of energy revenues, it has carved out a role for itself as tentative broker of power-sharing agreements in some of the many intra-state quarrels that beset the region. As of late, the Palestinian issue has been a main target of Qatari diplomatic initiatives, which have focused on reconciliation between the rival Palestinian groups Fatah and Hamas. While tangible results have been mixed, Qatar's prestige has no doubt been boosted by such initiatives. Thus, the increased regional activism displayed by some Gulf states is not a full novelty (others, like Oman, seem much less inclined to play an active role, however). Today, states such as Qatar have shifted from the fringes to the centre of the regional stage. But it is the sea-change brought about by the Arab uprisings that has opened up new pathways for Gulf states to extend their clout.

Direct intervention is the first of such pathways. In these terms, action on Libya and Syria loses the mostly reactive character of being essentially aimed at restoring stability. It emerges instead as a pro-active undertaking aimed at shaping events on the ground in ways which favour the interests of Gulf states more extensively than would have been the case if stability were the only game in town. Since, in this regard, the interests

of the Gulf states in question do not always dovetail, it is no longer useful to treat the two crises as if they belonged to the same class.

While restoring stability might have been the common denominator behind the GCC's (as a whole) support for NATO's war in Libya, Qatari and UAE participation in the military endeavour had broader objectives. Qatar, in particular, has seized on its participation in the Libyan conflict as a means to bolster its credentials in Western capitals as the go-between player in the region. In addition, thanks to the generally favourable coverage of the intervention by the Doha-based al-Jazeera broadcasting company (widely watched in the whole Arab world), the Qatari government has conveyed the message that it cares about Arab popular demands. Coupled with its activism on the Palestinian front, Qatar's involvement in Libya has cemented the image of a benevolent and caring player in an area tormented by political polarisation and profound ethnic and sectarian tensions. Finally, both Qatar and the Emirates knew that Cyrenaica, Libya's eastern region where the anti-Qaddafi revolt started, had been one of the main sources of would-be *jihadists* that swelled the ranks of the composite Iraqi insurgency in the worst phase of the post-invasion period. Qatari and UAE action in Libya, which also comprised political and financial assistance to the Benghazi-based National Transitional Council (NTC), was therefore also meant to prevent the rebellion from sliding into the arms of extremists.

Syria was and is a much more intractable problem. Here, the need to restore stability is accompanied by a genuine concern about the scale of the bloodshed that is taking place (if current trends consolidate and the war is not stopped soon, Syria's conflict is on the way to beat the sad record of Algeria's civil war in the 1990s or the Iraq war in the 2000s as the bloodiest event in modern Arab history). But also crucial is the fact that under the Assads (both father and son), Syria has become the main ally of Iran and the latter's only entryway to the Levant. Removing the regime in Damascus therefore entails the huge reward of depriving Iran of what is arguably its most important international asset. Proof of how important this objective is to Saudi Arabia and Qatar can be found in the decision by both governments to provide the Syrian opposition forces with lethal equipment, despite widespread concerns that fringe actors, particularly *jihadist* groups potentially affiliated with the al-Qaeda network, are the main beneficiaries of these arms transfers. Such concerns were a significant driver for the Qatari initiative that resulted in Syria's galaxy of rebel forces coalescing around a single banner, the National

Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, founded in Doha in November 2012. Tellingly, a moderate was appointed to head the new group.

Another means through which Gulf states can influence events in the MENA is *financial assistance*. The Arab uprisings have occurred at a time when most MENA countries were still reeling because of the effects on their economies of the 2008 financial crisis. Moreover, some of these countries suffered from worrisome pre-existing macroeconomic challenges, particularly in terms of growth, inflation rates and, most importantly, youth unemployment. Protests, revolutions and civil wars have worsened these problems. Libya saw oil production, from which basically all national wealth originates, grind to a halt during its seven-month-long civil war, and is only now regaining some of its pre-conflict economic strength. Tunisia is still struggling to restore its tourism industry to pre-revolution levels, an acute problem for its cash-strapped government. Egypt is in even more dire conditions and has been compelled to request an International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan worth 4.8 billion dollars to avoid insolvency and finance a national recovery programme. Civil war in Syria is not only paralysing the national economy, but also negatively affecting neighbouring countries.

For all these countries international financial assistance is of crucial, sometimes even vital, importance. IMF loans might be large-scale, but they come with many strings attached that can turn the loan into a straightjacket for national policymakers. Western assistance, traditionally generous, has been on a diminishing trend, as development aid has been a favoured target of public spending cuts forced upon US and EU governments by the economic crisis. Furthermore, a degree of conditionality is also included in Western aid programmes, with some notable exceptions (US military aid to Egypt's armed forces, for instance). Against this backdrop, the swift and potentially considerable financial help that GCC states can give their Arab partners in distress looks like a sensible way to engender precious goodwill in the recipient country. Qatar's financial support to the administration of Egypt's first elected president (and member of the Muslim Brotherhood), Mohamed Morsi, is a case in point.

Finally, the Gulf states can increase their clout in North Africa and the Middle East by virtue of their *links with local Islamist parties and organisations*. Evidently, creating a relationship with key domestic constituents is an integral part of any strategy for direct involvement in a crisis area,

but what is meant here is a subtler variant of that practice. The tightening of ties with these groups is not necessarily linked solely to the current crisis, and its rationale is not so much that of ending intra-state violence or brokering national reconciliation. Rather, it is to build up a responsive audience in a foreign country. In this respect, the socially and religiously conservative GCC states can take advantage of the fact that, in several nations that have experienced revolutionary change and especially in the most important one: Egypt, Islamist groups are clearly emerging as the winners of the revolution. Long repressed by secular authoritarian regimes, Islamist parties are now destined to play a preeminent role, as they can count on significant popular support and can benefit from their well-established party organisation.

Political Islam is, however, a large family whose members do not always look on each other with brotherly affection. In the nascent Arab political spectrum the fault line between moderate and radical Islamists might well be more significant than the more publicised fissure between secular and religious-inspired parties. Being traditionalist in both their social and religious habits, GCC states can in theory connect with both strands of Islamism. Politics, however, complicates things, given that Islamists themselves do not always see eye-to-eye with the Gulf dynasties on such a critical issue as the relationship between religion and the state. The GCC ruling families go the extra mile to publicly show devotion and adherence to Islamic principles, but the fact remains that their legitimacy is not unchallenged. Many Islamists, particularly members of the Muslim Brotherhood, the most influential and widespread Islamist organisation, hold democracy, or at least greater popular participation in the government, in higher regard than the Gulf dynasties. The House of Saud finds this infatuation with wider public participation in politics worrisome, not least because it contrasts harshly with its century-old attempt to reinforce its monarchic legitimacy by highlighting its special role as the guardian of Islam's most sacred sites, Mecca and Medina. The Saudis, as well as the Emiratis, are hostile to the Muslim Brotherhood, particularly its strong Egyptian branch that is now in power, and generally accord their preference to the socially more conservative and politically intransigent Salafi-inspired parties. Qatar, on the other hand, enjoys good relations with the Brotherhood.

Thus, a critical intra-GCC fracture emerges here; while (relatively) secondary in a time of crisis, the different orientation of the Gulf states concerning the various Islamist parties flourishing in North Africa might

end up being a source of strong intra-GCC competition once the new regimes pass from the current transition to a phase of consolidation.

The Basis of West-GCC (Partial) Alignment

When formulating their strategic responses to the advent of revolutionary change across the Arab world, GCC states have also taken the preferences and policies of external players into account. The West is by far the most important of these outside players, and the Gulf states have consequently been careful to present their actions as compatible with Western interests. Special attention to Western, and particularly US, sensitivities is traditionally an integral part of the foreign policy posture of the GCC states, and should not therefore be seen as an imposed constraint on their newfound autonomy. In fact, much of what GCC states have been trying to achieve in the region has hinged decisively on Western involvement or support, although the wide gap between Western and GCC normative backgrounds has at times strained relations. The Arab Spring has brought the West and the GCC closer, but it has also exposed the undercurrents of conflict that might jeopardise this relationship in the not too distant future.

The West has never been able to fully overcome the dilemma between its normative interests and perceived strategic priorities that has historically characterised its policies towards the MENA region. In the end, the need to preserve regional stability, secure energy supplies and prevent the formation of a large and cohesive anti-Israel (and potentially anti-Western) coalition has been accorded preference to normative concerns about the abysmal state of human rights and fundamental freedoms in most Arab countries. Thus, their authoritarian nature notwithstanding, Arab regimes in North Africa and the Middle East have generally enjoyed Western support. The need to fight Islamic extremism, terrorism and piracy, as well as (for Europe) to manage and possibly curtail massive increases in migration flows from Africa and South Asia, has only made intensified cooperation with Arab regimes even more critical.

From the point of view of the West, the Arab Spring has made its historical Mideast dilemma even more acute. On the one hand, the West cannot ignore the demands of the Arab public for greater participation in politics, government accountability and the end of arbitrary rule. These are, after all, the core elements of the normative content from which Western

liberal democracies derive their legitimacy. So, after some initial hesitation, both the United States and the European Union have thrown their support behind pro-democracy movements in the MENA region. On the other hand, none of the West's strategic interests in the region have disappeared. If anything, the Arab Spring might have made it more difficult to pursue them, at least in the short term. The West has yet to build relations with the new regimes, most of which harbour an understandable degree of suspicion towards governments that in the past used to get on quite well with most of the deposed autocrats.

In light of the above, it comes as no surprise that the West has struggled to devise a pro-active approach towards events unfolding on the southern shores of the Mediterranean. As the case of the GCC countries eloquently shows, to be pro-active involves at least a degree of strategic vision on the basis of which a transformational policy can be carried out. The Gulf states are determined to make the Arab uprisings an opportunity to expand their influence while securing dynastic survival. But the West has actually *lost* influence following the Arab Spring, with its strategic imperatives remaining unchanged. It is for this reason that cooperation with Gulf states has become more profitable: thanks to the GCC's political and financial resources, the West believes to be in a more favourable position to promote regional stabilisation. While this is occurring, the West can make an effort to consolidate relations with the new regimes, in the hope that they will be as forthcoming regarding Western strategic priorities as the old ones were. In short, the West's overall approach has been that of supporting the democratisation processes while also pressing the new regimes to display continuity in their foreign policies, something for which help from the Gulf is necessary. Here lies the essential reactive character of the West's response to the Arab Spring.

Indeed, cooperation with the GCC has produced some of the wished-for outcomes. GCC support was instrumental in having the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) authorise the use of force against Qaddafi, while Qatar's push for unity among the various Syrian opposition forces seems to be an indispensable step on the path towards the eventual pacification of that country. Greater consultation on issues relating to the Arab Spring adds to the positive momentum towards cooperation that the West and the GCC have experienced in recent years, particularly on crit-

ical issues such as counter-terrorism and anti-piracy off Somalia's coasts[2] (NATO has also renewed its interest in involving the GCC in collaboration programmes, although results have not always met expectations).[3] Moreover, the role of Gulf states is crucial to implement the wide-ranging sanctions regime imposed on Iran by the United States and the European Union in the attempt to curb Tehran's nuclear programme.

Cooperation has also come at a price, though. In Bahrain the West was forced to swallow a bitter pill. In order to safeguard its broader interests in the region – Bahrain also hosts the US 5th Fleet – the United States and its European partners opted for conveying complaints about the violent repression of protestors in Manama behind closed doors. In so doing, the West gave the public impression of having bowed to *Realpolitik* considerations, demonstrating caution when pressing an allied authoritarian regime. At the same time, however, its discreet protests were enough to deeply irritate the Bahrainis and the Saudis. Thus, what the West obtained in the end was to nurture the distrust of both Arab and Western public opinion as well as the al-Khalifa regime (and, by extension, of the other GCC regimes as well).

Bahrain is not only the least edifying chapter so far in the history of the West's response to the Arab Spring. It can also be the harbinger of further, potentially deep, disagreements between the West and the GCC. At stake in Bahrain was not only the (unsolved) question of how to strike a balance between support for popular demands and the need to back up a cooperative government. In the streets of Manama a fault line was also drawn between the West's and GCC's contrasting narratives of the Arab uprisings.

While acknowledging the national specificities of each instance of political change, the West views the epochal events occurring in the Arab world as basically a fight against authoritarianism and for greater political participation, if not democracy. The GCC has a different take, particularly when protests take place within its boundaries. In this case, demands for political reform are usually portrayed as Iranian interference aimed at stoking the fire of sectarianism within multi-confessional populations such as those of Bahrain (where disenfranchised Shi'ites are the majority) and Saudi Arabia (where the eastern, oil-rich provinces are mostly inhabited by Shi'ites).

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[2] See Frederic Wehrey's chapter in this volume.

[3] See Florence Gaub's chapter in this volume. See also appendix 1.

The tendency of GCC governments to depict manifestations of internal dissent in nationalist, xenophobic and sectarian terms – in a word, as ideological threats[4] – does not bode well for future West-GCC cooperation. Not only does it jar with the Western reading of the Arab Spring, thereby creating a permanent source of latent tensions. It also complicates the West's plan to achieve pacification and stabilisation of countries in turmoil by promoting inter-sectarian dialogue.

Furthermore, the GCC's overly ideological depiction of popular protests feeds the demonisation of Iran, a tendency from which the West is unfortunately not fully immune either. As Parsi argues in his chapter, GCC accusations that Iran is actively meddling in their domestic affairs are mostly groundless, although their unwarranted result might precisely be that of making a call for Iran's help an appealing option for repressed Shi'ite communities in the Gulf. But even if claims of Iran's interference do not become self-fulfilling prophecies, the 'blame Iran' game involves the doubly negative effect of neglecting a serious domestic problem while worsening a foreign one. As a matter of fact, this woeful practice of demonisation cannot but further undermine the minimal trust still existing between the West and Iran, and as a result the prospects for a diplomatic settlement of the nuclear dispute grow ever dimmer.

Conclusion: 'Your Sins Will Come Back to Haunt You'

The case of Bahrain offers a good standpoint from which the potential and limits of West-GCC relations can be assessed. The West's decision not to protest publicly against the Bahraini government's crackdown, preferring instead to rely on back-channels to convey such messages, reflects its decision to prioritise stabilisation and political reform in the MENA region over its more comprehensive normative interest in supporting democratisation anywhere and at any time. The West deems – and probably rightly so – that cooperation with Gulf states is critical to achieve its objectives in the MENA region. If one adds to this the West's imperative to crush terrorist organisations affiliated with or inspired by al-Qaeda, curtail pirate attacks off the Horn of Africa, and contain

[4] See Frederic Wehrey's chapter in this volume.

Iran's alleged nuclear ambitions, the decision to support Arab democracy everywhere but in the Gulf becomes more understandable, though not automatically acceptable.

This approach may have its merits, but it also has its flaws. Specifically, it is premised on a (partial) convergence of Western and GCC interests that is however mostly limited to the short- or mid-term. Counter-terrorism and anti-piracy are in all likelihood destined to remain a shared interest, but in the larger picture of political transformation in the MENA region and Gulf geopolitics, the proverbial sins will come back to haunt the West and the GCC, meaning that their priorities may well collide in the future.

Thus far, the West and the GCC have both supported the political transition in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt, and are on the same page concerning the desirability of Assad's downfall in Syria. However, they diverge in their respective readings of political transformation: for the West, it is Arab democratisation; for GCC states, it is the Islamic (Sunni) awakening. Thus, while ensuring pluralism is a key goal for the former, the latter are more interested in tightening ties with relevant domestic audiences, namely Islamist parties. In case of an all-out confrontation between secular and religious-inspired parties, particularly in Egypt, the agenda of the West and the GCC would run into one another. The latter would lean towards the Islamists irrespective of their potentially anti-democratic tendencies, whereas the former would be torn between its instinctive favour for secularists and its desire to avoid estranging popular Islamist parties. To complicate things further, just as the Islamists themselves are divided, so too is the support coming in from GCC member states. Saudi Arabia's backing of conservative Salafist groups in Egypt stridently contrasts with the West's attempt to encourage the Muslim Brotherhood to embrace political and social moderation and push fundamentalists to the fringes of the political spectrum. This is not only a normative contest; if future strategic priorities of the West and key GCC players were to diverge, the level of influence each exerts over countries such as Egypt will be a significant factor in tilting the balance either way.

But why should Western and GCC strategies diverge? A potential hotspot is Iran. This might sound counterintuitive, as common hostility towards Iran is a decisive factor behind the West-GCC partnership. In the short-term, there is no doubt that this will remain so. But in the mid-to-long-term, Western and GCC views may well differ. For all its antagonism against Tehran's clerical regime, the West – and particularly Europe – is not uncomfortable with the notion that Iran can one day play a prominent

role in the region. Actually, in the opinion of many Western policymakers and observers, if the West and Iran were to settle the nuclear dispute diplomatically (a big 'if', admittedly), this would not only improve the security environment of the region, but also be a first, significant step on the path towards the eventual normalisation of relations between Iran, the United States and EU countries. The Gulf's ruling dynasties are horrified by this prospect, not least because the common interest in opposing Iran allows them to play down the issue of political reform and democracy in their domestic settings in talks with the West. Provided that Iran does not cross the nuclear threshold, most people in the GCC are probably relatively satisfied with the status quo.

The above leads to the next, and potentially more serious, flashpoint that could emerge in the future of West-GCC relations. The question can be framed in very simple terms: for how long can the West afford to ignore demands for political reform coming from the populations of GCC countries? As long as protests are limited and do not trigger a violent clampdown by government forces as they have in Bahrain, the West can stay the course. However, it is uncertain for how long this can remain the case.

Crucial in this regard is the continued ability of Gulf dynasties to maintain popular consensus through welfare benefits. Reportedly, the level of public spending with which GCC governments are backing their claim to remain in power is hardly sustainable. Sooner or later, the policy of subsidising key domestic constituents to buy social peace will run its course, and this will raise the odds for the opening of a new phase of political turmoil. With some exceptions such as in Qatar, GCC dynasties are not very popular, and the fierce succession disputes within ruling family members – first and foremost over the Saudi 'throne' – will only complicate things further. A crisis in a GCC state comparable in magnitude to the ones that have proliferated in North Africa might propagate to other Gulf states and plunge the whole region into chaos. Should this be the case, the 'interest vs. values' dilemma that has so often short-circuited Western policies towards the MENA region will re-present itself, only in larger geographical scale and with more serious geopolitical consequences. What the West will do, or be able to do, if and when confronted with the challenge, will depend on a number of variables which today are impossible to ascertain with an acceptable degree of confidence.

The most important of such variables are the kinds of relationships the West will establish with Islamist forces in post-revolutionary Arab states, and the outcome of the nuclear dispute with Iran. If the latter

is settled consensually and a *detente* with Tehran is ushered in, and if Islamist parties in countries such as Egypt start seeing the West as a trustworthy and valuable interlocutor (including, for instance, for its potential to press Israel to make concessions to the Palestinians), the West will probably consider its position in the region as strong enough to allow some form of open support for popular demands in the GCC. However, it is extremely unlikely that the United States or EU nations may be inclined to support revolutionary regime change in a country such as Saudi Arabia, unless they have an absolute certainty that what may come next would not endanger their interests and security (needless to say, they will *not* have such level of certainty). Thus, even if the governments in Washington and European capitals feel significantly less reliant on the GCC than they do today, the most they can be expected to do is to favour internal reform.

This may work if GCC governments display a degree of responsiveness and bring about real, rather than cosmetic, improvements, and if popular demands focus on reform rather than regime change. But if the latter were the case and events on the ground were to come to a head, the West would be left with few options. It could trump its values and tacitly approve of the GCC regimes' repression of protests, hoping they are successful not only in the present, but also for the future. Alternatively, it could openly condemn repression, advocate dialogue, and hope that GCC regimes would consider their partnership with the West as more important than Western public criticisms. Finally, the West could throw its weight behind popular protests more seriously and face the consequences in terms of either alienating the GCC regimes (if these manage to quell protests) or coming to terms with a deteriorated security situation in the region (if popular protests manage to oust existing regimes).

Given the scarce appeal of any of these options, it is understandable that the West, much as the GCC regimes themselves, is betting on the status quo in the Gulf. But were this to change – and there are good reasons to think it could – the West and the GCC would have to come to terms with the limits of pragmatism, as those interests underlying their partnership could lead to reciprocal estrangement, rivalry and competition.

1.
The GCC States and the West: Challenges of Arab Transitions

Christian Koch

The entire Middle Eastern region is undergoing a historic and fundamental period of political and social transition. Even the oil-rich monarchies of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) – Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) – have been affected. For the moment and with the partial exception of Bahrain and Kuwait, GCC states continue to display a degree of domestic stability with opposition largely confined to promoting reforms from within the monarchical system rather than seeking to topple the existing ruling families. At the same time, the political temperature has been rising in the Gulf region, potentially challenging the strategic relations between GCC states and the West in unprecedented ways in the coming years.

The GCC states have tried to stay a step ahead of developments in the region by responding to domestic discontent with a mixture of carrots and sticks while at the same time pursuing a more activist foreign policy that seeks to limit the repercussions of the transitions that are occurring elsewhere in the region. Thus, while countries like Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria and Yemen remain for the most part consumed by their internal convolutions, GCC states have been active on the regional front, in many ways even contributing significantly to the changes occurring in neighbouring states. Whereas in the past the GCC states prided themselves on their low regional profile as well as on their preference for outsourcing much of their security policy to the United States (US), more recently GCC states have decisively inserted themselves into regional matters. Their policy of actually throwing their weight behind some of the popular demands for regime change stands very much in contrast to the

counter-revolutionary label that has often been attributed to GCC countries in some of the literature.[1]

Two caveats are in order here before proceeding with the analysis. Firstly, the GCC's determination to increase its role in regional affairs must be understood in combination with the deep unease about US policy in the Gulf, both today and potentially in the future. The United States' blatant disregard, as far as the GCC's viewpoint is concerned, of advice from regional allies prior to the decision to invade Iraq in 2003 resulted both in the disastrous post-conflict reconstruction phase (which bogged US forces down for a prolonged period resulting in many more casualties than originally anticipated) and in changing the regional balance of power in favour of Iran. As Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal stated in 2005: 'We fought a war together to keep Iran out of Iraq after Iraq was driven out of Kuwait … Now we are handing the whole country over to Iran without reason'.[2] Given the United States' perceived naiveté, combined with concerns over US aims and objectives, such as the quick abandonment of long-time ally Hosni Mubarak in Egypt or fears of a US-Iran grand bargain coming at the expense of the GCC, Arab Gulf states decided that a more direct involvement in regional affairs was absolutely essential to protect their own interests. The United States would remain their most important external ally, but that did not mean that it could always be trusted to 'do the right thing'.

Secondly, GCC states supported political change only in those contexts where it had become clear that the protest tide had become irreversible and that a transition was necessary in order to re-establish stability. If there is one thing that GCC states fear most, it is a situation where political conflict in one country deteriorates to such a level that regional repercussions are unavoidable. In Yemen, the continued rule of President Ali Abdullah Saleh threatened to turn the country into a failed state, which would have resulted in a new base for extremists that could directly threaten the Gulf states. In Tunisia, Saudi Arabia's offering of asylum to ousted Tunisian leader Zine El

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[1] See, for example, Toby Craig Jones (2011), "Saudi Arabia versus the Arab Spring," *Raritan: A Quarterly Review* Vol.31, No.2, p. 43-59; Mehran Kamrava (2012), "The Arab Spring and the Saudi-led Counter-Revolution," *Orbis,* Vol.56, No.1 (January), p. 96-104.

[2] Saud al-Faisal (2005), "The fight against extremism and the search for peace," Remarks at the Council on Foreign Relations, September 2005, http://www.cfr.org/terrorism/fight-against-extremism-search-peace-rush-transcript-federal-news-service-inc/p8908.

Abidine Ben Ali was premised on the hope that this would allow Tunisia to re-establish control before the revolutionary wave spread to neighbouring countries, a scenario that of course did not turn out as expected.

In addition, there is the fear of Iran and the continued attempts by Tehran to spread its regional influence. These are factors that can further explain the GCC's increased involvement in regional affairs. In Bahrain, GCC states took a defensive stance both to defend a fellow monarchy but also to draw a red line meant as a warning for Iran. But even here, it can be argued that the GCC acted before the situation deteriorated further. In Syria, GCC states have led the way in de-legitimising the Assad regime both because of the regional impact of a continued civil war, which could spill-over and endanger Jordan, for example, and because the removal of President Bashar al-Assad would represent a strategic blow to Iran. In all of these instances, GCC states have become actors in their own right rather than bystanders to regional developments.

In the West, such activism has largely been seen as a welcome development given that overall the strategic goals pursued by both sides have more or less overlapped. While the West continues to face the dichotomy between preserving stability and actively supporting political transformation, neither side wants to see uncontrolled chaos with its unforeseen consequences.

But for the West, it should at the same time be understood that there are limitations as far as the GCC states are concerned in terms of their own capacities to influence events regionally. Geopolitical considerations, especially the strategic rivalry with Iran, and divergent views vis-à-vis their traditional Western allies when it comes to the direction of political developments throughout the Arab world will represent potential areas of contention in the future. Thus, while the circumstances in place at the end of 2012 suggests a level of strategic convergence between the West and the GCC states, the relationship will be subject to severe tests as, for one, the Arab Gulf monarchies find themselves increasingly preoccupied by their own domestic 'Arab Spring', and second, as competing interests emerge over issues such as the future of the Arab world as a whole.

A Changing Regional Balance

The emergence of a more delineated and pro-active foreign policy by GCC states did not occur in a vacuum, nor can it be argued that this is

the result of the developments that have consumed the Middle East since the first regime change in Tunisia at the outset of 2011. Instead, a culmination of factors have come together over time to force the GCC states as well as provide them with the opportunity to increase their regional profile.

One key factor has been the slow but persistent shift of power in the Middle East from the Levant and North Africa to the Gulf region. This shift is itself comprised of several components. For one, geographically and within the context of globalisation, the Gulf region's position at the intersection between East and West, and the link it provides between Asia, Africa and Europe, has catapulted the region into the international spotlight. Backed by tremendous economic growth and business opportunities due to the oil wealth of the region and supported by both the relative political stability of the oil monarchies and the determination of their leaders to take advantage of opportunities provided by a more globalised environment, the Arab Gulf states have firmly established themselves as a hub of global proportions. Dubai, with its international airport that in 2012 served fifty-four million passengers and has risen to the fourth busiest airport in the world, is the most obvious example of a globalising Gulf.[3]

Naturally, the Gulf's extensive oil and gas reserves combined with its high production rates is a second critical factor that forces attention on the Gulf region. The Gulf contains two-thirds of the world's proven reserves of oil, produces more than one quarter of total world oil production and supplies nearly one-third of total world consumption. With world oil demand continuing to increase, especially from the Asian economies, the Gulf's share of oil production as a ratio of total world consumption is projected to increase further.[4] Even in light of new developments within the United States regarding shale oil, the Gulf will still remain critical to global energy requirements, in particular as far as their spare capacity production is concerned. In recent years, Saudi Arabia has invested heavily in order to

[3] See, for example, Edmund O'Sullivan (2008), *The New Gulf: How modern Arabia is changing the World for good,* Dubai, Motivate Publishing, (especially pp. 3-16).

[4] International Energy Agency (2010), *World Energy Outlook 2010*, Paris, http://www.iea.org/publications/freepublications/publication/weo2010-1.pdf ; see also Tim Niblock (2013), "Gulf-Asia Economic Relations, Pan-Gulf and Pan-Asia Perspectives," in Tim Niblock (ed.) with Monica Malik, *Asia-Gulf Economic Relations in the 21st Century: The Local to Global Transformation,* Berlin, Gerlach Press, forthcoming.

expand its production capacity with the result of having a spare capacity of up to four million barrels of oil a day in 2012. As a 2011 report from Barclays Capital underlined: 'No other country possesses the ability to plug in a supply shortfall to the same extent – hence the importance of Saudi Arabia'.[5] In addition to oil, the Gulf is also a major gas player as Iran and Qatar hold two of the three largest gas reserves in the world.

Supported by their hydrocarbon income, GCC states have also witnessed an unprecedented period of economic development and growth in the last decade. High oil prices since 2002 (apart from the decline in 2009 and 2010 as a result of the global financial crisis) have allowed GCC states to accumulate significant budget surpluses that in turn have helped finance their unprecedented economic development. In 2011 alone, GCC states posted a cumulative budget surplus of more than $60 billion.[6] Even in the crisis-hit year of 2009, GCC countries still managed a $19.6 billion surplus. Overall, GCC states have accumulated foreign assets of almost $1.7 trillion by the end of 2011 with forecasts pointing to a further increase to over $2 trillion by the end of 2013. About one-half of the foreign assets are held by sovereign wealth funds.[7] The combined GDP of GCC states topped one trillion dollars in 2011, thereby doubling in less than a decade.[8] All of this has led to widespread domestic investment programmes to upgrade facilities and infrastructure, in turn providing lucrative opportunities for international companies to obtain Gulf project contracts. As such, GCC states have become an important investment hub aside from their traditional role as hydrocarbon exporters.[9] This has occurred despite the region's designation as a permanent crisis zone.

Outside of economics and from a more traditional geopolitical and geostrategic perspective, one can also argue that over the past three decades the centre of gravity of conflict has shifted eastward to the Gulf region. It was in the Gulf that the 1979 Iranian revolution took place, an event that is

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[5] Barclays Capital Commodities Research (2011), *Saudi Arabia; shifting focus*, 8 March.

