



Gulf Research Centre Cambridge
Knowledge for All

Workshop 9

New Security Dynamics in the Gulf and the Transformation of the GCC States' Security Agenda

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Abstract

This workshop examines the transformations of the GCC states' security agenda prodded by the new security dynamics for some unleashed and for others reinforced by the Arab Spring. In particular, it seeks to discuss theoretically the drivers of the GCC states' new security agenda and empirically the roles played by the five dimensions of security – political, military, economic, social and environmental – on this redefinition. It is expected that papers will make contributions at both the theoretical level – security studies applied to the Gulf countries – and at the empirical level – specific case studies on different aspects of the GCC states' security. This panel therefore welcomes papers that discuss the impact of domestic, regional, and international factors on the GCC states' security as well as the roles played by political, military, economic, social and environmental factors on their new security agenda.

Description and Rationale

The six Arab states that comprise the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have in recent history been firmly at the centre of international relations and security concerns. Beset by a major conflict for each of the past three decades, the region has repeatedly been proven to be deeply unstable. The struggle over energy resources has been a conspicuous factor in recent wars, including the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), the Gulf War (1990-1991), and the US invasion of Iraq (2003). Cursed by their hydrocarbon riches stoking regional and international tension, these resources were nevertheless entirely transformative for the would-be GCC states from the mid-twentieth century onwards, contributing to the extraordinary wealth of these countries and shaping their domestic political and socio-economic realities. So too, the oil and gas resources became the backbone of their international alliances and proved to be crucial in saving one of the GCC states from continued subjugation with Operation Desert Storm removing Iraq from Kuwait in 1991.

Oil and its revenues have therefore been at the centre of Gulf security dynamics. Yet, since the 2003 American invasion of Iraq the traditional security dynamics in the Gulf have been questioned. Firstly, this operation demonstrated that the United States is no longer the hegemonic power that was able to impose its will regionally. The Iraq debacle, followed by the American wait and see approach during the Arab Spring with regard to Libya or Syria coupled with the “Pivot to Asia” doctrine, has directly challenged US primacy in the Gulf and its perception by the GCC states. This effect has been compounded by the 2007 economic crisis as well as the discovery of shale oil and gas, which have further reduced the traditional US economic interests in the region. It is worth noting though that US trade interests especially in the defence sectors have increased rather than the opposite. Concomitantly to the American disengagement or perceived disengagement from the region, the GCC states have been faced with enormous domestic and regional challenges since 2011. The so-called 2011 Arab Spring ushered an era of great uncertainty and instability in the Arab world and in the Gulf. Bahrain’s stability in particular has been directly challenged by this dynamic. Domestically, the GCC regimes have been busy fighting domestic movements (such as the Muslim Brotherhood, Iran backed organisations or Jihadist organisations) that could threaten their stability. The rise of the Islamic State (IS) in 2014 contributed further to challenge these societies both from within and from the outside. The Gulf States have been at the forefront of fighting IS in both Iraq and Syria. The power shift in Saudi Arabia in 2015 has also been accompanied by a more active foreign policy that has clearly identified Iran as the main threat in the region. The Yemen operation represents a watershed in GCC states’ military operations. For the first time, a GCC states’ coalition led by Saudi Arabia is conducting a major autonomous military operation. Over the last five years, the GCC states have moved from being passive observers of Middle East security to active shapers of regional dynamics:

Qatar and the UAE in Libya in 2011, Saudi Arabia and the UAE in Bahrain in 2011, Qatar and Saudi Arabia in Syria since 2011, the UAE, Kuwait, Qatar and Saudi Arabia against ISIS since 2014, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain in Yemen since 2015.

These power political dynamics have also been accompanied by new socio-economic developments. Firstly, the rapid growth of the GCC states economies have dramatically increased the number of expatriate workers, creating important domestic imbalances between the local populations and the expatriates. Managing this imbalance is a sensitive task. On the one hand, the GCC states need the foreign workforce to maintain their economic growth. On the other hand, such a high rate of expats represents a risk in terms of domestic stability. Indeed, foreign workers run the risk of bringing with them their own dynamics of domestic conflicts. The massive refugee crisis from Syria has been at the forefront of the GCC states' domestic security concerns. The rapid rise of foreign workers also has domestic implications that relate to food, water and energy security. The GCC states are highly dependent on food imports as well as water desalination. The latter is highly energy consuming. As the GCC states' populations increase, food and water consumption and, by extension, domestic energy consumption also increase manifold. An increasing share of local oil and gas production is consumed domestically, reducing by the same token the share of oil and gas for export. This creates a budget imbalance and has further highlighted the need for Gulf countries to diversify their economies. The massive drop in oil prices has compounded this effect since 2014. By losing more than half of its value, the new barrel price puts the GCC states' economies under pressure and requires austerity measures. For instance, Saudi Arabia has for the first time issued government bonds to generate new revenues while at the same time Riyadh is pumping into its foreign reserves to finance the country's 2015 deficit. The UAE has cut fuel subsidies and introduced VAT. These measures do not fit well with the rentier state model of the GCC countries. These measures aimed at curbing fiscal deficit bear the potential to be domestically destabilising for the Gulf monarchies.

