



**Gulf Research Centre Cambridge**  
Knowledge for All

## Workshop 8

# **The GCC States' Foreign and Security Policies after the Arab Spring**

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### **Abstract**

This workshop examines the transformation of the GCC states' foreign and security policies prior to and after the Arab Spring. In particular, it seeks to discuss theoretically the drivers of small states' behaviour changes, and empirically the roles that the small GCC states played in the changing dynamics in the Middle East over the past four years. It is expected that papers will make contributions at both the theoretical level (small states' foreign and security policies theories/approaches) and at the empirical level (specific case studies on different aspects of the GCC states' foreign and security policies). This panel therefore welcomes papers that discuss the impact of domestic, regional and international factors on these policies and the transformation of the regional structure that led to the emergence of a new balance of power.

### **Description and Rationale**

The GCC states have faced many challenges over the past fifteen years due to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and more recently the so-called Arab Spring and the ongoing civil war in Syria. Along with instability in the region, there has been a shifting balance of power among the GCC states. As the influence of Saudi Arabia wanes, smaller states like

Qatar, Kuwait, and the UAE are becoming more important. In addition, GCC's relationship with Iran has deteriorated since the beginning of the Arab uprisings. Furthermore, the discovery and exploitation of shale gas in North America has reduced the energy dependency of the United States on the Gulf. In contrast, China's need for raw materials and energy has prompted Beijing's growing presence in the region even as the GCC states' turn to the East due to the financial crisis in the West. Faced with changes at the systemic, regional and national levels the GCC states have to adapt to these new conditions. At a more regional level, the rise and decline of non-state actors such as the Muslim Brotherhood has led to significant divisions between the Gulf States. It has created two camps; one siding with these movements and one opposing them. This, in turn, has led to a division in the foreign policy behaviour of the GCC states despite the overall dependency on Western security. Therefore, the purpose of this panel is to explore how GCC states' foreign and security policies have adapted to these new conditions.

In particular, this panel will explore and seek to answer the following:

- What are the effects of changes in the international and regional balance of power on the GCC states' foreign and security policies?
- How have the GCC states responded to these changes and why?
- How have the relations between the GCC states evolved and why?
- How have the relations between the Gulf States and the GCC evolved and why?
- What is the impact of social movements on the GCC states' foreign and security policies?
- How the US-Iran rapprochement will affect the external behaviour of the Gulf States
- What are the drivers of the GCC states' foreign and security policies and have they changed over time? If so, why?
- What is the impact of domestic factors on the GCC states' foreign and security policies?
- Have there been any changes in the governance of the GCC states' foreign and security policies and why?
- What is the impact of non-state actors on the GCC states' foreign and security policies?
- What are the prospects for the evolution of the GCC states' foreign and security policies?
- To what extent has the Muslim Brotherhood and other non-state actors and ideologies affected the foreign policies of small states in the Gulf?

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.

### **Scholarly contribution**

Traditionally, the importance of the Gulf region was due to its energy resources. Yet, recent events have led to a sharp increase in the focus on this region. Earlier, most of the Gulf States were not as active as they are today at the regional and international levels due to their focus mainly and exclusively on development and domestic issues. Since the start of the so-called Arab Spring, the Gulf States have filled a power vacuum in the region which has put them in the spotlight. Yet so far, very few comparative studies on the Gulf have provided thorough analyses of the foreign and security policies of the Gulf States. This panel consequently aims at providing a platform for scholars from within and outside the Gulf to examine the changing foreign and security policies of these states.

This panel will also emphasize the theoretical dimensions of the Gulf States' foreign and security policies by anchoring them within the theoretical framework of small states' studies. Interest in small states' security has been cyclical (Neumann 2004). During the decolonisation process between the 1950s and 1970s, the focus was on the survival of small states in a world dominated by two superpowers. This interest in their survival contrasted with those arguing for cooperation through alignment (Keohane 1969; Rothstein 1968; Vital, 1971) and also with those favouring an independent policy through neutrality (Däniker 1966; Ralston 1969). From the mid-1970s to the end of the 1980s, small states' security was neglected. However, the proliferation of small states after the Cold War, especially in Europe, aroused renewed interest in their security (Wiberg 1996; Inbar 1997; Neumann 2006). Some studies looked at the impact of the EU on small states' security (Baillie 1998; Goetschel 2000; Molis 2006; Thorhallsson 2000; Wivel 2005), while others focused on the security options of small states within a military alliance (Gärtner 2001; Mouritzen 1991; Wivel 2003) and in NATO (Männik 2004; Simon 2005; Setälä 2004) or independently (Matthews 2007). There has also been an interest in small states' foreign and security policies (Fendius Elman 1995; Hey 2003; Jazbec 2001) but very few studies have specifically dealt with the issue of foreign and security policies of small states in the Gulf. This panel contributes to filling these gaps.