[6] "GCC posts $55 billion collective fiscal surplus," *Saudi Gazette* (Riyadh), 15 March 2011.

[7] "GCC assets surge $456 billion in 2011," *Emirates 24/7* (Dubai), 15 May 2012.

[8] The Economist Intelligence Unit (2009), *The GCC in 2020: Outlook for the Gulf and the Global Economy,* p. 4-6; "GCC GDP rises to $983 billion," *Arab News* (Riyadh), 12 October 2010.

[9] FRIDE (2010), "The Gulf in the new world order," *Working Paper 101*, Madrid, September.

still defining the security environment in the region three decades later. The region experienced the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war, one of the most devastating conflicts of the second half of the 20th century, and the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq in 1990, which fully opened the door for direct US involvement in regional matters pertaining to the Gulf. Finally, the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq proved pivotal in the realignment of strategic issues in the region.

While the United States has been the key external actor providing for the security of Arab Gulf states throughout the turbulent period of the 1980s and 1990s, there is also a growing sense of unease about such reliance and a concern within some GCC states that they were being used as pawns in a greater strategic game. This disillusionment came to the forefront following the United States' decision to invade Iraq and, more importantly, with the disastrous mismanagement of Iraq's post-Saddam domestic and regional environment. On the one hand, there was great concern within the Gulf about US hubris and what was considered to be an overreaction to the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. On the other hand, the failure to adequately plan for the post-invasion period left Gulf states with a crisis in their neighbourhood which was not of their own making and which ultimately unravelled the already unstable balance of power in the region.

The key concern from a GCC perspective was that Iranian influence and meddling in regional affairs would increase following the ousting of Saddam Hussein's regime which had long served as the traditional buffer against Iranian influence in the Arab world. Fears of a region-wide sectarian conflict emerging in the wake of the US-led invasion of Iraq were also present in the GCC's reaction to the US campaign. Instead of demonstrating American power, the post-invasion period undermined US might and credibility, thereby forcing GCC states to question whether their reliance on the United States for outside protection could indeed still be relied upon.[10] For Saudi Prince Turki al-Faisal, the former Saudi ambassador to Washington, the United States lost the moral high ground following the events of 9/11 because of their 'negligence, ignorance and arrogance'.[11]

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[10] James Russell (2007), *Regional Threats and Security Strategy: The Troubling Case of Today's Middle East,* Carlisle, PA, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, November, p. 16.

[11] Michel Cousins, "Turki Al-Faisal calls on Obama to push for Middle East settlement," *Arab News* (Riyadh), 15 May 2010.

The above led to an assessment that concluded that none of the various approaches applied by the United States to regional security issues – from the 'twin pillars' policy of the 1970s, to the balance-of-power approach in the 1980s, to dual containment in the 1990s and, finally, to the outright intervention and invasion of Iraq in 2003 – had in fact moved the region towards resolving its security dilemmas or providing the basis for a more inclusive regional security architecture. Instead, each policy simply supplied the seeds for the next crisis, with GCC states finding themselves in the same, if not worse, precarious position as before.

As a response, Gulf states began building 'a series of balancing political relationships to fill the vacuum created by the loss of US influence and the necessity for them to distance themselves from Washington'.[12] As stated by Nawaf Obaid, a Saudi analyst speaking about the kingdom: 'Riyadh intends to pursue a much more assertive foreign policy, at times conflicting with American interests'.[13] The push in this direction has intensified with concerns about US policy in light of the so-called 'Arab Spring' as well as the announcement of a re-orientation of US strategy towards Asia.[14] While no imminent break in the strategic relations between GCC states and the United States is expected, in large part also due to the realisation among the Arab Gulf states themselves that they simply do not have the necessary military power to defend themselves in a tough neighbourhood, it is nevertheless the case that today GCC states feel less beholden to Washington's wishes.[15]

This disillusionment is not limited to the United States alone but encompasses the wider Western world as well. Confidence is deteriorating as to whether Western powers truly have the answers to the present and future problems plaguing the region. Events such as the global economic crisis are seen as having been caused primarily by the Western capitalist model leading to a growing conviction in the Gulf that the Western economic model has run its course. Without a solid economic foundation to

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[12] Russell (2007), *Regional Threats and Security Strategy*, *cit*. p. 8.

[13] Nawaf Obaid (2011), "Amid the Arab Spring, a U.S.-Saudi split," *Washington Post*, 15 May.

[14] US Department of Defence (2012), "Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defence," January, http://www.aviationweek.com/Portals/AWeek/media /PDF/Defense/Defense_Strategic_Guidance.pdf.

[15] Nancy A. Youssef and Warren P. Strobel (2007), "U.S., Saudi Arabia Have Drifted Apart," *McClatchy Newspapers*, 1 August.

support a robust foreign and security policy, it is assumed that it will be difficult for Western countries to maintain their commitment in the region despite many official pronouncements to the opposite.[16]

In light of the above, GCC states began assuming a more determined and direct role in shaping regional affairs even prior to the Arab Spring. Events in Libya did not signal Qatar's first entrance on the regional stage. The country had already engaged in a series of mediating attempts between conflicting parties, in the Darfur conflict in Sudan, with regard to the Polisario in the Western Sahara and with the Houthi rebellion in Yemen, for example.[17] In 2002, Saudi Arabia put forward King Abdullah's Peace Initiative on the Arab-Israeli conflict which later turned into the Arab Peace Initiative. Equally, the United Arab Emirates has made a determined effort to showcase itself as a country open for international business and trade as well as to position the cities of Dubai and Abu Dhabi as international gateways between East and West. In 2007, the Emirates succeeded in a global diplomatic push to have Abu Dhabi selected as the host city of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) beating the contender, Germany. Such engagement would not have been thinkable without the convergence of the factors cited above. It resulted in what Christian Coates Ulrichsen refers to as the pursuit of 'pragmatic strategies for survival' allowing GCC states to position themselves in the volatile regional environment while at the same time safeguarding and expanding their sovereignty and independence.[18]

On the ground, implementing such survival strategies has resulted in a combination of balance of power considerations, building-up relationships with external actors to compensate for the lack of indigenous capabilities, investment in deterrence capacities, as well as efforts to

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[16] See, for example, the comments provided by US Senator John McCain at the 2012 Manama Dialogue conference, where he stated that to assume that the United States would pivot away from the Middle East and Gulf is 'just the height of foolishness'. Remark delivered in Question and Answer session, http://www.iiss.org/conferences/the-iiss-regional-security-summit/manama-dialogue-2012/speeches/first-plenary-session/q/ (Transcript).

[17] Sultan Barakat (2012), *The Qatari Spring: Qatar's emerging role in peacemaking*, Research Paper No. 24, Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance and Globalisation in the Gulf States, July.

[18] Kristian Coates Ulrichsen (2010), *The GCC States and the Shifting Balance of Global Power*, Centre for International and Regional Studies, Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar, Occasional Paper No. 6, p. 1.

maintain the status quo in order to be able to formulate policies in reaction to emerging challenges. Taken together, these aspects have led to a gradual confidence boost for the leaderships of Gulf states, reinforcing a belief that they have been following the right path and are making the right decisions.

The political turmoil that has engulfed the Arab world since the beginning of 2011 has provided an opportunity for GCC states to define their positions more concretely while at the same time forcing them to assume a more active posture in response to regional dynamics. In Libya, it was Qatar that stood at the forefront of organising the opposition from the Arab side against Muammar Qaddafi's regime, with a supporting role played by the Emirates. In fact, it was the GCC's role, both as a bloc and within the Arab League, that extended NATO the much needed legitimacy from the Arab world to pursue and ultimately achieve regime change in Libya. In Syria, again it was the GCC, led by Qatar and Saudi Arabia, that originally organised the Arab League mediation efforts and, when those failed, made the decision to withdraw support from President Assad's regime. Subsequently, these countries began to supply important financial support to the Syrian opposition, while later even suggesting that the UN Security Council adopt a Chapter VII resolution permitting military intervention. Furthermore, the GCC paved the way for the expulsion of Syria from the Arab League. Qatar's Emir Shaikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani stated: 'I think that it is better for the Arab countries themselves to interfere out of their national, humanitarian, political and military duties and do what is necessary to stop the bloodshed in Syria'.[19]

The motivations for the Arab Gulf states to pursue such an activism can be found on numerous fronts. In the Syrian case and in addition to responding to public sympathy for the plight of the Syrian people and a genuine belief that the violence must end, geopolitical considerations including the need to contain the regional repercussions of the Syrian crisis and subjugating Iran to a significant strategic loss by supporting the downfall of the Assad regime, have been the driving factors in GCC policy. More broadly, given the confidence stemming from the fact that their political systems have not only survived but even prospered in the turmoil of the past three decades, there is a general belief and conviction that GCC states can contribute to the building of a stable, developed and

[19] "Qatari Emir: Arabs must interfere in Syria," *Al-Jazeera,* 26 September 2012, http://www.aljazeera.com/news/americas/2012/09/201292645421649378.html.

long-lasting regional system. At the same time, there is an awareness that such a system must come from within the Arab world rather than waiting for the West to impose a solution from abroad. There is therefore a unique regional approach evident in the GCC's increased activism, adding an element that was not present in the past.

The GCC and the West: Convergence amidst Challenges

While GCC states have begun to carve out a greater regional role for themselves, as circumstances stand at the end of 2012, there is still a broad convergence of objectives between GCC states and the West when it comes to the critical issues facing the Middle East as a whole. In fact, on many critical issues of concern, the United States, Europe and the Arab Gulf states continue to share common perceptions and pursue common policies. Such common approaches to regional issues exist on the following items:

Non-proliferation issues, including the need to prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and associated materials; actions aimed at curbing countries seeking to or acquiring such materials, with Iran at the forefront; and, in the long-term, efforts aimed at establishing a Middle Eastern Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (MENWFZ) as well as re-affirming the importance of international arms control agreements such as the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Chemical and Biological Weapons Conventions (CWC and BTWC, respectively).[20]

Counterterrorism policy and combating extremism throughout the region. Here, the United States and Saudi Arabia have developed a very close relationship with sustained practical cooperation.[21]

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[20] See the speech by Prince Turki Bin Faisal al-Saud delivered at the ninth Global Strategic Review Conference of the International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS), 9-11 September 2011 on the concept of the Middle East Nuclear Weapons Free Zone, www.iiss.org/EasySiteWeb/getresource.axd?AssetID=58286.

[21] In a US embassy cable released by WikiLeaks, the Saudi Deputy Interior Minister, Prince Mohammed Bin Nayef, is quoted as stating that Saudi cooperation with the United States on counter-terrorism issues was 'very good, and has developed to the point that the US and Saudi Arabia are in "simultaneous mode" regarding the sharing of raw data and threat information.' US officials have regularly stated that they consider

The containment of Iran, including actively limiting Tehran's perceived hegemonic ambitions, and preventing it from becoming a nuclear-armed state.

Energy issues and energy policy, i.e. securing the unimpeded and uninterrupted flow of energy from the Gulf to world markets at reasonable prices.

Cooperation over Yemen. The GCC, working in close coordination with the United States and European Union (EU), led the effort to end the stalemate by enabling the transfer of power from President Saleh to his deputy, thus preventing the country from being dragged into a civil war.[22] The coordination of policy towards Yemen, including bringing about the transition of power, promoting social and economic development, re-establishing security in the country and preventing extremist elements from using Yemen as a base for operations, as well as preventing secession of Yemen's separatist regions, are all areas in which GCC states and the West have similar views and assessments.

As far as Syria is concerned efforts to prevent a deterioration of the security environment that could lead to broader uncertainty and regional chaos.

Even in the case of Egypt, where differing assessments of the stability of President Mubarak's regime certainly existed at the outset of the protests, the GCC and the West have found common ground in terms of supporting and promoting economic recovery which in turn would enhance security in the country.

Yet despite these many convergences and actual examples of pragmatic cooperation between the GCC and the West, there are a number of challenges as well as limitations in place that have to be considered and which are likely to have an impact as both sides will align their efforts towards the region to their individual and not always compatible interests.

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relations on this issue to be exceptionally good. For full text of US embassy cable see, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/244077.

[22] Interview with EU official, Brussels, 17 September 2012 in which the official specifically underlined the EU's impression that coordination with the GCC over Yemen has been 'exceptionally good'. The Secretary-General of the GCC, Abdullatif Bin Rashid al-Zayani, also highlighted the international and EU support during his keynote address to the annual Gulf Research Meeting of the Gulf Research Centre in Cambridge, United Kingdom. The address is available, http://grm.grc.net/speeches/15_Zya-Speech.pdf.

A fundamental area of concern is the impact of the Arab transition on the GCC states themselves. By the end of 2012 it has become clear that the monarchies of the Arab Gulf have been impacted by the 'Arab Spring' just like their neighbours in North Africa and the Middle East. The movement against corruption in Kuwait and the heightened tensions over parliamentary politics in the country; the protests for equal treatment among the Shi'ite community in Bahrain in which battle lines have become increasingly intense; the demonstrations for greater economic benefits and jobs in Oman that have begun to spill-over into personal attacks against the Sultan; the campaign against members of the al-Islah community in the Emirates which has led to the arrests of over sixty people and has led the European Parliament to issue a resolution condemning human rights practices inside the country; as well as the widespread blog discussions about the need for reform in Saudi Arabia in addition to widespread and continued demonstrations among the Saudi Shi'ite community in the eastern province; all these developments have dampened the impression that the Arab Gulf states are immune to political change. Clearly, they are not.

As the domestic climate has become more contentious, it will become increasingly necessary for the Arab Gulf monarchies to undertake a political and social reform process as a means for the ruling families to maintain their legitimacy. The current policy of widespread economic benefit packages followed by increased repressive mechanisms in those instances where local populations refuse to be compliant will not resolve issues of contention or eliminate the opposition. And while there is no indication that Arab Gulf regimes are in danger of being overthrown or face similar domestic situations as witnessed in Egypt for example, the contradictions within the governing systems, the increasing frustration among growing sectors of the population, the lack of political institutionalisation in terms of responsive bureaucracies and an active civil society, and the growing gap in expectations and delivery between the old ruling elites and a youthful population, all suggest that the ruling families could face unprecedented challenges to their rule in the not-too-distant future.

With increased attention needed on the domestic front, the ability of GCC states to maintain their regional activism could be severely curtailed. An increasingly volatile domestic environment would also put Western policy in a clear quandary as it would be caught between the moral imperative to support continued political and economic freedoms and the need to ensure stability in one of the most strategic regions of

the world. This is made all the more difficult by the fact that, in the event that political change does indeed arrive to the Gulf, GCC countries would also consider the emergence of conservative Islamist movements as a potent political force defining the way forward.[23] Therefore, political changes in any of the GCC states would be accompanied by a high degree of uncertainty and would further cast doubt over the GCC's continued, albeit conditional, support for a Western agenda in the rest of the Middle East. Moreover, as current rulers will increasingly rely on available security forces to crack down on opposition movements, Western governments will find themselves open to charges that they are complicit in the human rights abuses carried out by their Gulf allies. The case of Bahrain is already clear evidence of such a situation with the US, British and EU governments' coming under attack from human rights and other non-governmental organisations. And while the other regimes in the Gulf have not been tested to the same degree, the United States or Europe should not assume that such situation will continue indefinitely.

Outside of their own domestic agendas, other regional points of concern could also lead to greater tensions. As Western nations pursue a diplomatic solution with Iran, there are increased worries among GCC officials that due to the risks involved in conducting any military campaign against Iran to delay or eliminate that country's nuclear program, Western countries will prefer to switch towards implementing a containment strategy vis-à-vis Iran that would essentially leave GCC countries in an Iranian nuclear shadow. There are similar concerns that Iran and the West could begin serious negotiations that would ultimately lead to a sort of grand bargain, with GCC interests seconded to those of Western nations rushing to repair relations with Tehran. Given the deep distrust that GCC states have about Iranian policy intentions, there is a concrete fear that the Arab Gulf states will find themselves one day having to face the Iranian threat on their own. The Saudi foreign minister has spoken about the need for a new regional security architecture that includes 'a unified GCC, a prosperous Yemen, a stable Iraq, and a friendly Iran' with guarantees for such a system provided by the international com-

[23] Gulf analysts are already suggesting that the United States is naïve when it comes to its current policy towards Islamist movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood. See Abdulkhaleq Abdulla (2012), "US, Islamists and Arab Gulf States," *Gulf News* (Dubai), 27 November.

munity and not 'unilaterally ... by the only superpower in the world'.[24] But there is an acute awareness that under present circumstances, such a system cannot be implemented. Meanwhile, Western nations appear to be seeing a regional security structure from only two angles, either one that excludes Iran for the time being, for example through a NATO-style defence arrangement in the Gulf, or through the inclusion of Iran that would however also involve a leading role for Tehran similar to the twin pillar approach of the United States in the 1970s. The first approach does not resolve the existing security dilemmas while the latter would be unacceptable to GCC states.

In terms of future West-GCC cooperation, there are also some key limitations to be highlighted. One issue is that of capacity as far as GCC states are concerned. Within a complex environment consisting of intra-region actors (the six GCC states, Iran, Iraq and Yemen), the wider neighbourhood (Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Syria, Sudan, Turkey, Israel, Jordan, Egypt, Libya and Somalia), and the broader international community (the United States, Europe and increasingly also Asian countries such as China and Japan), the GCC states are challenged to defend their national interests while equally trying to promote a policy of dialogue and cooperation that could ultimately serve as a basis for better and more structured security relations both within the region and with external actors. This is a tremendously difficult agenda to fulfil, over which there are doubts whether the institutionally weak GCC states can maintain the current thrust and act succinctly on all these different stages. It has already become clear that much of the activism of recent times is rather closely related to the initiatives of individual personalities rather than being backed by a solid institutional framework consisting of a functioning bureaucracy. This, in turn, raises the question as to whether the activism shown in recent years can in fact be maintained when personalities change or lose interest. Capacity is also an issue when it comes to implementing policies and there are currently questions being raised about GCC initiatives to support opposition elements, for example in Egypt and Syria, with money seemingly flowing to extremist groups without sufficient oversight. For the West, empowering such groups seri-

[24] Saud al-Faisal (2004), "Towards a New Framework for Regional Security," Statement by HRH Prince Saud Al Faisal, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Saudi Arabia at the Gulf Dialogue, Manama, 5 December, http://www.mofa.gov.sa/media/35123_E05-12-04.pdf.

ously complicates the post-conflict political process and as such it is not clear what objectives the GCC is in fact pursuing.

The present semblance of GCC unity also needs to be closely scrutinised. All of the GCC states continue to be very protective of their sovereignty thus preventing the GCC from becoming a more effective regional organisation. In that context, the recent assertiveness of GCC states hides a certain apprehension about the dominance of Saudi Arabia in foreign policy issues, with Qatar's aggressive foreign policy being partly aimed to step away from the Saudi shadow. In addition, there is no agreement about how to move forward with the GCC's development. This was evident in the lack of enthusiasm of member states to the proposals put forward by the Saudi King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz al-Saud to expand the GCC to include Morocco and Jordan or that the GCC move 'from a phase of cooperation to a phase of union within a single entity'.[25] In terms of foreign policy, the main issue concerns the implications of a more centralised regional authority. This is again seen as something that favours Saudi Arabia, the largest GCC country by far, at the expense of the other states. Coupled with the capacity issues mentioned above, the lack of deep coordination among GCC members and the corresponding commitment to establish a strong regional organisation hampers its effectiveness when partnering with the West.

Conclusion

Overall, relations between the West and the GCC are solid and continue to benefit both sides. GCC states gained essential support for their security in a tough neighbourhood while the West has reliable partners that more or less pursue the same interests of a stable Middle East. But rather

[25] "King's strategic call to GCC bloc: Move from cooperation to unity," *Arab News*, 20 December 2011. Given different perceptions among GCC members about the need as well as the meaning of such a union, the proposal has lingered in a committee with little progress achieved by the end of 2012. In fact, Bahrain's State Minister for Foreign Affairs confirmed in December 2012 that 'the union will not be announced at the Bahrain summit' scheduled for 24-25 December and that the issue would not even be on the summit's agenda. Habib Toumi (2012), "GCC Summit unlikely to include talk of union," *Gulf News*, 6 December; See, also Matthew Martin (2012), "Plans for GCC union flounder," *Middle East Economic Digest*, 6-12 July, p. 32-33.

than simply accepting the fact that strategic relations have reached an acceptable level of consolidation, a continued effort needs to be undertaken to ensure that those relations produce more tangible benefits. This would involve maintaining a close dialogue on regional issues to ensure that respective policies are on the same page and that they pursue common goals. One key objective that both sides could agree on is preventing the economic collapse in those Arab states like Tunisia and Egypt undergoing transition, reinvigorating their cooperation in Yemen to ensure the success of the next round of national dialogue, and preventing the spread of the Syrian crisis to critical neighbouring countries like Lebanon and Jordan. In the medium- to long-term, the West needs a two-pronged strategy with the GCC that includes using their regional influence and economic tools to continue to support the transformation processes occurring in the Middle East while also promoting capacity-building in the GCC states themselves such as better functioning institutions, administrative and judicial reform, and increased engagement with the vibrant youth organisations and groups. This will go a long way to ensuring an evolutionary path to reform in the Gulf and taken together, these policies would put the Western approach to this critical region on a more solid footing.

2.
The Arab Spring: the Changing Dynamics of West-GCC Cooperation

Claire Spencer and Jane Kinninmont

The Arab uprisings were initially met with quite different reactions in what can loosely be termed the 'West' – here, the United States (US) and the European Union (EU) – and the Gulf countries. Yet, perhaps counter-intuitively, the Arab uprisings have so far resulted in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and Western countries working more closely together. Their differences were most pronounced over the uprising in Egypt, where Saudi Arabia in particular disagreed profoundly with the United States' eventual call for an 'orderly transition' away from the rule of then President Hosni Mubarak, a longstanding ally of both the Gulf and the West. More recently, GCC and Western partners have begun to coordinate their policies towards key transition countries: they have supported a limited political transition in Yemen and more drastic change in Libya and Syria. Meanwhile, the West has continued to ally itself with the pro-Western monarchies that have also faced unrest, notably in Bahrain.

This reflects the fact that although Western and Gulf governments say very different things about the value of democracy in the region, they also have a sense of shared *Realpolitik* interests. These include both overlapping interests in the outcomes of events in specific countries in the region and a broader desire on the part of both Western and Gulf governments to continue and enhance their mutual economic and business cooperation; the West needs Gulf capital and markets to help support its economic recovery, and the Gulf needs Western expertise and security assistance.

Yet while they may have common interests, these are not always identical. Notably, there are differences not only about the value of democracy in general, but about the acceptability of specific newly elected governments; in a development that was hardly foreseen before the Arab uprisings, the United States is now more supportive of elected Islamist governments in Egypt and Tunisia than some Gulf countries are. Moreover, since early 2011, the rapidly evolving regional context has resulted in

increased questioning about the value, reliability and longevity of the West's relations with the GCC. It has also highlighted a number of divergences in the ways in which actors on both sides of the West-GCC divide may seek to influence future developments in the broader Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. There is no single policy or strategic approach emanating from either the Gulf countries or the Western countries, let alone from both sets of partners combined.

In this respect, it is important to situate the changes taking place since January 2011 in a broader trajectory of both global and regional change, which predates the surfacing of unrest from Tunisia to Yemen. A key part of the context is the perception that the world's future economic growth – and, critically for the Gulf, global demand for oil and gas – will increasingly be driven by an emergent Asia, rather than by America and Europe. Should the geopolitical assumptions underlying much of the United States' strategic interest in the Gulf as an energy supplier weaken or even dissipate over the coming years, there will be considerable, if as yet unforeseen, repercussions for the US-Gulf relationship.

At the same time, key European countries are concerned that they are already facing increasing competition from rising powers, particularly in Asia, for both commercial opportunities in and diplomatic influence over Gulf states. Such trends will challenge the assumption that the countries described as 'the West' will continue to share the same strategic priorities in a region, in which, contrary to the United States, European nations will continue to have strategic energy-related and commercial interests. Instead, a divergence of priorities between, and even within, transatlantic partnerships may be more likely.

Within the MENA region itself, the most salient features to affect longer-term trends of political change are likely to remain the cumulative effects of demographic change and the region's information revolution, both of which have been much commented on since 2011. Since these developments are structural rather than circumstantial, they will continue to be felt across MENA states despite the reverses and setbacks to the processes unleashed by the popular revolts of 2011. The combined effects of majority populations across the MENA region now being weighted towards the young (with 50 percent or more of MENA populations aged 25-to-30 years) and of the break with the quasi-monopoly over information that the region's authoritarian governments have enjoyed for much of the past fifty years should, in this respect, be regarded as all-but-irreversible.

Attempts to stem the tide of demands for greater economic, political and social participation may thus succeed over the short-term, but the generational challenges to largely ageing leaderships will require more than stop-gap responses over the longer term. Equally, the effects of higher levels of education, however imperfectly applied across MENA states, including the access by larger numbers of people to a wider set of regional and global influences afforded by new technologies, mean that pressures for substantial change within MENA states will continue to mount in coming years.

The Global Context for West-GCC Relations

The ambiguously evolving relations between the West and the GCC need to be placed in the context of processes that started prior to 2011, in the global redistribution of wealth brought about partly through long-term shifts in commodity prices, and through eastward and southward shifts in economic, demographic and productivity growth.

As a result of these shifts, relations between 'centre' and 'periphery' states in the world system are being redefined, in a way that has benefited the profile of GCC states as key leaders of regional organisations, increasingly expected to provide the bulk of aid and investment to the rest of region. As noted above, this has also been supplemented by the Gulf's investment in the West following the financial crisis of 2007-08.

At the same time, shifts of power within states – whether these have started from elites engaging a broader base of popular support, or through the impact of education and technology and the rise of new elites – are increasingly troubling GCC leaderships. At the regional level in the MENA, the shifts of power within states are also weakening the ability of states such as Egypt, post-Arab Spring, to be regional foreign policy actors, even if this is short-term. The inability of Mubarak's Egypt to project regional 'depth' in the way that Nasserite Egypt did in the mid-20th century played into the hand of the 'status quo' policies of the Gulf states. It is now the unknown qualities of future Egyptian leadership, above all under the Muslim Brotherhood, that is of concern to GCC states.

At the same time, and in the context of the uncertain results of the lengthy military commitments in Afghanistan and Iraq, the coherence of US and EU policy cooperation has also come under some strain, notwithstanding NATO's involvement in Libya in 2011. The United States,

as was widely recognised well before President Barack Obama's re-election in November 2012, has been pivoting more towards Asia than its traditional alliances in Europe, which, in turn, are seen to be overly slow in definitively resolving the euro-crisis, and preoccupied with the internal dynamics and future of the European Union itself. The result has been little appetite for direct military engagement in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. Libya highlighted a US desire to 'lead from behind' while Syria has highlighted the lack of public and political will to commit ground troops, in contrast with 2003 Iraq.

On another key area of common interest, the United States and European Union have been cooperating effectively in establishing and implementing common policies towards Iran over its nuclear programme, in terms of both diplomacy and the intensified economic and financial sanctions regime. EU officials see this as a relative success story for European foreign policy. However, it has yet to bear fruit in terms of changing Iranian behaviour or securing a deal with Iran's leadership.

Meanwhile, although the Gulf states rely heavily on Western countries to provide them with implicit security guarantees against any threat of attack by Iran, some are dissatisfied with what they see as too soft an American approach towards Tehran. This reflects deep differences over the 2003 regime change in Iraq, widely perceived in the Gulf as having paved the way for Iran to exert its influence, to the point of taking over a strategically vital Arab country. US officials see more nuances between Iraqi and Iranian policies in the region, but this view is often regarded in the Gulf as either naive or disingenuous. The GCC countries would also like to see the United States and the European Union playing a more effective role in pushing for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and, in particular, in supporting the Arab Peace Initiative, launched by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia in 2002, before transitions in the region render that initiative entirely defunct.

For the GCC, its own integration into the global system has taken the path of assuming a greater role in international arrangements, above all the G20 and the World Trade Organisation (WTO), and in securing symbolic importance in areas such as global sport and cultural production. This raises the question of whether the international system is simply integrating the least threatening, wealthiest and most pro-Western countries into its ranks, and whether GCC states will be capable of remaking the rules. Underlying this is a new concern with the extent to

which GCC countries can, or indeed do represent wider Arab and Islamic populations, most of whom live outside the GCC.

The Gulf's pivot has also, like the United States, turned to Asia, insofar as south-south trade has provoked greater interest in south-south diplomacy and south-south security cooperation. This is a relatively new and exploratory area for now, but reflects a potential reassessment of the GCC's four key dependencies, the first being the GCC's reliance on Western security guarantees for its own security, the others being their economies' dependency on hydrocarbons, imported goods, and imported migrant labour – overwhelmingly drawn from Asia and above all the Indian sub-continent.

The GCC's alliances with Western states are heavily tilted towards the United States for security reasons, above all, with links to the United Kingdom (UK), as the former colonial power, being increasingly supplemented by that of France as the other main provider of arms and users of military bases in the Gulf.

This pattern is different when it comes to trade, as there is very little direct trade between the GCC and the United States beyond the oil sector. Saudi Arabia's energy exports to the United States have already been overtaken by those to China in recent years, but America still imported 20 percent of its global energy needs from the Gulf in 2012.[1] Regardless of where the United States purchases its oil from, it needs Saudi Arabia to help keep the global price of oil down by adjusting its production and supplies to global markets where, as a fungible commodity, oil prices are set to a greater degree than gas, for which longer-term bilateral contracts are drawn up.