As has been briefly sketched here, the security landscape facing the GCC states has dramatically altered, domestically and internationally, over the last few years. The purpose of this workshop is to take stock of these ongoing changes and explore how they are changing the security fundamentals and security agenda of the GCC countries. In particular, it will explore and seek to answer the following:

- What are the key dynamics, which redefine the security equation of the GCC countries?
- How have the GCC states responded to these changes and why?
- How are regional geopolitical changes affecting the GCC states' security and why?

- What is the impact of the rise of Islamic fundamentalist groups on the GCC states' security?
- What is the impact of non-state actors on the GCC states' security and why?
- What is the impact of social movements on the GCC states' security and why?
- How is the regional rise of Iran impacting the GCC states' security equation and why?
- What is the impact of the relative decline of US primacy on traditional GCC states' alliances and why?
- What is the impact of falling oil prices on GCC economic and domestic stability and why?
- How have the determinants of GCC states' energy security evolved and why?
- What are the key drivers of GCC states' food and water security?
- Have there been any changes to the governance of the GCC states' security policies and why?
- What are the future prospects for the evolution of the GCC states' security and why?
- Do the GCC states have the capacity to handle the new security environment?
- What are the steps taken by the GCC states to handle this new security environment?

The purpose of this workshop is to publish an edited book based on the individual papers presented. To that purpose, the panel directors will send a template that defines how each paper should be structured to the selected participants.

Contributions of Security Studies to Gulf Studies

Traditionally, the importance of the Gulf region was due to its energy resources. Yet, recent events have led to a sharp increase in attention and focus on this region. Since the 1970s, most of the Gulf States were not as active as they are today at the regional and international levels due to their focus mainly on development and domestic issues. Since the start of the so-called Arab Spring, the Gulf States have filled a vacuum of power in the region putting them at the centre of attention. Yet so far, very few comparative studies on the Gulf have provided thorough analyses of the security implications of these new dynamics and especially how they impact the Gulf States' security agenda. This panel consequently aims at providing a platform for scholars from and outside the Gulf to examine the changing security dynamics and agenda of the Gulf States.

This panel will also emphasize the theoretical dimensions of the Gulf States' security by anchoring them within the theoretical framework of security studies. Here, particularly useful as a point of departure is the framework provided by Barry Buzan (1991) which

identifies five dimensions of security: political, military, economic, social and environmental.

The political dimension deals with the issue of how states deal with power deficit at the regional and international level. Security policies are therefore a response to power imbalances and very often lead to alliance behaviours (Mouritzen 1997: 101-106; Walt 1987; Waltz 1979; Wivel 2005: 396). In the case of the Gulf States, regional and international power dynamics affect, to a great extent, their external behaviour. On the other hand, alliance patterns in the Gulf are also traditionally the product of threats – or perceived threats – against the legitimacy and stability of the ruling regimes (Gause 2003; Cooper 2003). The focus on internal threats is seen as particularly salient because of the importance of transnational identities and ideologies in the region (Barnett 1998, Buzan, Waeber, 2003), which offer ambitious leaders access to the domestic politics of their neighbors and levers of influence (Gause 2010). Successful regional cooperation has been based primarily on the convergence of regime interests relating to domestic stability and regime survival (Ayoob 1995), while protection against potential disruption of the external status quo was being outsourced to extra-regional protectors. Yet, while all those states agree on the importance of regime survival and the Western security umbrella, the perceived decline of the United States – the growing doubts about the US willingness and capability to impose a regional order that could secure the GCC states' core interests – is altering their traditional security posture.

The military dimension is strongly related to the perceived variations of power. Military adaptations are a reflection of these threat perceptions. Military responses, however, can go beyond just the power dimension. The military can also be used for domestic purposes to maintain domestic stability. The military dimension is also dependent on global defence expenditures. Traditionally, military procurement has played an important role in maintaining the security of the Gulf countries by guaranteeing the US security umbrella in return for US military capabilities (Gresh 2015). Used to cement political relations with outside powers, defence expenditures failed, however, to provide the GCC states with credible conventional military capability to reduce external threats to state security (Russell 2007). Overriding domestic political imperatives have instead led local rulers to trade military effectiveness for greater control over the military institution and a reduced risk of military takeover (Hertog 2011). However, in recent years, the transformation of GCC states' domestic realities and the emergence of new regional challenges have profoundly altered this equation. The Gulf States' leading role in regional military interventions and stabilizing efforts have produced a new set of policies and development and pushed for greater military professionalization and efforts to engage and mobilize the population for defense, as illustrated by the implementation of compulsory military service in the UAE. These new realities reveal many blind spots in the existing body of

literature on the military sector in Gulf countries, and raise various questions that this panel aims to address.