The workshop will thus examine the Gulf States' foreign and security policies and try to anchor them in small states' studies assumptions. The Gulf countries can be considered as small states with the exception of Saudi Arabia. Yet, if a relational definition of small state is adopted, even Saudi Arabia can be considered as a small state towards its main international ally, the United States. A small state can be defined as a state that has a deficit of power due to its weak ability to mobilize resources, which could be material, relational or normative (Rickli 2008). Power represents the ability to remain autonomous while influencing others. Due to their lack of resources, small states lack the power to set the agenda, thus have a limited capacity to influence or modify the conduct of others. They also lack the power to prevent others from affecting their own behaviour (Elman 1995: 171). Therefore, the aim of the foreign and security policies of small states is to

minimise or compensate for this power deficit (Goetschel 1998: 19). Due to their lack of resources and capabilities, small states have to choose between two security policy options. They can favour either influence or autonomy (Mouritzen 1997: 101-106; Wivel 2005: 396). If a small state decides to maximise its influence, it adopts a cooperative strategy, which corresponds to joining an alliance. The security policy options for a small state favouring influence are those that favour either balancing or bandwagoning strategies (Waltz 1979). A small state can either ally with or against threats (Walt 1987). This allows the small state to benefit from the protection and the dissuasion engendered by a great power, but at the expense of its autonomy. A small state indeed risks entrapment by the policy of its bigger partner, and, for example, may fight wars that are not in its direct interests. Moreover, uncertainty is always present, since protection by the bigger partner can never be guaranteed (Wiberg 1996: 37). On the other hand, a small state can choose to protect its autonomy. In this case, it adopts a defensive policy. This security policy option favours sovereignty. The small state does not expect protection from major powers and consequently can expect to stay out of others' wars. The corollary to this is that the small state risks being ignored by the great powers in the system. Traditionally, this option was characterised by the adoption of a policy of neutrality (Reiter 1996). When it comes to the Gulf States' foreign and security policies, these are perceived as being strongly influenced by external powers' interests and thus more akin to a policy of alliance than neutrality. Yet, with the changing dynamics in the region, small states in the Gulf have started to diversify their 'security partners'. This panel will also look at the changing regional balance of power and its impact on alliance policies.

In the case of the Gulf States, regional and international dynamics affect, to a great extent, their external behaviour. Despite their differences, foreign aid appears to be used significantly as a source of power projection in the Gulf States' foreign and security policies. Foreign aid is considered the most important, if not the only tool, they have to act specifically at the regional level. During the Arab uprising, Qatar, Kuwait, and UAE used aid significantly, which led to the support, rise and decline of non-state actors such as Muslim Brotherhood. This led to a clash in the external behaviour of those states as in the cases of the UAE and Qatar. However, all those states agree on the importance of regime survival and the Western security umbrella. This panel also welcomes contributions that further explore the role of foreign aid in the Gulf States' foreign and security policies.

Non-traditional security issues have also appeared on the agenda of the Gulf States. Cyber security came into focus with the attack against Aramco which was a wake-up call for the region. 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. This panel welcomes contributions that further explore the role of non-traditional security issues in the Gulf States' foreign and security policies.

Finally, the recent regional and international activism of the Gulf countries can create domestic threats at the national level by magnifying domestic divisions such as in the case of the UAE and Qatar in the context of the current situation in Egypt. While Qatar played a significant role in the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood, the UAE contributed to

the decline of this non-state actor. The domestic threats from the Muslim Brotherhood in the UAE led to a tense relationship between these two states. This workshop will also look at the interplay between domestic politics and foreign and security policies.

The workshop will consist of a number of papers focusing on the proposed theme. However, we encourage the examination of International Relations theories and how they explain the changing behaviour of the Gulf States despite their small size. It is therefore expected that contributions to this panel will adopt a strong theoretical framework ideally based on research relating to small states and apply it to case studies in the Gulf.

## **Anticipated Papers**

The following are the proposed themes for the papers:

- Domestic and international determinants and their impact over the years on the GCC states' foreign and security policies
- Changes in the GCC states' foreign and security policies
- Country specific case studies
- Role of foreign aid in the GCC states' foreign and security policies
- Impact of social movements on the GCC states' domestic, foreign and security policies
- Impact of social media on the GCC states' foreign and security policies
- Impact of energy on the GCC states' foreign and security policies
- Role of sovereign wealth funds in the GCC states' foreign policies
- Impact of cyber threats on the GCC states' security policies
- Security and defence cooperation in a bilateral and/or multilateral framework (e.g., GCC, NATO, EU...)
- Rise and decline of the Muslim Brotherhood and other social movements and their implication on Gulf States' foreign and security policies
- Impact of US-Iran rapprochement on the GCC states' external and security behaviour

## **Workshop Director Profiles**

**Dr. Jean-Marc Rickli** is assistant professor at the Institute for International and Civil Security at Khalifa University in Abu Dhabi. 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. 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 on 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.

**Khalid Al Mezaini** is an assistant professor at Qatar University, where he teaches in the Gulf Studies Program, and a visiting research fellow at LSE. Prior to joining Qatar University, he was a research fellow at London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). In addition, he taught International Relations and Middle East politics at three different universities in the UK: Cambridge, Edinburgh and Exeter. Al Mezaini received his Ph.D. in 2009 from the University of Exeter. His doctoral thesis focused on the role of foreign aid in UAE foreign policy. His teaching interests also include Political Economy of the Gulf, International Relations of the Gulf and Comparative Politics. Last year he published a book on UAE foreign policy titled *The UAE and Foreign Policy: Foreign Aid, Identities and Interests* (London: Routledge 2012).

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