Nonetheless, expectations of long-term shifts in the United States' energy supply structure may reduce the extent to which maintaining low international oil prices is a chief priority for US policy. In the *World Energy Outlook* report published by the International Energy Agency (IEA) in mid-November 2012, the most startling assessment was that by 2020 the United States will be producing and exporting more oil than Saudi Arabia, at 11.1 million barrels and 10.6 million barrels a day respectively.[2] While this is far from universally accepted, it has led to further debates about the future of US-Saudi relations, as have a number of studies indicating

[1] Data from US Energy Information Administration.

[2] International Energy Agency (2012), *World Energy Outlook 2012*, Paris, 12 November, http://www.worldenergyoutlook.org/publications/weo-2012/#d.en.26099.

that Saudi Arabia's oil export capacity is being squeezed by its rapidly mounting domestic consumption.[3] The relations between the West and the Gulf countries are not shaped only by oil, but energy security has been one of the key factors affecting their ties for the past four decades, and the perception that the United States is moving towards energy self-sufficiency is already beginning to affect the thinking and behaviour of parties in both the West and the Gulf.

In terms of the GCC's options for alternative partners, these are plentiful on the economic front, but not so obvious on the security front. For European firms concerned about competition from rising powers, a watershed moment came in 2009 when the United Arab Emirates (UAE) gave the contract for its civilian nuclear power system to a South Korean consortium firm rather than a French firm to build and operate four 1,400 megawatt reactors in total.[4] This has led Western firms to question their previous assumptions that while East Asia could out-compete them on low-cost consumer goods, they would necessarily have a comparative advantage when it came to higher-tech products and construction contracts. In many areas, Western brands still have an edge owing to perceptions of higher quality, but competition in other areas, such as healthcare and pharmaceuticals in India, has been on the increase.

There are few options for newer security partners to replace the United States' overwhelming role in providing security for the GCC countries in the near term, despite the concerns of Gulf leaderships that America has 'gone soft' on military deterrence, above all in respect to Iran's nuclear capabilities. Where there is potential for diversification it is in the number of rising powers who could provide alternative sources of arms as well as some military support. The main alternative contender in the long-term would be China, given that it has just overtaken the United States as the world's largest oil importer.[5] But China does not

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[3] Glada Lahn and Paul Stevens (2011), *Burning Oil to Keep Cool: The Hidden Energy Crisis in Saudi Arabia*, Chatham House Energy, Environment and Resource Governance Programme, December. http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Energy,percent20Environmentpercent20andpercent20Development/1211pr_lahn_stevens.pdf.

[4] "South Korea awarded UAE nuclear power contract," *BBC News*, 27 December 2009, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/8431904.stm.

[5] "China becomes world's top oil importer," *Financial Times*, 4 March 2013, http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/d33b5104-84a1-11e2-aaf1-00144feabdc0.html#axzz2NDqz631O.

yet have an appetite to patrol the Gulf when it can essentially free-ride on the United States' role there, and Washington is reluctant to consider losing its pre-eminence to China in this sphere. The Chinese honeymoon in the Gulf has also been soured for the time-being by its pro-regime stance on Syria.

Similarly, the Syrian impasse has chilled Gulf relations with Russia, which was never close to the Gulf states (which were on the US side in the Cold War), but began to reach out to the GCC a few years ago. In 2007 Vladimir Putin became the first Russian leader to visit Saudi Arabia and Russian media outlets reported that the two countries were engaged in serious talks about possible arms sales in 2010. In August 2011, a Bahraini official confirmed that the country was talking to Russia about cooperating in various areas, including in the provision of light arms, and Bloomberg reported a Russian official as saying Russia would sell the country Kalashnikovs, at a time when the United States had frozen a planned arms deal and European countries had withdrawn a number of arms export licences. However, it is not clear if this particular deal ever actually materialised, not least since it took place at around the same time that the GCC states were stepping up their pressure on Syria's President Bashar al-Assad, and when Russia and China had just vetoed a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolution imposing sanctions on the Syrian regime. The Saudi Arabian chambers of commerce subsequently cancelled meetings with a Russian business delegation due earlier this year, while Bahrain's defence chief has said the country could acquire arms from a number of other countries. These have included Turkey, which provided Bahraini riot police with armoured vehicles routinely used in the suppression of protests.

The GCC's discussion of expanding membership to include Jordan and Morocco is unlikely to materialise but will lead to greater cooperation. Part of the motivation is for the Arab monarchies to band together. Another motivation for the GCC seeking greater cooperation with Jordan in particular is that Jordan has a large, well-trained army.

Evolving Responses to the Shock of the Arab Uprisings

The regional policies of both sets of countries across the West-GCC divide have been changing over time, but have been brought up short by the

Arab Spring for the simple reason that there was no strategy to deal with these unexpected changes. Now, as the complexities of change (at different speeds but with equally unforeseen consequences) have spread across the region, the extent of the long-term effects of the watershed year of 2011 remains unclear.

When Tunisia's uprising started, there was little difference between the responses from the Gulf and Western governments alike. Famously, the then French foreign minister suggested France should send security forces to assist President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali in putting down the uprising, which – subsequent to Ben Ali's removal – sparked a political storm that led to her resignation. Ultimately it was Saudi Arabia rather than France that agreed to receive the fleeing president in exile. While France may have been mindful of the prospect for protests from within its large Tunisian diaspora, Saudi Arabia arguably helped to facilitate Ben Ali's departure by giving him a safe haven. A number of key officials in both the West and the Gulf also downplayed the risk of a domino effect.

It was with the uprising in Egypt – a far larger and more strategically important country – that significant differences began to emerge between the bulk of the GCC states and Western governments. Saudi Arabia strongly opposed the US decision to call for Mubarak to step down. Yet in retrospect the difference may be exaggerated. US officials have emphasised their role in persuading the army to back a transition, yet this came at the last minute. When the protests began, US officials were still praising Mubarak as an ally and US Vice-President Joe Biden said he was not a dictator. The differences came later. The United States, above all, did not want to see an army it backed financially firing on protestors in such a strategic capital as Cairo, while the King of Saudi Arabia, Abdullah bin Abdel-Aziz al Saud, was reported to have phoned President Obama to object to his approach.

This episode has remained a source of tension in US-Gulf relations, partly because of divergent perceptions over the extent to which the United States was able to control the political situation in Egypt. In general, US policymakers think that they had limited leverage and few options but to accept what was a fundamentally locally driven transition, while Gulf observers tend to see the United States as playing a far more significant role behind the scenes in deciding it was time for Mubarak's rule to end.

In the post-Mubarak transition period, governments in the Gulf and the West have continued to share a common interest in containing the

impact of Egypt's domestic revolution on the country's foreign policy. Specifically, they have been keen to see that the newly elected Egyptian government does not cancel or flout the 1979 Camp David peace treaty with Israel; that Egypt does not switch from the perceived pro-US camp in the region to the perceived pro-Iranian 'resistance axis'; and that Egypt maintains a broadly liberal economic policy rather than nationalising key industries or throwing out foreign investment. Since none of these fundamental interests have been threatened so far, the United States and other Western countries have enjoyed something of a honeymoon with the newly elected Muslim Brotherhood government – to such an extent that there are even local conspiracy theories suggesting that Washington plotted the revolution in order to install the Muslim Brotherhood. For Western democracies, promoting democracy overseas has rarely if ever been a top policy priority, but if more fundamental security and economic interests are not seen as being threatened, Western democracies tend to exhibit a preference for allies that are elected, seeing them as more legitimate and stable.

By contrast, for most of the Gulf countries, the Muslim Brotherhood has been harder to accept, for the simple reason that the GCC states fear the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood within their own countries (apart from Qatar, which has broken rank with the rest of the Gulf in its enthusiastic support for Brotherhood-associated groups, and Bahrain, where the government has traditionally seen the Brotherhood as a counterweight to opposition from among the Shi'ite majority population). Thus, the Gulf countries would have preferred to see Ahmed Shafiq, a former air force chief and the last prime minister appointed by Mubarak, to have won the 2012 presidential elections, instead of Mohammed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party. The Gulf states – particularly the Emirates – continue to see the way in which Western governments are developing ties with Muslim Brotherhood-inspired governments as naive at best, while some within the Gulf governments harbour anxieties that the West will eventually switch sides in the Gulf as well.

Further differences came when the protests started in Bahrain in February 2011, which initially caused a rift between the United States and the Gulf – but the rift proved temporary, even if the protests did not. With the support of the other GCC states, the Bahraini authorities were able to forcibly put down their uprising and still maintain strong ties with Western governments, even if their reputation among business, media and civil society has been greatly damaged.

This episode deserves particular examination as it is a test case of Western responses to unrest and repression within the Gulf itself. Initially, condemnation of the shooting of protestors, which the Bahraini government said was a mistake, led to backing for the crown prince to lead a dialogue initiative. The US preference for dialogue and reform was made clear by the mission of Jeffrey Feltman, who sought to broker an agreement on a transitional government of national unity. Negotiations were reportedly given a six week period to succeed, but four weeks in, they broke down and GCC troops, mainly from Saudi Arabia, entered Bahrain to support the al-Khalifa ruling family as the Bahraini authorities moved to put down the uprising.

According to the royally commissioned Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, talks broke down because the opposition party al-Wifaq said it would not participate in a dialogue with the crown prince unless he could guarantee that a new constitution would be written (on the basis of a constitutional monarchy) and put to a national referendum. While talks were failing, more rejectionist opposition groups were turning up the temperature on the streets. Amid calls for abolishing the monarchy altogether, roadblocks were erected around the Bahrain Financial Harbour and there were violent clashes between police and protestors, resulting in several deaths, mostly on the side of the protesters but also including policemen and expatriates.

The Bahraini authorities, for the most part, blamed Iran, and called for foreign protection against a supposed external threat, while Western governments – whose intelligence services were sceptical in the absence of any solid evidence of Iranian involvement beyond moral support for protestors from the Iranian media – tended to see the problem as fundamentally driven by domestic grievances that were within the hands of the Bahraini authorities to resolve. There are, however, shades of grey. There are those within the Bahraini regime who have always seen the protests as fundamentally driven by domestic grievances. But their hand was weakened by the failure to reach a deal with the opposition – especially after the entry of GCC forces. This decisively shifted the balance of power within the ruling al-Khalifa family towards hardliners such as the prime minister, in power since 1971, whose personal position would undoubtedly have been threatened if an agreement between the protestors had been reached, and a younger generation of security-minded conservatives headed by two brothers, the head of the army and the head of the royal court, had ascended to power. Where Western countries (and

to some extent, elements in Kuwait and Oman) saw hope in the crown prince and the (now marginalised) ruling family reformists, other powerful players in the Gulf (chiefly Saudi Arabia and the Emirates) saw them as ill-informed.

There is some ambiguity over whether the West supported the entry of Saudi troops. Bahraini opposition activists accused the United States of giving them the green light, noting – in the way that Gulf observers tend towards their own forms of Kremlinology – that then US Defence Secretary Robert Gates was in Bahrain just before the move took place. Yet Western accounts suggest that the United States was presented with the decision as a *fait accompli*; it did not oppose it, but it is not clear it would have had either legal or political grounds to do so. Then US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, said the move was legal under the GCC's collective security pact. A Saudi political analyst, Nawaf Obaid, later wrote that the US government had been against it.[6]

But there were virtually no tangible changes in relations – the United States and the United Kingdom resumed weapons sales, albeit withholding certain items like tear gas canisters, and in October 2012 the UK government signed a new defence cooperation agreement with Bahrain. A number of European states – with fewer defence and business interests involved – have been more outspoken. Notably, Denmark has suggested Europe should consider sanctions against some regime members. Yet Western states were not even able to achieve unity on a Swiss-sponsored resolution condemning human rights abuses in Bahrain, which 27 countries signed in June 2012 ahead of Bahrain's Universal Periodic Review at the UN Human Rights Council in September, but which the United Kingdom and United States refused to sign.

The most surprising aspect of the Bahraini crisis for many in the West was the unforeseen activism of its Gulf neighbours, above all Saudi Arabia. GCC states have gained in regional assertiveness over the past two years, most notably in brokering the arranged departure of President Ali Abdullah Saleh from protest-ridden Yemen in 2011, and in hosting the more recent negotiations for the creation, and subsequent recognition, of the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces in Doha in November 2012. Meanwhile, Western countries have worked

[6] Nawaf Obaid, "Amid the Arab Spring, a US-Saudi Split," *Washington Post*, 15 May 2011, http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2011-05-15/opinions/35263284_1_saudi-arabia-saudi-government-saudi-leaders.

closely with the GCC on Yemen and Libya, and have continued this cooperation to date over Syria.

In Yemen, the GCC, headed by a Bahraini former security official, Abdulatif al-Zayani, brokered a deal that saw President Saleh step down as part of an international effort to support a controlled transition, in the face of fears that the country could return to civil war. Yemen's transition has been seen by UN and Western officials as a particularly successful example of cooperation between Western countries and the GCC acting as a bloc, yet Yemeni democracy activists see both the West and the GCC as trying to contain pressures for a deeper regime change that might go beyond the removal of Saleh himself to address deep-seated issues of authoritarianism, profound state corruption, and calls for a less centralised state. The delivery of aid pledged by the 'Friends of Yemen' group, which includes both Western and Gulf countries, has also been slow and incomplete, especially in response to a UN-backed humanitarian appeal to alleviate the hunger suffered by nearly half of Yemen's thirty million people.

For both Western and Gulf governments – especially the United States and Saudi Arabia – security concerns have been paramount in policy towards Yemen. Both Washington and Riyadh place a particular priority on the ongoing 'war on terror' in Yemen, seen as a safe haven for fighters from al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), some of them from Saudi Arabia. The interim president, Abd-Rabbo Mansour Hadi, has been quietly supportive of US counter-terrorism operations continuing in Yemen, including drone strikes, which have risen significantly in numbers since he took power and which overtook the number seen in Pakistan for the first time in 2012. Hadi's appointment was decided by elites and then rubber-stamped by a popular 'election' with only one name on the ballot paper.

In the case of Libya, there was initially a strong international consensus on implementing a UNSC resolution authorising military action to prevent what appeared likely to be imminent massacres of Libyan opposition fighters and civilians, openly threatened by Colonel Muammar Qaddafi. The GCC played an important role in persuading the Arab League to endorse the UN-sanctioned intervention despite opposition from Syria and Algeria in particular; Arab League backing was crucial in persuading Russia and China not to adopt their usual stance of vetoing foreign military intervention, although they secured an explicit prohibition of the deployment of ground troops (both Russia and China regretted their decision after the UNSC mandate was stretched to justify regime change). The Emirates and Qatar also participated in the NATO-led

operation alongside Britain, France and others, with the United States adopting an attitude of 'leading from behind', partly because of intense scepticism among the US public about the wisdom of another intervention in the Middle East at a time of economic austerity. There was some speculation – stoked by reported comments by Gulf officials – that the GCC's support for the operation in Libya helped compensate for the differences over Bahrain. The temporary loss of Libyan oil output also highlighted Saudi Arabia's vital role in stabilising the international oil market, as it increased its own output to compensate.

In a different way to Bahrain, Syria has now become a test case for differing visions of what the conflict represents and what the best-case outcome might be for Syria and the broader region. In terms of opposition to the Assad presidency and the desire to see him and his dynastic regime toppled, there remains a unity of purpose between the West and GCC states, above all Qatar and Saudi Arabia which led some shaky Arab League initiatives in the first half of 2011 to persuade Assad, like Yemen's Saleh before him, to step down. However, there is no clear consensus over preferred outcomes for the future of Syria beyond the removal of the Assad regime, pending which, there have been occasional friction between the United States and some Gulf countries who would prefer to see the US government taking a more decisive, assertive and interventionist role.

Failing this, and in the wake of the failed plan of former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, and the equally thwarted Western-led efforts to secure a series of UN Security Council resolutions against Assad, vetoed by Russia and China, both Saudi Arabia and Qatar have more recently been instrumental in working with the US leadership to bring the Syrian National Council into negotiations with a broader array of opposition forces. An agreement to this end was eventually brokered and concluded in the Qatari capital Doha.

However, in terms of concrete support to rebel groups within Syria, the initially discreet, but now more openly discussed, arming of individual militias by Saudi and Qatari funders has gone beyond what the West has countenanced in terms of lethal material support to the armed resistance. In northern Syria, above all, the fragmentation of the local armed resistance, and the increasing presence on the ground of well-armed and foreign militias and *jihadist* groups have cast doubt over the

extent to which the Sunni Muslim states of the Gulf are happy to see the Syrians determine their own fate in the future.[7]

Post-2011 Strategies: Still a Work in Progress

Increasing political diversity across the MENA region means that Western policy has become even less consistent and coherent than usual. Beyond the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) initiatives towards the Mediterranean states of North Africa, there is considerable diversity among Western countries over the desirability of democracy if it means greater instability, of talking to Islamists, and over the desired depth of relations that the West should have with the Gulf. Moreover, divisions over these and related issues also exist among GCC states. There are also multiple factors determining Western policy towards the Gulf region. Close relations with GCC states may have less to do with a shared or coordinated response to the Arab uprisings than with pre-existing economic relationships whose importance has only been emphasised by recent global economic trends.

Both Western and Gulf governments view economic factors as being among the key drivers of the unrest that has swept the Arab world since 2011, but there is no consensus between them on the role of political grievances. The Gulf countries prefer to emphasise the role of economic grievances – the rising cost of living, unemployment and anger over the combination of official corruption and dilapidated infrastructure and public services. This approach is also evident in their domestic responses to the threat of unrest, which have tended to focus on increasing public spending and creating new state-sponsored jobs. Western governments, by contrast, also emphasise the role of the region's democratic deficit, human rights abuses and police brutality in generating grievances.

Western and Gulf governments are cooperating on a number of initiatives to deliver aid to the transition countries and to the reforming monarchies in Jordan and Morocco, notably through the European Union and the G-8 sponsored Deauville Partnership. However, the Western insistence on tying the delivery of much-needed aid to Egypt to an as-yet-elu-

[7] Rani Abouzeid, "Syria's Secular and Islamist Rebels: Who are the Saudis and Qataris arming?" *Time Magazine*, 18 September 2012, http://world.time.com/2012/09/18/syrias-secular-and-islamist-rebels-who-are-the-saudis-and-the-qataris-arming/.

sive agreement on an International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme for the country has seriously delayed inflows of Western aid. This has caused some resentment in Egypt, where the IMF is not popular and is seen as having lavished praise on the economic policies of the former regime. Here, and elsewhere in North Africa, the Gulf states have outpaced their Western allies, with Saudi Arabia and Qatar in particular making much-needed funds available to help shore up the Egyptian budget and currency, along with higher levels of investment to regional allies, above all Morocco. More opaquely, there are flows of money from Saudi, Qatari and Kuwaiti donors to both Muslim Brotherhood and Salafist groups in the transition countries, which can be seen both as a manifestation of religious sympathies and as an attempt to influence the political agenda in these countries, but the extent of official endorsement of such flows is unclear and is deeply contested.

More broadly, both the GCC and Western countries are still in the process of framing and constructing their interests in responding to the Arab transitions, most notably in GCC attitudes towards the Muslim Brotherhood following the latter's assumption of government responsibilities in Egypt and the influence that movements close to the Muslim Brotherhood exercise across the region. There is as yet no consensus within the GCC over how to respond to the sudden prominence of the Muslim Brotherhood and its affiliates: while Qatar is aligning itself with Muslim Brotherhood parties across the region, and while Bahrain has appointed a leader of its local Muslim Brotherhood party as its minister for human rights, the Emirates has recently imprisoned ninety-four citizens suspected of belonging to a local version of the organisation.

GCC countries are concerned by the perceived Western acceptance of the Muslim Brotherhood as a democratic partner. It remains unclear, however, how far Western countries really have embraced the advent of democracy to the region. One interpretation might be that, for pragmatic reasons, Western governments are working with the Muslim Brotherhood and Islamist-inspired governments (such as the Ennahda-led coalition in Tunisia) because they are the new powers-that-be. Western interests in the region are still contested and unclear, and there is, as ever, a significant gap between rhetoric and reality when it comes to democracy and human rights.

Given the normative aspects of US and EU external relations (most succinctly summarised as the promotion of good governance, democracy and human rights), Western countries have found themselves

at an increasing disadvantage in articulating a coherent strategy. The European Union's approach has been to promise 'more for more' and offer 'less for less' in terms of the region's progress towards democracy, but this has fallen victim to the vicissitudes of the political dynamics of the region, and lacks agreed criteria for measuring advances and setbacks to the democratisation process. For the Gulf in particular, the Arab Spring has increased the visibility of the contradictions for Western diplomacy of doing business in the ways it has been accustomed to prior to 2011. The broad welcome Western governments have accorded to democratic change in North Africa and Egypt sits uneasily with the increasing domestic and regional pressures on the United States and the European Union to support the same values of democracy and self-determination across the whole MENA region, including the Gulf. British Prime Minister David Cameron's November 2012 visit to the Gulf region, for example, was preceded by public assurances that he would raise human rights concerns with his hosts in Saudi Arabia and the Emirates on a tour otherwise dedicated to securing contracts for the sale of up to a hundred British-produced Typhoon jets. As a BBC journalist, Frank Gardner, accompanying the tour, put it: 'Mr Cameron knows he must raise the thorny issue of human rights with his hosts. He also knows that if he pushes too hard then Britain risks losing major contracts to countries that ask no questions'.[8]

The inherent tensions between humanitarian, democratic, commercial, financial and geostrategic priorities are likely to become more, rather than less acute in coming years, unless a new balance can be struck in the type of relationships the West forges with new and well-established Gulf actors and allies. So far this has largely stopped short of engaging with opposition leaderships (except in the case of Bahrain), or openly championing the cause of greater public and political accountability across the Gulf.

Ironically, while Gulf governments complain about activities of Western non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the region's democracy activists generally do not see the West as being on their side, and often portray Western powers and the Gulf as co-operating in an effort to contain the impact of Arab uprisings on the regional system (especially over economic models and over Israel).

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[8] "David Cameron in the Gulf: defence sales 'legitimate'," *BBC News*, 5 November 2012, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-20202058.

Gulf Perceptions of the Colonial Legacy

The GCC has long had ambivalent relations with its colonial tradition, and is still expressing a collective frustration with global imbalances of power and the continued dominance (sometimes arrogance) of the West. Yet, GCC states are net beneficiaries of this perceived Western control of international affairs. The management of their accrued wealth and the attractions of investing in spheres previously dominated by the West, such as the arts, architecture, sports, design and modern forms of leisure and consumerism all symbolise the ambivalence of Gulf elites' feelings over the legacy and cultural influences of the West. Critics of the wealthy Gulf states often depict them as pure colonial inventions or puppet states, but this is too simplistic. The real ambivalence for Gulf leaderships lies in attempting to marry their pro-Western political stances with their local self-presentation as authentic Islamic and Arab leaders, when, in reality, the latter is based on their much-vaunted oil wealth, and on achievements in developing state infrastructures.

Western leaders are often too ready to assume that the Gulf's monarchies are necessarily legitimate regional leaders – or the representatives of the wider Arab or Muslim community they claim to protect – whereas the populations of GCC states are a minority in the Arab world (with an overall population of around forty-two million, including expatriates, compared to a total Arab world population of over three hundred million). In the Islamic world, the vast majority of Muslims can now be found in Asia. It is therefore primarily because of its concentration of wealth and natural resources that the GCC exerts the regional influence it does.

With its own authoritarian systems coming under increasing domestic and regional pressure, GCC states are also now pushing back against democracy promotion as a new form of Western colonialism – facilitated by the crude rhetoric on democracy promotion deployed by the United States during the Iraq war. For instance, at a summit of GCC interior ministers in November 2012, the Bahraini interior minister, Sheikh Rashid bin Abdullah al-Khalifa, said that the Gulf countries were facing a 'new colonial onslaught', using the names of democracy, freedom and human rights to impose foreign concepts 'that are different from what we believe or want to protect'.[9]

[9] "Interior Minister Addresses GCC Meeting," *Bahrain News Agency,* 13 November 2012, http://www.bna.bh/portal/en/news/533150.

Yet it is historically inaccurate to identify democracy entirely with the West[10], and GCC states now have to contend with the emergence of new regional actors who want to experiment with political models that draw both on local traditions and on practices from elsewhere, appealing both to Islamic and Arab values and to ideas of democracy and human rights. European states were authoritarian for most of their history, while Kuwait's constitution and parliament is older than Spain's in its current form. Hereditary monarchies, especially those inherited by the first-born son, were consolidated in the Gulf and in Jordan under European colonialism.[11] There are many models of democracy, which Gulf leaders are quite right to emphasise, and it is likely that the relations between religion and state will be different in each case, as has also been the case in Europe.

Western Perceptions of the Gulf States

Since the first shocks of 2011 subsided, there has been some complacency in the West about the ability of GCC states to buy off dissent and to rely on the assumed traditional legitimacy of monarchy. The widely received wisdom that the Arab Spring somehow bypassed the Gulf ignores the sustained political crisis in Bahrain in particular, but also fails to explain the protest movements in Kuwait and Oman. Saudi Arabia has also been more affected than is often acknowledged by its own youth bulge, and the influence of the information revolution on domestic activism, inspired by uprisings elsewhere in the region. Change is nevertheless likely to materialise in different ways than through large street protests, which remain religiously and socially taboo, with the main exception of the Eastern Province, where protestors representing the distinct grievances of the Shi'ite population have failed to make substantial links with broader national protest movements.

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[10] Many counterexamples are explored in Amartya Sen (2007), *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*, New York and London, W. W. Norton & Company.

[11] See, for instance, Lisa Anderson (1991), "Absolutism and the Resilience of Monarchy in the Middle East," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 106, No.1 (spring), p. 1-15. "Monarchy as currently understood in the Middle East is no more indigenous than liberal democracy" p. 3.

The relative stability in the Emirates and Qatar reflects some other factors as well, not least the relative minority of indigenous Arab citizens who consider themselves, and are treated as, elites in otherwise expatriate-dominated populations. There is also a need to look more closely at the extent to which the major public spending pledges of Gulf leaders have actually reached the people, such as the new housing commitments made in Saudi Arabia. For the Gulf's Western allies to be sure that high levels of spending constitute a sustainable strategy to secure their own interests in the region, it should also be born in mind that the high international oil prices needed to sustain this approach will ultimately be underwritten by the oil importing countries.

Public opinion is often more critical of the Gulf countries – especially Saudi Arabia, whose image in the West suffers from particularly negative perceptions about its treatment of women – than governments are. In a recent Chatham House survey of UK public opinion on foreign policy priorities, Saudi Arabia was one of the top ten countries listed as 'viewed unfavourably' by the respondents; it was ranked as the 8th least favourably perceived country (chosen by 16 percent of the 2,079 respondents, each of whom was asked to choose the five countries they perceived most and least favourably).[12] In the influential Chicago Council survey of US public opinion on foreign policy, the 2012 paper includes no mention of any of the Gulf states in the chapter on the Middle East, focusing instead on perceptions that the Iraq war was not worthwhile and on the mixed views of the Arab Spring in the United States.[13]

The gap between Western governments' rhetoric on norms of democracy and human rights, and their actual practices, partly reflects the ambiguous positions of domestic public opinion in America and Europe. These populations want to think that their countries are broadly benevolent, but they also want jobs and security, and are unsure about the extent of Western leverage in a post-colonial world. The conflict in Syria has focused greater Western attention on the risks of sectarian polarisation – and sectarian violence – in the region. While some analysts

[12] Jonathan Knight, Robin Niblett and Thomas Raines (2012), *The Chatham House-YouGov Survey 2012: Hard Choices Ahead*, Chatham House, July, http://www.chathamhouse.org/publications/papers/view/184631.

[13] Dina Smeltz (2012), *Foreign Policy in the New Millennium: Results of the 2012 Chicago Council Survey of American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy*, The Chicago Council On Global Affairs, October.

have seen an opportunity to ally with Sunni groups and states against Shi'ite Iran, there are serious long-term risks for conflict associated with exploiting sectarian and ethnic fissures for short-term gains. An increasing number of voices are warning against taking sides in what is sometimes portrayed as an escalating Sunni-Shi'ite confrontation in the region. In reality, the current spike in sectarian tensions is likely to have more to do with the politics of what Vali Nasr has called a Saudi-Iranian Cold War than with the longstanding religious differences between Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims.[14]

Conclusion

The setbacks to protest movements across the MENA region have so far indicated the residual ability of authoritarian states to resist demands for greater political inclusion and political reform. Even in the Gulf region, where political opposition has differed in both focus and intensity across the member states of the GCC, the quiescence of the region's populations cannot be taken for granted over the longer term. This is especially true in states, above all Saudi Arabia, where a combination of economic pressures and succession issues are likely to come to the fore in coming years.[15]

This prospect poses a dilemma for the West, insofar as the GCC has long been seen as a pole of stability in the wider MENA region, where security cooperation, particularly over the long-standing Iranian nuclear issue, and more recently over Syria, has primed the structuring of bilateral and trans-regional relations. At a time of financial and economic crisis in the West, GCC states have also been a critical source of financial support as well as commercially important export markets for Western services and manufactures, above all arms. The impact of these priorities, along

[14] See, for instance, Paddy Ashdown, "Who Should We Back In This Sunni-Shia Cold War?," *The Times*, 12 December, 2012 http://www.shafaqna.com/english/component/k2/item/10119-who-should-we-back-in-this-sunni-shia-war?.html; or James Jeffrey, "Avoiding A Sectarian Split in the Middle East," *Washington Post*, 7 September 2012, http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2012-09-07/opinions/35497070_1_sunni-shiite-shiite-sunni-shiite-groups.