Non-traditional security issues that pertain to economic, social, and environment dimensions have also hit the agenda of the Gulf States (ECSSR 2010, 2013; Woerth 2013). With the attack against Aramco, cyber security in the region received a wake-up call (Zetter 2014). In order to mitigate threats, remediate vulnerabilities, and manage consequences in cyber space, the GCC states have established cooperative plans and developed new organizations, procedures, and policies (Clarke 2010, Green 2015). Similarly, shale gas and the growing domestic consumption of domestic oil production represent energy security challenges for the Gulf. Yet, financial resources accumulated by oil production and centralised in sovereign wealth funds represent new tools to conduct foreign policy and hence guarantee security. Domestic demographic imbalances increasingly entail a domestic security dimension and raise new challenges as Gulf States struggle to implement nationalisation programmes that could reduce their dependence on foreign labour and increase the participation of local populations in the private sector. This panel welcomes contributions that further explore the role of non-traditional security issues in the Gulf States' security agenda.

Finally, the recent regional and international activism of the Gulf States can create threats at the national level by magnifying domestic divisions such as in the case of the UAE and Qatar with regard to their policy towards Libya and Egypt. While Qatar played a significant role in the rise of Muslim Brotherhood, the UAE contributed to the decline of this non-state actor. The domestic threats from Muslim Brotherhood in the UAE led to a tense relationship between these two states (Spencer & Kinninmont 2013). The current activism of the GCC countries has also created a new dimension in their security agenda namely: post-conflict stabilisation. Libya, Syria and Yemen are examples of countries that will require the involvement of the GCC states in their reconstruction.

The workshop will consist of a number of papers focusing on the proposed theme. However, we encourage the examination of Security Studies theories and how they explain the changing behaviour of the Gulf States. It is therefore expected that contributions to this panel will adopt a strong theoretical framework ideally based on Buzan's framework and apply it to case studies in the Gulf.

Anticipated Participants

The following are the proposed themes for the papers:

- Traditional and new determinants of GCC states' security

- Changes in the GCC states' security since the Arab Spring
- Country specific case studies
- Changing role of military dynamics in GCC states' security
- Changing dynamics of military expenditure and their impact on regional balance of power
- Impact of traditional security alliances on GCC security
- Impact of US-Iran rapprochement on GCC states' security
- Impact of current military operations on GCC states' security
- Role of post-conflict stabilisation on GCC states' security agenda
- Impact of social movements on GCC states' security
- Impact of social media on GCC states' security
- Impact of cyber threats on GCC states' security policies
- Impact of changing energy dynamics and oil prices on GCC states' security
- Role of sovereign wealth funds in GCC states' security
- Impact of foreign workers on domestic stability
- Impact of food and water security on GCC states' security policies

Workshop Director Profiles

Dr. Victor Gervais is assistant professor at the Emirates Diplomatic Academy (EDA) in Abu Dhabi. Prior to joining the EDA, he was assistant professor at the Institute of International and Civil Security (IICS) at Khalifa University and visiting researcher at the Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research (Abu Dhabi). Dr. Gervais also worked as researcher for the Kuwait Program at Sciences Po and as post-doctoral fellow at the Institut de Recherche Strategique de l'Ecole Militaire (IRSEM) in Paris. He received his Ph.D. in 2011 from Sciences Po. His doctoral thesis focused on the development of the UAE armed forces, in relation to Abu Dhabi's state-building strategies. His main research interests focus on the international relations of the Middle East, with a particular interest in GCC states' security and defence policies. His publications range from academic books, book chapters, and peer-reviewed articles to policy briefs and reports.

Dr. Jean-Marc Rickli is assistant professor at the Department of Defence Studies of King's College, London but based at the Qatar Joint Command and Staff College in Doha. He is also a researcher at the Near East Center for Security and Strategy of King's College. He holds a Ph.D. and an M.Phil in International Relations from Oxford University, UK, where he was also a Berrow scholar at Lincoln College. Prior to his current position, Dr. Rickli was assistant professor at the Institute for International and Civil Security at Khalifa University in Abu Dhabi. He is the former President of the

Geneva University Strategic Studies Group and was program coordinator of the Urban Security program at the University of Geneva. He is also a former Vice-President of the Oxford University Strategic Studies Group. Dr. Rickli taught and conducted research at several institutions in nine different countries, including China and the United States. His research interests are the use of force in international relations, small states' foreign and security policies, risk analysis, and non-traditional security issues such as energy, financial, and cyber security. He has published several book chapters, journal articles in the Cambridge Review of International Affairs, the Oxford Journal on Good Governance, the Encyclopedia of Political Science, as well as a book titled "The Coercive Use of Air Power in the Balkans." His latest articles are on energy security in the Gulf, cyber security as well as on small states' survival and strategy.

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