[15] Glada Lahn and Paul Stevens (2011), *Burning Oil to Keep Cool: the Hidden Energy Crisis in Saudi Arabia*, cit.

with the critical role played by Saudi Arabia amongst the Gulf states of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in not only supplying oil, but in stabilising oil prices in times of crisis, means that that the West has traditionally run shy of openly criticising the centralised and authoritarian nature of Gulf regimes.

This may go on, however, to pose a further set of challenges to the West. While the United States and the European Union currently share with Gulf leaders a similar set of objectives concerning regional security and stability, the greater involvement of Gulf actors in the application of their own strategies and priorities across the MENA region may, in practice, highlight increasing divergences in the real national and regional interests of states on both sides of the West-GCC divide. This will be particularly so if democracy is eventually consolidated in Arab transition countries, a scenario that would be likely to add to the demands for political change in the Gulf itself.

Thanks to strong intergovernmental contacts, trading interests and the personalised relationships that have characterised Gulf-West alliances, shared priorities have survived a number of setbacks and disappointments over more than fifty years. In the last decade, these have included the 9/11 attacks on the United States, in which Saudi militants played a critical role; the stagnation of EU-GCC trade talks; the US-led intervention in Iraq in 2003; and the absence of Saudi Arabia and Oman from NATO's initiative for cooperation with the Gulf countries. So far, the EU-US-GCC relationship has survived the testing times of the Arab uprisings. In the longer term, however, questions remain over whether the foundations of the US-EU-GCC relationship can survive the challenges of global and regional changes outlined above.

3.
Iran: the Uncertain Basis of the West-GCC Strategic Alignment

Simon Henderson

Before the outbreak of what the media promptly came to dub 'the Arab Spring' in December 2010, the West looked to the Middle East primarily as a source of energy, principally oil, but also of danger, as Islamic fundamentalism, particularly its violent and extremist variants associated with al-Qaeda's ideology, began threatening the West. Two troublesome dark clouds on the horizon added to this picture: the lingering dispute between Israel and the Palestinians, and the revolutionary regime in Iran.

From the perspective of the conservative Arab states which make up the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the priorities were different. Iran, in particular, has increasingly come to dominate the agenda because of concern about the actual purpose of its avowedly peaceful nuclear programme. Although Tehran's harshest rhetoric is reserved for Israel, with the demand that the country be 'wiped off the map' often repeated by Iran's leaders, an Iranian nuclear weapon capability would also threaten Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates (UAE): the major oil producers of the Persian Gulf. These conservative Arab states, along with Bahrain, Qatar (a minor oil producer but the world's largest exporter of liquefied natural gas) and Oman, are concerned about Iranian hegemony in the Gulf and Tehran's support for co-religionist Shi'ite Muslim populations in their countries.

While the West has generally welcomed the changes of the Arab Spring, the conservative Arab states of the Gulf are of a different mind. They regard the swiftly changing diplomatic positions of the West as, at best, fickle, if not downright disturbing. They were shocked when Washington's support for President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt switched completely within a matter of days. They consider subsequent pressure for such political changes on themselves as being out of place and incompatible with the consensual style of politics which they have developed within their otherwise autocratic systems. And they are profoundly concerned that the West, particularly the United States (US), thinks that the

Arab Spring phenomenon is more important than the threat to regional security posed by Iran.

So, while Iran is currently the basis of a strategic alignment between the West and the GCC, there are uncertainties about how long this will continue. Key to this is the extent to which the GCC can be considered a unified body. Although its six member states have always had differences over some borders, they have been apparently united in their approach to Gulf security. The 'Arab Spring' has opened up differences between them. Some are opportunistic – those member states with relatively young leaders (for example, Qatar and the Emirates) are frustrated by the increasing feebleness of Saudi Arabia, where King Abdullah is 88 and Crown Prince Salman, though only 77, is reportedly suffering from poor health. Other differences are more fundamental – Qatar is happy to support the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and elsewhere, while the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia regard the Brotherhood as being a direct threat to their own systems of government.

For the United States and Europe, this poses a dilemma: should the focus of the West's relationship with the GCC be on coping with the threat of Iran, or is the GCC acting as a hurdle for greater freedoms in the rest of the Arab world. Fundamentally although not exclusively, the Iran issue is about security of energy supplies. The issues related to the 'Arab Spring' are more closely associated with the principles of Western societies and the extent to which the West should support them elsewhere.

BACKGROUND

The Gulf Cooperation Council is both a useful grouping for the conservative Arab states of the Persian Gulf as well as an evolving organisation. Its full name is the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf.[1]

Established at a meeting in Abu Dhabi attended by representatives of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the Emirates and Oman on 25 May 1981, the GCC was widely seen as being a diplomatic response to the Iran-Iraq war, which had started in September 1980 when Iraqi forces had

[1] The GCC website can be visited at; http://www.gcc-sg.org. Incidentally, the Arab states refer to the body of water between Iran and the Arabian Peninsula as the Arabian Gulf, while Iran calls it the Persian Gulf. The official name for the waterway in the United States is the Persian Gulf, though the US military often refers to it as the Arabian Gulf.

crossed into Iranian territory. Having decided to remain on the sidelines of this conflict, the conservative Arab states of the Arabian Peninsula became increasingly concerned as, by late 1980, the initial Iraqi advance into Iranian land had been blunted and Iran was preparing counter-offensives. The prospect of eventual Iraqi defeat and Iranian victory made the Arab states of the Peninsula feel vulnerable. Although they quietly supported Iraq with oil revenues, these countries otherwise professed neutrality. The formation of the GCC was a way of demonstrating this neutrality more emphatically.[2] Pointedly, Iraq was not invited to join. The West, particularly the United States, Britain and France, encouraged the formation of the organisation.

Relations with the United States

Since the end of Iran-Iraq war in 1988, the GCC has developed into a power bloc capable of countering both Iran and Iraq diplomatically and, at least in theory, militarily. Tested by the 1980-88 conflict and the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, GCC members have become open friends of the United States. Under President Bill Clinton, the US pursued a policy of 'dual containment' that sought to limit aggression by both Iran and Iraq.[3] After the 2003 overthrow of the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq, the GCC has become more focused on countering Iran, again with the support of the United States. The experience of waging war in Iraq and Afghanistan has tempered US enthusiasm for foreign military involvement, opening up a sense of uncertainty in GCC member states about US policy and the Obama administration's readiness to commit forces to the region. Despite apparently clear statements about being prepared to use all means to stop Iran obtaining a nuclear weapon, GCC states fear that Washington prefers containment to confrontation. Although verging on the paranoid, there is a widespread view in GCC states that the United States regards Iran as its natural ally in the Gulf area rather than the conservative Arab states of the GCC.

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[2] Simon Henderson (2003), *The New Pillar: Conservative Arab Gulf States and U.S. Strategy*, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, p. 14.

[3] *Ibid*.

RELATIONS WITH THE EUROPEAN UNION

The European Union (EU), by contrast, has taken a commercial approach to the GCC, a policy increasingly accentuated by the declining military strength of European powers, which means that, certainly in the Persian Gulf, European militaries can only function alongside larger US forces, rather than representing any independent alternative.

The commercial relationship was formalised in 1988 with the signing of a Cooperation Agreement.[4] There is a resident delegation based in Riyadh with the formal title of 'Delegation of the European Union to Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates'. There is also a GCC liaison office in Brussels. In January 2013, the European Union announced that it was also opening a delegation office in Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates.

Collectively, the EU is the GCC's principal trading partner.[5] The focus of EU diplomatic contact has been negotiations for a free trade agreement, seeking progressive and reciprocal liberalisation in goods and services. Negotiations were suspended by the GCC in 2008 though informal contacts between negotiators continue to take place.[6] The GCC objected to EU tariffs on petrochemical and aluminium products.[7] In 2010, the 1988 agreement was given fresh emphasis by a Joint Action Programme.[8] This concentrates on economic, financial and monetary cooperation, and, separately, on investment. Mechanisms were agreed for advancing cooperation with target dates set for the period 2010-13.

With military sales, where commerce becomes embroiled with diplomacy, EU member states act individually and competitively, as evidenced by President François Hollande of France and British Prime Minister David Cameron visiting Saudi Arabia within two days of each other in

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[4] European Union (1988), "Cooperation Agreement between the European Union and the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf," Luxembourg, 15 June, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:21989A0225(01):EN:HTML.

[5] European Commission, "Countries and Regions: Gulf Region," Bilateral Trade Relations, http://ec.europa.eu/trade/creating-opportunities/bilateral-relations/regions/gulf-region.

[6] *Ibid*.

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] EEAS, "Joint Action Programme for Implementation of the GCC-EU Cooperation Agreement of 1988, 2010-13," http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/gulf_countries/documents/eu_gulf_countries/eu_gcc_joint_action_programme_en.pdf.

November 2012.[9] France and Britain are also in competition with the United States for such arms sales.

The GCC and the Western Powers

The Gulf Arab states have a variety of relationships with the EU, its member states, and Washington. The most important bilateral relationship is usually between the individual GCC states and the US. Britain's role, although of a lesser nature, has a historical as well as a military supply and diplomatic dimension, having been intricately involved in the creation in the 1970s of the independent states of Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE and Oman. But increasingly this is less relevant, in part because of limited British military capabilities compared with the United States. This also applies to France but Paris continues to have some influence because of its ability to provide weapon systems, which can be used to balance US and British involvement. The persistently independent nature of French foreign policy, as evidenced by its leading role in Libya (under former President Nicolas Sarkozy) and also in Mali (under Hollande) is also important. A probable significant additional – and far from trivial – factor in these bilateral relations is that leading members of Gulf governments' apparently prefer to go on vacation in Britain and France rather than the United States.

Western Support for Democracy and Human Rights

Until recently, notions of supporting the spread of democracy, human rights and the rule of law in GCC states were only paid lip-service by the United States and European Union. The style of governance of GCC nations – feudal with elements of wider consultation – was recognised as being explicable and its unfairness, excusable.

But the changes in the region brought about by the so-called Arab Spring, and the expectation of further transformation have caused a reassessment. After visiting Saudi Arabia, the Emirates and Oman in

[9] "French president discusses Syria, Iran in Saudi Arabia," *al-Arabiya/AFP*, 4 November 2012, http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/11/04/247637.html.

November 2012, British Prime Minister David Cameron felt obliged to use the opportunity of a major policy speech to defend 'his role in selling arms to countries criticised over human rights', claiming it was right to support 'British jobs and British allies'.

Cameron's defensive remarks are also explicable in the context of a British Parliamentary investigation of the UK's relations with Saudi Arabia and Bahrain.[10] The inquiry follows a report by the Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee into the 'Arab Spring' democracy movement, which concluded that the government was right to 'support peaceful reform efforts where possible in Bahrain' but that it 'must also be clear in its public criticism of human rights violations there if it is to avoid charges of hypocrisy'.[11] The news of the second investigation prompted an angry reaction from Saudi officials, who said they were 're-evaluating their country's historic relations with Britain'.[12]

Other Regional Actors

Amidst the turmoil in North Africa and the Middle East, the GCC appears to have retained a relevance compared with the Arab League (AL) and the African Union (AU). The decision to facilitate Western intervention in Libya was secured via the Arab League[13], but that grouping's relevance is a factor of the influence of Egypt. While Egypt continues to be beset by revolutionary chaos, the organisation has limited influence. Admittedly, the Arab League provided diplomatic cover for the Emirates and Qatar to send military aircraft to the Libyan combat zone, but there is no evidence that these forces directly contributed to the collapse of the Muammar Qaddafi regime. The AL's role in the continuing Syria crisis was initially an important part of the diplomatic pressure on the Assad regime. But

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[10] Parliament of the United Kingdom (2012), "The UK's relations with Saudi Arabia and Bahrain," Commons Select Committee, 19 September, http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/foreign-affairs-committee/news/uk-relations-with-saudi-arabia-and-bahrain.

[11] Frank Gardner, "Saudi Arabia 'insulted' by UK inquiry," *BBC News*, 15 October 2012, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-19943865.

[12] *Ibid*.

[13] Ian Traynor, "Arab League chief admits second thoughts about Libya air strikes," *The Guardian*, 21 June 2011, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jun/21/arab-league-chief-libya-air-strikes.

the GCC states have collectively been working more urgently on the issue, apparently judging that the overthrow of President Bashar al-Assad will be a strategic defeat for Iran.[14] The AU's contribution to the diplomacy of the Arab Spring has been miniscule and its lack of influence is likely to be proven as the crisis of al-Qaeda's presence in Mali and other parts of the West Africa develops.

The region's oil and gas wealth and the size of the market it represents means that other players are attracted by its commercial opportunities. Turkey, Russia, China and India have potential regional diplomatic roles, especially regarding Iran. Turkey became involved in the ultimately unsuccessful 2010 attempt, backed by Brazil, to persuade Iran to ship abroad its stocks of enriched uranium.[15] Russia, as the provider of the nuclear power reactor in Bushehr and its associated fuel rods, also has a possible role, especially because its technicians still appear to have control of crucial parts of the plant's operations.[16] Even more significant is the fact that Russia is a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and also part of the P5+1 talks with Iran. Its diplomatic stance in these talks appears to be focused on maintaining the legitimacy of the current international system, which is in Moscow's favour as it gives protection from foreign interference in its domestic affairs. But another consideration is that it limits US independence of action and thereby diminishes US power.

Yet a distinguishing feature of these other players is their unwillingness or inability to play any significant military role as well as, usually, any sustained diplomatic one. This has added to the quandary facing the GCC that there is no obvious alternative to continuing its arrangements with the United States and Europe, despite their reduced nature.

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[14] "Syria Crisis: Arab League welcomes new opposition bloc," *BBC News*, 12 November 2012, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-20307668.

[15] "Iran signs nuclear fuel-swap deal with Turkey," *BBC News* , 17 May 2010, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8685846.stm.

[16] "Russia delays transferring Bushehr plant to Iranian technicians: report," *Tehran Times*, 31 October 2012, http://www.tehrantimes.com/politics/102932-russia-delays-transferring-bushehr-plant-to-iranian-technicians-report.

THE SHAPE OF THE GCC

Meanwhile, the GCC has been debating its purpose and its size. Among its initiatives has been the consideration of enlarging its membership to include the extra-Persian Gulf monarchies of Jordan and Morocco.[17] Invitations to join, sent by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, apparently on a whim[18], in May 2011, are developing slowly.[19] Both Jordanian and Moroccan representatives attended the meeting of GCC foreign ministers in Riyadh in November 2012, but full membership appears to remain elusive. The GCC appears to be facing a dilemma: whether to be a grouping of residual Arab monarchies, concerned about the political challenges of the so-called Arab Spring, or remaining as a Gulf-oriented body, more concerned about the perceived threat posed by Iran. The most recent GCC summit, held in the Bahraini capital, Manama, in December 2012, made no reference to any pending membership in its final communique[20], suggesting that the issue was no longer a priority.

IRAN'S NUCLEAR PROGRAMME

The leaderships of the conservative Arab states of the Gulf regard Iran's nuclear programme with trepidation, perceiving it as a bid by Tehran to secure regional hegemony. The uncertainty about Iran's intentions, because of its limited cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the UN nuclear watchdog, feeds Arab Gulf suspicions about the real purposes of the programme.[21]

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[17] Sara Hamdan, "Gulf Council Reaches out to Morocco and Jordan," *The New York Times*, 25 May 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/26/world/middleeast/26iht-M26-GCC.html?pagewanted=all.

[18] Simon Henderson, "Saudi Arabia's No Good, Very Bad Year," *Foreign Policy*, 15 June 2011, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/06/15/saudi_arabias_no_good_very_bad_year.

[19] Simon Henderson, "Gulf Arab Leaders Meet to Discuss Syria and Iran," *Policy Alert*, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 11 May 2012, http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/gulf-arab-leaders-meet-to-discuss-syria-and-iran.

[20] "The 33rd GCC Summit concludes today in the Kingdom of Bahrain," *Bahrain News Agency*, 25 December 2012, http://www.bna.bh/portal/en/news/539240.

[21] Simon Henderson and Olli Heinonen (2012), *Nuclear Iran: A Glossary of Terms*, Washington DC, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, p. ix, http://www.

The GCC states have looked to the West and particularly to the United States for support in pressuring Iran to make it clear that its nuclear programme is only for peaceful purposes. Along with the Western countries, the GCC has been encouraged by the growing strength of economic and financial sanctions, even though these have also impacted negatively on GCC states, some of which, for example Dubai in the Emirates, have long-standing commercial relations with Iran.

A predicament for the GCC is to balance short-term pressure with the need to continue working relations in the longer-term. The test for US and EU policy – that Iran is not able to achieve a break-out capability – is likely to come in the next twelve months. A break-out capability can be defined as having the potential to convert a stockpile of 20 percent highly-enriched uranium into enough 90 percent – or bomb-grade – highly enriched uranium (HEU) to make a nuclear explosive device. The phrase 'break-out' refers to the potential to escape from the restrictions of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to which Iran is a party. The treaty prohibits the development of nuclear weapons but the international community can be presented with a *fait accompli* if a clandestine programme is successful. If and when Iran achieves this capability, the GCC will feel let down by the United States and European Union, even though Washington and Brussels might argue that Iran still does not have a nuclear weapon as the US and European militaries might define it. The distinction is technical but relates to the deliverability of a nuclear device and its reliability.

Even without a break-out capability, Iran's real nuclear potential may emerge anyway. A comparison to draw here is Israel's nuclear progress. It is now widely judged that Israel achieved a nuclear weapon capability in the late 1960s but the Arab world did not recognise or appreciate this until much later. Indeed, the 1973 war could be argued to have convinced Israel's principal enemy, Egypt, that the Jewish state could not be defeated with conventional means and so peace was the only option. Cairo essentially ignored Israel's nuclear strength. Israel's nuclear status perhaps only helped its own government to have the self-confidence to make a peace agreement, which developed from the 1979 Camp David accords. In the case of Iran, the fear is that Tehran will use its nuclear status, recognised or not, to increasingly dominate the Gulf region. In the first instance, it would press GCC states to revise their relationships with

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washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyFocus121_1.pdf.

the United States and European powers so that foreign military forces were excluded from the area.

It is a reflection of the GCC's own realisation of its predicament that discreet contacts with Israel are said to continue though, in public, GCC governments condemn the prospect of any Israeli attack on Iran's nuclear installations. The dilemma of wanting Iran's nuclear programme to be destroyed while not wanting Israel to do it is only compounded by the perception that Israel is more willing to do it than the United States. There is also a shared coincidence of views with Israel on the destabilising nature of the Arab Spring.

Differences in Assessment of Iran

The United States, the European Union and the GCC share the view that Iran should not be allowed to obtain nuclear weapons – although the definition of this level of technical ability varies. The GCC though is probably alone in not wanting Iran to achieve a dominant status in the Gulf. Any diplomatic deal which leaves the Islamic regime in Tehran free to exert what the GCC considers to be a malevolent influence, would be bad from the point of view of Gulf rulers. The GCC leadership regards Iran in visceral terms. Today's Sunni-Shi'ite divide is comparable to the historical antagonism in Europe between Catholics and Protestants, a view which almost certainly fails to win sympathy from European politicians and officials.

Pre-eminence of the Iranian Nuclear Issue

Despite its centrality, the nuclear issue is one problem among many between the GCC and Iran. The GCC countries regard Iran as a challenger on multiple fronts: Shi'ite versus Sunni, revolutionary versus monarchy, Persian versus Arab, anti-US versus pro-US. The nuclear issue is just one part of this spectrum. The GCC will therefore be likely to need to continue to look to the West, in particular the United States, for diplomatic support and security guarantees even if there is a resolution of the nuclear crisis. Failing adequate support, there is the prospect of other regional states deciding to go for nuclear weapons. Turkey, Egypt and Saudi Arabia are the most frequently mentioned though the list could be expanded to include all

those, like the Emirates, which have recently displayed an almost intense interest in accessing the benefits of civilian nuclear power and research programs. This presents a potential dilemma to the West, which would not want to lose out on commercial contracts but would also want to block proliferation of nuclear technology to other states.

There is an important element in GCC thinking which is hard to rationalise. Top officials, including Western-educated ones, are said to believe that the preferred ally of the US in the Persian Gulf area is Iran rather than the conservative Arab states of the region. This leads to an added dimension of mistrust as the GCC states observe the negotiations on the nuclear issue. The GCC fears that Washington will cut a deal with Iran which will be unfavourable to the conservative Arab states. Although implausible and unlikely in the near future given current antipathies, the reasoning is that the United States respects Iran's historical standing and permanence. Washington would therefore prefer to deal with the most important regional player rather than the disparate members of the GCC.

Conclusion

Iran and its malevolent foreign policy is without doubt the major issue in the bilateral relationship between the West and the GCC, all the more so because of the unresolved nuclear dimension. But Europe's weakened economic standing and reduced funds for expeditionary military forces mean that its actual support for the GCC is rhetorical rather than practical. Equally, the experience of the US in Afghanistan and Iraq is a major constraint on new military involvements.

The usual slow incremental advance of diplomacy could be shattered in terms of the Persian Gulf region by an Iranian nuclear test. Alternatively, the same awareness of Iran's strength and scientific advance could emerge, albeit much more slowly, by Iran being allowed to continue its nuclear programme. In the latter case, the world will slowly realise that the balance of power has changed in favour of Iran.

While the attitude of the United States towards Iran's nuclear programme remains firmly opposed, at least publicly, there is increasing scepticism that the Obama administration, now in its second term, will use military force. Despite having declared that it is opposed to 'containment' of a nuclear Iran, it is difficult to be convinced that President

Obama, along with his new team of advisers, really wants a new military engagement, having celebrated the success of the policies to leave both Iraq and, within the next two years, Afghanistan.

An additional complicating factor have been the events of the Arab Spring, which have served to accentuate the autocratic appearance of the GCC states, making support for these countries harder among the electorates of Europe and the US. Although the initial euphoria of the Arab Spring has been diminished by democratic setbacks in Tunisia and Egypt, and the bloody conflict in Syria, the forms of government in the GCC are unappealing to Western electorates, despite GCC claims that the systems are widely supported by their populations.

In the case of the United States, Washington's nuanced position on Iran, as much perceived as stated, as well as its support for the new Muslim Brotherhood regime in Egypt, means that the GCC will likely become more cautious in its reliance on the West. The absence of alternatives to Western support could mean that GCC member states attempt to reach accommodations with Iran so as to avoid confrontation and any attempt at destabilisation.

In so far as having a strategy suggests a long-term commitment, the GCC will be likely to examine other options in developing alliances and tactics to ameliorate the Iranian threat. The field is wide open for greater involvement by Chinese and Indian diplomacy. Looking further ahead, with forecasts of reduced US demand for Middle East oil potentially leading to less domestic support for involvement in the region, it is conceivable that the West's diplomatic leadership in its relationship with the GCC could fall to Europe.

For the moment, such forecasts are very dependent on the outcome of short-term changes, namely, the status of Iran's nuclear programme and the continuing fall-out of the events of the Arab Spring. The West's relationship with the GCC is currently being aligned by strained economic circumstances, diplomatic caution and unwillingness to consider military involvement. Given the legitimacy of these views, the situation cries out for more diplomatic engagement to manage the transition, retaining good communications on issues where positions are frequently misunderstood.

4.
Triangulating Iranian-Western-GCC Relations

Rouzbeh Parsi

The Persian Gulf can be defined as a regional security complex[1], i.e. a region where the primary concern of the countries involved is each other and this is where most of their interactions are found. The United States (US) is a 'complicating' factor in this perspective, but this approach is useful nonetheless because it also stresses the primacy of intra-regional interaction and puts the pedestrian notion of US dominance and omnipotence in perspective.

A second feature that chimes well with the concept of a regional security complex is the prevalence of transnational identities. For sure there are no neatly and evenly set state borders anywhere. There are always over-lapping identities (religious, ethnic, linguistic etc.) all over the globe, but in the Gulf they constitute potential fault lines within each country and potential ignition points between states. Identity issues are not automatically ideological or politically decisive, but given that many of these states are of a recent vintage, their most important sources of insecurity and paranoia, despite their claims to the country, are domestic, not external. It is a particularly absurd and self-defeating line of defence and analysis espoused by many officials in the region, on both the northern and southern shores of the Gulf, that their societies are unusually harmonious and would remain so were it not for the nefarious meddling of one or more of their neighbours.

[1] See, Gregory Gause III (2010), *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf*, New York, Cambridge University Press, p.3-8 (via Barry Buzan's definition).

Framing the Issue

Transnational identities and sectarianism

The sectarian aspect is played up and abused in varying degrees, but undoubtedly it has come to the forefront more than usual as of late. The advent of a shaky democracy in Iraq which inevitably grants the Shi'ites in that country a more prominent position in politics, the tumultuous events of the Arab awakening that have laid bare many different fault lines in Arab societies, and the fact that the religious card is readily available for those who want to play with fire, have led to an increase of sectarianism across the region. In 2004 King Abdullah of Jordan coined the phrase 'Shi'ite crescent', depicting the rise of Shi'ites from Lebanon through Damascus, and Baghdad all the way to Tehran.[2]

In general, Iran, as a distinctly Shi'ite country, tries not to dabble too much in sectarianism, if anything because it has nothing to gain from stressing its Shi'ism, which is by far the minority branch of Islam, instead preferring to push the inclusive *umma*, 'we are all Muslims', line. The sectarian divide is much more pronounced in Saudi thinking, with the Saudi monarchy portrayed as the custodian of 'proper' (Sunni) Islam and the bulwark against revolutionary Persian/Shi'ite influence. In addition, like many other states in the region, the kingdom of Saudi Arabia has a Shi'ite minority (located primarily in the oil-rich eastern part of the country) which has been woefully neglected and whose expectations and demands Saudi Arabia is ideologically unable to come to grips with.

Iran's position in the region

The origins of Iran's isolation are fully self-inflicted, but the continuation of this isolation can only partly be blamed on Iran. The revolutionary government (like most revolutionary governments) believed itself to have solved the fundamental political problem of governance through its new ideology, which it vowed to spread beyond its borders. Among the first targets were the monarchies to the south, Saudi Arabia in particular, which were seen as corrupt US lackeys. This stance is now more rhetorical than practical,

[2] For a chronology of the concept's spread and critique see Michael Bröning (2008), "Don't fear the Shiites: the idea of a Teheran-controlled "Shiite Crescent" over the Greater Middle East is at odds with reality," *Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft Online* Vol.3, http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/ipg/ipg-2008-3/06_a_broening_gb.pdf; Vali Nasr (2006), "When the Shiites Rise," *Foreign Affairs* Vol.85,No.4 (July/August).

but is still used by hardliners in Tehran and similarly reverberates in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries as evidence of Iran's insidious long-term ambitions. This assessment is by and large off the mark as it projects too much intent and definitely more capability than Iran actually possesses. Nonetheless, leaving aside the accuracy of this view, an openly stated and consistent Iranian goal and demand has been that security in the Gulf be indigenised, i.e. addressed and solved by the countries of the region and that the United States and other global actors withdraw from the area. As far as the GCC is concerned this is unacceptable, since a Western disengagement from the Gulf would leave them at the mercy of Iran, a regional heavy-weight with hegemonic ambitions. Again it is important to stress that this sense of endangerment is primarily an extension of the perception of Iran in general and the Islamic Republic in particular, rather than a cool headed assessment of what kind of challenge Tehran represents. Iran was perceived by many Arab states as the overbearing and dominant northern neighbour with potentially dangerous ambitions already during the shah's rule. But as long as the Arab Gulf states shared the United States as an ally with the shah, rivalries and tensions were tempered at least until the establishment of the Islamic Republic. For the Arab monarchies, the Iranian revolution brought Iranian nationalism together with an explosive Islamist ideological agenda with explicit ambitions to spread the revolution *beyond* Iranian borders and upset the regional status quo both in terms of interstate relations as well as with regard to domestic power arrangements. Thus the potential Iranian revolutionary menace became a set narrative that required vigilance and a more urgent response in the shape of external (United States) and collective (GCC) security arrangements.[3]

At the same time Iran does lend support to its co-religionists in the Arab world, although more symbolically than in practice. There are several reasons for this, particularly a lack of focused ambition, which renders Iran's efforts to support Shi'ites throughout the region somewhat hapless and reactive rather than concerted and strategic. The general relationship with

[3] For a discussion of these perceptions among Gulf Arab states see, T. W. Lippmann, A. Vatanka & T. R. Mattair (2011), "A Reawakened Rivalry: The GCC v. Iran," *Middle East Policy Council* Vol.18, No.4, (Winter), p. 1-24, http://www.mepc.org/journal/middle-east-policy-archives/reawakened-rivalry-gcc-v-iran?print; an interesting theoretical analysis of this can be found here: Michael C. Williams (2003), "Words, Images, Enemies: Securitization and International Politics," *International Studies Quarterly* Vol. 47, No. 4 (December), p. 511-531.

Iran's Arab neighbours is wobbly and not framed in strategic terms. For all of their shared characteristics and proximity, the Arab countries do not feel that Iran understands or interacts with them in a sophisticated and deft way. Furthermore, the Shi'ism of Tehran and that of Arab co-religionists in the GCC is not the same. Most Arab Shi'ites in the Gulf relate more to the quietism espoused by Shi'ite leaders in Najaf (Grand Ayatollah Sistani being its most prominent representative) and are also no less nationalist than their Arab Sunni brethren. Conversely it is also important to understand that one cannot easily pigeonhole or delineate the religious-political affiliations of Iranian Shi'ites. While most of them adhere to Iranian *marja's* (the grand ayatollahs being those with the authority to take decisions concerning Islamic law) it should not be taken for granted that these would be the most politically active *marja's* or even if that were the case, necessarily represent those toeing the line of the Supreme Leader.

Domestic stability in GCC countries

As evident in Bahrain, the main causes for social unrest in GCC states are domestic grievances, inequality and discrimination, lack of transparency as well as of participation in governing the country. Governments prefer to deny these realities and instead blame everything on outside powers (read Iran). The lack of common ground between opposition and government in Bahrain has led to a radicalisation of some parts of the opposition which, over time though not yet, may turn the Persian scare into a self-fulfilling prophecy. In short, if the domestic problems of Bahrain are not addressed, at some point desperate elements in the opposition may turn to Tehran. Thus, the situation would not be created by Iran nor are the worsening realities on the ground something that Iran can influence that much, but the crisis does represent a structural opportunity for Iranian influence, courtesy of domestic Bahraini mismanagement.

This in turn points to both the fear of ruling families in GCC countries and the real question the West should ask itself in the wake of the upheavals that have spread from Tunisia to Bahrain: how stable are the Gulf monarchies?

Although it is difficult to generalise considering the variation in their make-up, the short answer is that they are not nearly as stable as they are portrayed. Leaving aside sudden events that can change the entire picture, the fact remains that Saudi Arabia, for instance, has huge problems with a growing, young and educated, population for

which it has no outlet. In addition, there is the uneven development, partly along geographical and sectarian lines, of the country, and the striding contrast between increasing female education on the one hand and institutionalised female discrimination and disempowerment on the other. The Saudi state has so far tried to buy itself out of these quandaries and the concomitant social crisis without addressing the structural fissures, a strategy that is unsustainable over time and does not bode well for the future stability of the country.[4]

IRAN AND WEST-GCC RELATIONS

The ebbs and flows of US presence in the Gulf

The United States has had a historically important role in maintaining the stability in, and Western tilt of, the Gulf since the British left in 1971. This manifested itself primarily in arms sales and military training for various countries, especially Iran under the shah and Saudi Arabia. With the fall of the Soviet Union and the attack by Saddam Hussein's Iraq against Kuwait in 1990, a new phase began where the United States started deploying significant numbers of combat troops to the region. Thus, the military build-up aimed at repelling Iraqi forces in 1991, which was first seen as an exception, set a trend. In 1995 the US 5th Fleet was re-activated and Bahrain became its host country. With the invasion of Iraq in 2003 US presence grew even further and, while all active troops have now been withdrawn, the plan was to have some kind of residual presence in the country. So far all attempts at an institutionalised foundation (e.g. a Status of Forces Agreement) for a US military force have failed. In Iraq the role and weight of the United States as a political player has therefore waned. As one Kurdish policymaker recently observed, 'American policy is very weak. It is not clear to us how they have defined their interests in Iraq. They are picking events and reacting on the basis of events. That is the policy'.[5] Thus

[4] See, for instance, Glada Lahn and Paul Stevens (2011), *Burning Oil to Keep Cool: The Hidden Energy Crisis in Saudi Arabia*, Chatham House, December, http://www.chathamhouse.org/publications/papers/view/180825.

[5] Fuad Hussein, chief of staff to Massoud Barzani, president of the semiautonomous Kurdish region in northern Iraq; see Michael R. Gordon, "In US Exit from Iraq, Failed Efforts and Challenges," *The New York Times*, 22 September 2012, http://www.nytimes.

the United States is now just one among several players competing for influence in Baghdad.[6]

While for many it seems logical that the United States should safeguard the flow of oil by supporting friendly regimes in the Persian Gulf, it is important to remember two trends that belie the notion of US dependency on the Gulf. First, the US does not import that much oil from the Persian Gulf[7], whereas Europe and emerging global players like China and India are becoming more and more dependent on a steady supply of oil and gas from the region. Thus the need for stability has more to do with the global economy than particular US energy needs. This will, however, undoubtedly affect US attitudes and policies towards the GCC in the long term, particularly as the United States is apparently heading towards energy self-sufficiency thanks to the shale oil and gas revolution. This means that the importance of the Gulf for the United States, while not destined to disappear, is nonetheless likely to diminish.

The wars that the United States waged in Afghanistan and Iraq have revealed the crevices in American power. The United States does not have the appetite for more wars and massive long-term deployments of troops. Thus it needs both economic and political reasons to scale back its military involvement in the Gulf while the brinksmanship it engages in vis-à-vis Iran requires the regular flexing of military muscles. The latter objective obviously contradicts the former, but is necessary in order to make the repeated threat of military action against Iran credible and also assure Arab 'client states' that the United States is able and willing to defend them in the event that conflict with Iran escalates into outright war.

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com/2012/09/23/world/middleeast/failed-efforts-of-americas-last-months-in-iraq.html?_r=0.

[6] For a clear eyed assessment on what the absence of the United States actually means for developments in Iraq see Marc Lynch (2012), "The Irrelevance of America's Withdrawal from Iraq," *Foreign Policy*, 2 April, http://lynch.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/04/02/americas_withdrawal_from_iraq_didnt_matter.

[7] US imports from the region peaked in 2003 at 885 million barrels, reaching their lowest level in 2009 at 606 million barrels. For 2011 the figure is 675 million barrels. See US Energy Information Administration (2012), "US Imports from Persian Gulf Countries of Crude Oil," 27 August, http://www.eia.gov/dnav/pet/hist/LeafHandler.ashx?n=PET&s=MCRIMUSPG1&f=A; see also Benoit Faucon and Sarah Kent, "Shale Boom to Turn U.S. Into World's Largest Oil Producer, Watchdog Says," *Wall Street Journal*, 12 November 2012, http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887323894704578114492856065064.html.

Many in the United States and the Gulf disagree with a definition of the Gulf states as 'US clients'. Yet, the patron-client relationship is evident on security related matters where various forms of US support are crucial. The United States has guaranteed the security of the Gulf monarchies including by accepting the narrative of the inherent legitimacy of their ruling families. The monarchies have in turn guaranteed the safe and steady supply of oil and the stability of oil markets. In sum, the relationship has been more than a straightforward alliance or a clear case of one-sided dependency.[8]

The United States has a closely-knit relationship with GCC countries and is extremely cautious in its criticism of the monarchies' poor human rights record and other sensitive topics. Washington is their main arms provider and its military presence is considered vital for the security of these states as well as the reliability of the flow of gas and oil from the region. These are aspects of the relationship that have existed for quite some time. The friction lies in the democracy promotion that intermittently is pursued by the United States and the general demand for greater democratisation by numerous sections of the population in the region triggered by the Arab awakening in North Africa and the Middle East.

While Iran is perceived as a great threat and believed by many decision-makers in the Gulf to be fomenting whatever societal discord may exist in several of the Gulf monarchies, it is also evident that the GCC has no wish to embark on a war with Iran. Thus there is a constant seesaw between being worried about Iran's nuclear programme while fearing the inevitable repercussions and spill-over effects on the Gulf that could follow from a war against Iran.[9] In the years following the US invasion of Iraq that crisis took precedence, but today the risk of navigating between the Scylla and Charybdis of a nuclear Iran and a war against Tehran, combined with

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[8] For more on the notion of patron-client see C.P. Carney (1989), "International patron-client relationships: A conceptual framework," *Studies in Comparative International Development* Vol.24, No.2 (June), p. 42-55; an empirical mapping of this perspective can be found in O. G. Afoaku (2000), "U.S. Foreign Policy and Authoritarian Regimes: Change and Continuity in International Clientelism," *Journal of Third World Studies*, Vol.17, No.2, (Fall) p.13-40.

[9] "Gulf states brace for unwanted US-Iran war," *AFP/al-Ahram*, 6 January 2012, http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/31073/World/Region/Gulf-states-brace-for-unwanted-USIran-war.aspx; Julian Borger, "US warns Israel off pre-emptive strike on Iran," *The Guardian*, 31 October 2012, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/oct/31/us-warns-israel-strike-iran.

the uncertainties unleashed by the Arab awakening, are at the forefront of GCC concerns.[10]

In crude terms it is clear (for US officials as well) that even when GCC politicians express frustration at Iranian intransigence on the nuclear issue and interference in their domestic affairs and feel that the United States should act, they are in essence saying that they would like America, but not them, to fight Iran. For the United States, and despite the heated rhetoric, a war with Iran is still considered as the very last resort. If possible the United States clearly prefers the kind of 'covert' warfare and harsh sanctions regime pursued so far, whether it forces Iran to abandon/curb its nuclear enrichment programme or not. The problem is that it is very difficult to manage the tension arising from this tit-for-tat, and a besieged Iran is more likely to become more intransigent rather than malleable. It is also rather optimistic to believe that any of the actors involved are capable of the subtle brinkmanship involved to keep the conflict from reaching boiling point. A complicating factor is that the only country that has explicitly threatened Iran with war is Israel, and Israel is also the unspoken (and intransigent) party in nuclear negotiations with Tehran. A war against Iran initiated by Israel would be difficult to support for GCC states, especially in the event (however unlikely) that the United States is not directly involved in the conflict. In fact, Gulf regimes would be in the unenviable position of having Israel wage a war which in theory is in their interest, but also have to deal with an Arab public opinion which would massively lean towards Iran and against Israel, the United States and all those perceived as supporting the attack.

GCC security concerns

The GCC does not feel that it can afford to put all its eggs in that particular basket, meaning that it is concerned about the consequences of a military confrontation with Iran notwithstanding the fact that it may fit well with its interest. The disastrous manner in which the United States handled the occupation of Iraq and the fact that, as a result, Baghdad was 'lost' to Iran (a reading grounded in Persian-Arab, Sunni-Shi'a animosity) seriously damaged the GCC's trust in American strategic acumen. In the words of Prince

[10] For a discussion of the reasoning and assessments done around 2005 in the GCC on Iran, see Matteo Legrenzi (2011), *The GCC and the International Relations of the Gulf: Diplomacy, Security and Economic Coordination in a Changing Middle East*, London & New York, I.B. Tauris (especially chapter 7, p.116-119).

Saud al-Faisal, foreign minister of Saudi Arabia: 'We fought a war together to keep Iran from occupying Iraq after Iraq was driven out of Kuwait. Now we are handing the whole country over to Iran without reason'.[11] Furthermore, the long-term prediction is one of the United States receding from the region both in terms of presence and capability. While perhaps this is, at times, more of an impression of what may occur in the future, it is nonetheless grounded in certain structural trends and increasingly acted upon as a reasonable forecast of things to come.

Thus in the security sector, more than before, GCC member states are encouraging other major international players to become stakeholders in the GCC's continued survival and stability. In a sense, the status quo, which they see as their existential pre-condition, can be seen as a company whose chances for survival are contingent on the amount and diversification of businessmen it can attract to become shareholders.

The GCC has its own prevarications regarding Iran's nuclear programme. At times GCC leaders have officially stated that they support Iran's right to nuclear enrichment while insisting on International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) demands for solid evidence of the purely civilian nature of Iran's nuclear programme. This being said, several GCC leaders have also expressed in private a darker view of Iranian ambitions, i.e. that the ultimate aim of Tehran is nuclear arms.[12] This assessment is most likely not based on access to additional data, but derives from what these politicians consider to be a more realistic and hard-nosed knowledge of Iran's overall regional ambitions and generally devious modus operandi. Leaving aside whether this is a fair assessment of Iran's nuclear programme, it is nonethe-

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[11] Prince Saud al-Faisal (2005), "The Fight against Extremism and the Search for Peace," Speech at Council on Foreign Relations, 20 September, http://www.cfr.org/terrorism/fight-against-extremism-search-peace-rush-transcript-federal-news-service-inc/p8908.

[12] For the change of tack by GCC leaders with regard to the end-purpose of the Iranian nuclear programme, see Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Mahjoob Zweiri (eds.) (2008), *Iran's Foreign Policy: From Khatami to Ahmadinejad*, Reading, Ithaca Press, p.132-133; and a 2008 Wikileaks document where in discussions with GCC leaders the US was supposedly encouraged to attack Iran; "US embassy cables: Saudi king urges US strike on Iran," *The Guardian/Wikileaks*, 28 November 2010, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/150519; "US embassy cables: Bahrain king says Iranian nuclear programme must be stopped," *The Guardian/Wikileaks*, 28 November 2010, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/232927.

less crucial to take the Arab states general fear of a looming Iranian ambition for regional hegemony into account.

The EU's role in the Gulf

The European Union has much at stake in the Middle East. It is engaged in the Israeli-Palestinian process and the Iranian nuclear issue. There are several reasons for this but obviously the proximity of the Middle Eastern region is an important factor. So is the need to maintain oil market stability and progressively enhance the Union's energy supply and security by increasing the number of stable partners providing oil and gas. As the EU's energy needs continue to grow, so too does its dependency on foreign imports. It is especially noteworthy that the primary source of oil, natural gas and coal is, and has been for at least the last ten years, Russia.[13]

The European Union is devising a strategy for its relations with the GCC. There is some goodwill on both sides for deepening the relationship, but a concerted effort is required to turn this political will into concrete and actionable steps towards stronger institutional links. In the slowly progressing negotiations (on trade, energy etc.) and discussions between the European Union and the GCC, the former is looking for greater technical, commercial, and other kinds of exchanges, while the latter also wants to have enhanced co-operation in the security sector. This is already a reality with several member states, like France and the United Kingdom (UK) which both have a military presence in the Gulf as well as big arms sales arrangements with GCC countries.

This distinction is very important because the European Union as a whole has no significant military assets or decision-making power (in the security and defence field EU member states can only take decisions on the basis of consensus). Changing this has so far not been the Union's number one priority, and would in any case be an arduous task to achieve.[14] It is

[13] For natural gas see, for example, this report; Michael Ratner [et al.] (2012), "Europe's Energy Security: Options and Challenges to Natural Gas Supply Diversification," Congressional Research Service, 13 March, http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R42405.pdf; For an overview of import origin see, European Commission, "Main origin of primary energy imports, EU-27, 2002-2010," Eurostat data, http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php?title=File:Main_origin_of_primary_energy_imports,_EU-27,_2002-2010_%28%25_of_extra_EU-27_imports%29.png&filetimestamp=20121012131852.

[14] While there recently have been some initiatives towards changing this, the issue is rife with problems, caveats and rivalries. Thus while the diagnosis of the problem might

then not feasible in the short-to-medium term, nor are there any indications that the European Union would be interested in deployments beyond Europe's borders.

The Union as such however has key expertise, in terms of internal harmonisation and institutionalised cooperation and integration that can be beneficial for the GCC as it potentially embarks on closer cooperation among its member states. In addition the European Union is a project that from its inception has had an inclusive approach using integration and trade as means to foster *détente* and mutual security benefits. Obviously this cannot simply be replicated in the Gulf – nonetheless there is a lesson in this experience worth pondering. A framework based on a similar approach of inclusiveness, mutual benefit and institutionalised cooperation, could serve as a crucial element in a long term strategy for Gulf countries.

Individual member states, on the other hand, have or might have specific interests in having a military presence in the region and in cooperating with GCC countries on security issues. Due to these interest variations it is difficult for the European Union to achieve a common position on issues related to the Gulf. Over time we can discern a somewhat unconstructive division of labour, where the member states go about their business of trade and cooperation, leaving the necessary but unpopular task of discussing and criticising human rights abuses and lack of democratic governance in the region to EU institutions. This creates both a strange impression of what the aim of the 27-strong Union is vis-à-vis the GCC and increases the risk of self-inflicted wounds.

The European Union is generally on the same page of the United States concerning the course of action on Iran's nuclear programme, but this does not necessarily mean the EU and the US see exactly eye-to-eye on everything. Their common strategy is premised on the assumption that pressure is what Iran responds to and that this must be kept up on

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be quite clear and even widely shared the leap to acting upon this insight is still missing. See Ian Traynor, "EU heavyweights call for radical foreign and defence policy overhaul," *The Guardian*, 18 September 2012, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/sep/18/eu-foreign-defence-policy-overhaul/print; for an indication of the intricate difficulties involved see "'Future of Europe group' bids for foreign policy, defence clout," *EurActiv*, 19 September 2012, http://www.euractiv.com/future-eu/future-europe-group-tables-propo-news-514876; for an in-depth study of European defence see Daniel Keohane and Tomas Valasek (2008), "Willing and able? EU defence in 2020," *Centre for European Reform*, June, http://www.cer.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/attachments/pdf/2011/e_2020_844-1362.pdf.

all fronts: diplomatic, economic etc. This does not however translate into active EU support for a military strike against Iran. The European Union sees yet another war in the Middle East, with all its ramifications and the fact that neither its development nor its outcome can easily be influenced, let alone controlled, as sufficient reason to prevent such a scenario from happening without however abandoning demands on Iran regarding its nuclear programme.

Yet, the notion that sanctions can both pressure Iran into ceding on the nuclear issue and fend off those clamouring for war remains to be proven. The pervading policy orthodoxy prescribes an increasingly draconian sanctions regime to halt Iranian advances in uranium enrichment and force a scaling back of the programme, even though Iran's overall end-goal remains uncertain. Since the IAEA cannot firmly ascertain that there is an active military component to the programme there is also some hesitation on how to officially call out Iran.

The EU's Iran policy is the congruent element in EU-GCC relations. Here the EU is basically acquiescing to the Saudi narrative about the threat of Iran, in turn reinforced by hawks in the United States and Israel. The incongruence lies instead in the different perceptions of the Arab awakening: for the former, in spite of all the ensuing instability and insecurity, the Arab revolutions fit in a democratisation process and are ultimately a positive thing; for the latter they might represent a threat not only to regional stability but to the legitimacy of their autocratic regimes while however also offering prospects for increased GCC influence in both North Africa and the Middle East. In the GCC, there is no uniform assessment of the upheavals. In general, ousting Libya's dictator Muammar Qaddafi was considered acceptable, while the fall of the autocratic rulers of Tunisia and particularly Egypt has definitely not been welcomed. The fall of Syria's president Bashar al-Assad, however, would be seen as a great boon by Riyadh in its attempt to wrest both Lebanon and eventually Iraq away from Iranian influence. The question here is to what length Saudi Arabia is willing to go to eject Assad from power, and at what cost.

Qatar has a more open and friendly relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood, the Islam-rooted political organisation which has been a key component of either revolutionary or post-revolutionary forces in most Arab Spring states, while the Saudis have historically seen the Brotherhood as an anathema. Riyadh saw the fall of Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak with dismay and has decisively put a stop to any spread of the revolution to the Persian Gulf by 'assisting' the Bahraini royal family in suppressing

the protests, even going as far as to send troops to the tiny island kingdom. Thus the domestic danger of further and greater social unrest is high on the agenda, and the GCC would probably like to have support for their line from the European Union. This is however not going to be forthcoming. While the signals from member state capitals and Brussels have at times been timid and confusing, the latter at least is not going to latch itself to a status quo that requires the suppression of protests.

For EU member states however the continuation of protests in GCC countries can be ignored by virtue of them being overshadowed by the civil war in Syria and the nuclear standoff with Iran, but all this comes at a cost. Sooner or later a clearer line with some modicum of consistency will be required.

CONCLUSION

It is not clear that any of the actors analysed in this paper have a clear strategy, whether relating to the Iranian nuclear issue, or for what is to come after its eventual and hopeful resolution.

In the general zero-sum mentality that plagues policymakers in the region, any rapprochement with Iran, no matter how modest and unambitious, will, for many in the GCC, entail a lessening of their own relevance for Washington. In this regard no side is incentivised to participate in, or support, a process that does not bring itself immediate benefits. As long as this mindset holds there will be plenty of spoilers and far too few stakeholders for a process of *détente*.

In this regard the experience of creating the European Union by way of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) which benefitted *both* France and Germany, and later of the establishment of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to ease tensions with the Soviet bloc during the Cold War are highly relevant. A regional security framework encompassing the GCC and Iran and Iraq is in the long run the only path towards a sustained atmosphere of *détente* which in turn could engender substantial co-operation between state actors in this regional security complex.

5.
Combating Unconventional Threats in the Gulf: Convergence and Divergence between the GCC and the West

Frederic Wehrey

Linked together by familial ties and dynastic structures, the rulers of the Arab Gulf states comprise a sort of dynastic club that is highly conservative in outlook and has proven surprisingly resilient to the ideological forces, revolutions and coups that have buffeted the rest of the Arab world since late 2010. At the formal level, these states have coalesced into a multilateral security structure, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), formed in response to the aftermath of the 1979 Iranian Revolution. At the individual state level, security policies have typically followed a time-tested pattern: the dispersal of oil rents to placate potential opposition, the reliance on an external security guarantor, tribal patronage and intermarriage, the construction of nationalist narratives that link the ruling families with the state, and, most recently, carefully calibrated political reforms – the creation of parliaments and other participatory structures such as consultative councils (*majalis al-shura*).[1] Finally, the Gulf system is marked by a high-degree of cross-border exchange: people, goods, and – most significantly for this paper – ideas.

What is often overlooked in studies of Gulf security is that the region's rulers tend to frame *transnational ideological* threats – rather than conventional *military* ones – as the most pressing challenges to their sur-

[1] For explanations of the longevity of Gulf regimes see Michael Herb (1999), *All in the Family: Absolutism, Revolution and Democracy in the Middle Eastern Monarchies*, New York, New York University Press; Gerd Nonneman (2000), "Security and Inclusion: Regime Responses to Domestic Challenges in the Gulf," in S. McKnight *et al.*(eds), *Gulf Security: Opportunities and Challenges for the New Generation*, London, Royal United Services Institute, September, p. 107-116; Anoushirvan Ehteshami (2003), "Reform from Above: The Politics of Participation in the Oil Monarchies," *International Affairs*, Vol. 79, No. 1, p. 53-75.

vival.[2] Throughout the modern history of the Gulf, these threats have included Nasserism, Ba'athism, Communism, and Revolutionary Shi'ism from Iran. Fears in the Gulf of the so-called "Shi'a crescent" and, most recently, post-Arab Spring worries about the ascendance of the Muslim Brotherhood across the region are only the latest variation of this trend.[3] From the perspective of Gulf states these ideological and political threats are just as 'unconventional' and perhaps even more pressing than the menace of terrorism and piracy.

With this observation in mind, any examination of partnership between the Gulf and the West must account for differences in how 'unconventional'[4] threats are defined and responded to. This paper will explore current developments in the GCC-West partnership against these threats. There is a clear convergence and shared interest in combating terrorism and piracy; both the United States (US) and the European Union (EU) have a strong interest in bolstering the capacity of the GCC and individual Gulf states in countering these threats. Added to this, cyber defence is emerging as a pressing area for Western assistance to the Gulf states. But there are and will continue to be differences over the nature of domestic political and ideological challenges and how best to address them.

Nowhere is this more evident than in Bahrain, where the regime continues to paint the domestic Shi'ite opposition as an extension of Iranian

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[2] Gregory Gause III has deployed Barry Buzan's concept of a 'security complex' to argue that the Gulf states, as a whole, spend most of their energy and resources worrying about threats emanating from other states in the Gulf, rather than states outside the region. F. Gregory Gause III (2010), *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf*, New York, Cambridge University Press, p. 6-7. Arab authors from the Gulf have themselves echoed this paradigm, albeit with a more realist, balance-of-power approach. See for example, 'Abd al-Jalil Zaid al-Marhun (2005), *al-Amn al-Khaliji b'ad al-Harb fi al-'Iraq*, *Gulf Security after the Iraq War*, Riyadh, Institute for Diplomatic Studies; Gamil Matar and 'Ali al-Din al-Hilal Dessouki (1983), *Al-Nizam al-'Iqlimi al-'Arabi*, *The Arab Regional Order*, Beirut, Dar al-Mustaqbal al-'Arabi.

[3] This argument is made by F. Gregory Gause III (2007), "Threats and Threat Perception in the Gulf," *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (Summer), p. 123; *Ibid.* (2007) "Saudi Arabia: Iraq, Iran and the Regional Power Balance and the Sectarian Question," *Strategic Insights*, Vol. 6, No.2 (March).

[4] This paper defines unconventional threats as those challenges to the state other than conventional military force – in this case, terrorism, piracy, political subversion, and cyber-war. In most cases, these threats are carried out by non-state actors, although they may be supported by a state.

meddling in the region. Whereas the United States has pressured to address this challenge through calibrated but expedient reform, the regime has tried to shift the focus to Iran.

A GCC-Western Convergence: Piracy and Terrorism Threats

On the issues of piracy and terrorism there is general agreement between the United States, the European Union and the GCC over the severity and immediacy of the threat. Attacks targeting the Strait of Hormuz and Bab al-Mandeb (BAM) could block significant oil transports and severely damage the regional and global economy. Almost all of the trade between the EU and China, Japan, India and the rest of Asia passes through Bab el-Mandeb and up to 30 percent of the world's oil – including all of the oil and natural gas from the Persian Gulf heading west – passes through the Horn of Africa every day.[5] Additionally, about 17 million barrels (more than 18 percent of daily worldwide oil demand) transit the Strait of Hormuz daily.[6] Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) has indicated its intent to close BAM and the Abdullah Azzam Brigades (AAB) conducted an attack in the Strait of Hormuz in July of 2010 and may attempt to launch similar attacks in the future. There have also been indications that AQAP would like to advance their alliance with Somalia's al-Shabaab in order to carry out maritime attacks.[7]

Given the dependence of their economies on maritime trade through the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea, the GCC states have serious concerns about the threat of piracy. Oil tankers in particular, are an

[5] Thomas C. Mountain (2011), "Choke point Bab el-Mandeb; Understanding the Strategically Critical Horn of Africa," *Foreign Policy Journal*, 19 November, http://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2011/11/19/choke-point-bab-el-mandeb-understanding-the-strategically-critical-horn-of-africa/.

[6] Eugene Gholz, "Strait of Hormuz: Assessing Threats to Energy Security in the Persian Gulf," The Robert S. Strauss Centre for International Security and Law, University of Texas at Austin, http://strausscenter.org/research/strait-of-hormuz-assessing-threats-to-energy-security-in-the-persian-gulf.html.

[7] Rupert Herbert-Burns (2012), "Countering Piracy, Trafficking, and Terrorism: Ensuring Maritime Security in the Indian Ocean, STIMSON, April, http://www.stimson.org/images/uploads/research-pdfs/Indian_Ocean_Rising_Chapter_2.pdf.

enticing target for pirates because of the large ransoms they provide.[8] Evidence also suggests pirate activity is moving northward given that in 2011 twenty-two attacks and six hijackings were recorded north of the 19th parallel.[9]

According to the International Maritime Bureau (IMB), in 2012 at least eighty commercial cargo ships were attacked in the Gulf of Aden, with nineteen successful hijackings.[10] In the first six months of 2012 the IMB recorded a 54 percent drop in pirate activity compared to 2011. However, while moves to thwart piracy activity in the Gulf of Aden appear to be paying off, the IMB says that Somali piracy in the Indian Ocean is still a serious concern.[11]

The United States considers the main counterterrorism challenges in the Gulf to be the direct threat posed by AQAP, most critically in Yemen. A secondary threat is the flow of financial aid from Gulf charities and individuals to al-Qaeda affiliates around the globe. The GCC regimes, on the other hand, view terrorist organisations as a serious threat to their legitimacy. Terrorists groups like AQAP have successfully mobilised popular discontent against the pro-Western orientation of Gulf regimes. Additionally, by attacking oil targets, terrorist groups have the potential to weaken the ability of GCC regimes to bolster their legitimacy through the dispersal of oil rents. This risk was seen in February 2006 when AQAP attempted to attack a Saudi oil processing facility at Abqaiq. Had the attack been successful, it would have crippled Saudi oil production.[12]

While the current capability of terrorist organisations in the Arabian Peninsula has diminished, they remain a serious threat to the internal security and external stability of GCC states. Additionally, *jihadist* websites continue to galvanise support and facilitate communications between different groups. Terrorist financing continues, although Gulf

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[8] Centre for Strategic and International Studies (2011), "A GCC Strategy for Counter Piracy?" Roundtable Summary, May, http://csis.org/files/attachments/110513_Summary_Cosgriff_HB_0.pdf.

[9] *Ibid*.

[10] National Defence University (2012), "Piracy off the Coast of Somalia," 26 September, http://merln.ndu.edu/index.cfm?type=section&secid=263&pageid=35.

[11] "Piracy drops by 54% in Gulf of Aden," Sea Association for Maritime Industry, October 2012, http://www.seasecurity.org/2012/10/piracy-drops-by-54-in-gulf-of-aden/.

[12] "Saudis Foil Oil Facility Attack," *BBC News*, 24 February 2006 http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4747488.stm.

states, particularly the Emirates, have made great strides in curtailing it. Saudi Arabia, in particular, has endeavoured to cut off non-official funding to al-Qaeda-linked groups in Syria, having learned the painful lesson of blowback during the Iraq War.[13]

Responses to piracy: the US and Europe carry most of the burden

Despite the fact that the economies of GCC states rely significantly on maritime trade through the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea, the United States and Europe have borne the brunt of counter-piracy efforts in the region. Part of this is due to the perennial inability of the GCC to field a truly multilateral and coordinated military force. In other instances, it reflects an on-going preference by individual Gulf states to keep interactions with NATO and the European Union at a bilateral level.[14]

Aggressive patrolling by combined international naval forces and the growing use of private security contractors on vessels are acting as an effective deterrent in many cases. Currently, around three dozen warships patrol more than one million square miles of territory. These include ships from the European Union Naval Force antipiracy operation (EU NAVFOR) and the US Navy, as well as those provided by Russia, India, China and NATO.[15]

As a UN Security Council permanent member, the United States supported international resolutions authorising international action in Somalia against pirates. Beyond this, the United States assisted in the founding of an international Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of

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[13] Ulrichsen (2009), "Gulf Security," *cit*.

[14] An example of this is the troubled state of NATO's Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI), which the Gulf states see as increasingly counterproductive. The ICI was established in 2004 and promotes practical defence and security cooperation between NATO and individual countries of the Broader Middle East region. The Initiative is complementary to, but separate from, NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue. The ICI offers countries of the region voluntary, mutually beneficial opportunities to cooperate with NATO through individual tailored programmes. Issues covered included defence reform; civil-military relations; promoting military-to-military cooperation; fighting terrorism through information sharing and maritime cooperation; and countering the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. To date, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates have formally joined the ICI. The first visit by the North Atlantic Council (NAC) to the region took place in 2006 when Kuwait hosted a conference on cooperation with Gulf countries. Since then, the NAC has participated in conferences in Bahrain in 2008 and the Emirates in 2009.

[15] "Piracy drops by 54% in Gulf of Aden," *cit.*

Somalia to coordinate individual counter-piracy efforts. At the military level, the US Navy and US Coast Guard contribute forces to the Combined Maritime Force's Task Force 151 which conducts counter-piracy operations. Washington also supports NATO Operation Ocean Shield and EU Naval Forces' Operation Atalanta.[16]

The main focus areas of the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) are 'defeating terrorism, preventing piracy, encouraging regional cooperation, and promoting a safe maritime environment'.[17] The CMF draws together twenty-seven national components split between three major Combined Task Forces (CTFs). CTF-150 (maritime security and counter-terrorism), CTF-151 (counter-piracy) and CTF-152 (Arabian Gulf security and cooperation). The CMF is led by US Naval Forces Central Command commander Vice Admiral William Gortney and its deputy is the United Kingdom (UK) maritime Component Command Chief Commodore Tim Lowe of the Royal Navy.[18]

The European Union has taken on a particularly strong role in maritime security and counter-piracy. Because its view is that piracy will not be ended until the root causes of the problems in Somalia are successfully tackled, the European Union has developed its activity by formulating a Strategy for the Horn of Africa and appointing a Special Representative for the area, as well as launching the EU Training Mission (EUTM) Somalia, a six month training programme scheduled to end in December 2012 which trains security forces and aims to strengthen the Somali government.[19]

The EU has also launched EUCAP Nestor which aims to combat piracy by strengthening the rule of law sector in Somalia, with an initial focus on the regions of Puntland and Somaliland. In particular, the mission will support the development of a coastal police force and the judiciary. It will also strengthen the sea-going maritime capacity of Djibouti, Kenya and

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[16] US State Department, "The United States Response to Piracy off the Coast of Somalia," http://www.state.gov/t/pm/ppa/piracy/c32662.htm.

[17] Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) Website, http://combinedmaritimeforces.com/about/.

[18] See, Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) Website, http://combinedmaritimeforces.com/about/.

[19] EU Common Security and Defence Policy (2012), "EU military mission to contribute to the training of the Somali Security Forces (EUTM Somalia)," 26 March, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/missionPress/files/Fact%20sheet%20EUTM%20-%20EN_March%202012.pdf.

the Seychelles.[20] The European Union is focusing on providing alternative livelihoods for the Somali in order to remove incentives for piracy and make sure that the coastal states of the region are able to police their own coastlines.

The European Union agreed to set up Operation Atalanta in 2008 as an operation to combat piracy and in March 2012 the operation's mandate was extended until December 2014. Operation Atalanta operates in a zone comprising the south of the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, the Somali basin and part of the Indian Ocean, including the Seychelles.[21]

GCC counter-piracy efforts

In recent years, there have been nascent but largely incomplete efforts by the Gulf to shoulder more of the counter-piracy burden. The military side of the GCC, the Peninsula Shield Force, established a maritime information-sharing centre in Bahrain in 2010. Although ambitious in scope, the centre has been hobbled by technical problems and perennial reluctance to share sensitive information by individual GCC states. Another key organisation is the Arab Navy Task Force. It was set up by the Saudis in June 2009 and includes eleven Arab navies from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Jordan, Bahrain, Djibouti, Sudan, Oman, Qatar, Egypt, Kuwait, and Yemen. However, not all countries have participated and activity was limited to protecting Saudi ships or assisting Yemeni coast guards in patrolling in the Red Sea or the Gulf of Aden.

Increasingly, Gulf states are relying on private military companies to combat piracy. Kuwait and the Emirates are believed to be funding Saracen International, reportedly trained a force of over one thousand men in Puntland to act as a land-based counter-piracy force. Some have expressed concern at the potential for this new force to undermine existing soldiers and peacekeepers being trained and supplied by the European Union and African Union (AU). While the Kuwaiti government is highly likely to be motivated to assist Puntland with combating piracy and Islamist insur-

[20] European Union Common Security and Defence Policy (2012), "Operation NESTOR Fact Sheet," July, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/1704166/eucap_nestor_fact_sheet12072012.pdf.

[21] Interview by the author with a member of the EU Delegation, Washington DC, 2 November 2012; House of Lords, European Union Committee (2012), "Turning the Tide on Piracy, Building Somalia's Future: Follow-up report on the EU's Operation Atalanta and beyond," 21 August, http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201213/ldselect/ldeucom/43/43.pdf.

gents in the interest of regional security, the interests of private Kuwaiti investors may also have been influential. For example, the Kuwaiti Energy Company is interested in concession rights in Somalia.[22]

The Gulf states' involvement in Somalia itself is unclear, although there have been a number of high-level attempts at mediation and dialogue. Aside from piracy, much of this involvement is driven by fears of collaboration and coordination between al-Shabaab and AQAP in Yemen. On 28 June 2012 the Emirates convened a summit in Dubai intended to achieve reconciliation in Somalia, which culminated in the signing of the Dubai Charter. The GCC described it as a historic achievement that would contribute to the cessation of a protracted bloody conflict. The GCC's secretary general praised the United Arab Emirates' efforts to achieve consensus among the parties in Somalia in order to preserve the region's security and stability.[23] On 5 July 2012, the commander of the UAE navy seemed to imply that the GCC was poised to play a greater land-based role in combatting piracy, calling for a combined GCC naval force that could achieve 'significant results' by 'taking the benefits of historical links, long-lasting economic relations and perfect knowledge of Somali society, especially [of] the clan structure'.[24] Yet given the structural weakness of the Somali Transitional Federal Government and the dominant role of African Union forces in Somalia, it is likely that the GCC's role will be largely secondary, confined to diplomacy and financial support.

GCC counter-terrorism cooperation with the US and the EU

In contrast to anaemic counter-piracy efforts, there has been more robust counter-terrorism (CT) cooperation on the part of the GCC, although much of this has occurred at the bilateral rather than multilateral level. Saudi Arabia has been at the forefront of this effort. Riyadh has made CT a priority for all of its security and law enforcement agencies. Importantly, the Saudi government has worked to coordinate efforts against terrorism financing by opening lines of communication between the Saudi Arabian

[22] "Kuwait and UAE look to tackle piracy in northern Somalia to protect variety of interests," *Gulf States Newsletter*, 11 February 2011.

[23] GCC Secretariat (2012), "Secretary General of the GCC commends the efforts of the UAE for the Somali reconciliation," Riyadh, 30 June, http://www.gcc-sg.org/index4e28.html?action=News&Sub=ShowOne&ID=2481&T=A.

[24] Awad Mustafa (2012), "UAE Navy Chief Seeks GCC Alliance on Piracy", *The National*, 5 July, http://www.thenational.ae/news/uae-news/uae-navy-chief-seeks-gcc-alliance-on-piracy?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=hmp&utm_campaign=feed.

Monetary Agency (SAMA) and the Ministry of Interior.[25] Internationally, Saudi Arabia has security-related bilateral agreements on counterterrorism cooperation with the United States, Italy, the United Kingdom, India, Iran, Turkey, Senegal, Pakistan, Tunisia, Oman, Morocco, Libya, Yemen, Iraq, Jordan, and Sudan.[26]

The United Arab Emirates has taken a variety of measures to implement a counter-terrorism strategy that includes enhancing its national legal framework, strengthening measures against money laundering, and enhancing all legal measures for preventing and prosecuting transnational crimes such as arms and drugs smuggling. The Emirates are also completing arrangements to host the International Centre for Excellence on Countering Violent Extremism. That centre opened in October 2012 and is intended as a forum where both governments and civil society actors can exchange ideas on combating terrorism.[27]

While Kuwait lacks legal provisions that deal specifically with terrorism and terrorist financing, the Kuwaiti government has taken certain measures to counter terrorism and violent extremism through other legal statutes and official statements. The government's decision, however, to resort to other legal statutes to try suspected terrorists has hampered enforcement efforts, according to a recent State Department report.[28]

Bahrain has worked to tighten restrictions on terrorism financing and bolster its border patrol capabilities. Bahraini-US counter-terrorism cooperation has also flourished.[29] Unfortunately, like Saudi Arabia, Bahrain's domestic opposition have frequently been included under its broad definition of terrorism. In 2006, it gave sweeping powers to its

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[25] "Saudi Arabia: The World's Finest in Counter-Terrorism," *Al-Sharq al-Awsat,* 5 February 2012, http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?id=29480.

[26] US State Department (2012), *Country Reports on Terrorism 2011 - Saudi Arabia*, 31 July, http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,,,,SAU,,501fbca228,0.html.

[27] "UAE renews commitment to counter-terrorism plan," Khaleej Times, 1 July 2012, http://www.khaleejtimes.com/kt-article-display-1.asp?xfile=/data/government/2012/July/government_July3.xml&section=government.

[28] "Kuwait laws 'lacking' in fight against terror," *Arab Times*, 1 August 2012, http://www.arabtimesonline.com/NewsDetails/tabid/96/smid/414/ArticleID/186303/reftab/96/Default.aspx.

[29] US State Department (2011), Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, *Country Reports on Terrorism, Chapter Two: The Near East*, http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2011/195544.htm.

security agencies and judiciary with the passage of the Bahraini Anti-Terror Act – a document that has come under fire from the UN and human rights non-governmental organisations (NGOs).[30]

For many years, Qatar's counter-terrorism cooperation record was mixed, although there are signs of improvement. In a State Department cable Qatar is said to be the 'worst' in counter-terrorism in the Middle East.[31] Although Qatar enacted strong anti-money laundering/counter-terrorist financing (AML/CTF) legislation in 2010, its efforts to counter terrorist financing outside its borders by private individuals and charitable associations have fallen short of international standards.[32]

Oman's value as a counter-terrorism ally stems in large measure from its strategic location at the mouth of the Strait of Hormuz. Muscat has benefitted from US security assistance to bolster its ability to monitor the strait, as well as its expansive land borders. Oman's cooperation on securing the border with Yemen is especially critical; several suspected terrorists have attempted to cross the border into Oman.[33]

Cyber warfare: an emerging area of GCC-West cooperation

Aside from piracy and terrorism, cyber threats are a critical unconventional challenge facing the GCC. GCC efforts span a broad range of actions intended to prevent cyber espionage, protect infrastructure targets from cyber attack, and counter the theft of intellectual property and trade secrets.[34] The Emirates recently confronted a wave of website attacks and phishing attacks, causing significant financial damage. In response, the government created a Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT) and special courts to deal with cyber crime.[35] Qatar, Saudi

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[30] Interview by the author with US Embassy officials, Manama, Bahrain, 12 September 2012; "USA hails counter-terrorism measures taken by Bahrain," *Bahrain News Agency*, 8 August 2012, http://www.bna.bh/portal/en/news/469299.

[31] US State Department, Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, Country Reports on Terrorism 2010: Qatar, http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/topic,4565c225e,-46d6814f2,4e5248192,0,,ANNUALREPORT,QAT.html.

[32] *Ibid*.

[33] *Ibid.*

[34] Roger Cressey and Mahir Nayfeh (2012), *Cyber Capability in the Middle East*, Virginia, Booz/Allen/Hamilton, http://www.boozallen.com/media/file/cyber-capability-in-the-middle-east-vwpt.pdf.

[35] Paul C. Dwyer (2010), *Cyber Crime in the Middle East*, Paul-C-Dwyer Security GRC and Cyber Crime Advisor, October, http://www.paulcdwyer.com/Cyber%20Crime%20

Arabia and countries such as Kuwait, Oman and the Emirates are now demanding greater US assistance in technology and expertise. Like Qatar in 2010, many want help from the US government and US companies. Saudi Arabia is setting up a cyber unit for defensive purposes and Aramco, the Saudi national oil company, has hired US consultants to help protect its networks.[36] According to a *The National* article published on 14 November 2012, 'All the GCC states are creating their own centres or programs related to cyber defence. There are no hard facts on spending or on counteracting cyber warfare, but numbers must be quite dramatic, clearly in the billion and billions of dollars'.[37]

Political and Ideological Threats after the Arab Uprisings

A central point of divergence between the West and the GCC is that the regimes in the Gulf define political and ideological challenges to their rule as 'unconventional threats' that are equal too, if not greater, than the threats from terrorism, piracy and cyber warfare. The general consensus among Gulf states is that the Arab uprisings of 2011 have opened the door for the migration of new ideological threats to their corner of the Middle East. This was most clearly evident in Bahrain's Pearl Roundabout uprising, which was severe enough to prompt the GCC's most serious expeditionary effort since its creation. The uprising has been frequently painted as an effort by Iran to extend its reach into the Gulf by local proxies. Less explicitly, Bahrain has emerged as an important litmus test of US reliability for rulers in Riyadh and Abu Dhabi. Frustrated and alarmed with what they perceive as Washington's blithe abandonment of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, Saudi Arabia and Abu Dhabi have pressured the United States to be steadfast in their

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in%20the%20Middle%20East%20-%20PCD.pdf.

[36] Ellen Nakashima (2012), "As cyberwarfare heats up, allies turn to US companies for expertise," *The Washington Post*, 23 November, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/as-cyberwarfare-heats-up-allies-turn-to-us-companies-for-expertise/2012/11/22/a14f764c-192c-11e2-bd10-5ff056538b7c_print.html.

[37] Triska Hamid (2012), "Cyber-warfare in the Middle East is no game," *The National*, 14 November, http://www.thenational.ae/thenationalconversation/industry-insights/technology/cyber-warfare-in-the-middle-east-is-no-game#page2.

support of the al-Khalifa ruling family. Saudi Arabia has also witnessed convulsions in its Eastern Province by marginalised Shi'ite communities. Since October 2011, roughly fifteen people are believed to have been killed in clashes with security policies. Like Bahrain, the ruling regime has viewed – or at least portrayed – the protests through the prism of Saudi-Iranian strategic competition.

Increasingly, there are accusations that the United States is abetting this strategy. The anxiety over what the United States plans for the region is most dramatic in Bahrain, where high ranking government officials, Sunni Islamists and commentators in official media regularly raise the fear that Washington is plotting to create an al-Wifaq-led government in a regional reordering of power that would include a strengthening of US ties with Iran.[38] It is important to note that this sentiment is not confined to media and Islamist figures. No less a figure than the commander of the Bahrain Defence Force (BDF), an important security partner with the United States, has made the accusation that the domestic Shi'ite opposition has been cooperating with Western NGOs to subvert the kingdom and hand it over to Iran.[39]

Aside from the spectre of Shi'ism and Iranian influence, a new, potentially more dangerous threat has vexed Gulf leaders: 'Ikhwan-o-phobia' or fear of the Muslim Brotherhood. The Muslim Brotherhood threat is especially pernicious because it challenges the legitimacy of hereditary rulers using Islamic vocabulary, fused with populist rhetoric and a democratic political programme. Here again, there are mounting concerns that the United States may be coddling the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and facilitating its rise throughout the region. Fears of the Brotherhood are most pronounced in the Emirates and Saudi Arabia whereas Kuwait,

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[38] Andrew Hammond and Rania El Gamal, "Analysis – Some Gulf rulers wary of U.S. shifts on Islamists, Iran," *Reuters*, 5 September 2012. In fall 2012 interviews with the author, a number of Sunni Islamists were astounded that President Obama publicly mentioned the main Shi'ite opposition society, al-Wifaq, during his speech to the UN General Assembly on 21 September 2011. These figures believed that the mere mention of al-Wifaq was proof that Washington was conspiring behind the Bahraini government's back.

[39] Husayn al-Harbi (2011), "Al-Mashir Khalifa bin Ahmed al-Khalifa li-Al-Ra'y: Nam Huhnaka Ma'mara li-Qalb Nitham al-Hakim…Wa Laysa Li-Ma'arada Silah bi-al-Rab'i al-'Arabi" (Field Marshal Khalifa bin Ahmed al-Khalifa to al-Ra'y: Yes, there is a Conspiracy to Overthrow the Ruling System … And There is No Connection Between the Opposition and the Arab Spring), *Al-Rayy* (Kuwait), 11 March.

Bahrain and Qatar are more tolerant of the Brotherhood. Indeed, in the case of Bahrain, because of the sectarian split, the local Ikhwan have long been cultivated by the al-Khalifa as political allies against the Shi'ites.

As said, the fear of the Brotherhood is especially pronounced in the Emirates. Here, anxieties have resulted in increasingly repressive behaviour at home and the Gulf region that clashes with the US approach to the wider Arab world. The Emirates' interpretation of the uprisings revolves around two fears: the exploitation of the revolts by Iran; and the rise of Islamist groups, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood, which are hostile toward authoritarian regimes across the Arab world. On 9 October 2012 the United Arab Emirates' foreign minister stated that 'Gulf Arab countries should work together to stop the Muslim Brotherhood from plotting to undermine governments in the region.' The Emirates has arrested around sixty Islamists this year, accusing them of belonging to the banned Muslim Brotherhood and conspiring to overthrow the government.

Balancing cooperation and reform: the case of Bahrain and the US

In the wake of the Arab uprisings, new questions have arisen in the West about the liabilities and risks incurred by continued cooperation with Gulf regimes that are resorting to increasingly repressive measures against largely peaceful movements for political change. While these tensions between realism and idealism are not new, they have been further highlighted by the Arab uprisings. It is a dilemma that is particularly acute for the United States, which has sought to maintain strategic access in the region in its containment of Iran while at the same time bolstering the domestic capacities of regional partners to shoulder more of the counter-terrorism and counter-piracy burden.

The United States finds itself in an especially difficult position in Bahrain where, beyond the basing of the US Navy's 5th Fleet, Washington has enjoyed strong counter-terrorism cooperation with the al-Khalifa ruling family. Increasingly though, the United States finds itself in the undesirable position of maintaining close ties with a repressive regime that has skilfully avoided meaningful reforms while engaging in a concerted public relations campaign to burnish its image. Aside from the perceptual damage to US legitimacy in the region, this exposure is having more direct consequences on the ground. Although the ruling al-Khalifas are not in any near or even mid-term danger of being overthrown, mounting instability could jeopardise US access and personnel on the island.

In light of these challenges, US policy has used arms transfers as a form of leverage to convince the Bahraini regime to enact reforms – or at least empower factions within the royal family that it believed were more predisposed toward reform. In the fall of 2011, concerns about the government's abuses prompted a Congressional resolution to delay the planned sale of 53 million dollar worth of arms, including 44 Humvees and several hundred Tube-launched Optically Tracked Wire-guided anti-armour missiles (TOW). A State Department press release on 27 January 2012 indicated that a portion of the sale was in fact proceeding, using a clause that allowed military equipment under one million dollars to be sold without Congressional approval. In the release, the State Department cited 'initial steps' by the Bahraini government in implementing the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry's (BICI) recommendations and stated that the equipment – comprised of non-lethal spare parts – was being used to 'reinforce reforms in Bahrain.' Not included in the release, the State Department emphasised, are Humvees and munitions used by Bahraini Ministry of Interior forces for crowd control, such as teargas canisters and stun grenades.[40]

Withholding crowd control items may be an attempt to limit the symbolic damage to US legitimacy caused by the regime's crackdown. But such restrictions have had negligible effect on the street. Bahraini oppositionists point out that the regime has circumvented US restrictions by purchasing small arms munitions from Brazil and China. Most significantly, the regime bought Turkish-made 'Cobra' armoured personnel carriers as a substitute for the Humvee; the vehicles were deployed on the streets of Manama in time for the one-year anniversary of the 14 February uprising.[41] According to several activists, the 'Cobra' is actually a more effective crowd control tool than the Humvee because its smaller chassis allows it to traverse the narrow backstreets of Bahrain's Shi'ite villages.[42]

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[40] For background, see Frederic M. Wehrey (2012), "The March of the Hardliners in Bahrain," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 31 May, http://carnegieendowment.org/2012/05/31/march-of-bahrain-s-hardliners/b0zr.

[41] Interview by the author with Office of Security Cooperation personnel, US Embassy, Manama, Bahrain, 17 February 2012.

[42] Interview by the author with February 14 Youth Movement activists, Manama, Bahrain, 28 February 2012.

Ostensibly, the arms sales are also intended to shore up the more moderate, pro-reform crown prince against the hardliners – the State Department announced the approval during a visit by the crown prince to Washington in May 2012.[43] Yet the crown prince has been steadily stripped of significant authority since the Saudi intervention in Bahrain and diplomatic support from Washington is unlikely to restore this.[44] Moreover, the conservative faction – which includes the commander of the Bahraini Defence Force – has likely interpreted the transfer as a 'win' and sign of normalcy in US-Bahrain relations. For the opposition, specifically al-Wifaq, the release was a disheartening blow, confirming that Washington, in the words of one activist, 'carries a large carrot and a small stick' in its dealings with the regime.[45]

Conclusion

This paper has canvassed GCC and Western perceptions of and policies toward unconventional threats, highlighting key areas of convergence and divergence. A fundamental and often-overlooked dimension in analysing GCC-Western partnerships is the tendency of Gulf regimes to define the greatest threats to their security in ideological and political terms, emanating from within. While this feature is found throughout the Middle East, it is especially pronounced in the Gulf because of the nature of the ruling bargain in these states and the increasingly shaky legitimacy of the region's ruling families.

Historically, Western defence assistance has focused on helping the Gulf states meet a conventional threat – first Iraq, now Iran. But the Gulf states themselves do not define the threats from these more powerful neighbours in terms of materialist, balance-of-power calculations. In the case of Iran, the fear is not so much that a nuclear-armed Iran will attack the Gulf states with a nuclear weapon, but that it will feel emboldened

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[43] Josh Rogin (2012), "Obama administration seeks to bolster Bahraini crown prince with arms sales," *The Cable* blog on ForeignPolicy.com, 11 May, http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/05/11/obama_administration_seeks_to_bolster_bahraini_crown_prince_with_arms_sales.

[44] *Ibid*.

[45] Interview by the author with senior officials in *al-Wifaq*, Manama, Bahrain, 1 March 2012.

to conduct more aggressive terrorism and ideological subversion throughout the region.

While the threat of Iran and internal dissent borne of the Arab Spring have produced new levels of consensus in the GCC, it is doubtful whether this will translate into genuine military cooperation, the sharing of information, joint command arrangements, and interoperability of military communications and hardware. Military relationships among the GCC will continue to be arrayed in a spoke-like fashion, with the United States at the centre, playing the critical role of primary security provider.

Over the past decade, the Gulf has increasingly defined terrorism and piracy as threats to its efforts to integrate into the global economy, to say nothing of the safety of its own citizens. On these menaces, there is broad convergence between the GCC and the West, both in perception and response. It is doubtful, however, that GCC states, either bilaterally or as a collective, will ever develop a fully self-sufficient capability to meet these challenges in the future – outside assistance, whether from foreign governments or the private sector will continue to be the norm.

And perhaps more importantly, Western cooperation in these areas may become increasingly strained by divergent views about political and ideological threats to the Gulf, and the tendency of Gulf rulers to 'securitise' these challenges rather than address them with substantive reforms.

6.
The Odd Couple: NATO and the GCC

Florence Gaub

There was a time, after World War II, when multilateralism was considered the panacea to international conflicts – bilateralism was seen as a source of discrimination and therefore inequality within the international system, whereas multilateralism would create equality and therefore prevent war. While this view is long outdated, multilateralism has established itself as a key feature of the 21st century, with the number of multilateral organisations having grown from less than fifty in 1945 to one hundred or more by 1990.[1] Although not without its critics, multilateralism is seen today as the only option to handle certain indivisible challenges to human security which cannot be tackled by single states alone.

In this sense, it seems only logical that two multilateral organisations such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) would join forces when facing common threats. When NATO offered security cooperation and partnership to the member states of the GCC in its Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) in 2004, a new age of multilateralism seemed to dawn from North America to the Gulf, bringing together NATO's then twenty-six and the GCC's six member states. In contrast to previous NATO partnerships such as the Partnership for Peace (PfP) and the Mediterranean Dialogue (MD), the ICI deliberately focused on members of another multilateral forum.

Today in its eighth year, the ICI has not only proven to rest on significant potential but also to face a number of challenges which have limited its scope. As the threats existing at the time of the ICI's inception have intensified rather than subsided, common challenges seem to not suffice to foster cooperation between the two groupings. It is therefore time to

[1] Miles Kahler (1992), "Multilateralism with small and large numbers," *International Organization*, Vol.46, No.3 (June), p. 681-708.

revisit the relationship between the Gulf states and the Atlantic and ask: what are the key obstacles to deepened cooperation?

How It All Began: the Backdrop to the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative

Born as a self-defence organisation, the Alliance adjusted to the post-Cold War world's changed security architecture by reaching out to non-member states, seeking partnership and dialogue where no contact had existed before. Its transformation from collective defence to collective, and even cooperative, security has proven an on-going process, involving a new understanding of not only threats but consequently of security. Where the Alliance had divided the world in friend and foe during its first four decades, it now began to reach out to ever-growing circles of partners; where security used to be read in primarily military terms, it now grew into an indivisible complex which no state alone could face successfully.

This became apparent in the 1991 Strategic Concept noting that 'Alliance security must also take account of the global context. Alliance security interests can be affected by other risks of a wider nature, including proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, disruption of the flow of vital resources and actions of terrorism and sabotage', noting at the same time that 'the stability and peace of the countries on the southern periphery of Europe are important for the security of the Alliance, as the 1991 Gulf war has shown. This is all the more so because of the build-up of military power and the proliferation of weapons technologies in the area, including weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles capable of reaching the territory of some member states of the Alliance'.[2] In the following years, the Alliance created first the Partnership for Peace reaching out to European states, and then the Mediterranean Dialogue designed for states adjacent to the Mediterranean sea as forums to build trust and security cooperation. The Gulf would follow only thirteen years later.

[2] NATO (1991), *The Alliance's New Strategic Concept*, 8 November, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_23847.htm.

Analytically, such kinds of partnerships fall into the realm of cooperative security. Transcending collective security as well as collective defence, cooperative security grasps a certain way of interaction amongst states, or as the then Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans put it 'to connote consultation rather than confrontation, reassurance rather than deterrence, transparency rather than secrecy, prevention rather than correction, and interdependence rather than unilateralism'.[3] Cooperative security has no clearly identifiable goal such as collective self-defence, but it seeks to contribute to international stability and the reduction of likelihood of conflict through cooperation.[4] As such, it first emerged in NATO's 1999 Strategic Concept, but focused then mostly on the Partnership for Peace; only in the 2010 Strategic Concept was cooperative security promoted to one of the Alliance's three main pillars (next to collective defence and crisis management).[5] This document was also the first one to see the Gulf mentioned explicitly as a region whose peace and stability matters greatly to the Alliance, declaring the desire to 'develop a deeper security partnership with our Gulf partners and remain ready to welcome new partners in the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative.'[6]

The strategic shift responsible for the emergence of the Gulf in NATO's security vision as well as the strengthening of cooperative security had in fact occurred in 2001 with the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington DC. Although the attack on Afghanistan was not conducted by the Alliance but by a US-led coalition, in August 2003 NATO took the lead of the UN-mandated International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, its biggest out-of-area operation since its inception. The invasion of Iraq, again by a US-led coalition and against advice of the Gulf states (and a number of NATO Allies) proved not only a 'near-death

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[3] Gareth Evans (1994), "Cooperative Security and Intra-State Conflict," *Foreign Policy*, No.96 (Fall), p.3-20.

[4] Richard Cohen and Michael Mihalka (2001), "Cooperative Security: New Horizons for International Order," *The Marshall Centre Papers*, No.3 (April), p.33, http://www.marshallcenter.org/mcpublicweb/MCDocs/files/College/F_Publications/mcPapers/mc-paper_3-en.pdf.

[5] NATO (2010), *Active Engagement, Modern Defence: Strategic Concept*, November, p.8, http://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/pdf/Strat_Concept_web_en.pdf.

[6] NATO(2010), *Active Engagement*, *cit.*, p.32, http://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/pdf/Strat_Concept_web_en.pdf.

experience'[7] for NATO, but laid subsequent groundwork for NATO's 2004 Training Mission Iraq. At the same time, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) raised concern regarding the potential that Iran was developing a nuclear programme for military ends.[8]

Taken together, these developments not only contributed to a weakening of Iraq and thereby strengthening of Iran in regional terms, but also led to a rapprochement between NATO and the Gulf states as concerns about threats seemed to be converging. Regional instability (then as a result of Iraq's as well as Afghanistan's security implosion) had a direct impact not only on Allies in the immediate neighbourhood (such as Turkey) but also on energy security; piracy and terrorism disrupted economic as well as physical security, and added a financial burden to security budgets. Although at the time less prominent, the potential of an Iranian nuclear weapon unsettled the Gulf states just as much as most NATO Allies. Taken together, shared threats created a convergence logically leading to security partnership.

Against the backdrop of the launch by the United States (US) in 2004 of a new G8 initiative to promote economic, political and social development in the broader Middle East through cooperation and dialogue[9], NATO initiated a new cooperation programme designed primarily – but not limited to – the six states of the Gulf Cooperation Council. The programme aimed at 'enhancing security and stability through a new transatlantic engagement, offering tailored advice on defence reform, defence budgeting, defence planning and civil-military relations, promoting military-to-military cooperation to contribute to interoperability, fighting terrorism through information sharing and maritime cooperation, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery means and fighting illegal trafficking'.[10] Although open to other states in the region,

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[7] "NATO turns to terrorism fight," *BBC News*, 18 October 2003, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/3201578.stm.

[8] International Atomic Energy Agency (2003), *Implementation of the NPT safeguards agreement in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, 19 June, http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2003/gov2003-40.pdf.

[9] G8 Information Centre (2004), *Fact Sheet: Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative*, 9 June, http://www.g8.utoronto.ca/summit/2004seaisland/fact_mena.html Note: the region outlined in this initiative includes Arab states as well as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and Turkey.

[10] NATO (2004), *NATO elevates Mediterranean Dialogue to a genuine partnership, launches Istanbul Cooperation Initiative*, June 29, http://www.nato.int/docu/upda-

the ICI was developed and framed as an initiative directed towards the Gulf Cooperation Council and therefore originally aimed at cooperation between two multilateral bodies – a preconceived notion which turned out to be false as soon as only four of the GCC's six member states accepted the invitation, although during the initial consultations all had signalled interest.

In Practice: Cooperation between NATO and the Gulf

Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar and Bahrain accepted the invitation in 2005, whereas Oman and Saudi Arabia refrained from doing so (although choosing not to decline, either). The Initiative complemented NATO's other political outreach programme for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), the Mediterranean Dialogue[11], but retained distinct features. In contrast to the fact that the ICI was originally conceived as a means to reach out to the GCC, it ended up not being multilateral but bilateral in nature, and focused on military cooperation rather than political exchange. The areas of cooperation include: a) tailored advice on defence transformation, defence budgeting, defence planning and civil-military relations; b) military-to-military cooperation to contribute to interoperability through participation in selected military exercises and related education and training activities that could improve the ability of participating countries' forces to operate with those of the Alliance; and through participation in selected NATO and PfP exercises and in NATO-led operation on a case-by-case basis; c) cooperation in the fight against terrorism, including through intelligence-sharing; d) cooperation in the Alliance's work on the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and their means of delivery; e) cooperation regarding border security in connection with terrorism, small arms and light weapons and the fight against illegal trafficking; f) civil emergency planning, including participating in training courses and exercises on disaster assistance.[12]

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te/2004/06-june/e0629d.htm.

[11] Members include Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan and Israel.

[12] NATO (2004), *Istanbul Cooperation Initiative*, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_58787.htm?.

The birth of the initiative was accompanied by the inception of NATO's Training Mission in Iraq (NTM-I), an upgrade of the Mediterranean Dialogue to full partnership and a recognition of Libya's decision to dismantle its WMD programmes. All in all, the Istanbul summit declaration reflected an Arab moment in the Alliance's history, the recognition that regional security matters to NATO as well. As then NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer declared on a visit to Qatar, 'this region faces formidable security challenges. Several countries in this region have been the target of terrorist attacks. And your immediate neighbourhood remains a flashpoint of unresolved regional issues, of proliferation risks, and of political and religious extremism'.[13]

Compared to the Mediterranean Dialogue, the ICI focuses less on mutual understanding and dispelling of misperceptions. Instead, the emphasis is on contributing to 'regional security and stability'[14] in the broader Middle East region. From the outset, the Initiative thus took a noticeably more practical approach in the security area rather than focusing on the deconstruction of mutual suspicions. In part, this was due to the previous engagement with the Mediterranean Dialogue, which allowed the Alliance to build on established mechanisms and tools. In addition, the Gulf states' initial interest in NATO was rather greater than in the case of the MD. Since they had already pursued a strategic internationalisation of their security (e.g. by concluding bilateral agreements with France, Britain and the United States), a relationship with the Alliance could be seen as another card in the deck to achieve this goal. Yet there is also distrust and a lack of understanding regarding the way NATO functions, which ultimately has prevented the Initiative from reaching its full potential.

NATO's outreach in the MENA region is further complemented by its Training and Cooperation Initiative, launched in 2006 with the aim of making its training expertise more widely available to its regional interlocutors.[15] This was what had been done after the end of the Cold War in offering advice and support on security sector reform (SSR) to all former

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[13] NATO (2005), *NATO's role in Gulf security*, Speech by NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, 1 December, http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2005/s051201a.htm.

[14] NATO (2004), *Istanbul Cooperation Initiative*, NATO Policy Document, 28 June, http://www.nato.int/docu/comm/2004/06-istanbul/docu-cooperation.htm.

[15] NATO Review (2007), *The NATO Training Cooperation Initiative*, Spring, http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2007/issue1/english/art3.html.

Warsaw Pact members seeking to join the Alliance, a rather successful contribution to transformation in the states concerned. Niche expertise of this kind has resulted in education and training effectively becoming a diplomatic tool in the Alliance's portfolio – the training mission in Iraq being an important example of such activity. Education and training are attractive tools, as they allow for a certain level of engagement where the time might not be ripe for political acceptance of a partnership agreement. As an example, Saudi Arabia, which has so far not accepted the invitation to join the ICI, is participating in seminars, courses and conferences, which could be seen as indicative of tentative engagement.

So far the ICI has failed to develop the depth and strength anticipated. There is to date no framework document and no established military forum. In spite of the Initiative's strong emphasis on military cooperation, the level of participation in the activities concerned (such as seminars, workshops, mutual visits and participation in exercises) is low. In 2008, the ICI states participated in 57 cooperation activities (25 by the Emirates, 13 by Qatar, 12 by Bahrain, 7 by Kuwait). While this is a 72 percent increase compared to 2005, it is still only 10 percent of the total activities offered.[16] At the same time, NATO has tripled its offer on activities, which are largely (85 percent) of a military nature. To date there have been no regular meetings at the level of defence ministers or foreign ministers, and no Individual Partnership Cooperation Programme has been concluded with any of the states involved.

This stands in stark contrast with active participation by three of the four ICI states in NATO's operations – Qatar and the Emirates in Libya, and the Emirates and Bahrain in ISAF in Afghanistan. In addition, NATO has intelligence-sharing agreements with the Emirates, Kuwait and Bahrain. This seems to indicate that the problem in deepening military cooperation is not merely political but also structural. The Gulf armed forces engaged with NATO are rather small in size, ranging from 8,200 troops in Bahrain to 11,800 in Qatar, 15,500 in Kuwait and 51,000 in the Emirates.[17] Hence, their personnel pool is rather limited, particularly when it comes to the officer level.

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[16] Pierre Razoux (2010), *What future for NATO's Istanbul Cooperation Initiative?*, NATO Defense College Research Paper No.55, p.3.

[17] The International Institute for Strategic Studies (2011), *The Military Balance 2011*, London, Routledge, p.304, 317, 327 & 333.

More importantly, the ICI suffers from the absence of Oman and, to an even greater extent, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf giant in terms not only of size, but also of political and economic influence. The inclusion of these absentees would give the Initiative the credibility and visibility necessary for its success. For this reason the Alliance has kept the door open to both states, and Saudi Arabia has started sending officers to attend the NATO Regional Cooperation Course at the Alliance's Defence College. There are several reasons explaining why these countries have not joined: Oman's foreign policy traditionally seeks to maintain the fragile balance entailed in its close relations with Iran and its peninsular neighbours, whilst Saudi Arabia prefers bilateral ties and is generally concerned about foreign military personnel on its territory.

Common Threats, but Same Priorities?

A puzzling feature of cooperation between Gulf states and NATO is the fact that threat perceptions seem to overlap to a very large extent, whereas actual collaboration is in fact limited. This points to three possible explanations: the overlap is not as complete as it seems; the cooperation faces a potential structural problem; or there are divergent approaches to the threats in question – or all three.

Although the list of threats shared between the member states of NATO and the GCC is long, there is by no means total agreement within either body. Differences exist within the Alliance notably when it comes to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Notwithstanding deep differences in how the conflict is assessed within either NATO, or the GCC, support for the two-state solution is widespread in both organisations. And although Israel is a NATO partner in the context of the Mediterranean Dialogue, its tense relations with Turkey following the Israeli raid on a Turkish ship headed for the Gaza strip in late May 2010 have somewhat restricted NATO's freedom for manoeuvring towards Israel. Similarly, not all states – whether in the GCC or NATO – share the same view on how much of a threat Iran's nuclear programme actually is.

In sum, the ICI's potential is hampered by several elements: the hesitance of Oman and Saudi Arabia to participate, the largely bilateral nature as well as the fragmentation of Gulf security all contribute to its comparatively slow progress. Especially the latter aspect, namely 'the lack of real coordination among the GCC countries in the realm of security, a fact

that NATO has possibly underestimated for the last few years'[18] was an aspect which glossed over the fact that NATO as an Alliance was effectively not dealing with an Arab version of the European Union (EU). The divergence between NATO and the GCC is extensive, although they have a lot in common at first sight. Both were founded against an external threat – the Alliance formed, after World War II, against a Soviet threat to Europe, whereas the Gulf Cooperation Council came into being in 1981 amidst the turmoil created by the Islamic revolution in Iran and the war between Iran and Iraq shortly thereafter. Security, and shared threat perceptions among more than two states, was what brought both organisations to life. Yet this is where the commonalities end, as the organisations differ not only in their levels of ambition, but also in their implementation of multilateralism. But what is multilateralism aside from its numerical aspect, pinpointed at more than two states involved? 'What is distinctive about multilateralism is not merely that it coordinates national policies in groups of three or more states (…), but that it does so on the basis of certain principles of ordering relations among those states'.[19] These are indivisibility, generalised principles of conduct and diffuse reciprocity.

From this perspective, NATO is a somewhat truncated multilateral institution because the overwhelming power and prestige of the United States has given it a privileged status irrespective of the consensus-based decision-making procedures of the Alliance, according to which all states have equal rights and powers. 'At the same time, NATO provided security to its member states in a way that strongly reflected multilateral principles'.[20] Within this framework, the Alliance's ambition remained, throughout its history, restricted to defence and security, resulting in limited institutionalisation in the shape of an integrated military command structure established at the outbreak of the 1950-53 Korean War. NATO never professed ambition to be anything more than a politico-military alliance; and while one can argue that it has grown into a security

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[18] Jean-Loup Samaan (2012), *NATO in the Gulf: Partnership Without a Cause?,* NATO Defense College Research Paper No.83, October, p.4, http://www.ndc.nato.int/download/downloads.php?icode=353.

[19] John G. Ruggie (1992), "Multilateralism: the anatomy of an institution," *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No.03, (June), p.567.

[20] Steve Weber (1992), "Shaping the post-war balance of power: multilateralism in NATO," *International Organization,* Vol. 46, No.3, (June), p.633.

community, 'real assurance that the members of that community will not fight each other physically'[21], this change in its nature did not come with deepened integration. Within its own comparatively limited goals, NATO has therefore achieved what it sought to achieve.

The GCC's overall objective, in contrast, is much broader as it seeks 'coordination, integration, and cooperation among the member-states in all fields'.[22] Surprisingly, common defence and security were not specifically mentioned in its founding document although the GCC was born as a result of deteriorating regional security. Its main objectives, as noted in article 4, did not spell out a mandate for security cooperation, nor was the existing regional security environment mentioned as a matter of concern although it provided the geostrategic backdrop for the GCC's creation. In other words, although the GCC was born amidst and created because of a distinct shared threat perception, common defence was not a core agenda. As a consequence, security cooperation progressed only slowly. The final communique issued after the first summit in May 1981 merely affirmed the will and the intention of the signatories to defend their security and independence and to keep the region free of conflicts, but provided no further impetus for cooperation on defence matters.

Commitments to establish a collective military force, the Peninsula Shield Force, in 1986, were tested with Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, when the ineffectiveness of the force became so apparent that the GCC summit's declaration that year acknowledged its failure in deter-

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[21] Karl Deutsch (ed.) (1957), *Political Community in the North Atlantic Area: International Organization in the Light of Historical Experience*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, p.5.

[22] GCC General Secretariat (1981), *The Charter*, 25 May, http://www.gcc-sg.org/eng/indexfc7a.html?action=Sec-Show&ID=1.

Specifically, the charter seeks to:

- effect coordination, integration and inter-connection between member states in all fields in order to achieve unity between them.
- deepen and strengthen relations, links and areas of cooperation now prevailing between their peoples in various fields.
- formulate similar regulations in various fields including the following: Economic and financial affairs; Commerce, customs and communications; Education and culture.
- stimulate scientific and technological progress in the fields of industry, mining, agriculture, water and animal resources; to establish scientific research; to establish joint ventures and encourage cooperation by the private sector for the good of their peoples.

ring Iraqi aggression or protecting Kuwait against the invasion. It also called for the establishment of a new security and defence arrangement capable of ensuring the national security of every GCC state and protecting the regional security of all six states.[23] Most importantly, the inability to tackle the Iraqi aggression regionally brought to light the diverging visions of regional defence of the GCC member states. While Saudi Arabia had envisioned the Peninsula Shield Force as one able to contribute to regional conflict management and resolution, the other GCC states (except for Oman, which shared the Saudi perspective) saw the 1991 war as proof for the limited value of a regional security system, preferring reliance on external (especially US) aid. As a result, expansion and reform of the rather small force – Oman proposed to raise it from 5,000 to 25,000 or even 100,000 troops – turned into an intractable point, with the smaller Gulf states fearing Saudi domination of it while not perceiving any clear added value. Several other, fruitless, attempts were made to progress on the security file. In 2006 Saudi Arabia proposed the dissolution of the Peninsula Shield Force and the creation of a centralised command, flanked by decentralised national forces earmarked for the GCC – an idea that was welcomed but not studied further; in 2009 a joint rapid reaction force designed to address security threats, as well as the formation of a joint naval force, were initiated, but both measured have made just limited progress so far.[24] A step closer to common defence was the Joint Defence Agreement signed in 2000 which, along the same lines as NATO, recognises an attack on one of the GCC states as an attack against all of them – going further than the Alliance, the agreement actually recognised any 'danger threatening any of them means a threat to all of them'.[25] The agreement also established a Joint Defence Council and a Military Committee to supervise cooperation.

Thus, while the GCC has achieved greater integration in other policy areas (such as economic cooperation) it can hardly qualify as a regional security organisation. It is precisely for this reason that cooperation between NATO and the member states of the ICI has remained a mul-

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[23] Quoted in Christian Koch (2010), "The GCC as a regional Security Organisation," *International Reports*, Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation, 10 November, p.27.

[24] "Gulf states launch joint military force for security," *Al-Arabiya*, 15 December 2009, http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2009/12/15/94203.html.

[25] GCC (2009), *The GCC: Process and Achievement*, Riyadh, p.29, http://sites.gcc-sg.org/DLibrary/index-eng.php?action=ShowOne&BID=333.

ti-bi-lateral affair (28 plus one) rather than a truly multilateral one (28 plus four). The GCC's multilateralism remains underdeveloped when it comes to security concerns. 'Bluntly, it was barely possible for NATO to engage in cooperation with the GCC because there was scarcely any cooperation within the GCC to start with'.[26] When dealing with NATO, the Gulf states pursue their own national security agendas rather than a common one.

This is where NATO and the GCC are different: although born under similar circumstances and professing similar ambitions, the two organisations effectively show very different levels of security cooperation and integration – and different threat perceptions as well.

Although common views exist in the Gulf when it comes to the Iranian nuclear programme, terrorism, maritime and energy security, Iraq's stability and the Syrian crisis, there is not necessarily agreement on how to deal with them. While some states would prefer a more muscular approach to Iran, others, like Oman, favour dialogue and negotiation. Similarly, not all Gulf states have engaged at the same level with Iraq. As for the Arab Spring, some states, such as Qatar and the Emirates, have engaged actively both at the diplomatic and military level, facilitating regime change, whereas others, such as Saudi Arabia, have offered asylum to former Tunisian President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali when he fled Tunisia in early 2011.

Within the Gulf, disputes over border issues and internal rivalries, lack of trust and suspicions continue to hamper deepened cooperation. As the Gulf states feel incapable of defending themselves in the case of a large-scale attack, reliance on outside forces has featured prominently as part of the regional security strategy – a strategy which however is not shared by all the states.

Lastly, while the GCC and NATO share a long list of common threats, there are also disagreements which prevent further cooperation. These go beyond single issues: in spite of cooperation and common threats, perceptions of the Alliance or the West in general in the Gulf are detrimental to security collaboration. Doubts about a possible NATO's 'hidden agenda'[27] permeate the security establishment in the Gulf; US presence in the Alliance is seen not only as an advantage in terms of military

[26] Jean-Loup Samaan (2012), *NATO in the Gulf: Partnership Without a Cause?*, NATO Defense College Research Paper No.83, October, p.4.

[27] *Ibid.* p.6

might, but also as a disadvantage because its foreign policy is occasionally harmful to Gulf interests. 'The initiative being put forward within the framework of NATO has been perceived in negative terms as being no more than a mechanism by which the West can continue to control the region. With the reputation of the United States in the Gulf deteriorating rapidly, NATO was perceived as a wolf in sheep's clothing or as a new package for Western policies of the past'.[28]

CONCLUSION

Cooperative security between NATO and the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council has encountered obstacles in spite of a long list of common threats which range from ballistic missiles to regional stability and maritime security (tightly connected to energy security). This points to the fact that common threats alone are not enough to foster cooperation. As the analysis shows, structural as well as political issues impede the progress of collaboration.

In structural terms, the GCC does not profess the same levels of security cooperation as NATO does; cooperation between the two blocks is therefore not truly multilateral but multi-bi-lateral. Where the Gulf states continue to define their security policies at the national rather than regional level, cooperation with the Alliance reflects this. Fragmentation of security cooperation entails not only loss of momentum and efficiency, but points also to political differences as a root cause for this fragmentation in the first place.

This difference manifests itself at several levels: not only are there divergent prioritisations of threats but also different approaches to them, both within the GCC as within NATO. In addition, there are real disagreements over certain issues, such as the image of NATO in the region which jeopardises its credibility as a partner. All of these elements counterbalance the solid basis for cooperation which the common threats form.

In order to overcome these obstacles, a real strategic dialogue is needed between NATO and the GCC which, in truly multilateral form (28 + 6), includes not only those Gulf states which are not part of the ICI

[28] Abdulaziz Sager (2006), "What Do the Gulf Cooperation Council States Want from NATO?" in Ronald Asmus (ed.), *NATO and Global Partners: Views from the Outside*, Riga Papers, German Marshall Fund, p.17.

such as Saudi Arabia and Oman, but brings together all sides in one place. Ranking threats, and commonly identify approaches to these, would lend new momentum to cooperation and help overcome some of the structural issues. In addition, such a dialogue would add a new dimension to the largely practical Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, and help clarify NATO's agenda for the region.

Considering the many threats NATO and the GCC share, cooperative security is the next logical step. The need to overcome these obstacles is therefore self-evident.

Appendix A
"NATO's Relations with the Gulf Region"

Rolf Schwarz

Speech given at the Transatlantic Security Symposium 2012 "Potential and challenges of EU-US relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council" organised by the Istituto Affari Internazionali in Rome on 16 November 2012

Gulf Security Matters to NATO and Vice-Versa

NATO's transformation in the post-Cold War era has led to the creation of a wide network of partnerships with countries and organisations around the globe. In particular, NATO has developed closer political and security cooperation relationships with countries in the Gulf region. This marks a shift in Alliance priorities towards greater involvement in this strategically important region of the world, whose security and stability matters to NATO and vice versa.

NATO and Gulf countries are 'natural partners' given the common security challenges they face and given their shared commitment towards international crisis management, ranging from Afghanistan to Libya and the Balkans. The current drive towards increasing dialogue and cooperation between NATO and the Gulf region goes back to the decision taken at the NATO summit meeting in Istanbul in June 2004 to launch the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI). This initiative forms the bedrock of NATO's relations with the countries from the Gulf, but membership in the initiative is offered to all interested countries in the region. Directed particularly toward with the six monarchies of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the initiative aims to 'foster mutually beneficial bilateral relationships and thus enhance security and stability'.

NATO's relations with the Gulf region are part of NATO's wider outreach to countries and organisation around the globe. Indeed, NATO's new Strategic Concept, adopted at the Lisbon Summit in November 2010,

clearly states that 'cooperative security' is one of the Alliances' core tasks, that NATO does not consider any country to be its adversary, and that the best way of assuring NATO's security is through a wide network of partner relations with like-minded countries around the globe. The new Strategic Concept further recognises that the threats facing NATO's security today can emanate from instability or conflict beyond NATO's borders, including extremism, terrorism and trans-national illegal activities such as arms, narcotics and people trafficking. Many of these trans-national challenges are shared by the Gulf countries, and therefore cooperation between NATO and the Gulf states seems only most logical and natural.

THE ISTANBUL COOPERATION INITIATIVE: WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED?

NATO's ICI, launched in 2004, is a relatively young initiative but in its eight years of existence it has already made major inroads into NATO-Gulf cooperation. This was evident in the recent Libya crisis, where the close interaction between Gulf states, in particular Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), NATO and NATO member states was crucial for a quick implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1973, which authorised the use of force to protect civilians in Libya. Indeed, one can argue that the Gulf states have moved from becoming security consumers, to being security providers. This is even truer if one also considers the political and operational support provided in one way or the other by the ICI countries to the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. From this, one can clearly see how far the cooperation between NATO and the Gulf states has evolved to the level of concrete joint operational missions.

Indeed, the crisis in Libya in 2011 is probably the best illustration of the benefits of NATO-Gulf cooperation. Not only does the Libya crisis highlight the interconnectedness of security in the 21st century for the crisis in Libya at NATO's doorsteps affected not only the security of NATO member countries but also the security of NATO's partners in the region. In fact, it was calls coming from the region, notably from the GCC and Arab League Ministerial Meetings in March 2011 that led to the decision by the UN Security Council to approve Resolution 1973 and later to NATO's decision to implement that resolution by, among other things, enforcing a

no-fly-zone over Libya. One might argue that the fact that NATO had been engaged for many years with these Arab countries through the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative and the Mediterranean Dialogue (MD), subsequently enabled the Alliance to politically engage with regional actors in implementing the UN mandate. In that sense, the Libyan crisis also underlined the full potential of NATO's cooperation with the countries of the region, through the concrete contributions by Morocco, Jordan, Qatar and the Emirates to the NATO-led Operation Unified Protector (OUP).

The unprecedented level of cooperation between NATO and Gulf states underlines that the ICI partnership has come a long way even though Oman and Saudi Arabia have not yet officially joined the initiative. Indeed, the advantages of the ICI partnership are that they offer a forum for political and military consultations and for establishing better mutual trust that can lead to concrete security cooperation. Indeed, the level of political dialogue has increased tremendously over the years. The secretary general and his deputy together with the entire North Atlantic Council have visited all four ICI partners: in 2006 Kuwait, in 2008 Bahrain, in 2009 the Emirates, and in 2011 Qatar. In all these meetings, representatives from the other two GCC member states, Oman and Saudi Arabia, as well as the secretary general of the Gulf Cooperation Council participated. In 2012 alone, the secretary general of the GCC, the prime minister of Qatar, and the minister of state of foreign affairs of Saudi Arabia visited NATO headquarters to hold consultations. Additional high-level political consultations took place in the framework of the ICI, through the North Atlantic Council seminar on 14 February 2012 in order to discuss ways to deepen the ICI partnership ahead of the NATO Summit in Chicago. At the Chicago Summit in May 2012, three Gulf foreign ministers (from Bahrain, Qatar, and the UAE) represented their government in different meetings. If one adds the bi-annual ISAF ministerial meetings, as well as the ministerial meetings during Operation Unified Protector in 2011, one can easily make the case that political dialogue between NATO and the Gulf states is closer and more regular than ever before. If one also adds ad hoc meetings on such issues as anti-piracy, military or education, one can also include Saudi Arabia and Oman into this equation and thus argue confidentially that NATO's regular consultations with all GCC states has advanced considerably and seen concrete expression in joint operations (OUP and ISAF) where Gulf nations have supported NATO missions through military, financial and other contributions.

Working within NATO's ICI framework has also allowed NATO member states to contribute towards a better mutual understanding, especially given joint education and training efforts, and has thereby diminished misperceptions which existed when the ICI initiative was launched. Indeed, the founding document of the ICI mentions in article 9 that 'this initiative would carry NATO into a *new* set of relationships with countries that may have a *limited* understanding of the Alliance as it has been transformed' (emphasis added). With the decision, taken in 2011, by the Emirates to designate, as the first ever country from the Middle East, an ambassador and to open a mission at NATO headquarters, one can ascertain that this characterisation no longer applies. The relationship between NATO and Gulf countries has been elevated significantly and both sides know each other well and appreciate the cooperation they have attained. The offer by Kuwait to host a Regional ICI Centre in Kuwait City, announced at the NATO Chicago Summit in 2012, will further advance the level of interaction and understanding.

The Arab Spring and NATO's Partnership with the Middle East

Contrary to public perception, NATO is not new to the Middle Eastern region: NATO has two complementary yet distinct partnership frameworks, the Mediterranean Dialogue since 1994 and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative launched in 2004, and will build on these to better tailor the cooperation so that it reflects the specific needs and priorities of partners, particularly in view of recent developments associated with the Arab Spring.

Unprecedented changes have taken place in the Middle East and the people of the region have decided to take their destiny into their own hands calling for better living conditions, for more democratic and accountable governments, that are respectful of their fundamental human rights and able to provide them with better services. These changes are political, social and economic in character and they are therefore primarily a matter of domestic political stability. The three most prominent cases are Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya.

NATO's existing MD and ICI cooperation is well structured to adjust to the changes witnessed in the region. There is clearly a need to reach out to new elites, continue engagement through more political dialogue,

such as visits to NATO and to the region by NATO officials, and tailored practical cooperation through individual programmes of cooperation (so called Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programmes). NATO has also made it clear that it stands ready, as an Alliance, to support on-going transition in the area of security, institutions building, defence modernisation, security sector reform, building integrity and best practices in defence budgeting and the democratic control of armed forces.

The 2012 NATO Summit in Chicago sent a strong signal of cooperation to the Middle East and North Africa region. NATO heads of state and government affirmed that at a time of unprecedented changes in the Mediterranean and broader Middle East, NATO is committed to strengthening and developing partnership relations with countries in the region, with whom 'we face common security challenges and share the same goals for peace, security and stability'. NATO's leaders affirmed further that 'NATO supports the aspirations of the people of the region for democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law – values which underpin the Alliance'.

NATO-GCC Relations: Future Challenges and the Way Forward

Clear progress has already been achieved in the ICI, both in the political dialogue with Gulf countries and in the practical dimension with ICI partners. NATO has increased its offer of cooperation to ICI countries each year since the launch of the initiative in 2004 and, with the decision at the Berlin foreign ministerial meeting in April 2011 and the establishment of a single Partnership Cooperation Menu (PCM) for all of NATO's partners, it has considerably expanded the number of activities accessible to ICI countries. With a view to the future, a challenge will be to develop concrete practical cooperation projects in the areas of interest to Gulf states, notably energy, maritime and cyber security, to underline that NATO's ICI partnership responds to the security needs of Gulf states and brings mutual benefits. There is also a need to work towards more regular contacts and political dialogue between NATO and the GCC, such as the visit by the GCC secretary general to NATO headquarters in January 2012 and the visit by the NATO deputy secretary general to Riyadh in December 2012, with the aim of establishing working relations between the two secretariats.

Finally, there is a need to continue building trust and maintain a dialogue-based public diplomacy strategy for NATO's cooperative activities with ICI countries: careful attention must be paid for NATO not to be misperceived as intrusive or wishing to take advantage of the current phase of domestic changes taking place in some countries of the Middle East. Such misperceptions could backfire and set back many years of work undertaken jointly by NATO and ICI countries, but also with MD countries, in a joint effort to correct misperceptions, building mutual understanding and trust, and thereby contributing to long-term regional security and stability.

Appendix B
Potential and Challenges of EU-US Relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council

Report of the Transatlantic Security Symposium 2012

Andrea Dessì

The 2012 edition of the *Transatlantic Security Symposium* aimed to discuss the West's deepening relationship with the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in the context of a profoundly changed regional landscape and analyse the potentials and challenges that are likely to emerge in the short, medium and long-term. Experts from the Gulf region, the European Union (EU), and the United States (US) convened in Rome at Italy's Ministry of Foreign Affairs to discuss these developments allowing for a fruitful exchange of ideas and recommendations between a group of academics, policy-makers and area experts from different backgrounds.

Structure of the Conference

The conference was divided into three sessions, each dedicated to exploring a specific macro-issue and its effects on the West's relationship with GCC states. The first session dealt with the Arab Spring and its implications for EU-US relations with the GCC. The second session focused on the standoff over Iran's nuclear programme and explored whether shared concerns over Iran's nuclear ambitions can really serve as a basis for a West-GCC strategic re-alignment. Between the second and third sessions a NATO official delivered a keynote speech addressing the Alliance's relationship with the GCC in the context of NATO's Istanbul

Cooperation Initiative (ICI).[1] Finally, the third session of the conference explored the potentials and obstacles for a West-GCC security partnership to counter mutual threats such as regional instability, terrorism and piracy. What follows provides a detailed report of the discussion held at the conference. As usual with the Symposium reports, the opinions expressed are not attributed to participants. Titles and positions of the mentioned speakers are given in appendix C.

AGENDA

Opening the seminar proceedings, Political Director Sandro De Bernardin from Italy's Ministry of Foreign Affairs highlighted the significance of focusing on West-GCC relations in the wake of the important new developments in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. He underscored the increased regional activism displayed by GCC states while however reminding the audience that domestic stability in the Gulf cannot be taken for granted in the long-term. Ambassador De Bernardin stressed that both an opportunity and challenges exist in trying to strengthen the West's relations with the GCC, but cautioned that a structured political framework to channel this relationship is still lacking.

The podium then passed to IAI Director Ettore Greco, who placed the fifth edition of the *Transatlantic Security Symposium* in the context of IAI's extensive activities on issues relating to EU-US relations, the Mediterranean region and the Gulf.[2] The Gulf, noted Greco, had unquestionably become a crucial area for transatlantic cooperation.

Final introductory remarks were delivered by Riccardo Alcaro from IAI, who linked the 2012 edition of the conference to the preceding year's event entitled: *Re-thinking Western Policies in Light of the Arab Uprisings*. By focusing on the Gulf, a key section of the geopolitical framework in the region, the 2012 *Transatlantic Security Symposium* built on the 2011

[1] See appendix A.

[2] In this context, IAI is currently acting as project coordinator of a three-year project, Transworld (http://www.transworld-fp7.eu/), run by IAI's Transatlantic programme, and of another project, Sharaka (http://www.sharaka.eu/), aimed at enhancing understanding and cooperation in EU-GCC relations and run by IAI's Mediterranean and Middle East programme. Both Transworld and Sharaka are funded by the European Commission.

edition and highlighted the deep transformations occurring in the West's relationship with GCC states. Alcaro recalled that energy interests have traditionally formed a core pillar of this relationship. He nevertheless emphasised that, in light of the United States' diminishing dependence on Gulf oil and the emergence of new security and geostrategic concerns in the region, West-GCC ties have expanded beyond the energy paradigm to include broader political, military and economic issues. While at a first glance the deepening of EU-US relations with the GCC is based on a number of mutual concerns and interests, significant challenges lay ahead, including the dilemma of how the West can reconcile its interest in cooperating with the authoritarian and socially conservative GCC states with its commitment to liberal democratic values. The overall objective of the conference, Alcaro concluded, was that of exploring these short, medium and long-term challenges by concentrating on a series of macro-issues that have the greatest potential to influence West-GCC relations.

First Session. The Arab Spring: Challenges and Opportunities for West-GCC Cooperation

The first roundtable discussion was chaired by Nathalie Tocci, and consisted in the presentation and discussion of two papers authored by Christian Koch and Claire Spencer and Jane Kinninmont. Discussants for this session included Michael Eisenstadt, Steven Heydemann and Abdullah Saleh Baabood.

As the GCC increases its activism in the region, the EU and the US have visibly deepened their relationship with GCC states. The greatest example of West-GCC cooperation is NATO's campaign in Libya, which was called for by the Arab League but also championed by the GCC. Following the beginning of the campaign two GCC member states – Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) – directly joined the war effort. Attempts to produce an orderly transfer of power in Yemen, where Europe and the United States were content with Saudi Arabia taking the lead in mediating between the government and opposition, is another example of West-GCC cooperation. Finally, in the civil war in Syria the United States and the European Union are cooperating with GCC states and Turkey to support the Syrian opposition and devise a formula that could allow for an end to the fighting and a political solution to the crisis.

Tensions and disagreements are also present. This was especially the case following the United States withdrawal of support for its ally President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt in the wake of popular protests there. This caused much consternation in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere in the Gulf, due to a feeling that if the United States had abandoned Mubarak it could conceivably do the same with the Arab monarchies of the Gulf. This in turn led Saudi Arabia and other GCC states to increase their activism in the region and approve, without consulting Washington, the deployment of Saudi and UAE troops to Bahrain in support of the monarchy. The GCC's intervention in Bahrain is one of the main areas of disagreement with the West, even though this was not expressed in a public manner by the United States and the European Union. Financial assistance from Gulf countries to Salafi movements in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria and elsewhere in the region is another issue of contention not only between the EU-US and the GCC but also between segments of the populations of North Africa and the GCC, given their mistrust of Gulf states meddling in their political transitions.

Domestic, regional and international challenges to EU-US relations with the GCC. In the domestic realm, as the Arab revolutionary tide approaches the Gulf region – and the protests in Bahrain, Oman and Kuwait remind us of this possibility – tensions will likely emerge becoming a serious test for the West-GCC relationship. Regionally, one must question whether the long-term interests of the United States and the European Union are compatible with those of the Gulf monarchies, whose primary interest is to ensure regime survival. Do the transatlantic partners and the GCC agree on the broad outcomes of the political transformations underway in the region? Finally, at the international level, as the United States is backtracking from the region and slowly gaining energy independence from the Gulf, will the transatlantic partners themselves be on the same page with regards to developments in the Arab world? Europe still remains heavily dependent on Gulf oil and does not have the capabilities to replicate US engagements in the region, especially in the military and defence fields.

Origins of GCC regional activism traced back to the early 2000s. This was the case especially following the 2003 US invasion of Iraq. The way the US conducted the war and subsequent occupation of the country created much concern in the Gulf, especially in Saudi Arabia. GCC states lamented that the Washington did not listen to their advice and as a result effectively allowed Iran to break its regional isolation and expand its influ-

ence over Iraq's large Shi'ite population. Iran's increased influence in turn pushed GCC states to take a more active role on the regional stage, as evidenced by Qatar's mediation in Sudan's and Lebanon's political crises or in Saudi Arabia's sponsorship of the Arab Peace Initiative, first proposed in 2002. Other explanations for the GCC's increased regional activism are given by a vacuum of leadership in the Arab world and the fact that the administration of Barack Obama has not taken a leading role on important regional issues such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In the short-term the GCC has emerged as a pragmatic partner for the West. The West and the GCC hold similar views on a number of issues, but challenges will no doubt emerge. Transatlantic partners are overlooking the prospect of future political change in the Gulf because the economic situation there has allowed for internal stability. Gulf monarchies hold a greater degree of legitimacy compared to the Arab republics, particularly thanks to the economic hand-outs they have provided to their populace.

In the long-run challenges will emerge. There is a feeling that the future of the Arab monarchies is overly reliant on the ability of governments to keep providing their citizens with very generous (and in the long-term unsustainable) benefits. Furthermore, the ruling families are growing increasingly old and insulated from their populations. Technology is giving rise to many youth movements which are bringing social challenges to the forefront of national discourses. Youth unemployment is especially worrying and is compounded by the lack of a strategy for economic diversification in many Gulf states which remain dependent on hydrocarbon exports. Sooner or later these realities will prove to be unsustainable and public pressure will increase as hand-outs and subsidies are scaled back. Moreover, in light of events in the Middle East and North Africa new pressures will be brought to bear on GCC states. The question is how will they react?

The West can play a role... but it must engage the GCC with greater levels of ambition and press GCC states to play a constructive role on regional issues. The incomplete political transition in Yemen is a good case in point. The European Union and the United States at first exerted much pressure on Saudi Arabia to intervene and mediate between the government and opposition in order to end the fighting and establish the conditions for a smooth transfer of power. Once the agreement that led President Ali Abdullah Saleh to cede power to his deputy was reached, however, the transatlantic partners prematurely relaxed their pressure instead of ensuring that the deal was implemented correctly and that an

actual power transfer would follow. As a result the transfer of power has not been completed and Yemen remains highly unstable politically, economically and in security terms, with Abdullah Saleh still exerting considerable influence from behind the scenes. Moreover, Western powers must increase their bilateral consultations in order to make sure their engagements in the region are serving a common goal.

The West must look to the future, diversify and strengthen its relations and contacts with other sections of society in GCC states. The West should concentrate on promoting institution building, media and judicial reform in these societies. Moreover, contacts must also be established with youth movements as a means to prepare for any eventualities in the future. New EU offices should be opened throughout the Gulf in order to allow for greater contacts. At present the EU only has an office in Riyadh and will be opening a new office in Abu Dhabi, but more direct contact points will be needed in order to have an effective regional approach.

Distinguishing between EU and US roles in the region. While EU countries are important for trade, investment and weapons sales (the United Kingdom and France especially), they are not able to give security guarantees, and matters of security coordination are primarily run by the United States (which is also involved in arms sales). It is important to look at the international dimension to understand EU and US engagement with the GCC. In the context of the economic crisis and the United States 'pivot to Asia', Washington is trying to backtrack from the region, an aspect that is creating some apprehension in the Gulf but also in Europe. Perhaps a division of labour between the United States and the European Union could be in order, with the former concentrating on the Gulf while the later takes on more responsibilities in North Africa.

Significance of US pivot to Asia and diminishing energy dependence on Gulf. New studies predict that by 2020 the US will be self-sufficient in the energy field, and this will generate a need to re-prioritise US deployments and engagements in the region. However, given the massive US military presence in the Gulf, the need to uphold security guarantees towards Gulf states and the fact that Europe (as well as China) will remain heavily dependent on Gulf oil means that the United States will not disengage completely from the region and will continue to ensure the stability of international trading lines. Moreover, a resolution of the Iran question, as well as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, will need to be achieved before the United States can truly think about disengaging from the Middle East or the Persian Gulf.

Divisions among GCC states are also important. The GCC is not as integrated as the European Union, its organisation is totally different, and its member states are still troubled by past and present tensions. Divisions between Saudi Arabia and Qatar are reflected in the rivalry and competition between the TV broadcasting companies al-Arabiya and al-Jazeera, or in the alternative support for Salafi parties (Saudi Arabia) and the Muslim Brotherhood (Qatar). The Emirates is also uncomfortable with Qatari support for the Muslim Brotherhood, which UAE authorities have been repressing for years. Oman has publicly distanced itself from Saudi Arabia's and Qatar's willingness to militarily support the Syrian opposition. There are also different points of view within the GCC on how to deal with Iran. Finally there is the traditional mistrust towards Saudi Arabia due to the size and influence of the country and its potential to intimidate other Gulf states.

Second Session. Iran: the Uncertain Basis of a West-GCC Strategic Re-alignment

The second roundtable session was chaired by Riccardo Alcaro. The two paper-givers were Simon Henderson and Rouzbeh Parsi. Featured discussants for this session included Kayhan Barzegar, Trita Parsi, and Asaad Al Shamlan.

Iran and the West-GCC relationship. Western powers and GCC states share similar concerns regarding the potential threat posed by a nuclear-armed Iran, but this single issue cannot serve as a basis for a strategic re-alignment, especially in the long-term. In fact, while the West and the GCC seem to be on the same page regarding the need to halt Iran's nuclear advancements, views are bound to differ, especially in the event of a resolution of the nuclear issue and an eventual normalisation of Iran's relations with the West. Saudi Arabia has been a major Western partner in sanctioning and isolating Iran, especially in terms of increasing its oil output in the wake of the EU ban on oil imports from Iran. Notwithstanding the United States' declining dependence on Gulf oil, energy issues are still important when considering the Iran-West relationship. This is especially the case with Europe which sees Iran in trade and energy terms, including with regards to gas and the need to limit European reliance on Russian supplies. These considerations have caused some concern in the GCC, given fears that Europe might be ready

to accept a greater Iranian influence in the Persian Gulf and Middle East in the wake of an agreement on the nuclear file.

The Iran issue is not only about nuclear weapons. GCC-Iran rivalry is rooted in deep historical, ethnic and geostrategic dynamics and primarily has to do with a power struggle for influence in the Arab world and the Persian Gulf. However, tensions are also the by-product of US involvement in the region and Washington's antagonism towards Tehran. Iran wants to be recognised as a regional power and be an active participant in regional dynamics, but it is unclear whether the GCC and the United States would accept this. While GCC states fear that a diplomatic solution to the nuclear standoff could herald a Western rapprochement with Iran, there appears to be little appetite for this in Washington and perhaps a more realistic scenario could be that of a return to the kind of relationship that existed before the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, when the United States oscillated between containment of Iran and instances of low-level or issue-specific dialogue.

Sectarianism and the Sunni-Shi'ite rift. In light of the GCC's increased activism across the region and particularly in the wake of events in Bahrain and Syria, sectarianism has again emerged as a major dynamic in Middle East politics. This re-emergence of sectarianism is also traceable back to the 2003 US invasion of Iraq and the ensuing civil war that erupted in that country which in some respects resembled the Lebanese civil war of 1975-1990 (which itself had herald a resurgence of sectarianism across the region). As a result, events in the region are increasingly being explained in sectarian terms, but such a categorisation hides more than it reveals. While there is no doubt that sectarian polarisation and tensions exist, and that ethnic and sectarian rifts are present in all societies in the region, these divisions have been used by various actors to advance their political agendas. There is a tendency to suffer from a 'domestic blind spot' in the region and most states tend to explain their domestic problems in terms of outside interference thus deflecting pressure for reform while exaggerating the subversive influence of other states. Ethnic divisions and sectarian rivalries are a reality but their significance has been overblown and most of the foreign actions of Arab states can be explained in terms of power politics. This is also reflected in the way Iran conducts its foreign policy in the region by prioritising state interests over those of the revolution. Iran has demonstrated a capacity to act in a pragmatic manner as its actions are mostly dictated by instrumental calculations.

Zero-sum politics in the region. A major challenge for the region is the predominance of power struggles, rivalry and a tendency by Arab states to view regional developments as a zero-sum game. Sectarianism is also a by-product of this reality. Some maintain that GCC-Iran relations should not necessarily be based on a zero-sum game, but have developed along those lines due to US involvement in the equation. Europe could play a more neutral role and European experiences in overcoming regional antagonisms could work as an important example for the region as a whole, but Europe's capacity to act as a model is being undermined by its emergence as an active participant in the nuclear dispute with Iran. There is also an overall lack of strategic thinking in the European Union's involvement in the Iran-GCC rivalry and a tendency to send mixed signals. While on the one hand certain states, like France and the United Kingdom, have announced important arms sales for GCC states, thus angering Iran, on the other the European Union as a whole is trying to act as a player committed to a diplomatic resolution of the nuclear dispute. There is an inherent tension in these two approaches which must be reconciled if Europe is to emerge as a key player in helping to bridge the mistrust and rivalry between the United States, the GCC and Iran.

Risks of a nuclear arms race in the Middle East. In the event that Iran attains a nuclear weapon, there are concerns that states such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey and others would feel the need to achieve their own nuclear capabilities to counterbalance that of Iran. However, such concerns may be exaggerated, as all the aforementioned countries would have much to lose in their relationship with the United States, should they choose to pursue nuclear weapons.

All diplomatic efforts have not been exhausted on the nuclear issue... and there is still the possibility of reaching a diplomatic agreement. Due to practical military obstacles and regional and international realities the military option seems an unlikely scenario and Iran is hesitantly displaying a more forthcoming attitude for engaging in direct talks with the United States. In order for diplomacy to succeed however there must be a clearer articulation of the tangible political, economic and diplomatic benefits on offer if Iran were to compromise. Moreover, there also needs to be a clear understanding in the West and the GCC of what could be considered an acceptable compromise. More flexibility on Iran's right to pursue nuclear energy for peaceful purposes should not be discarded out of hand, as long as this is done in the context of a rigid inspection regime. In order to advance the diplomatic agenda, however, the West must give

tangible proof of its willingness to lift certain sanctions in exchange for Iranian concessions, rather than expecting concessions on the basis of unclear promises of a future lifting of sanctions.

A grand bargain. A series of open ended questions remain on what consequences would follow from a potential West-Iran rapprochement once the nuclear issue is overcome. This prospect is worrying for GCC states, given that there is a feeling that Iran and not the Gulf monarchies represent the West's 'natural' ally in the region due to the existence of certain commonalities in the political culture of the United States, Europe and Iran that is lacking in the Arab Gulf states. In the context of a possible agreement, GCC states worry that their interests and prerogatives will be overshadowed by the West's apparent willingness to accept a greater regional role for Iran in exchange for an accommodation on Tehran's nuclear programme. Iran has long harboured grievances for not being recognised as a regional power in the Gulf and in turn the United States has taken on much of the burden in working to isolate Iran and reassure Western allies in the region. Overall, it is highly unlikely that the United States will bargain away its extensive military presence in the Gulf in the context of an accommodation with Iran as continued US military presence in the area will be fundamental to ensure freedom of navigation in the Gulf while serving as a security assurance for GCC states. This will likely diminish some of the fears of the Arab Gulf states. Moreover, in order to avoid possible tensions with the GCC, it would be advisable to link any resolution of the Iran nuclear file to other outstanding issues in the Iran-GCC relationship, in order to reassure GCC states that Iran is capable of playing a constructive role in the region. In the long-run, however, it is debatable whether the United States will be able to maintain its military primacy in the region, especially if this becomes increasingly characterised as an insurance policy for the conservative Arab monarchies of the Gulf. The European Union will not be able to replace the US role and therefore some form of accommodation in the region that includes the GCC states, Iran, Iraq and Syria will be necessary in order to promote development, cooperation and stability for all.

Opportunities for cooperation... However unlikely, recent events in the region do provide some room for cooperation between the West, the GCC and Iran. It is important to note that in order to find lasting solutions to many of the region's unresolved issues – whether related to Lebanon and Iraq's tense political setting, the civil war in Syria, the Israeli-Palestinian and Arab-Israeli conflicts, persistent tensions in the Persian Gulf and

Iran's alleged nuclear weapons programme – an inclusive framework for dialogue must be created in the region. Solutions cannot be found by continuing to exclude two central powers such as Iran and Iraq, and instead an effort should be made to concentrate on issues that are of common interest to both the GCC and Iran. After all, the combination of domestic threats and outside rivalries cannot be sustainable in the long term, and some form of accommodation is arguably in the interests of all powers in the region. In Syria, for example, both the GCC and Iran have an interest in creating conditions that would allow for a solution to the crisis, and, contrary to what is often claimed, Iran is not supporting Assad at all costs but rather wants to find a 'soft landing' solution to the crisis. Iran, like other powers in the region, has shown a capacity to act pragmatically when it is not pushed into a corner and does not perceive its interests as being under threat. With regards to Iran's nuclear file, talk of a Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone (WMDFZ) in the Middle East could serve as a further basis for dialogue and cooperation between the West, the GCC and Iran, notwithstanding the fact that Iran's nuclear programme and Israel's own nuclear arsenal act as counter dynamics towards this trend.

Third Session. An Evolving West-GCC Security Partnership: the Shared Threats of Regional Instability, Terrorism and Piracy

The last session of the conference was chaired by Michael Bauer. The paper-givers were Federic Wehrey and Florence Gaub. Discussants for this session included Matteo Legrenzi and Michael Elleman.

Role of NATO is central when discussing West-GCC security cooperation. Cooperation between NATO and the GCC is limited, even though on a bilateral level the United States and certain EU member states have established good working relations with GCC member states. The problem with NATO is that it is widely perceived in the region as the military arm of the West, whose motives and aims raise suspicions of pseudo-colonial hegemonic ambitions. This is lamentable as NATO's potential for enhancing West-GCC cooperation is not limited to practicalities. In spite of it being perceived as the armed branch of the West, NATO can instead represent a model of a political-military organisation based on both

interests and values, and as such it can work as an inspiration for other groupings of countries, such as the GCC, which are willing to integrate. There are in fact some similarities when addressing the underlining reasons for the creation of NATO and the GCC, relating to an external threat (the Soviet Union for the former, revolutionary Iran for the latter), but that is where the commonalities end. The level of interstate rivalry and suspicion within the GCC is nowhere to be found in NATO, nor is a commitment to advancing integration on the basis of a common vision of the region and the world present. It must be said however that the GCC, as a collection of religiously homogeneous conservative Sunni countries, also features a degree of value commonalities. In addition, its role as a guarantee of reciprocal assistance in preserving the domestic status quo of its members is increasingly appreciated by the ruling elites of Gulf states.

Difficulty in defining the GCC as a unitary actor. The GCC acts as a united actor primarily when dealing with certain external threats (Iran, regional instability and piracy for example) but deep divisions emerge when discussing possibility of security integration and burden – or intelligence – sharing. This limits the possibilities of reaching a true security partnership given that in effect NATO-GCC relations are not conducted in a bloc-to-bloc framework but rather on a multilateral-bilateral (NATO-individual GCC country) basis. Overall, Gulf security is highly fragmented and it is debatable whether the GCC will ever make progress in security integration. For instance, while GCC states have spent billions in advanced missile-defence technology there has not been any effort to integrate these systems into a region-wide defence programme.

Defining West-GCC cooperation in security matters is problematic. There are fundamental differences in the ways each perceive and respond to threats. The GCC's major preoccupation has to do with regime survival and given that this fear is shared by the ruling families of all GCC states, many examples of GCC cooperation can be understood as a by-product of this concern. This is especially significant given the perception that the fates of the Gulf monarchies are closely interlinked and that a domino effect could follow if one family is overthrown. On the other hand, the opaque nature of these regimes combined with the fact that many still harbour instances of mistrust, jealousy and competition against each other has also prevented the GCC from increasing cooperation in the security field. The inherent tension between the West's professed support for political change throughout the Arab world and its deepening relations with GCC states whose priority is that of preserving the status quo in the

Gulf cannot be missed by international and domestic observers. Events in Bahrain are a case in point, evidencing the differences in the ways the West and the GCC perceive and respond to threats, while also undoubtedly representing a 'dark patch' in the evolving relationship between the West and the GCC.

Bahrain, the GCC and the West. The deployment of Saudi troops to Bahrain in March 2011 as popular protests raged against the governing al-Khalifa family represented a fundamental challenge to West-GCC ties. The deployment of the Peninsula Shield Force, a joint military force created by the GCC in 1984, was called for by the Bahraini ruling family and represents the first deployment of GCC troops in the region. Given that the troops arrived following an official request by the ruling family, it is incorrect to term the deployment as a unilateral military intervention that contravenes international law. However, the fact that the deployment occurred just days after a visit by the US secretary of defence to Bahrain led many in the opposition to believe that the United States had implicitly given a green light for the intervention. To date the United States maintains that it was not informed about the decision to deploy foreign troops and that it was presented with a *fait accomplì* by its ally, Saudi Arabia. The Saudi contingent was not directly involved in repressing the demonstrations, but was used primarily to guard important infrastructure and government buildings. According to one speaker at the conference, a major reason that led to the decision to deploy GCC troops was the financial damage the protests were having on Bahrain's business and financial sector. Following the deployment the United States has made efforts to persuade the al-Khalifa family to open a dialogue with the opposition and implement political reforms. However, US influence over decision makers in the country is limited. The West has invested much hope in the calls for dialogue coming from the Bahraini crown prince, but many experts agree that the true power broker in the country is the prime minister, whose powers exceed those of the king or prince, and is close to Saudi Arabia. The prime minister is also the principle opponent to opening dialogue with the opposition. Bahrain reflects the difficulty of balancing interests with values given that the presence on the island of the US 5th Fleet is fundamental to contain Iran and ensure the safe passage of oil through the Gulf, while the human rights violations of the Bahraini monarchy represent a clear stain on the West's professed commitment to political change and reform across the region.

Security cooperation against piracy is one area of success. Anti-piracy operations are one area where West-GCC cooperation has advanced, but the success of this can be explained by the fact that cooperation on this issue does not imply the surrendering of sovereignty given that operations are conducted at sea in extra-territorial waters. This diminishes the potential for mistrust and tensions between the West and the GCC as well as between the various Gulf states. However, as mentioned above, the GCC and the West differ somewhat on defining the root causes of the threat in socio-economic or security terms. As a result any long-term strategy to respond to the threat of piracy could hold the potential for disagreements if the focus moves inland.

Common threats are not enough to promote long-term cooperation. Thus, there are significant differences in the ways each side perceive, react, and prioritise security challenges. Iran currently features high on the list of mutual threats but contrasting views on how to engage Iran are already creating troubles in the West-GCC relationship. Moreover, as long as the West is viewed in the Arab world as biased towards Israel the potential for deep security cooperation will be diminished due to mistrust and the fear of being discredited by other Arab states. There is also a tendency in the Gulf region to confuse NATO, the European Union and the United States, and given that NATO and the United States are not viewed as neutral actors in the region, similar suspicions are also cast on the European Union's role. Finally the West and the GCC have different approaches to pro-reform movements in the Gulf, as well as to radical Salafi Islamism, meaning that for the time being talk of security cooperation is primarily limited to countering Iran, anti-terrorism and anti-piracy activities but do not tackle such issues as regional mistrust, rivalry and instability or the spread of movements pushing for social, political and economic reform in the region. A key future challenge in this West-GCC relationship will emerge when and if pro-reform movements increase their activities in the Gulf forcing Arab monarchies to increase their repression and therefore directly challenge the values paradigm which is meant to form the basis of US and EU engagement towards the region.

Appendix C
List of Participants in the Transatlantic Security Symposium 2012

Awes Abukar Awes	Second Secretary, Somali Embassy in Rome
Riccardo Alcaro	Senior Fellow, Transatlantic Programme, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Rome
Roberto Aliboni	Scientific Advisor, Mediterranean and Middle East Programme, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Rome
Abdullah Saleh Baabood	Director and Assistant Professor, Gulf Studies Programme, Qatar University, Doha
Kayhan Barzegar	Director, Institute for Middle East Studies, and Faculty Member, Department of International Relations, Science and Research University, Tehran
Michael Bauer	Head, Middle East Programme, Centre for Applied Policy Research (CAP), Munich
Cinzia Bianco	MA Graduate, Middle East and Mediterranean Studies, King's College, London
Michael Braun	Director, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Rome Office
Edward Burke	Associate Researcher, FRIDE, Madrid

Gabriele Checchia	Diplomatic Advisor, Italian Ministry of Defence
Silvia Colombo	Researcher, Mediterranean and Middle East Programme, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Rome
Andrea Dessì	Junior Researcher, Mediterranean and Middle East Programme, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Rome
Sandro De Bernardin	Political Director, and Head, Directorate-General Political and Security Affairs, Italy's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Rome
Michael Eisenstadt	Senior Fellow, Director, Military & Security Programme, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Washington DC
Michael Elleman	Senior Fellow, Regional Security Cooperation, International Institute for Strategic Studies(IISS)-Middle East, Manama
Florence Gaub	Researcher and Lecturer, Middle East Faculty, NATO Defence College, Rome
Ibrahim Al Ghareeb	First Secretary, Saudi Arabian Embassy in Rome
Ettore Greco	Director, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Rome
Christian Haenel	Deputy Head of Department, Programme Area International Relations Western Europe, America, Turkey, Japan, India, Robert Bosch Stiftung, Stuttgart

Simon Henderson	Senior Fellow and Director, Gulf and Energy Policy Programme, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Washington DC
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Daniela Huber	Researcher, Mediterranean and Middle East Programme, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Rome, and PhD Candidate, Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Volker Kaul	Researcher, LUISS-Guido Carli University, Rome
Christian Koch	Director, Gulf Research Centre Foundation, Geneva
Matteo Legrenzi	Associate Professor and Chair in International Relations and Gulf Studies, Ca' Foscari University, Venice
Elena Maestri	Researcher, Political Science Department, Università del Sacro Cuore, Milan
Raffaello Matarazzo	Researcher, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), and Political Analyst, ENI, Rome
Angela Mattiello	Parliamentary Advisor and Head, Foreign Policy and Defence Research Office, Italy's Senate of the Republic, Rome
Alexandra McKnight	Political Officer, United States Embassy in Rome

Cesare Merlini	Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Rome, and Non-Resident Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution
Katja Niethammer	Junior Professor, Department of History and Culture of the Middle East, Asia-Africa Institute, University of Hamburg
Rouzbeh Parsi	Research Fellow, EU Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), Paris
Trita Parsi	President, National Iranian-American Council, Washington DC
Eva Pfostl	Director, Economic and Juridical Area, Istituto di Studi Politici, S. Pio V, Rome
Francesca Piazza	Parliamentary Counselor, Secretary to the Foreign Affairs Committee, Italian Chamber of Deputies, Rome
Ovidiu Pufu	Third Secretary, Romanian Embassy in Rome
Nadia Quadrelli	Head, Office for Relations with International Organization, Italy's Senate of the Republic, Rome
Guido Rampoldi	Journalist and Author, La Repubblica
Rolf Schwarz	Political Officer, Mediterranean Dialogue & Istanbul Cooperation Initiative Countries Section, Political Affairs and Security Policy Division, NATO, Brussels
Stefano Silvestri	President, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Rome

Asaad Al Shamlan	Director of the European Studies Centre, The Institute of Diplomatic Studies, Riyadh
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Riyadh Al Thobaity	Administrative Officer, Saudi Arabian Embassy in Rome
Nathalie Tocci	Deputy Director, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Rome
Vladimir Vasilchik	Advisor, Russian Embassy in Rome
Frederic Wehrey	Senior Associate, Middle East Programme, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (CEIP), Washington DC
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Alexander Zezyulin	Advisor, Russian Embassy in Rome
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